

IT BUYERS GUIDE



Systems Support

IT Support & Service Since 1989

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From The Desk Of: William MacFee
President, Systems Support Corporation

Dear Colleague,

If you are the owner of a business in Central or Eastern Massachusetts that is currently looking to outsource some or all the IT support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can trust. My name is Will MacFee, the president of Systems Support. We've been providing IT services to businesses on the South Shore and to Massachusetts for more than 35 years now. You may not have heard of us before, but I'm sure you're familiar with one or more of our clients. You'll hear from them later in the report.



One of the most common questions we get from new prospective clients calling our office is “What do you guys charge for your services?” Since this is such a common question — and a very important one to address — I decided to write this report for three reasons:

1. I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways IT services companies package and price their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
2. I wanted to bring to light a few “industry secrets” about IT service contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT service providers that can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.
3. I wanted to educate business owners on how to pick the right IT services company for their specific situation, budget and needs based on the value the company can deliver, not just the price, high or low.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible, so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner, and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Will MacFee". The signature is fluid and cursive.

William MacFee,
President

ABOUT SYSTEMS SUPPORT:

Since 1989, Systems Support has worked with Boston and South Shore small businesses to help them use the best of enterprise technology. The company was started by brothers Brian and Willie MacFee.

Brian MacFee grew up in Weymouth and went to Wentworth and Northeastern University after high school. Brian's job as a Test Engineering Manager at LTX where he first encountered the IBM PC. In the late 80's, Brian noticed these personal computers showing up on people's desks, and became involved in networking them together, and productivity skyrocketed. After some conversations with his brother Willie, Systems Support was started on the front deck of Brian's home.

Fast forward to 2008, after installing over 7000 computers in over 50 schools in Boston and Providence, Brian assumed full ownership of the company in 2008 as Willie retired. Fast forward again to 2016 and Brian's son Will joins the company.

Will MacFee grew up in Marshfield and after school went to North Carolina State University for Nuclear Engineering. At school he worked on various simulation projects and passed the exam to operate the school's nuclear reactor. After school, he worked for two years at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the Office of Nuclear Reactors. With the nuclear industry slowing down, Will joined Systems Support bringing the safety mindset from the reactor world. Coupled with the technical skills from networking computers during

simulation research, Will learned quickly.

Fast forward a few more years to 2023, and Brian retires on his 64th birthday. Will MacFee, his son, takes over as President of the company. Brian trained him well, and Will has helped the company meet the new challenges of running an IT business.

Over the past few years, IT has rapidly changed from "digital plumbing" to security compliance. As cybercrime made headlines and hit businesses of all sizes, the needs of companies changed. Today, IT companies not only have to make sure everything works as expected but also must defend against cyberattacks like email compromise and ransomware. Every day the threat actors get better, and we need to as well.

Rather than take an approach of sealing every door and battening down the hatches, Will used another mantra from the NRC: "reasonable assurance of adequate protection". There are plenty of common-sense steps to take to protect a company's data assets. No solution is perfect, and if one understands the risk the choice is easier for what actions one has to take.

When you work with Systems Support, you have a direct relationship with the people providing the service. We hate bureaucracy (Will saw enough of it at the NRC) so we do everything we can to make it easy to do business with us. You will work with the same name and faces on a consistent basis, people who know your business and your people. When you work with us, you become part of the family.



Systems Support
IT Support & Service Since 1989

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READ THIS EXECUTIVE GUIDE TO DISCOVER:

- ✓ THE 3 MOST COMMON WAYS IT SERVICES COMPANIES CHARGE FOR THEIR SERVICES, AND THE PROS AND CONS OF EACH APPROACH.
- ✓ A COMMON BILLING MODEL THAT PUTS ALL THE RISK ON YOU WHEN BUYING IT SERVICES; LEARN WHAT IT IS AND WHY YOU NEED TO AVOID AGREEING TO IT.
- ✓ EXCLUSIONS, HIDDEN FEES AND OTHER “GOTCHA” CLAUSES IT COMPANIES PUT IN THEIR CONTRACTS THAT YOU DON’T WANT TO AGREE TO.
- ✓ 5 WAYS “CHEAPER” IT FIRMS HIDE THE TRUE COST OF THEIR SERVICES IN THEIR CONTRACTS.
- ✓ 20 CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR IT SUPPORT FIRM BEFORE SIGNING AN AGREEMENT.
- ✓ LEARN THE TRUTH BEHIND FOUR COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT IT SERVICES.

COMPARING APPLES TO APPLES: *EXPLAINING THE THREE PREDOMINANT IT SERVICE MODELS*

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company to another, you need to understand the three predominant pricing and service models most of these companies offer. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three predominant service models are:

Time and Materials (Hourly):

In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially, you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to “fix” your problem when something breaks. The price you pay will vary depending on the provider you choose and the complexity of the problem, but most will be in the \$200-\$350 range. Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work ranges from simply resolving a specific problem (like fixing slow WiFi or resolving an e-mail problem) to encompassing a large project like a software upgrade, implementing cyber protections or even an office move. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.

Managed IT Services (MSP, or “Managed Services Provider”):

This is a model where the IT services company, called an MSP, takes on the role of your fully outsourced IT department. In this model, they handle everything related to your IT infrastructure. That includes things such as:

- Troubleshooting IT problems.
- Setting up and supporting PCs, tablets, Macs and workstations for new and existing employees, both on-site and remote.
- Installing and setting up applications such as Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, SharePoint, etc.
- Setting up and managing the security of your network, devices and data to protect against hackers, ransomware and viruses.
- Backing up your data and assisting in recovering it in the event of a disaster.
- Providing a help desk and support

team to assist employees with IT problems.

- Monitor and maintain the overall health, speed, performance and security of your computer network on a daily basis.

In addition to managing your IT, a good MSP will work proactively with you and budget for necessary projects to further secure your network and improve the stability and availability of critical applications, as well as ensure that your IT systems are compliant with various data protection laws (HIPAA, FTC Safeguards, PCI, etc.) and that your cyber protections meet the standards on any cyber insurance plan that you have. These projects are not included in the routine, day-to-day maintenance and are typically planned out in advance, based on the growth of your organization, your risk tolerance, operations, unique business model, etc.

Vendor-Supplied IT Services:

Many software companies and vendors will offer pared-down IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific software application and not your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t and won’t help you and will often refer you to “your IT department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business (often referred to as a “line-of-business” application), this is not sufficient to provide the full IT services, cyber security, back-up and employee (end-user) support most businesses need.

As a small or midsize business looking to outsource your IT support, you are most likely to end up having to choose between two service models: the managed services and “break-fix” models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both. †

MISCONCEPTION

#1

AN HONEST IT COMPANY SHOULD BE ABLE TO QUOTE YOU OVER ONE CALL

Deciding which IT provider to work with isn’t like ordering takeout, where it’s easy to call in and just pick items off a menu. A good IT partner will work with you to discover your pain points and come up with a plan to address what your business needs so you can get the best value for your investment. With a managed services provider, a large part of what you’re paying for is their expertise and insight to help your business not just run day-to-day but be ready to grow and change. Be wary of anyone that is quick to quote you a price before taking the time to understand your business.

This caution even applies to “break-fix” support. An honest, professional technician will need to interact with your device or network before they can give an accurate quote. Sometimes the issue is as simple as a loose cable keeping something from working, which is a simple fix but impossible to diagnose over the phone, leading to a “guesstimate” that’s safe for the technician’s bottom line but not the best value for your needs.





MANAGED SERVICES VS. BREAK-FIX:

WHICH IS THE MORE COST-EFFECTIVE OPTION FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

The advantage of break-fix services is that you only pay for IT support when you need it, without being locked into a monthly or multi-year contract. If you're not happy with the service you're getting, you can change providers easily. If you're a micro-business with only a few employees, very simple IT needs where you don't experience a lot of problems and don't host or handle sensitive data (medical records, credit cards, Social Security numbers, etc.), break-fix might be the most cost-effective option for you.

However, the downsides of break-fix services are many if you're not a micro-business and are attempting to grow in revenue, staff, and clients; or if you handle sensitive, "protected" data. The six biggest downsides of the break-fix model are as follows:

- 1. Break-fix can be very expensive** when you have multiple issues or a major problem (like a ransomware attack). Because you're not a managed client, the IT company resolving your problem will likely take longer to troubleshoot and fix the issue than if they were regularly maintaining your network and therefore familiar with your environment and had systems in place to recover files or prevent problems from escalating.
- 2. Paying hourly works entirely in your IT company's favor, not yours.** Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a ju-

nior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician may have resolved in a fraction of the time because there's no incentive to fix your problems fast. In fact, they're incentivized to drag it out as long as possible, given that they're being paid by the hour.

- 3. You are more likely to have major issues.** One of the main reasons businesses choose a managed services provider is to prevent major issues from happening. As Benjamin Franklin famously said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." The smart way to avoid disasters and minimize the cost and damage is to prevent them from happening in the first place, not "hope" they won't happen.
- 4. You can't budget for IT services** and, as already explained, could end up paying more in the long run if you have to constantly call for urgent "emergency" support.
- 5. You won't be a priority for the IT company.** All IT firms prioritize their contract managed clients over break-fix clients. That means you get called back last and fit in when they have availability, so you could be down for days or weeks before they can address your problem. Further, because you're not under a contract, the IT company

has no incentive to keep you happy or even address the root causes of your problems, which can lead to MORE problems and MORE costs.

- 6. If no one is actively maintaining the security of your network and data, your chances of getting hacked go up exponentially.** Believe me when I tell you most people grossly underestimate the costs and damage done by a ransomware attack. Your operations shut down and your client contracts, private e-mails, company financials, employee payroll and other sensitive data are in the hands of criminals who won't think twice about e-mailing your list of employees' and clients' confidential information. Thinking you're fine because "nobody wants to hack us" or "we're 100% in the cloud" is gross ignorance. If you don't have a professional IT company monitor and maintain your company's IT security, you WILL get hacked, incurring significant financial losses, not to mention reputational damage and client losses.

For all these reasons, hiring an MSP to manage your IT environment for an agreed-upon monthly budget is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for most businesses with 10 or more employees, or who handle critical operations and sensitive data and are risk-averse. †

MISCONCEPTION

#2

MY IT NETWORK DOESN'T NEED REGULAR MONITORING AND CYBER SECURITY MAINTENANCE (MANAGED SERVICES).

This is probably one of the biggest and most costly misconceptions that business owners have. Usually this is because they've been fortunate enough to have never encountered a major system failure that caused data loss from human error (or a disgruntled employee), failed hardware or even a ransomware attack, but that's just like someone thinking they don't need to wear a seat belt when driving a car because they've never had an accident. IT networks are complex and dynamic systems that need regular updates and maintenance to stay up, secure, running fast and problem-free – especially now with the proliferation and sophistication of ran-

somware and hacker attacks. Here are just a FEW of the critical updates that need to be done on a weekly – if not daily – basis:

- Cyber security patches, updates and management
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter updates
- Operating system updates, management
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure

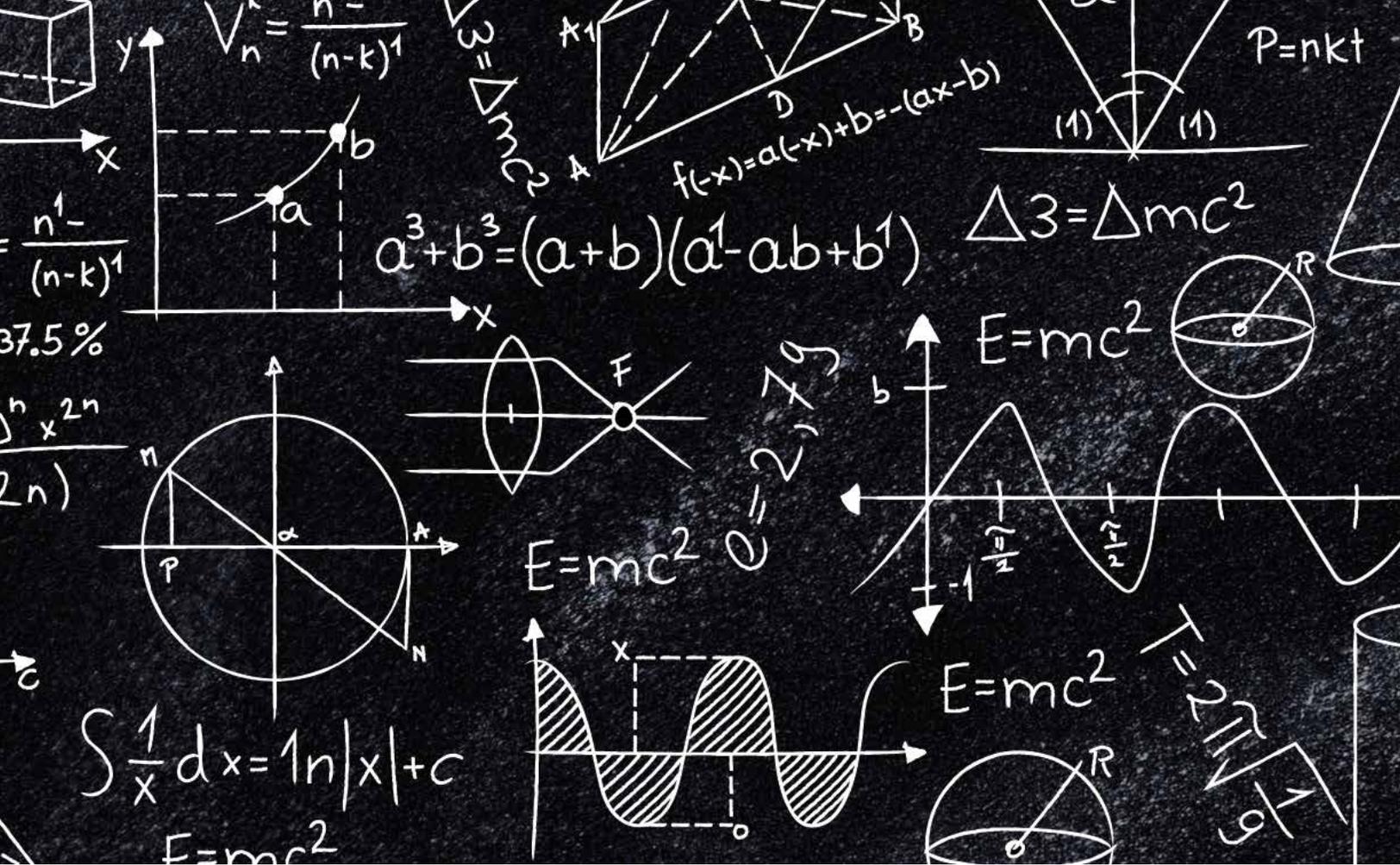
If your IT support tech does not insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, es-

pecially for cyber protections, then do not hire them.

1. Either they don't know enough to make this recommendation, which is a sure sign they are grossly inexperienced and unprofessional, or...
2. They recognize that they are profiting from your IT problems and don't want to recommend steps toward prevention, which would reduce the number of issues they are paying you to resolve.

Either reason is a good one to get as far away from that person as possible!





WHAT SHOULD IT SERVICES COST?

Important! Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted by a well-known and trusted independent consulting firm, Service Leadership, that collects, analyzes and reports on the financial metrics of IT services firms from around the country.

We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most MSPs and IT services charge and to help you understand the vast differences in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does not reflect our pricing model or approach for your unique situation. We are simply providing this as an educational resource to help you understand the vast differences in price and value.

Hourly Break-Fix Fees:

Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$200 and \$350 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In some cases, they will give you a discount on their hourly rates if you pur-

chase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

Project Fees:

If you are getting an IT firm to quote you for a onetime project, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined and the complexity of the project. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I suggest you demand the following:

- **A detailed scope of work that specifies what “success” is.** Make sure you document what your expectations are in performance, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Clarifying your expectations up front will go a long way toward avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you really wanted.
- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant’s. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for “unforeseen” circumstanc-

es. The bottom line is this: it is your IT consulting firm’s responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly. With that, a safety margin should be built into whatever they quote. If they’ve done the work several times before, they should know the range of hours it should take them.

Managed IT Services:

Most managed IT services firms will quote you a monthly fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. On average, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$250 to \$650 per server, \$90 to \$175 per desktop and approximately \$45 per smartphone or mobile device. Some will instead charge by the user, with ranges from \$195 to \$355 per user, depending upon the needs of the firm

- and those fees are expected to rise due to constant inflation and a tight IT talent labor market.

Obviously, as with all services, you get what you pay for. Operationally mature MSPs typically charge more because they are far more disciplined and capable of delivering cyber security and compliance services than smaller, cheaper-priced MSPs.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services contract, here are some things that should be included (make sure you read your agreement to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly, if not daily, for urgent and emerging threats
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers

- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Regular reports that these activities are completed

The following services may not be included and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily unethical unless the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is not included!

- Hardware, such as new servers, PCs, laptops, etc.
- New Firewall Hardware and Subscriptions
- Backup software and external drives
- Licenses for Email Accounts
- Provisioning a new user
- Software licenses for Windows or

Microsoft Office

- On-site support

Warning! Gray areas of “all-inclusive” service contracts. In order to truly compare the cost of one managed IT services contract to another, you need to make sure you fully understand what is and isn’t included and the “SLA” or “service level agreement” you are signing up for. It’s very easy for one IT services provider to appear far less expensive than another until you look closely at what you are getting.

To be clear, I’m not suggesting you must pay top dollar to get competent IT services, nor does paying a lot of money guarantee you’ll get accurate advice and responsive, customer-centric services. But if an MSP is charging below average rates, you must question what they are not providing or not including to make their services so cheap. Often, they are simply not providing the quality of service you would expect. †

MISCONCEPTION #4 YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO PAY "THAT MUCH" FOR IT SERVICES.

We all know you get what you pay for. A cheap hourly rate (in Eastern Massachusetts, average rates for break-fix services start around \$200/hour) usually means a cheap job. Like every other profession, good IT engineers and techs do not work cheap because they are in high demand. When you see low IT services fees, it’s because of one of the following:

1. They are a small shop just getting started. Usually, they will have only one to two techs working for them (or they are a solo shop). That size of company may be perfectly fine for a small business that is not regulated, doesn’t have sophisticated IT requirements and/or has only 10 or fewer PCs to support. This would not be a good choice for a larger organization that needs professional IT services for their growing company.

2. They are only hiring inexperienced technicians because they will work for next to nothing, or they allow interns to support your network because they don’t have to pay them at all – but what you don’t realize is that an inexperienced technician like this can end up costing more because:

- They improperly diagnose problems, which means you’re paying them to fix the wrong thing and they still won’t resolve your issue. Case in point: A few years ago a TV reporter went undercover to IT services companies in LA with a perfectly working PC, but simply disconnected a cable in the back (a fix that the average tech would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several shops improperly diagnosed the problem and wanted to charge them up to \$275 to fix it!
- They could take three to five times as long to do the same repair an experienced technician could fix quickly. Again, you’re paying for those extra hours AND you’re frustrated and unproductive while you wait for the SAME problem to be fixed!
- They could do things that put your security and data in jeopardy. True story: An inexperienced engineer of a competitor turned off all security notifications his client’s network was producing because it was “too much work” to sift and sort through them. Because of this, the company got hacked and ended up having to pay a ransom to get their data back, not to mention suffered downtime for days while they scrambled to recover. Don’t let a cheap, inexperienced tech do this to you!

With your client data, accounting records, e-mail and other critical data at stake, do you really want the lowest-priced shop working on your machine?

We take the view that most people want value for their money and simply want the job done right. You will find that we are not the cheapest, but we don’t apologize for that. As the owner, I decided a long time ago that I would rather explain our higher rates one time than make excuses for poor service forever. That said, we’re not the most expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer a good service at a fair price. That’s why we have been able to stay in business for over 30 years and have more than 100 satisfied clients.

HOW FIRMS HIDE COSTS

As we said previously, no two IT services agreements are alike, and unless you are technically savvy (and most C-level executives aren't, obviously), you won't really know if what you're being quoted is insufficient, overpriced or even underquoted.

If you're not careful, the cheapest or less expensive IT provider can end up costing you a lot more due to carve-outs and hidden fees in their contracts that they will later nickel-and-dime you over, or quoting inadequate solutions that you'll later need to pay to upgrade.

Here are the five most common things cheaper IT companies leave out of their proposal to make themselves appear cheaper – but those companies are not the bargain you might think they are.

1. Grossly Inadequate Compliance and Cyber Security Protections.

A ransomware attack is a significant and devastating event for any business; therefore, you must make sure the IT company you're talking to isn't just putting a basic (cheap) antivirus software on your network and calling it done. This is by far the one critical area most cheaper MSPs leave out. Antivirus is good but woefully insufficient to protect you. In fact, insurance companies are now requiring advanced cyber-protections such as employee cyber awareness training, 2FA (2-factor authentication) and what's called "advanced endpoint protection" just to get insurance coverage for cyber liability and crime insurance. These can greatly reduce your chances of a cyber-attack, and help you avoid being

denied an important insurance claim (or denied coverage, period).

2. Inadequate Backup and Disaster Recovery Solutions.

Make sure your IT company includes daily backups of your servers and workstations, as well as cloud applications such as Microsoft 365, Google Workspace and other line-of-business applications, such as your CRM data, client data, etc. That's because online applications do NOT guarantee to back up your data (read the small print in your contract and you'll be shocked). Further, your backups must be immutable, which means they cannot be corrupted by a hacker. Many insurance companies now *require* immutable backups to be in place before they insure against a ransomware or similar cyber event that erases data. Be sure to ask your IT company if that's what they quoted you.

3. Carve-Outs for On-Site and After-Hours Support.

This is another area that takes many business owners by surprise: all after-hours and on-site visits might involve an extra fee. We include all of this in our agreements, so you aren't nickel-and-dimed for every request, but you need to make sure you understand what is and isn't included in the service agreement you're signing.

4. Nonexistent Vendor Liaison and Support.

Some IT firms will charge you hourly to resolve issues with your phone system, ISP, security cameras, printers and other devices they didn't sell you but that still reside on the net-

work (and give you technical problems). As a client of ours, you get all of that included, without extra charges.

5. Cheap, Inexperienced Techs.

Many of the smaller MSPs will hire techs under a 1099 agreement or find cheaper, less experienced engineers to work on your network and systems. Obviously, the more experienced and knowledgeable a tech is on networking and, more specifically, cyber security, the more expensive they are because IT skills are in demand.

Buyer Beware! In order to truly compare the cost of one managed IT services contract to another, you need to make sure you fully understand what is and isn't included in the SLA you are signing up for. It's very easy for one IT services provider to appear far less expensive than another until you look closely at what you are getting.

The SLA should define the following:

- What services the MSP is providing in clear terms.
- Guaranteed response time to a problem (both minor and major outages).
- What fees are extra (like on-site fees, after-hours support, etc.).
- Contract terms and renewals.
- Cancellation terms: specifically, how do you get out of the contract if they are not delivering the services promised?
- Liability protection, both for them and you.
- Payment terms.

But the best way to avoid having a problem is to pick the right MSP to begin with. So call us at Systems Support today and set up a consultation. †

MISCONCEPTION

#4

MY NEIGHBOR'S KID KNOWS THIS IT STUFF AND CAN TAKE CARE OF IT

Most people look for a part-time "guru" for one reason: to save a few bucks. But this often comes back to haunt them. We frequently get calls from business owners who desperately need our help to get them back up and running or to clean up a mess that was caused by an inexperienced employee or friend who was just trying to help.

If the person you have working on your IT systems does not do IT support for a living, there is a good chance they won't have the knowledge or experience to truly help you – they are a hobbyist at best. And do you really want a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and IT network? As with everything in life, you get what you pay for. That's not to say you need to go broke to find a great IT firm, but you shouldn't be choosing someone based on price alone.



The following are 20 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you're getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you; then make sure you get this in writing.

CUSTOMER SERVICE:

1

WHEN I HAVE AN IT PROBLEM, HOW DO I GET SUPPORT?

We answer our phones live from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, even on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network and can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

When a client has a problem, we "open a ticket" in our IT management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document and resolve client issues. While some IT firms force you to log in to submit a ticket and won't allow you to call or e-mail them. This is for their convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your only option for requesting support.

Also, make sure they have a reliable system in place to keep track of client "tickets" and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be easy for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy.

2

WHAT IS THEIR GUARANTEED RESPONSE TIME?

We guarantee to have a technician working on a problem within 60 minutes or less of your call. Customers today work in a dynamic world and need to have their issues resolved immediately. A small business can't afford to be down for a half a day.

Be very wary of an IT firm that can't quickly respond to your issues – that's a sign they are too disorganized, understaffed or overwhelmed to handle your request. Our response time is one hour or less. A good IT firm should also be able to show you statistics from their PSA (professional services automation) software, where all client problems (tickets) get responded to and tracked. Ask to see a report on average ticket response and resolution times.

3

CAN THEY GIVE YOU CLEAR ANSWERS IN PLAIN LANGUAGE?

We take pride in explaining issues in Plain English. and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association had to say:

"From the start, System Support was down to earth and showed the willingness to do a great job for their clients. System Support is a professional company with a real commitment to provide superior technical expertise and outstanding customer service. This has not always been the case with other providers we've worked with over the years. System Support allows us to focus on our member's needs. They regularly evaluate our systems to ensure our requirements are being met and, if not, work with us to implement a plan to improve our systems."

-Tara McGrath
Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association

4

ARE THEY PROACTIVE PARTNERS OR JUST REACTIVE?

We conduct regular review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive. With technology changing all the time, these meetings help not only keep the business up to date with the latest standards, but find ways to leverage better technology.

5

DO THEY PROVIDE CLEAR, DETAILED INVOICES?

We provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.

6

DO THEY GUARANTEE PROJECT GOALS AND TIMELINES?

We have installed just about every form of technology you can think of. Since we've done it so many times, we know how much it should cost and how long it can take. Even in the event of unforeseen circumstances and Acts of God (exploding power supplies anyone?), we work with you to bill what's fair.

7

DO THEY HOLD YOU HOSTAGE IF YOU WANT TO CANCEL?

Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many IT firms hold their clients hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

One thing that makes Systems Support stand out from other IT firms is that we don't require clients to sign long-term contracts that lock into a service you're unhappy with. Therefore, we make it easy to cancel your contract with us, with zero contention or fines. Our "easy out" agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations every day, so we keep your business.

8

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK?

If an IT provider doesn't have this type of feedback system, they may be hiding their lousy customer service results. If they DO have one, ask to see the actual scores and reporting. That will tell you a lot about the quality of service they are providing. We are very proud of our positive client feedback scores and will be happy to show them to you and we make it easy for clients to give feedback on tickets so we can continually improve our service.

NETWORKING AND SECURITY:

9

CAN THEY SHOW YOU THE SECURITY RECEIPTS?

Every week our clients get a detailed report that shows an overall health score of their network and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches and other important network checks (like hard-drive space, backups, speed and performance, etc.). We also schedule regular reviews with your business to discuss what's happening under the hood and ways to protect your growing business.

10

HOW CLOSELY ARE THEY WATCHING YOUR NETWORK?

Yes; our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them before they turn into bigger problems.

11

DO THEY SHARE THE "KEYS TO THE KINGDOM"?

All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

12

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR TECHNICIAN GETS SICK?

Great documentation isn't just helpful for our clients, it's also useful for getting technicians up to speed about your business so they don't have to spend hours familiarizing themselves with your network before they start solving the problem you actually called about. We also foster an open, collaborative working environment, so technicians can more easily parachute in to a situation if additional help is needed.

13

WHEN THEY OFFER AN "ALL-INCLUSIVE" SUPPORT PLAN, IS IT TRULY ALL-INCLUSIVE, OR ARE THEIR "GOTCHAS" HIDDEN IN THE FINE PRINT?

Our "all-inclusive" support plan is just that — all-inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by consulting firms today is an "all-inclusive" or "all-you-can-eat" managed services plan. These are actually a good thing because they'll save you a lot of money in the long run. **HOWEVER**, make sure you **REALLY** understand what is and isn't included. Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/e-mail help desk included or extra?
- What about network upgrades, moves or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd-party software support? (We recommend that this IS included.)
- What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you aren't happy with their services? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are off-site backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?

Our Complete Cloud solution rolls the all-inclusive together. While the price tag may be high for some, we can break out some of the pieces for some of our other plans. Not every business needs a Cadillac for each employee!

BACKUPS AND DISASTER RECOVERY

14

IS YOUR DATA SAFELY BACKED UP? OFF SITE? IN THE CLOUD?

We do not allow our clients to use only local backups as external drives can crash and may be susceptible to ransomware. We make sure all of our clients have at minimum a cloud file and folder backup to cover the most critical data. For clients that can't be down for more than an hour, we use a system that replicates all of your data and can act as your server while we repair your current server or order a new one.

15

ARE YOUR BACKUPS BEING REGU- LARLY TESTED?

We perform a monthly “fire drill” and perform a test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.

16

DO YOU HAVE A WRITTEN RECOVERY PLAN?

If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored fast and/or enable you to work from a remote location? All clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. We encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM:

17

DO THEY ARRIVE ON TIME AND DRESS PROFESSIONALLY?

Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

19

WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE HELPING YOU REALLY LOCATED?

We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's important to keeping your data secure. You will know the name (and faces!) of those who are answering the phones.

18

CAN THEY SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS APPLICATIONS?

We own the problems with all lines of business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software — but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you. This helps to give you “one throat to choke”.

20

DO THEY OWN PROBLEMS OR PASS THE BUCK?

We feel we should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own — that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

A FINAL WORD

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your IT support to. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

If you have any other questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me! There is no cost or obligation, and I am more than happy to answer any questions you might have.

Looking forward to your call!

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