



# 9 Questions to Ask Before Choosing an IT Partner

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## Before Choosing an IT Partner

Nearly every facet of your business relies on technology. When technology fails, it can cause crippling disruptions that threaten productivity, customer service and, ultimately, your revenue and reputation.

Like you, we believe that IT should lead your business to success, not cause delays and loss.

As one of Northeast Ohio's leading IT managed service providers (MSPs) for the last two decades and counting, we know that optimizing your business's IT infrastructure can:

- Increase operational efficiency
- Delight clients
- Improve your bottom line

We also understand that the right partner will cultivate sustainable business growth and ensure your IT is strong, secure and strategic. (That's where we come in.)

This guide will explain which 9 questions you should ask to find the IT partner that can lead your business to success.

# The Questions

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Can you explain what makes your team qualified to address my company's IT issues?

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Can you explain what makes your team qualified to address my company's IT issues?

There are more than 20,000 MSPs in North America<sup>†</sup>. These technology partners vary in shape, size and capacity, but many use the same buzzwords. As a business leader, it's not always easy to tell whether an MSP has the skills and expertise your business needs.

**A few follow-up questions might include:**

- What do you do to keep your team educated on the most recent technology trends and best practices?
- How many team members would you dedicate to working with my company?

Not all MSPs have the same level of experience, and some industries (especially those in highly regulated industries like healthcare) have different needs than others. By asking these questions, you can quickly identify whether a provider has the competencies your business requires.

<sup>†</sup>According to [ChannelE2E](#), a leading provider of information and research for MSPs.

## What will you do to provide our company with IT leadership?

Your company is not static. Your priorities and goals change as your company evolves, and your IT partner should adapt their services and process to maximize your growth. They shouldn't only address your objectives today, but anticipate future needs in a way that empowers your people and facilitates positive change.

### **A few follow-up questions might include:**

- What does the onboarding process look like?
- Will you provide leadership and management of technology vendors and third parties?
- Could you explain how you'll manage my IT budget, roadmap and vision?
- How will you continue to improve my team's experience?
- Who are your virtual CIOs and what are their qualifications and backgrounds?

Asking these questions will help ensure you're choosing a partner who will grow alongside your business and support you well into the future.

## What do your fees include?

The last thing you want is to be stuck with hidden fees and end up paying more for IT support than you intended. That's why it's essential you understand all the costs before you commit to working with an MSP.

Keep in mind, even MSPs with subscription-based models may set limits on the number of users or the hours of support that they provide.

### A few follow-up questions might include:

- Is your IT service subscription-based or pay-per-use? (Most MSPs use a subscription model, whereas typical break/fix services are pay as you go.)
- Does your contract clearly indicate what support is part of your program and what isn't?
- Does your support cover project work, and are the materials covered or just the time?
- Are there limits to the service you provide (e.g., the number of users or time of day)?
- Do you have a **guarantee for the services** you provide?
- Do you charge any initial setup fees or onboarding costs?

Your IT services provider should be able to provide you with an explicit Service Level Agreement (SLA) that outlines what they'll provide for you. Make sure you explain precisely what your organization needs and what you expect you'll need in the future. The SLA should meet those needs.

## How fast does your team resolve issues?

When your computer or IT systems are down it often feels like you can't get any work done—and it's frustrating. We get it. The technology we all use is complex, and solutions are rarely simple so it can be tough for an engineer to tell you exactly when your problem will be solved. By asking this question, you'll get an idea of how the IT provider resolves issues and what to expect when you experience a problem.

### **A few follow-up questions might include:**

- How quickly can we expect an engineer to begin working on an issue when we reach out with a problem?
- What's your process for escalating IT issues and making them high priorities?
- Can you explain how you'll keep us abreast of your resolution progress?
- What are your service level agreements?

A good technology partner will be honest about their timeline and process for addressing every technology issue that comes their way.

## How do we know you're doing what you say you're doing?

You don't want your IT partner to be like the Wizard of Oz—all bluster with nothing behind the curtain.

They should be proactively informing you of all project updates and changes as well as ensuring you have the final say in any decisions made for your IT network. You should never be left wondering why your MSP is doing something or how long a project may take.

### **A few follow-up questions might include:**

- How often do you communicate with your clients?
- What measures do you take to ensure transparency?
- Can you describe how you'll communicate when something needs to be changed, overhauled or updated?

A great IT partner should provide you with a roadmap for every project—that includes clear timelines and budgets—and hold themselves accountable to you.



## In what ways will you deliver your service?

IT support can be delivered in many ways: Over the phone, in person, via remote support, through a ticketing system—or a combination of all of the above.

While it's important to rely on an IT partner that's easily accessible, it's even more important to receive clear communication from a reliable team.

The best IT partners offer transparent and supportive communication that sets expectations that everyone can understand. They will also let you know exactly how you and your team will be communicating with them.

### **A few follow-up questions might include:**

- Is your support local, or do you outsource it to another company or country?
- Can I visit your support facilities to learn more about your processes?
- Will I need to speak with a different representative every time, or will you **assign a point person** to my account?

When it comes to service, you don't want any unpleasant surprises—like trying to explain your problem five different times to five different people. The more streamlined their processes, the fewer headaches you'll have to ensure if something goes awry.

## How will you work with my current IT team?

Whether you have an existing team of IT professionals on staff who just need a little extra help, or you only have one team member who's handling everything alone, it's essential your MSP is prepared to work with any existing employees.

Equally important is your MSP clearly explaining who's in charge of what. You don't want a lack of clarity to lead to assumptions and loss (e.g., your business losing everything following a server crash because your IT team thought the MSP was in charge of backups when they weren't).

### **A few follow-up questions might include:**

- How will you communicate with our IT team?
- In what ways will you collaborate with our IT team on a project?
- Can you explain how you'll give my team visibility into your efforts?
- What can you do to help make my current team better?

Be sure to ask how they have worked collaboratively in the past, what they have seen work well and how they have witnessed collaborations fail. Every co-management model is unique, but you need to ensure that they have the experience to work with your team—without stepping on any toes.

## How do you handle an emergency IT situation outside of regular business hours?

When it comes to IT emergencies, it's not a matter of **if** it's going to happen, but **when**. How an IT partner is prepared to respond in the event of an emergency is a good indicator of the service you'll receive when something goes amiss.

### A few follow-up questions might include:

- Will you provide a recovery plan customized to my business needs?
- If my network goes down, how quickly can you get my system up and running?
- Are you prepared to handle issues at inconvenient times, such as in the middle of the night?
- Do you take proactive IT measures, or are your solutions strictly reactive?

While there's no such thing as a convenient time for an IT concern, encountering a breach or outage after-hours can be especially catastrophic if your provider isn't available. After all, when the average cost of IT downtime is \$5,600 per minute\*, even a half-hour delay can be disastrous for your company.

Your IT provider should be flexible and capable enough to respond to threats at any time—whether it's noon on a Tuesday or 3 a.m. on a Saturday.

\*According to [data from Gartner](#), the world's leading research and advisory company.

Do you  
have any  
references  
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speak with?

It's crucial to find out whether an MSP has served similar-sized companies within the same industry as you, and what processes they've put in place to ensure satisfaction. After all, IT providers have access to all your most critical systems, and you want to be sure that you can trust them with the keys to your castle. Just as you wouldn't hire someone without checking references, the same can be said for selecting an IT provider.

**A few follow-up questions to the MSP might include:**

- Have you ever worked with another organization in this industry?
- What measures do you take to ensure a top-quality customer service experience?

**A few follow-up questions to the reference might include:**

- How responsive are they to your needs?
- Is the skill set of the engineers adequate?
- How is the customer service experience?

In addition to references, ask if the MSP has any **case studies or customer success stories** they'd be willing to share. This will give you an idea of their level of service and the types of clients they work with.

# No Two MSPs Are Alike

A managed services provider is more than just a vendor—they should be a trusted partner who will support your business and your team. To choose the right partner, it's crucial that you understand their approach, skill set, culture, communication style, collaboration processes and more.

No two MSPs are alike, but asking these nine questions will help you narrow down your options so that you can find the right one.

***Ready for more secure and strategic IT? Take the first step.***

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Experts Today

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