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 Maximized Productivity,
Predictable Budgeting and more!

How Much Should Managed IT Cost?

We Cover the 6
Managed IT Services
Pricing Models

gen IX
technologies

If you've made the decision to start looking for a managed IT service provider, you're already two steps ahead of many companies who are still relying on an in-house person or team exclusively. While an in-house person or team is great, they're only able to offer so much based on their hours of availability, expertise, and skill-sets. Outsourcing, on the other hand, tends to be less expensive as you don't have to worry about the costs associated with salaries, training or certifying staff. Plus, you get the benefit of paying a flat-rate monthly fee for an entire team of experienced technicians with varying skill-sets.

It's a strategic choice that lets you incorporate technology as an inextricable part of your overall business plan without spending an excessive amount of money. *So what's next?* Now it's time to better understand the ins and outs of managed IT services before you choose a technology partner. After all, it's important to go into any investment with the knowledge and expertise to manage your expectations and achieve your desired outcome. Whether you're looking to augment your internal person or team or you want to completely outsource the management of your technology, Gen IX Technologies is here to help with our buyer's guide.

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What Are Managed IT Services?

Many businesses think the only option they have to handle their information technology is hiring an internal person or team to help them out. Although this can be an effective approach, it can also become quite expensive with upfront and hidden costs. For instance, you'll need to pay them a salary, benefits, and in some cases, cover the cost of training and certifying them in technologies you use. You will also need to provide them with a computer, desk, telephone extension, and anything else they need to do their job. Plus, you're limited in terms of the expertise available to you, especially if you're relying on one or two people. While they might be an expert in configuring software, they may lack the expertise needed to create a disaster recovery plan or upgrade a server.

Nowadays, many businesses are opting to outsource part of all of their information technology functions to a managed IT services provider. This lets them offload the monitoring, management, and maintenance of their infrastructure for a flat-rate fee. This is intended to improve operations with a proactive approach wherein issues are minimized, which means the business experiences much less downtime. Even those who want to keep their internal person or team find this approach beneficial as they can pay a flat-rate monthly fee for the "heavy lifting" and use their internal person or team as needed instead of having them on board full-time.

Under this subscription model, the business still owns the systems being managed while the managed service provider

(MSP) delivers services to take care of those systems. A service-level agreement is in place to bind the relationship – outlining the performance and quality metrics that will be met and agreed upon. The business benefits from having access to an entire team of experts with varying skill-sets – meaning they never have to worry about running into an issue where nobody knows how to resolve a problem.

What is the History of Managed IT Services?

The concept of managed IT services really came to light in the 1990s as application service providers started offering remote support. Initially, the focus was primarily on remote monitoring and management of networks and servers. As technology grew, the services available under this subscription model grew to include:

- Mobile device management
- Remote firewall administration
- Managed security
- Managed print services
- And more

As time goes on, managed IT services are expected to become a more popular, desirable approach because technology drives virtually all business operations. The market for managed IT services is steadily growing – allowing businesses to benefit from a more cost-efficient, reliable method of handling their technology.

Will Managed IT Services Truly Be More Affordable Than An Internal Person or Team?

As mentioned above, you're able to avoid paying upfront and hidden costs, such as salaries, benefits, and the cost of training and certifying your internal person or team. In addition, you can rest assured knowing the flat-rate monthly fee you're paying offers you around-the-clock monitoring and support. If you have to reset your email password at 2:00 am, no problem! They're able to handle that without charging you by the hour for the time they spend helping you out. If your main point-of-contact is unavailable for any reason, there will always be someone else who can offer assistance. This means you're never left in the dark because someone is sick, on vacation or otherwise unavailable – saving you the high cost of downtime in the event of an issue.

Instead of waiting for problems to occur, businesses are able to feel confident knowing their MSP is monitoring for any sort of issues and resolving them before they turn into downtime. An MSP takes care of all types of functions, including but not limited to:

- Malfunctioning computers
- Hardware and/or software updates
- Networking equipment
- Maintenance on servers
- And much more

They will typically have partnerships with a range of leading technology companies, which allows them to expertly implement and support solutions to suit any company's unique requirements.

These partnerships may include:

- Dell
- Microsoft
- Netgear
- Lenovo
- SonicWall
- Datto

Instead of having an internal person or team procure, implement, and support solutions from leading technology companies, businesses can trust that their MSP has access to these same solutions, as well as the expertise necessary to help you leverage them properly. They don't simply fix broken equipment, they offer strategic guidance in terms of setting up the right network for you, installing new cabling to accommodate video surveillance systems, and virtually any project necessary.
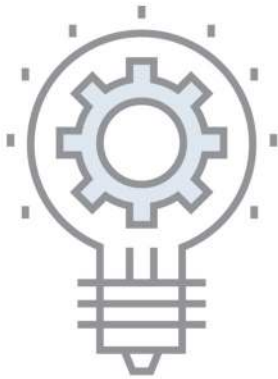
Although we will go into more detail on the separate components of managed IT services, here's a quick overview of what you can expect:

1. **Auditing**
2. **Storage to backup**
3. **Regular onsite support**
4. **Help desk services**
5. **Security management**
6. **Disaster recovery**
7. **24/7 remote monitoring**
8. **Onsite executive home support**
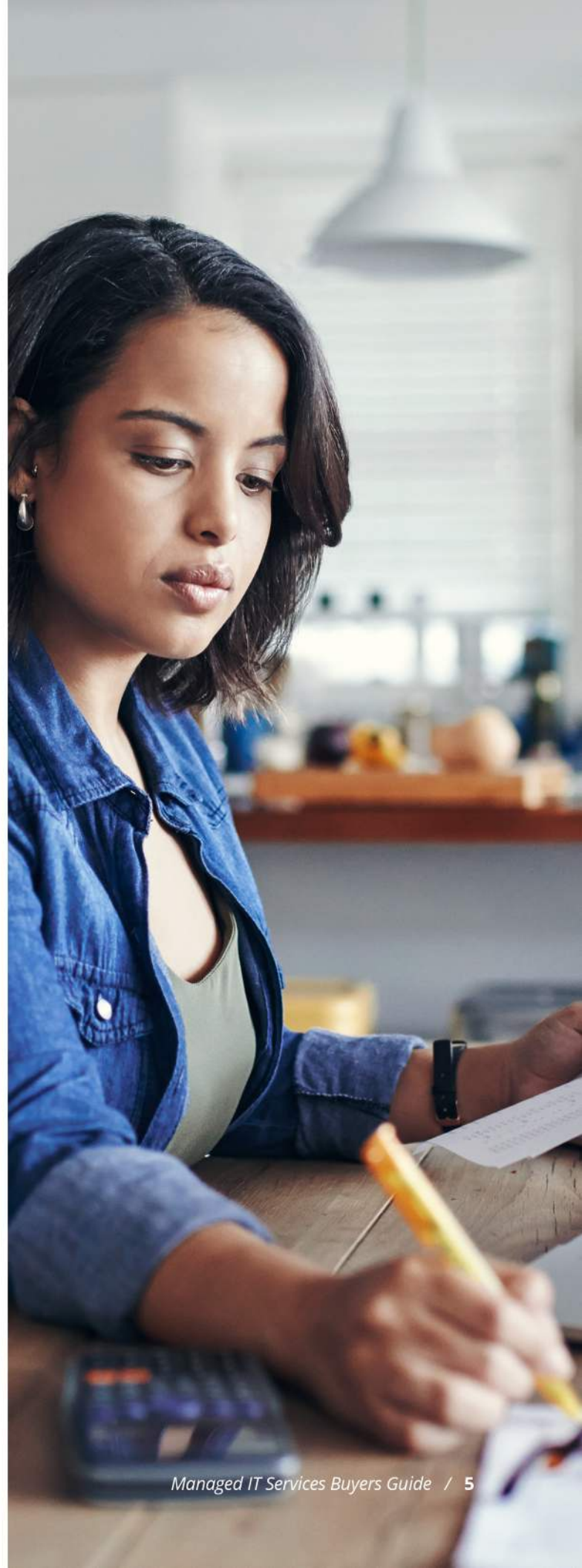
What Are The Separate Components of Managed IT Services?

Your infrastructure acts as the foundation of your day-to-day operations – allowing you to keep track of inventory, communicate with customers, fulfill requests and/or orders, and much more. You rely on your technology because your technology lets you deliver your products and/or services to the marketplace. If you're considering making the move to managed IT services, you're making a great choice. It's a much more reliable model for managing your information technology. After all, you're able to rest assured knowing an experienced third-party is taking responsibility for the ongoing monitoring, maintenance, and support of your infrastructure.

Before we review the separate components of managed IT services, let's quickly review what defines an MSP. Essentially, an MSP is defined by its proactive, more involved approach. They monitor, manage, and maintain the hardware, software, and all other equipment in a proactive manner - resolving issues as they arise and putting measures in place to prevent problems in the long-run. An MSP is defined by their ability to:

- Provide a flat-rate monthly fee that's easy to predict each and every month.
- Offer guidance on strategic technology planning to meet organizational objectives.
- Define and document standard operating procedures, policies, and protocols.
- Provide a comprehensive scope of services to manage the entire environment.
- Offer a service level agreement, and in many cases, a response time guarantee.

They become a trusted resource and partner for you to rely on for all things technology-related.

What Are the Separate Components of Managed IT Services?

Most MSPs offer very similar services, so naturally, there are specific components you can expect to see in most standard plans. The separate components include:

1. Network Monitoring

A remote monitoring and management tool, also referred to as an RMM, will be installed on each endpoint to monitor performance, health, and overall status. The MSP will be alerted in the event of an issue anywhere on the network – allowing them to resolve it quickly.

2. Backup and Disaster Recovery

A backup and disaster recovery plan should be included in any given managed IT services plan. This should incorporate cloud-based offsite backups, automatic on-site backups, regular testing to verify availability, and emergency response planning to prepare for the inevitable.

3. Helpdesk Support

A helpdesk support team will be available to provide remote or onsite support as needed. If an issue happens, the client is able to submit a support ticket. The helpdesk support team will reach out and gather more details, then start working on resolving that issue.
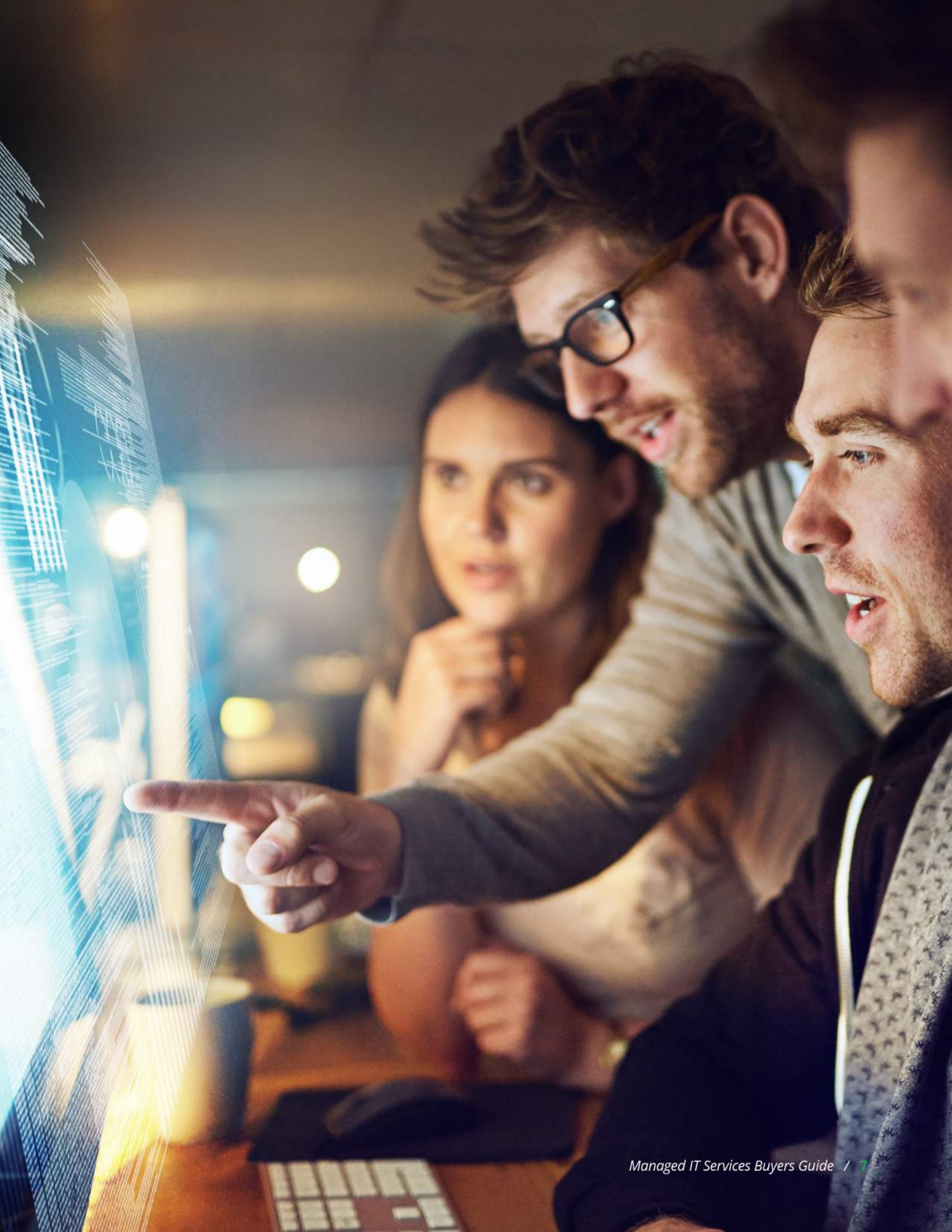
4. Security

Cybercrime is evolving at a rapid rate. Nowadays, security should be a standard component of ANY managed IT services plan. It's not optional, and if an MSP treats it as optional, it's a good idea to move on. Security should include anti-virus software, firewalls, encryption, and more.

5. Cloud Solutions

The cloud isn't always the right choice for every business, so this is one component that may or may not be included. If you're interested in the cloud, talk with your MSP about whether or not it's right for you. This can involve moving your email, applications, desktops, etc. to the cloud.

What Are the Three Primary Physical Components MSPs Focus On?

There are three primary physical components MSPs will focus on managing for you. This includes the following:

1. **Infrastructure:** This refers to all of the physical elements that make up the information technology environment, including computers, network hardware, and facilities.

2. **Platform:** This is the environment in which computer programs run on, such as an operating system used to support specific pieces of software.

3. **Software:** In the simplest terms, the software encompasses computer programs, libraries, and related non-executable data, such as online documentation.

What Components of the Actual Contract Should I Inquire About?

Now that we've covered the components of a managed IT services plan, it's time to look at the components of the actual contract. You should always inquire if there's anything you're not completely clear on. This may include:

• **Onboarding:** Will you be required to pay any fees in regards to onboarding? Some MSPs charge one-time fees associated with bringing you into their system.

• **Project Fees:** Do you have to pay a fee whenever you need to add another user, server or workstation to the environment? Talk about one-off costs that aren't covered.

• **Time and Material Pricing:** If upgrades are required, what is the expected price for time and materials? Is it included or an extra fee?

If you don't see any of the elements listed above in your contract, make sure you inquire about them to be fully prepared ahead of time.

What Are the Benefits of Managed IT Services?

For most companies, technology plays an important role throughout every business process – allowing them to develop new capabilities that achieve various organizational objectives, such as automating time-consuming tasks, lowering administrative costs, analyzing data to make informed decisions, and much more. Let's take a look at the benefits of having an MSP take care of your environment:

1. Minimal unexpected support and/or troubleshooting costs

As an MSP takes a proactive approach to monitor, manage, and maintain your infrastructure, you're left with fewer unexpected support and/or troubleshooting costs. They catch issues before they turn into major problems, keep everything properly updated, and overall, give you strategic guidance to avoid major problems that would result in costly downtime and/or repair requirements.

2. A more cohesive, well-managed environment

Nowadays, most businesses don't leverage a simple mix of a few applications and a single operating system. As technology continues to advance, businesses tend to have a mix of hardware, software, and even some cloud-based systems. This means they need a higher level of expertise to manage the environment.

An MSP will take inventory of the entire infrastructure, including any mobile devices used, and create a plan to address the unique management and security requirements of every single device, system or application on the network. This helps you avoid running into compatibility issues in the future.

3. Less risk of costly cyber-attacks

Did you know ransomware attacks are growing more than 350% each and every year? Cybercrime is becoming more coordinated and sophisticated as time goes on. Almost every business has experienced some form of cybercrime - from a simple malware infection to a complex ransomware attack and everything in between.

For companies that store sensitive information, it's important to ensure you're protected against all types of malware. Otherwise, you may end up with your employee and customer data for sale on the dark web. An MSP can implement comprehensive security solutions to prevent this, including:

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

4. Augment your internal IT person or staff

If you have an internal IT department, whether you've employed one person or ten people to manage your infrastructure, it's always helpful to augment their capabilities with an MSP. Why? Because they're able to focus on what's important to them, such as strategic initiatives, while the MSP takes over day-to-day tasks. Plus, they're able to go away on vacation or take a sick day without worrying about the environment.

5. Meet industry-specific regulations

If you're obligated to meet specific regulations, such as Sarbanes Oxley, HIPAA, PCI DSS, and other mandates, it's helpful to have an MSP with in-depth knowledge of your industry. They're able to make sure all of the technical safeguards necessary are in place. They'll implement the right policies, systems, and reports to help you meet and prove compliance as required - keeping you prepared for a potential audit at any time.

What Are the Primary Challenges of Managed IT Services?

An MSP's primary goal is to keep your network running as smoothly and securely as possible. They don't aim to simply fix problems, they aim to prevent them with reliable solutions that keep you operating at peak performance. So what could go wrong? Although the managed IT services model is highly recommended, there are instances where managed IT services can be challenging, whether your internal IT department is resistant to change or you're not comfortable handing over all of the documentation around your environment. Here are the primary challenges many businesses, organizations, and government agencies face:

1. A gap in knowledge and/or skill-sets
Every MSP has specific areas of expertise. They may partner with certain manufacturers and keep up to date on the solutions offered via those manufacturers. This means they'll take part in training, get certified, and other important steps will be taken to keep themselves up-to-date. But not all MSPs will be experts in the technologies you use. It's important to find an MSP that is.

2. Hidden fees and/or clauses in the contract
While it would be ideal if all MSPs were transparent about their pricing and/or stipulations, this isn't always the case. It's important to carefully review your contract to see if there are any hidden fees and/or clauses that you aren't comfortable with. This can become a huge point of contention if you don't review everything.

3. Roadblocks in terms of integration
As mentioned above, not all MSPs are experts in all areas. If they don't fully understand the technologies you're using, you may experience roadblocks in terms of integration. Alternatively, if you have specific software programs that simply don't work with the operating system your computers run, integration problems will arise.

4. Unclear service level agreements

A service level agreement is a document outlining any promises and/or guarantees in terms of performance. You should discuss your requirements ahead of time to ensure the MSP is able to meet those requirements when it comes to availability, uptime, and other tolerance levels you're set on.

5. Resistance on behalf of the internal technology department

If your internal technology department is resistant to working alongside an MSP, you may experience challenges in terms of them sharing the workload, giving access to specific technologies or providing essential information about the network and/or login information and access to vital resources.

6. Lack of industry-specific compliance expertise

Those who operate in an industry with specific compliance mandates must ensure the MSP they're hiring understands those mandates. Otherwise, you may run into problems with important safeguards not being met. Make sure any MSP you hire is completely familiar with your industry and the laws surrounding it.

Can I use managed IT services to augment my internal IT person or team?

Finding a great technology person is hard, so if you've managed to secure a team of great technology people, way to go! Many businesses struggle with this task, but it's always helpful to have internal resources available to support your evolving technology requirements. If you're looking to maximize the value of your internal IT person or team, managed IT services will be an investment that makes sense. How so? Although an in-house technology department helps ensure the stability of your environment, you may grow beyond their capabilities and/or skill-sets – requiring additional expertise to augment them.

Those who already have an internal IT person or team can benefit greatly from outsourcing to an MSP, especially if they're looking to:

• Keep their in-house IT person or team focused on strategic initiatives rather than time-consuming day-to-day tasks.
• Retain assistance, resources, and better pricing for upcoming projects and/or changes to the environment.
• Prevent availability issues, such as staff going away on vacation or being out of the office sick, from impacting operations.

Rather than hiring more employees, you're able to get the benefits of additional skill-sets, expertise, and availability without the added expense associated with paying a full-time salary, benefits, and other costs. Plus, if you're looking for a specific area of expertise, it's easier to choose an MSP that gives you access to a number of technicians rather than trying to find one person that fits the bill.

How do you know it's time to augment your internal IT person or team?

As technology continues to evolve and businesses become more dependent than ever before on their systems, most internal IT people or departments can use a helping hand. Here's a few signs it's time to augment your internal IT person or team:

• They're very knowledgeable in terms of cybersecurity, but they haven't had time to train your staff yet.
• They're usually quite responsive to support tickets, but lately, staff members are waiting hours, or worse, days for completion.
• They're keeping up with the day-to-day tasks but haven't had a chance to give you an update on network health and performance.

You pay a flat-rate monthly fee for the services your internal IT person or department doesn't have the time, availability or expertise to handle.

***How do managed IT services help your internal IT person
or team keep your business safe against cybercrime?***

Managed IT services are an excellent way to increase
security within your business. How so? Essentially, your
internal IT person or department will have the assistance
you need to combat ever-evolving, increasingly
sophisticated forms of cybercrime. It's no longer a one or
two-person job to keep an entire company safe against
threats. As you create more data, it becomes harder to keep
all of that data safe against hackers. And as you expand your
infrastructure, it becomes harder to safeguard each entry
point against unauthorized access.

When it comes to cybercrime, it's easy for a single person or
small team to feel overwhelmed. Managed IT services allows
your internal IT person or team to have the backup they
need to combat all sorts of attacks.

What is Managed IT Services + Hardware-as-a-Service?

Technology is evolving at an incredibly fast rate, which
means hardware and components are becoming obsolete
faster than ever before. Time and time again, we've seen
businesses balk at the cost of necessary maintenance or
upgrades. When a system becomes obsolete, they tend to
put off updating their environment to save money, but in
the end, they end up paying twice as much in expenses
associated with repairing or maintaining outdated
equipment due to:

- Slow performance
- Constant crashes
- Exploited vulnerabilities

In many cases, businesses aren't aware of the risks of
running outdated equipment. For some, the cost of
upgrading puts them off enough to ignore the risks until
they're faced with the consequences head-on.

Aside from the obvious benefits of using newer hardware,
such as better performance and greater security, there are
less clear benefits that shouldn't be overlooked:

- More powerful analytics to make quicker, more
  informed decisions
- Greater functionality in terms of advanced features
- Streamlined internal and external communication and
  collaboration
- Simplified automation of bookkeeping, data entry, and
  other tasks

Ultimately, there's a reason we've seen new technology
replace old technology, time and time again, throughout
history. Think about it... Computers have replaced
typewriters. Emails have replaced faxes. There have been
many instances where something new and improved
replaced a traditional way of performing or completing
a task.

How does managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service help you take advantage of the latest technologies?

Rolling out new hardware can be challenging for many businesses, especially when you're on a tight budget. Managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service gives you all of the traditional benefits of a managed approach wherein you're offloading the responsibility of monitoring, maintenance, and support, as well as the ability to essentially "lease" the hardware necessary to support your business.

This means you're gaining access to the hardware you need, along with any accompanying software, installation, maintenance, and upgrades. You never have to worry about struggling with antiquated, outdated equipment because it's up to the MSP to upgrade, update, and replace the hardware. Essentially, the MSP installs the hardware with a service level agreement in place to outline each party's responsibilities in regards to the hardware. You pay a monthly fee for the hardware or the cost of using the hardware is included in your managed IT services plan that already covers installation, monitoring, and maintenance.

What technologies can be included in a managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service plan?

Whether you're in the start-up phase or you're looking to offload the expense of upgrading your environment as often as necessary, a managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service plan simply makes sense. Plus, the monthly payments are considered operating expenses as opposed to capital expenses under the tax code. You may include the following:

1. **Computers:** The right computers for your unique requirements in terms of hard drives, RAM, processor, peripherals, and more.
2. **Servers:** One of the most expensive types of technology made affordable with a level of support that often surpasses the manufacturer's terms and conditions.
3. **Firewalls:** Enterprise-grade firewalls to keep you safe against advanced, sophisticated threats.
4. **Switches and routers:** The right switches and routers to ensure optimal performance in terms of routing data within your network and connected devices.

5. **Storage devices:** An expansive storage device to help you organize your saved files, data, and backups with ease.

Hardware-as-a-service makes it possible for those in the start-up phase or struggling with upgrades to compete with larger organizations. You're able to access innovative technologies without the hefty upfront cost commonly associated with embracing the latest and greatest solutions.

What are the benefits of choosing a managed IT services + hardware-as-a-service plan?

Not only are you paying a flat-rate monthly fee for an MSP to take care of your entire environment, but you're able to eliminate costs associated with purchasing, installing, and maintaining hardware. This is beneficial in many ways:

1. **More physical space within the office:** Newer technology tends to be smaller and more compact, which means you can have a bit of office space freed up, especially if you choose to virtualize some elements of your infrastructure.
2. **Greater security against cybercrime:** Outdated technologies tend to be riddled with vulnerabilities that can be exploited quite easily, whereas new technologies have more built-in security features to prevent unauthorized access.
3. **Fewer capital expenses:** You're paying a monthly fee rather than purchasing the hardware upfront, which allows you to conserve capital and invest in other areas of your business instead.
4. **More scalability as you grow:** As you grow, you're able to easily and quickly update your information technology environment to accommodate new staff, applications, and storage requirements.

Will Managed IT Services Help with Business Automation?

Automation is the key to success for virtually all types of businesses, regardless of industry or size.

Automation isn't reserved for large corporations with massive budgets. Small to midsize businesses can incorporate automation into every department of their organization nowadays - from capturing leads to checking off routine administrative tasks and everything in between. This is especially important for businesses looking to focus on growth as automating time-consuming processes allows you to devote that time to more strategic initiatives instead.

In today's competitive world, businesses must leverage their resources in the most efficient manner possible, and in this endeavor, automation simply makes sense.

An MSP is able to help you not only monitor, manage, and maintain your information technology infrastructure, but also strategically plan for business automation. First, let's clarify what exactly can be automated. Business automation refers to the process of automating processes and workflows to cut costs and improve efficiency. A process can be automated as long as:

- There is no logical thinking or human intervention required for completion
- There is a repetitive nature to the task
- There is a need for consistency within the process
- There is no room for error with the task

According to a report from Smartsheet, at least one-third of the activities within a specific job in approximately 60% of occupations may be automated. They conducted a survey that found 59% of employees believe they would have more than 6 spare hours per week if routine tasks were automated.

What aspects of managed IT services help with business automation?

Generation IX Technologies offers the following to our managed clients who are looking to automate routine, time-consuming processes and workflows:

1. **Digital Transformation:** Taking an in-depth look at your complex processes to find innovative solutions that automate them - increasing productivity while eliminating labor-intensive work.

2. **Application services:** Assisting with application upgrades, roll-outs, and configuration to make sure you're getting the most possible value out of the software programs you've invested in.

3. **Mobile Device Management:** Selecting the third-party products that make the most sense for you, then helping you manage them as we support the administration side of things.

We know new technologies relating to automation and artificial intelligence can be intimidating, but we've seen the value they bring to companies looking to streamline their day-to-day tasks - enabling them to focus on more strategic initiatives.

How Much Should Managed IT Services Cost?

The managed IT services approach is the most appealing option for many business owners. After all, you pay a flat-rate monthly fee to have an MSP take over the monitoring, maintenance, and ongoing support of your entire information technology environment. It's a predictable, proactive approach that leaves you worry-free. But what does it actually cost? Or better yet, how much SHOULD it actually cost? There is no industry standard, per se, so MSPs are left to decide how much they want to charge businesses like yours. Some will charge a fair price for the value they're delivering in exchange, but some will also charge a hefty price without delivering much return on your investment.

How much is too much to pay for your technology support?

If you're paying an hourly rate for support, naturally, we believe you're paying too much. Why? Because a managed IT services approach eliminates the need for unexpected repairs, upgrades, and other situations that occur when you're using a reactive approach. So how much is too much to pay for managed IT services? It all depends. If you're looking to augment your internal person or team, you might pay a bit less than a company looking to outsource all of their information technology functions.

What are the pricing models associated with managed IT services?

There are two main pricing models associated with managed IT services: per-user and per-device.

Let's take a look at each pricing model:

1. **Per-device:** If you have a small number of computers, this is a great option as you pay for each device within the company that will be managed.
2. **Per-user:** If you're a larger company with a complex infrastructure, this is a great option as you pay for every employee that uses technology.

How much should you expect to spend based on your needs?

As we mentioned above, the cost varies with an estimated $125 per user - $350 per user. Typically, an MSP will offer varying levels of plans to suit the needs of any given business. This may include:

1. **A basic plan** that costs around $125 - $200 per user, per month and covers monitoring, maintenance, and security for all devices. They may include a set number of hours OR all-inclusive remote/onsite support.
2. **A mid-level plan** that costs around $150 - $300 per user, per month with everything included above, as well as data backup and business continuity, strategic consulting, and more.
3. **A high-end plan** that costs around $300 - $350 per user, per month with everything included in the mid-level plan, as well as covering hosted or cloud systems, security measures for regulatory compliance, and more.

Should 24/7 Support Be Included in Managed IT Services?

Downtime is a widely accepted part of running an organization, but we can't overlook the consequences of being inoperable for even a short time. In fact, downtime can be quite expensive when you add up all of the costs associated with systems being inaccessible for a few hours:

- The expense of paying idle employees
- The expense of overtime to make up for lost productivity
- The expense of revenue lost during the outage
- The expense of losing customer trust
- The expense of reputational damage
- The expense of repairing and/or troubleshooting issues

When your technology goes down, there's no way around it: The cost is excessive, and for many businesses, crippling. Even a simple outage of your email system can cost you a HUGE amount of money. If you're in an industry that's highly regulated, you may face penalties and violations.

Should 24/7 support be included in your managed IT services plan?

In the simplest terms: Absolutely. You need around-the-clock support for times when something goes wrong

after-hours. Let's say a server goes down at 7:00 pm on a weekday. If you're not able to resolve the situation before the next morning, you're left spending the workday in a panicked frenzy - missing deadlines, leaving tasks untouched, and watching your employees lose motivation as they struggle to get anything done.

Even after the situation is resolved, the cost of repairing your reputation must be considered. You will need to spend hours upon hours fixing damaged relationships and building a positive image again. If you have 24/7 support included in your managed IT services plan, on the other hand, the server can be fixed before the morning comes and there's very minimal downtime suffered.

What can you expect from a promise of 24/7 support?

When an MSP promises 24/7 support, this means they'll be available whenever you need them if an urgent issue arises. If they can help you avoid downtime during the workday, they'll be there. If they don't have service engineers on-site, they'll resolve the problem remotely. If they can't resolve the problem remotely, they'll call someone into your office to work on the problem right there.

What Items Must Be Covered in a Managed Services Agreement?

Managed services agreements can vary greatly depending on the MSP... So what needs to be covered and what doesn't?

MSPs all vary in terms of the agreements they provide. So what should be covered? And what isn't absolutely necessary? At the end of the day, it's up to you to make sure you're signing an agreement that covers all of the bases. There are certain "non-negotiables" that should be included in ANY managed services agreement:

1. Cybersecurity:

Your managed services agreement should detail exactly what they provide in terms of cybersecurity. Why? Because threats are evolving at a rapid rate and this is an essential part of your relationship. This should include:

- Firewall settings
- Encryption
- Intrusion detection/prevention
- Any other measures used
- Service delivery specifications

2. Services:

Naturally, the other services you're receiving should be outlined in the contract. This may include networking, telecommunications, monitoring, maintenance, and other general services that should be outlined.

3. Helpdesk Support:

This is standard in many contracts. They should outline their helpdesk support team's responsibility to your company. They should also outline whether or not they're local, and if so, how much onsite support is included. Pay close attention to the hours stated in the contract. If it's not 24/7, make sure you have a plan for emergencies that happen after-hours.
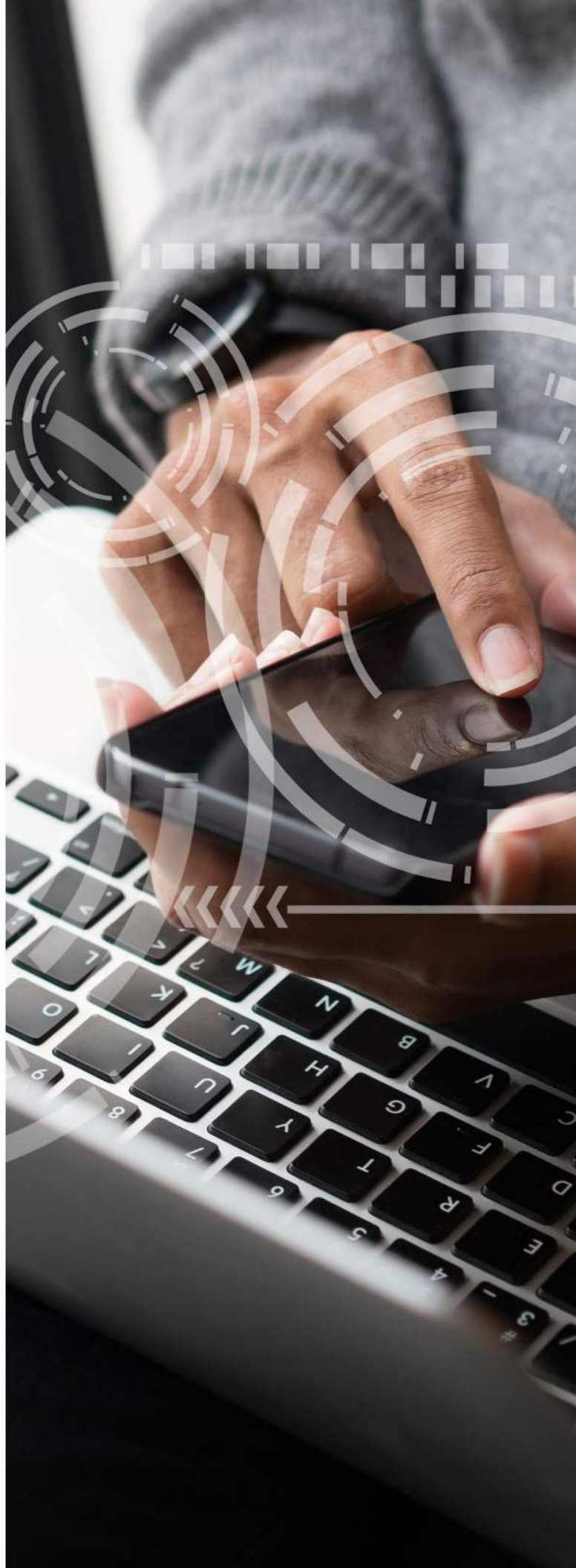
4. Availability:

Availability refers to the uptime of machines and/or equipment. Make sure there's some sort of "availability" stipulation that details how much downtime you can expect. Remember, you need to be realistic in terms of how much downtime you can actually manage.

5. Performance:

99.999% uptime is great, but if the machines are lagging constantly, it's not very helpful. Make sure there is an expectation of high performance. In fact, there should be expectations laid out for ISPs, operating systems, and bandwidth-heavy add ons.

6. Response:

How quickly can you expect to hear back after you submit a ticket? Sure, they may claim to have 24/7 helpdesk support hours, but this doesn't mean you'll receive an instant response. If you don't see a response time guarantee listed in the agreement, make sure you ask.

7. Resolution:

This is entirely different than the response time mentioned above. If they offer a 1-hour response time guarantee, that means they'll acknowledge your request within that limit. A resolution time guarantee refers to the amount of time it'll take to resolve the average issue.

8. Policy Development/Implementation:

As your infrastructure evolves, policies will need to be written, re-written or updated, especially if you have mandatory compliance requirements. Your agreement should outline how they will handle policy development and/or implementation.

9. Termination of Service:

You want to make sure there's a way to terminate your agreement if things don't work out. Check if the contract requires a monthly or annual renewal, and if so, will you incur any penalties for ending before the expiration date?

12 Questions to Ask Before Signing a Contract with an MSP

It's a long, tedious process - finding the right MSP. But don't rush through signing a contract once you've found the right one!

We know that finding the right MSP can be quite a long, tedious process. But that doesn't mean you should rush through signing a contract at any point. After all, selecting a technology partner is an important decision - one of the most important decisions you'll make for the growth and success of your company. Make sure you're asking the right questions to cover all of your bases ahead of time. Here are 12 questions to ask before signing a contract with an MSP:

1. Will you be flexible in terms of adding or removing service offerings according to my needs?
2. How can my data and all documentation be retrieved in the event that I need to terminate the contract?
3. What is your level of expertise in my industry when it comes to regulatory compliance requirements?
4. Do you or your staff carry any specific credentials and/or certifications that would be helpful to us?
5. If I am audited for compliance reasons, will you be involved in the process, and if so, how?
6. What channels can I use to contact you in the event of an issue - phone, email, web form, etc.?
7. Will I need to purchase additional hardware upon starting our agreement or will that be included?
8. How will you inform me of the need to purchase and/or upgrade hardware within my environment?
9. What metrics do you use to assess the speed, reliability, and overall performance of my equipment?
10. Do you have case studies or testimonials detailing the benefits of your proposed solution?
11. What happens to my data and all documentation if you go out of business, sell or merge with another firm?
12. Do you run your service operation through a third-party hosting provider or data center? If so, can you validate them?

If you're satisfied with the answers to all of the questions listed above, you're on your way to a happy partnership.

Developing A Business Case For Management IT Services

The trend of companies moving toward managed IT services rather than hiring in-house or relying on break/fix companies is huge. But why? What's the business case for managed IT services? Of course, an in-house workforce brings a range of benefits, such as delivering on projects, offering availability after-hours, and other great factors.

But hiring full-time employees has limitations. After all, paying a salary, benefits, and other necessary expenses can become quite costly, especially when you need around-the-clock support or help navigating the complexities of regulatory compliance.

Let's take a look at the business case for managed IT services:

1. Greater Cost Savings:

An MSP is driven to continually deliver their services to you, which means they'll continue to justify their existence with an unsurpassed level of uptime, reliability, and security. They handle everything for a flat-rate monthly fee, and typically, they focus on keeping your technology operating at peak performance with a proactive approach. You're able to depend on them around-the-clock for a predictable cost each month.

2. Proper Onboarding and Offboarding:

An MSP has a predictable, reliable process for onboarding and offboarding. They've likely done this quite a few times, which means they'll be able to handle the transition quite smoothly with little to no downtime. You can rely on a proper onboard and offboarding that ensures all of your systems, information, and documentation is taken care of.

3. Less Time to Fill a Job:

An MSP is able to get started quickly due to their experience, expertise, and proper onboarding and offboarding process. You won't have to worry about a lengthy transition or the need to train them on specific technologies and/or processes. They will already be prepared ahead of time and ready to tackle any urgent needs right away.

4. Greater Expertise for Regulatory Compliance:

An MSP that has experience working with others in your industry is able to offer greater expertise for regulatory compliance. They likely already know the laws inside and out because they've helped other businesses like yours maintain compliance. They have processes, procedures, and more to ensure safeguards, documentation, etc. are done properly.

Final Considerations...

Your technology has the power to increase productivity, improve the customer experience, and ultimately, minimize the cost of doing business. But if you're not properly taking care of your environment and leveraging the power of innovative technologies to the fullest extent, it's easy for your technology to become yet another necessary expense rather than a business driver that helps you grow and succeed. An MSP can help you turn technology into the business driver it's supposed to be - aligning your environment with your organizational goals and objectives.

Even if you have an internal technology department, they can only do so much. If they're focused on the continuity and security of your operations, they're not able to move important projects forward. An MSP can help you enable your resources to focus on what's important: keeping your technology reliable and safe. The MSP, in turn, handles the rest to keep them from becoming bogged down.

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