BUYING GUIDE FOR
MANAGED SERVICES

How to Pick the Right Managed IT Service Provider for your Small Business

SILVERLEAF
Computer Services

GETTING STARTED

If you are like most executives, buying technology can be exciting, hopeful, uncertain, frustrating and everything in between. You must identify requirements, weigh competing needs, evaluate capabilities, assess ROI and consider a host of other factors – all of which can be overwhelming, especially when they involve new delivery models like managed services.

The *Silverleaf Buying Guide for Managed Services* is designed to provide you with a starting point.

From providers to pricing to contracts terms, there are many elements you should consider when deciding whether to engage a managed services provider (MSP) for some or all of your IT needs. Even for the most tech-savvy of businesses, evaluating managed services can be a complicated and challenging endeavor.

We created this guide to assist you in navigating the decision-making process for a managed services engagement. This guide is not intended to be a Consumer Reports-style product review, but rather a framework for "asking the right questions" to ensure that you are making an informed decision.

What you will find in the *Silverleaf Buying Guide for Managed Services*:

1. OVERVIEW
- What are managed services?
- Who are managed services providers?
- How are managed services delivered?
- How are managed services purchased?
- What IT functions are delivered as managed services?

2. CONSIDERATIONS
- What are the benefits of managed services?
- What are the challenges of managed services?
- What are sample business cases for managed services?

3. QUESTIONS
- What are the MSP's capabilities and offerings?
- What are the MSP's data protection and accountability policies?
- What is the MSP's level of support?
- What is the MSP's expertise?
- What are the MSP's costs and contract terms?

OVERVIEW
UNDERSTANDING MANAGED SERVICES

The term "managed services" is at best vague and at worst confusing. As a technology buyer, this can make it more difficult for you to search for a managed services provider (MSP), frame a conversation with a potential provider and, ultimately, decide what's best for your organizations' IT needs.

That's a shame since the potential benefits of the managed services model can hold significant value for your business – no matter its size. Indeed, there's no "one size fits all" in managed services. By its nature, the model is scalable and, therefore, can address the smallest, most discrete technology need for one company while also tackling the full range of IT demands for another.

To get a better understanding of managed services, let's clarify the definition:

WHAT ARE MANAGED SERVICES?

The central tenet of the managed services model is a provider-customer relationship based on a contract backed by a service level agreement (SLA).

In practice, the managed services model is a form of outsourcing that involves contracting with a third-party MSP to handle one or more of your company's IT services, such as email, help desk, security, etc. The MSP is tasked with remotely monitoring, updating and managing your IT services as part of a contractual arrangement that typically spans one to three years. The MSP's work is guaranteed under the terms of an SLA, which usually covers performance expectations and metrics, such as Internet uptime and 24/7 support as well as remediation steps and remuneration should something go wrong.

Additionally, an MSP may offer reporting on not only the technical actions that have been taken to maintain your IT solutions, but also intelligence gleaned from data, traffic patterns and activities that will allow your organization to make tactical and strategic decisions that can improve your business performance.

Similarly, today's MSPs are spending an increasing amount of time with their customers on strategic issues outside of the day-to-day tech concerns. While quarterly business reviews are standard operating procedure, 4 in 10 MSPs surveyed in a 2016 study[1] said they spent time – in person or virtually – with their clients' business and technology stakeholders on a monthly basis in order to help them plan for future needs and align technology with business goals.

What Are Managed Services?
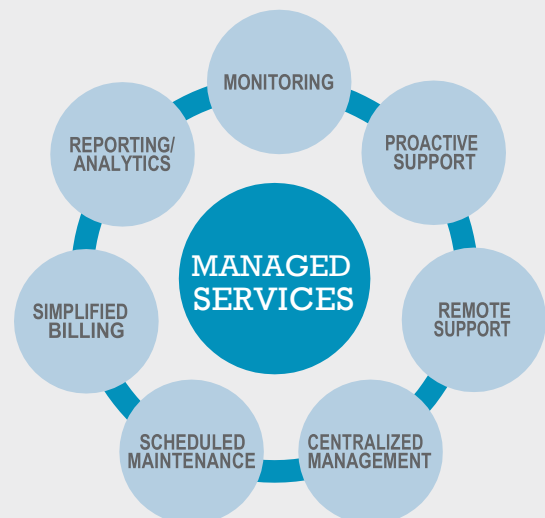
Thanks for reading! We hope you found this Buying Guide Preview to be useful.

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Silverleaf Computer Services Inc.
14320 Ventura Blvd Unit 340
Sherman Oaks, CA 91423

+1 818 296 9432

silvercomputer.net