

Getting Started with New IT Systems



Choosing Equipment

Important to get this right to deliver the charities outcomes & activities.

Cost

- What can you afford? Can you get refurbished equipment if you can't buy new?
- Stay with reputable brands e.g. Dell / HP
- Check guarantees and warranties and make sure you are covered for as long as you need. Some suppliers will try and sell an extended warranty. Consider if you really need this or if you might replace your equipment before then anyway. Typically, office equipment lasts around 4-5 years.
- Cheap isn't always best!

Functionality

- Where will you use the equipment (e.g. home, office, on the bus, outreach etc.)? Choose equipment based on how you will deliver your activities.
- Who will be using the equipment? Do you need one each or can you share?
- New or refurbished? If you can afford new equipment then this is always the best option as equipment will have a guarantee and warranty, usually for 12 months. Refurbished is generally okay providing the device has been thoroughly cleansed to remove old data, and also that the specification is good enough. Try and avoid 'second-hand' equipment as the history is uncertain and equipment unlikely to be guaranteed or yonder warranty.
- Battery life is hugely important for mobile devices e.g. laptops, phones, tablets etc.
- Internet – do you want to be able to access the internet using your equipment? Make sure the spec covers what you need.
- Specification – nobody likes a slow PC!!! Depending on the activity you are delivery, you may need a device with a higher specification e.g. more RAM / storage, processor etc. Always think about what activities you will be doing using the equipment and make sure the equipment has a good enough spec to deliver this.

Where to Buy

- Direct from the supplier. Has its advantages, particularly if you are buying in bulk and can negotiate a discount. May also get an account manager who can help with future deals. Better to stick with big names e.g. Dell and HP
- Most suppliers now offer some form of charity discount so **always ask about this**; even if you are not a registered charity but still a not-for-profit group.
- [Computers for Charities](#): provide refurbished computer equipment for charities.
- [IT for Charities](#): a directory of organisations to buy (or gift) recycled PC's for charities
- [Charity Digital Exchange](#) is a discount supplier of software for charities. Register and you can get discounts on lots of software and licenses e.g. Office 365, Adobe, anti-virus.

Internet

- You can compare business broadband providers on the [Uswitch](#) website.
- Use supplier online tools to check what is available in your area. [Virgin](#), [BT](#), [Vodafone](#) – all the big internet service providers (ISPs) - have online tools where you can enter your landline or postcode and see what internet services are available.
- Virgin and BT are the main suppliers with their own infrastructure. There are a few others but generally most ISP's run over Virgin or BT. If you go through a reseller e.g. TalkTalk, bear this in mind, as fault times may be longer as they do not own the infrastructure.
- Try and get fibre wherever possible, and if you can afford it, a dedicated leased line. Although, be aware of longer contract terms with a dedicated leased line.
- Just because you are told you will get superfast speeds, doesn't mean you will. Unless you have a dedicated line (leased line) you will be sharing your internet line with other people and businesses in your area. The further you are from the telephone exchange, the slower the connection becomes.
- Check contract terms to make sure there is nothing nasty and be careful of hidden costs e.g. setup fees, cost of routers, having new lines installed, relocation costs if you have to move.
- When it comes to renewal, always say you are leaving for a new supplier. This will put you through to the relevant sales that will offer the best deals to keep you as a customer.
- Check reviews!!!

Printers

- Think about volume of printing. If you are doing a bit of printing you can probably get away with an Inkjet. If you do a lot of printing you may need to consider getting a laser jet which is better at printing at volume and speed.
- Most Inkjet printers these days are all-in-one i.e. they scan, print and copy.
- Do you need Wi-Fi printing? Check the printer is Wi-Fi compatible if so. This would enable you to print from your phone or other internet-enabled devices, usually using an app.
- Printers are cheap to buy but ink is expensive!
- Refurbished cartridges are generally okay, although using them may invalidate your warranty.

Servers

- A server connects desktops and laptops together over a network. Servers can be public, private or cloud-based.
- In an office environment, generally a server will either be physical i.e. an actual PC with server software running on it, or it will be cloud based, i.e. this system is set up and accessed online and you have no physical server (PC) in your office.
- More organisations are now moving to cloud based servers (and cloud based system in general) as you can reduce cost by not having to purchase and maintain a physical server. Physical servers can also fail e.g. hard drive or backup failure. By moving your systems and storage to the cloud then you avoid single points of failure as these are protected in the cloud infrastructure.
- Work out if you actually need a server. These articles are quite good at explaining the differences between physical and cloud infrastructure and whether you need a physical server or if you can simply use the cloud:
 - <https://www.leadingedgetech.co.uk/it-services/it-consultancy-services/cloud-computing/how-is-cloud-computing-different-from-traditional-it-infrastructure/>
 - <https://www.techsoup.org/support/articles-and-how-tos/do-you-need-a-server>
 - <https://www.it-champion.co.uk/do-i-still-need-a-server/>
- Examples of the differences between physical and cloud-based infrastructure:

Infrastructure	Physical Server / Application	Cloud Server / Application
Server	Microsoft Windows Server software	Microsoft Azure
Office software	Microsoft Office Application	Office 365 / / GSuite
Email	Outlook	Outlook web application / Gmail

Finance software	QuickBooks Desktop	QuickBooks online
File storage	Physical company drive for shared files	SharePoint / OneDrive (part of O365); Google documents, Dropbox etc.

Microsoft or Google?

- Microsoft Office / Office 365 and GSuite / Gmail / Google Docs are equivalent systems. They all have email, file storage and the typical applications you'd expect in an office e.g. word processing, spreadsheets.
- Choosing which system to use is essentially a matter of preference. The comparison on this website is quite useful to show the comparative features of each product: <https://info.templafy.com/blog/googles-g-suite-vs-microsofts-office-365-comparison-cheat-sheet>
- Whichever system you decide, on, stick to it! It is much easier to work with one system than several. You may also run into compatibility issues switching between the two systems.
- You may need to get support in setting these systems up if you do not have expertise in-house.

Ongoing Support

- Try and keep all your office systems as simple and easy to maintain as possible. The more complexity you add, the more you will depend on people with those skills to manage and maintain your systems.
- Always try and understand the system so you know how it works and are not hoodwinked later on into buying complicated replacements, fixes or alternatives.
- Who else has accountability for the quality of the support you get? Share responsibility for choosing systems and suppliers with a senior management team or trustee where possible.
- Do you have expertise and capacity to deliver support in-house?
- If not, can you afford to take on an IT support company?
- If you do, make sure you get plenty of reviews, speak to other organisations using the company, and negotiate on cost.