MANAGED IT SERVICES
BUYERS GUIDE

MANAGED IT SERVICES EXPLAINED!

Achieve **PEACE OF MIND** for Your Business

Learn the Benefits of Managed IT

Keep Your Business Healthy with Maximize Productivity, Predictable Budgeting and more!

How Much Should Managed IT Cost?

We Cover the 6 IT Managed Service PRICING MODELS

RetroFit technologies

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Introduction

There's no denying the tangible and intangible benefits technology brings to organizations of all types and sizes. It's a simple fact: technology helps businesses produce the results their customers desire, and ultimately, helps businesses make more money more quickly and efficiently. The technological infrastructure in place plays an integral role within the entire business - from the culture to the productivity and everything in between.

If you're starting your search for a strategic technology partner, you might be wondering if managed IT services are right for you. Chances are, you've considered your options: hiring an internal person, outsourcing part of your IT department, and lastly, finding the right managed IT services plan to handle all of your technology needs.

Maybe you've learned that keeping your technological infrastructure running smoothly requires a lot more time and attention than you have on hand. In addition, advancements in the realm of technology happen fast and it's hard to keep up and remain competitive without help. That's what makes managed IT services a great alternative to virtually any other option.

Does My Business Need Managed IT Services?

Regardless of the type of business you're running, managed IT services will likely be helpful if you're overwhelmed with time-consuming tasks, such as:

- Monitoring your technological infrastructure for issues and/or concerns
- Applying security patches and/or updates as soon as they're available
- Troubleshooting end-user issues that arise during or after business hours
- Setting up the proper security solutions to prevent data theft and/or loss
- Configuring the network to work properly on all end-user devices
- And much more

Above all, you might need managed IT services if you're struggling with higher-level problems within your business, such as:

- Slow or unresponsive communication with customers - from responding to requests to sending out documents and everything in between.
- Inefficient day-to-day operations - from lack of proper inventory management to lack of insight into cash flow needs.
- Vulnerability to security threats - from the way you send financial information to the way your employees browse the web.

That's right... managed IT services can be surprisingly helpful in resolving not only technology issues, but business issues that arise due to rapid growth, expansion, and various other factors. After all, technology is the backbone of your operations.

When Did Managed IT Services Become So Widely Used?

Since the early 1990s, organizations of all types and sizes have been leveraging managed IT services to help them monitor, manage, and maintain their technological infrastructure. They've relied on MSPs (managed service providers) to help them handle all of their technology needs, whether they're receiving on-site support or remote support. Before this, businesses relied on what's known as "break/fix" support wherein they pay by the hour for help with setting up, managing, or protecting various pieces of their infrastructure.

Although break/fix support has been incredibly useful in the past, most businesses have grown past this. In today's day and age, we're more technology-dependent than ever before. More importantly, we have more rules and regulations governing the way we use technology in business than ever before. This is why managed IT services are becoming more widely used to maintain business operations, as well as ensure industry-specific compliance regulations are met.

The typical MSP provides a whole host of services - all for one flat-rate monthly fee. This may include:

- Network design and configuration
- Cyber security
- Asset management
- vCIO (virtual CIO)
- Hardware maintenance
- Network monitoring and reporting

- End-user support (onsite and remote)
- Mobile device management
- Backup and disaster recovery
- Application management

Most MSPs can deliver these services, so how do you know which MSP to choose? And what services you need in your managed IT services plan? Fortunately, our buyer's guide has been created to act as a starting point for businesses looking for managed IT services. As you continue to read through this buyer's guide, you'll find answers to many of the questions you've been wondering, such as:

- What exactly are managed IT services?
- What are the separate components of managed IT services?
- What services do I need in a managed IT services plan?
- How much should I expect to spend on managed IT services?
- How are managed IT services delivered?
- What is the business case for managed IT services?
- And much, much more

This buyer's guide will help you navigate the decision-making process to ensure you're making an informed IT outsourcing decision.

What Exactly Are Managed IT Services?

Let's take a look at what exactly managed IT services are. Typically, an organization offloads its IT functions to what's known as an MSP (managed services provider). This MSP will assume ongoing responsibility for those IT functions - handling the monitoring, maintenance, and troubleshooting of any systems within the environment.

A Story to Highlight the Value of Managed IT Services

Before we go into more detail about managed IT services and how they work, let's take a look at a story to highlight the value of managed IT services. This is the story of a small accounting firm that started in the early 1990s - we'll give them the fictitious name of "Smith and Jenson Accounting" to protect their privacy. When Smith and Jenson Accounting was established, they brought an amateur network designer into their firm to help them develop some simple systems.

They relied heavily upon their personal computers, Internet access, and spreadsheets to do their jobs - making break/fix support the perfect solution going forward. Whenever they had problems, they simply called their amateur network designer to fix them. This worked fine... Until it didn't. Over the years, improvements in database technologies, accounting software, and various cloud-based solutions made it impossible for their network to keep up.

As they started adding on various systems into their infrastructure, their amateur network designer had more and more trouble keeping up when problems occurred. After all, everything was essentially pieced together. He could only see what was happening on that particular day, on that particular system, rather than seeing the infrastructure as a cohesive environment. This made it next to impossible to add innovative technologies into the mix - limiting their competitive edge significantly.

He couldn't foresee problems because nothing was in place to help him monitor the entire infrastructure. Instead, he would use an elaborate checklist to record processor usage, disk usage, and other important factors. Smith and Jenson Accounting simply couldn't

handle the influx of problems any longer. They decided it was time for a change. They turned to an MSP to develop the cohesive environment they needed.

After a few months, they noticed a huge difference in the number of issues that occurred on a weekly basis. After all, everything was connected together with their MSP monitoring the entire infrastructure around-the-clock. They not only decreased the number of issues they had, but also the amount of money they spent on support that was charged by the hour. Instead, they paid a flat-rate monthly fee that was easy to budget, month after month.

In addition to having fewer issues and spending less money, they were able to access an entire team of knowledgeable technology experts who were able to advise them on a range of topics, such as:

- The latest accounting software programs
- The latest cloud computing programs
- The best business phone systems
- And much more

An MSP essentially allows businesses to be proactive rather than reactive - waiting for problems to occur, paying to fix them, and hoping for the best. An MSP takes care of all types of issues, including software updates, malfunctioning computers, networking equipment, maintenance on servers, and much more. Typically, they're certified partners with industry leaders, including but not limited to:

- Microsoft
- Dell
- SonicWall
- Cisco
- Hewlett Packard
- And much more

They have engineers and technology experts on hand who are able to handle virtually any technology requirements.

What Are the Separate Components of Managed IT Services?

The separate components of managed IT services can include a range of individual functions and/or solutions, depending on your unique needs. Most MSPs allow you to choose from a few different plans they have available. These plans are typically created based on industry best practices, and more often than not, they'll have a plan that suits your unique needs. If you don't think you need all of the services listed, you can request to remove one or more services. However, we don't recommend doing so.

As mentioned, their plans are created based on industry best practices. They know what needs to be done to keep your business operating in a secure and efficient manner. Here are some of the most common components of managed IT services:

- **Managed applications:** This includes monitoring, patching, updating, and reporting on the applications you use. This also includes any configuration and/or security measures required.

- **Managed business phones:** This includes configuration and support for VoIP business phones - a technology designed to allow you to leverage the phone over the Internet, as well as various enterprise-grade features.

- **Managed backup & disaster recovery:** This includes the development and ongoing testing of a customized backup and disaster recovery plan designed to keep your business functioning, no matter what happens.

- **Managed network:** This may include managed wireless access points, router & WAN management, switch and cloud management, and any other tasks required to keep your network operating around-the-clock.

- **Onsite or remote support:** This may include a set amount or an unlimited amount of hours available for support, whether it's onsite or remote, depending on your unique needs.

- **Managed security:** This includes properly configured firewalls, secure web filtering, end user awareness training, dark web scanning, advanced end point protection, advanced network management and other services to keep unauthorized users out of your network.

- **Managed servers:** This includes maintaining all servers - from patching/updating to incident management to around-the-clock monitoring and everything in between - ensuring optimal performance.

If you need other services, they're likely available to be added to your managed IT services plan or a-la-carte, such as:

- Virtual CIO Services
- 24x7 Support
- Penetration Testing
- Advanced Network Security SIEM
- It Projects and/or consulting
- And Mouch more

Once you've settled on a specific bundle of services, they'll put this into your service level agreement (SLA) - an agreement that outlines your services, the prices, and any conditions and/or specifications on response times.

How Much Do Managed IT Services Cost?

A 6 Pricing-Model Guide

When you call around trying to find out how much Managed IT Services cost, you'll probably find that the pricing isn't uniform. The answers you receive can vary, and you may end up confused and frustrated. Unfortunately, there's no online catalogue to pick and choose from or a one-price-fits-all formula. However, there are six popular Managed IT Service Pricing Models that you can use as a guide.

What Are These Six Managed IT Service Pricing Models?

IT companies offer a wide variety of services. And like other service-oriented companies, each has pricing based on what they provide and the value it brings to their clients. Even though their pricing may vary, they will typically offer these six different pricing models.

Note: The pricing models here don't constitute specific pricing. Instead, each model represents a set of services provided in the desired plan.

The 6 Pricing Models Are:

1. **Monitoring Only**
2. **Per Device**
3. **Per User**
4. **Tiered**
5. **All You Can Eat**
6. **A La Carte**

1. What Is The Monitoring-Only Model?

The monitoring-only model provides network monitoring and alerting services. Your IT provider can offer this model to companies of all sizes. The midsize or enterprise companies with in-house IT technicians can also use this service and be alerted when something goes amiss. With this model, there are several service levels offered.

2. What Is The Per-Device Model?

The per-device model is a flat fee for each device that's supported in your IT environment. For instance, a basic per-device pricing model might designate a flat price: per desktop / per server / per network printer / per managed network.

The pricing is straightforward to quote, and the monthly service fee gets adjusted when you add or delete devices.

3. What Is The Per-User Model?

The per-user model closely resembles the per-device model. But instead of being billed per device, you're invoiced per user, per month, which covers support for the hardware used by each user. The support typically covers commonly used equipment:

- Office Equipment: PC, laptop, tablet, and connectivity
- Home Equipment: home PC, laptop, tablet, and smartphone
- Communication Equipment: hotels and kiosks when travelling

4. What Is The Tiered Model?

The tiered model is designed to provide bundled packages. With each package, "X" amount of services are included. And as a tiered model, there are three or more bundled package levels, with three or more pricing levels.

They usually get labelled as "Gold, Silver, and Bronze" or "Basic, Standard, and Premium." The premise with this model is simple–when you pay more, additional services are available that aren't offered with a lower-level bundled package.

5. What Is The All You Can Eat Model?

The all-you-can-eat model gives you flexibility. Budgeting your IT expenses in this manner enables you to gauge what's taken place over the past year, and then make calculated IT cost forecasts for the coming year. Typically you'll have access to:

- ✔ Remote support / On-site support
- ✔ Lab or Bench time / 24/7 year-round support
- ✔ Services during specific hours of the day / particular days of the month

The all-you-can-eat model gives you the ability to genuinely budget your IT support costs over a year with no hidden or surprise fees.

6. What Is The A La Carte Model?

The a la carte model is unique. With this model, you're getting individual services. Maybe there's a specific problem which came up and needs addressing. This is when you pay for only the services you need. You can also create a customized Managed IT Services Bundled Package that's tailored to your company's specific needs or requirements. This is what makes this model different from an all-inclusive, Managed IT Services model or pre-bundled package.

What About Actual Pricing Ranges?

Actual pricing ranges vary from one jurisdiction to another. But to give you a brief overview of what pricing ranges look like, here's the breakdown. Just remember that these aren't actual prices, only pricing ranges.

1. Flat-Based Range: Monthly, quarterly, or annual fee depending on needs
2. Per-User Range: $75 - $200
3. Per Device Range: Workstations ($25 - $75), Servers ($175 - $300) (approximate costs)

This should give you a guide for how much Managed IT Services should cost when you call different providers.

How Does Managed IT Service Compare To Hiring A Full-Time Tech?

Some small businesses hire one or more in-house IT technicians on a full-time basis to handle their technology infrastructure. Depending on where you live in the USA, an IT technician might earn between $116,000 to $150,000. In addition, you'll have to provide insurance, paid vacations, and a range of benefits.

The biggest problem for most companies comes when your IT tech gets a year or so of experience under their belt. They often begin to look around to see if they can find a better-paying job, and eventually, they leave you for a larger company that offers better benefits.

This is practically inevitable. It happens frequently. You put a lot of time into training employees, and then they leave you for another firm. Now you must start all over again.

Can We Use Managed IT Services To Supplement Our In-house Techs?

Yes,… this is called Co-Managed IT Service. A Co-Managed IT Solution can give your team the additional support they need to optimize IT performance and accomplish their tasks efficiently. It's a solution that offers numerous benefits.

Co-Managed IT Services allow you to get help with already configured tools and software to allow your team to leverage. Help with big projects when you need it. You can also cut back on the number of IT employees you hire. With CO-Managed IT Services, you'll have the right people and help you need to pro-actively manage your network or if a big problem crops up that no one can resolve. And these are IT professionals with lots of industry experience.

To help you decide if Managed IT Services are right for your business in New England area, you should stay up-to-date on the latest news and information in IT. Visit our Blog where we publish current articles each month.

How Do You Buy Managed IT Services?

CompTIA found that managed IT services are the second-most popular business model in the information technology industry nowadays. In theory, buying managed IT services should be fairly easy, right? After all, the market is growing at a rapid rate. Gone are the days of paying an hourly fee for someone to come in and fix things as they break. There is simply too much going on within the average company's environment to rely on such a reactive approach to maintaining technology. So how do you buy managed IT services? Is there anything you need to know before you take the plunge?

Should you look for a budget friendly option?

Naturally, you'll want to find an MSP that offers plans within your budget, but this is far different than actively seeking out the most "budget-friendly" option. As you turn to an MSP to handle elements of your information technology, you want to make sure you're putting your money in the capable hands of a knowledgeable team that can:

- Monitor your network around-the-clock to detect and address issues
- Keep your data and applications backed up and ready to recover
- Offer strategic guidance to help you meet organizational goals
- Provide remote or onsite support when you need assistance
- Apply regular updates and/or patches to keep your hardware and software up-to-date
- Secure your network and any devices connected to the network against cybercrime

Although you want to make sure your MSP of choice provides the services listed above and anything else you need, it's vital to look for an MSP that understands business rather than focusing solely on technology. You want them to have an idea of how to use their service to achieve your objectives from a business perspective, not a technology perspective.

Should you ask any specific questions prior to signing a contract?

When you're ready to sign a contract, take a step back and ask a few questions prior to committing to the MSP of your choice. You should feel confident in your decision, especially if you're going to be locked into a contract. Here's a few questions to ask:

1. Do you have existing clients I can speak to?

Ask them for references. It'll give you confidence knowing there are people out there who speak highly of the MSP. Once you get references, ask a few questions like "would you hire them again?" or "how responsive are they when you need support?"

2. What should I expect in terms of response times?

This is an important question. You don't want to find out later on that you have to wait hours, or worse, days to get issues fixed. Talk about response times and see what you can expect in the event of a software problem or hardware failure.

3. Is there anything that isn't supported under the agreement?

You should be clear on what is supported under the agreement. Many IT companies will cover the labor costs associates with supporting hardware and software, but ask about peripherals like printers, scanners, etc. too.

Should I partially or fully outsource my technology functions to an MSP?

When buying managed IT services, you might be wondering how "full" of a plan you actually need. Some companies already have an in-house IT department that handles the day-to-day maintenance, but require help with big projects. Other companies use their internal person or team for strategy and consulting while looking for help with the day-to-day maintenance. Consider your own situation before deciding whether to partially or fully outsource your technology functions to an MSP.

You may elect to sign up for their lowest level of plan, including remote monitoring, maintenance, and security, then leave the rest to your internal person or team. Or you may elect to outsource absolutely everything because it's more cost efficient than maintaining an entire team.

Will we be able to customize our service contract?

This is entirely up to your MSP of choice. If they're not very flexible on their service contracts, keep in mind that they're taking over responsibility of your technology and it's always important to trust their judgement. If they say you need XYZ, chances are, they know from experience working with other companies similar to yours. Remember, you wouldn't go to the doctor and demand to have a specific treatment for an issue. This is very similar. They are the experts and if they're not flexible in terms of customizing, ask them about their reasoning.

This highlights another important reason for buying managed IT services: partnership. In the past, buying managed IT services was viewed as a way to cut costs associated with ongoing support. Nowadays, it's all about having access to a team of experts who know and understand your business. They're able to help you operate more efficiently - streamlining and automating tasks wherever it makes sense to help you generate additional revenue. It's more than simply maintaining your systems, but making sure you're able to create new opportunities for development.

If you enjoyed this installment in our managed IT services buyer's guide, keep an eye out for the next installment. We're answering all of the questions we hear so often from businesses looking to better leverage information technology for growth and success.

Questions? Call (508) 478-2222 to talk about buying managed IT services. We'd be happy to answer your questions!

How Are Managed IT Services Delivered?

In the last section of our buyer's guide, we covered what exactly managed IT services are. If you missed it, managed IT services involve a service provider, known as an MSP (managed service provider), assuming ongoing responsibility for the IT functions within a business - handling the monitoring, maintenance, troubleshooting, and other elements of any systems within the environment.

What Makes a Business Decide to Have Managed IT Services Delivered in the First Place?

There are many reasons a business may decide to have managed IT services delivered in the first place. For instance, technology advances at a rapid rate. For many industries, technology can make a world of difference when it comes to maintaining a competitive advantage. If you don't have the latest technologies in place, you're at risk of becoming obsolete. In addition, many industries face various compliance regulations wherein they're required to have a higher level of security measures in place. It's typically easier to outsource the management of your technology than hope you're getting it right in terms of protecting confidential data.

In other cases, a business may simply have grown beyond what used to fit them perfectly fine. For instance, the business may already have an in-house IT person or a break/fix support company that handles their technology, but as time goes on, they're no longer able to get by without the help of an entire IT department that's dedicated to them. An MSP, on the other hand, is able to provide all of the services and support they need at a flat-rate monthly fee - making it a cost-effective choice.

When you choose managed IT services, you have access to an entire team of well-trained technology experts who are able to better understand your technological infrastructure - helping to provide guidance and support whenever necessary.

They proactively monitor your systems, in order to catch and resolve issues right away. This greatly minimizes potential downtime wherein staff members aren't able to get their work done.

How Does an MSP Deliver Their Managed IT Services to End-Users?

It all starts with a network assessment. This allows the MSP to get a detailed view of what is in place and to document the entire network they will be managing. Once this is completed, the MSP now has all the information they need to properly support and maintain your environment. A detailed report would be provided at the end of this process. The next step to accept the agreement designed to outline the managed service terms. You will receive an MSA (master services agreement) and an SLA (service level agreement) - two documents that define the relationship in terms of the services delivered and the requirements. The MSA will outline the scope of services that are being delivered from the service provider to the client. This should include:

- Data privacy requirements
- Service methods and processes
- MSP and Client responsibilities

The SLA outlines any sort of performance guarantees the client can depend on in relation to the services provided. This should include:

- Infrastructure uptime and/or availability
- Data recovery time objectives
- Service incident response time

You may agree to a flat-monthly or a pay-per-use billing model, however, managed IT services are typically done on a flat-rate monthly basis. The cost may vary depending on a number of factors, such as:

- Number of users and/or workstations
- Number of services managed
- Any other features and/or service delivered

Once you've finished the agreement, a Go Live Date is scheduled and its time for the MSP to deliver the services agreed upon. Typically, they will start by installing an RMM (remote monitoring and management) software that helps them keep an eye on endpoints, networks, and computers from any location. This will be deployed through an agent and installed on all servers, workstations, mobile devices, and other systems. This enables the MSP to gather insight into your network as the agents send information back to them, including:

- Machine status
- Machine health
- And much more

They're also able to use these agents to keep systems up-to-date - applying patches and updates, installing and configuring software, and more. This RMM is a huge part of what makes MSPs so proactive in the way they manage your technology.

What About Onsite Support? How Does That Work?

In the event that onsite support is needed because remote support doesn't resolve the issue, an MSP will send a technician out to your office to take a look at the problem. Typically, you would call or email the MSP with a detailed explanation of the problem you're experiencing. As mentioned above, your SLA will outline how fast you can expect a response and/or resolution to this problem.
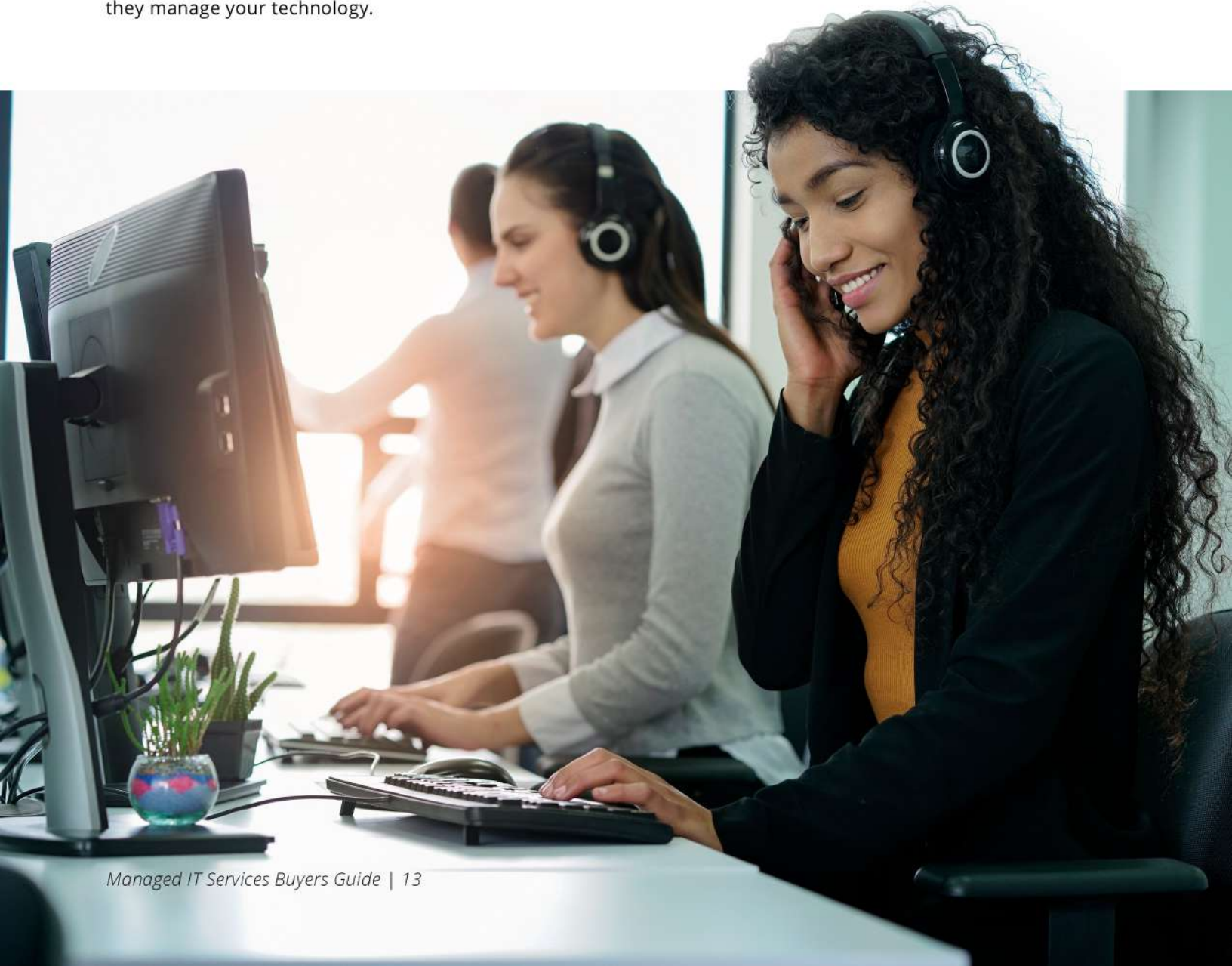
What Are the Benefits of Managed IT Services?

In this part of our buyer's guide, we're reviewing the many benefits of managed IT services. For many companies, technology plays an essential role in virtually every business process - allowing them to develop new capabilities while achieving a range of organizational objectives, such as lowering administrative costs, automating time-consuming tasks, analyzing data to make informed choices, and much more. As companies become more and more dependent on their technology, they're looking for better ways to manage their infrastructure. For most companies, managed IT services is the right choice - allowing them to rest assured knowing their technology is monitored, maintained, and managed around-the-clock.

Let's take an in-depth look at the many benefits of having a local IT company provide managed IT services:

1. Greater management of all technologies

In today's day and age, businesses can no longer standardize on a couple of computer models, a small list of applications, and a single operating system. This is much harder to do as technology continues to advance. From advanced applications to cloud-based systems to mobile devices and everything in between, businesses are using a wider range of technologies at any given time than ever before.

When you choose to leverage managed IT services, you're able to rest assured knowing your IT company will take inventory of your entire infrastructure, then create a plan that addresses the unique management and security requirements of every single application, device or system on the network.

2. Less risk of cyber-attacks

Cybercrime is becoming more sophisticated and advanced than ever before. In fact, ransomware attacks are growing more than 350% each and every year that goes by. Naturally, it's nerve-racking for personal information to fall into the wrong hands. Whether it's our social security numbers or our financial accounts, it's a scary thought. For companies that store this type of information on their employees and customers, this is an even scarier though because a security breach is the last thing customers want to hear.

An MSP is able to protect you against cyber-attacks as they implement a range of cybersecurity solutions to prevent unauthorized access to your data, including but not limited to;

- Anti-virus software
- Intrusion prevention software
- Web content filtering
- Firewalls
- Access controls
- And much more

3. Simplified ability to meet industry-specific regulations

Many organizations are obligated to meet specific standards in terms of their information technology infrastructure. There are various regulations, such as HIPAA, PCI DSS, Sarbanes Oxley, and more, that have various technical and physical security requirements. An MSP can help you better understand these requirements, and ultimately, better meet them to give you peace of mind. They'll implement the right systems, policies, and reports to guarantee you're able to meet industry-specific regulations.

4. Less unexpected support and/or troubleshooting costs

When you're leveraging break-fix support, you're paying for support whenever something goes wrong. Unfortunately, technology issues tend to arise much more often due to the lack of proactive monitoring and maintenance. An MSP, on the other hand, acts proactively to catch issues before they even happen. They monitor the network around-the-clock and keep everything properly maintained and up-to-date, but if something does happen, they're typically able to resolve it remotely. You pay a flat-rate monthly fee for all of these efforts - helping you:

- Simplify your budgeting with predictable monthly payments
- Avoid unexpected, expensive hourly fees associated with support
- Minimize the risk of unnecessary downtime

5. Free up your internal IT person or staff

If you have an internal IT person or staff, choosing to invest in managed IT services can help them be even more efficient. They're able to focus on their core competencies while we handle the day-to-day tasks, such as patching, monitoring, and supporting your end-users. This means they're able to dedicate their time to projects that help you achieve your organizational objectives.

Stay on the lookout for the next installment of our buyer's guide wherein we'll talk about the primary challenges associated with managed IT services. If you have questions, reach out to us here: **(508) 478-2222** or **www.retrofit.com.**

What Are The Separate Components of Managed IT Services?

If you've read our buyer's guide up until this point, you're likely aware of what managed IT services are and how they work. If you're new to our buyer's guide, we'll fill you in. Your IT infrastructure is made up of hardware, software, network resources, and other services required to have an operational environment. A managed IT service provider, also referred to as an MSP, is an outsourced company that acts as your technology department - monitoring, managing, and maintaining your IT infrastructure.

Nowadays, your IT infrastructure acts as the backbone of all your day-to-day operations - from fulfilling customer requests/orders to managing payroll to keeping track of inventory and everything in between. You depend on your technology because your technology enables you to grow your business - delivering your products and/or services to your customers in a timely manner.

This is what leads many businesses to invest in an MSP to take care of their environment. Every investment you make, as a business owner, carries a certain degree of risk. Depending on your industry, government regulations and financial conditions can change in an instant. An MSP takes the risks associated with technology off your plate - allowing you to focus on your business while they handle the rest.

What Defines an MSP?

In the past, many businesses leveraged what's known as the "break/fix" model of support wherein they would call a company when something went wrong with their technology, then that company would come in and fix the problem. They'd be charged an hourly rate for this support. Although this worked fine in the past, businesses nowadays have much more complex technology infrastructures.

This means a more proactive approach is necessary. Managed IT services refers to the practice of offloading the day-to-day management of your technology to an MSP. The MSP will proactively monitor, manage, and maintain the infrastructure, including all workstations, hardware, software, network sources, and more. An MSP is defined by their ability to:

- Provide a full scope of services to manage the entire technology infrastructure.
- Offer remote monitoring and management to detect issues, install patches, etc.
- Define and document standard operating procedures.
- Provide a flat-rate monthly fee that's easy to budget for and predict.
- Report to the client on a regular monthly or quarterly basis.
- Manage all vendor relationships, including internet, phone, and any applications.
- Offer a guaranteed service level agreement, and in some cases, response time.
- Provide recommendations based on the client's organizational goals/challenges.

Naturally, this goes above and beyond the "break/fix" model because the MSP becomes an integrated part of your company. They know your technology infrastructure inside and out - becoming a trusted resource you can depend on.

What Are the Separate Components of Managed IT Services?

Although not every managed IT service plan will be the same, there are some common components you can expect to see in most plans. If your MSP doesn't offer everything you need, you're likely able to have them add one or more components into the plan you're leveraging. The separate components of managed IT services include:

1. Network monitoring

A remote monitoring and management (RMM) tool will be installed to monitor all endpoints, computers, and the overall network. This allows the MSP to watch for any sort of issues that may arise. In addition to giving them insight into the network, an RMM will also help them generate reports about machine health, performance, and security.

2. Helpdesk support

This is standard in most contracts. When a technology issue does happen, helpdesk support refers to your ability to contact a team of technology professionals who can help you or your end-users resolve the issue. This may be done remotely wherein they log into the system and troubleshoot or they may come onsite when necessary.

3. Security

As cybercrime continues to evolve, security becomes more important than ever before. A firewall and anti-virus software is simply not enough to keep your sensitive data safe from hackers. Most MSPs offer comprehensive security solutions nowadays - keeping you safe against all sorts of threats. This should include:

- Firewalls
- Advanced End point Protection
- Secure DNS Web Filtering
- End User Awareneess training
- Monthly Simulated phishing
- Dark Web Scans
- Advanced network management
- and more

4. Backup and disaster recovery

If your managed IT service plan doesn't include a backup and disaster recovery plan, make sure you request to add this to your agreement. Most MSPs will bring it up before you even realize it's not included as they know the risk of data loss is serious. A backup and disaster recovery plan should include:

- Regular, automatic on-site backups
- Cloud-based backups
- Emergency response planning
- Regular testing of restore availability

Essentially, you want a mature plan that covers your entire business in the event of downtime due to unplanned outages, natural disasters, cyberattacks, and more. The goal is to ensure you're able to continue operating without any sort of data loss.

5. Cloud solutions

This may or may not be included in your managed IT services plan. It's important to ask because the cloud is a great way to reduce costs, improve accessibility, and overall, simplify your environment. You're able to avoid upfront costs associated with purchasing, maintaining, and supporting hardware and/or software. There are many resources that can be moved to the cloud, such as:

- Your email
- Your phone systems
- Your desktops
- Your applications
- And much more

As more and more businesses move to the cloud, it's vital to talk to your MSP about the cloud and whether or not it's the right choice for you.

What Should I Ask Before Selecting a Managed IT Services Plan?

If you're in the process of finding a managed IT services plan that works for you, it's important to ask the right questions. This should include:

- What is my expected level of uptime?
- Do you include onsite support in my agreement or will it cost extra?
- How long should I expect to wait for issues to be resolved?
- Do you have a response time guarantee?
- How often is maintenance performed?
- Who performs the maintenance and how do they do it?
- How do I reach out to you when I need support?
- How do you protect your environment?
- Which cyber security framework are you following?

When you're hiring an MSP, feel free to ask them about each separate component of managed IT services. If you have any questions, make sure you have a discussion with your MSP to clarify them so you can feel confident about your investment.

How Does Managed IT Services + Hardware-as-a-Service Work?

In the last section of our buyer's guide, we covered the benefits of managed IT services. If you missed it, managed IT services involve a managed services provider assuming ongoing responsibility for your infrastructure - handling the monitoring, maintenance, and support of all systems within the environment. The benefits are huge - offering you a flat-rate monthly fee, a proactive approach to security, and much more. So what happens if you want the benefits of managed IT services without having to buy all of the hardware? In this section, we'll be reviewing how managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service works for those who don't want to outright purchase all of their hardware.

What is Hardware-as-a-Service?

Hardware-as-a-service is a procurement model wherein the hardware belongs to a managed service provider while the organization leases it for their own use. Essentially, an MSP installs hardware at an organization's site with a service level agreement in place to outline each party's responsibilities in regards to the hardware. You might pay a monthly fee for the hardware in particular or you might include the cost of using the hardware within your managed IT services plan that covers installation, monitoring, and maintenance.

If you're in the start-up phase, this is an incredibly appealing option because you don't need to pay the upfront cost associated with building an entire infrastructure. In addition, the monthly payments are considered operating expenses under the tax code as opposed to capital expenses. Hardware-as-a-service may apply to:

1. **Computers:** Your MSP helps you find the right computers for your unique requirements in terms of processor, RAM, hard drives, peripherals, and more. They'll take your number of employees, budget, and more into consideration to make the right choice, then install them for you.

2. **Virtualization technologies:** If it makes sense for you, you can virtualize your desktops and servers. This is the process of running multiple machines on a single physical machine (stored at your MSP's location) to consolidate the number of machines you're running while helping to operate more efficiently.

3. **Firewalls:** Firewalls that help you stay protected against advanced, evolving cybersecurity threats can be expensive. You might choose to include firewalls in your hardware-as-a-service plan to keep yourself safe against threats without spending a fortune.

4. **Servers:** Servers can be one of the most expensive types of technology when you're starting out. Typically, when you choose to procure servers through hardware-as-a-service, the MSP will offer a higher level of support. Often, they actually surpass the manufacturers terms and conditions.

5. **Switches and routers:** These devices are used to communicate and route data within your business and any connected devices. An MSP can help you select and configure the right switches and routers for your environment - lowering costs while ensuring great performance.

6. **Storage devices:** If your storage appliance runs out of space, you're at a stand still. After all, you need to store your saved files, data, and backups somewhere. A larger, more expansive storage device can be obtained through hardware-as-a-service to give you greater space.

Hardware-as-a-service makes it possible for small to midsize businesses or those in the start-up phase to compete with larger organizations. They're able to access innovative technologies without spending a ton of money upfront. Plus, hardware-as-a-service minimizes the risk of organizations operating with old, outdated equipment that's likely riddled with vulnerabilities waiting to be exploited.

What Are the Benefits of Hardware-as-a-Service Within a Managed IT Services Plan?

When you bundle your hardware into a managed IT services plan, the benefits are vast - allowing you to take advantage of innovative technology without having to worry about monitoring, maintaining, and supporting it with an in-house person or team. You end up with the following:

- **More physical space throughout the office:** As technology evolves, it's getting smaller and more compact. Rather than having outdated hardware on premises, you can switch to more recent technologies that give you a bit of office space back. This is especially true in the case of virtualization.

- **Less capital expenses:** You're able to conserve capital because you're paying a monthly fee rather than outright purchasing the equipment. You can use your additional cash flow to invest in other areas of your business. For start-ups, this might mean more money available to market.

- **Greater security against threats:** It's almost impossible to stay safe against the latest forms of malware if you're using outdated technologies. This is because outdated technologies are often unsupported - meaning there are no patches or updates to resolve vulnerabilities.

- **More scalability whenever needed:** If you hire new staff, change applications or require more storage, it's a phone call away. Your MSP will work with you to accommodate your requirements in terms of scaling your environment up or down as needed.

Naturally, it's a lot of stress taken off your plate because you don't have to worry about the cost of purchasing hardware OR the hassle of installing, monitoring, and maintaining it yourself. Everything is taken off your plate so you can focus on what's important: finding new customers and/or taking care of the customers you have.

If you have any further questions, call (508) 478-2222 or visit us at www.retrofit.com to learn more.

In the meantime, keep an eye out for the next installment of our buyer's guide! We're going to cover a range of topics in the coming weeks - from what to look for in an agreement to the primary challenges involved with choosing managed IT services. Don't miss out. Let us know if you want to receive updates as we release installments.

7 Services & Features You Need In Your Managed Services Agreement

Do Your Managed Services Include These 7 Necessary Services & Features?

These are the "must-have" parts of any worthwhile managed services agreement. If your IT company isn't delivering, then it's time to find someone else who will.

There's no end to the variations that can be made to Managed Service Agreements. Depending on the size of your business, the field of work in which you operate, and what your Managed IT Services company of choice specializes in, your agreement could be almost entirely unique from any other.

No matter how you go about developing it, the important part is that you have the following "non-negotiables" included. These are the services and standards that apply to any size of business in any industry. If your Managed Service Agreement doesn't include them, you're doing something wrong.

1. Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is top of mind in the business world today. More and more breaches are occurring as cybercriminal tactics become more common and more effective.

That's why your IT company should have a comprehensive plan detailing how cybersecurity gets addressed. Their procedure must include:

- Firewall settings
- Intrusion detection
- Intrusion prevention
- Encryption at the file level
- Service delivery specifications

2. Infrastructure Management & Support

It may not be as exciting as cybersecurity, but administration for your infrastructure is just as important. Don't forget that your infrastructure is the backbone of your IT environment; it needs to be well maintained to keep your business functioning.

That's why all managed IT services should include basic server maintenance, network administration, storage maintenance, and typical network issues.

3. Helpdesk Support

This seems like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many service contracts don't include Helpdesk Support, or do, but impose extreme limits of its use. It could be that hours of operation are only at specific times of day, or that any overage amounts to extreme additional charges.

Either way, it's worth checking to make sure that you're getting the support you need at a reasonable rate. You'll want to have access to support via phone, email, online ticketing system,

and even Live Chat if available. 24/7 availability is a bonus, but will often come at an additional cost. If your business doesn't operate after hours or on the weekend, you probably don't need 24/7 support.

4. Network Monitoring & Maintenance

Just as your infrastructure and staff need support, so does your network. Control plays a critical role, especially when you consider how network vulnerabilities can disrupt your network. You need to have a remote monitoring solution put in place and personnel responsible for tracking any suspicious activity and addressing it according to cybersecurity best practices.

5. Data Backup & Disaster Recovery

Your IT company shouldn't only be concerned with supporting you while everything is working properly. They should also have plans in place to address your data and business-wide continuity in the event of data loss, power outage, inclement weather, or otherwise.

If your IT company uses the cloud for backup purposes, you'll want to know:

- How secure is their cloud backup solution?
- Is their backup hosted on a public or private cloud server?
- If they use a public cloud, will they consider using a private cloud for your backups?
- If your data won't get backed up in the cloud, where are the backups getting stored?

Furthermore, check the service agreement to make sure a disaster recovery plan comes standard. If it's not mentioned in the agreement, ask to have it added.

A comprehensive and detailed disaster recovery plan must be included so that when disaster strikes your business, you'll know you'll have immediate access to your backups and a recovery plan that will get you back online quickly.

6. Policy Development & Implementation

IT isn't just about technology. It's also about how it's used and how it is maintained. Over time, your business will change, and so will your IT infrastructure. As it does, those old policies will need to be re-written and updated, or new ones will need to be created, especially if your industry has mandatory compliance regulations.

Make sure to request that any and all new or updated documentation covers security, data monitoring, and BYOD. Policy creation and updates to current literature needs to be defined in the managed services agreement.

7. Termination of Service

There's always the possibility that, after trying it out for a few months, you'll determine that managed services aren't the right fit for you. Maybe it's your budget, maybe it's your size, maybe it's your needs – there are plenty of reasons why managed services aren't the right call.

As there's a possibility that you'll have to terminate your managed service agreement, it's best to check ahead of time what will take place. You don't want to incur any undue penalities for canceling your contract, so make sure to verify under what conditions you *(or IT company)* can cancel the agreement on their end.

Ask The Right Questions About Your Managed Services Agreement

If you've decided you're not getting what you need *(or deserve)* from your current IT company, then it's time to start looking for someone else.

In your research, make sure you ask the right questions:

- How often is maintenance performed?
- What is the expected level of performance?
- What type of damage gets and doesn't get covered?
- Who performs the maintenance, and how do they do it?
- Who is responsible if the equipment gets damaged during maintenance?
- If you are assigned a dedicated technician, how can you stay in touch with them?

You can't afford to settle when it comes to managed IT services. Do the work needed to find an IT company that will deliver everything you need to enjoy an optimal IT environment.

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What Do Managed IT Services
Look Like In Action?

It's one thing to hear about something like Managed IT Services in theory. It's another to know what they're actually supposed to do.

At this point, you've heard lots about what Managed IT Services are, what services they're supposed to include, what they should cost, how they can go wrong, etc.

That's all well and good, but at the end of the day, don't you want to know what the whole point of Managed IT Services is? Don't you want a clear idea of what they can do, in action?

In the end, their value to you will be determined by the actual effect they have on your business, day in and day out.

What Do Managed IT Services Actually Do?

Consider these three examples below to get a better idea of how Managed IT Services operate *(and the advantages they offer)* in the workplace.

Managed IT Services Simplify Your IT

The Situation

Let's say you employ less than 100 people. You figure that you only need *(not to mention, can only afford)* one or maybe two in-house IT staff members. And you also checked with your other employees to see if any were "tech-savvy." For those that were, you let them take on ad-hoc IT roles, but only when it's vital.

The Problem

As your organization grows, and more IT "growing pains" began to appear, problems with the initial IT staffing approach arise as well. Now you have a whole new set of complications:

- Your staff only has access to specific skills. Their current knowledge does not keep up with technology changes and updates.

- Your staff lacks training and makes critical mistakes, leading to additional IT issues and downtime.

- Hiring IT support by the hour in an emergency to solve errors, concerns or problems, who are unfamiliar with your system, just got expensive and more complicated.

The Solution

Managed IT Services offer a team of professionals that have specialties in a range of technologies, receives ongoing training and certifications, and have the means to go beyond basic monitoring and maintenance of your systems.

An in-house IT rep often lacks the resources to do more than just address day-to-day issues, whereas an outsourced IT team has the personnel and resources to go beyond proactively maintaining your IT environment. They can help you anticipate the future, and properly prepare your business for how changes and evolution in technology can help transform your company and bring massive success.

Managed IT Services Take Care Of The Small Stuff

The Situation

Daily IT activities, such as patches, user helpdesk, adds, moves and changes, do not require a high level of skill but are necessary for IT teams no matter the business. As a result, you've discovered your growth projects have halted. All due, in part, because your IT team stays continuously preoccupied with keeping devices, the network and your security updated.

The Problem

90% of IT work is handling tedious (yet nonetheless important) daily tasks. You can try to stay on top of it yourself, but if you miss even one day, it could lead to downtime or a cybersecurity vulnerability.

Your staff is managing two separate, coherent modes of IT delivery - one focused on stability, the other on agility.

- **Delivery 1** – is traditional and sequential, emphasizing safety and accuracy.

- **Delivery 2** – is exploratory and nonlinear, emphasizing agility and speed.

The Solution

Rather than bring in the high salaried IT personnel to address Delivery 1, you pass that daily task over to your MSP. That leaves the in-house IT staff to tackle Delivery 2, which focuses primarily on business-enabling, revenue-driving digital transformation projects.

Managed IT Services Equip You With New Technologies

The Situation

You're relying on outdated and ineffective line of business software. As dependable as it may be *(and let's be honest, mileage varies)* software like this has a core flaw – it only works for those who are fluent in it. After all, it's not that accessible if you're not familiar with it. Your IT company should be able to help you find a better way. New technologies, such a the cloud, can help you get past old line of business software.

The Problem

You may know about the cloud, and you may want to use it for your work. But doing so without the right expertise can make the migration a tedious process, and the ongoing management can come with downtime and security risks. Many businesses find it difficult to keep up with the latest advances in technology.

The Solution

Outsourcing your IT to a local IT company provides easy access to the latest technology so you can be more competitive in this technology-driven world. Cloud applications are also becoming a more significant option providing more flexible, unlimited scalability, IT environments where employees can access information, communicate and collaborate from anywhere on any device privately.

Furthermore, with an IT company, these solutions are less expensive than you if you purchased them yourself. Most IT companies have partnerships with vendors and can provide new technologies at a reduced cost.

Managed IT Services In A Nutshell

What's the point of Managed IT Services?

They are designed to make sure that your technology works properly, without you having to do anything about it. Problems are prevented, daily management is outsourced, and you enjoy the benefits offered by well-maintained IT – simple as that.

55 Questions To Ask When Considering IT Managed Services

As you've been following along, you have a clearer idea of what outsourcing your IT responsibilities to a managed service provider entails. But before you meet with an MSP and take the next step, we recommend asking the following fifty-six questions. Not just to the potential provider, but also ask your staff, mainly if your company employs an in-house IT team.

9 Questions to ask when developing the service

What is your average network uptime performance?

Do you have a list of tiered features and capabilities?

Do you offer on-site hours built into the regular contractual fee?

What metrics do you use to assess speed, reliability and overall performance?

Is there enough flexibility to add or remove service offerings based on my business needs?

Are you able to diagnose and remedy service issues remotely without the client's IT team intervention?

Do you offer customized solutions for different businesses regarding growth plans and achievable goals?

Which software, professional services automation (PSA) or remote monitoring management (RMM) runs your managed services operation?

9 Questions to ask regarding your contract and fees

How is my data retrieved should my contract be terminated?

Can a break clause be initiated should I decide to terminate my contract?

Is your service level agreement consistent for all customers or is this negotiable?

Does contract flexibility include monthly and annual payments with capping on yearly rate hikes?

Can you provide a comparison detailing the cost of on-premises versus cloud solutions over time?

Will I need to purchase additional infrastructure when your managed services work with my business?

Does your fee structure cover additional cost management that notifies when new charges get applied?

Do you include an assessment of IT infrastructure before providing projected Service fees?

If so, is this a separate cost?

11 Questions to ask regarding your data management

Who will have access to my data?

What methods do you use to protect data?

Will my competitors be able to see my data?

What redundancy gets built into the solution?

Who owns my data if it gets hosted at your facility?

How are data backups and disaster recovery handled?

What happens to my data if you go out of business, are sold to or merge with another firm?

What measures and processes are in place to protect my data against security breaches or data leaks?

Ultimately, who is responsible for my data? You as the MSP, a third party, or me as the business owner?

Do you host multiple clients on the same systems, in a multi-tenant environment or exclusivity in-area?

Do you run your service operations through a 3rd party hosting providers or data centers? If so, can you provide or validate these?

12 Questions to ask regarding the MSP's credibility and capabilities

How do you train ad-hoc support?

Do you employ a dedicated staff, or ad-hoc?

Can I meet the team members providing my support?

How many years have you been providing IT managed services?

Would you classify yourselves as experts in IT Managed Services?

What is your level of expertise in my industry regarding regulatory compliance requirements?

What industry credentials or certifications, does your company, and your technical staff carry?

How does your IT service desk team stay current with new technology developments and trends?

Are your IT managed services primarily what you do or are they an add-on service to your business?

Will you provide references and phones numbers to customers that are still doing business with you?

What percentage of your business gets dedicated to managed services versus other business models?

When I'm required to provide an audit trail showing compliance, how does your company handled that?

14 Questions to ask regarding the MSP's support model

How is support provided?

How are complex issues escalated?

What are the hours of emergency support?

What are the satisfaction levels with your customer help desk?

Will you provide references to call from any existing customers?

Do you offer on-site support hours as part of the contractual fee?

What are the first, second and third line parameters for escalation?

May we discuss your managed service support levels with existing clients?

Is emergency support available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week?

Do you include channels such as telephone, email, portal access, and live chat?

What percentage of issues are confirmed as resolved at first contact by your helpdesk?

Do you offer traditional break or fix support for hardware, software and other infrastructure?

What type of training is provided, by your company, for my in-house IT staff to educate them?

How do I guarantee the return on my investment covering Support and organizational IT knowledge?

Summary

Now that you have reviewed the fifty-six questions to ask when considering IT managed services, the answers you receive, from the managed service provider and your staff, will give you a clear picture of the direction to go in and what to expect as you move forward.

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