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The Comprehensive MSP Buyer's Guide

About US

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We are a Managed IT Services provider for small to medium-sized businesses looking to support and empower their employees with IT that enables them to be at their best in today's remote and hybrid work environment.

Our vision is bettering your world through innovative and meaningful technology. We design, implement and manage technology solutions as a means to anywhere access, from any device, from any network, for Work Life Balance, improving engagement, productivity and profit for our clients.

MSP Buyers Guide

How to Choose a Managed IT Services Partner You Can Trust

If you're considering Managed IT Services, you're making a critical investment in your organization's technology's stability, security, and performance. But the MSP industry can be inconsistent, confusing, and if you're not careful, costly in ways that don't bring value. This guide is designed to help you vet potential providers thoroughly. It's built from the perspective of someone who's been in the MSP industry for 17+ years and has seen where customers thrive... and where they get burned.

Quick Checklist: 5 Things Every MSP Must Get Right

Keep this list in mind as you read through the sections that follow. Each one unpacks what good looks like, and red flags to watch for.

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1. Value

Why It Matters:

An MSP should deliver measurable improvement whether that's reducing downtime, tightening security, boosting productivity, or helping your business grow. Without a clear value proposition and proof to back it up, you risk paying for "busy work" instead of results.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Impact stories: Real examples of customer successes and challenges solved.
- Metrics: Quantifiable results like reduced incidents, faster response times, or cost savings.
- Strategic contribution: Evidence they're more than just a help desk, they should be helping you plan, not just react.

Questions to Ask:

1. Can you share a specific example of how you've improved a client's productivity, security, or costs in the last 12 months?
2. What key performance metrics do you track for your clients, and will we have access to them?
3. .How will you measure success for our organization?

What Good Looks Like:

Recent, relevant examples backed by measurable outcomes, tied to your context.

Red Flags:

- Vague or generic responses.
- No metrics or unwillingness to share reports

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2. Profitability (for Both of You)

Why It Matters:

It might seem counterintuitive, but your MSP's profitability directly affects your service. A provider that underprices to win your business may struggle to invest in tools, staff, and training, eventually harming you.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Pricing model sustainability.
- Service capacity to invest in proactive work vs. firefighting.
- Ongoing training and staff retention strategies.

Questions to Ask:

1. How do you ensure your services remain sustainable while delivering great results?
2. How do you balance "all-you-can-eat" services with profitability?
3. What happens if our needs grow beyond the scope of the contract?
4. How do you train your staff to stay current on technology and industry trends?

What Good Looks Like:

They can explain how they stay profitable while still delivering value and why that benefits you.

Red Flags:

- "Too good to be true" pricing.
- Evasion around sustainability or scalability.

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3. Working Style

Why It Matters:
An MSP isn't just a vendor, they're an operational partner. If your working styles clash, the relationship will suffer.

Areas to Dig Into:
- Communication style and responsiveness.
- Escalation process for critical issues.
- Flexibility for emergencies and out-of-scope work.

Questions to Ask:
1. How do you handle communication and updates during a major incident?
2. How do you escalate and resolve critical issues?
3. Are urgent, unexpected problems included in our plan or billed separately?

What Good Looks Like:
Clear, documented processes for communication and escalation.

Red Flags:
- No formal escalation procedure.
- Surprise charges for urgent work.

4. Technology Stack

Why It Matters:
Your MSP's tools and platforms become your tools and platforms for better or worse.

Areas to Dig Into:
- Core platforms: productivity, security, backups, device management.
- Selection rationale for each tool.
- Integration with your systems.

Questions to Ask:
1. What tools and platforms do you use to deliver services, and why?
2. How do these choices fit with our specific needs?
3. How often do you review and update your technology stack?

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Technology Stack Continued....

What Good Looks Like:

Choices explained in terms of your needs, not vendor partnerships.

Red Flags:

- *"This is just what we always use" without rationale.*
- *Tools chosen for profit over effectiveness.*

5. Transparency

Why It Matters:

If you can't clearly understand what you're paying for, you can't manage your IT investment effectively.

Areas to Dig Into:

- *Billing clarity.*
- *Service scope in plain language.*
- *Pricing model rationale.*

Questions to Ask:

1. *Can I see a sample invoice with a clear breakdown of services?*
2. *Will you put your pricing model and service inclusions in writing?*
3. *How do you handle out-of-scope requests?*

What Good Looks Like:

Invoices that match agreed services, clear pricing terms.

Red Flags:

- *Vague line items.*
- *Unexplained fees.*

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6. Alignment

Why It Matters:
An MSP that doesn't understand your industry can expose you to compliance risks, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities.

Areas to Dig Into:
- Industry experience.
- Awareness of regulations and best practices.

Questions to Ask:
1. Have you worked with organizations like ours before?
2. How do you stay current on industry-specific requirements?
3. What does success look like for us from your perspective?

What Good Looks Like:
Proven industry expertise or a clear process to learn your field.

Red Flags:
- Generic "we work with anyone" answers.

7. Talk to Customers, New and Old

Why It Matters:
References reveal how the MSP performs during onboarding and over time.

Areas to Dig Into:
- New client onboarding experiences.
- Long-term relationship sustainability.

Questions to Ask:
1. Can I speak with a customer who joined in the last 6 months?
2. Can I speak with a customer who's been with you for 3+ years?
3. Can I speak with a client who rarely needs to open tickets but still considers you essential?
4. Can I speak with a customer who puts your support model to the test?

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Talk to Customers continued...

What Good Looks Like:

Willingness to connect you with actual clients.

Red Flags:

- *Only polished case studies.*

8. Security & Compliance

Why It Matters:

An MSP is a gatekeeper to your data and systems. Weak security practices put your business at risk.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Frameworks followed (NIST, CIS, ISO 27001).
- Security tools deployed (MDR, EDR, SIEM).
- Compliance alignment for your industry.

Questions to Ask:

1. What security frameworks do you follow?
2. How do you ensure compliance with our regulations?
3. Can you walk me through a recent incident you handled?

What Good Looks Like:

Documented policies, clear compliance expertise.

Red Flags:

- Security as an afterthought.

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9. Onboarding & Offboarding

Why It Matters:

The transition into and out of an MSP relationship can make or break your IT stability.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Documentation processes.
- Credential handover protocols.

Questions to Ask:

1. How do you plan and execute onboarding?
2. How do you ensure a smooth transition from our old MSP?
3. If we leave, how do you hand off documentation and credentials?

What Good Looks Like:

Structured, low-impact onboarding and offboarding plans.

Red Flags:

- No formal exit process.

10. Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

Why It Matters:

SLAs define the service experience you can expect.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Response and resolution time guarantees.
- Remedies for missed SLAs.

Questions to Ask:

1. What are your SLA targets?
2. How do you track SLA performance?
3. What happens if you miss them?

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SLAs continued...

What Good Looks Like:

SLAs in writing, with transparency on performance history.

Red Flags:

- Avoidance of written commitments.

11. Strategic IT Roadmapping

Why It Matters:

A great MSP helps you plan for the future, not just fix today's issues.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Quarterly business reviews (QBRs).
- vCIO or strategic advisor roles.

Questions to Ask:

1. How do you help us plan for the next 12–24 months?
2. Do you provide a dedicated account manager or vCIO?

What Good Looks Like:

Regular, proactive planning aligned to your goals.

Red Flags:

- Only reactive service delivery.

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12. Vendor Management

Why It Matters:

Your MSP may manage relationships with other tech vendors, saving you time and headaches.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Vendor escalation process.
- Procurement assistance.

Questions to Ask:

1. Will you handle vendor escalations?
2. Do you manage licensing and renewals?

What Good Looks Like:

Single point of contact for tech vendors.

Red Flags:

- Pushing vendor products without clear value.

13. Scalability & Growth

Why It Matters:

Your MSP must adapt as you grow or change.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Capacity planning.
- Flexibility in service tiers.

Questions to Ask:

1. How would you handle a 25% increase in headcount?
2. How do you adapt to new business models or acquisitions?

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Scalability & Growth continued...

What Good Looks Like:

Clear plan for scaling without service degradation.

Red Flags:

- *Inflexible agreements.*

14. Cultural & Relationship Fit

Why It Matters:

A mismatch in culture and values can undermine even the best technical service.

Areas to Dig Into:

- *Shared values and communication style.*
- *How they handle mistakes.*

Questions to Ask:

1. *Describe your company culture in three words.*
2. *Tell me about a time you made a mistake with a client and how you resolved it.*

What Good Looks Like:

Openness, accountability, and shared values.

Red Flags:

- *Overly defensive when discussing past issues.*

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15. Contract Terms, Renewal & Exit Clauses

Why It Matters:

Even the best MSP relationship can change - leadership shifts, your business evolves, or priorities diverge. You need contract terms that protect you, allow for flexibility, and give you a fair exit path if things stop working.

Areas to Dig Into:

- Term length: Are you committing for 12 months? 36 months? Month-to-month?
- Renewal conditions: Automatic renewals vs. explicit re-signing.
- Cancellation clauses: Required notice period, early termination fees, or pro-rata refunds.
- Performance escape clauses: The ability to exit without penalty if SLAs are repeatedly missed.

Your MSP may manage relationships with other tech vendors, saving you time and headaches.

Questions to Ask:

1. What is the initial contract term, and what happens at renewal?
2. Is there an auto-renewal clause, and how much notice do we have to give if we want to cancel?
3. Are there penalties for early termination, and under what conditions can we exit without fees?
4. Can we include a performance-based exit clause tied to SLA compliance?

What Good Looks Like:

Reasonable terms, clear notice periods, and flexibility if service quality declines.

Red Flags:

- Auto-renewal without clear notification.
- Multi-year lock-ins without performance outs.
- Large penalties for early termination regardless of cause.

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Final Word

If my own brother was signing an MSP contract tomorrow, these are the exact questions I'd tell him to ask.
If a provider hesitates, dodges, or hides behind jargon, walk away.

The right MSP will not only answer these questions; they'll welcome them.

Next Steps

1. **Put the Questions to Work**: Use this guide as your checklist in real conversations with MSPs. Don't just read it, ask the questions, compare answers, and see who's willing to be transparent.

2. B**ook a Discovery Call**: If you're ready to skip the guessing game, let's talk. We'll walk through your current IT setup, your goals, and where gaps might exist—no jargon, no pressure.

3. **Stay Connected:** Follow our blog and LinkedIn page for more practical resources that cut through the noise and help you make smarter IT decisions.

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