

## Top 10 Things to Look for in a Technology Partner

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1. **Proactive monitoring and maintenance to reduce risk.** To prevent downtime, a managed service provider will keep your systems up-to-date with Microsoft updates, security patches, and anti-virus definitions. This regular maintenance, in addition to 24x7 network monitoring, is designed to stop problems before they cause downtime.
2. **Unlimited support.** A good managed services provider will have 24x7 support available for everyone in your organization. Support should be accessible via email, phone, and Web. Submitting a routine service ticket should be as easy, and you should be able to check the status of tickets. The best managed service providers will include unlimited on-site support in addition to remote management.
3. **Resources not available to your company internally.** A quality managed services provider will have made great investments to identify the best technology and methods—this means that anti-virus, backup tools, monitoring agent etc. are all state-of-the-art and are typically a large upgrade over the tools that a small business has in place now. Better technology for monitoring and management means less downtime.
4. **Disaster recovery planning.** A managed services provider will become familiar with your company's systems and workflow, and will create a disaster recovery plan designed to allow you to resume critical business operations after a disaster with as little downtime as possible.
5. **VCIO services.** Most managed services providers talk about the alignment of business and technology, but not all include the VCIO (Virtual Chief Information Officer) resource needed to make your technology align with your business. Quarterly VCIO visits give you a big-picture view of your technology: Because the VCIO understands your business, they are able to give you expert advice on which new technologies you could benefit the most from. A VCIO will also help with budgeting and planning by advising well in advance when aging equipment will need to be upgraded.
6. **Vendor management.** A managed services provider should offer 100% technology vendor management—this saves your business time and frustration by giving you just one contact for all technology problems. Some problems can require calls to the Internet provider, the software vendor, and the hardware manufacture...if your managed services provider offers vendor management, just let them know about the problem you're having and they will handle it from there.
7. **Complete documentation.** In addition to documenting your network (keeping an updated record of what technology is where, its specifications, and its age), a managed services provider will also document your other technology assets (like software licenses).
8. **Monthly report reviews.** A reputable managed services provider will maintain your confidence by offering statistical data about items like problems resolved, server and workstation health reports, and proactive monitoring notification summaries. This gives you a more complete understanding of the service you're receiving; these reports should be easily accessible to you.
9. **Image based backups and backup verification testing.** Nearly every managed services provider will offer backups, but not every provider includes image based backups. Image based means the entire system is backed up, including programs and settings—these backups can be restored in minutes instead of hours or days. Data loss is very costly for small businesses, so a managed services provider should offer the most advanced backup solution to protect your business.
10. **Help you use your business's resources effectively.** The goal of a managed services provider should be to maximize the return on your IT investment by driving improvements in reliability, efficiency, and productivity. In addition to being confident the money you spend on IT is being used effectively, outsourcing your IT also lets your company focus on its core competencies.