

# Sourcing Guide:

## 21 Things to Look for When Selecting an Office Supply Vendor



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Office supplies and furniture can make up a surprisingly large part of your business' expenses, across all company sizes.

According to United Stationers, offices with 1-4 employees spend as much as \$1844 per employee on office supplies, computer consumables, tech equipment, furniture, janitorial and break-room products. Meanwhile, medium-sized offices spend about \$1069 per employee, and offices with over 200 people spend the least at \$639 per employee.

Selecting the right office supply vendor ensures that you:

- Always have the essential office supplies needed to run your business
- Pay the best price for products and reduce unnecessary expenses
- Get recommendations for the products that best fit your needs

To help you pick the supplier that's right for your company, this guide will go through 21 questions to ask when you're selecting an office supply company.

Pricing is a major consideration when selecting a vendor, but especially when selecting an office supply vendor. Office and printing supplies are a requirement of every business and products are usually exactly the same across office supply vendors.

## Pricing

One of the simplest ways to select an office supply vendor is by choosing the vendor with the lowest prices, since products are usually across different suppliers.

To compare prices, create a list of the top office supplies you commonly use and compare the prices across different vendors by using their website or print catalogs.

## Sneaky Pricing Tactics

Before selecting a vendor, look out for confusing or hidden pricing methodologies, such as:

- **Pricing discounts off a list price** – discounts from a high price may not mean savings, nor competitive prices
- **Added fees** – some vendors often boast about the lowest prices, but add costs to the overall bill, such as additional gas charges or handling fees

Always clarify the pricing structure with the vendor, and if there are additional fees and charges, request an itemized list of extra fees to ensure you take them into consideration when evaluating costs.

## Price Matching

Vendors who are selling items identical to what other vendors sell commonly offer price matching so that their clients are not incentivized to place orders with other vendors.

Selecting a supplier who offers this service ensures that you will always have the lowest price on the items you're ordering.

When you're inquiring about price matching during the vendor selection process, ensure that the criteria the vendor uses to price match is easy to follow.

## Minimum Order Requirements

Suppliers serving enterprises often have minimum order requirements. If the supplier has restrictions on order sizes, make sure ask these questions:

- Is the threshold low enough that it can be easily met? A minimum order of \$50 is easily attained for any business team, but a minimum order of \$500 might be much harder
- What is the delivery fee if the minimum order is not met?

How easy will it be to place orders with your supplier? Making purchases is a key process in how your employees will interact with the vendor. Ensure the vendor accepts multiple methods for placing orders to meet the needs of your employees.

## Reorders/Favourites

Basic office and printing supplies such as printer toner, paper, pens and notepads are supplies that need to be re-ordered on a regular basis.

To make the ordering process efficient for you, the vendor should offer the ability to remember or store past orders so that re-orders of the same supplies becomes fast and simple.

## Order Methods

Vendors should offer methods for placing orders and allow you to select the method that is most convenient for you.

Some of your staff may prefer to order online, but other employees may find sending in orders through other channels faster. Ideally, the vendor should be able to accept orders by:

- Online
- Email
- Telephone
- Fax

You should also confirm that the delivery time or product availability isn't impacted by how you place your orders.

## Product Catalogs

A product catalog, whether print or online, that's easy to navigate and search should be available and should list every item that's available for order.

In addition, you should be able to both browse through categories of products, as well as search for specific items. For example, you should be able to easily view all the sticky notes available, as well as search for a specific brand, size and colour.

## Overall Number of Products

A good office supply vendor should carry at least 50,000 items, across different product categories and brand names.

To ensure the vendor you're considering has all the items your business requires, make a list of all supplies and brands you use and have them confirm they carry all those items or product types.

## Brand Names & Generic Brands

In addition to carrying standard brand name products, such as Post-It and Hilroy, ensure that the office supply vendor carries a generic brand.

Generic brand products are usually exactly the same or very similar in specifications and quality to their brand name version, but cost less. Replacing brand name products with generic versions can save you 10% to 70% in costs, depending on the particular office supply product. Even if you don't plan on using generic brands, it's a great option to have.

## Additional Supplies

Major office supply vendors should also carry additional items like break-room supplies, such as paper towels and coffee. It should also carry electronic accessories such as iPad cases, and furniture & fixtures such as chairs, literature racks or filing cabinets.

Selecting a vendor with a wider range of products can save you time and resources through having to make fewer, but larger orders and by having to manage few vendors.

Once orders are placed to the office supply vendor, how long does it take them to fulfill the order? Is it as fast as the next business, or do you need to wait a week or more? What provisions do they have for urgent or rush orders? Ensure you negotiate delivery terms that meet your business needs.

## Average Delivery Times

Your office supply vendor of choice should have reliable delivery operations and should consistently be able to deliver in-stock items within 1-2 business days if you are situated in, or near, a major metropolitan area.

## Rush/Urgent Orders

No matter how organized a company is and plans their orders in advance, sometimes rush orders are necessary. This can be the case if essential printing supplies like toner or paper may have suddenly been used up or damaged and a replacement is needed as soon as possible.

To meet your needs, a good office supply vendor should be able to accommodate urgent orders by delivering items on the same day or the next business day. Find out beforehand if there is a fee for rush or next-day delivery.



Favourable invoicing and payment terms from suppliers are essential and always beneficial for accounts payable management and cash flow. Before you select a vendor, make sure their payment terms are aligned with your cash flow policy.

## Payment Terms

What payment terms does the vendor offer? Is payment due at the time the order is placed, or can you pay until after the products are received?

Cash management is an important part of any business, especially if you're a small or medium-sized company. Your vendor should be able to offer payment terms of at least 30 days. It's also important to note what the penalties are for late payments, in the unlikely event you forget or miss the payment date.

## Invoicing and Payment Methods

Can the vendor provide invoices and accept a variety of payment methods?

A good office supply vendor should be able to invoice you for either an individual order after it's been delivered, or provide a consolidated invoice once per month that includes all orders placed across the entire company.

Be sure that the vendor has the flexibility to provide the invoicing your accounting department prefers and accept whatever payment method is best for your company, whether that is cheques or credit cards.



The office supply vendors role doesn't end when they deliver the products. Post-purchase service and support should be critical elements in your agreement.

## Returns/Exchange Policy

What is the vendor's policy on returns and exchanges if you are unsatisfied with your purchase?

Most vendors offer 30 days for a return in its original packaging, and 14 days for computers, tablets and eReaders. If your company will be ordering accessories, equipment or furniture, it's imperative you clarify the return and exchange policy ahead of time.

## Damaged Items

If products arrive damaged, how fast will the vendor replace and deliver a new item?

This is especially important if you will be ordering larger ticket items, such as electronics, furniture or accessories. In addition, you should clarify the process for:

- Returning, exchanging or repairing a product that's covered under the manufacturer's warranty. For example, will the vendor handle it for you, or will you have to deal directly with the manufacturer?
- Whether the vendor offers product warranties or guarantees above and beyond the manufacturer's warranty

In addition to selling office supplies, what value-added services can the vendor provide? Vendors catering to small, medium, large businesses and enterprises typically offer additional services that are not available to consumer purchasers.

## Account Management

Will the vendor provide a dedicated account manager who you can call directly with inquiries or problems, or do all the vendor's customers call the same general inquiries phone number?

A good office supplies provider should have account managers for all their business clients to ensure someone understands any special requirements that clients have and who can resolve any issues or needs quickly and responsively.

## Office Supplies Audit

An office supply audit can easily save you 20% to 30% on office supply expenses.

By examining your past purchases, office infrastructure and inventory levels, the vendor should be able to recommend changes to your ordering process, order quantities, brands and products to streamline your expenses and office supply management.

## Complimentary Consultations

A great office supply vendor will be able to provide complimentary and personalized services such as product recommendations as part of the contract.

Consulting the vendor for suggestions on remanufactured toners and generic versions of brand name products you currently use can help reduce unnecessary office supply expenses.

It's important to select business partners and vendors who have values that are aligned with your company's to enforce your corporate brand and culture. If your company invests in diversity and the local community, then ensure that all aspects of your business including your supplier choices reflect these values.

## Independent Businesses vs. Large Chains

Surprisingly, many local, independent office supply vendors are able to provide the same range of products and service as large chains.

In fact, these independent vendors, particularly online vendors, may even be able to offer the same products at a lower cost compared to large chains due to less marketing and overhead expenses.

If you're a business who believes in supporting the local community, selecting an independent vendor may be a better fit with your corporate values.

## Commitment to Local Community Development

What corporate values does the vendor have, and are they aligned with your company's values?

Similar to how you choose business partners, choosing a vendor who has values similar to your own business' is extremely important. If your business believes in supporting projects or organizations that contribute to the local community, you should look for similar beliefs in the vendors you work with.

Everyday Office Supplies is a 100% Canadian-owned and woman-owned online office supply and furniture company serving businesses and enterprises throughout Toronto and GTA area.

We carry over 50,000 office products and furniture, guarantee low prices and provide free next-day delivery with no minimum order sizes.

Visit [shopeveryday.ca](http://shopeveryday.ca) to view all our products or contact us at [info@shopeveryday.ca](mailto:info@shopeveryday.ca) to book a free office supply audit that could save you 20% to 30% on your office supply and print expenses.

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 [linkedin.com/company/everyday-office-supplies](https://www.linkedin.com/company/everyday-office-supplies)



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