

A Business Owner's IT Provider Guide



YOUR GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONSULTANT FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

Choosing the right IT provider for your business is not an easy task—and not one to be taken lightly.

As the IT environment in the workplace continues to evolve in its capabilities and its complexity, there comes an increasing need to ensure that your network availability and business information are secure, while taking advantage of new technologies and IT practices to stay competitive.

However, although technology has revolutionized the way we work—in today's economic environment, businesses are under enormous pressure to reduce costs while improving efficiency and productivity. Due to this financial strain and because the IT department is often ignored until there is a problem, it is normally the first-place businesses cut their funding. With limited IT budgets, many businesses are often either relying on one or two IT generalists to manage a diverse set of IT areas – email, security, patching, network and server management and monitoring, as well as the applications that run their business—or they contract work out to a 3rd party they call on when they have computer issues. Both solutions, although seemingly cost effective up front, are often more detrimental than beneficial for your business.

Why Should You Care About This?

There is nothing more frustrating or expensive than choosing the wrong managed services provider to support and manage your network. Choosing an inexperienced provider can cost you downtime, expensive repair bills, the loss of critical business data and the unnecessary headache of having to find another consultant to pick up the pieces. So how can you ensure your business network is protected by a reputable, knowledgeable and honest consultant without being surprised at the price every month?

Within this guide you will find:

- ✓ Information about Managed IT and why it makes sense for businesses.
- ✓ Pros and cons of outsourcing vs. internal IT solutions
- ✓ Questions to ask any potential provider who will be supporting your network to help you determine the right one for your business.



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Managed IT – Why It Makes Sense for Businesses

Managed IT is key to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the operations at your company, without the surprise costs normally associated with IT support. Unlike traditional IT, which works in a break/fix model—meaning, it breaks, you call someone to come fix it and then they charge you for their time; Managed IT works by proactively monitoring your network for a fixed monthly fee—meaning they are constantly monitoring your network allowing them to detect problems that could cause your computers to break and fixing those issues before they have the chance to. The benefit to this type of IT model is that should unexpected issues arise; your provider will fix the problem and eat the associated costs.

What are some Benefits of Managed IT?

1. Focus on Your Business, Not Your IT

If you are like most businesses that only have one or two IT generalists to manage your IT needs, the reality of the matter is that they are often too busy with mundane day-to-day tasks to focus on tactical issues and cannot be as proactive as you would like them to be in thinking about IT strategy. By outsourcing repetitive and mundane tasks to a Managed Service Provider, this leaves your internal IT agents to focus on strategic projects that will help with moving your business forward.

On the other hand, if you are a small business owner who hires on a 3rd party to help with your computer related issues, the reality is that these consultants often charge for time of the service call or with a pre-sold block of hours commitment for IT work. Some unscrupulous IT consultants may also make issues seem larger and more difficult to fix than they are, which, as a result, ends up costing you more to fix. By fully outsourcing your IT to a Managed Service Provider who charges a flat-fee, you can rest assured that you will not be dealing with a fox in your hen house.

2. Benefit from their Expertise and Experience

Let's face it, no small or medium-sized business can afford to fall behind with technology trends in today's business world. With how quickly technology is upgraded and changes, your internal team may not be fully aware of all of the possibilities available to your business. A Managed Service Provider not only has more tools and skill sets at their disposal to be able to solve problems quicker or before they happen, but they have more IT-specific knowledge that can be helpful in critical areas such as Security and Backup and Disaster Recovery.

3. The need for 24/7 Support

When relying on one or two individuals to take care of your business' IT needs, there are a few different problems that could arise; sick days, vacations, leaves of absence, etc. Furthermore, the demands of your business can sometimes be taxing on one or two individuals to be constantly available, even during non-business hours. By relying on a Managed Service Provider to be available to your business 24/7, you can rest assured that your business will remain running and be able to service your clients 24/7/365.

4. Decrease Downtime

Downtime can be a death sentence for many businesses, especially the small medium businesses. Did you know in Canada 60% of SMBs that experience a ransomware attack go out of business within six months? Companies rely on technology in virtually all parts of their business operations, making IT Risk Management an important part of any business that hopes to survive and thrive. The benefit of a Managed Service Provider is that they offer a proactive approach to IT support that can prevent problems before they happen, making sure that your business does not become one of these statistics.

5. Save Money: The Utility Model

Although an important part of your business environment, many businesses are cutting corners when it comes to their IT needs and are simply relying on traditional time-based (break/fix) IT consultants. When you take into consideration the full extent of your IT needs and expenses, you may find that your business is spending a lot more money than you originally bargained for. The benefit of Managed IT is that it offers flat-rate services that you can account for, like a utility bill. It also provides management reporting that discusses your environment and helps you plan your future IT requirements and budgeting. The proactive approach to IT is also beneficial since by proactively monitoring your network, a MSP will be able to prevent emergencies before they happen and make sure that your operations keep running smoothly.

Have your own internal IT department or IT guy?

The advantage of Managed IT is that it can work in two different ways—fully outsourcing your IT services or supporting your existing internal IT staff. There are benefits to either option, but it is important to figure out which option works best for your business needs.

Should You Outsource or Keep IT In-House?

As a business owner, it's nice to have an in-house IT staffer who has intimate knowledge of your business, your network and your individual business needs. However, no individual can be available 24/7 or be an expert in all areas and even if there was such a person, could you imagine how much they would cost to employ? For many small and medium-sized businesses, outsourcing your IT may be a better and more cost-effective solution.

There are several IT issues that can arise on a daily basis: maintaining the network, ensuring remote users have access to resources, updating critical patch updates and even troubleshooting email problems.

So, with all that is required of an IT staff, does it make sense for small and medium-sized businesses to hire a full-time person or outsource their IT needs? The answer to that question relies on the individual business. Weighing the pros and cons of each scenario can help in determining which option will best serve your business.

In-House IT Support: Pros

Easy access: A tech support person on staff can address issues immediately. Other clients won't be competing for your IT staff's time, though there may be other departments doing so.

Cost control: As a full-time employee, your IT support staff's salary remains the same, regardless of the tasks undertaken – for example, troubleshooting a printer problem, setting up a new server, or staying late on a Thursday night to complete an operating system upgrade. This means that your costs remain steady even as your technology needs change.

In-House IT Support: Cons

Upfront and hidden costs: Hiring a full-time IT professional is an expensive endeavor. Providing that pro with a computer, desk, telephone extension, payroll account and benefits drives the cost up even higher. For many small businesses, having a full-time IT specialist with a full-time salary working on staff is too cost-prohibitive to even be considered a viable option. Not to mention the costs associated with ongoing training for IT personnel and all the tools they need to support the environment.

Limited technological expertise: Your IT specialist may be good with Excel and handy when it comes to figuring out why the printer isn't working but may not be as savvy when it comes to diagnosing network security issues or migrating from on-premises servers to the cloud. It's unlikely that one IT professional will be able to provide expertise for all your technological needs.

Outsourcing IT Support: Pros

Less expensive: All things considered; outsourcing tends to be less expensive than hiring a full-time IT employee in-house. Many costs – such as overhead – are spread over several clients via the agency model. Additionally, your small business doesn't have to worry about costs associated with training or certifying IT staff.

Round-the-clock service: Most professional IT help desk or tech support firms offer their customers 24/7 access to tech support specialists, either by phone or through remote computer access. This means that you'll have someone to walk you through resetting your email password – even at 2 a.m. What's more, if your main contact is sick, there will be a substitute that you can count on.

Outsourcing IT Support: Cons

Language or cultural differences: Struggling to understand your tech support specialist can make a frustrating situation even worse. Unfortunately, many small businesses choose offshore outsourcing as their least-expensive option, while not considering the time and aggravation spent on communication issues. This can be mitigated either by carefully interviewing various offshore firms and giving them a "test drive," or by hiring a local firm. The latter may also allow you to have the specialist on-site, which is highly recommended for handling most IT support needs.

Not part of the team: Because outsourced IT specialists are there only when scheduled or when you need them to fix a problem, you'll spend time bringing them up to speed when issues do arise or when you want them to provide advice on future technology initiatives. Again, there is a solution: Get an outsourced firm involved in your IT needs on an ongoing basis via "managed services." This way, the firm can help with routine help desk and tech support issues and will be more fully plugged in to your needs and requirements when it comes time to upgrade the network.

Our suggestion: Outsource Locally

Certainly, small and medium-sized businesses have a variety of options for solving their tech support issues. For most of these businesses, however, outsourcing is the best option. Outsourcing IT support allows businesses to stay focused on their own core offerings without getting sidetracked on IT projects. It also allows businesses access to cutting-edge resources and expertise, without the costs typically associated with staying ahead of the technological curve.

Outsourcing to a local firm provides the right combination of cost savings, flexibility and round-the-clock support. Outsourcing locally also provides small business owners with peace of mind that when they need on-site tech support, they can get it, thus allowing them to focus on their business, not their IT.

How do you find the right IT provider for your business? Ask the right questions.

Selecting the right IT provider is an enormous decision for your business. Turning over key functions means ensuring that your requirements are clearly understood and that they have proven experience, staff, tools and processes that are vital to proactively managing your business.

Your IT provider is an extension of your company and is intricately involved in the management and maintenance of your workforce. Therefore, selecting the appropriate provider for your unique business needs is vital. The provider who can best answer these questions will be better able to serve your business needs now and in the future.

Here are 6 questions to ask before selecting the IT provider to manage your business:

1. How long have they been providing IT service?

Although more years in service does not necessarily translate to a better technical service, working with an IT provider who has been in business for more than a few years does provide some assurance that the company will still be around next year.

2. Can they work with your business to meet its unique needs?

Any IT provider should be customizing their solutions to meet the requirements of your business.

They should be able to answer three fundamental questions:

- What is my business problem?
- How will you address it?
- Why are you the best provider to resolve it?

3. What security measures do they have in place?

The IT provider you chose should insist on remotely monitoring your network 24/7/365 to be able to proactively fix any security issues before they turn into a problem that affects your business' productivity.

4. What kind of redundancy do they offer?

Even the healthiest networks fail occasionally and having a backup solution is invaluable. Talk with the provider to see what maintenance services are included in your package. Make sure to see what is not included so there are no billing surprises if something goes wrong later. Avoiding surprise billing is why it is suggested that you work with a provider that offers a managed IT solution.

5. How do they report and communicate their results?

Why would you pay for a service without receiving concrete results of what it is you're paying for? Your provider should deliver monthly status reports and quarterly business reviews. There should also be a clear chain of communication, so you know what to do and where to contact if you require immediate support.

6. What kind of support do they provide?

Before signing up with any IT provider, you should know the level of support provided.

Here are a couple of questions to ask:

- Are there formal escalation and ticketing procedures?
- Do they answer their phones live and have emergency after hours support?
- Do they monitor the services on your behalf?

We hope that this guide has given you some knowledge about Managed IT that will provide some insight into the different types of IT providers out there and what type of solution would work best for your business. Our purpose for this guide is to help business owners make informed decisions when it comes to a part of their business they are not too familiar with, but which is vitally important to their success. If you have any additional questions or comments about Managed IT or IT services in general, we would love to hear from you!

About Intega IT

Intega IT began operating in 2001, as Dr-Desktop. In the beginning, Dr-Desktop provided IT support for residential, small business and Not for Profit clients based in the Greater Ottawa area. More than two decades later, we still have many clients who began their service with Dr-Desktop and continue to rely on Intega IT for all their IT support today; however we no longer offer residential IT support.

So how and why did Dr-Desktop become Intega IT? As the market matured, our customer base and our service offering evolved. After speaking and listening to the owners and stakeholders of Ottawa's small and medium business community, it was evident that unplanned capital expenses were not ideal in today's marketplace. Furthermore, business owners found it difficult to keep up to date with all the technology and system investments they needed to make because they were not core to their business but they understood they were important. By listening to the needs of our clients and potential clients, Dr-Desktop's re-branding represented the evolution of our IT service model from break/fix to proactive monitoring and maintenance.

Proactive monitoring and maintenance allows our company to work in partnership with our clients, rather than against them as is typically found in a break/fix model. Rather than only correcting a problem after it has affected our clients, Intega IT and our proactive model were developed to identify and problems before they affect our clients and lead to downtime and data loss which can severely impact their business. Since prolonged downtime and data loss can result in the dissolution of a business, proactive monitoring and maintenance is crucial to ensure the security of the businesses that support our community. Therefore, Intega IT was created to align our goals with the needs of the businesses and community we serve.

Our mission is to provide peace of mind for small-medium business owners in the Greater Ottawa area. We want to work with you as an integrated, dependable and trusted advisor to develop quality and innovative business solutions. Through expert knowledge, experience, integrity and ingenuity, we will ensure that your business' information systems are always available, scalable and secure. Intega IT gives you a virtual IT department.

Network and Security Assessment – What to expect?

If you are a business owner dealing with chronic computer problems, slowness, servers going down, sudden crashes, viruses, error messages, or you need IT consulting services and don't know who you can trust to do an honest job at a fair price, we want to help you out!

A Network and Security Assessment from Intega IT will ensure that proper security controls are present in your IT network. We will put our expertise, insights and experience to work for you so that you can make an informed choice that works for your business and gives you leverage and peace of mind. Our Assessment will generate a Client Risk Summary which will highlight any issues we uncovered and include all the information in easy-to-read charts and graphs which we will help us discuss solutions that will benefit your business now and in the future.

The following discovery tasks will be performed:

- ✓ Identify Domain Controllers and Online status
- ✓ List the Organizational units and Security Groups with members
- ✓ List users in AD, status, and last login/use to help identify potential security risks
- ✓ Create a comprehensive list of Network Shares by Server
- ✓ Detect Major Applications
- ✓ Web Server Discovery and Identification
- ✓ System by System Event Log Analysis
- ✓ Detailed Domain Controller Event Log Analysis
- ✓ Network Discovery for Non-A/D Devices
- ✓ Internet Domain Analysis
- ✓ Missing Security Updates
- ✓ Internet Access and Speed Test
- ✓ External Security Vulnerabilities

To request a Network and Security Assessment for your business:

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