FULLYMANAGED

8 TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE PERFECT IT PARTNER

When small and mid-sized organizations are evaluating opportunities to partner with a Managed Services Provider (MSP), they often find it difficult to make an informed decision at the end of the buying process. Today, most MSPs look very similar on the surface and many will market similar service levels and scope.

This guide provides you with tips & tricks to help assess the quality, depth and capabilities of any MSP you may be considering. You will learn how different IT service providers operate and how organizations seeking these services can identify potential challenges in advance.

1 Know what you're looking for.

Are you looking for a break/fix (time and materials billing) provider or a fixed-fee (unlimited) provider? What is each provider's proficiency in meeting those needs?

If, for example, the provider generates the majority of their revenue through project services or billable time, they will not be too effective at Managed Services because this represents a relatively small number or percentage of their clients. The same is true for the reverse. Great companies exist within each predominant business model, but most concentrate their efforts on their primary revenue source (e.g. break/fix or managed services) and simply do not have the depth of focus or team capacity to be able to deliver both effectively.

More mature providers have a higher proportion of clients (around 75% of clients) subscribing to their predominant line of business and offer a more standardized service delivery platform, allowing for a far superior, polished experience as well as significantly greater value for money.

2 Assess adherence to technology standards.

Does the provider actively promote the adoptiion of technology standards? Can these standards be easily articulated and do they make sense?

Mature providers will leverage their extensive experience to develop a "best practices platform" with the aim of providing you with a stable and secure operating environment. They may recommend that you adopt these practices before becoming a client. Providers with less stringent technology standards may be willing to take on your environment tomorrow with no fees and a minimal effort to standardize; however, in our experience, this will cause a great deal of disruption as the provider learns about your specific environment and needs. We call this type of service delivery "fire-fighting" and it is not sustainable for either you or the provider in the long-term.

When evaluating your current or potential service provider, think about their technology recommendations. Are they suggesting pro-active changes to improve and standardize your environment at the beginning of the relationship?

3 Assess technology strategy capabilities.

Does the provider present a thorough, formal technology strategy to your organization? What processes are in place initially and on an ongoing basis to drive this? Who is handling this?

Although a less mature provider will indicate that they can meet your current needs, if they cannot provide you with an evaluation of your current environment and a long-term technology strategy (i.e. roadmap), there is a good chance your evolving business will quickly outpace their capabilities. A mature provider should provide you with a detailed assessment from a trained, certified consultant at the outset, along with a strategy to meet your changing business needs including a road map for your technology future.

It can be costly and disruptive to change service providers, so if you suspect they may not be able to meet your needs in the future, ask for a detailed assessment to make sure.

4 Deep dive the client onboarding experience.

What is involved in becoming a new client? if you were to sign with this provider today, what would the process look like (in detail)?

Bringing an entire ecosystem of technology under management should not be as simple as exchanging passwords and any provider who says "we can start tomorrow" should raise a red flag in your process.

To ensure a smooth "go-live" experience for your staff, look for a provider with an extensive, comprehensive and detailed onboarding process. Don't be deterred if there is a fee for this type of onboarding service or if it will take multiple weeks to complete. Proper onboarding can be a complex, resource intensive process for the provider and needs to be done right.

5 Assess the overall capacity and breadth of the organization.

What is the structure of their delivery team and will they have the right resources to manage your business needs?

When you form a partnership with an IT services provider, you are embarking on a journey together and your new partner must have the depth and experience to support the needs of your organization. It is important to ensure that the prospective provider can not only handle your basic business requirements, but can also provide proactive and strategic services to drive your business forward.

Can the provider demonstrate how services are delivered, how the teams work together and introduce you to key management staff? How many staff will be servicing you directly? Be wary of a mismatch between organization sizes.

6 Make sure you understand the fee structure.

How is the monthly fee established? How are the projects billed? What is in scope vs out of scope? Can the provider give you "black and white" confidence in their fee structure?

Several factors impact the fee structure including the number of physical locations, number of supported users, devices and backup requirements. Generally, the quality providers will have a similar "all-inclusive" pricing structure that takes into account the complexity of fully managing your environment. Although some newer service providers may appear to offer lower monthly rates than their more mature counterparts, the services offered may not be comparable and there will be additional fees for basic services that are built-in to an "all inclusive" pricing structure. Many times, there are exclusions or limitations to the service which put risk back on your organization.

When determining the value of the monthly service fees, make sure that the services offered are a direct "apples-to-apples" comparison to more established industry leaders.

7 Make sure you like each other.

Does the provider align with your organization's purpose and core values? What are their core values and how do they live them day to day? If possible, ask to visit the provider's offices. What is the feeling you get from their offices and from meeting their team?

While technology is a critical component of managing your business, making sure that the provider aligns with your values is critical to the long-term success of the partnership. Anyone can talk about culture and values, but not every provider can demonstrate a commitment to their purpose and apply their core values every day.

To make sure that the provider is a character fit for your organization, ask for a tour and observe their culture in action.

8 Let their clients do the talking.

Can the company provide powerful references and testimonials, preferably in your industry and with clients of your size and requirements?

Look for "raving fans" of the brand and ideally talk to some of their largest and most prominent clients. Typically, there are a very small number of IT service providers who have this reputation in their respective markets.

Now that you're armed with these tips and tricks, it's time to put them into action. We hope this guide makes choosing the perfect IT partner for your organization easier.

If you're interested in seeing what Fully Managed can do for you, contact us today!

Call 1.877.432.0747 or email info@fullymanaged.com.