

How to Choose a Managed Services Provider

Finding Peace of Mind

If you're outsourcing your IT services, you need to find a Managed Services Provider you can trust. A technology partner with the experience, expertise and skills to manage your technology infrastructure. Whether you're considering an MSP for the first time, or thinking of making a change, it's important to know the factors to consider when choosing an MSP. Here's a look at a good way to start.





► Infrastructure

Providing world-class IT services requires having a solid infrastructure in place.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- Is there a state-of-the-art operations center?
- Does it operate that center itself?
- Does it provide a redundant system designed to ensure reliability?
- Does it guarantee 99.9% uptime?
- Has it shared its comprehensive methodology for disaster recovery?
- Is it monitoring backups 24/7/365?
- Does it provide on-site, voice and web-based support?

► Cloud

Your MSP has to know its way in, around and over the Cloud. That's how you'll be able to leverage the full value of cloud computing.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- Does the MSP offer private, public and semi-private clouds?
- Will it implement full and hybrid cloud architectures?
- Can it support every use case: Infrastructure (IaaS), Platform (PaaS) and Software (SaaS) as a service.?
- Are its services easily scalable ?
- Does it support physical and virtual environments?

► Customer Support

An MSP's technicians, engineers and other staff should take pride in delivering service that delights. Most important: make sure you'll have a dedicated account manager who will be with your business for the long haul.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- Are all levels of support available 24/7/365?
- Does it perform inventory and management of all IT assets?
- Is there proactive network and systems management in place?
- Are its data center and help desk in operation ?
- Does it offer a range of flexible Service Level Agreements (SLAs)?
- Can it promise turnaround time for SLA-based services that start at 30 minutes?
- Does it provide a remote help desk, including after hours?
- Will it deliver standard and emergency onsite support?
- Can you submit support tickets over the Web?
- Is there instant escalation of emergency issues?
- Are its performance reports easy to understand?
- Does it invoice with predictable monthly charges?



▶ Security

Don't lose sleep worrying about the security of your IT assets. Demand a comprehensive range of security services.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- ▶ How does it protect data?
- ▶ What if it fails on its protection promise?
- ▶ How does it prevent unauthorized access?
- ▶ What are its backup and disaster recovery processes and systems?
- ▶ Is your data isolated from that of its other clients?
- ▶ Will it perform regular audits to assess network security?
- ▶ Will it be responsible for optimizing your network performance?
- ▶ Does it provide proactive critical patch and security alerts and updates?
- ▶ Does it protect against viruses, spyware and malware?
- ▶ Are there network-based intrusion detection systems (IDS) and instant threat-detection alerts?
- ▶ Will it handle network configuration management, including backups?

▶ Maintenance

A proactive approach to maintenance keeps your IT assets up to date. That's how you get the most out of your IT investment.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- ▶ Does it offer service and warranty contracting?
- ▶ Will it optimize desktops and servers?
- ▶ Will it handle software installation?
- ▶ Does it enforce corporate desktop policy?
- ▶ Does it provide SQL and Exchange maintenance?
- ▶ Is it responsible for network and VPN access administration?
- ▶ Will it configure and maintain your Wireless Application Protocol (WAP)?

▶ Reporting

You deserve to know what's going on with your IT. Make sure your MSP regularly delivers easy-to-understand reports that can help guide your business planning.

Ask the MSP if it reports on all of these:

- ▶ Network health
- ▶ System activity
- ▶ Operating systems
- ▶ Software licenses
- ▶ Backup activity
- ▶ Disk utilization
- ▶ Patch updates
- ▶ Service tickets
- ▶ Machine summary



▶ Vendors

There's a lot that goes into managing vendor relationships, from reviewing invoices and evaluating new providers to negotiating terms and coordinating multiple vendors. Your MSP should be able to take these responsibilities off your plate.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- ▶ Does it manage broadband service vendors?
- ▶ Does it manage phone service vendors?
- ▶ Does it manage copier and printer vendors?
- ▶ Does it manage software and hardware vendors?
- ▶ Does it manage web and email hosting providers?

▶ Projects & Planning

Having project management expertise can help your MSP formulate and execute key components of your long-term IT strategy.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- ▶ Will it take on specific areas or tasks?
- ▶ Will it allow you to easily add or cut back on services?
- ▶ Does it perform needs analysis and management of security, risk and disaster recovery?
- ▶ Will it create a technology roadmap with periodic updates?
- ▶ Will it perform project research and proposals?
- ▶ Does it provide guidance regarding financial budgeting and forecasting?
- ▶ Does it perform yearly technology audits?

▶ Deployments & Scaling

Your MSP should be able to get your IT assets up and running (including a deployment timeline guarantee) and scale your resources as your company's needs grow.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- ▶ What is its performance promise and guarantee?
- ▶ How quickly will it respond to RFPs?
- ▶ Will it perform platform capacity planning?
- ▶ Can it consult on deployment issues?
- ▶ Does it offer custom implementation services?
- ▶ Does it offer burstable bandwidth (for handling periods of peak usage)?



► **Contracts**

The way an MSP structures its plans, plan tiering, fees and services can make all the difference between a one-size-fits-all and a perfect fit.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- Does it have tiered service plans?
- Does it have tiered SLAs?
- Does it have minimum or maximum fees?
- What are its terms of payment?
- Can it handle a totally custom project and contract?

► **Company Certifications**

Certifications really matter in the IT world. Make sure your MSP demonstrates strong technical expertise through certifications.

Ask the MSP these questions:

- On what hardware is it certified?
- With what software is it certified?
- Whom does it have partnerships with?
- What certifications do its employees have?

► **One More Question: Are You Ready to Take a Next Step?**

If your IT infrastructure is beginning to become harder to manage and more expensive than you'd like, it's definitely time to consider turning it over to a first-caliber MSP. In this paper, we've shared some of the questions to ask every MSP, but it's really just the start.