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IT SOLUTIONS



5 BOXES TO CHECK

What makes a good
Managed Services provider?



You need to shop around to ensure the provider you choose has the necessary chops.

Perhaps you're looking to better manage your IT costs, or free up your IT staff from the daily grind of keeping the environment running. Both are good use cases for managed IT services.

You may be going further, like starting to create your strategy for implementing your company's digital transformation.

No matter what your reasons are, Managed Services are something you need to consider.

Broadly speaking, Managed Services are used to provide IT expertise and targeted support capabilities to an organization's IT environment. Managed Services are often provided remotely, and can encompass almost every IT category, from network infrastructure to help desk, to desktop/end-user systems support.

All Managed Services Providers are NOT created equal, however. You need to shop around to ensure the provider you choose has the necessary chops to manage your requirements.

When you start shopping for an MSP, make sure they can check off these five boxes:

- 24x7 availability
- End-to-end IT management
- Expertise in cloud, hybrid, and on-prem environments
- Capability for continuous improvement, not just keeping the lights on
- Security expertise



1. 24x7 accessibility

Talk to enough managers and you will hear horror stories of an emergency that was exacerbated because a key internal IT staff member was out sick, on vacation, or otherwise unreachable.

“I had a storage problem and our storage guy was on his annual fishing trip” or “We had a server crash and our server guy was out sick” are just a couple of the stories you might hear. And those are situations in which everyone depends on an internal IT department that’s stretched very thin.

Your storage guy obviously doesn’t work 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, but your IT environment does. So does your business. So, when you consider managed services providers, make sure they’re available and accessible around the clock, 365 days a year.

Regardless of what access your prospective provider offers, web portal, toll-free phone number or live chat capability, for requesting support, you need to make sure their staff is available around the clock in supporting your organization.



2. End-to-end IT management

Ranking just slightly below 24x7 accessibility on your checklist should be end-to-end IT management. But what does that mean?

It means taking care of the whole ball of wax, providing comprehensive coverage from soup to nuts and skilled resources capable of address all issues you may have from stem to stern. Or, if you prefer:

End-to-end IT management means your managed IT service providers service includes setup, installation, and configuration of the environment. The provider will configure and deploy products into the environment based on recommended best practices, provide ongoing patching and monitoring, harden the configurations from a security perspective, fine-tune the settings for performance and dynamically change the configuration state to meet business needs on the fly.

If the MSP you are considering can’t meet this requirement, keep looking!





3. Expertise in on-premise, cloud and hybrid environments

Simply put, beware of providers who try to make their singular solution fit every one of your requirements. For example, cloud-only MSPs will try to address every issue with a cloud based offering. Just like a little child with a hammer who sees everything as nails, beware of the MSP that doesn't provide "platform agnostic" solutions. Ideally you want the requirements to drive the solution be it a public cloud, private cloud, hybrid, or on-prem deployment.

The best providers can deliver their managed services in the way that makes the most sense for your business.

Cloud based managed services have their benefits. However, sometimes on-premises infrastructure wrapped with remotely provided managed services will still be the best route for an organization.



4. Capability for continuous improvement, not just keeping the lights on

Information technology never stands still, and you can't afford for your managed services provider to stand still either.

If your MSP isn't devoting time and budget to increasing their support efficiencies or in expanding their portfolio of capabilities, then it's probably not truly focused on the needs of its clients. After all, you fully expect that from your internal IT department; why would a services partner be any different?

That's exactly what your MSP should be doing. Many of the services being offered today, like cloud implementation and migration, were merely concepts just a few years ago. Services organizations that ignored them at the time are now scurrying to catch up and add them to their portfolios.

You want an MSP to know what's new in technology and, more importantly, how new technology can be leveraged by them to help their clients like you increase efficiencies, become more competitive or profitable.

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5. Security expertise

Cybersecurity is vital to your enterprise, but managing it is very time-consuming for your staff and the ever changing landscape makes it difficult for them to on top of all threats. These dynamics create the chance for breaches or infections by viruses or ransomware. Security services are an indispensable component of an MSPs offering portfolio.

The odds of a company experiencing a data breach are now better than one in four. Growing risks such as identity compromise, unauthorized access to the network, data exfiltration, compliance, malware, and phishing, to name just a few, become more advanced every day and the sophistication used by cyber criminals grows by the day, and at times by the hour.

You need someone very very good watching out for your organization.

So when you examine the cybersecurity bona fides of an MSP, look for the experience and knowledge of the staff. Your best bet is an MSP that has the capability to assess an enterprise's security posture and design a solution that addresses its vulnerabilities.

One more thing

Once you've found an MSP that checks all 5 boxes – ALL 5 of them – it's important to understand that a big advantage of managed services is flexibility. Start off with some of the services you need, such as cybersecurity monitoring, and grow or add services as you identify specific needs or as your organization grows.

As you do that, you will discover that your MSP can help you forecast and manage your IT spend. You will have a set monthly cost that gives you all the technical support and expertise you need without hidden charges.

And you can focus on growing your organization.



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Start with some services, and add more as you identify
specific needs.**



www.LRSolutions.com
217.793.3800
LRSolutions@LRS.com