Nationwide Technology Rollout Companies

What you need to know to avoid risk. BY DENNIS MAZARIS

As the growing need for IP-based equipment increases, installations at the field level have become less complex when managed properly. This allows ICT* contractors to install multiple technologies and expand their repertoire of capabilities.

This increased ease of IP installation at the field level has caused many inaccurate perceptions in the industry. One of the foremost of these is that there is a decreased complexity in the management of field deployments on a nationwide or global scale. This misperception has caused a growth in the number of firms specializing in a variety of services utilizing local resources on a national and global basis. The down side is that not all firms offering nationwide and global rollout services are true technology rollout companies, and even when they are, their expertise, processes, methodologies and support abilities may vary considerably. This article will take you through several basic areas which you should be aware of when engaging firms that perform nationwide and global rollouts.

The Basics

What is a Multisite Technology Rollout?

A multisite technology rollout is an initiative to perform the same process across dozens, hundreds or thousands of geographic locations over a defined period of time.

What is a Technology Rollout Company?

A technology rollout company is an organization with its core business in multisite, multiservice, multiple technology rollouts with established processes and methodologies in place to perform nationwide (and global) field deployments of a varying scale of magnitude. This type of company is different from companies or consultants that are proficient in a specific technology and service a specific geographic area and different from solutions providers with core competencies that lie outside the expertise of field deployments (e.g., system design, engineering).

Technology Rollout Categories

While the information in this article applies to all rollout categories, it is important to note that it will be discussed primarily in relation to the most common type of rollout—category 1. Table 1 is a breakdown of each rollout category.

Problems with Nationwide Technology Rollouts

The primary issues when working with a technology rollout company can be broken down into three areas—same sales pitch, rise of incapable organizations and growth of the problem.

Same Sales Pitch

For the past decade, traditional technology rollout companies have relied primarily on presenting the same sales pitch criteria for establishing competency. This, from the customer perspective, comes in the form of the technology rollout company claiming three key points:

- Single point of contact for the customer
- Nationwide contacts (contractors)
- Software application to manage rollout

Although these sound very plausible, they cause trouble for many firms. The contractor or field partner also is provided a sales pitch. According to a partner survey conducted with 345 nationwide field contractors (see sidebar), 80 percent stated that they were contacted by a technology rollout company. The sales pitches include common language like, “We do a lot of jobs in your area,” or “There are more jobs to come.”

Rise of Incapable Organizations

Due in part to the oversimplification and inaccuracy of what is

*Information & Communications Technology

Category	Work Intensity per Site Location	Time Frame per Site Location
1	Short	1 Day or Less
2	Medium	2-6 Days
3	Long	7+ Days

Table 1: Technology rollout categories

required to successfully complete multisite technology rollouts on a nationwide and global scale, there are often various scenarios of companies attempting to complete these projects. The following list shares some of the common examples:

- Technology rollout companies with initial capabilities but that fail to deliver over the life cycle of the project
- Solution providers imitating a technology rollout company
- Unethical companies

Growth of the Problem

The problems will continue to grow without awareness of the situation. After all, 62 percent of contractors surveyed stated that they have performed work for three or more technology rollout companies in the past year (see sidebar). This increase is based on two primary trends in the world today - the current business landscape and the increased use of IP technologies.

Decreased Employees + Increased Outsourcing = Increased Technology Rollout Companies

The second part of problem growth is that field installations are becoming easier through the use of IP technologies. This allows for multiple equipment and technologies to be installed with use of the telecom circuits.

If the problems continue to grow and more technology rollout companies emerge, the consequences may become more evident, including:

- Payment problems
- Job loss
- Lawsuits or no legal action taken (see sidebar)
- Replacements
- Reputation damage

A Guide to Determining the Answer

All of the problems detailed above result in a project with a high risk of failure, especially if there is not a proper set of methodologies and processes in place to perform technology rollouts on a nationwide or global scale. The formalized technology rollout system of methodologies for efficiently deploying technology nationwide and globally is a comprehensive, multiple technology, multiservice, multisite system designed to meet varying project requirements in the ever-changing ICT industry and consists of four key parts as shown in Figure 1:

- Process structure
- Rollout services model
- Internal resources
- Partnerships

Part 1: Process Structure

Various process structures are employed by technology rollout companies to facilitate the management of multisite nationwide and global projects. The primary process structures and their advantages are as follows:

- **Centralized single tier—** The customer uses a technology rollout company that directly manages field technicians through a direct partnership.

- **Centralized multitier—** The customer uses a technology rollout company that hires subcontractors in a tiered hierarchy to manage field technicians.

The following information is presented from the Concert Technologies Partnership Survey of 345 Nationwide Contractors conducted for a national presentation at the BICSI Conference in Baltimore:

- 42% of contractors surveyed stated that they have not been paid for work performed for technology rollout companies.
- 36% of contractors surveyed stated that they did not take any action when they were unpaid by technology rollout companies for work performed.
- 62% of contractors surveyed stated that they have performed work for three or more technology rollout companies in the past year.
- 80% of contractors surveyed stated that the technology rollout companies contact them for work.
- "Potential for a long-term relationship" ranked number one for highest impact on contractors' decision to perform work for a technology rollout company.

- **Rent-a-tech—**The customer or technology rollout company uses a "rent-a-tech" company in a shared management effort of field technicians.

- **Internal employee—**The customer or technology rollout company uses internal employees for project management and field technicians. In internal employee process structures, additional external local field technicians are likely to be required due to the number of sites and costs associated with employing sufficient internal field technicians to handle nationwide or global rollouts.

- **Hybrid—**A number of variations of the four aforementioned basic structures may exist as a hybrid structure. They will have associated advantages and disadvantages on an individual structure basis.

Figure 2 depicts each process structure along with key benefit comparisons showing that the centralized single tier process structure provides superior benefits for a category 1 rollout, including maximized communication speed and minimized labor costs.

Part 2: *Rollout Services Model*

This model integrates and consolidates all activities and processes for the entire rollout project into a single, more efficient and powerful engine. There are nine key components:

- Project management
- Circuits
- Equipment and technology
- Cabling
- Site surveys and estimates
- Nationwide warehousing
- Maintenance 24/7
- Billing
- Solution support

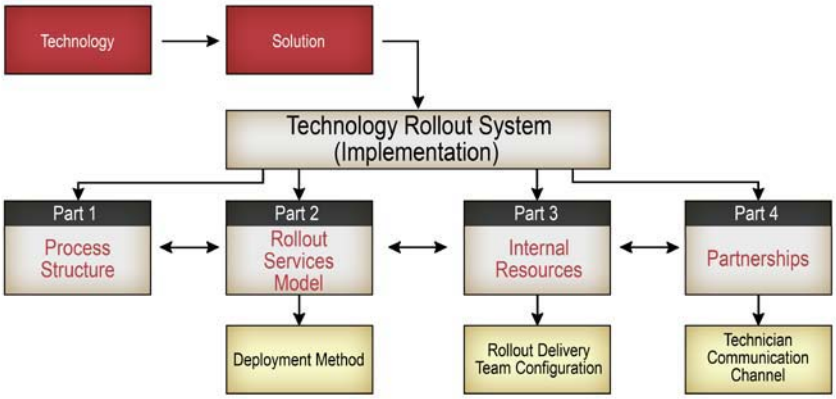


Figure 1: Technology rollout system

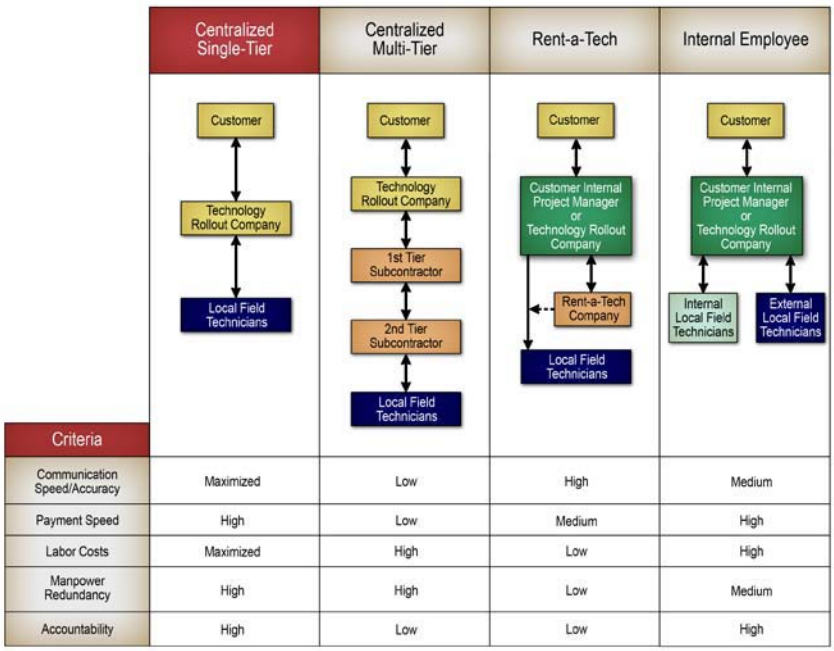


Figure 2: Process structures with key benefit comparisons

As with the process structure, the rapid deployment of multiple technology, multiservice, multisite rollouts requires a defined deployment method to maximize efficiency. The various deployment methods used by technology rollout companies include:

- **Local multiservice—**The technology rollout company minimizes the number of local field technicians to deploy multiple services in as few truck rolls as possible. Each technician specializes in multiple services and is managed and supported by the technology rollout company.

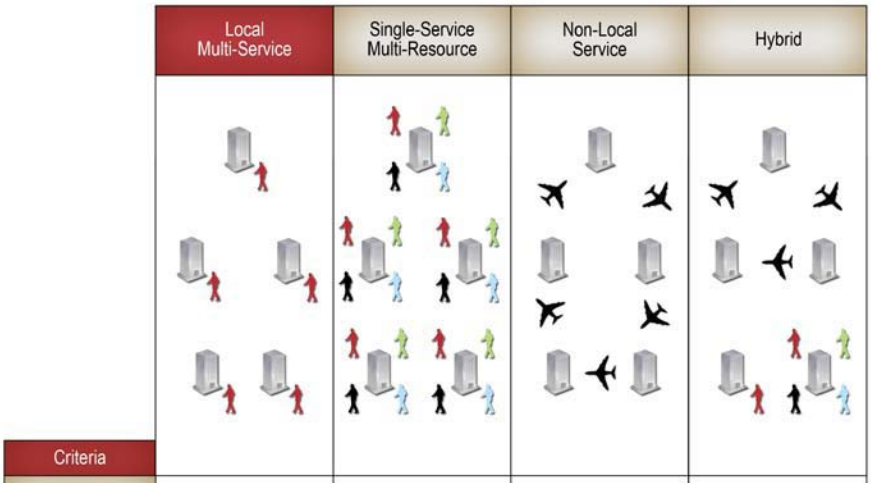
- **Single service multiple resource—**The technology rollout company uses multiple local field technicians. Each technician specializes in a single service.

- **Nonlocal service—**The technology rollout company uses a single group of technicians as its field force.

These nonlocal technicians travel to each site from a central location. Each technician may or may not specialize in multiple services.

- **Hybrid—**A number of variations of the aforementioned three basic methods may exist as hybrid methods, each with their own advantages and disadvantages.

Figure 3 depicts each deployment method along with key benefit comparisons. It shows that the local multiservice method is the most efficient for deployment of category 1 rollouts through its use of a minimized number of technicians to complete multiple services in the fewest truck rolls. This provides the benefit of accelerated deployment speeds, enhanced communication flow and reduced labor costs.



Criteria	Local Multi-Service	Single-Service Multi-Resource	Non-Local Service	Hybrid
Number of Truck Rolls/Dispatches	Minimized	High	Minimized	Medium
Deployment Speed	Maximized	Low	Low	Medium
Communication Speed/Accuracy	High	Low	High	Medium
Labor Costs	Minimized	High	High	High
Revisit Availability	High	High	Low	Medium

Figure 3: Deployment methods with key benefit comparisons

Part 3: *Internal Resources*

Internal resources consist of the technology rollout company's internal operations, network infrastructure, Web-based application software, training and company culture. The benefits of these aspects can include real-time project status reports, minimized administrative time and costs and convenient asset management and recovery services.

Although the actual titles of the key roles on the rollout delivery team may differ depending on a company's internal naming conventions, the critical role that they serve should not vary. Each job is essential to the overall management and success of the technology rollout:

- **Program manager—**Provides overall support and quality assurance to each assigned project. The program manager oversees projects to ensure they are completed to the customer's specifications. This position also guarantees a consistent level of expertise and speed for all projects.

- **Project manager—**Serves as the customer's single point of contact. The project manager manages all aspects of the rollout from interaction with the customer to the project facilitators who manage the on-site local resources. There should be multiple project managers within a given rollout company's configuration. This role should report to the program manager.

- **Project facilitator—**Manages all aspects of the local site resources, including scheduling, on-site job performance assurance, communication with each site's point of contact and interfacing with material management. There should be multiple project facilitators within a given deployment company's configuration. This role should report to the project managers.

- **Warehouse manager—**Along with the warehouse team, manages all equipment and materials responsibilities for each rollout including, shipping, service level agreement warehousing requirements and configuration. A technology rollout company may elect to provide a separate operations unit to supply configuration services. The warehouse manager should report to the program manager.

- **Technology manager—**With a technology team, provides management functions for the Web-based application software and electronic transfer of customer data. This role should report to the program manager.

- **Partnership manager—**With the support of the partnership team, is responsible for the recruitment and quality of the partners utilized by the technology rollout company. This person should report to the

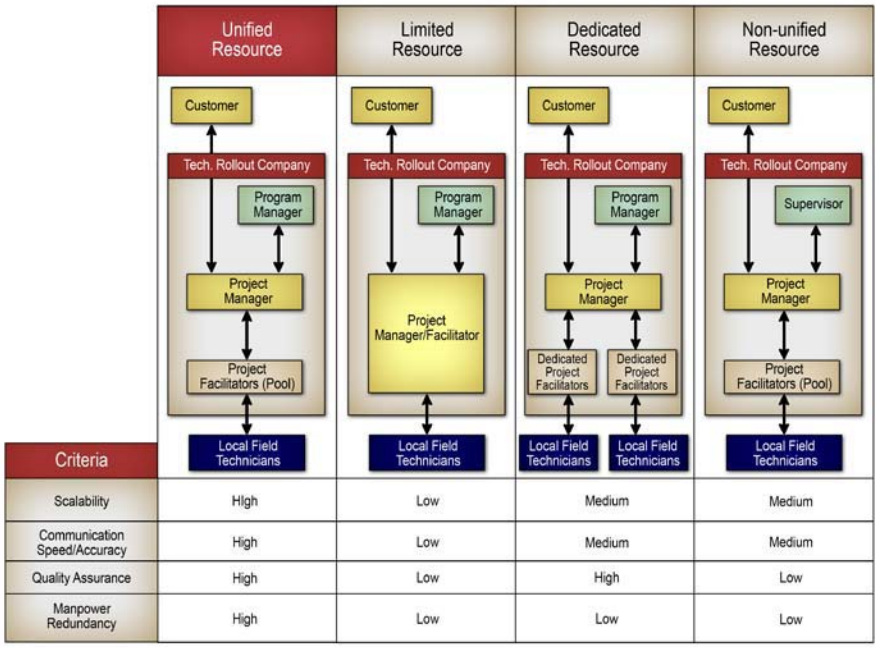


Figure 4: Delivery team configurations with key benefit comparisons

Category	Company Partner	Individual Partner	Staffing Firm Partner
Business License & Insurance	Yes	???	???
Equipment Provided	Yes	???	???
Redundancy	High	None	High
Rollout Categories	All	Limited	Limited to Category 2 & 3
Core Business	Yes	???	No

Table 2: Technology rollout partnership types with associated benefits

program manager or project manager.

If the basic internal resource job requirements of the rollout delivery team are not met, the capabilities of the technology rollout company should be in question. Thus for the purposes of the following delivery team configurations, these necessary positions are considered critical:

- **Unified resource**—The rollout delivery team consists of a program manager, project manager, project facilitators, warehouse manager, technology manager and partnership manager. The project manager can utilize project facilitators as needed, including using dedicated project facilitators depending on project requirements.

- **Limited Resource**—The rollout rollout delivery team consists of a program manager, project manager/facilitator, warehouse manager, technology manager and partnership manager. The project manager assumes the duties of the project facilitator.

- **Dedicated resource**—The rollout delivery team consists of a program manager, project manager, dedicated project facilitator, warehouse manager, technology manager and partnership manager.

- **Non-unified resource**—The rollout delivery team consists of a project manager, dedicated project facilitator, supervisor, warehouse manager, technology manager and partnership manager. The supervisor serves as the direct report of the project manager, but the supervisor's primary role is outside of the rollout project.

- **Hybrid**—A combination of the four aforementioned rollout delivery team configurations may exist with associated advantages and disadvantages.

Figure 4 depicts the rollout delivery team configurations along with key benefit comparisons. The actual number of project managers, project facilitators and other resources utilized to maximize rollout efficiency will vary from those indicated by the confines of the rollout delivery team configuration diagrams. Additionally, the roles of warehouse manager, technology manager and partnership manager are considered to be fulfilled in each of the examples.

Only by utilizing the unified resource rollout delivery team configuration for category 1 rollouts will you be assured that the rollout has the most efficient deployment possible. This efficiency relates not only to costs and time but also to the communication flow and assurance that all aspects of the project are completed to the customer's specifications.

Part 4: Partnerships

Technology rollouts on a nationwide and global scale require local technicians to perform on-site work. Thus it is important to understand what types of partnerships are available and how they are managed by a technology rollout company. There are three

types of partnerships for technology rollout companies. Table 2 compares the partnership types along with associated benefits.

- **Company**—While all serve a purpose in providing rollout services, a local company employing individual technicians provides the resources, redundancy and scalability as needed for your project.

- **Individual**—An individual technician working as an independent contractor may be unable to provide the necessary advantages detailed above. They also may lack the local requirements (e.g., licenses, insurance, equipment) necessary to provide all required services.

- **Staffing firms**—There are limitations as to the types of rollouts for which staffing firms will provide technicians. With a one-day or less time frame, category 1 rollouts are often too short for a staffing firm's business model to provide cost-effective services.

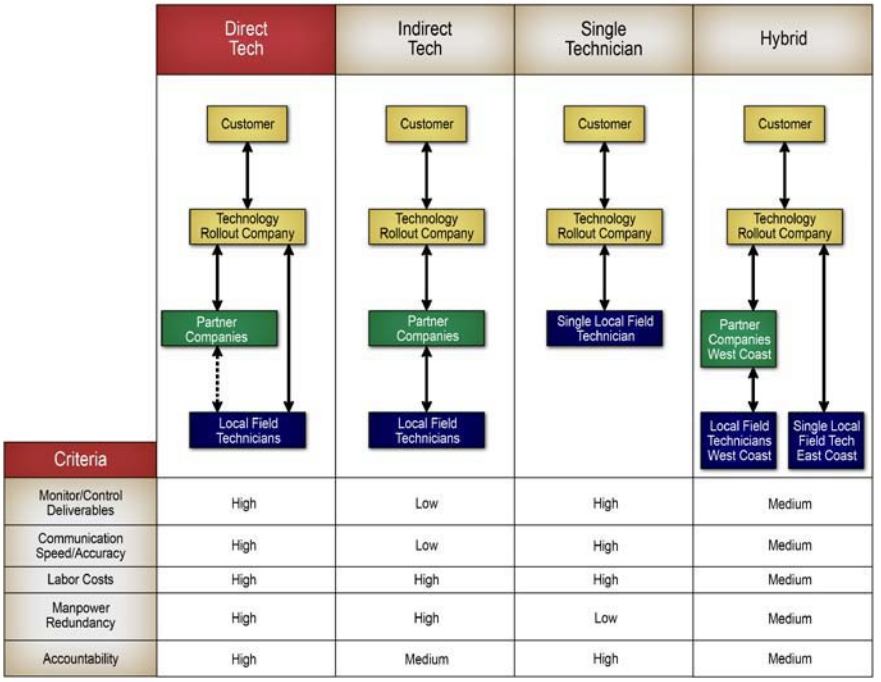
The technician communication channel defines how the technology rollout company manages and communicates with each on-site technician. The following information compares the primary technician communication channels:

- **Direct technician communication channel—** The technology rollout company engages the local partner company but directly manages the field technicians or supervisor at each site location.

- **Indirect technician communication channel—** The technology rollout company allows the local partner company to communicate directly with each field technician. The local partner company communicates with the technology rollout company upon site completion and for support.

- **Single technician communication channel—** The technology rollout company does not use companies as partners and instead opts to partner with each technician directly.

- **Hybrid technician communication channel—** A combination of the three aforementioned technician communication channels may



Criteria	Direct Tech	Indirect Tech	Single Technician	Hybrid
Monitor/Control Deliverables	High	Low	High	Medium
Communication Speed/Accuracy	High	Low	High	Medium
Labor Costs	High	High	High	Medium
Manpower Redundancy	High	High	Low	Medium
Accountability	High	Medium	High	Medium

Figure 5: Technician communication channels with key benefit comparisons

exist with associated advantages and disadvantages.

Figure 5 shows the technician communication channels and compares related benefits of each. Utilizing the direct technician communication channel for category 1 rollouts will ensure that technicians are managed and supported directly by the technology rollout company that is employed by the customer. This provides quality assurance and work performance that are not inherent in other communication channels.

The direct technician communication channel also can be used for a category 3 rollout in which a project management representative from the technology rollout company would be present on-site to manage the technicians directly.

Summary

By having a set of guidelines to understand the process structure, deployment method, rollout delivery team configuration and technician communication channel, you will be better equipped to ensure the technology rollout company you engage with is both efficient and professional. From a contractor perspective, this means less risk of not being paid and more chance of additional work in the future (as the company will have a solid business model and reputation). As a customer, this information will ensure that your project avoids missed deadlines and increased project costs.

While there are always additional factors to consider, the information detailed in this article serves as a starting point for education and awareness of how a technology rollout company operates. Only time and experience will determine whether the relationship you establish with a technology rollout company will be mutually beneficial. ■

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-Dennis Mazaris, President & CEO, Concert Technologies

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