

The Ultimate Guide to Partnering with a Managed Service Provider (MSP)

As technology continues to evolve and play an increasingly important role in businesses, many companies are turning to managed service providers (MSPs) for support. MSPs provide a wide range of IT services such as network monitoring, cloud management, cybersecurity, and more. Partnering with an MSP can help organizations save time and money while also gaining access to specialized expertise and improved technology.

We'll provide a deep dive into everything you need to know about outsourcing IT services with the help of an MSP and how to find the right partner for your business.

Navigating IT Issues Without an MSP

With business technology changing at a rapid pace, it can be difficult for companies to keep up on their own. Here are some of the common IT challenges that organizations face without the support of a managed service provider:



Limited Resources and Expertise:

One of the most significant hurdles businesses face without an MSP is the lack of resources and expertise to manage complex IT systems. Many companies rely on a small in-house team that may not have the specialized skills needed to handle advanced technologies, leaving them unprepared to handle necessary tasks.



Cybersecurity Concerns:

Cybersecurity is a top priority for any business, yet many struggle to keep up with the latest threats and best practices. Without expert guidance, vulnerabilities can go unnoticed, leaving your data and operations at risk.



Scaling IT Resources:

As your business grows, so do your IT needs. Scaling your IT resources can be challenging without a well-defined strategy and the necessary support, leading to inefficiencies and bottlenecks that hinder growth—not to mention the costs of hiring additional staff needed to keep up with growth.



High Costs of In-House IT:

Maintaining an in-house IT team can be costly, with IT managers' salaries in the \$100–142,000 range. On top of salaries, additional costs like benefits, training, and equipment add up quickly, often exceeding the budget of many small to medium-sized businesses.



Impact of Technical Issues:

Technical issues can easily disrupt business operations, leading to downtime and lost revenue. Without immediate access to skilled IT professionals experienced enough to provide prompt solutions, resolving these problems can take longer and be more costly.

The Power of Outsourcing

Outsourcing specific business functions or processes to external service providers has become a strategic imperative for many, allowing businesses to focus on their core competencies while leveraging the expertise, technology, and resources of specialized firms. By tapping into the capabilities of MSPs, companies can enhance service quality and ensure operational efficiency.

Managed service providers aim to employ teams equipped with the latest knowledge and experience in IT, providing you with access to specialized expertise that not only improves service delivery but also minimizes risks associated with handling complex systems internally and reduces the costs associated with recruitment for in-house IT support.

Additionally, the strategic value of outsourcing goes beyond mere cost savings. Businesses should consider factors such as improved service quality, enhanced flexibility, access to innovative technologies, and alignment with business objectives. For example, if a goal is to improve customer satisfaction, outsourcing technical support to an MSP with a reputation for excellent service may lead to faster issue resolution and higher client satisfaction scores.

Understanding the Role of Managed Service Providers

Businesses are increasingly turning to managed service providers for their reliability, expertise, and ability to provide scalable solutions. According to a recent report, 60% of organizations are expected to rely on MSPs for IT operations by 2025.

Let's review the basics. A managed service provider is a third-party company that takes on the responsibility of managing and maintaining an organization's IT infrastructure. This may include anything from network monitoring and management, data storage, backup and recovery, cybersecurity, cloud computing, and more.

Here are three of the biggest IT services that MSPs provide:

- **IT Consulting:** Managed service providers offer guidance and advice on how to optimize your technology infrastructure, ensuring that it aligns with your business goals. They can also propose improvements and new solutions to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, and support business growth.
- **Managed Security:** With cyber threats on the rise, cybersecurity is more important than ever for businesses of all sizes. MSPs provide continuous security monitoring and threat detection services to protect your data and systems from cyber threats and potential breaches.
- **Cloud Services:** Many companies are leveraging the cost savings and flexibility of cloud technology. MSPs can help you plan, implement, and manage your entire cloud infrastructure, ensuring a smooth transition to the cloud and ongoing support for all your cloud-based applications.

Co-Managed IT

Managed service providers offer a wide range of IT services tailored to meet the specific needs of different businesses—even if you already have some in-house IT staff. Co-managed IT services are a great option for businesses that prefer to retain some control over their IT operations. This collaborative approach allows you to leverage the expertise of an MSP while maintaining an internal IT team.

For instance, with co-managed IT you can assign specific high level projects or functions to your MSP when you need extra support or specialized skills, while still managing other aspects of IT in-house. This provides the best of both worlds, giving you a few full-time technicians on hand with specialized support available when you need it.

Key Criteria for Selecting the Right MSP

When it comes to selecting the right managed service provider for your business, there are a few key criteria to keep in mind:

- **Technical Expertise and Industry Experience:** Choose an MSP with proven technical expertise and industry experience. Look for certifications and case studies that demonstrate their capability to handle your specific needs.
- **Range of Service Offerings:** Choose an MSP that offers a range of IT services that meet your current and future needs. Whether you want a specialist in industry compliance or a one-stop solution for all your technology needs, make sure their services match your needs.
- **Cultural Fit and Alignment with Business Values:** Outsourcing IT requires a strong partnership built on trust and open communication. Choose an MSP that aligns with your business values, culture, and goals to ensure a smooth working relationship.
- **Financial Stability and Reputation:** Financial stability and reputation are essential factors to consider when selecting an MSP. Choose a company with a solid reputation, checking reviews and testimonials to gauge their reliability and performance.

Understanding Contracts and Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

When engaging with a managed service provider, contracts and service level agreements (SLAs) serve as the foundation for the partnership, outlining the expectations, responsibilities, and specific services that will be provided.

An effective SLA includes several critical components:



1. Service Description: Clearly outlines the services offered by the managed service provider, detailing the scope and any limitations to prevent later misunderstandings.



2. Performance Metrics: Establishes measurable standards for service delivery, such as response times for technical support, system uptime percentages, and resolution times for incidents.



3. Roles and Responsibilities: Defines the responsibilities of both the MSP and the client, ensuring there is clarity on what is expected from each party.



4. Penalties and Remedies: Specifies penalties for failing to meet the agreed performance metrics, ensuring accountability from the MSP.



5. Review and Reporting: Outlines how often service reviews will occur and the process for reporting performance metrics to the client, fostering transparency.

When negotiating the terms of the contract, it's essential to ensure that the agreement not only addresses current needs but also anticipates future challenges. Addressing scalability in the contract is important to accommodate future business growth and technological advancements, allowing for easy expansion of services or adjustments based on changing business needs.

Other key aspects to focus on during negotiation include flexibility, customization, and exit strategies to outline conditions under which either party can terminate the contract.

Barriers to MSP Partnerships

Despite the many benefits of outsourcing IT services to a managed service provider, some businesses may face potential barriers or challenges in forming a successful partnership. Here are some tips to overcome issues and ensure a productive working relationship:



Addressing Resistance to Change

Change can be challenging, especially for employees accustomed to existing systems. Communicate the benefits of outsourcing IT services to employees and involve them in decision-making processes as much as possible. Keep communication channels open, address concerns, and provide support during the transition period.



Managing Expectations

Set clear expectations from the outset, ensuring both parties understand their roles and responsibilities. Be realistic about the timeframes for implementation and any potential disruptions that may occur. Addressing expectations upfront can help avoid misunderstandings and conflicts later on.



Handling Disputes and Issues

Have a plan in place for handling disputes and issues. Establish a clear escalation process and communication channels for raising concerns, and ensure all parties are aware of the procedures to follow in case of disputes or issues.

Find the Right MSP For You

Partnering with a managed service provider can revolutionize your business operations. From improving efficiency to enhancing security, the benefits are immense.

For expert IT services in Western Canada, consider partnering with Northern Computer. With extensive experience and a team of 50 local experts, this MSP provides tailored IT solutions with a customer-centric approach, ensuring you receive the best support and solutions.

Join the growing number of businesses that trust Northern Computer for their IT needs. [Schedule an assessment](#) to experience the benefits of partnering with a top-tier MSP.