

# **Business Owner's Guide to Understanding Technology**

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Published & distributed by:  
Tom Wagenhauser

in association with:  
IBJ Book Publishing, LLC.  
41 E. Washington St., Suite 200  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
[www.ibjbp.com](http://www.ibjbp.com)

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ISBN 978-1-939550-40-8

First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to my loving and supportive wife,  
Kristin, and my three children: Tyler, Jacob, and Alexis.

–You will always be in my heart!

# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Finding the Right IT Provider .....	1
Chapter 2 The Cloud .....	9
Chapter 3 Hardware.....	15
Chapter 4 Networking.....	23
Chapter 5 Servers.....	29
Chapter 6 Email.....	37
Chapter 7 Malware, Viruses, Trojans, and Other Threats .....	43
Chapter 8 Security.....	51
Chapter 9 Backups.....	57
Chapter 10 Phone Systems.....	63
Chapter 11 Branch Offices.....	67
Chapter 12 Policies and Compliance.....	71
Chapter 13 Cost Worksheets.....	79
Q & A.....	85
About the Author.....	89

# CHAPTER 1



## Finding the Right IT Provider

Information Technology (IT) is the backbone of your organization. If your company's IT function is working, and all cylinders are firing as expected, your business operates as a well-oiled machine. But when your IT resources falter – downed servers, insufficient virus protection, deficient hardware, unprofessional or diminished customer support – your business, and its customers, suffer.

Simply choosing an IT service provider is easy – a simple search on the web will uncover numerous choices. Organizations have quickly come to realize that relying on external providers can reduce costs and enable faster growth. The hard part is finding the right IT provider – the company that understands the unique needs of your business. The right IT service provider will take the time to understand your company history, industry, plans for growth, and challenges your business faces on a daily basis.

### **How to Search for the Right IT Provider**

Start with the basics. The first step is determining your company needs. Consider the following questions:

- Are you looking for a proactive support model (managed services) or more of a call-as-needed, reactive support model (hourly / time and material)?
- Do you require full-time support, or do you prefer a team that offers as-needed consulting?
- Do you want a company that takes care of infrastructure only, or do you want a partner that can guide you along the path of incorporating cutting-edge resources?
- How large is your company?
- How many employees use your IT resources?
- Is 24/7 support a necessity?
- What is your budget?

Being able to answer these questions is a sign you're in a position to identify the IT service provider right for your company.

## How to Interview for the Right IT Provider

After you've established the parameters of what you need from your IT provider, the next step is to create a list of candidates. An internet search will uncover several options. Your best option, typically, is through referrals. Choosing the company that will provide your IT support is, in most cases, considerably more important than the company who fulfills your janitorial support needs. Talk to colleagues and other trusted resources about the providers they use. Ask them what they like and dislike and apply those answers to your company needs.

When you've narrowed the list to two or three candidates, your next step is to put together a set of questions to ask potential companies. Here are a few suggestions—A list of 20 questions you should ask during the interview process can be found at the end of this book:

- How long have you been in business?
- What makes your company different? Why is that important to my business?
- Do you have experience providing IT support for other companies in our industry?
- How do you determine what's best for a client?
- Do you have specific certifications or skills that align particularly well with our IT needs?
- Describe some of your recent work and accomplishments.
- Do you have established processes and procedures?
- How do you determine your pricing structure?
- How do you ensure your technicians are current on the latest technologies?

Using questions like these can help you better understand what an IT provider brings to the table. With answers in hand, you'll be in a better position to choose the one that's right for you.

## **Key Features to Consider**

Every organization has hot-button issues – the big concerns for which they expect their IT service provider to always be aware and available. The following are some of the more universal concerns:

### **1. Customer Service and Communication**

Too often, companies deal with IT providers that offer poor communication and no focus on customer service. In choosing the right IT support, select a company that understands how debilitating it is when your server goes down, or a virus gets loose on your network. The right IT provider should treat your problems as if they were their own. You can't replace the peace of mind you feel when you know your IT provider is proactively working on your problem and focused on delivering a solution.

### **2. Quality and Experience**

Can you afford to have an IT provider figure out problems as they go along? Inexperience can result in a trouble ticket taking longer than necessary to close. You want an IT provider with experience handling problems for several clients in multiple industries because they're less likely to encounter an issue they've yet to see. As a result, they can solve the problem faster, resulting in less down time. Your IT provider should employ technicians with a deep and varied skill set. Your company benefits from more qualified, experienced support, resulting in a higher quality product.

### **3. Efficiency**

The higher the quality and experience of your IT support, the greater the level of efficiency your company will recognize. You need an IT provider that will identify and implement solutions quickly, improving company efficiency. And better efficiency translates into increased output.

### **4. Multi-Disciplinary Expertise**

Your IT service provider should provide access to a deep reservoir of talent. The value of multi-disciplinary expertise can't be understated. You need an IT provider that has several experienced technicians who can pool their knowledge to attack a problem. This is one of the major reasons why a company should consider outsourcing vs. a traditional full-time employee who may be limited in capabilities.

### **5. Implementing New Technology**

Some providers struggle with the speed in which they adopt new technology. When your organization wants to implement new solutions, you can't wait for your IT resource to get up-to-speed. Vendors with a deep well of experienced resources are able to ramp up faster. It's an old saying, but it's true: Time is money.

### **6. Business Focus**

You want the comfort of knowing experts are handling your IT needs, which enables you and your employees to focus on the top priority – growing the business. Productivity from executives on down to lower level employees is enhanced when their concentration remains on job tasks. Your IT partner should help you define that separation.

### **7. Small Business Budget/Big Budget Access**

Smaller businesses can't afford to lay out the amount of money on IT support itemized by big corporations.

But companies of lesser size can ensure they compete with the top dogs by using their IT dollars wisely. Your IT provider should position you to keep up with the big dogs, improving opportunities for competition.

#### **8. Risk Management**

Your IT provider should provide the security that, regardless of business cycles and employee turnover, technology support will remain continuous. Employees may come and go but the operations will suffer fewer changes. Your IT provider can keep track of risks and also implement a mobile data management (MDM) system that can't be compromised.

#### **9. Impartial Consulting**

The IT provider you choose is there to do what's in the best interests of your company. When it comes to installation or upgrades of IT resources, personal preferences, or specific vendor relationships, are irrelevant. The right IT provider understands that delineation.

#### **10. Compliance**

Maintaining compliance standards in addition to staying focused on core business decisions can be a challenge. Your IT provider should have a wide array of resources to stay on top of compliance issues for your business, ensuring your company data – as well as that of your customers – remains secure.

#### **11. Documentation**

Your IT Provider needs to understand the value of documentation. By stressing the importance of good documentation, a service provider can maintain a list of unique business environment variables. This results in quicker resolution and can help combat retraining of new hires.

## 12. Easy to Fire

A good vendor shouldn't hold your business hostage by integrating all your systems into their product offerings that you can only get from them. Many businesses hesitate to move from an IT provider, even if they are providing poor service, because they are fearful of all the systems that are held hostage by their current provider. Make sure your IT company provides independent solutions and that you feel confident you can easily separate from them, if needed. Make them **prove** to you on a regular and consistent basis that they deserve your business.

### Costs

Beyond all the qualitative determinants of choosing the right IT provider for your business, the company you choose must also align with your budgetary needs. Many companies choose to employ full-time IT staff. But that requires dedicated expenses for salary and benefits. When your systems are running smoothly, in-house IT staff often end up sitting on their hands. Meanwhile, you're still cutting a paycheck every couple of weeks.

Your IT provider should help you improve efficiencies. Managed services contracts enable you to pay for just what you need, and at an affordable rate. By eliminating the fixed costs of permanent staff, you add flexibility to your organization's bottom line.

One other downside of full-time employees is the total labor cost. The hiring and onboarding process can be expensive and take a considerable amount of time. And after all the costs necessary to bring on a new employee, they may not work out or choose to suddenly leave for another role. And what happens when that employee decides to take a vacation and you have a system failure?

Your business may be dead in the water during that time. With an IT service provider, you can feel safe in having multiple resources available to you regardless of the time and situation.

Choosing the right IT service provider ensures you're not on the hook for as substantial an investment. If you're unhappy with the technician assigned to your ticket, you can request another resource be assigned to you.

## **Conclusion**

Every company has unique IT needs. By following the procedures and asking the questions suggested above, you'll be able to better choose the right IT provider for your organization.