Title:
Third-Party Hardware Maintenance vs Manufacturer's Warranty: What's Best For Your Business?

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Summary:
When purchasing computer hardware for your business, system availability is a major consideration. While you hope it will remain reliable, you need to manage the risk that at some time a critical system component will fail, calling for hardware maintenance.

Such failures often result in the system being unavailable to users until repaired. This 'system down-time' can be very costly when users sit idle and unproductive.

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Such failures often result in the system being unavailable to users until repaired. This 'system down-time' can be very costly when users sit idle and unproductive.

Many assume that the standard manufacturer's warranty will adequately protect them. But the 'small print' of standard warranties can result in less than satisfactory hardware maintenance results for businesses. Even expensive warranty uplifts may not deliver adequate protection against these costs.

RESPONSE TIMES

One of your systems fails, so you call the warranty-provider's telephone hotline and speak to an operator in a call centre -- perhaps overseas -- who simply

takes a message.

If the failed system is under a 'next business day' telephone response arrangement for hardware maintenance, then your staff could be unable to do their job for a day or more before the warranty provider even gets around to diagnosing the problem. And with a 'best effort' onsite response, it could be several days before a hardware maintenance engineer arrives.

If the system loss has company-wide impact then the implications are even more serious. Standard warranties only cover you for hardware maintenance during working hours -- so a failure on a Friday afternoon could leave your business crippled well into the following Monday.

Businesses that can't afford this sort of downtime should look to specialist third party hardware maintenance providers that maximise system availability by tailoring support arrangements to meet your specific business needs.

Look for hardware maintenance service providers who offer short, defined response times -- such as a guarantee of a response to your call within ten minutes from a trained hardware maintenance engineer who will solve your issue, and on-site response within two hours for critical system failures.

Also look for organisations who will assign a hardware maintenance engineer permanently to your account. This ensures that they become familiar with your IT environment and personnel -- a factor crucial to ensuring speedy response and resolution of critical system failures.

PARTS HOLDINGS

Hardware maintenance response times are irrelevant if you then have to wait for parts to be shipped from interstate or overseas. Equipment manufacturers generally hold replacement components for warranty service in a single location nationally. As a result, you may be waiting for 24 to 48 hours while the part you need is shipped, delivered and installed.

A hardware maintenance provider which is focussed on maximising system uptime holds spares locally to shorten delivery times. Ask potential service providers for an explanation of their parts holding strategies and methodologies. Find out what ratio of spares are held against systems under contract and whether these parts are regularly tested. With sufficient local spares, hardware maintenance engineers can attend site with the appropriate part in hand to further speed the repair process.

BEYOND HARDWARE 'BREAK-FIX'

A standard warranty will only cover you for the repair of your system, including the delivery and installation of replacement parts, and provides no guarantees as to when your hardware maintenance issue will be resolved.

A hardware maintenance service tailored to maximise systems availability, however, offers a lot more, including:

- taking ownership of the 'grey' areas -- such as operating system issues and other causes of hardware problems.

- a first-call fix rate of over 95% -- which means you won't have to wait for multiple engineer visits before system functionality is restored.

These superior service levels meet the operational needs of businesses which are dependent on system availability. Ask potential hardware maintenance providers for customer testimonials and references to substantiate their service levels.

SO, IS A STANDARD MANUFACTURER'S WARRANTY REALLY GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

A standard warranty service might be 'free', but having staff unable to work -- or customers able to contact you -- could end up costing your business heavily in the long run. Even expensive warranty uplifts do not completely mitigate the risks.

The good news is that specialised and highly-focused third-party hardware maintenance solutions are available to solve this problem.

Your hardware maintenance agreement can be tailored to meet your specific operational needs and risk management strategy. Paid on a monthly basis, they offer you better cash flow and operational flexibility -- for around the same as a manufacturer's warranty uplift.

But most importantly, they can reduce system downtime by many hours a year -- saving you many thousands in lost productivity and revenue.