



Do you know how managed IT services can help overcome your challenges?

Technology is the backbone of virtually every business, and it is only becoming more advanced and pervasive as new solutions emerge. With the speed of change, many organizations have trouble keeping up and can benefit from working with a qualified advisor to help navigate the crowded technology waters. A managed services agreement with the right strategy and provider can help your business proactively address your challenges and position you for greater success.

Several solutions can give organizations a technological advantage to complete processes more efficiently, securely and in a more streamlined fashion. Determining the right solutions is a challenge, and finding someone to help you determine what to implement and when to implement it can help maximize your investments. The right service provider understands your business drivers and obstacles and can help you determine how to best allocate your resources.

Taking advantage of virtualization and the cloud

In the spirit of doing more with less and increasing efficiency, companies are figuring out how to take advantage of virtualization and the cloud. The business world is fluid, and there is a level of uncertainty for how many people many organizations need. Companies have been forced to become more efficient and find that they often have too many people. However, in other cases, you may not have enough people after experiencing growth. Scalability has never been more important and is a key advantage of cloud solutions.

Virtualization and the cloud present many advantages, cutting hardware, software, support and maintenance costs and decreasing your footprint in a hosted, off-premise environment. In an on-premise environment, costs are often sunk with infrastructure and software investments; however, the cloud offers per-user or per-year pricing in more cost-effective and scalable Infrastructure as a Service or Software as a Service solutions.

Microsoft Office 365 is a cloud-based solution that resonates with many small and midsized companies, with over 4.4 million worldwide business users. Office 365 provides cloud productivity solutions, like business email, calendaring, online conferencing, file sharing, websites and Office Pro Plus hosted in Microsoft's secure data centers. Office 365 pricing ranges from \$5 per user per month for small business to \$20 per user per month for enterprises that include enterprise voice functionality. Gone are the days of managing email internally and falling behind with versions of Microsoft Office.

To address the challenges related to a cloud deployment, organizations need a technology provider with an understanding of on- and off-premise models, the cloud and what and when to migrate to a virtualized environment. In many cases, companies utilize a mix of cloud and on-site technology, and it is important to develop the right strategy and pace of migration.

The pace of change

Technology as a whole is changing at a faster pace than ever before. In general, innovation and processes behind the scenes that produce memory, processors and storage are much more affordable. While this is a positive, it also presents a significant challenge to determine when you want to innovate and what technologies will bring the most value to your business. Most organizations are focused on generating revenue and remaining competitive; you need technology, but it is often not a core competency.

Bad decisions are made by good companies that understand what they do, but do not understand technology thoroughly to know when a beneficial change is available. The optimal situation is working with an advisor that knows your business and how emerging technology can help you build a competitive advantage. This relationship can help evaluate your current and future state and align them with technology to help meet your current and long-term business goals.

Choosing the right provider for your needs

We live in an era of outsourcing and cosourcing. Amid an overabundance of providers and platforms, it can be difficult to choose the right solutions for your needs. Technology discussions 10–20 years ago centered on why businesses should outsource and move away from an internal model. Organizations now see the value in outsourcing to pay less for technology and gain access to more resources, but have difficulty developing an optimal strategy, given the wide range of available options.

When you are weighing those options, you must understand your core competencies and how your internal technology resources fit in the equation. Most organizations have dedicated technology personnel, but do not have everything they need to confidently address all of their requirements to implement, monitor, maintain and support systems and platforms. Additionally, you must know your appetite for communication and how you process technology information, and how much data is too much for you.

Pricing models vary widely in the industry, but you can expect to pay from \$100–\$150 per month per user in a small to midsized business managed services relationship. While many managed service providers do a good job automating routine information technology (IT) tasks, the rubber meets the road when it comes to the quality of the help desk—the first line of defense.

Once you understand how you want to communicate with a service provider, you can begin having conversations to understand their capabilities, processes and pricing structure. Benchmark an organization's experience against your expectations to help make a more informed decision. The most valuable tool that a provider can give you is the ability to communicate; understanding your business and needs is the most important step to help you choose, implement and manage the right technology for your organization.

A proper relationship will begin with an assessment, where your potential provider can learn about your business, your needs and current technology. This process is similar to a doctor's initial consultation to evaluate your records, background and current state before making recommendations. A provider must understand your objectives, what you have in place and where you may be falling short.

The assessment provides a foundation for a provider to begin making recommendations and supporting you moving forward. Be sure to understand whether the organizations you are evaluating have assessment processes in place and how thorough they are.

Technology is meant to solve problems, but when it is not working well or optimized effectively, processes can become painful and businesses can struggle. As technology evolves, and the business landscape becomes more competitive, it has never been more important to implement the right technology to increase efficiency, manage costs and streamline processes. A managed IT services agreement with a provider that understands your business can provide peace of mind that you are making technology decisions to align with your strategy and goals.

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