

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 mobile workers who are not connected to the office. If you're conducting business on the road, whether it's selling houses or selling thousands of boxes of polypropylene to a major corporation, 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. Internet faxing also provides the ability to preview faxes when you receive them, allowing you 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.

There's an old saying that the man who gives away his product for free knows its value. While free services may be tempting, there are often hidden charges involved, such as going over your limit of received faxes due to junk faxes from companies to which the provider sold your number or charges for failed faxes. Charges for toll-free numbers can also become expensive if the service appends a charge to incoming faxes that use your 800 number – something that may not be immediately apparent. Be sure you understand up-front what you're paying for, what the limitations are, and how you will be invoiced each month. The little fees can add up quickly, and negate any savings you were trying to achieve.

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 also be able to deliver documents in a range of other formats that work with common office tools, including Adobe Acrobat (PDF). Having a wide selection of document formats not only works better with the document management systems but also gives you a more universal ability to share the document as needed.

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. But if you can't easily switch the e-mail address as needed, or have the fax sent to multiple addresses, you're losing out on the flexibility you were seeking. 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.

Setting up an Internet fax service is not very complicated, at least on a small scale. As a result, there are a number of providers that literally operate out of a basement in their homes with just a handful of people. This sort of fly-by-night setup is not good enough for your faxing needs, whether you do high volumes or just the occasional document. Murphy's Law is always in play, so you know a small operation's server will go down just when you need it most. Be sure the service you pay good money for has the capacity and reliability you require. Some of the best ways to find out what level of service the company offers are to seek out product reviews, read online forums and blogs, and ask others who use the service how well their needs are serviced.

6

Get a confirmation of fax results.

With a standard fax machine it's easy to see whether the fax went through. The papers wind up in the receiving tray and often are stamped. Because Internet faxes are electronic documents, there are no success stamps to see. So, you need to make sure you have a way of confirming that your important faxes went through. A good Internet fax service will send confirmation e-mails directly to your in-box, with complete log information so there's no guesswork.

7

Check out the scalability.

Different Internet fax services can accommodate a wide range as far as the numbers of users go. What you want to avoid is starting with one, and then having to change numbers as your business grows. Ideally, you should be able to go from one to one thousand without any disruption. Otherwise, you risk lost sales, customer confusion, or faxes that never reach their intended destination.

8

Know your limitations.

Each Internet fax service has its own threshold regarding how many faxes (inbound and outbound) are included in the monthly fee, and what the charges are for going beyond those limitations. It's a lot like the mileage charges on an automobile lease – if you drive a lot, the added charges could be more than the base lease itself. You should 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. Before you sign up, you should have an idea of what volume of faxes you normally send and receive each month in order to obtain the service level that is most economical for you. Then stay on top of it, so you continue to get the best value as your needs change.

9

Confirm that help is available if needed.

In a perfect world your Internet fax service will always work without problems. If you find that perfect world, go there immediately, because in our world there is the occasional need for a little help. Especially because things rarely go wrong at a convenient time. 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 shouldn't need any additional on-board software or other measures to fax via the Internet. You should be able to both send and receive faxes from your e-mail account anywhere you can connect to the Internet, whether it's in the office, at home, at a customer's office, in the car, or at your favorite coffee shop. Seamless connectivity means always having what you need when you need it.

If faxing is a critical component to your business, 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 – for cost effectiveness, reliability, flexibility, and excellence. Just remember that all may not be what it seems. Do your investigation thoroughly and you'll have a better total experience. Happy faxing!

About the Author: Steve Adams is Vice President of Marketing for MyFax (www.myfax.com), a provider of Internet faxing services for individual home users, small businesses, and large corporations. MyFax has won a number of awards in head-to-head competitions for ease of use, reliability, and best overall value. He can be reached at sadams@protus.com.

About MyFax

MyFax is the fastest growing Internet fax service used by individuals, small, medium and large businesses to send and receive faxes using existing email accounts or the web. MyFax offers services in North America, Europe and the UK to industries recognized among the fastest growing adopters of internet fax including finance, insurance, real estate, healthcare, transportation and government. More than 10,000 new customers subscribe to MyFax each month. Additional information is available at www.myfax.com.

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