



managed computer networks

Caring for Your Technology



**Nurturing your IT;
Best Practice for SMBs**

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Challenges



As businesses grow and resources become stretched, organisations often find that their IT infrastructure no longer meet their requirements.

Outsourcing IT management places your network in the hands of professionals. This relationship can often be hampered by a lack of understanding around roles, responsibilities and timeframes. In the absence of clear guidelines and expectations, businesses grow increasingly frustrated as their IT infrastructure is unable to satisfy their business drive in a timely and efficient manner.

This is particularly concerning to small and medium sized businesses that have no other means at their disposal to address faltering infrastructure. In the process there business is able to direct its attention to more important matters.

Solutions

Aligning the goals of your business with your IT infrastructure makes sense but is often overlooked.

IT management should be proactive, not reactive.

Central to maintaining a solid IT network is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders concerned, primarily between IT service provider and the small business owner / manager. Agreeing upon formal terms provides security as well as peace of mind that all parties can expect a reasonable level of service that will allow a business's IT to function as efficiently and stress free as possible.

The implementation of Managed Service Plan provides certainty that an untimely IT crisis will be solved in a quick and agreeable manner. Through outlining routine response procedures, IT solutions can be implemented with minimal disruption to their client's business activity.



Outsourcing IT

Technology can relieve many headaches but cause quite a few also. Small businesses, whose resources are generally already stretched, are not immune from this problem. In the process of dealing with an IT crisis, small businesses are forced to redirect valuable resources to address problems they often don't understand or have the time to deal with.

Whilst the business is sidetracked by such a crisis, the core objectives of the business remain unaddressed.

In house IT technicians can remove this obstacle but are only cost effective when employed within large organisations. Outsourcing your IT places your IT needs in the hands of professionals and allows small businesses to streamline their workforce. Outsourcing and making the most of contracted professionals minimises staff expenditure on areas such as training and development and insurance which greatly affects the bottom line within an organisation.

The by-product of this is that small business managers can ensure that the people they employ are able to focus exclusively on executing the skills that they were hired for.

Finding The Right Provider

Finding the right provider to service your IT infrastructure needs to be a considered approach. IT service providers can be categorised in one of two ways. IT service providers can offer either Managed Services or work on break fix terms.

The traditional model is break fix, whereby the outsourced IT professional (or even the resident IT professional) only have their expertise enlisted when the businesses IT infrastructure breaks down.

As technology has developed though, there has been a development in the way IT is managed. Managed Services is an alternative solution whereby IT infrastructure is proactively managed so that IT problems can be diagnosed and addressed before they infect the entire businesses infrastructure.

Currently there is a significant shift by IT providers towards Managed Services offerings. According to market research analyst Techaisle, over 3.7 million small businesses (classed as having 1-99 employees) spanning the US, UK, Brazil, India, China and Australia are using some form of remote, managed services, reflecting a 19% penetration.



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This is in response to client demands for a more efficient way to address their computing, networking, storage and security support needs and help reduce the total cost of ownership of their IT. A network constantly dealing with IT issues can grossly affect the efficiency of a small business. As such, risk adverse small businesses have tended to be more vigilant with their technology through the implementation of managed services, ensuring that their IT infrastructure is always being monitored.

The movement towards managed services has fostered stronger relationships between small business and IT providers. Under the break fix model, the relationship developed purely in response to a crisis that emerged when a business experienced IT pains. The IT professional provided the solution in exchange for an exorbitant fee. The level of trust existing between IT professional and the business was minimal, as the IT professional's very livelihood depends on the failings of the businesses IT infrastructure. It also encourages IT professionals (billing on an hourly rate) to take as long as possible.

Under a managed services model, small businesses commit to paying a small monthly fee in exchange for constant monitoring by the service provider. This measure has ensured a proactive approach to IT management, allowing any potentially disastrous IT issue to be eliminated before it affects the productivity of the business. SMB's have discovered "the benefits of predictable, recurring costs over the haphazard spikes that come from incident based IT spending. Monthly or annual service fees can be calculated and incorporated into budgets, forecasts, and analyses easily, amortized over time, and measured against performance metrics. Thus, SMBs that work with MSPs have a better understanding of their IT maintenance costs and how they relate their other operational expenses and revenue streams". (Source: Ziff Davis MSP Research 2008)

Quality Assurance - The Service Level Agreement

Ensuring your IT needs are being met is best enforced through contracts.

This brings a level of certainty to your business relationship and more importantly introduces accountability. Managed Service Plans have emerged as a formal way to ensure certain standards are being met by IT professionals when monitoring the needs of their business.

Through negotiating a Managed Service Plan with an IT provider, small businesses are able to outline expectations around issues like timeframes for service delivery and continuity plans that can be put in place to support the business. Managed Service Plan's can be tailored to suit the needs of businesses and help crystallise the important processes within a particular IT environment.



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The Managed Service Plan brings a level of transparency and accountability to the business relationship. With these mechanisms in place, IT providers have no choice but to perform the tasks they promised in a timely manner. This immediately removes the distrust that has characterised the relationship between small business and the traditional break / fix IT professional.

Key Benefits

Aligning the goals of your business with your IT infrastructure is important and best achieved by utilising the services of a professional.

Through utilising a professional, businesses are able to ensure that their own staff can remain focused on achieving the tasks they were hired for. Adopting the managed services model of IT management eradicates concerns over responsibility and accountability that can be present in the small business / IT provider relationship.

This certainty is enforced through the Managed Service Plan which guides the roles and responsibilities of the IT service provider, bringing certainty to the small business manager. In the process, the small business owner enjoys peace of mind that their IT infrastructure will perform efficiently, allowing the business to focus on its core competencies.

