

ComputerWeekly.com

Guide to buying IT support services



How to choose the right IT support supplier for your business

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ABOUT COMPUTER WEEKLY

ComputerWeekly.com is the number one online destination for senior IT decision-making professionals.

It is dedicated to providing IT professionals with the best information, the best knowledge and the best range of solutions that will enable them to succeed in the industry.

- ComputerWeekly.com benefits from Computer Weekly magazines unrivalled 40 year history
- ComputerWeekly.com offers exposure to a senior IT audience, backed by user profile research
- Computer Weekly is a five-times winner of the PPA Editorial Campaign of the Year award, demonstrating editorial excellence
- ComputerWeekly.com produces editorially independent breaking news picked up regularly by the media
- Initiatives such as the CW500 club reinforces Computer Weekly's impact and influence amongst senior IT decision-makers
- Complete dominance of the national news agenda – over 750 mentions within the media in 2006

ABOUT APPROVED INDEX

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INTRODUCTION

IT Systems have become such a crucial and integral part of everyday business life that even the slightest hardware or software glitch can have a very grave impact on business performance. It is important, therefore, that your IT Systems are designed to run as smoothly and safely as possible. However, if things do go wrong you want to have the confidence that they will be resolved efficiently with minimum downtime. Put simply, having an experienced support company only a phone call away is not so much a luxury but a necessity. Your company's IT support strategy could be the most valuable kind of insurance you have.

IT support companies can provide you with round the clock helpdesk support and the peace of mind to know that no matter what goes wrong, your systems will not suffer.

CHOOSING AN IT SUPPORT COMPANY

Since most companies do not have the luxury of being able to hire in-house IT support managers and technicians, IT support is a huge industry. As such there are a large number of IT support companies vying for your business. This is where the Approved Index, the UK's leading online business to business referral service, proves invaluable, with a list of established, IT support companies who are certified to provide helpdesk support, maintenance and repairs for all your IT support needs. You can complete a simple form on our website and receive up to six free quotes.

<http://www.approvedindex.co.uk/indexes/ITSupport/default.aspx>

Ultimately, you will still have to choose one company to work with, so the guidance below is an overview of the process and how to choose the right supplier. It is worthwhile clarifying the following issues during contract negotiations, so that you will be able to make a more informed decision about the kind of company that is best suited to your particular needs.

Core Services

Your IT support company should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to come in and fix problems as and when they arise. This support should be accessible through a single central number by which you can ask questions, report errors or check the status of a piece of equipment. There should also be a secure online system where you can make requests and check the status of work that is being carried out on your behalf.

Their support should be flexible enough to resolve any problem rapidly and with as little disruption to the company as possible, from providing an emergency piece of hardware on a Sunday afternoon, to taking an employee through a software programme step by step over the telephone.

The support should include assistance with the operation of all peripherals, including printers, switches, hubs, routers and wireless hardware.

It should include support for all types of server machines, desktop machines and laptops, whether they are Compaq, Dell, HP, IBM or Apple. Equally software support should include all Microsoft products and operating systems, Exchequer, ACT, CRM and all telecommunications including Alchemy and BT Nortel Systems.

There should also be support available for IT Networks, such as LAN, WAN and Wireless.

You should clarify whether the IT support company provides these core services during contract negotiations.

Level of Service

It is worth investigating the chain of command when you send a request through to the company and how urgently the request is attended to. Will you be put immediately through to a support engineer who specialises in your problem? And will that support engineer stick with the problem until it is resolved?

Alternatively, if the issue cannot be addressed while you are on the telephone, will the details of the fault be noted down and passed on to somebody specialising in your problem who will call you back as soon as they are free? How long is this process likely to take?

You should check that the company provides both telephone and remote support.

How involved and proactive will the IT support company be? For example, will representatives from the company visit your workplace regularly and make recommendations about the various ways you can upgrade and improve your system in light of your business

needs and suggest ways of cutting costs? Will this service be inclusive of their annual fee?

Monitoring

You should ask the IT support company how frequently they will monitor your servers to do a health check on the performance of your system. Will this include essential maintenance such as performing any software updates and restoring deleted files, deleting old users, data backup, log monitoring, re-setting passwords, bug fixing and ensuring there is enough disk space?

Other issues that need to be monitored on a regular basis include network usage status to avoid bottlenecks and to assist the efficient flow of data. You should also check whether the company will undertake security checks to ensure that there are no listening ports open.

Will this monitoring also identify possible future problem areas before they arise, and will it be performed remotely without any interference to your daily business affairs?

Certification

You should check whether the IT support company has the necessary vendor accreditations to carry out work on your systems and programmes without affecting the warranty.

Some IT support companies are Microsoft Certified Partners. Microsoft Certified Partners have demonstrated expertise, a broad range of experience and direct support from Microsoft.

Gaps in service

Ask the IT support company to identify the areas of support they do not cover. For example, the support offered may not include laptops

that are remote to the office or support to any software upgrades and new implementations you may be thinking of carrying out.

Service adapted to your needs

You should enquire with potential IT support companies about the various levels of support on offer to find the best level for your needs. Perhaps you just want a one-off network maintenance visit or a quick clean up after a virus or hacker has infiltrated your system. Or maybe you have some level of IT skills in-house and only need occasional help on an ad-hoc basis. Is there a pay structure for this sort of work, alongside packages that give you the choice of paying annually or quarterly?

BENEFITS OF IT SUPPORT COMPANY

Some of the benefits of have an ongoing contract with an IT support company include:

- Leaves you to concentrate on your business and customers
- Save money on expensive in-house IT staff
- Minimum downtime on your systems
- Immediate reaction to any IT problems as they arise
- Support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

PRICING GUIDE

There are many relevant variables that need to be taken into account when you are looking for IT support (see above), so it is difficult to determine how much you will have to spend to meet your requirements. Below is a rough guide to the baseline prices you can expect to pay for IT support services for your company.

Some of the different variables that will affect the price you are quoted for IT support include:

- The number of users of your IT system
- The complexity of your system
- If you want extra services included, like spam solutions and a monthly maintenance visit
- The number of days needed for onsite support

A typical contract will be for ongoing support and will include a monthly fee for help desk support and additional call out charges on top.

As a rough estimate, for an IT system with 5 users, the price for remote and onsite IT support will start at around £300.

If your IT system has 50 users, the price range for remote and onsite support can be anything from around £800 - £1400.

You should check whether there are any extra costs for any travel required by the IT support company on top of the monthly charge.