



Consumer's Guide to Managed IT Services

Who Should Read This Manual?

If you own a business or are an executive for an organization that uses information technology (IT) in any way then you should read this manual.

What Are Managed Services?

Managed Services provides organizations with predictable, business-focused IT services that optimize operations, manage risk and deliver measurable value from technology.

Why Should My Organization Consider Engaging a Managed Services Provider (MSP)?

MSPs are experts at managing IT. Whether your organization already has an IT department or you simply would like to extract more functionality from your existing IT assets, Managed Services can be an effective means to making IT work for you rather than the other way around.

MSPs specialize in proactively monitoring and managing IT for their clients. MSPs often specialize when it comes to the services they offer and the clients they help. Some MSPs specialize in security while others only deal in specific applications. Some MSPs have a multitude of service offerings but specialize only in a certain vertical market like financial services or healthcare.

Today, organizations of every shape, size, and variety rely on IT. Whether it is sending email, selling a product or service on the internet, sending data across the world to a remote office, or using a computer to type a letter, IT plays an important role in virtually every organization.

If more organizations are relying on the benefits of IT today then the risks of attacks on those IT assets have also increased sharply. The endless benefits of IT also demand constant vigilance and responsibility. Hackers and malcontents around the world plot and design attacks on even the most guarded and impenetrable networks. Malicious worms and other virulent programs continuously bombard networks and systems with a wide variety of purpose.

It is sometimes all an IT department can do to keep their organization's network protected, much less have time to focus on the core competencies necessary to propel the interests of the organization forward. Other organizations engage a MSP due to large impending projects that drain the resources of an internal IT department. Sometimes, the pressures of regulatory compliance or simply the pressures of maintaining a 24/7 watch over their IT assets drives an organization to seek out help from a MSP.

Whatever the reasons may be, organizations all around the world are finding that managed services is providing benefits in many areas.

How do I know if I need a MSP?

The following questions can serve as a self-assessment or evaluation of your organization's internal IT needs.

- ***Do I have and/or use IT?***
- Most organizations today, regardless of their technical sophistication, rely on IT in some manner. Even the most non-technical organizations use email, web sites, and other IT to conduct daily business tasks. If this describes your organization then you may need the assistance of a MSP.

- ***Do you have an IT department?***
- One of the biggest fallacies is the idea that an organization with an internal IT department does not need a MSP. Similarly, some IT departments may think that a MSP is out to take their job. ***Nothing could be further from the truth!*** Most managed services clients (especially those with in house IT staff) will tell you that they have an incredibly high level of communication and trust with their MSP. The truth is that most managed services relationships actually allow the IT department to do the things that they should be doing while the MSP handles the things that are important but take up too much time.

- ***Are you in a regulated industry?***
- As regulatory pressures¹ increase entities that have or use IT will be forced to take greater care of their IT assets. Most organizations are not qualified to handle this task. Most organizations would not be able to afford to bring all the technical and human resources in house in order to accomplish this task. A relationship with the right MSP can not only help solve your IT regulatory needs but do so at an affordable price.

- ***Have you ever suffered an IT security breach? Would an IT security breach have negative repercussions to your business?***
- Companies who have suffered a security breach involving their IT assets can attest that it is not a pleasant experience. Similarly, there are probably many more organizations that have suffered an IT security breach but never knew about it. Having a MSP that is constantly vigilant about monitoring your network status

¹ IT focused regulation is occurring all over the world and impacts a wide range of organizations that use IT.

can not only know if a breach is taking place but in many cases prevent such a breach from ever happening.

- ***Is IT important to your business?***
- Many IT users think that life without IT would be nice because their IT never works. Many consumers of managed services have said similar things prior to engaging a qualified MSP. The simple fact is that most of us rely on IT. Another simple fact is that many companies today do not have IT that functions properly. If this is you, contact a qualified MSP today.

What type of MSP should I use?

There are many types of managed services companies in existence today. Just like there are doctors that practice different forms of medicine (i.e., pediatrics, surgeons, etc.) there are also many forms of managed services.

For example, if you are a small organization you may want to engage a MSP that is more like a general practitioner. This MSP will have a broad set of tools and services that will meet all the needs of your organization. Some companies want a specialist in the area of security, storage, or application management. If so, then seeking out a MSP with those qualifications would be a logical choice.

There are also MSPs who practice in a particular market vertical like financial services, healthcare, or legal services. Whatever your needs are there is likely to be a MSP that can help.

Questions You Should Ask Your MSP

If you have read this document and believe that your organization is ready to explore the benefits of using Managed Services, then here are some basic questions that any consumer ought to ask their MSP. Although the following questions should not be determinative of which MSP you choose, the questions and their answers should help guide you in your decision. The following questions are not listed in any order of importance.

Does the MSP have a NOC or a virtual NOC? A Network Operation Center is defined as an enclosed facility that separates the MSP's available resources to perform Managed Services from the rest of the firm's operations. A growing trend in the managed services industry is to have a virtual NOC (or vNOC). A vNOC has all the capabilities of a hardened facility but it is hosted rather than contained in a physical location.

Availability: The ability of a MSP to effectively help its clients is in great part achieved by having a continuous supply of human resources watching and available at all times should some issue arise. Although some Managed Services relationships do not involve around the clock services you should know if your MSP has 24/7 staffed operations or simply "on call" resources during off-peak hours.

Is the MSP offering monitoring only or do they have proactive managed services?

There are many companies today who call themselves MSPs or who offer managed services when what they really do is offer monitoring services. Monitoring is an essential part of Managed Services, but without at least some level of remote remediation the true benefits of Managed Services are difficult to realize. Do not be afraid of asking your MSP if they offer anything in addition to remote monitoring. Remote monitoring with on-site repair is nothing more than reactive IT management and really should not be characterized as managed services.

Conclusion

Chances are if you are reading this document you are receiving it from a MSPAlliance MSP member. MSPAlliance MSPs are some of the most qualified and expert providers of managed services around the world.

MSPAlliance members (similar to other professional industries) frequently network with one another in order to advance the profession of managed services. Because they share knowledge, maintain standards, and strive to maintain the credibility and legitimacy of this important and thriving industry, you can rest assured that your IT needs are in good hands.