



MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDERS

12 Critical Questions to Ask When Choosing a Managed Services Partner.

Choosing the right Managed Services Provider (MSP) is an enormous decision for your company.

These days, technology is changing at lightning-fast pace and more businesses (big and small) are opting to partially or fully outsource their IT needs.

MSPs offer a broad range of IT capabilities. Whether you have an in-house IT team that just requires extra support, or you need an end-to-end provider, you need to determine what questions to ask a potential MSP before signing a contract.

The right managed services partner can make a huge difference to your efficiency and to your bottom line.

Here we outline 12 critical questions you should ask a potential MSP.

When choosing an MSP, doing your homework can really pay off.



At the end of the day you are choosing a business partner, not just deploying a service.

Huon IT is committed to helping businesses with technology, strategy and IT support services.

To learn more, feel free to call us today on 1300 HUON IT (4866 48).



W www.huonit.com.au | **E** info@huonit.com.au

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What kind of reputation and experience do they have?

The last thing you want is for your MSP to be understaffed and underqualified.

You want at least a basic idea of the size of the team, and their positions. What is the ratio of IT experts to sales staff? You want to ensure that your MSP has a robust team that can cover all your requirements.

How long has the company been in operation and what is their staff retention like?

What certifications do they hold? Do they follow [best practice ITIL methodologies](#)?

2

What do they outsource?

Many MSPs white label or outsource certain services, using either local or offshore resources. If the MSP does outsource some roles, find out exactly what functions are managed externally. You may want to ask similar questions about the companies that they outsource to. That is, what experience do they have, where are they located, what are their SLAs?

If any issues arise, you want to make sure you know exactly how to call, and when. You also want to know that there is constant monitoring and support available.

3

Will you have a single point of contact for the MSP?

Will you have one person, or even a small-team available, to help manage your account? There's a fine balance between the convenience of a single contact versus risks associated with knowledge redundancy if that person is away.

We believe the ideal scenario is ensuring a small group of people are familiar with your business to overcome knowledge redundancy in case your key account manager is absent. Huon IT achieves this through Customer Care Units, where each customer is assigned a dedicated lead consultant, secondary consultant, and an account manager, who are all intimate with their site.

Also, find out what kind of site documentation the MSP keeps regarding your account and how they share their knowledge base.

4

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) – what's NOT included?

What services are covered under your contract, and what lies outside of it? It's extremely important to understand this early on to protect yourself from hidden fees down the track.

Managed service providers can differ on how they provide services so ask for a detailed breakdown of inclusions and exclusions.

How quickly will someone respond to your call? Do they have written guidelines for response times?

5

Do they offer a collaborative ticketing system?

Most MSPs will have a formal escalation and ticketing system in place. Find out if you have visibility of the ticketing system so that you can track your progress. Will you be able to see your ticket queue, who has been assigned to the task, and what is the status of the issue?

Huon IT provides clients with logins to their ticketing portal, and even offers shared helpdesk software so you can use it internally, too. This allows in-house IT teams to decide if they will manage a ticket themselves or escalate to the MSP for assistance.

Transparency plays a big role in the relationship between your company and the managed service provider. The best MSPs end up being more like employees working for your business, rather than just another external supplier.

6

What assistance do the MSPs provide with planning and budgeting?

Every business needs to plan and budget for the year ahead. Will your MSP be able to proactively contribute to your business planning and help accurately plan for your IT expenditure? Huon IT performs an annual audit for all our managed service clients, which forms the basis of an annual plan including both CAPEX and OPEX budgets.

Your MSP should help translate your business goals into a clear technology plan to reach your objectives.

7 Do they conduct regular quality checks?

How often does the MSP review your account? Do they conduct regular IT reviews? Do they use an external auditor, or do they conduct the review internally?

8 What security, monitoring and back-up measures do they have in place?

A conscientious MSP knows that the security of your data is paramount. Find out what security measures are in place to protect your data internally and externally.

How do they manage your passwords? An MSP has access to all your administrator passwords, so it is crucial that you ensure they are using a secure password system to store, access and manage them going forward.

Another common source of vulnerability comes from systems that are not routinely updated with the latest software patches. How often will the MSP update or perform maintenance on your infrastructure?

How often is the MSP backing up your data? Is it daily, weekly or monthly? This simple task can save thousands of dollars, and priceless reputational damage, down the track.

9 What kind of reporting and communication do they provide?

Does the MSP provide monthly status reports? How regularly will they meet with you? Are the meetings face-to-face or over the phone?

Important, proactive reporting to expect might include:

- Whether SLAs have been met
- Support ticket breakdown and trends
- Backup success report
- Storage and server performance and capacity
- Internet usage, including top users & sites visited
- Antivirus status
- Maintenance program update

10 Does the MSP offer flexible billing options?

Different companies have different IT needs. Some need end-to-end care of their entire IT including system monitoring, management and remediation. In this instance, a fixed price arrangement is the best option. These might be based on per device or per user metrics. Understand this in advance so you can forecast for growth, and don't shy away from asking for discounts for longer term commitments, such as 24 or 36-month contracts.

However, if you only require occasional escalation support or perhaps coverage during peak workloads and staff absences, then ad hoc, block hour or even secondment arrangements may be desirable. In this case, just ensure that you receive detailed usage reporting along the way to avoid any bill shock later.

An MSP should be able to provide you with a variety of options so that you can select the most economical option for the long term.

11 What is their service management methodology?

Asking about the MSPs service management methodology will give you an understanding of their ticket management and workflow system, their service level management, problem management process, quality and performance management plan, reporting process, and more.

12 How will the MSP transition you from your old IT provider to their service?

Changing IT providers is a process and should be given the attention it deserves. The greatest priority should be to ensure risk is minimised as much as possible.

Find out how the MSP conducts transitions and what process they follow to mitigate risk. Do they have a formalised onboarding process? How will they manage site lockdown, including changing of all passwords? How do they resource staff through change? Do they provide a training program for end-users?

To find out why our customers chose Huon IT, click on these links:

12 CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR **MANAGED SERVICES PROVIDER**



☐ What kind of reputation and experience does the MSP have?

☐ What do they outsource?

☐ Will you have a single point of contact for the MSP?

☐ Service Level Agreements (SLAs) – what's NOT included?

☐ Do they offer a collaborative ticketing system?

☐ What assistance do the MSPs provide with planning and budgeting?

☐ Do they conduct regular quality checks?

☐ What security, monitoring and back-up measures do they have in place?

☐ What kind of reporting and communication do they provide?

☐ Does the MSP offer flexible billing options?

☐ What is their service management methodology?

☐ How will the MSP transition you from your old IT provider to their service?
