



APPLIED COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES



Ultimate Buyer's Guide: Managed IT Services

Technology Education Series

Table of Contents

Are you considering Managed IT Services?

Page 2

What's the Difference Between Managed IT Services vs Co-Managed IT Services?

Page 3

I Think We Could Benefit From Managed IT Services, but Where Do We Start?

Page 4

Questions to Ask a Potential IT Provider

Page 5

Service Agreements - What You Should Know

Page 6

Questions a Managed IT Services Provider Should Be Asking You

Page 7

What Every Managed IT Services Provider Wants You to Understand About Their Services

Page 8



| Are you considering Managed IT Services?

Whether you're selecting an IT services provider for the first time or switching providers, this guide will help you make an educated decision with a better understanding of:

- What today's Managed IT programs offer
- How Managed IT Services can benefit your organization
- Proven strategies to begin your search
- Key considerations for procuring the right partner

Plus, you'll see an extensive list of questions to ask a potential provider and a list of questions a provider should be asking you.

We understand the importance of this decision and are here to guide you every step of the way!

What is Managed IT Services?

Managed IT Services represent a strategic approach to outsourcing the management, operation, and delivery of a company's technology needs to a specialized third-party provider. This model encompasses a wide range of services including, but not limited to, network management, cybersecurity, data backup and recovery, cloud services, and helpdesk support. By partnering with a Managed IT Services provider, businesses gain access to a team of IT experts committed to ensuring their technology infrastructure is efficient, secure, and aligned with their strategic goals.

Why are Managed IT Services So Popular?

Keeping up with your core competency while managing the complexities of today's IT infrastructure has given rise to the popularity of organizations outsourcing some or all of their IT procurement and support. Here are some of the benefits driving the demand for Managed IT Services.

1. **Expense Reduction:** The cost to hire, train and retain the necessary personnel with the expertise you need can be daunting.
2. **OPEX vs CAPEX:** Managed IT Services often involve operational expenditures (OPEX) rather than capital expenditures (CAPEX), allowing businesses to allocate predictable monthly costs without significant upfront investments in hardware and software.
3. **Access to Expertise and Experience:** By engaging Managed IT Services, businesses gain access to a team of experienced professionals with specialized expertise, ensuring the effective management and maintenance of their IT infrastructure.
4. **Improved Uptime:** Managed IT Services providers offer swift response times to address any IT issues that may arise, minimizing downtime and maximizing operational continuity.
5. **Proactive Monitoring and Support:** Through proactive monitoring, providers can identify and resolve potential issues before they escalate, leading to a more stable and reliable IT environment.
6. **Improved Efficiency:** With the support of Managed IT Services, businesses can streamline their operations, optimize workflows, and enhance overall efficiency through the strategic use of technology.
7. **Compliance:** Managed IT Services providers often assist businesses in maintaining compliance with industry regulations and data security standards, reducing the risk of non-compliance penalties and associated costs.
8. **Insurance:** Some providers offer insurance or risk mitigation services as part of their offerings, providing additional protection against potential IT-related losses.
9. **Scalable Resources / Talent:** Businesses can benefit from scalable access to IT resources and talent, enabling them to adapt to changing needs and seamlessly accommodate growth without the burden of recruiting and training additional staff.
10. **Eliminate IT Turnover Exposure:** Partnering with an IT Services provider eliminates the headaches and burden associated with replacing key IT people because you're paying for the service and not additional staff.

What's the Difference Between Managed IT Services vs Co-Managed IT Services?



Managed IT Services allows your organization to fully outsource your IT operations to an external provider. This is an ideal solution for businesses looking to focus on core activities without the complexities and headcount associated with IT management.



Co-managed IT Services, on the other hand, acts as a complement to your existing IT department, providing additional expertise and support where needed. This co-managed model suits organizations that require additional resources to maintain their environment, need complete high-priority projects on time or lack specialized skills in-house that are necessary to sustain their IT landscape.

Essentially, while Managed IT Services offer a complete solution for those wanting to offload IT tasks, Co-managed IT Services provide a collaborative approach to enhance and support an internal IT team's efforts.

10 Reasons Managed IT Services Are So Popular

Which of the following red flags can you relate to in your business?

1. Fluctuating IT expenses and unpredictable budgets
2. End-user complaints about productivity disruptions
3. Vulnerability to cyber attacks due to inadequate security measures
4. In-house IT personnel are generalists – not specialists
5. Challenges maintaining compliance and keeping up with updates
6. Unreliable / untested data backup and retrieval systems
7. System downtime or delays addressing IT challenges
8. Multiple IT vendors and confusing invoices
9. Insurance requirement vulnerabilities
10. IT staff turnover and difficulty sourcing talent

“The TOP 2 outsourced services by small to medium size businesses are Accounting and IT Support”

- Office Tech Insider

What's Driving the Rapid Adoption?

As technology continues to advance and grow in complexity, yesterday's IT generalist approach doesn't work for most organizations. The generalist can often put your business at risk and become overwhelmed with emerging responsibilities like remote workplaces, increasing cyber threats and simply keeping up with the workload during and after hours.

For business leaders, the shrinking talent pool of qualified specialists makes the task of sourcing, recruiting, and training specialized IT personnel harder than ever before.

I Think We Could Benefit From Managed IT Services, but Where Do We Start?

This is a pivotal question that many businesses face when considering Managed IT Services. Here's a list of key steps to help you get started.



Assess Your Current IT Infrastructure:

Begin by conducting a thorough evaluation of your existing IT infrastructure, encompassing hardware, software, networking, usage patterns, legacy systems and security protection. Identify any deficiencies or areas for improvement. Most Managed IT providers have the tools to help you collect these data driven insights you will need to make an educated decision.



Identify Pain Points and Challenges:

Pinpoint the specific pain points and challenges present in your current IT environment. This may involve addressing issues such as sluggish system performance, security vulnerabilities, outdated software, remote worker support gaps or inefficiencies in workflows.



Understand Business Objectives:

It's critical to align your IT requirements with your business objectives. This will allow you to evaluate where and how technology can help you drive success with enhanced performance and operational efficiency that's congruent with your long-term goals.



Involve Key Stakeholders:

Engage with essential stakeholders from different departments to gain insights into their unique IT needs and challenges. Understanding their needs will help in defining the best technology solution and the level of support required.



Consider Compliance and Security:

Include your industry-specific compliance mandates and security standards relevant to your business. These considerations are crucial in helping you select an IT provider with the industry experience and specialized expertise you need.



Forecast Future Growth:

Anticipate your business's future growth trajectory and contemplate how your IT needs may evolve alongside this expansion. Scalability and flexibility should be key considerations when mapping out your IT requirements.



Review Budget and Resource Allocation:

Gain a comprehensive understanding of your current and future IT budget to help determine the appropriate funding and resource allocation to IT initiatives. This knowledge will aid in creating predictable budgeting and maximizing the value you receive within your budget constraints.



Evaluate User Experience and Support Needs:

Solicit feedback from employees and end-users regarding their IT experience including their current and future support requirements. This insight will enable you to understand and prioritize the level of user support necessary for your organization.



Document Specific Requirements:

Methodically document your precise IT requirements, encompassing elements such as 24/7 support, disaster recovery capabilities, cloud services, data security, network monitoring, software updates, and more.



Seek Input from Industry Experts:

Consult with industry experts or IT consultants to gain valuable insights into best practices and emerging technologies that could strategically benefit your business. Their expertise will often assist in defining a comprehensive IT strategy.

| Questions to Ask a Potential IT Provider

When meeting with an IT provider, be ready to ask plenty of questions. You'll want to have a full understanding of their capabilities and how they compare with other providers. Some questions to ask include:

Company Experience and Services

- ☐ What is your experience in providing Managed IT Services?
- ☐ Do you have experience working with businesses in our industry or of our size?
- ☐ What specific services do you offer as part of your Managed IT Services?
- ☐ Do you offer an assessment service to determine our needs?
- ☐ Can you customize your services to meet our business needs?

Support Capabilities

- ☐ What is your response time for addressing IT issues?
- ☐ Do you provide 24/7 support and monitoring?
- ☐ What process do you follow to resolve service tickets?
- ☐ What is the average resolution time for service tickets?
- ☐ What is your problem escalation process?

Security Protection

- ☐ Do you offer a Risk Assessment to identify vulnerabilities in our infrastructure?
- ☐ How do you ensure the security of our data and systems?
- ☐ Could you outline your backup and recovery processes in case of system failure or data loss?
- ☐ How do you train our people to identify common threats such as phishing emails?
- ☐ Can you provide documentation for our insurance provider?

Technology and Partnership

- ☐ How scalable are your services?
- ☐ Who are your technology partners?
- ☐ How do you stay updated on the latest technology trends and advancements?
- ☐ How do you provide insights into how emerging technologies can benefit our business?
- ☐ What certifications and qualifications do your technical staff have?
- ☐ Do you provide a confidentiality agreement between our organizations?

Quality Control and Communication

- ☐ Could you provide information about your customer and employee turnover rates?
- ☐ Who would be our primary contact?
- ☐ How do you provide ongoing updates and performance reviews?
- ☐ Where are your support personnel located?
- ☐ Is your company privately owned?
- ☐ What additional services do you offer to optimize tech spending?

Service Agreements - What You Should Know

When you partner with a Managed IT Services provider, you'll be asked to sign a service agreement. This is what you can expect:

Master Services Agreement (MSA): A master service agreement (MSA) serves as a foundational contract that outlines the fundamental relationship between two parties, setting the terms and scope of their engagement. It helps establish a framework for future potential work and ensures both parties are aligned on crucial aspects of their collaboration.

Service Level Agreement (SLA): A service level agreement (SLA) is a critical component of a Master Services Agreement, defining the level of service, responsibilities, and guarantees expected from the service provider. It often includes metrics such as response times, uptime percentages, and resolution expectations.

Variables that Affect Price:

Several variables can influence the pricing structure of service agreements, including:

- Number or types of services
- Number of users or devices
- Types of services/features
- Term of the agreement
- Industry/trade incentives

Both parties need to understand these variables to ensure fair and transparent pricing that aligns with the specific needs of the engagement.

The Value of an IT Assessment

Get the data driven insights you need to make an educated decision by starting with an assessment of your current IT infrastructure.

You'll receive an inventory of your current assets, strengths and opportunities to determine the best Managed IT Services for your needs and budget.



Questions a Managed IT Services Provider Should Be Asking You

A good Managed IT Services provider should ask you insightful questions to better understand your specific business needs and goals. Some important questions they may ask include:

Discovery Questions

- What does your current IT infrastructure look like?
- What are your current in-house IT support resources and capabilities?
- What are the existing pain points or recurring issues within your IT environment?
- What are your short-term and long-term business goals, and how do you envision technology supporting these objectives?
- Are there any upcoming projects or initiatives that will impact your IT requirements?
- How do you anticipate your business evolving in the next few years, and how does this tie into your IT needs?

Security and Compliance

- Have you encountered any security incidents or compliance challenges in the past?
- How have you trained your people to identify security risks?
- What are your specific security and compliance requirements?
- Have you reviewed your cyber insurance policy to evaluate potential exposure?

Scalability and User Experience

- What level of scalability do you anticipate from your IT systems to accommodate future growth?
- What level of user experience and support are you currently providing to your employees and customers?
- What feedback or suggestions have you collected from your users regarding IT services and support?

Data Management and Disaster Recovery

- Have you faced any critical data loss incidents in the past, and how were they resolved?
- Can you provide insights into your current data backup and disaster recovery processes?
- Have you tested your disaster recovery plan?
- What is your cloud computing strategy?

Financial and Operational Efficiency

- Do you have a defined IT budget?
- What is the process for procuring and allocating resources to IT initiatives?
- Are there any cost-saving opportunities or efficiency improvements you are seeking in your IT operations?

Technology Integration and Adoption

- What new technologies or applications you are considering integrating into your existing IT environment?
- How open is your organization to adopting emerging technologies for improved efficiency and productivity?

Vendor Engagement and Partnership Expectations

- Have you previously engaged with other IT service providers, and if so, what were the positive and negative aspects of those engagements?
- What specific improvements or enhancements are you seeking in your new IT service partnership?
- What are your expectations regarding communication and reporting?

Success Measurement

- How do you measure success when it comes to IT services and support within your organization?
- How frequently would you prefer progress updates?

What Every Managed IT Services Provider Wants You to Understand About Their Services

#1: Continuous Monitoring and Maintenance are Essential

Your IT systems require ongoing monitoring and maintenance. Just like how devices constantly request updates, your network and infrastructure also need regular attention. Software evolves, operating systems require adjustments, and hardware ages - all necessitating continuous maintenance.

#2: Quality Reflects Investment

Choosing top-tier IT support aligns with the understanding that quality support is an investment in your business. It's essential to consider what you can realistically spend on IT support and aim for the upper end of your budget. For most businesses, the high cost and business impact of downtime often exceeds the premium you pay for a quality IT provider.

#3: The Value of Long-Term Partnerships

Establishing long-term partnerships allows us to deeply understand your business and its unique needs. This enables us to:

- Take an active role in forecasting IT opportunities to achieve your goals
- Prevent avoidable mistakes that negatively affect your internal or external customers
- Tailor your infrastructure and IT strategy to align with your future trajectory, not just your current state
- Construct an adaptable infrastructure that grows alongside your business



Do You Think Managed IT Services Might Be Right for You?

If you're considering Managed IT Services and want to explore it further, let's start a conversation. By discussing your unique business objectives, we can develop a customized and holistic approach to optimize your IT infrastructure, enhance security, and streamline your operations.

Let's work together to create a technology roadmap for your future growth and success!



APPLIED COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

About Applied Computer Technologies

Applied Computer Technologies (ACT) is your full-service source for IT infrastructure, run by fellow islanders.

We greet you with a smile and we're laser focused on helping your business leverage technology to control expenses, boost productivity and protect your confidential data.

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