Resultant

Managed IT Services
Building a Relationship for the Long Run

From a desire to eliminate unnecessary burden on internal IT staff to completely outsourcing the management and maintenance of IT infrastructure, businesses are searching for the right managed service provider (MSP).

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INTRODUCTION

Stability and security of your IT environment. Elimination of day-to-day IT challenges bogging your internal team down. Adherence to strict compliance requirements. Alignment of technology and business strategy for continued growth. Renewed focus on the strategic initiatives of the organization.

For these reasons and more, businesses are turning to managed IT services for business growth. From a desire to eliminate unnecessary burden on internal IT staff to completely outsourcing the management and maintenance of IT infrastructure, businesses are searching for the right managed service provider (MSP).

If you find yourself evaluating MSPs, possibly even your current provider, this guide will assist you establish a long-term, high value relationship with the right partner.

In an increasingly competitive market, selecting the right partner is more complex than ever.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER

In recent years, the demand for managed services has grown. In an increasingly competitive market, selecting the right partner is more complex than ever. Before finding and selecting the managed services provider that is right for your organization's needs, consider these evaluation criteria.

STRATEGY AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Many firms hire a provider in order to extend their breadth and depth and lean on their experience as they help to make strategic technology decisions. Factoring in the direct cost of technology, the soft cost of implementation effort and time, as well as the success or failure as a result of poor user adoption, technology decisions that aren't optimal can derail critical business goals and result in unnecessary and expensive redos.

Your MSP should be in the know about the latest trends in technology including business intelligence, utilization of cloud resources, as well as knowledgeable about the business applications you use daily. The better your provider aligns with the vision you have for your technology stack, the shorter the learning curve, and the faster immediate value can be realized.

STABILITY AND SECURITY OF IT ENVIRONMENT

When your technology isn't working, productivity comes to a halt. For this reason and more, people are turning to managed service providers for proactive management and maintenance of their IT systems to ensure they are always up and running.

To provide this level of service, your managed service provider must not only be technically excellent, but a thought leader in regard to the latest system improvements, features, and functionality. Your provider should stay knowledgeable about the latest requirements relevant to your specific industry and ensure compliance. In addition, to keep your environment at its best, your provider should clearly communicate changes before they occur, provide regular updates in regard to the status of the environment, and document findings to ensure team members not only remain up-to-date but can troubleshoot with ease, should the necessity arise.

ELIMINATION OF DAY-TO-DAY IT CHALLENGES

Many IT departments struggle to find time to focus on higher value initiatives due to day-to-day challenges such as end user troubleshooting, environment maintenance, and more. These challenges, while impossible to eliminate completely, can be reduced through the proactive maintenance and management of technology.

The right partner can resolve these requests through their helpdesk, leaving resources within your organization time to focus on higherlevel strategic work.

Considerations to take into account when reviewing your potential managed service providers helpdesk include the compatibility of their helpdesk systems and processes with your own, the metrics upon which they evaluate their success, and the service model and support team in place to resolve your requests.

QUESTIONS TO ASK TO UNCOVER THE RIGHT MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER

Whether you are seeking a managed service provider or evaluating your current provider, asking these questions will help you get the conversation started in uncovering the right provider for your organization.

STRATEGY AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- When have you assisted a business in selecting technology that has proven to be a long-term investment?

- How do you assist clients in leveraging technology to achieve their business goals?

- Upon introducing new technology to a business, how do you ensure successful end user adoption?

- What does your team do to keep up with the latest technology trends in order to provide businesses with the best possible recommendations?

STABILITY AND SECURITY OF IT ENVIRONMENT

- What does proactive monitoring and maintenance mean to you?

- What tools will you use to manage my environment remotely?

- What documentation will I receive?

- How often will you proactively communicate with our team?

ELIMINATION OF DAY-TO-DAY IT CHALLENGES

- How will our team communicate and ensure resolution of common day-to-day IT challenges? Provide an example scenario.

- What metrics are used to track client service? How are these communicated with us?

- Who are the resources that will be providing service to us? Are we consistently in contact with the same resources who know and understand our business?

TIPS ON BUILDING A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

Prior to selecting a managed service provider, it is important to consider how you will build a long-lasting, successful relationship. After all, a relationship is a two-way street. A great relationship requires **trust and transparency**, **process alignment**, **advanced expectation setting**, and **effective communication**.

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

All great relationships are built on a foundation of trust, which must be earned up front, and nurtured over time.

A managed service providers goal should be to simplify your day-to-day operations. To successfully achieve this, your managed service provider should work to holistically understand your business strategy, which requires transparency surrounding:

– Any challenges going to market

– Long-term strategy and plans

– Whether the business is growing or shrinking

– Recent changes in workflows or processes

– Recent changes in organization leadership

Trust is displayed when you share insight into your business goals and objectives, provide context surrounding the technology you have in place, and allow your managed service provider to get to know your people and processes. You can extend your managed service providers ability to give the best possible service by providing context into issues you have experienced in the past and concerns you have for the future as well as by granting your managed service provider with access to systems, documentation, and people.

Achieving trust and transparency requires effort from both parties. To earn your trust, your managed service provider should have some of the most capable technicians in the country on staff to support your business. Your provider should continually be asking good questions, have a healthy curiosity surrounding your technology environment, and, in general, continually looking for ways to best serve you.

Tips on building trust and transparency:

• Ask questions along the way

• Maintain an open mind about solutions and technology

• Be open, honest, and proactive about business and technology challenges

• Bring a strong desire to align technology with overarching business strategy

PROCESS ALIGNMENT

Every managed service provider is unique and so are their processes, procedures, documentation, and communication styles.

Some providers are willing to customize these processes and procedures based on your preferences. For instance, as a client, you may want your employees to have the opportunity to contact the helpdesk directly or prefer to work through an intermediary within your organization so you know exactly what types of requests your employees are making.

From helpdesk protocols, communication cadences, documentation processes, and more, to establish the most effective processes for your organization, both parties need a thorough understanding of the best ways to work together.

Tips on process alignment:

- Share how your organization most effectively communicates
- Establish protocols for helpdesk requests across the organization
- Communicate process changes prior to implementation

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Similarly, it is important to engage your MSP to ensure your expectations surrounding your relationship align. Set upfront expectations regarding items such as the level and prioritization of service, response to service requests, system upgrades, and more.

Below, we highlight some scenarios that emphasize the importance of sharing expectations:

Scenario: Prioritization of Service

For organizations that manage several office locations, the prioritization of IT service requests may be based on issue resolution and receipt of request. For example, consider a healthcare provider with several locations. If one of the locations is twice the size of the other locations, the healthcare provider may desire for the larger location to be given higher priority based on the additional demands it faces. Knowing this information, the MSP can adjust its service approach to best serve the healthcare organization overall.

Scenario: System Upgrade Prioritization

Working with an MSP, a client will likely build a technology roadmap that keeps the MSP and client in alignment about system upgrades, improvements, and more throughout the year. The development of the roadmap ensures expectations are aligned, eliminating a scenario where the MSP may be preparing the enhance your communication platform when, in fact, you prefer to enhance your IT security program.

When engaging an MSP, be sure to think through what expectations you will bring to the table and establish how the MSP will meet or exceed those expectations upfront to ensure long-term success.

Tips on setting expectations:

- Share and agree upon expectations at the onset of the relationship
- Clearly articulate changes in expectations throughout the relationship
- Ensure your MSP remains accountable to the defined expectations

COMMUNICATION

Communication, when proactive and timely for both parties involved, is the anchor that allows great work to get done.

To communicate effectively, your MSP should have established communication protocols by which they live and breathe. This includes:

– Status updates on weekly progress

– Discussion of what is currently in the pipeline

– Regular conversation around how the business is doing

– Clear statement of expectations and timelines

Additionally, your MSP should fend off any issues that happen in real time. All of the above should be addressed by an established project champion or main point of contact. For the best results, you should also determine an individual to serve as your internal project champion to help facilitate communication.

As a client of an MSP, you will likely be asked to:

– Provide advanced notice regarding new undertakings

– Communicate deadlines within realistic timeframes

– Report issues as soon as possible

– Communicate a change in the business

When proactive and timely, communication is a powerful tool that can help drive change, and requires equal participation from both parties.

Tips on effective communication:

• Establish a main point of contact

• Respond in a timely manner (generally within 24 hours pending the severity of the situation)

• Maintain proactive communication regarding business changes or IT challenges as they arise

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Ryan Achterberg is the Chief of Technology and a Senior Consultant with Resultant. Ryan's experience with the technical aspects of networks, operating systems, and software implementations for accounting firms has proven to be a valuable resource for our clients. His experience and knowledge of information systems have provided him with the ability to meet clients' main business objectives through efficiently and effectively using business and technology solutions.

ABOUT RESULTANT

Resultant helps clients develop innovative solutions. Our client-focused approach starts with developing a deep understanding of their business. We then use our expertise in technology, data, management consulting, cybersecurity, and project management to help clients fully leverage technology, support their people, and optimize their processes.

TECHNOLOGY

The Business Technology (BT) practice is the longest established and largest practice in the organization. The BT team provides IT assessments, strategic solutions, network services, implementation services, disaster recovery, and managed IT services to its clients. With every engagement, Resultant works to align clients' businesses with technology to help further their goals.

Learn more about Resultant IT Managed services.

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