

Title:

Is It Time to Call an IT Expert?

Word Count:

814

Summary:

<p> Establishing a relationship with an expert can bring peace of mind </p>

Keywords:

Small Business Ideas, Small Business Startup, Small Business Specialists

Article Body:

<p>When it comes to making important decisions about technology, small business owners often find themselves in a difficult position. Many lack the time to thoroughly research solutions that could benefit their operations. But they also lack the resources to dedicate staff to information technology (IT) matters. </p>

<p>So what often happens is the small business owner takes the advice of friends and relatives ... or does nothing. </p>

<p>A better alternative is to find an IT expert with experience helping small businesses address their technology needs. And that can be a challenge. Many consulting firms focus on larger enterprises where commitment to IT is often stronger – and revenue potential greater. </p>

<p>However that is changing as more technology providers are focusing on the small business market and developing partner networks to ensure support for the solutions they're providing to small businesses. </p>

<h2>Signs You Need an IT Expert </h2>

<p>There are some obvious signs that your business needs IT help: </p>

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<td class="listBullet" valign="top">• </td>

<td class="listItem"><p>Downtime from increasingly frequent computer crashes is seriously affecting productivity </p></td>

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<td class="listBullet" valign="top">• </td>

<td class="listItem"><p>Employees who think they know how to fix problems are actually creating new problems </p></td>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<p>You've patched together several different systems and they aren't working well together</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">•	<p>You know your business could benefit from a technology upgrade but you have no idea where to begin</p>
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If you've decided you need to bring in professional IT help, you have a couple of choices on how to proceed. Short-term, you could locate an IT expert to fix what is broken and perhaps set up a maintenance contract to help avoid similar problems in the future. This may be an appropriate scenario if technology isn't central to your business operations.

However, you may want to take a longer term approach and develop a true "partnership" with an IT expert who specialises in small business. That way you get assistance with your immediate concerns. At the same time, the expert will get to know you and how your business operates. Together you can develop and implement – as resources permit – an IT strategy that fulfills your vision of where you want to take your business.

Finding the Right Expert

There are various qualifications to consider when you select an IT expert to partner with. But all things being equal, it may come down to your best instincts about who is the right fit for your business. You want to develop a long-term relationship with someone you can trust will do what is best for your business. You are hiring a technology expert because you don't have the time and/or the expertise to investigate solutions yourself. That means you need to convey what you want to achieve, what your budget allows – and in the end you'll have to be able to trust the recommendations your IT expert makes.

Here are other considerations as you interview IT experts:

Referrals – You may be reluctant to take technology advice from friends and relatives, but it never hurts to ask for referrals from trusted business colleagues who are satisfied with their IT experts. It's a good place to begin your search.

Location – With the internet it is possible to problem-solve technology issues from thousands of miles away. But not everyone is comfortable with that arrangement. You need to decide whether you would prefer to find a local expert who is available to come on-site?

Expertise – IT experts who specialise in working with small businesses have experience working with solutions designed for small businesses. They also understand the resource constraints that small businesses typically face. As you talk to potential experts, ask about their knowledge of operations

similar to yours; some may specialise by industry. Also enquire about certifications in products you currently use or are likely to consider. If you use line-of-business applications, enquire about the expert's background working with these as well. </p>

<p>Support – If you are seeking a long-term arrangement, make sure the prospective experts you talk to understand that. Find out if they are able to train and support your team as they learn a new system. Are they available around the clock if you need them to be? If you're working with a small firm, is there adequate backup so your needs are met during vacations or illness? </p>

<p>In the end, what you are after is peace of mind. Make sure your IT expert can deliver it. </p>