



Good IT Support – has it been easy to find for your business?

Are you getting value for money?

How do you compare one IT company with another?

Not sure ? How about this to work with ...

... 5 Steps to Getting the IT Support Your SME Business Deserves!

### **Step 1 – How will the prospective IT support company deal with urgent matters?**

Splitting IT work up into high & low priority jobs, ask yourself these questions ...

- How fast do you want high priority (urgent problems) responded to?
- How fast do you want everything else responded to?

Be realistic. If you want urgent problems responded to immediately, you need to employ an IT person full-time.

Can you manage without your IT for the rest of the day? Some companies (maybe yours) can easily manage without their IT for half a day to a day (occasionally) without it causing any real disruption. Another business (again maybe you) might be "ultra-reliant" on their IT & need peace-of-mind that the systems they use, have the resilience to ensure continued service & responsive support no matter what. So for these businesses, anything more than a few hours downtime causes major headaches & loss of revenue.

So which one of the above is YOUR business - you need to decide which camp you are in because the cost implications are BIG!

It's not just the speed of the IT support company, it's the equipment, systems design, failover & resilience that are just as important – you aren't going to be impressed with an IT company that keeps turning up on-time but can't actually provide a reliable IT system or fix the problems properly!

Any prospective IT support company will need to clearly understand your response time expectations combined with how they are going to devise/develop your IT into a system that meets your requirements. This is a very significant set of factors in relation to how this prospective IT company will price your support. Moreover, are they capable of understanding this & delivering it?



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## **Step 2 - Geography & Hours**

Most problems can be resolved remotely nowadays – but not everything. What's the distance between your premises & the prospective IT company premises? If they need to come to you - how long is it going to take them? Often overlooked, this is of course important.

Similarly, what are your working hours - don't assume the prospective IT support company keeps the same hours.

## **Step 3 – Number of Engineers**

There are some really good “one man band” IT businesses out there. He/She might well get to know you & your business really well. Maybe too well! Trouble is, what do you do when you urgently need them & he/she is very busy with another customer, or goes sick or goes on holiday ?

At the other end of the scale, if/when you are dealing with a really big IT support company, you might well be working with a different person every single time you have any contact with that company. With big IT companies, it's not very likely that they are going to get to know you at all & hence might not know your systems too well.

If you are an SME with a reliance on IT my recommendation would be for you to choose an IT support company that has 3 or 4 technical staff; cover for when one member of the team is away or busy & you will get regular contact with the same people i.e. you need an IT support company that's not too big & not too small!

## **Step 4 - Experience & Expertise in Your Industry**

Computers are a big part of almost everyone's working life these days. It would be asking the impossible for any IT company to have a good working knowledge of every industry. But you're not interested in every industry – just yours! So ask any prospective IT support company where/when they have worked in your industry, what types of jobs have they done, what relevant expertise do they have & ask for references.

Only when they have clearly demonstrated meaningful work in your field of expertise should you consider them. Similarly, unless you are a “techie” you aren't going to be able to measure their expertise – so instead use suitable references to establish if they have credibility within your industry. By taking up the references, you'll find out if they are doing good work with “similar” companies to yours. Assuming they are, there's every chance things will work out just fine for your business as well.



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## Step 5 – Price

It might seem like putting the cart before the horse but before you seriously consider any IT support company fees, try to do these two things;

- Firstly, work out (both in terms of direct revenue loss & man hours for your staff) how much any downtime actually costs your business.
- Secondly, what is the likelihood of major problems? What's the current state of your IT. Be honest. If it's old & unreliable, don't expect miracles.

There are typically three types of contract;

- Standard call out fees against an agreed response time. E.g. IT support company will guarantee to respond within "say" 4 hours & you agree to pay a set hourly rate for the engineering time.
- Monthly retainer with on contract & not on contract fees. The retainer guarantees a response time & sometimes includes some hours each month at no additional cost. On contract hours are typically for repairs to agreed/known equipment. Not on contract relates to new work or equipment outside of the contract.
- Comprehensive. Single monthly fee to cover all support issues.

## Your 5 Steps Summary

Choose an IT support company that can respond to you in a timely manner with more than one skilled engineer hopefully not too far away.

Support for a business that can manage without it's IT for a while is very different to supporting a business where IT is mission critical.

Similarly, supporting new/modern equipment, systems & up-to-date software is very different to supporting old systems with failing technology.

If you are unsure of which type of contract you need, ask for a trial period (e.g. 3 months) rather than signing up to 12-months.

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<http://ansystems.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/the-5-steps-to-getting-it-support-your.html>



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