6 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE HIRING ANY IT COMPANY

Meeting Tree
COMPUTER

FROM THE DESK OF

ED SHANKER
PRESIDENT, CEO

DO YOU DEPEND ON YOUR COMPUTER NETWORK TO RUN YOUR BUSINESS?

IF YOU DEPEND ON YOUR COMPUTER NETWORK TO RUN YOU BUSINESS, YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR SURE THAT YOUR IT PROVIDER HAS YOUR BEST INTEREST AT HEART.

Imagine this: You have two employees. Both are clueless about tech. Both are scrambling to meet a critical client deadline. Then, out of nowhere, the office Wi-Fi tanks and all progress stops. Employee One tinkers in vain with the router. Employee Two sits on hold with your Internet service provider's customer frustration line, while you try to get in touch with your IT guy (or girl) who is not answering his/her phone. You have already left several messages and... they just are not getting back to you.

Fruitless hours pass and you miss your deadline. Your client bails and you kiss their trust -- and their business -- goodbye. Sound familiar?

It sounds like you are in the market for a new IT provider. And now you're faced with a difficult decision. There are so many companies out there, all of them telling you that they are the right company for you. How will you know which unknown provider will do a better job for you?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN HIRING AN IT COMPANY

And how to get exactly what you need without unnecessary extras, hidden fees and bloated contracts.

My name is Ed Shanker, President of Meeting Tree Computer. We have been providing IT services to busineses in the Hudson Valley for over 20 years now.

One of the most common questions we get from new prospective clients are: What do you do, how do you do it and how much do you charge for your services.

I wrote this report with the purpose of helping you make the most informed decision possible so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner and budget that is right for you.

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company to another, you need to understand the 3 predominant service models most of these companies fit within.

Some companies offer a blend of all 3, while others are strict about offering only one service plan.

The 3 predominant service models are:
- Time and Materials
- Managed IT Services
- Software Vendor Supplied IT Services.
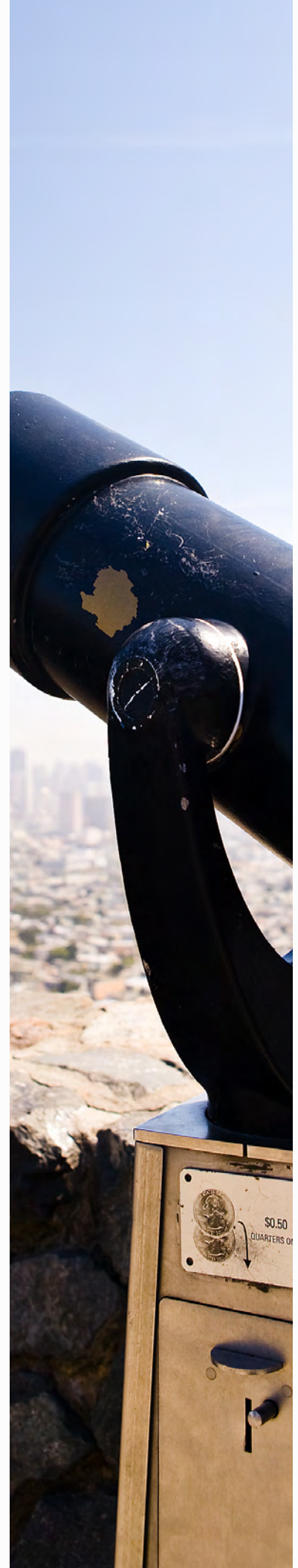
Time and Materials.
In the industry, we call this "break-fix" services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to "fix" your problem when something "breaks." Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem (like removing a virus), or it may encompass a large project like a computer network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well..

Managed IT Services. This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your "IT department" and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network.

Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services. Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an dditional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their   specific software or the server they will often refer you to "your IT department." While it's often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the "managed IT services" and "break-fix" models. Therefore, let's dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both

MANAGED IT SERVICES VS. BREAK-FIX

Which is the better, most effective solution?

You've probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

I couldn't agree more — and that's why it's my sincere belief that the managed IT approach is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for any small business.

The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn't have the time or expertise to implement (such as a network upgrade, installing a backup solution, etc.).

Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of "cure" for problems that could have easily been avoided with an "ounce" of prevention.

WHY "BREAK-FIX" WORKS ENTIRELY IN THE CONSULTANT'S FAVOR, NOT YOURS

Under a "break-fix" model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to stabilize your computer network or to resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve in-efficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer.

Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON'T want.

Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician may have resolved in a fraction of the time. here is no incentive to properly manage The time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and to find MORE problems than solutions.

Of course, if they're ethical and want to keep you as a client, they should be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that's akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they've worked to make sure you aren't getting overbilled; and since you often have no way of really knowing if they've worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

WHY REGULAR MONITORING AND MAINTEANCE IS CRITICAL FOR TODAY'S COMPUTER NETWORKS

The fact of the matter is, computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold — not to mention the type of data we're now saving digitally — has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations and who work around the clock to do one thing: compromise your networks for illegal activities.

In most cases their intent is to access financial information and passwords to rob you (or your clients), create fake identities for credit card fraud, etc. In other cases they may want to use your computer network to send illegal spam, host pirated software, spread viruses, etc. and some do it just for the "fun" of being able to make computer systems inoperable. These criminals work around the clock in teams, constantly finding and inventing new ways to get around your antivirus software and firewalls; that's why you have to remain ever vigilant against their attacks.

Of course, this doesn't even take into consideration other common "disasters" such as rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (which are the #1 reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

SHOULD YOU JUST HIRE A FULL-TIME IT MANAGER?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 100 employees to hire a full-time IT person, because you can outsource this function of your business far cheaper and with a lot less work; but you DO want to hire a professional to perform basic maintenance just as you would hire an attorney to handle your legal matters or an accountant to prepare your taxes.

FOCUSING ON CORE BUSINESS IS A MAIN MOTIVATION FOR OUTSOURCING IT FUNCTIONS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

There are several basic questions to ask when looking for an IT provider.

Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical.

Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you; then make sure you get this IN WRITING.
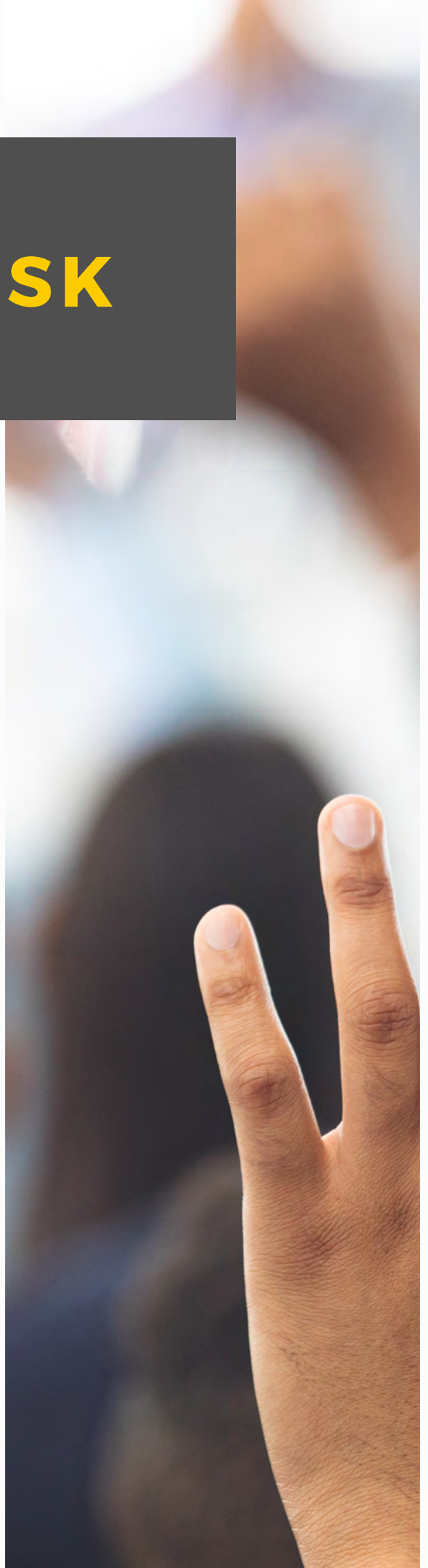
ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

BELOW ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION:

IS IT AN ESTABLISHED BUSINESS WITH A LONG HISTORY IN THE INDUSTRY?

You are going to invest time, money and resources in managing this partnership, so you want to make sure they are going to be there next year.

HOW IS SUPPORT DELIVERED?

Many providers offer multiple levels of support, allowing you to choose according to your needs and budget. Be sure you know what your support contract includes, as well as what it does not include.

Are they remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up to date?

Do they consistently and proactively offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

WHAT DO THESE SERVICES COST?

Partnering with an MSP involves an investment. In many instances this investment will save money down the road. However, make sure to find out how and when you will be charged.

Do they offer a flat rate fee or fixed-fee project quotes, or do they give themselves a wide open playing field with "time and materials' ?

Do they charge an onboarding fee? What happens when you move locations or hire new people? What is projects take longer than expected? Are these expenses that you should budget for in addition to the regular fees?

HOW DO THEY HANDLE SERVICE REQUESTS?

Do they answer their phones 'live' and response to support issues in 1 hour or less or do you have to get in line to get your questions answered in a timely fashion?

HOW IMPORTANT IS DATA SECURITY TO THEM?

Data security should be paramount. Ask them if they educate their team and their clients on cyber security to keep networks safe, Are they up to date on data compliance requirements specific to your type of business or location?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Not a week goes by where we don't get a "911 crisis call" from a business owner with a major technical disaster that COULD have been prevented. Why do so many businesses pay for substandard computer support? Simply because they don't know how to truly verify that their network IS secure and end up have to take someone at their word.

Quite honestly, I am regularly shocked at the oversight, sloppiness of some the self proclaimed experts and want to see the standard raised.

The 5 questions posed in this report are meant as an acid test that you can use to determine whether or not your network is really being supported properly and that you are receiving the customer service that you deserve from your IT provider.

Let us show you *how* we can solve your IT problems.

We live the concept of Assess - Plan - Managed & Protect with our clients. We understand the typical problems that many businesses face and over the years we have tried and tested all the best IT hardware and software, and we've pulled together a portfolio of services that we know best meets the needs of business owners.

We will work with you to assess where your IT pain points are and make a series of suggestions to bring you up to standard.

Of course we carry out the work for you if needed, but there is no obligation to buy from us ever.

Let's have a no obligation chat about your business. You can call me or my team at 845-237-2117 or email us at info@meetingtreecomputer.com

HOW WE WORK WITH OUR MANAGED CLIENTS

1. IT STARTS WITH A SIMPLE CALL

On this call we will discuss your unique situation and IT pain points. We will answer any questions that you might have and start mapping your concerns. It is the perfect time to find out if we are a good fit for each other.

2. ONSITE ASSESSMENT

We will meet with you at your place of business and evaluate your current IT infrastructure and learn about your business. Knowing what you do will help us to create a customized plan to relieve your IT burdens, which we will then review with you..

3. IF WE ARE A FIT

We will implement solutions that will have an immediate positive impact on your business. We will work with you and your team to ensure that both your IT and your security goals are achieved..

4. YOUR SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

From now on we are only a phone call away. We manage your system behind the scenes so that you can work without interruptions. And you'll breathe a sigh of relieve knowing that your network's health and security is in good hands.

We Make I.T. Easy

WE MAKE IT WORK

Managed Services Providers (MSPs) offer significant benefits, including improved security, enterprise-level expertise and up-to-date technology without prohibitive capital expense. But not all MSPs deliver the same level of service. Make sure to ask the right questions when choosing an outsourced IT provider.

Meeting Tree
COMPUTER

CONTACT US

LET'S HAVE A NO OBLIGATION
CHAT ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS.

YOU CAN REACH US HERE:

CALL US AT:

845-237-2117

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

www.meetingtreecomputer.com

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA: