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10 Tips for Selecting an Internet Fax Service



By Steve Adams

You've seen the studies and you've read the articles. You know that you can save as much as 93% on the cost of adding fax capabilities and 89% of the monthly cost by using an Internet fax service instead of a fax machine or fax server. You've also bought in to the idea that it will help you improve privacy, simplify document management, and extend your faxing capabilities everywhere. In other words, you're ready to sign up.

But when you do a Google search on the term "Internet fax," you're suddenly bombarded by almost as many choices as you would have gotten if you used the term "Labrador Retriever." You know there must be differences between the various services, but how do you sort through them to know which one will work best for you?

Following are 10 tips you can use to help you sort through the myriad of choices in order to get the best combination of features and flexibility. While it may not be everything you need to know, it should be enough to get you started.

1 **Make sure you can receive faxes either via e-mail or online.**

Some services limit you to e-mail delivery only, which can be a problem for agents who are not connected to the office. You'll want to be sure you can send and receive faxes anywhere there's an Internet connection – even if you can't access e-mail. That way you'll be able to review the fax, forward a clean copy, and append a note if required – all without having to print the document.

2 **Watch out for hidden charges.**

While free services may be tempting, there are often hidden charges such as fees for going over your limit of received faxes or failed faxes. Toll-free numbers can also become expensive if the service appends a charge to incoming faxes that use your 800 number. Be sure you understand upfront what you're paying for, what the limitations are, and how you will be invoiced each month.

3 **Check for the availability of different file formats.**

Most Internet fax service providers will deliver the fax to you as a TIF file attachment. That works fine – unless you are trying to tie in to an existing document management system that requires a different format. Your service should be able to deliver documents in a range of other formats that work with common office tools, including Adobe Acrobat (PDF).

4 **Don't get tied down to one e-mail address.**

One of the purposes of using Internet faxing is to provide you with flexibility. A good service will make it easy to change or add multiple e-mail addresses online, so you can always receive that important fax when you need it.

5 **Research the company behind the service.**

There are a number of providers that literally operate out of a basement in their homes with just a handful of people. This creates a risk that a small operation's server will go down just when you need it most. Be sure the service has the capacity and reliability you require. Seek out product reviews, read online forums and blogs, and talk to others who use the service. 6 Get a confirmation of fax results. With a standard fax machine it's easy to see whether the fax went through. Because Internet faxes are electronic documents, there are no success stamps to see. A good Internet fax service will send confirmation e-mails directly to your in-box, with complete log information so there's no guesswork.

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7 Check out the scalability.

Different Internet fax services can accommodate a wide range as far as the number of users go. Ideally, you should be able to go from one to one thousand as your business grows without having to change numbers.

8 Know your limitations.

Each Internet fax service has its own threshold regarding how many faxes are included in the monthly fee, and what the charges are for going beyond those limitations. Be particularly careful of services that promise “unlimited” numbers of inbound or outbound faxes. Check the fine print in the user agreement, as often there actually are limits hidden within it.

9 Confirm that help is available if needed.

Make sure you can get support when you need it, preferably 24 x 7 support with a live person who knows the service and can help you solve problems quickly. If not, you’ll be faxing at your own risk.

10 Assure you have complete independence.

You should be able to both send and receive faxes from your e-mail account anywhere you can connect to the Internet, without having to download additional software.

Faxing is a critical tool for nearly every real estate agency, so you want to be sure you make a wise decision on how to do it. Follow these tips and you’re 99.998% sure of getting an Internet fax service that will meet all your requirements.

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