

The role of context in integrator selection

Making heads and tails of integrator bids for security systems migrations



When reviewing bids for a physical security systems migration, many decision makers instinctively flip to the last page to see the total cost—as if that number alone tells the whole story. But other decision factors must weigh into the procurement equation as well.

Specifically, you must account for everything you know already, not just about each vendor but also about the history of your environment, including how it was built and maintained over the years and who performed the work. This “tribal knowledge” plays a major role in how you receive, interpret, and ultimately judge the migration bids you receive. As we recently discussed in our white paper, [Physical security systems migration considerations and scenarios](#), your team’s collective knowledge extends to not only your past relationships with vendors but also the documentation you or they have produced (or neglected to produce) about system changes over time.

Context is king

Familiar, long-time integrators may submit higher bids that trigger initial sticker shock, especially when you compare them to newer or unfamiliar vendors ostensibly offering a better deal. However, evaluating these bids isn't necessarily an apples-to-apples comparison. Those higher bids likely reflect a more accurate understanding of your systems, standards, and challenges—insights that often only come from direct experience.

At the same time, an unfamiliar vendor may simply not know what they're walking into. The lower bids from vendors you don't know as well might fail to account for nuances in the project they're unaware of—nuances based on the history and complexity of your existing conditions. Without context, they underbid, either because they assume a simpler path forward, or because your documentation didn't fully capture the environment's complexity. While their number might be appealing, the risk is real of accumulating costly change orders and seeing your migration schedule slip accordingly.

Before making a vendor decision for systems migration, weigh the context of each bid to realistically bring it in line with the others. Ask: Who is submitting the bid? What do you know about them, and what do they know about you? What devil is hidden in the details that they (or you) might not immediately perceive? What assumptions are each of you making that you maybe haven't shared?



You can't always “go with your gut”

It's also important to recognize internal biases. Organizations sometimes default to predetermined assumption: the idea that cheaper is better, or that a fresh set of eyes might find efficiencies, or that their favorite vendor is automatically the front runner for tackling a systems migration project. Those perspectives aren't invalid, but they should be balanced with the reality that past experience has tremendous value.

The bias toward incumbent bidders is particularly slippery. Long-tenured or embedded integrators who've done significant work in your environment often come to the table with hard-earned experience. They understand the ins and outs of your unique infrastructure, legacy systems, installation standards, and internal expectations. But their pricing likely also reflects this knowledge, and you should assess the value proposed in their bid accordingly. This evaluation must include assessing their core capabilities: Just because they've played a role in building and maintaining your system, are they truly prepared to overhaul it on the scale and schedule you require?

Your security consultant plays a key role here by helping validate assumptions and compare vendor capabilities objectively. Any favor the security consultant might show to particular vendor options will be based purely on their insight into each bidders' past performance, including any pattern of submitting bids that might include hidden assumptions or potential additional costs.

This informed perspective serves your procurement process well by offsetting the inherent biases your team might bring to the migration project. Because your partner is uniquely positioned to understand the state of your current site documentation, they can also help sort and adjust your RFP responses accordingly.



Look for the story behind the numbers

At the end of the day, a bid is more than just a number. It's a reflection of knowledge, risk, and accountability. And in the long run, avoiding surprises is often worth a higher upfront investment.

Treat your systems migration procurement strategy as an opportunity to fully assess every participating vendor's pluses and minuses with respect to biases on your part, biases on their part, and the context of what is known and not known by each party. Then, collate all of this assessment with your security consultant's systems migration knowledge, experience, and perspective. Following this intentional, well-reasoned path will lead you to the real numbers around what your migration will ultimately cost.



For more tips and detailed guidance on systems migration strategies, read our white paper [Physical security systems migration considerations and scenarios: What to expect when refreshing your technologies](#). Want to talk in person? Join us at [GSX 2025](#) in Suite 1277!

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