

Tips from an Industry Expert: Going to Market & Onboarding

Finding your position in this competitive market and providing the best customer experience during onboarding can be difficult for any business. There are many common challenges that resellers face when it comes to going to market and onboarding, so we sat down with telecom expert Alex Aristides, Owner and President of M2S Integrations, for a Q&A to uncover useful tips that can help your business succeed.

Q: What are some common challenges that prevent an easy go-to-market launch?

I feel that the biggest challenge is understanding how to effectively price your hosted VoIP solution in order to maximize your margins and stay competitive. Many businesses, when starting out, try to price every little thing, but there are some features and services you can't charge for in order to be in line with your competition. I've seen this be especially difficult for companies making the transition from selling a traditional on-premise PBX model (which is usually sold as a one-time charge, allocating every cost, marking them all up, and hopefully getting service in future) and for MSPs (who price every inch of network, calculate the largest monthly charge, and hope the client doesn't call for support) because those pricing models do not work for selling VoIP competitively on a large scale. All the players you are competing against sell on a per-seat basis. All their prices are set and are on their website. Certain services (such as porting) are generally not charged, whereas others (such as DID's) are included.

It's a numbers game in the beginning. Most people aren't all on their phones 24/7, so it's a usage sell. If the average usage cost is \$2 max per user, your total cost will be around \$5 per user. If you're charging \$24.95 per seat, you're making 5X your cost each month. If you have to eat the port charge, this will only cost you another \$5, so you're still making \$19.95 the first month and \$24.95 every month after. In addition, even if you give a free phone and you come out even the first month and only make \$10.95 the second, after three months you'll be making the full 5x gross profit. Consider all of these aspects and know your margins when you set your pricing structure.

Q: What are the technical and resource limitations you've faced and how did you work around them?

Your pricing and features are going to be similar to those of your competitors, so providing the best support, installation for each client, and personal care are the most impactful areas that will set you apart from the big players in the market. Since your pricing and features are similar, you have to white glove every customer. Especially because there's a good chance your competitors are making the client do everything themselves – either because they don't want to learn another industry or they have done it before and the customer was unhappy. The key is to show your clients how you make everything simple for them. Going above and beyond by creating user training documents, videos, and programming sheets the client can easily understand will have a huge impact on the customer's experience and satisfaction.

Q: Not being a telco guru, how can someone figure out what their customers need?

Call flow, call flow, call flow! 90% of your customers don't care that you can write an API that will put their logo on the phone, for example. They want the user experience to be smooth, especially if their current solution is working for them. You want to mirror their existing setup and add to their experience – give them new capabilities that will make them more productive. No one wants to reinvent the wheel for a phone. It's a phone!

I like to compare understanding a customer's current phone system to dating. It's all about asking questions, getting to know the end-users, and understanding what they're used to rather than rambling on about the features. Here are some key questions I like to ask:

- Do they have a key system? Line 1, Line 2, Line 3 on their phones now?
- How do they answer calls during the day, and where do they end up if not handled?
- How do they handle calls after hours, on holidays, etc.?
- How does the receptionist handle calls?
- How does the owner's secretary handle calls? Shared line appearance? Parking?

Q: What are some ways to make it easier for your customers to onboard?

Create a standard procedure you can follow for installation, training, cut over and porting, and follow up. In addition, taking the time to create specific documents you can provide to each customer throughout each phase will not only help customers throughout the onboarding process, but it will also show your commitment to helping them have the best experience possible. You'll want to create:

- Programming cheat sheets
- Training sheets and videos
- Informational documents on porting, E911, etc.

Q: What are some simple outside integrations that can help?

- Accounting software
- Get yourself an API team
- Carriers and their integrations
- A cell phone app
- Communication integrations so you can offer UC

Q: What you have done with MS2 to achieve success?

All of the above. However, the main focus is our agents. Agents are the best! Even if you can sell, why not have a number of people selling all of your services for you? One important point I want to make regarding agents is that you need to commission them fairly and always pay them. Never miss a payment and never pay them late, just like you would with an employee. They will build your business for you – they're your salesforce.