



**INDEMAND**  
*Interpreting*

# How to Select a VRI Provider

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*12 Steps to Selecting a VRI Provider  
for your Organization*

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**InDemand Interpreting**



# Introduction

THIS WHITE PAPER OUTLINES A PROCESS FOR SELECTING A VIDEO REMOTE INTERPRETING (VRI) PROVIDER. IT IS PRIMARILY WRITTEN FOR HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS, BECAUSE THAT IS WHOM WE SERVE, BUT THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK CAN BE USED FOR SELECTING A VRI PROVIDER FOR ANY USAGE SCENARIO.

You might expect a self-serving, biased set of selection criteria. After all, we are a provider of VRI technology and services. We've tried very hard to avoid that trap. We've written a guide that we would want to follow if we were in your shoes.

In the spirit of providing an un-biased guide, we won't talk about the specifics of our products or services. You can find plenty of information about us on our website and in other brochures and white papers.

## Start by Explicitly Stating Your Goals for Selecting VRI

Organizations generally begin looking at Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) for one of three reasons:

**Compliance** Providing language services in health care is not an option; it's required by law and by accreditation agencies. Often, the impetus for looking at VRI comes from a lawsuit, a complaint, or an investigation.

**Costs** Many hospitals are looking for ways to reduce their un-reimbursed costs, and for the most part, language services is not reimbursed. Video Remote Interpreting can substantially reduce costs, particularly when compared to in-person interpreting.

**Provider Satisfaction** Every health care provider has a story about having to wait for an in person interpreter. Video Remote Interpreting means no waiting, and availability of many languages 24 x 7, 365 days a year. This is particularly useful in Emergency Departments, Labor & Delivery and Surgery. In some cases, organizations are not happy with their current VRI provider and are looking for a better solution.

Once you've clarified your goals, and you may have many goals, you can then begin the process of determining which solution or solutions best meet those objectives.

But before you begin the process of selecting a solution, you may want to consider who is going to be on the selection committee.

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**“I've got the DOJ and the Joint Commission breathing down my neck. I need to do something.”**

*- InDemand Client*

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If you'd like more information about setting detailed goals, take a look at InDemand's Customer Goals Template. [Click Here](#)

## Involve IT Early

It is also important to involve Information Technology (IT) early. Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) is not like phone interpreting. It requires considerably more IT support. IT will want to understand the network requirements, security concerns, and their role in supporting VRI.

Again, IT is more likely to support a VRI project if they are involved early on. The amount of time required of IT is generally not extensive. Some IT departments will push back on any new project, particularly if they are overwhelmed with an EMR installation. Supporting VRI is not a large magnitude project, and they should be able to fit it in to their priorities.

Some organizations allow IT to lead a VRI project. I think this is usually a mistake. The priorities of an IT department are not always the same as caregiver and patient priorities, and more often than not, when IT leads a selection committee, the goals listed above (improving compliance, saving money, improving the provider and patient experience) are compromised. In one recent case, IT chose the most expensive and complex solution because they believed it to be the most “secure.” Whether the solution selected was more secure was debatable; what was not debatable was that the caregivers were stuck with a solution that they did not like and found very difficult to use.

▶ If you'd like more information for IT Professionals, take a look at InDemand's *Guide for IT Professionals*. [Click here](#)

## Decide Which Departments Will Use VRI First

Certain departments tend to prefer VRI because of the match between their needs and the unique characteristics of VRI (unscheduled, quick access, multiple languages, 24x7 availability). These departments include Emergency departments, labor and delivery, surgery (where you may need an interpreter prior to surgery and after the patient wakes up, but don't want to pay an interpreter to wait around in between) and pediatrics (where the children may speak English, but the parents may not).

Involve these departments in the selection process, including any pilots or on-site evaluation.

## Plan for the Long Run

In addition to determining which departments will use VRI first, think about the organization's long-term needs. Clients who have been using VRI for some time tend to use it in a variety of usage scenarios. For example, here are some usage scenarios that you may or may not have considered:

**Clinics:** How does the proposed VRI solution work in the smaller clinic environment? Clinics may not have as much floor space, so a smaller solution may be preferred (a tablet or a multi-use laptop, for example). If the solution requires a private MPLS network, are you willing to install that network in every clinic?

Not all the issues associated with clinics are technical.

For example, you may have clinics or physician practices that

are associated with your hospital, but different legal entities. What is the provider’s policy in terms of aggregating volume from associated organizations in order to get the best pricing?

**Home Health Care:** Does the proposed VRI solution work with 4G networks? Do they have a solution that can easily be carried by a home health care worker? Is HIPAA information protected in a home health care scenario, and what is required to ensure security of that data (some solutions require the home health care worker to make a VPN connection).

**Kiosk Solutions:** Health care organizations sometimes use VRI in public spaces without an employee present. Does the provider have a kiosk solution that is securely locked (it can’t be stolen), and which can’t be used for any other purpose? Is it easy enough to be used without training?

## Decide Where VRI Fits in Your Mix

VRI cannot meet all language interpreting needs or handle every patient situation. Even after you have VRI installed, you will continue to use phone interpreting and on-site interpreting. It is important for you to decide where VRI fits into your mix of modalities (VRI, phone, on-site). Will you use VRI as a supplement, but prefer on-site interpreters when available? That’s fine, although it can be more expensive. Will you primarily use VRI, only using on-site interpreters when absolutely necessary?

Many hospitals have specific strategies for health care professionals to help determine the most appropriate modality for each scenario. InDemand, and several other VRI providers, have sample guidelines about when to use VRI. Request these and decide what mix is right for your health care organization.

## Weight Your Criteria

Once you’ve decided on your goals, where VRI fits into the mix, and which departments are most likely to use VRI, then evaluate your criteria based on your organization’s unique needs.

### Here are some sample criteria:

Criteria	Weight
<i>Quality of interpreters</i>	_____
<i>Equipment that meets our needs</i>	_____
<i>Ease of use</i>	_____
<i>Features</i>	_____
<i>Support</i>	_____
<i>Availability of languages</i>	_____
<i>Integration with other technology we use</i>	_____
<i>Cost</i>	_____
<i>Business terms</i>	_____

When you evaluate a provider, make sure to ask specific questions. For example, don’t just ask “How many languages do you support?” Almost everyone will tell you over 200 languages. Ask “How many languages are supported on video?” “How many languages are supported 24x7?” “Which languages are supported by your employees and which by contractors?” “What is the response time for languages other than Spanish and ASL?”

## Consider At Least Three Providers, Test At Least Two Providers

The industry's top four VRI providers, include: Cyracom, InDemand Interpreting, Language Access Network (LAN) and Language Line/Stratus Video.

As of this writing (May of 2015), I combine Language Line and Stratus Video offerings because they use the same technology and they share interpreters. Language Line's LanguageUC is the same technology as Stratus Video's product. Stratus Video provides American Sign Language interpreters to Language Line, and Language Line provides spoken language interpreters to Stratus Video. There is some talk that Language Line may come out with their own solution, but until that happens, there is not a lot of difference between the two solutions.

I would advise any organization to take a look at three or four of the major providers and bring in at least two providers for a trial. I strongly advise against selecting a provider without trying out the product first. Or you could negotiate a 30-day out clause, during which time you can test the product. But be sure that you have some real-world experience with the product before making a long-term commitment.

## Check References

Checking references is important for obvious reasons, but many organizations still don't do it. It's best to seek references for organizations that are similar in size and type of organization. If you're a large IDN, ask for references that are of similar size and complexity. If you're a children's hospital, ask for references from your peers.

## Consider Total Costs, Not Just Price Per Minute

This may also seem obvious, but it's less important to focus on the cost per minute of VRI. Taking into account the entire cost of equipment, installation fees, support fees, software, cost of ownership and networks in to the overall total cost. Be sure to consider the costs for IT to support the VRI project if they have to provide first line support. If the solution requires a separate virtual private network (VPN) for example, include those costs.

## Calculate an Expected ROI

Particularly if one of your goals is to cut costs, calculate an expected return on investment (ROI). Not only will this set expectations with the provider and the team, but it can also help justify the project.

Most VRI providers, including InDemand, have ROI models. They can help to determine the right mix of VRI with on-site interpreting and calculate the expected ROI. This is best done by gathering data on existing spend. Sign an NDA with the provider and ask them to help your organization with a model that is sophisticated enough to share with your finance department.

## Request for Information (RFI) and Request for Proposal (RFP)

We realize that many healthcare providers are mandated to go through an RFI/RFP process. It would be worthwhile asking a few different VRI providers for a sample RFP to use as a reference when developing the document to provide sufficient background and ensure that a well-rounded RFP is distributed. Just as many people wouldn't buy a car based on a matrix of specifications and features, we'd recommend taking the product for a test drive. Many companies offer the option of a trial period up front prior to making a final purchasing decision.

## After the Selection

The success of a VRI project is based on more than just selecting the best product and service for your needs. Success of the project also depends on the rollout and training involved in introducing the VRI product to the organization. Assign someone to oversee the project, and make sure they have the resources and support they need to understand how to effectively and efficiently use VRI. Don't assume that the provider is going to do all the work – they can't.

Introducing VRI to an organization is a change management problem, and most organizations are resistant to change. If the change is well thought out, strongly supported and has specific measures of success, it is much more likely to succeed than if no one is in charge, no one is accountable, and the assumption is that everything will “just work”.



## InDemand Interpreting

InDemand was founded in 2007 with the vision of ensuring that every patient receives the highest quality healthcare, regardless of language, cultural background or disability. By delivering the most experienced medical interpreters and highest quality video technology, InDemand Interpreting gives doctors, nurses and clinicians the language access they need to provide the best possible care.

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