

Tech Savvy

EBOOK

Everything You Need to Know About

Third-Party IT Support

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Intro



Every business needs robust information technology solutions in place. That's anything from day-to-day helpdesk support to more strategic services, such as consulting and projects.

And while it's certainly true that IT powers modern business, it doesn't always mean your IT support needs to be in-house. Many small and medium-sized businesses have made the move to partner with third parties to deliver IT solutions.

If you are considering outsourcing your IT support, it's good to do your research. You may be on the fence as to what move to make next.

Having the right IT support is fundamental for any business that wants to ensure consistency in operations, reduce cybersecurity threats, and align business with modern trends. Your business needs to grow, and your IT needs to be scalable as well. Further, you need to ensure that your IT and business strategy are aligned.

With all these competing needs and challenges, you may find that third-party IT support is the best approach for your organization. However, you probably still have many questions about how it works and if it has true benefits.

That's why we've created this ultimate guide to third-party IT support to help you understand your options and the potential advantages of shifting to a managed services model for IT. Let's dive in with everything you need to know about third-party IT support.

In-House vs Outsourced IT: What's the Right Balance?



On average, **6.9%** of a small business's revenue goes toward IT. But what are those dollars really going toward? Is it mostly salary for in-house employees? Or are you using your budget to future-proof your infrastructure and thwart cyber-attacks?

If you only have an in-house team to provide you with IT support, chances are that the substantial investment you're making in IT is labor-based. There is nothing wrong with having knowledgeable, experienced staff on board, but can you really afford to add more headcount? And can you find the right combination of skills?

For SMBs, IT staff needs to be a hybrid, encompassing both hard and soft skills. Yet, many employers find that the **biggest hiring challenge** is finding workers with those soft skills.

Many SMBs Already Use Some Type of Outsourcing

It's quite possible that you've already dipped your toe into the world of outsourcing. A 2018 report found that **75% of SMBs** have outsourced some part of their IT to a third-party with around 39% using managed services in some capacity.

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Managed services is the practice of outsourcing IT proactively to improve processes and functions with the desire to cut costs and streamline operations. Using managed services has become a popular way for SMBs to address IT support and is an alternative to the former model of break/fix, wherein third parties only responded to organizations when there was a problem.

In-House Staff Is Still Necessary

SMBs also recognize the value of having in-house staff. You still need someone “on the ground” and ready to handle the day-to-day issues that every company faces. This doesn’t necessarily just encompass help desk type of duties but it also refers to cultivating an IT culture. Having an IT culture in your organization means that your IT team communicates with the rest of your staff and makes known the significance of every employee doing their part to be a champion for introducing new technologies and adopting those platforms.

In-house IT staff also knows your company, its goals, and what type of technology is needed for success. While a third-party can learn about your company and its objectives, your in-house staff has insights that can’t be gleaned by outside parties.

What's the Right Balance for Your Organization?

Here's the biggest secret: There is no magic answer to this question.

Much of it depends on your size, budget, and what projects you have in the queue. Some of the most successful SMBs use their in-house staff for daily operations and rapid response. They also often procure hardware and software, facilitate IT training, and lead cybersecurity initiatives.

Those same companies use third-party managed services for more of the big picture part of IT. These types of projects may include a long-term strategy for IT growth, migrating to the cloud, cyber-attack monitoring, and other types of support that can be accomplished remotely.

To find your ideal balance, start by asking these questions:

- What skill sets does my in-house IT staff have?
- What is my budget?
- Can I add more headcount or does outsourcing makes more sense?
- Do we have an IT strategy? Or, do we need to invest in experts that can help us develop one?
- How smooth is adopting new technology for the company?
- Are we doing enough to protect our data and networks?
- Do we have a maintenance plan in place?
- Do we have sufficient backup and recovery?

Then you can dig deeper by looking at the pros and cons of in-house IT vs outsourced IT.

Pros and Cons of in-House IT vs Outsourced IT

In-House IT Staff

Pros:

- Staff is accessible because they are on-site
- Quick resolution of emergencies
- Predictable costs for labor—you'll know exactly what you are spending relating to salaries and benefits
- Institutional knowledge of your company and its needs

Cons:

- Most in-house teams are only reactive in support rather than proactive, mostly because they don't have the time
- Internal staff might not have knowledge of the latest technology, threats, and trends because they are too busy trying to make existing systems work
- No coverage—if your IT team is out of the office, you don't have a backup
- Multiple departments are always competing for IT help

Outsourced IT

Pros:

- Typically, outsourcing certain functions is less expensive than hiring full-time employees—[studies suggest outsourcing IT can save companies](#) when it comes to operating costs
- No training required—a managed services company has the skill sets you need to get to work fast
- 24/7 support—most IT services companies provide constant support for their companies, so if something happens on Saturday night, you'll have access to help
- Fewer mistakes—because you are working with firms that are experts in their field, there is likely to be less human error
- Continuous monitoring—using a third-party for IT support usually includes constant monitoring for threats, risks, and other challenges

Cons:

- They work for other companies—rarely will you have dedicated teams unless you have someone on site
- They don't know your business as intimately as in-house staff
- They may not meet your expectations—not every third-party firm is going to hit it out of the park every time, which is why you need to do your research when selecting a partner

Tangible Business Benefits of Having Appropriate IT Support



In the modern world, there is no substitute for having the right IT support. Your technology is the foundation of your business. Without it, you'd be paralyzed and unable to fulfill your duties to your customers and vendors.

However, you may have found that your in-house staff isn't adequate and you need proof points on why you should outsource your IT support. What benefits will it actually bring to your company? What will you be able to accomplish?

Here are the tangible benefits of having ample IT support for your organization.

Control IT Costs

You may have serious concerns that having enough support could cause a significant increase in IT costs. But with managed services, you have a defined budget every month, and with proper planning and help from a third-party, you can define what long-term costs you need to factor in such as hardware upgrades or new software platforms.

Reduce Labor Costs

Needless to say, hiring and training more new IT staff is expensive.

There's also the crunch of turnover. According to LinkedIn, [technology has the highest turnover of all industries at 13.2%](#). Higher turnover leads to higher costs to recruit and retain employees. Outsourcing mitigates these expenses and also enables your HR team to focus on other areas.

You should also consider that the average salary for an IT professional is [\\$62,571](#). Depending on your specific needs, it could be far more cost-effective to turn to an outsourced solution.



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Third Parties Have Qualified, Certified, and Experienced Individuals

Many times, SMBs hire IT professionals that look good on paper. But because these hiring decisions may be made by a non-IT employee, it's hard to know if they really have the skills until they begin work.

On the other hand, third-party firms display their credentials and certifications, making their level of expertise crystal clear.

Enhance Efficiency and Competitiveness

Your technology can either be a competitive advantage or a weakness. If you attempt to do all your IT in-house then you may spend more time and money on research, development, and implementation. By engaging with a managed services firm, projects run smoother and don't hit bottlenecks, which could derail your progress.

Implement New Tech Faster

An outsourced partner has experience with a variety of new technology and can make recommendations based on your needs. Your in-house staff, on the other hand, may have to spend hours researching products. If you want to implement new tech quickly, you'll want to rely on experts.

You Can Stay Focused on Your Core Competencies

When you take away many of the essential functions of daily IT support, your in-house team can get back to focusing on your core competencies and how technology can support or improve them.

Reduce Your Risk

Risk is inherent no matter what type of business you have. The biggest threat may be that of a data breach. Currently, a data breach could cost a company up to [\\$6.9 million](#).

That's a shocking statistic. But, it's one that's all too real.

Thus, you need to be prepared for cyberattacks. Hiring IT support that specializes in cybersecurity and compliance can help reduce your overall risk by establishing a variety of tools and tactics to keep your data safe and compliant.

Compete With Bigger Fish

As a small company, you can't afford the in-house support of a larger company. However, that doesn't mean you can't compete with them.



Outsourcing can enable you to be “big” where it matters by providing you access to advanced technology, strategies, interoperability, and scalability.

Ensure Compliance and Security

Do you know if your programs are up to date? If your firewall is configured properly? Do you audit your systems regularly? There are so many considerations when it comes to compliance and security, which can be overwhelming for an in-house staff that has so many other responsibilities.

Working with a third-party moves some of this off their plate and allows you a clear view into exactly how your systems are running and if they are protected.

Offer Your Employees Constant Support

Your IT team may be limited in the amount of support they can offer employees. Much of the time, it's because they are pulled in many competing directions. But when an employee has an urgent issue that's keeping them from doing their job, that's a problem. With outsourced IT support, your employees can gain access to 24/7 support so that operations and productivity aren't impacted.



Aligning IT Strategy and Your Business Strategy



Your IT strategy and business strategy can't live in silos. They must be aligned, otherwise, your technology will not be able to support your company's future growth and expansion.

However, many companies don't have this alignment.

The differences between firms that have allied IT and business strategies and those that don't are pretty glaring. If your business has achieved this alignment, your path seems agile and dynamic. Everything is connected, and you are proactive in your use of technology.

Those that don't have this alignment struggle mightily. They will be left behind, unable to compete and thrive because they haven't developed strategies that co-exist. It's essential that your IT team, whether in-house or outsourced, is familiar with your company's goals and more importantly, how they bring value to the situation.

In the book, "[Be the Business: CIOs in the New Era of IT](#)," it was discovered that 24% of IT employees aren't clear on how their work relates to the company's goals. Furthermore, 10% of those professionals said that IT does not connect work with business value.

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To us, those are fairly concerning numbers. But why does it matter to you?

Your Business Relies on IT

IT does more than just support the traditional aspects of technology. In many cases, IT is the business. Without IT, software wouldn't work, new products wouldn't launch, you'd have no website or online presence, and many other areas of a business couldn't operate.

IT and its ability to deliver are linked to a business having successful outcomes. And IT is more and more complex every day. It's not simply hooking up computers and putting them on a network. IT is now much more encompassing, hitting every area of business. With this growth comes the concern of more risk as well.

IT and Business Must Be Linked

When IT and business are properly aligned, IT becomes more about driving growth, instead of just keeping operations running and avoiding risk. It helps empower market share, profitability, productivity, efficiency, and more. Imagine for a moment what any business would look like without IT. It's impossible to do that unless you want to set up a lemonade stand in your yard (although if you want to take credit card payments, you'll need IT).

The idea of linking IT and business goals isn't a novel approach, yet it still seems to be a tactic that is hard to develop and maintain.

When it comes to an IT decision, the first thought you should have is determining its impact on your business. If your company needs a software platform to manage customers better, your first thought may be to head to Google and click the first thing that comes up.

That's a potentially dangerous move.

You could, at times such as these, require some expert help like a third-party. They implement new technology all the time. They know the pros and cons of multiple systems. By communicating exactly the requirements and needs of your business, they can guide you in making the best decision, aligning IT strategy with business goals. But don't think that matching a need is the same thing as alignment. Rather, that match has to be based on the foundation of the initial question of, "What's the impact on the business?"

Challenges to Alignment

One of the greatest barriers to alignment is that IT and business units often speak different languages. So, they often need an interpreter, which could be an IT consultant. An IT consultant can be a liaison between the groups, helping them come to common ground and better understand each other's perspectives. The consultant can build strong relationships with stakeholders and get everybody on the same page.

Another challenge you may encounter is when the goals and strategy of the company shift. This could be due to external factors like a slowing economy or internal occurrences like new leadership. When this shift occurs, IT also has



to be ready to pivot. If you don't have alignment here, the wheels are going to run off the track.

The alignment between IT strategy and business strategy is essential in the 21st century. You cannot successfully thrive as a business if these two areas live in a vacuum. Take the necessary steps to ensure alignment by:

- Educating IT professionals on business goals and how they bring value
- Working with a third-party IT consultant to facilitate communication between business and IT
- Being prepared for a shift and having a process in place for how IT will support this change
- Creating a culture where technology is valued by all employees

Think about IT, not just as a practical asset, but also as something strategic.



How to Choose the Right IT Partner



If you weighed your options and have determined that your business should engage an IT partner, your next challenge is finding the right one. There are many considerations when searching for a third-party IT support provider. The most significant of those being:

Budget

Your budget may help you refine your list. Some firms may be outside of what you're comfortable spending. Pricing is a good way to eliminate options. You should also pay attention to pricing models. Some providers charge a la carte while others have one price for unlimited support.

Location

Is it important for you to have your provider be local? There are benefits to sourcing locally. You can meet with the team in person, and they can come to your site if necessary. However, most services can be deployed virtually. So, don't exclude out of town firms if they have attractive pricing and services.

Experience

If you are in a highly regulated industry, such as finance and healthcare, you'll be best served by working with a partner that has specific industry experience. If they are already aware of the many regulations and compliance requirements, they'll be able to fulfill your needs better.

Range of Services Offered

Not every IT support company offers the same services. This may impact your decision. Compare the services of those providers you feel strongly about to determine if the company can meet your needs.



Compatibility

In every working relationship, compatibility matters. You want to find a partner that has a similar culture and values. If you aren't aligned in this way, it could cause challenges in the future. For example, your culture may embrace collaboration. If your provider seems to operate in silos, this won't be a good fit!

Finding the Ideal IT Partner: What You Need to Ask

Now that you've begun to contemplate all the considerations for finding your ideal IT partner, there are some specific questions you should ask. These questions can provide you with insights into the company's processes, character, and capabilities.

Asking these questions could help you avoid a mistake that could cost you time and money.

What's Your Level of Expertise?

Start with this question always. Any company can put up a website and claim they are IT experts. You need to be assured that the provider can actually deliver on their promises.

While you can ask this question directly, you might not always receive a plethora of information. To support the answers they are giving, ask for references from current

clients. Also, check to see if the company has any accreditations or belongs to any industry associations.

You should also consider how many years they've been in business and the backgrounds of their leadership. Your goal here is to determine their reliability and legitimacy.

Experience absolutely matters. The more specific expertise they have in your industry or with the platforms you use, the more likely they can begin to have an immediate impact.

What Is Your Response Time, and How Do You Communicate With Clients?

Having the right credentials is a good start in selecting your provider. But you're also going to want to get a feel for their responsiveness and communication style.

When you work with a managed services provider, the conditions aren't simply a set of deliverables. It's an ongoing relationship—one that requires consistent communication.

The most successful IT firms understand the need to communicate well and often with their customers. They don't just set up an autoresponder email so they claim they respond in minutes. It's about a real human replying to you and letting you know what the next steps are.

In many instances, you can work out with your provider a service-level agreement (SLA) so that your immediate expectations are put in place.

You'll also have the opportunity to gauge their communication skills during the discovery process. While some IT firms may prioritize communication during



the phase of earning your business, you want to make sure this continues after you become a paying customer.

What Value Do You Offer?

You're going to be investing in your new third-party provider, so you need to be sure they offer real and tangible value. They are, after all, providing a service, not a physical product or good. Thus, you should talk to them about the ROI that you can expect by being their customer and shifting some or most of your IT needs.

Think about the man-hours you'll be saving by choosing to outsource, as opposed to what it takes now to put out a fire or solve a problem. You could see these types of numbers decrease substantially.

You should also factor in other value like less exposure to liability and risk with improved cybersecurity practices, business continuity, disaster recovery, and more. Further, think about what you'll be able to accomplish with your in-house team when their hands aren't tied with the constant need to fix something. That's time they can use to innovate and help your company grow.

Are You Available When I Need You?

As discussed, response time is critical in IT, and you can hammer this out in your SLA. But you might want to ask about their overall bandwidth and workload. If a provider is already stretched to their capacity yet still wants to take on new business, you may not get what you anticipate.

You also need to ensure they have around the clock availability so that no matter what time something happens, they'll be ready to address it. You shouldn't have to wait for standard business hours to resolve a major issue.

However, not everything can be handled remotely. You may have to wait until someone can physically come to your site, so be sure to work out this kind of agreement with them by providing them with some kind of access during off-hours. You'll want to inquire how quickly they can get someone on-site and if it requires travel—if this is a big concern of yours, then you are probably best served by choosing a local provider.

Are You Proactive in Your Approach to IT Support?

You know that your current model of IT support is reactive because there are simply not enough hours in the day for your in-house staff to do everything. One of the great advantages to outsourcing is to be able to shift your model to being proactive.

Proactive means that the provider is always up to date on the latest technology and is forward-thinking about how to develop the best infrastructure and strategy. A superior IT support firm will come to you with the newest solutions to meet your challenges and recommend a course of action to optimize your business.

Meeting SLAs and being responsive and communicative are excellent traits, but it's not enough. Your firm needs to provide you with an approach that drives value and delivers a competitive edge.

You should be having conversations about long-term goals as well as short-term actions that need to happen. Once they understand your goals, give them the opportunity to respond. A highly qualified firm will have ideas about how to



keep you moving forward, not just help you maintain where you are.

What's Your Culture Like?

A culture clash isn't what you want in your relationship with an IT support firm. Culture is the essence of how your business runs, and you want to partner with like-minded companies. Culture can encompass many different things, including communication styles, level of formality, expectations, and mindsets.

In other words, this is truly about what's the best fit.

If you have very different takes on culture, no matter how great their qualifications and experience are, the relationship with your IT service provider may fail. Get a good feel for how they interact with each other and you, so you know if there is proper alignment.

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Optimize and Maximize Your IT Support With the Right Partner



The journey to optimizing and maximizing your IT operations is never linear. That's the nature of technology itself. However, many SMBs have found success by hiring a third-party IT support partner. It opens up so many possibilities for your internal staff and your entire business. But you have to choose wisely for it to drive real value.

When you decide that outsourcing is a smart move for your company then it's time to get your own ducks in a row, aligning IT strategy and business strategy. Then, you need to be very particular about your partner, asking them the most important questions.

When you do these things, it's a partnership that's truly a win-win.