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Streamline Your Business Operations With Professional Services

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Introduction

Streamline Your Business Operations With Professional Services

Outsourcing simply means hiring or working with third-party service providers rather than employing permanent workers to carry out particular tasks. Large and small businesses outsource professional services mainly to increase operational efficiency, cut labor costs, reduce risks, expand their talent pool, and gain a competitive advantage.

Nowadays, thanks to limitless interconnectivity, companies outsource professional services on a global scale. The trend has become so popular that 37 percent of small firms currently outsource at least one business process. Accounting and IT services are the two most commonly outsourced professions, but many businesses also delegate project management, manufacturing, and customer support.

That brief introduction paints a picture of the global professional services landscape, although there is a lot more to it that we shall not get into. This e-book focuses on how to leverage professional IT services to streamline your business processes. Strap in, and let's get started.

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What are
IT Professional Services?

A professional service is an occupation that requires specific expertise or qualifications. IT professional services refer to a broad range of highly specialized IT-related services, such as IT advisory and consulting services, web and software development, product implementation services, IT project management, and cloud migration services.

Professional IT services come in handy in a world where technology evolves so fast that there's now a widening digital skills gap.

What's the Difference Between Managed Services and IT Professional Services?

It's easy to mistake professional IT services for managed IT because they sometimes seem to solve similar problems. Although both types of services ultimately help businesses achieve specific IT goals, they are distinctly different regarding the timeframe and scope of work.

IT Professional Services

IT professional services are project-based solutions that address specific IT challenges or tasks. They usually focus on one-off projects that require specific skills and field experience, such as cloud migration and complex systems implementation. The work scope depends on what the project entails and the activities the client wants to delegate. It can range from preliminary planning and feasibility research, design and development, implementation, user training, and support.

Managed IT Services

On the other hand, managed IT covers a broader spectrum of repetitive dayto-day IT responsibilities. A managed IT partner can take over the full support and maintenance of either the entire IT infrastructure or specific aspects of it. Managed IT providers work on long-term contracts or subscription basis. According to the service-level agreement, managed services may include hardware and software updating, servicing and repair, network monitoring, proactive managed cybersecurity, and cloud management.

Categories of
IT Professional Services

The world of enterprise IT is vastly diverse, stretching from data analytics, digital customer support, telecom systems, cloud computing, and cybersecurity to digital marketing. As you'd expect, individual businesses have unique technical requirements that often change as the business grows or the commerce environment changes.

As we mentioned earlier, IT services encompass various outsourced professions designed for different industries and institutions. There may be hundreds of unique IT professional services, but they all fall into four broad categories.

Consulting

IT consulting or IT advisory is probably the most frequently utilized IT professional service. A consultant is an expert who gives professional IT advice. Consultancy service providers only offer technical advice on specific matters, but most usually have a richer portfolio of offerings. In fact, most consultants are value-added vendors and system integrators.

Consulting is pretty straightforward. First, you contact a consulting service and describe your IT problems or the goals you want to achieve. The service provider will then make an objective assessment of your IT infrastructure, either remotely or through a team of field agents. After a thorough evaluation, the consultant will make a formal report documenting the assessment procedures, key findings, and recommendations.

Entrepreneurs can consult on general IT inquiries or more specific areas such as security, performance, telecom systems, and cloud migration. However, most consulting requests involve feasibility studies, budgeting, and recommendations for implementing new IT equipment or upgrading existing ones.

Recommendations depend on what the assessors find and the evaluation's scope. But general advice includes recommendations for the most suitable hardware, software, and IT approaches to solve the business's specific problems or help it reach a benchmark digital performance level.

Problem-Solving/ In-Demand Services

In-house IT staff or managed services can easily resolve day-to-day technical issues, such as a computer not starting, Wi-Fi not working, and printer jams. But these conventional support structures commonly break down when faced with a company-wide IT problem or emergency.

Some IT professional service providers specialize in emergency response for large-scale technical difficulties such as data loss. In some cases, in-house IT teams may be unable to handle IT restoration at such a scale due to a lack of skills, enough manpower, or experience. And you can't blame them. Most modern IT systems utilize highly advanced technologies, such as AI and self-automation, that require specialized hands and a trained eye to comprehend.

Some common problem-solving practices include:

- Data recovery and restoration after a disaster

- Server environment reconfiguration

- Intensive hardware repairs

- Data backup installation

- Power, network, and ethernet restoration

- Critical web and software patching

Solving problems quickly gets your entire IT infrastructure or the problematic areas back up and running without delays, minimizing unnecessary downtime, and the associated implications.

But not every problem is an emergency; some IT issues are a bit more subtle. For instance, if you notice your server's performance is dropping with no explainable or diagnosable cause, you can have professionals take an indepth look and try to fix it. In fact, problem-solving services often follow IT consultation to act on the experts' recommendations.

Strategic Planning

Technology is a crucial aspect of modern enterprises. Just as a business strategy defines various business goals and outlines how to achieve them, an IT plan describes the digital resources and techniques needed to manage and operate the business now and in the future. An IT strategy details the IT budget, applications, infrastructure, and labor required to address all the business's technical requirements.

Without a clear IT roadmap, it's easy to make critical mistakes along the way that may eventually compromise business performance, legal and industrial compliance, digital security, and the bottom line.

An IT strategist helps you make the right investment decisions, given the scale of your business operations, growth rate, revenue, and size. A great deal of deliberation goes into picking out, structuring, and implementing IT solutions – it's not just about selecting the best of everything. You have to calculate the value that each resource brings to your business while at the same time considering scalability, cost-efficiency, ease of use, security, durability, and many more factors. IT professional services can help you build and orchestrate a strategy that supports your organization.

First, the strategist will assess your IT goals and how they align with and complement other business strategies and objectives. After that, it's only a matter of visualizing your business's ideal IT infrastructure, then trimming it down to fit the proposed budget and other constraints without compromising performance or quality. The important thing is to adopt an IT framework that satisfies mission-critical demands and has unlimited room for expansion and adjustment if those demands change.

Project Management

An IT project manager plans and controls all the activities related to a specific IT project. Even with an adequately equipped and skilled in-house IT staff, some company-wide projects may be way too large, sensitive, or complicated to handle internally. Some highly demanding one-off projects include:

- Web and software development

- Cloud migration and data porting

- Resource implementation

- Digital security installation

- IT evaluation and documentation

- Systems upgrade

- User training

- Systems testing and validation

Project management is an involving process that requires some level of technical dexterity, know-how, and experience. An outsourced project manager ensures all operations and deliverables meet a target deadline and budget while overcoming any obstacles and challenges encountered along the way. Every project follows a predefined success-focused lifecycle, from initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and controlling to closing. It's the manager's job to mobilize the necessary resources to push a project through the various stages.

> **"Project management is an involving process that requires some level of technical dexterity, know-how, and experience."**

In some cases, project managers also act as liaisons between organizations and other third-party service providers or vendors. For instance, if you're launching an IT venture with no idea where to begin, a project manager can link you with suitable contractors, find out what to expect, how much to spend, and the completion timeframe.

How Can You Find a Professional Service Provider?

The internet, particularly Google Search, has made it a lot easier for customers to find any business they're looking for. A simple Google search with the key phrase "professional services" or "IT service" will probably list dozens of recognized and verified professional service providers.

However, the trick to finding the best company to work with is learning to filter through all the search results and lists of potential candidates. Unbiased online company review sites such as Glassdoor are good places to assess the general credibility and reputation of various B2B professional service providers. You can also seek referrals from other businesses through forums and meetings. Sometimes, professional service providers will find you via sales calls, seminars, and conferences.

The bottom line is that finding companies that offer various IT professional services is not really going to be a problem. But, choosing one that matches your expectations and suits your business is a different matter.

Steps to Choosing the Correct IT Professional Service Provider for Your Organization

There are hundreds of IT service companies, making it difficult to narrow down on the right service provider. You'd be wrong to assume that choosing a professional service provider is just as easy as picking the one with the most attractive or reasonable offers – frankly, there is a lot more to it than that.

What does it take to find the most suitable IT professional service provider for your organization? Well, here is a step-by-step guide to finding the right IT professionals:

1. Understand What Your Business Really Needs

First things first, ask yourself why you need to hire an IT service. Step #1 to finding the right service provider is understanding your business's IT requirements, both long term and short term. IT services are not one-size-fitsall. Hiring a professional service without critically considering your business and IT structure could result in wasted capital, poor efficiency, and a weak IT framework.

Carry out a thorough internal assessment of your entire IT infrastructure, including your in-house IT staff, to get a clear picture of your digital environment. Then, compare your findings to your business and IT goals to find out what's missing – what must be done to align the IT performance with the efforts to achieve those goals?

Identifying and documenting your IT needs lets you know where your business stands and where it needs to be. From there, you can then formulate a course of action that involves outsourcing IT services.

From the assessment, you might find that you need, for instance, a more robust security framework, more expansive communication systems, or a new data backup and recovery facility. Now, getting those specifics helps you narrow down on the kind of professional service that would truly benefit your business.

2. Weigh the Pros and Cons

It's essential to understand the exact value that hiring a third-party service provider brings to your business by weighing the benefits against the downsides. In most cases, you'll find that enlisting a professional helping hand can help your business get things done faster and more efficiently. You might also be after cost savings or developing a more productive IT framework.

Hiring an IT professional service provider is a big decision because doing so often means you're looking to make some significant adjustments to your IT structure. Part of finding the value in any IT service is understanding how the outcome will impact your business in the short and long run.

For instance, if a company develops and implements a new e-commerce site for your business, the real impact is defined by how the platform transforms your digital trade. In such a case, you may have to invest even more in migrating data, operations, and customers to the new platform, but then again, the site will potentially improve your overall online sales in the long run.

In other words, fully understanding the business gains of hiring a professional service, from an objective wide-viewed perspective, will help you make the right decisions.

3. Develop Vetting Criteria

Now that you understand exactly what your business needs and have decided that it's fitting to hire a professional IT service, it's time to develop a comprehensive vetting criteria list. Consider all the qualities and attributes that a good IT professional service provider should possess.

At the top of the list should be general attributes such as:

- The kind and scope of services provided

- Costs and timeframes

- Qualification credentials and experience

- Legal and industrial certifications

- Terms of services

- Guarantee of quality

- Transparency, reliability, and professionalism

In a nutshell, you will obviously want a service provider who operates within your geographical location, offers the expert services you need at affordable prices, and can get the task completed within a designated window.

This is probably the most challenging part of the process because you may have to contact some of the shortlisted candidates to gather the information you need.

Remember, it's okay to make a few minor compromises in the vetting and selection process. If you don't get a service provider that perfectly fits the bill, go for the one that at least comes closest. In other words, don't set the bar unreasonably too high.

4. Look for Added Advantages

At this point, your shortlist should only have a few names of companies matching your criteria. Based on their portfolios alone, all the service providers on the list should be able to deliver the services needed at an acceptable price point, timeframe, and fair terms. Dig deeper and look for other value-added attributes that can set one service provider apart from all the rest. Consider convenience factors such as payment flexibility, accessibility, reputation, work ethics, and extra perks.

For example, take a service provider who develops smartphone apps; what else do you get besides the app package? Maybe once the app is finished, they may also throw in free or discounted lifetime support, hosting, and promotion.

As petty as some of these after-sale or value-added services and products may seem, they sometimes make a huge difference. And they are not just customer lures either. For instance, if a web service only delivered webpages, it means you'd have to go through all the trouble of finding a web host and

web maintenance service and end up spending even more time and money. Essentially, additional perks tie up all the loose ends and make the service delivery more holistic and fulfilling.

5. Make Your Pick

After carefully deliberating on the IT assistance your business needs and vetting potential candidates based on merit, competence, and value, you'll eventually end up with one or just a few IT professional service providers suitable for your business and capable of handling the task at hand. Finally, you can go ahead and book an appointment or consultation with the service provider to discuss working together.

What Will the Process Look Like When You Hire a Professional Service Provider?

The processes of hiring an IT professional service provider is pretty straightforward. Although some companies may have unique procedures, it generally follows five stages – consultation, agreement, onboarding, execution, and completion.

Consultation

This is a preliminary no-obligation meet-and-greet where you explain in brief detail the services you require. You don't necessarily have to meet with the service provider; you can just do it over the phone, in an email, or via live chat.

Draft the Service-Level Agreement

A service-level agreement (SLA) is a legally binding contract that outlines the commitment between a professional service provider and a client. It describes both parties' responsibilities and liabilities, along with the crucial details of the engagement, such as the services rendered, the project's scope, timeframe, cost, and resources needed.

A typical SLA basically explains the terms and conditions of the service. Be sure to pay close attention to the fine clauses, especially those involving risks, liabilities, and contract termination. When handing sensitive and expensive IT equipment, you need a guarantee that the service provider can accept responsibility for a breach of contract or unfortunate errors and accidents on their part.

Onboarding

Think of onboarding as an orientation process to get the contractor ready for work. It mostly involves giving the service provider access to the existing infrastructure or officially signing off on the project's commencement.

Execution

At this stage, the service provider begins work as per the agreed schedule. Depending on the work scope and the SLA, the contractor may turn in reports and invite feedback after reaching certain milestones as the work progresses.

Completion

Once the task is completed, you're free to assess the outcome and verify that everything is satisfactory as per the agreed-upon success metrics. The deliverables will obviously depend on the nature of the project and its outcome. After completing the main task, the service provider may also offer supplemental services or products.

What Are the Benefits of IT Professional Services?

The global IT professional services market value is expected to reach just over $1 trillion by 2025, registering an 8.4 percent CAGR between 2018 and 2025. The rapid growth indicates that more and more organizations are turning to project-based IT services in order to take advantage of new technologies and streamline their business operations.

But how exactly can you leverage IT professional services to improve your business? To answer that question, here are the seven main reasons why enterprises across all classes and industries opt for third-party professional services.

Reduced Operational Costs

Some entrepreneurs see IT services outsourcing as an additional or unnecessary expense. In reality, third-party IT contractors can save you money. According to Glassdoor, American employers spend, on average, $4,000 per new hire. At that cost, hiring permanent workers to complete a one-off task is simply impractical.

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With professional services, you only pay a one-time fee for the services provided, either in a lump sum or hourly rate. And since IT contractors are not permanent employees, you don't have to pay for their upkeep, benefits, and allowances. In many ways, it makes economic sense to work with a professional service provider instead of expanding your IT department to handle occasional spikes or high-profile tasks.

Fast Delivery

Time is a critical factor in an IT emergency or project. When reconfiguring your IT infrastructure or trying to solve a serious problem, you want it done as quickly as possible to minimize inconveniences and downtime.

IT professional service providers do not need any training or an elaborate orientation before commencing work – they already understand what they need to do and how to do it from the get-go. This means you get instant services on demand. On top of that, IT outsourcing companies can work around the clock or during odd hours, whether on-site or remotely, to get the job done on time.

Access to a Diverse Talent Pool

The continued adoption of advanced enterprise solutions, such as cloud services and AI-based data technologies, is one of the driving forces behind the popularity of professional services. It's increasingly becoming hard for entrepreneurs to keep up with the rapidly evolving IT landscape or even find highly qualified and skilled IT job candidates in the labor market.

IT professional services can help your business learn and adopt exciting new ideas, solutions, and processes to modernize its operations in ways you probably never imagined. Most professional service providers employ exceptionally talented individuals who undertake regular refresher courses in IT to polish up on the latest trends. Outsourcing IT services gives you a unique opportunity to pick the minds of the sharpest experts in the tech industry.

Plus, a third-party contractor observes your organization from an unbiased outsider's point of view, which might be just what you need to identify technical bottlenecks and flaws in need of improvement.
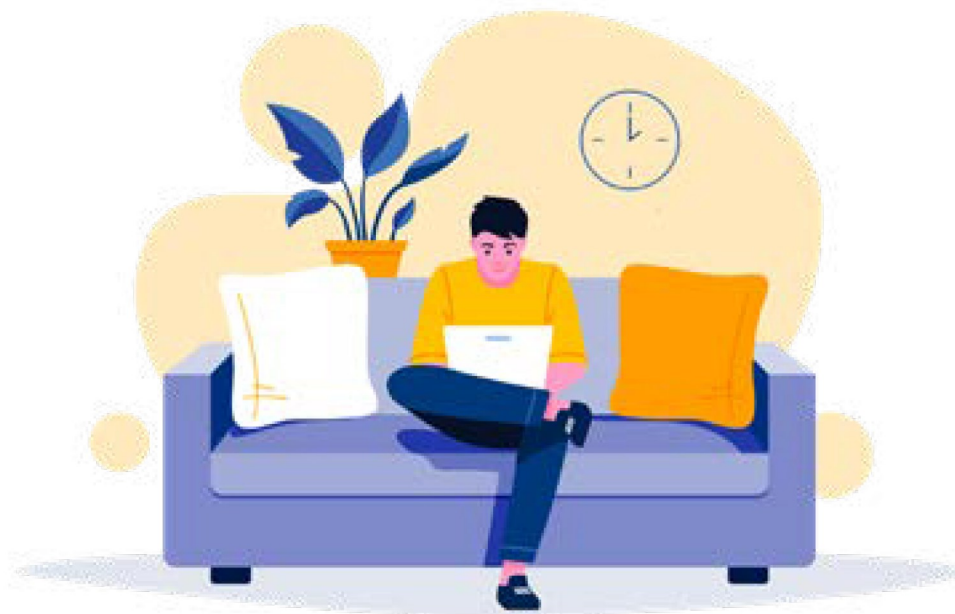
Minimized Risks

Due to the ever-worsening cyber threat landscape, organizations must comply with IT security and safety standards that dictate maintaining and using data-centric systems. CCPA, GDPR, HIPAA, and PDPA are some common examples of data protection and privacy laws that many businesses are expected to observe.

Professional service providers are particularly keen on adhering to industrial and legal regulations. In fact, legal compliance and bonding are part of the certification requirements for IT outsourcing companies. You can rest assured with the knowledge that your sensitive data systems are in safe hands.

Data security is not the only risk you avert by working with professional services. IT contractors also guide you in observing IT best practices and readily advise against making costly mistakes and bad decisions regarding IT investments.

Competitive Advantage

Besides high-level expertise, IT outsourcing companies also possess several cutting-edge tools and equipment to enhance IT performance and business operations. Sophisticated tools such as analytical systems, diagnostics toolkits, and remote monitoring equipment are quite expensive and out of reach for many businesses. Some are even proprietary and only available to the contractors' clients. Access to such advanced and exclusive techniques gives your business a technical upper hand to outdo its competition.

IT prowess and efficiency are, no doubt, key performance indicators in a tech-driven business environment. Professional services enable even small businesses to put enough muscle behind their IT infrastructure to compete with giant corporates on a level digital playing field.

Maximized Employee Productivity

Outsourcing complex and involving IT services offloads your staff to concentrate on their daily activities. Besides, overburdened employees often become unhappy and unproductive. When HR morale starts going down, you run the risk of high turnover rates, which is the last thing you want when trying to streamline operations. Outsourced services fill in your workforce gaps by taking on responsibility and roles that are not in your HR's job descriptions.

Hiring an extra set of hands to tackle some of the most pressing IT issues also buys you the much-needed peace of mind to focus on achieving your business's core objectives.

Optimized IT Efficiency

IT efficiency means doing more with less. Optimizing efficiency involves maintaining high IT performance levels and dependability while minimizing operational overheads, risks, and liabilities. IT outsourcing services can streamline your IT processes by consolidating the entire IT infrastructure into a neat, trimmed down, versatile package.

First of all, you minimize wastage on labor and unnecessary redundancies. Second, IT consultants and auditors can advise you on the most robust software and hardware combinations for your business that strikes a key balance between performance and economy.

Remember, IT efficiency directly correlates with business productivity, so the better and more efficient your IT structure and resources, the higher and more predictable your business's throughput.

How Soon Should You Expect to See Results?

Results and deliverables from an IT service provider are instant once the task or project is completed. Before working with an IT outsourced company, it's important to first agree on when and how the assignment should yield tangible or measurable results.

The results timeframe and the deliverables themselves vary depending on the project. For instance, outsourced cloud migration might take a few days to a couple of weeks to finalize, depending on how much work is involved. IT consulting usually takes only a few hours, but it can go on for days if there's a lot of ground to cover.

Large projects, such as IT products implementation, are often broken down into phases to make the adjustment smooth and manageable. In such cases, you can expect to start seeing results even before the project is fully completed.

In short, your agreement with the professional service provider and the task in question determines how long it takes to realize the outcomes.

What Can Hiring an IT Professional Do for You?

Whether you're building an entirely new IT infrastructure from scratch, refurbishing an existing one, taking a totally new approach, or trying to solve a nagging glitch, hiring IT professional services can save you a lot of money, time, and headache. Outsourced IT can help you solve immediate problems and develop a long-term technology roadmap that gets your business anywhere it wants to go.

Nowadays, due to the rapid development of enterprise technologies, an in-house IT staff, on its own, cannot meet the ever-growing demands for technical prowess. In a recent survey, 55 percent of tech CEOs said a lack of talent hindered their ability to innovate. IT professional services is the bridge between the widening skill gap and the evolving tech landscape.

The trick to leveraging professional services is understanding your business needs and finding a service provider that matches your requirements. You must also know what to expect from the moment you engage an IT service provider to the project's completion.

Do you have a pressing IT matter or an upcoming project with no idea how to handle it? Get in touch with us, and let's talk about your IT needs. Our team can lend a professional helping hand to restore, realign, or revamp your digital infrastructure.

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