



Can you...

MANAGE IT?

SEVEN QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF.

By Monique Phalen, Director of Technology, AIS



IS IT GIVING YOU A BUSINESS EDGE OR SETTING YOU ON EDGE?

Everyone wants an edge over the competition. Information technology can set your company apart. But much of IT today is basic, keeping the lights on functionality – security and network management for example. When you devote in-house resources to staff, purchase, and maintain this basic functionality; you’re spending your time trying to keep the lights on. That’s time you’re not spending thinking about how to improve your business.

WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER SPEND YOUR TIME ON?

THOSE OF US IN IT LIKE TO BE IN CONTROL. WE'RE ORGANIZED AND WE LIKE TO DO IT OURSELVES—AND WE OFTEN BELIEVE WE HAVE TO. BUT WE DON'T; **YOU DON'T.**

Here's a logical way to look at it. Every company relies on information technology to run its business (which we think we have to do ourselves). You also need electricity, but you wouldn't try to establish your own power source would you?

THE POINT?

When it comes to those basic, "keeping the lights on" IT functions, you don't have to do it yourself— and just because you think you can, doesn't mean you should.

It's time for you to consider partnering with a managed service provider if you are experiencing these things:

- Spending more time managing your IT infrastructure than using technology to improve your business' operations
- Or lighting money on fire by spending it on the break-fix model (on issues that are never actually fixed)
- Have no formalized plan to keep the lights on and don't understand what it takes to do so



WHAT IS A MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER?

A managed service provider (MSP) is a company that manages IT infrastructure and/or end-user systems as an outsourced service, typically contracted through a subscription model and with a proactive approach to managing IT. Essentially, an MSP can be your IT department or a supplement to an in-house IT department. An MSP's IT resources and expertise are maintained and kept at their expense, not yours.

A PARTNER

WHAT DOES A MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER DO?

A MSP works to proactively prevent something IT-related from breaking and when it does—and inevitably it will—an MSP will also fix it, which allows small and medium size businesses to run on technology that would have been out of reach as a capital investment.

But they're not just there to keep things from breaking or fix the things that do, a great MSP will help identify the best way to use IT to achieve a company's overall goals. They won't be a cost center, but serve as an actual business partner building an IT strategy.

An MSP can provide various levels of service, from network monitoring and alerts that a company will fix internally, to full-fledged problem resolution.

You're an expert in your industry. Managed service providers are experts in information technology. MSPs also employ subject matter experts whose job it is to use their understanding of your industry and organizational culture to help build better business outcomes when it comes to technology and its use.

HOW DO YOU KNOW

IF YOU NEED AN MSP?

Now that you understand what an MSP is and a little of what they do to provide managed IT services, you're thinking, "Do I actually need this?"

To help simplify that decision for you, here are seven questions to ask yourself about how you're addressing your IT challenges today:

- DO YOU HAVE NO (OR LIMITED) IT DEPARTMENT OR STAFF?
- ARE YOU SPENDING TOO MUCH ON STAFFING?
- DO YOU HAVING RECURRING TECH ISSUES?
- IS YOUR IT TEAM OVERWHELMED?
- DOES BUDGETING SEEM IMPOSSIBLE OR UNPREDICTABLE?
- DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?
- ARE YOUR TECHNOLOGY VENDORS ALL BEING HELD TO A PERFORMANCE STANDARD BY YOUR IT STAFF?



“...the largest growth area for targeted attacks in 2012 was businesses with fewer than 250 employees; 31% of all attacks targeted them.”

#1 DO YOU HAVE NO (OR LIMITED) IT DEPARTMENT OR STAFF?

Internal IT staff are usually stretched too thin to keep up, much less plan ahead.


SMALLER COMPANIES TEND TO UNDERSTAFF THEIR IT DEPARTMENT— usually because they lack a budget that allows them to hire all of the needed positions. And since someone has to do things like backup and recovery, patch management, network setup, etc., the most tech-savvy employees usually end up being assigned these types of various IT functions.

When you're juggling too many things you're way more likely to drop a ball (or two). Spreading employees too thin makes it nearly impossible for them to be productive and perform at their best. When you put a person in charge of IT and they aren't an IT expert, new technologies and capabilities aren't able to be adopted. So, not only does it spread the employee too thin, it also creates gaps in your IT processes.

And, hackers are increasingly targeting SMBs. Do you really want to risk having a security hole in your network just because you “think” someone can juggle your business' network management needs? Information technology is continuously evolving, and it's easy to fall behind. Maybe your current network is secure, but how do you plan to remain secure? What's the upgrade path? And who's planning it? If you expect it to be your part-time IT person, they're most likely already struggling to stay on top of current IT needs AND their “day job”—they probably don't have spare time to be planning for the future.

SOURCE:

SYMANTEC CORPORATION,
INTERNET SECURITY THREAT
REPORT 2013

 *Your Managed IT Edge*

You get the advantages of a fully-staffed IT department without the burden of having to pay for or manage one.

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TAKE A LOOK AT THE MATH.

- For a somewhat capable local IT-administrator that's just entering the industry you're looking at a starting rate of around \$35,000.
- For an IT-administrator with some decent experience, good amount of knowledge, and is fairly equipped to handle a variety of technology issues you're going to pay anywhere from \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year.
- To get a seasoned pro who can solve a vast variety of the problems you encounter you'll pay \$80,000 and higher.
- Plus, you'll need to pay for ongoing training so your IT team can keep up with the constant changes in IT.

And that's just their base pay. That's not including any kind of bonus structure or benefits package (insurance, 401k, pension plan, etc.). Then there's the office space, cell phones, computers, and any other equipment they might need. That internal IT person just got expensive in a hurry.

#2 ARE YOU SPENDING TOO MUCH ON STAFFING?

Staffing IT in-house can be expensive and deliver poor ROI.

ON THE FLIPSIDE OF THAT, SOME COMPANIES WILL TRY TO HIRE THE

entire staff necessary to serve their IT infrastructure, and when you're building a workforce or working on a tight schedule, staffing can become hinderingly expensive and – unfortunately – can end up costing you more in the long run. Which puts you in a difficult position – forge through and attempt to operate without adequate staffing or neglect a fiscal responsibility. That sounds like a double-edged sword (and some pretty terrible options).

Fortunately, you have a third option – partner with an MSP and lower all staffing costs.

Though many smaller companies may think it's less money to keep their IT management in house, this is actually not the case. It may look cheaper on the surface, but it actually ends up costing you a lot more.

Outsourcing to an MSP should be thought of as an upfront investment, an investment that saves you up to 50%-70% and improves your outcomes. Not to mention it lets you avoid that double-edged sword situation.

) *Your Managed IT Edge*

You will spend less on staffing, avoid spreading your existing staff too thin, and still reap the benefits of having a well-staffed IT department (again, with no burden of paying for or managing one).



WHEN IT COMES TO SOFTWARE AND IT, IT'S NO SECRET THAT IT'S NOT A MATTER OF "IF" IT WILL BREAK, BUT "WHEN."

#3 DO YOU HAVE RECURRING TECH ISSUES?

Managed IT service providers have an incentive to prevent your IT infrastructure from breaking. Pay someone on a break/fix model and you can expect more "breaks."

IT GOES GREAT UNTIL EVERYTHING GOES WRONG, RIGHT?

It's the same concept for managing IT. When your stack is working well, managing it seems simple. But behind that front-end ease of use for the user (which is the focus of IT and business software) is intense complexity. That complexity makes keeping up with the detailed requirements for all of the software a business relies on pretty difficult for an IT generalist. Especially when you toss in the need to integrate multiple software programs and considering the requirements of server capabilities—that complexity starts multiplying quickly.

When it comes to software and IT, it's no secret that it's not a matter of "if" it will break, but "when." Unfortunately, when it does break, a simple reboot of your smartphone or laptop isn't going to fix it. If you don't have the necessary resources present to replace and repair the software, you're looking at a loss in productivity – and, depending on what goes down and the length of downtime—possibly a loss in business, a strain on customer relationships, and your finances.

Are you experiencing frequent downtime, viruses, or other issues with your hardware or software? If so, it's extremely likely that you're losing profits and productivity.

The scary thing is many people don't know the "what" or the "why" of their IT issues. They don't know where their risk lies. It's almost like they would rather bury their head in the sand, or have someone who is on the team who "knows computers." I may know how to change the oil in my car, but I wouldn't translate that into changing out someone's brake pads.

Your Managed IT Edge

With a quality MSP partner, you can improve your overall productivity and profits through a decrease in maintenance and replacement costs. Plus, you can breathe easy with the assurance that a team of experts are monitoring and running your technology and systems efficiently, allowing you to meet IT demands and scale to meet future needs.

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#4 IS YOUR IT TEAM OVERWHELMED?

IT is hard and trouble-shooting can be time-consuming. Piling more responsibility on overburdened staff is a recipe for disaster.

ALL BUSINESSES NEED A STABLE IT INFRASTRUCTURE IN ORDER

to grow. But when it comes to scaling IT infrastructure to support the growth you're seeking, even the experienced IT pros can feel overwhelmed thinking about maintaining servers, managing patches, network monitoring, keeping the company website online, troubleshooting user accounts, service desk support for users, and backup management (and that's just naming a few of the tasks an IT team is dealing with daily).

WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOUR INTERNAL IT TEAM CAN'T KEEP UP:

- Declining user support levels
- Lagging virus patch updates that expose your company to a security breach
- Delayed new server purchases due to budgetary constraints

These challenges will compound over time and your overwhelmed IT team will end up running at full speed only to always be slightly behind.

:) *Your Managed IT Edge*

You need an IT plan that meets your specific IT needs. A great MSP partner will work with you to create that plan. And just because you could outsource everything, doesn't mean you necessarily have to. For example, if your staff is great at running your current infrastructure needs, but struggles with planning and implementing an upgrade path – your MSP partner will focus on the area(s) you're experiencing IT challenges. Or conversely, you could be great at planning, but not have the bandwidth to execute—regardless of your challenges or strengths an MSP will help you where you need it.



#5 DOES BUDGETING SEEM IMPOSSIBLE OR UNPREDICTABLE?

Unexpected and unplanned for IT expenses can blow a hole in your bottom line.

WHEN IT COMES TO SMALL BUSINESSES, THERE COULD BE consecutive months where you are having to purchase a new server, replace a tape drive (do you go with another tape drive or replace it with a cloud-based backup strategy?), a computer or laptop, and upgrade software. With such unpredictability, attempting to predict your monthly IT spending becomes extremely difficult—making it a serious challenge to budget IT costs.

By using your existing staff to “help” with IT, you impact your overall productivity, profitability, and employee morale.

:) *Your Managed IT Edge*

You can actually budget your IT costs. MSPs provide services on a flat, monthly fee, so you won't be trying to predict the unpredictable.



#6 DO YOU HAVE A PLAN AND KNOW WHAT TO DO FIRST?

Knowing which IT challenges to tackle first is as valuable a skill as the ability to address the challenges.

BUYING IT OR SERVICES ISN'T A PLAN. DO YOU HAVE A TECHNOLOGY roadmap? Is it aligned with your company's financial and operational goals/business plan? IT doesn't operate in a vacuum, it exists to meet real business objectives.

What's missing from your infrastructure? What technology do you need? Do you need new computers, email systems, firewalls, servers? And if you do, which one(s) do you need right now, which ones can wait? Can you mark some of them off the list completely or outsource any of your IT needs to the cloud?

That's a lot, right? Let's say you figure all of that out. Now you have to decide which one you need to do first. And if you're lacking the ability to decipher what IT changes and upgrades are most important, it will be nearly impossible (at the very least difficult) to make the right decision on what order these needed improvements should be tackled in—especially when it all seems urgent, and it all needs to be done.

Your Managed IT Edge

Assistance in goal setting is invaluable as you determine what steps you need to take to ensure your IT infrastructure meets the needs of today while planning for growth tomorrow.



#7 ARE YOUR TECHNOLOGY VENDORS ALL BEING HELD TO A PERFORMANCE STANDARD BY YOUR IT STAFF?

Who on your IT team is managing vendor relationships? Anyone?

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR TECHNOLOGY VENDORS ARE FULFILLING on their contracts to you? Are you getting the most bang for your buck in those contracts. An MSP can help you manage all of your contracts with technology companies and scrutinize them for:

- Responsiveness and time to service
- Value
- Are all deliverables being met
- Quality of service



Your Managed IT Edge

Vendor management ensures you're getting maximum value from your technology providers.

BENEFITS

WE'VE OBVIOUSLY ALREADY MENTIONED A FEW BENEFITS. HERE ARE A FEW MORE ADVANTAGES FROM PARTNERING WITH AN MSP.

SAVE TIME

In order for IT to be successful, it takes a lot of time and effort. There is time spent trying to plan and keep up with the next steps for making sure IT is running and improving for the future. Then there's time spent actively managing the company's IT infrastructure (setting up PCs, ensuring weekly backups were successful, updating and applying patches to software, etc.) And, of course, the troubleshooting—there's too much time spent troubleshooting—why won't the president's phones connect to the wireless network, or the printer, having to rebuild a computer because a virus patch didn't get applied correctly, and the list could go on (but you get the point).

If you still have time to think through how to use the information in your systems to better serve customers or improve and automate business processes, then kudos to you—you are extremely efficient and/or extremely lucky.

REGULAR COSTS AND DECREASED CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

We mentioned regular monthly costs as one advantage. Some MSPs also provide managed cloud services in their portfolios. While you can choose to own your own infrastructure and have your MSP manage and monitor your network, storage capacity, etc.; you can lower your capital expenditures even further by pursuing a cloud IT strategy—eliminating or at least reducing the need to buy hardware and software upfront.

BENEFITS

(CONTINUED)

KEEP TECHNOLOGY UP-TO-DATE

Professionals who base their careers focused on security, backup and recovery, or managing networks (just to name a few) have a hard enough time keeping up with technology and best practice changes. When your in-house staff is limited, with individuals responsible for multiple aspects of IT, it becomes completely unrealistic to expect them to be able to keep current.

With an MSP, you'll have a team of experts in place and at your service so you'll never fall behind the technology curve.

CONNECTIONS

An MSP will have relationships and partnerships with a variety of technology software and hardware suppliers. These relationships often include training and insights into how to best apply the technology in business

situations. The perk for you is that this knowledge is then applied to solve your business challenges.

SUPPLEMENTAL CIO

You'll often see this as "virtual CIO" or "VCIO." Your managed IT provider can serve as your CIO or supplement an internal CIO/Head of IT. This service will ensure that your business doesn't lag in technology implementations and has an ongoing plan for the future.

24 X 7 SYSTEM MONITORING

Maybe your IT staff is extremely dedicated, but they're still human and they do need sleep (and probably a serious vacation). Partnering with an MSP means your system will be monitored around the clock, which means your IT staff can actually sleep or take a day off without having to parachute in to troubleshoot something. And alerts are dealt with as they happen, so mornings are less chaotic.

ABOUT AIS

Our purpose is to provide superior quality multifunction copier, printer, fax, and software products and managed IT services to businesses and organizations in Southern Nevada and Southern California. We believe that for each customer we service, performance of our products and staff is what makes the difference.

As a locally-owned independent dealer, we have the flexibility to create or select from a variety of resources, so that we use only the very best programs to fit each customer's individual needs. Our mission as a Company is to exceed our customers' expectation by providing unparalleled business solutions with leading-edge technology products, coupled with unmatched service, supplies, and support. Our foundation of work ethic, integrity, and teamwork enables us to work within a culture that cares about our customers, our community, and each other.

ISN'T IT TIME TO LET THE EXPERTS MANAGE YOUR IT?

Instead of hiring a full-time IT staff member (or more than one); consider partnering with an MSP to handle your IT services, in whole or in part.



CLICK HERE

to schedule a no-obligation conversation
with us to discuss if managed IT services
is right for you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monique Phalen is AIS' Director of Technology where she is focused on building better business outcomes for clients. She enjoys putting the technology puzzle pieces together for clients so that they can focus on their business, not their IT infrastructure.



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