



How to select the best MSP

39 percent of small businesses use managed services in some way, and this number is only poised to grow along with the complexity and scale of data management needs. Increasingly, businesses need greater access to managed services, yet few companies have a comprehensive understanding of how to select the best MSP -- or what's really at stake.

How the Right MSP Benefits Your Business

With a managed service provider (MSP) that fully understands their needs, companies can enjoy greater IT services for less money than it would cost to purchase standalone services. Since costs are predictable and include preventative maintenance needs and data backup, there are no more unplanned emergencies, such as disaster recovery after a hardware failure.

When your company has an in-house IT department that's overwhelmed or busy with other tasks, paying for an MSP allows your business to access the technology you need to grow without adding more employees to your organization.

Taken together, these benefits mean your company can focus on its central mission while relying on its technology systems to operate efficiently at all times. When your business puts more effort into serving its customers and living its mission, then your organization will grow exponentially.

Of course, your company will only realize these benefits by selecting the right MSP -- a difficult task considering how many managed service providers there are. Ask these questions to choose the best MSP for your needs.

7 Questions to Ask to Choose the Best MSP

1. What do you need and what is your budget?

Ask this question before you begin to research managed service providers. Knowing your budget up front allows you to set parameters on what you're looking for, so you can quickly discard MSPs you cannot afford.

By defining the search ahead of time, you can cross off managed service providers that don't offer a core service you need, or cost more than you can afford at present, to focus your efforts.

2. How long has the MSP been operating in this area?

New MSPs come online all the time as the industry grows. Yet you're hiring a managed service provider for their expertise in your industry-specific needs, and there is a disadvantage associated with being a service provider's first client.

A better fit for your business will be an MSP that already works with clients in your industry as opposed to a large MSP that doesn't have clients in your niche. Identify those MSPs that have a long history of service in your niche, because they are more likely to know what you need (even when you don't know it yet).

Then look for demonstrated experience that a company has seen and done it all, such as a history of excellent service, testimonials or case studies that show proven results for clients similar to you, and industry recognition, like awards or affiliations.

3. What range of service is offered?

Best practice is to search for an MSP that can support your company's needs now and as you grow. Look for an MSP that offers the full range of services you need, as well as services that may appeal as your company scales up.

Many MSPs offer flexible services, either by letting you pick and choose from a variety of plans or customizing a plan that's unique to your organization. High-quality MSPs are willing to work with you to define a plan that fully meets your needs and best supports your growth. Don't settle for a company that offers a narrow range of services that don't match up with your needs when there are better MSPs to choose from.

4. How does the MSP proactively protect your business from disaster?

Disaster recovery and cybersecurity are two of the main reasons companies seek managed services. With this in mind, it's critical that any MSP have a proactive plan in place to protect your system from intruders, minimize downtime if something goes wrong, and protect your data to the full specifications required by your industry.

MSPs provide preventative maintenance rather than waiting until something is broken to fix it. The best-in-class MSPs monitor for flaws, apply patches immediately, and actively suggest ways that you can improve your security. Some go the extra mile with a cybersecurity assessment that shows your company exactly where vulnerabilities are and provides a road map to fix them.

Ask about an MSP's plan for proactively protecting your business from disaster of all kinds. Listen carefully to what they tell you and cross off any MSP that doesn't have a clear, detailed answer.

5. What kind of support is offered?

The gold standard for support is 24/7 remote monitoring and emergency support. This means that if something goes wrong in the middle of the night, your team can get the help they need rather than wait until business hours. Since every minute of downtime represents lost revenue for your business, it's key to have support at all times.

Dismiss any MSP that does not offer 24/7 support, but take it one step further: Ask how long you can expect to wait for help when something goes wrong. Incident response time can help you narrow down your list of MSPs to those that offer the best service.

See whether in-person service is available. While many issues can be resolved remotely, sometimes in-person service is necessary. Especially if the MSP is your only IT provider, it's important to find a provider who is able to make a site visit when needed.

6. How does the MSP keep up to date?

Technology is constantly changing. Who will be keeping up with relevant changes, your MSP or you, because they don't prioritize staying up to date?

Ask how the managed service provider keeps their technicians up to date with the latest technologies, skills, and threats. A company that fumbles this question indicates that they do not keep up to date with changes, which means that your business data is vulnerable to the next cyber security hack or software vulnerability.

It's worthwhile to pay for more a service provider that keeps up to date, because that company will come to you suggesting improvements that protect your business now and in the future. They will create efficiencies within your organization, which extend employee productivity.

7. Can you speak with references?

The best way to see how an MSP will perform is to check in with existing customers on the level of service provided and their satisfaction. Once you've looked at an MSP's track record, features, plans, and pricing, seek out references who can provide proof that the company does what it says it will, when it says it will.

Take as much time as you need to ask and answer these questions, narrow down your list of potential MSPs, and make a choice. When you gather the data you need to make an informed decision about the best MSP for your business, you get the right level of service that aligns with your budget and your values and pave the way for a long-term relationship with a service provider that enables you to free up time and resources to do what only you can do.