Realizing Value from your IT Support Provider

Small Business Owners have several options when outsourcing their computer support.

In order of increasing cost they are:

1. Rely on a family member, or friend
2. Work with a sole support provider
3. Engage a small shop through pre-paid support plans
4. Contract with a Managed Service Provider (MSP)

Please consider the following positives and negatives of the first 3 approaches:

Option	Positives	Negatives
Family or Friends	• Inherent Trust	Availability - This person usually has a full time job and while their intentions are good, they usually only help when really necessary. Reactive Approach = more downtime and unpredictable costs Capabilities – Expertise limited to a few subjects and industries Backup Job and Systems Monitoring is your responsibility
Sole Support Provider	• Gained Trust • Capabilities improve through partners	Availability – Can only help one client at a time Capabilities – If they don't know they need to loop a partner in Mostly Reactive Approach = more downtime and unpredictable costs Backup Job Monitoring & Systems Monitoring is your responsibility.
Small Shop	• Organizational Experience • Availability Improves • Capabilities Improve In-house and with Strategic Partners.	You share the responsibilities of managing the effort More predictable costs but your time is taken up managing the support effort and scrutinizing new technology and budgeting for large project expenses They've learned from their mistakes but will they be learning in your account next? Backup Job Monitoring may or may not be your responsibility & Systems Monitoring may or may not be done.

A Managed Service Provider (MSP) offers predictable costs that can be budgeted and manageable, rather than the sporadic and magnified costs associated with downtime and lost productivity.

Positive	Benefit
Availability	Dedicated, remote and on-site staff to fix problems quickly and provide just-in-time training to keep your staff productive. Support is available 24x7.
Capabilities	Calls are escalated through a tiered team-based support staff structure. Experts on staff are leveraged in a timely fashion when required.
Proactive Approach	Little downtime as the service methodology is proactive and mature.
Managed	Systems and backup monitoring, systems and anti-virus patching, are centrally managed by a dedicated team. Dedicated technical management of technical staff.
Direction	CIO consulting services help you understand and leverage technology with timely and relevant advice, allowing you to make the right decision for your unique business needs.
Fine Tuned	The service provider has the staff, procedures and discipline in place to execute on strategy you've agreed on in planning meetings.
Predictable Cost	Fixed monthly recurring fee. Economies of scale and streamlined management allow for more expertise and services to be provided at a lower overall cost.

So, you agree that a Managed Service Provider will provide the best value for your IT investment. Now, how do you choose the RIGHT MSP?   Consider the following:

#	Items for Consideration
1	**Assigning a Primary Engineer** This allows the engineer to become familiar with your account and you to become familiar with the Engineer. A working dialog is established, giving you piece of mind.
2	**All Support Costs Included** Many providers quote a low monthly fee but cap the amount of support hours in that month, when you use extra hours this adds to extra, unbudgeted cost. Sometimes, all remote support is included but on-site is an extra fee. In other cases, standard desktop support is unlimited but there is a separate charge for System Engineers. This can look attractive at first, but to do a job right takes the right amount of time. A fixed monthly fee aligns the service providers goal with yours: Maximum uptime, minimal disruption.
3	**Highly Available Systems In Use By The Service Provider** If the service provider does not use highly redundant and/or cloud based systems, those systems can go down. Without them, how can they assure they will always be there for you when you need them?
4	**A Scorecard On The Health Of Your IT Systems** An easy to understand scorecard helps management prioritize spending. It should also provide insight into the work and improvements being made over time by your provider. Without it how do you evaluate if you're on the right track and what the provider is doing?
5	**Quarterly Business Reviews** Your assigned engineer will always give you the best technical advice. A quarterly business review allows everyone to step back and look at the bigger picture. A CIO level consultant should attend this meeting to help with strategy. The scorecard should be reviewed at this time.

#	Items for Consideration (continued)
6	*When you agree that a fixed monthly fee puts the burden on the MSP and aligns their goals for uptime with yours. The service should include:*

An offsite, Cloud-based Backup, Disaster Recovery, & Business Continuity Solution that includes a local appliance.

A

Bundling in a preferred solution allows a service provider to provide superior service. Maintaining separate, different solutions for each client only drives up support costs which are passed to you.

Anti-virus / Anti-malware Solutions / Anti-Spam Service

B

You should trust your provider to choose and deploy the best product. You don't need to be bothered with discussions on renewals, upgrades or migrations to a superior product mid-stream.

Internet Content Filtering Service

C

Even if you don't want to block social media, shopping, or porn, you do want to block users from known bad websites that host trojans, viruses and malware.

Systems Maintenance and Patching

D

Applying patches hardens your system by removing security vulnerabilities. It should be done at least monthly. Mature MSP's have staff dedicated to this process.

24x7 Monitoring

E

Since you actively work on your systems you'll typically know your down before any monitoring solution alerts you during the working day. This monitoring is in place to be forewarned of failures that may occur and catch things when you aren't there. When done right it prevents equipment or service failure from impeding day to day productivity.

Emergency Server

F

While it is essential to have the ability to recover to the cloud - if your offices are still available, restoring to local server on loan from your provider the same day, allows everyone to work in their most productive environment.

7   **Service Provider IT Policies, Procedures and Standards**
Ask 5 engineers to solve a problem and you'll get 5 different solutions. Company policies, procedures and standards establish the framework for providing consistent, superior service.

8   **Quarterly Review of Internal Policies, Procedures and Standards**
Changes in Information Technology happen at a rapid pace. Regular reviews ensure your MSP's operations stay up to date and staff are kept in the loop.

9   **HIPAA, PCI, and/or SOX Compliance Expertise**
Even if you aren't subject to regulatory compliance, these standards consist of the best practices for improving the safety and security of your data - the lifeblood of any modern business. Your provider should be able to help you meet and beat these standards. Good security is dynamic and forward looking. A security breach will not only cost you financially but could harm your businesses reputation.

10   **In-House Support**
All the support staff should work for the MSP. If a provider outsources their Level 1 helpdesk or Level 3 engineering there is often a disconnect between the two groups. This results in end user frustration as the helpdesk is out of the loop on project work and the engineers don't know what people are calling about.

At BMT, we include all these items as part of our IT Essentials,
Managed Service offering.
Remove just one of the items and it becomes the weak link, affecting the overall integrity and resilience of your IT systems.

Contact us today for more info and to schedule a Free IT Health Check !

When you're ready to evaluate providers, use the following scorecard:

#	Questions To Ask The Service Provider:	Points
1	Do you assign a primary engineer to our account?	
2	Is all remote support, on-site support and engineering included in the cost?	
3	Are the systems you use to support us highly available?	
4	Do you provide a scorecard on the health of my systems to facilitate the quarterly business review discussions and provide insight into the improvements being made over time?	
5	Do you offer quarterly business reviews to identify key issues and discuss how technology can be applied to our business needs?	
6	Does your service include:	
A	A Complete Local Appliance to Offsite Cloud-based Backup, Disaster Recovery & Business Continuity Solution?	
B	Anti-virus/Anti-malware / Anti-Spam solutions?	
C	Internet Content Filtering service?	
D	Systems Maintenance and Patching?	
E	24x7 Monitoring?	
F	An Emergency Server to use locally if we need one?	
7	Do you have and use published Policies, Procedures and Standards?	
8	Do you review and update your Policies, Procedures and Standards at least quarterly?	
9	Can you help me with HIPAA, PCI, and/or SOX compliance?	
10	Are you providing all of the support in-house? OR Do you outsource any of your support functions?	
	Total	

Use your best judgement to rate the quality of answers given on a scale of 1—10. The perfect provider will score a 100. If you're like most people , you'll choose on a provider based your overall impression of their representatives and after checking with references. Keeping score will help you break a tie.