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Things you need to know **before** signing up with a managed services provider (MSP)



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So, you are at that stage of your business where you have finally decided and accepted that you need the services of a MSP. Makes sense, considering that bringing a MSP on board can help save you time, resources and money. Plus, having a MSP manage your IT requirements lets you focus on your business and its growth, without worrying about rising IT costs. Having a MSP brings a lot of flexibility and scalability to the table for you. While all of that is true, there are a few things you should consider before bringing a MSP onboard. The decision to sign up with a MSP is a big one--you are essentially trusting someone with the backbone of your business–your technology infrastructure, so you need to make sure you pick someone with whom you can have a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship. This whitepaper discusses what you need to know before you sign up with a MSP.

Basic values

Your relationship with your MSP is likely long-term. So, make sure you both share the same basic values as organizations. If your MSP's core business values are different from yours, chances are you will part ways soon.

Do they offer everything you need?

As a business, you will have the need for multiple IT services such as, say, data backups and recovery, email archiving, VoIP, etc., Check to be sure the MSP you are considering offers all the services you need. Sometimes though, some MSPs don't offer everything and may outsource some services to others. That's okay, but you want to be aware of that. However, there's one thing you need to look out for in such scenarios--a single point of contact. Ask your MSP who will be your point of contact from their end. Whether your MSP is providing all the services, or offering you some services via a third party, insist on getting a dedicated, single, point of contact. The last thing you want to be doing when your IT fails is calling up different people and explaining your IT problems to them.

At times, you may even find that one MSP is the right fit for certain services while another one is good for some other services. In such cases, you can check whether you can opt for only the services you want, so you can pick and choose what aspect is taken care of by whom, though it may diminish the benefits that a single point of contact has to offer.

SMB IT specialists

If you are a SMB, your IT challenges will be quite different from that of a bigger corporations, and the approach to be taken to resolve them will also vary. Make sure the MSP you are considering is has worked with SMBs enough to understand your specific needs. MSPs that have worked with only bigger organizations may not be able to serve you effectively.

Experience & Knowledge

How experienced is your MSP? Before you entrust your IT to someone, you need to know how stable they are. How long have they been in business? If you are counting on them to resolve your IT problems and maintain your IT infrastructure, make sure they have enough experience and knowledge doing so.

Can they grow with you?

Having a MSP manage your IT needs means not having to worry about scaling your IT resources up or down to suit your business demands. But, for it to work that way, your MSP should be flexible enough to scale with you. Before you sign up with a MSP, check if they have the capabilities to support your growing IT needs.

Service hours

One of the key reasons SMBs want a managed service provider is to avoid adopting a fire-fighting approach to IT problems. You need to ensure this is conveyed very clearly to your MSP. Also, verify from their current customers/references that they really do this. Every MSP promises 24/7 monitoring of client IT networks, servers and systems, but only a few really offer it.

Support

It is better if the MSP you are considering is close to your business location. While most IT maintenance, troubleshooting and monitoring can happen remotely, it is a big plus if your MSP is close to you and can stop by easily for an on-site visit. Speaking of on-site visits, do confirm if your MSP offers them in the first place.

Pricing

One of the key reasons SMBs opt for a MSP is to save on IT costs that arise from maintaining an in-house IT team. Make sure you are saving a sizable amount. Check and compare pricing packages of different providers and look out for hidden charges. For example, is there a limit on the number of service hours? What rates are applicable when the limit exceeds?

There are plenty of MSPs in the market, but not everyone will fit well with your needs. You need to ensure they have enough knowledge and expertise to add value to you in your business environment--which may include multiple operating systems, different business software applications and often, multiple vendors.

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