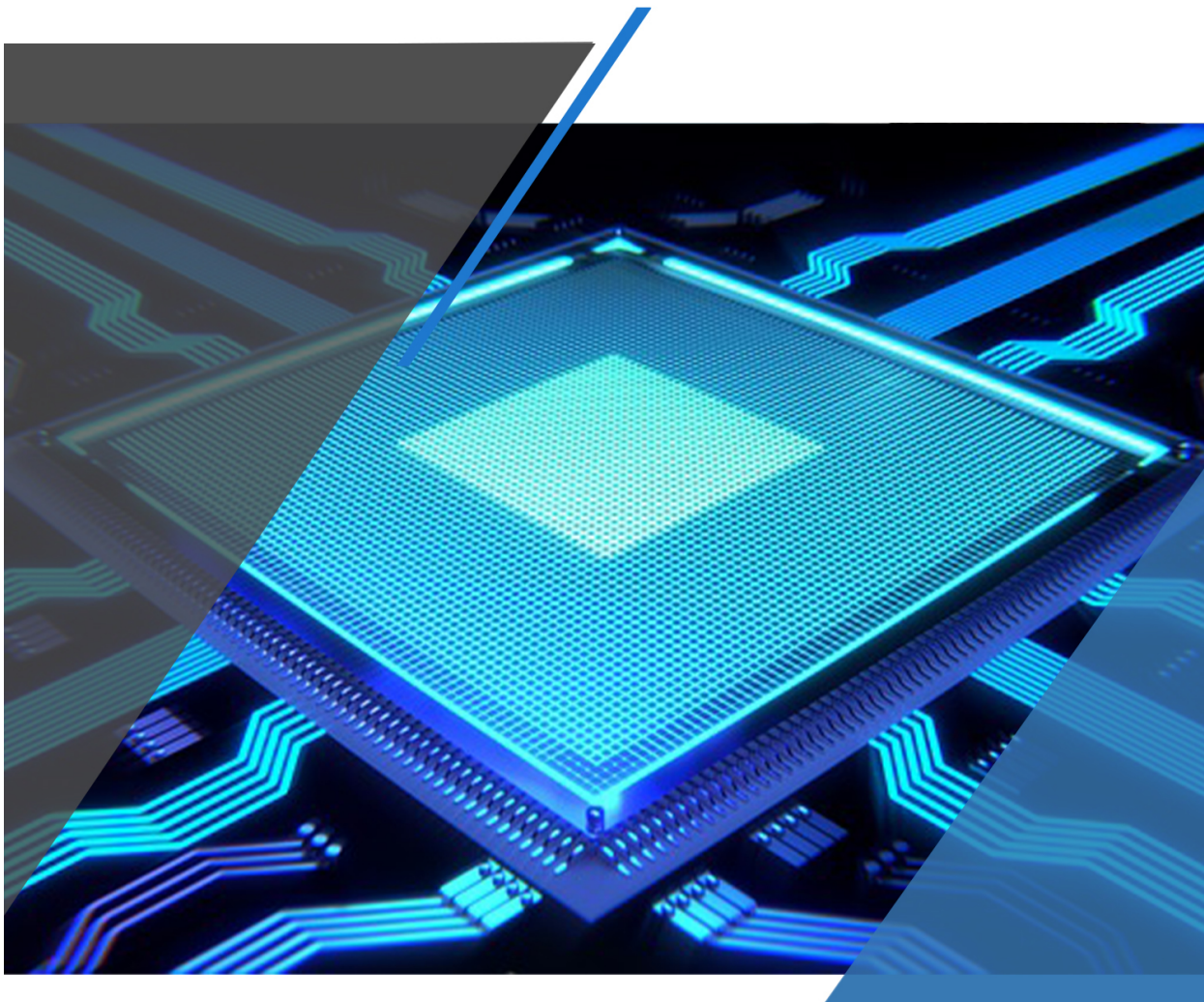


What Every Business Owner Owner MUST Know About IT Services and Fees **IT BUYERS GUIDE**

James Pearson
President
The Computer Center



The Janesville Small Business Owner's Guide To IT Support Services and Fees

(And How to Get *Exactly* What You Need Without
Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees and Bloated Contracts)

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The 3 most common ways IT services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying IT services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.
- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.
- ✓ 21 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail and data.

Provided as an educational service by:

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Never Ask an IT Services Company, “What Do You Charge for Your Services?” Instead You Should Ask, “What Will I *Get* for My *Money*?”



From The Desk of: James Pearson
President, The Computer Center

Dear Colleague,

If you are the owner of a small business in Janesville (or the surrounding areas) that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can **trust**.

My name is James Pearson, President of The Computer Center and author of *10 Costly Mistakes Most Small Business Owners Make with Their Computer Systems – and How YOU Can Avoid Them*. We’ve been providing IT services to businesses in the Janesville area for over 34 years now. You may not have heard of us before, but I’m sure you’re familiar with one or more of the other small businesses who are clients of ours. A few of their comments are enclosed.

One of the most commons questions we get from new prospective clients calling our office is “What do you guys charge for your services?” Since this is such a common question — and a very important one to address — I decided to write this report for 3 reasons:

1. I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways IT services companies package and price their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
2. I wanted to bring to light a few “industry secrets” about IT service contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no small business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT service providers that can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.
3. I wanted to educate small business owners, like you, on how to pick the **right** IT services company for their specific situation, budget, and needs, based on the **VALUE** the company can deliver, not just the price, high OR low.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

James Pearson

About the Author

Hi, my name is James Pearson. For over 30 years now I've been working in the computer industry. I've done nearly every job from sales, to service, to education. I've sold it, fixed it, and taught it.

I also have a business background. I've successfully managed two businesses with up to 30 employees and now I own the 34-year-old IT company that I worked for over 10 years prior to owning it. I know all about the headaches and trials of getting your expenses down and your profit margins up. I know what it's like to deal with employees, taxes, and I've dealt with all the extra "burden" that comes with "being in charge."

I've lived in Rock County for over 20 years, have a wife and two daughters and own a home in Janesville.

I graduated with a B.A. degree in Communications from Beloit College.

You're probably wondering what all that has to do with why I wrote this report? Well, I just wanted you to know where I was "coming from." I've been in this business for over 20 years now and I can tell you, I've seen people make some really huge mistakes when it comes to their computer systems – especially businesses!

I've found that most business owners make extremely poor, uneducated decisions when it comes to computers. They take advice from just about anybody. Usually, the advice is from the best meaning, but worst possible people - like a friend or a relative.

I also have found that many business people are just overwhelmed when it comes to computers. After all, your goal is to make your business profitable, not become a computer expert. What often happens then is that the business person is ready to jump at any recommendation, even if it comes from a minimum wage salesperson at Super-Duper Computer Mart.

I realized that a little education could save most business owners thousands of dollars in the long run. You spend countless hours studying your markets, your products, your competition, etc. But...

How much time have you spent when it comes to designing and implementing your computer systems?

Now, I'm not saying that you have to become a computer expert. Far from it. But, as a business person YOU need control over every aspect of your business. When it comes to computers, just a small amount of knowledge can save you thousands of dollars.

Over the years I've heard some things over and over again. There's one thing in particular that always makes me feel good. People ask me to "download my knowledge".

They'd say "James, if I could just dump all your computer experience and knowledge into my head, I'd really have something!"

Well, here it is. Some of it at least.

Grab a cup of coffee. Lock your door. Hold all your calls. Spend the next few minutes devouring this report. I guarantee that it will help you improve your computer systems in some way.

Even if the only thing I can get you to do is to pause for a couple extra moments before making decisions about your computers, and really analyzing your choices, then I've succeeded.

Comparing Apples to Apples: The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company to another, you need to understand the 3 predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all 3, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The 3 predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to “fix” your problem when something “breaks.” Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem (like removing a virus), or it may encompass a large project like a computer network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.
- **Managed IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your “IT department” and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network. This is all done under an agreed-upon monthly fee and usually has a 1 to 3 year contract associated with it.
- **Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t help you and will often refer you to “your IT department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the “managed IT services” and “break-fix” models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both.

Managed IT Services Vs. Break-Fix: Which Is the Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You’ve probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” I couldn’t agree more — and that’s why it’s my sincere belief that the managed IT approach is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for any small business with between 5 and 25 computers. There are only a couple of times I would recommend a “time and materials” approach.

The first is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn't have the time or expertise to implement (such as a network upgrade, installing a backup solution, etc.).

Next, is when you are smaller than 5 computers. At this level, your company is usually not generating enough revenue to justify the monthly cost. However, one important exception is if the IT company's managed services include hardware and software with the fixed fee (a rarity). If so, and you're in need of new computer systems, then rolling that into the monthly fee allows your company the ability to grow and pay for computer hardware and software that you may not otherwise be able to pay for all at once.

Outside of these specific scenarios, I do not believe the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of "cure" for problems that could have easily been avoided with an "ounce" of prevention.

Why Regular Monitoring and Maintenance Is Critical For Today's Computer Networks

The fact of the matter is, computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold — not to mention the *type* of data we're now saving digitally — has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations who work around the clock to do one thing: compromise your networks for illegal activities. And yes, they DO target small companies like yours. As a matter of fact, small businesses make perfect targets because they usually don't have the knowledge, or resources in place to adequately protect against such hackers and thieves.

In most cases their intent is to access financial information and passwords to rob you (or your clients), create fake identities for credit card fraud, etc. In other cases, they may want to use your computer network to send illegal spam, host pirated software, spread viruses, etc. And some do it just for the "fun" of being able to make computer systems inoperable. These criminals work around the clock in teams, constantly finding and inventing new ways to get around your antivirus software and firewalls; that's why you have to remain ever vigilant against their attacks.

Of course, this doesn't even take into consideration other common "disasters" such as rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (which are the #1 reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

Apart from Mr. Franklin's saying, I like to think that "smoke detectors are less costly than fire engines." Keeping things running smoothly, and being proactive, not only helps you sleep easy at night but, in the long run, costs you less over time.

Should You Just Hire a Full-Time IT Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 25 employees to hire a full-time IT person, because you can outsource this function of your business far cheaper and with a lot less work; but you DO want to hire a professional to perform basic maintenance just as you would hire an attorney to handle your legal matters or an accountant to prepare your taxes. **And if you truly understand the cost of your TIME and factor in employee productivity, the managed IT services model is considerably less expensive over time than the "break-fix" model.**

Another common way that small businesses handle their IT needs is with what I call the "go-to-guy". Here's the way this usually works. When your company is small someone on your staff that "knows a thing or two" about computers becomes the company's person to call for computer issues. Usually this person's primary job is **not** IT. Often times we find an office manager or sales person in this position.

However, as your company grows, two things tend to happen in this scenario, forcing you to make some tough decisions. First, as the complexity of your IT environment increases (usually between 5 and 10 computers), this person will start spending more time putting out IT fires than actually doing their primary job. The one they were actually hired for.

The second situation is when something comes along that is honestly outside this person's skillset. Since nobody likes to be "wrong", this staff member will spend LOTS of time trying to resolve the issue for the company, or will make the problem worse.

In either of the two examples I've given above, the biggest issue that you, as the business owner must come to terms with is cost. You now have a person who, in most cases, was hired to perform one task, and is now performing two tasks (one of which they may not be truly qualified for). When resolving computer issues become that person's primary daily activity, your company will lose money due to lost profits, sales, and productivity. If your sales person isn't selling, then it's costing you money.

Why "Break-Fix" Works Entirely in The Consultant's Favor, *Not* Yours

Under a “break-fix” model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to stabilize your computer network or to resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON’T want.

Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician may have resolved in a fraction of the time. There is no incentive to properly manage the time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and to find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they’re ethical and want to keep you as a client, they *should* be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that’s akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they’ve worked to make sure you aren’t getting overbilled; and since you often have no way of really knowing if they’ve worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next. This, is one of the biggest frustrations I’ve seen from small business owners throughout my 25 years in this business. When you rely solely on your IT company to put out fires, it’s already too late. The following bill is always more than expected and, always an unexpected, un-planned for expense that is painful for businesses of your size (any size really).

What to Look for in a Managed IT Services Agreement and What You Should Expect to Pay

Important! Please note that the following price quotes are based on what we, and our customers have found as average rates here in our area. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget and situation.

Hourly Break-Fix Fees: Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$40.00 and \$150.00 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

The wide range in prices usually comes from the size of the IT company itself. On the lower-end of the scale you find 1 and 2 person companies, often start-ups that have turned a hobby into business and work out of their home. Of course, their overhead is significantly lower than a well-established, multi-technician organization, partly because they neglect things like investment in training, proper business insurance coverages.

On the higher end of the spectrum you will find larger IT organizations with multiple engineers, well designed processes and procedures in place, dedicated help desk and monitoring staff, and well insured, financially sound organizations. Of course, with this comes more overhead. You will also tend to find better qualified, more experienced engineers at this level. The reason is that companies that charge higher, but still industry standard rates, can afford to hire, and keep, better quality engineers. This ultimately means more efficient engineers that can handle a broader range of business-specific IT issues.

If they are quoting a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I would suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what “success” is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, work flow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way in avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.
- **An agreed upon frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant’s. For our company this is a project plan that outlines, in detail, what we are going to do and what our target dates are.
- **A pre-project audit of your network that also includes discussions with all your key employees to review business goals, current processes, and technology challenges that you are currently facing.** Sometimes an IT company will call this a network audit. In most cases this usually includes visual inspection of your current systems, a brief engineer-speak discussion about “what system requirements do you think you need”, and maybe running some software that collects data about your computer systems as they are now.

However, in order to really create an accurate project plan, and avoid scope creep (where unknown problems begin to cause the project to take longer than originally anticipated), the company should have an in-depth knowledge of your existing network AND business goals. Simply matching equipment to system requirements laid out by one of your software programs is too short-sighted to be cost effective.

Managed IT Services: Most managed IT services firms will quote you a monthly fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. In Janesville, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$100 to \$300 per server, \$20 to \$150 per desktop and approximately \$10-\$20 per smartphone or mobile device.

I know that's a pretty broad range but, as we've discussed, it's what's included in that fee that's truly important. For some, these prices just include "monitoring", or maybe some remote support. Of course, the more all-inclusive the support is, the more truly flat-fee it will be. There will be fewer surprises throughout the terms of your contract if the contract is more inclusive. Of course, that also means that the monthly fee will be higher.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services contract, here are some things that **SHOULD** be included (make sure you read your contract to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly, if not daily, for urgent and emerging threats. Patches and updates are one of the most critical, and challenging parts of protecting your network from cyber-bad-guys. As with all the services below, these should not be left to be managed by a piece of software alone and require a human being, a real live engineer, to be checking on these weekly, if not daily
- Antivirus updates and monitoring. The first thing most virus programs try to do is disable your antivirus software. Quietly and without letting you know. The best protection is to have software, in place, that alerts your IT company directly (most programs don't), and then they can personally follow up with any potential threats. The software your IT company uses should have several important features. First, be sure that it is a business-grade product. The off-the shelf products, and those made for home users are good, but they lack centralized management. This means that, in a networked environment, there is no way (except touching each computer individually) to set policies about what is allowed and what isn't. Further, a truly excellent malware protection product will also allow your IT vendor to monitor for suspicious activities and alert him so that he can take immediate action, should a virus get through.
- Firewall updates and monitoring. Software and hardware firewalls are a necessity in today's Internet-based world. Most consumer-grade equipment simply is not good enough for a small business network, even a small one. Further, we see time and time again where hardware firewalls are installed and improperly configured, leaving your company exposed to outside threats. At the very least, there should be a regularly scheduled audits of these items (by a person) to verify that your equipment has the latest security firmware and patches.
- Backup monitoring and test restores. This should be monitored (by a human) daily. Your backup, which should be taking several snapshots of your servers and key computers throughout the day (not just once a night), needs to be tested frequently. It's more common than you think for backups to fail, or become corrupted, without anyone ever knowing about it, until it's too late. Further, backups should be able to restore your systems in 20 minutes to an hour. Most backup solutions that IT companies use simply backup files. If they do take regular snapshot images of your servers, they are not easy to test, and they are not easy to restore from if you were to have a hardware failure. The goal with any backup solution is to not only allow you to restore lost files, but to get your business up and running again fast in the case of a disaster or hardware failure (the most common cause of data loss).

- Spam-filter installation and updates. A rock solid email filtering service protects not only against junk mail, but against viruses and phishing (identity theft) scams as well. A quality product will also include some sort of emergency mailbox feature. This feature protects your business against downtime. We all depend on our email being up and working. However, regardless of how your email is configured (on site or hosted somewhere), outages can still cause your email to stop working and bring your business to a halt. Having a failover service ensures that you have access to vital communications all the time.
- Regularly scheduled on-site business reviews. Here's a place where many IT companies will really skimp. Why? Because it's costly. However, I highly recommend that you meet regularly with your IT company, face-to-face to have a **business** review. What you are looking for here is personal meeting with you and someone from your IT company (preferably the owner or other key person – NOT an engineer), to discuss business topics. In order to truly serve your business IT needs, your IT company must understand YOUR business. They must know what your plans are for growth, employees, new software, new regulations, and discuss what to expect in the upcoming quarter. Just like you need to meet with your employees on a regular basis, to make sure you are all on the same page, you and your IT company should also have these types of meetings.
- Dedicated Help Desk. In many IT companies, especially one or two-man shops, having a dedicated person, waiting in the office to take your problems, isn't possible. That impacts their service delivery in important ways that you should be aware of. If there is no dedicated staff that "stays put" in the office, not only might you have to call around to reach an engineer to solve a key problem for you, but there won't be anyone to monitor the items I've discussed above. If that's the case, then at best, they've installed monitoring software on your system and wait for it to send them alerts, maybe via email or phone. But, what happens if a critical alert on your network occurs, and your engineer is in a basement somewhere, working on someone else's system? How quickly can they respond? Would they have your information at hand to help? Would they even get the alert?

The following services might not be included and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a "scam" or unethical UNLESS the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware, such as new servers, PCs, laptops, etc. However, the best-in-class IT businesses include hardware, software and equipment in their monthly fees. This means higher monthly fees but, again, fewer surprises throughout the year. Also, for your business, paying for your hardware over time (we call that Hardware as a Service – HaaS), may make a lot of sense for you. This allows you to avoid huge capital outlays and allows you to categorize your equipment as business expenses, each and every month. You should know that including hardware and software licenses in your monthly fee is difficult for smaller, less mature, IT companies to do. Many don't have the financial stability, or buying power to do this. Meanwhile, stable, well-established companies have established relationships with financing companies that allow them to provide this

higher-than-normal service to their clients

- Software licenses. At the very least, it just makes sense to include the base set of licenses your company needs to function, with the monthly fee. Microsoft Office, any server licenses, Spam, Antivirus, and sometimes even your main business application can easily be included in your monthly service contract. This avoids those annual “pending renewals” and ensures that the IT company just takes care of them for you.
- On-site support. I’ve mentioned before that many Managed Service IT providers don’t include on-site support, mostly because it’s costly. However, it is often significantly more efficient than working remotely.
- New additions, changes, and projects. As your business grows, you may find that you are adding staff, moving, or taking on projects that were not included in the original agreement. You’ll need to know how your IT company will handle these “extras” as they occur. Of course, you should expect to pay for new equipment and software and such if you add users. However, is the setup included? Is working with vendors on a new branch or an office move included? In most cases a Managed Services contract is designed to support your network as it is when the agreement was entered into. Therefore, it’s standard practice for any changes, such as these, would be billable as actual projects. In some cases, the preliminary consulting about a change is covered under the agreement and it’s just the implementation that is considered outside of the contract’s scope.
- Parts warranties. It’s important to understand how your contract handles hardware failures for any equipment that is not new. Some companies will take on a contract where they do not require the replacement of any equipment. However, when it fails, you are responsible for the costs of repairing or replacing the equipment, which may include extra labor. This, of course, reduces the predictability of your costs but, results in lower monthly fees. Other companies (ours included) will cover the cost of replacing parts in existing equipment we adopt with the contract.

Warning! Gray areas of “all-inclusive” service contracts. In order to truly compare the “cost” of one managed IT services contract to another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN’T included AND the “SLA” or “service level agreement” you are signing up for. It’s VERY easy for one IT services provider to appear far less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you are getting.

The following are 21 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you’re getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you; then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them to Support Your Network

Customer Service:

Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?

Our Answer: We answer our phones live from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients emergency after hours' numbers they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it to be the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Do they have a service satisfaction guarantee?

Our Answer: We guarantee to have a technician working on a problem as quickly as possible. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure. Quite simply, we know that if we don't respond in a timely fashion to your issues, eventually you'll look somewhere else.

Further, if you are ever dissatisfied with any service for ANY reason, call and let us know. We will work with you to correct or repeat the service at no additional charge, or arrange for another technician to repeat the service at no additional charge.

If this still does not resolve the issue to your complete satisfaction, we will refund 100% of the money you've paid us. All we ask is that you notify us within 72 hours of the unsatisfactory service and before another service begins.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across as arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. The heart of our business is that we are in the customer service business first and foremost. Our long tradition of teaching our clients continues to this day.

Handled in a very professional manner, issue was resolved immediately. [I] was asked appropriate questions and able to understand what was needed of me on my end to assist with troubleshooting.

Brenda M.

Evansville Manor

Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer ways to stabilize and improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?

Our Answer: Our Business and Technology Assessments, Quarterly Network Maintenance, and meetings with our clients help us find ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive with these meetings.

Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?

Our Answer: We provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why and when so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.

Further, our engineers are required to document their work so that if another engineer needs to step in, they don't have to waste time starting from scratch and repeating troubleshooting steps.

Q6: Is their Help Desk really dedicated?

Our Answer: We've worked very hard to create the premiere, truly dedicated Help Desk in the area. Our Help Desk, staffed by our very own technicians and never outsourced, was built from the ground up to provide fast resolutions to your problems. Many of our competitors claim to have a Help Desk, but their technicians are not truly assigned to the Help Desk, they just "catch calls" if they are in the office. Our technicians are actually assigned to the Help Desk each day. We have a dedicated Dispatcher whose job is to make sure your calls are properly routed, escalated and handled. Further, we've invested thousands of dollars and hours in training our staff, creating standardized procedures, and selecting the industry-best software. All this is done so that we can provide you with a single, efficient point of contact and communication for the fastest resolution to your issues.

Excellent customer service and faster than expected turn around! Life saver in fixing my laptop!

Jason Yost

Fetch Graphics

Maintenance of Your Network:

Q7: How many layers of security do they offer in order to protect your network and you and your customers' data from hackers and identity thieves?

Our Answer: We recommend 6 core layers of security for all our clients. Your data is one of your most important assets and small businesses are common targets for cyber criminals. You are seen as “easy prey.” Most IT companies will only touch on the most common layer, antivirus software, and might even recommend email spam filtering. However, if all you have are these two layers, then you’re leaving the other 4 layers exposed.

We take security very seriously. For example, our antivirus program alone actually adds 2 layers of security. But, we also monitor (with a real live human being in our office) our clients’ antivirus software and are alerted of potential threats that we then follow up on, personally.

Q8: Do they believe that “set-it-and-forget-it” is good enough for your business? So often we run into companies who are paying their IT guys for “network monitoring” each month. And yet, we find that all this means is that the IT company has installed some software to do all this for them. I’m here to tell you that, after years of working with and monitoring our banks (and having to answer to the FDIC), we’ve learned that you simply can’t install a piece of software and then ignore it. If that were the case, you wouldn’t need an IT guy at all!

We know that software, even the kind meant to monitor your network, can fail and produce incorrect reports. Further, if a live, physical person, is not checking on it, these kinds of issues can go unnoticed, and uncorrected, for weeks or even months!

This is true of monitoring software, patch management software, anti-virus software, and even your critical backups. Every week we come across people that call us to resolve an issue, only to find out that their backup, which their current IT guy was charging them for and supposed to be watching, had failed days ago!

Instead, we take a different approach. Whether it’s our monitored backup solution, antivirus, or monitoring products, we are actually watching these. Plus, we document, every day, what we found, so that you can see what we have done to make sure that things are truly running smoothly.

It was nice to know you were already on top of it when we called and it came up quickly. Thanks
Colleen Whaley
Settlers Bank

Q9: Do they work to proactively stabilize and improve your network, or wait for expensive issues to crop up and then go into “emergency mode?”

Our Answer: Our proactive monitoring services, truly flat-fee IT support, and regular **Business and Technology Assessments** help us to stop network “fires” before they can start. Our philosophy is that smoke detectors are less expensive than fire engines. That means that we constantly work with you to create a stable, trouble-free network that is both cost effective and efficient.

Q10: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written, network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc. - or are they the only person with the “keys to the kingdom?”

Our Answer: We pride ourselves on having some of the best documentation procedures in the industry. We fully document our client’s networks, including pictures. Further, we are constantly updating this documentation as we work with you. This documentation is yours and an updated copy can be provided to you at any time, including all passwords, IP addresses, domain names and more.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you have the suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this information under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don’t suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don’t tolerate it!

Q11: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

Our Answer: Yes, and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client’s account, any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off. We have a formal training session with our engineers whenever we onboard a new client. This makes sure that you will always have an entire IT TEAM at your disposal, not just “a guy.”

Yes, its network upgrade time at Genesis Counseling Services. Time to get rid of the dirt road and install top of the line interstate highway! With the help of Michael Arnold from The Computer Center we are now up to speed and state of the art. A big thanks to them and a hats off for a fantastic job well done! Michael professionally custom built our server, transferred our data, upgraded our network, internet, essentially all of our technology. All while putting up with my questions and calls. Thanks much guys!
James Burns
Genesis Counseling Services

Q12: Do they have a support solution designed around YOUR business needs, not theirs?

Our Answer: We know that every business has different needs, at different points in their lifecycle. We have support plans designed to meet those needs within your budget. Our services are - and the way we support your network - carefully selected based on what YOU need and can afford.

One of the keys to making sure that our solution is properly aligned with your business goals is our thorough **Business and Technology Assessment**. Our BTA process is a deep dive into your business, your culture, and how YOU work. All new clients are required to go through this process before we work with them. The **Business and Technology Assessment** helps us truly understand YOU and YOUR business, before we even begin to offer a solution. Once this process is completed, we then sit down to design a solution that will meet your business goals.

“[The Computer Center] spent a large amount of time before we ever sat down at a meeting analyzing and assessing our company needs. There was time spent with all of our office personnel as well as all the site managers so the solutions

they proposed were designed to meet our needs based upon the information they gathered in the time spent with our people...

This time spent allowed [The Computer Center] to put together a program that met our needs.”

Tim Buchheit

Farm City Elevator

Q13: Do they insist on backing up your network BEFORE performing any type of project or upgrade?

Our Answer: We do; and that’s simply as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.

We hope we never need to recover files from our nightly back-ups, but if we must, we can be confident having these illustrated, step by step instructions that even a novice computer user can follow. Karen did a great job providing us what we needed to have on hand for an emergency situation!

Scott Frazer

Advanced Engineered Systems

Technical Expertise and Support:

Q14: Is their help-desk U.S. based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?

Our Answer: We provide our own in-house Help Desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it’s important to keeping your data secure.

Tom's follow-up on this issue was very prompt and resolved the issue on the first shot.

Jim Hutchinson

Husch Services

Q15: Is their flat-fee service, truly flat-fee?

Our Answer: Many IT companies offer some sort of “flat-fee” or monthly service contract. Honestly, these types of contracts can truly put YOUR interests ahead of the IT company’s. You see, with any type of flat-fee agreement, the IT company is forced to work efficiently in order to be profitable. It works much like an insurance plan. The more “claims” that are made against an insurance policy, the less profitable the policy is.

However, beware! Not all flat-fee services are the same! As a matter of fact, any company that comes in and can quote you a flat-per person, or per-device price, has not spent enough time learning about your company, and cannot possibly be providing you great service. You see, many of my peers rely on “network monitoring” software that they set up, and then forget. However, as I’ve mentioned before, even though they can give you a ridiculously low price, there’s no value in the service, because they aren’t proactively doing the work that should be done. And, as I’ve mentioned, software fails.

Also, most flat-fee programs may seem like a deal at first because they are so low. But, when you look deeper into the contract, the company actually excludes more things than they include. It's common for a flat-fee monthly contract to only include remote support between 8 and 5. What tends to happen in very restrictive agreements like this is that you start getting nicked-and-dimed with extras. Licenses, on site visits, repairs, parts, all start to add up.

A truly trustworthy IT company that has YOUR best interest in mind, will spend a large amount of time up front getting to know you, and your company (like we do in our **Business and Technology Assessment**) before giving you a price. Further, that flat-fee price should have very, very few "extras".

Simply by having one consultation with The Computer Center I have a clear understanding of how I can adjust my office technology use and equipment to increase my business performance. Certainly it is a great value to have an expert IT person whenever I need them without having one on staff.

Jim Spude

Fish Window Cleaning

Q16: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?

Our Answer: Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally, show up on time and if they cannot for some odd, unforeseen reason, we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

Unlike the cable company, and so many service providers, we are able to schedule exact times with our clients, not "windows". This means that we are there, working on your issue (even if it's remotely), right when we say we will. We know your time is valuable and, in business time is money. We combine our robust scheduling software with a dedicated dispatcher to make sure your tickets are handled in a timely fashion.

Q17: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?

Our Answer: We own the problems with all line of business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software – but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you. All of our businesses rely on some sort of key program. Our documentation and training process helps us efficiently work with other vendors to resolve even the toughest problems. We are accustomed to working with other vendors and know that, because we can speak geek with them, it's more efficient for us to call that vendor and work to resolve any issues than it is to have you call them and try and muddle your way through a problem.

Q18: When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT services, do they own the problem or do they say "that's not our problem to fix?"

Our Answer: We feel WE should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

I had problems accessing my email after switching to U-Verse from AT&T. I called AT&T and they were unable to help me. One call to The Computer Center and it was taken care of. They never seem to have a problem that they can't solve. I can't say enough of the help they offer.

Char Nieuwenhuis
Nieuwenhuis Bros., Inc.

Q19: Do they have experience with HIPAA and the FDIC and PCI compliance?

Our Answer: We do. Many of our clients are banks and we are accustomed to dealing with, and defending our networks, to the FDIC. Further, we also deal with a variety of customers in the medical field. This means that we are no strangers to HIPAA and privacy laws. As a matter of fact, all of our staff has signed privacy and non-disclosure agreements to further protect you, your patients' and clients' confidential information. Further, we regularly work with our client's to ensure that their businesses are PCI compliant so they can accept credit cards and protect their customers' sensitive data.

Q20: Do they have a stringent hiring processes and standards?

Our Answer: Yes. Because of the confidential nature of our clients' data, we do background checks on all new hires that include criminal checks. Your data and privacy are as important to us as they are to you. That's why we are very selective about who we hire.

Additional Benefits

Q21: What other value do they add to their services?

Our Answer: Lots! We don't stop at providing you with just IT support. Our clients receive extra benefits all the time. These include our weekly Tuesday Tidbits newsletter, full of helpful computer tips and tricks; Printed monthly newsletter; Educational Lunch and Learn sessions; our Technology Open House; access to an entire team of professionals (not just "a guy"), and more.

The Computer Center Team is amazing! They are always so positive, sounds like they have a smile on their face when they answer the phone, courteous and right on the money when "fixing" our issues-no matter how small. I can't say enough of how well they do the job. I wish more companies we work with are as great as them.

Kim Boyd
Boyd Consulting Group

A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide to be helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by the many incompetent firms offering these services.

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Let us know! And, of course, if you are looking for someone you can trust to take over the care and maintenance of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business.

Below you will find information on how to request a **FREE Business and Technology Assessment** (valued at up to \$2,800.00). This is, of course, provided for free, with no obligations and no expectations on our part to qualified prospects. I want to be clear that this is NOT a bait-and-switch offer or a trick to get you to buy something. My reputation for running an honest and trustworthy business is something I hold very dear. I would never jeopardize that in any way. So why are we offering something like this for free?

Two reasons:

1. We are simply offering this service as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with. Again, our goal is to allow you to make an informed and confident decision – and offering this is one way we can help you better evaluate us.
2. This will allow us to determine if we even CAN help you. Obviously we can't help everyone, and our services might not be a good fit for you. Conducting this Assessment enables us to meet you personally and you evaluate whether or not we're the right company for you, without risking your money.

Looking forward to your call!

James Pearson, President
The Computer Center
608-755-1524

Special Offer for Readers of this Report!

Our Business and Technology Assessment Costs up to \$2,800.00! But, Here's How You Can Get it for FREE ...

As a perspective client I'd like to offer you an in-depth **Business and Technology Assessment**, up to a \$2,800.00 value, for free. During our on-site assessment, I will send one of my Solution Engineers and a Solution Advisor, to do an in-depth, deep-dive, analysis of your company's current IT health and business issues. During this visit we will:

- ✓ Diagnose slowness, problems or concerns you may have with your computer network and explain in plain English what your options are for resolving them quickly and inexpensively.
- ✓ Check for security vulnerabilities that could expose you to data loss, hackers, and identity thieves.
- ✓ Verify your data backups are working (Note: most times we find out that it's been days, even weeks, since you had a good backup!)
- ✓ Look for hidden viruses, spyware, and security loopholes that could allow hackers and viruses to invade your network, corrupt your data and bring your system down.
- ✓ Review your server logs to uncover developing problems and conflicts that will turn into unexpected down-time.
- ✓ Discuss how your business uses technology and what is currently holding you back from being more efficient and profitable.
- ✓ Review your processes and procedures, as they relate to technology, and where you want to be.
- ✓ Look for technology and efficiency bottlenecks that may be holding your company back from earning more profits.
- ✓ Much more ...

As a fellow business owner, you can appreciate that this is a considerable investment in time and resources for the both of us. I assure you, this is no small undertaking. Therefore, even at \$2,800.00 a pop, I can only perform a limited number of these Assessments each month.

However, I am able to perform a certain number of these in-depth assessments each month for **FREE**, for the right prospect. Of course, my goal is to introduce you to The Computer Center, and our services. I'm hopeful that, once you've met our team and seen how we are different from the "other guys" out there, you will become a lifelong client.

But, not everyone we come into contact with is a good fit. We get that. So, in order to determine if you qualify for a **FREE Business and Technology Assessment**, all I ask is that you talk with one of our Solutions Advisors. We will have a brief conversation about your company, and a few of your current concerns. Then, we'll give you an over-the-phone quote on the cost of your Business and Technology Assessment and, more importantly, **how you can qualify to get your fee completely waived!** That's right ... if, after our brief (less than 10 minute) conversation, your company qualifies for an assessment, we'll schedule your appointment for **FREE!**

Call today to lock in your FREE Business and Technology Assessment.

Sincerely,
James Pearson, President
The Computer Center
608-755-1524

P.S. As I mentioned, I can only do so many of these FREE Business and Technology Assessments each month, so it's important that you call and request to speak with one of our Solutions Advisors today.

P.P.S Here's what some of our clients have said about our deep-dive Business Technology Assessments.

"First of all, I think that the concept is appealing to the customer. I like the idea of having the Computer Center go over our entire system once and for all to understand our entire computer set up here at the office. I had complaints with prior IT providers not doing this and not even being aware of what system that we have. The idea of having a complete inventory of my IT system has great value."

Scott Schroeder
Scott Schroeder S.C.

"[The Computer Center] spent a large amount of time before we ever sat down at a meeting analyzing and assessing our company needs. There was time spent with all of our office personnel as well as all the site managers so the solutions they proposed were

designed to meet our needs based upon the information they gathered in the time spent with our people...

This time spent allowed [The Computer Center] to put together a program that met our needs.”

Tim Buchheit
Farm City Elevator

“...you performed a deep-dive business and network audit. We had conversations with you and your staff about a variety of technology and business concerns. We also did a significant amount of technical investigation, with an engineer on-site taking pictures, and running your assessment software...Your organization expended an extreme amount of time and effort evaluating the needs of our law firm’s informational technology...”

Ed Thompson
Clair Law Offices, S.C.

“I am extremely happy that Boyd Consulting Group took advantage of your Comprehensive Care Program. From the initial meeting with your staff and the step by step technical investigation, to your running the assessment software, it was an enlightening experience. I especially liked the fact that your engineers and tech’s explained things to me in language I could understand because I am not a computer geek.”

Bill Boyd
Boyd Consulting Group, Inc.

Are you searching for an IT support firm but don't know where to start?

Are you confused by all the different pricing and contracts?

Do you know what you should expect to pay for IT support services?

Inside you'll learn:

The 3 most common ways IT service companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons to each approach.

A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you!

Exclusions, hidden fees, and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.

How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration, and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.

21 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, email, and data.



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