A computer can make billing customers easier. A good software program provides easy access to information on customers.

COMPUTERIZING CAREFULLY

Thinking of computerizing your business?
Here's some tips to follow before investing money.

Computerizing may help ease business management, but it takes time and money to get it under way.

"To say one system is best is inappropriate," says Sally Kujawa, vice president of Kujawa Enterprises in Cudahy, Wisc. "There is no state-of-the-art in the computer world."

Kujawa says the lifespan for a system is three to five years. "You change not because it break downs, but because computer technology changes so rapidly," Kujawa says.

The first step in choosing a system is to appoint a committee, says Kujawa. That may mean a committee of one—you.

The next step is to appoint a chairman of the committee. The chairman's job is to investigate the company's needs. The function of a computer system is to provide management with a tool and to crunch numbers.

The chairman can ask questions of employees: Is the company losing money because bills aren't sent on time? Is there a way to track past-due accounts? Are there calculation errors? What the chairman reports will influence the type of software chosen.

The chairman should read through magazines and books to completely understand the way software and hardware fit together to form a system. Companies with different needs require different types of systems.

"A great benefit of computers is their ability to rearrange the facts stored in their memories," Kujawa says. "With the spreadsheet software available today, it is a simple process to analyze sales, profit centers, cash flow, customers, vendors and almost anything else you choose."

When choosing software, pick a software that will fit your hardware system. If you don't already have hardware, check your software needs first. Make sure it can fit within the budget. Get a system the staff can operate easily and will work with the company's future needs.

All office procedures are integrated to some extent. Therefore, choose a software program that can be integrated. "You'll find a lot of packages which will do 85 to 90 percent of what you're asking," Kujawa says. "That's a good match. I doubt if you'll find 100 percent."

When buying software, Kujawa says to always stick with the brand name. Go to a reputable software/hardware dealer. Once you know about software, ordering by mail through software magazines can save money.

Kujawa says four points should be kept in mind no matter what system you choose:

● Software should be well documented, with easy-to-follow instructions. It should be backed by training and duplicate copies should be available at little cost.

● Hardware should be well-built with an easy-to-read screen and little glare.

● The keyboard should be standard typewriter arrangements with well-marked function keys.

● The system should be expandable by adding external memory, screens, printers and programs.

A good printer is a must, says Kujawa. Choose carefully from the three types available: matrix, laser or daisy-wheel. A laser is necessary for desktop publishing of sales literature or newsletters, while a daisy-wheel works slowly like a typewriter.

A good personal computer will allow for expansion in the memory and will do graphics.

"There's no such thing as a $500 computer," Kujawa says. "$5,000 is a good beginning budget." That, of course, includes hardware, printer and software.

Kujawa says one thing to remember in choosing a computer is that it probably won't cut back on hours. If the bookkeeper spends three hours working now, it will still take three hours to input information into the computer.

She also warns that computers don't eliminate paper, but generate more paper. Converting from a manual operation to a computer system takes time. Kujawa says it's best to input receivables first, then accounts payable, then payroll.

"I can't stress enough to give yourself plenty of time," she says. **LM**