

EBOOK GUIDE

Finding Your Way Through **IT Managed Services**

Resultant
Partners with Purpose



Welcome.

Nobody hikes Everest without a guide, and you wouldn't drive cross-country without GPS. Leaning on an outside provider for IT managed services helps your organization stay on course—safely and efficiently—without adding experts to your staff.

On the plus side, your budget goes a lot farther if you outsource. The potential downsides are daunting, though: How do you know which provider to trust? What do you look for in an IT managed services provider? What if you end up in the wrong partnership?

This is your livelihood, after all.

Consider the information to come your roadmap to finding the right guide. A primer on what IT managed services can do for you and the important questions you'll want to ask in your quest for a partner who helps your business thrive



Find out more.
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Defining IT Managed Services

At its core, IT managed services—also called outsourced IT—means enlisting a partner who ensures everything you use to create, share, and save information is in good working order.

They're the eyes on your systems and your resource when anything goes wrong. They work to ensure your computers and servers and everything that supports them—the firewalls, software, applications—are up to date and functioning as they should.

That's a lot. And although the overarching mission—helping your technology facilitate your business—is the same for almost any provider you consider, the details vary depending on the business, people, and technology you rely on. Here's a partial list of the services that go into the job:

- Network monitoring
- 24/7/365 end-user support
- Backup and disaster recovery
- Warranty renewals
- Compliance maintenance
- Cybersecurity
- Unified communications
- Equipment and software selection
- IT strategy
- Server patching

Based on the contract terms you define (more on that later), you pay your IT managed services provider a monthly fee, and in return you receive the level of support your organization needs.



What an IT Managed Services Provider Can Bring to Your Business

If you've experienced an outage, you know how costly it is. An IT managed services provider keeps you from experiencing that kind of catastrophe, whether from security breach or network malfunction or any of the dozen other ways your system can go sideways. Proactive monitoring identifies potential issues early and heads off problems immediately so that your servers, network, and security function effectively.

From that element alone, you gain back the time you're currently losing to technology issues. A skilled partner brings even more to your organization.

When you work with a provider who develops comprehensive knowledge of your organization and goals, you get more than resolution to issues as they arise. You get the kind of support that enables you to fully utilize your technology and make sure it grows with you.

Unless you fall into a very tiny minority of businesses, you could be getting more from your technology. Assessing the technology you have on hand and how your teams work highlights potential that a provider can help you take advantage of. With that detailed knowledge, your provider becomes a resource for shaping IT strategy to help your organization become more efficient and effective, alerting you to opportunities for improvement and helping prioritize technology spending so that you get the most from your budget.

A skilled provider functions like an internal IT director for your organization but brings the perspective of a much broader universe of possibility. They know what has worked and what to avoid because they have a wide range of experience helping other organizations get more from technology.

The Evolution of IT Managed Services

IT outsourcing began as a kind of office-within-your-office solution for very large organizations that couldn't keep up with their own growth and the growth of technology. It has since become an excellent option for businesses of all sizes. Cloud technology expanded offerings and brought new talent into the marketplace, meaning that even a small business can enlist top-notch expertise, even if they never meet face to face.

FIRST, THERE WAS A SIMPLE BREAK/FIX APPROACH THROUGH STAFF AUGMENTATION.

The earliest days of IT outsourcing meant that companies found vendors who would come to their offices when things went wrong. The service existed as a transactional, cost-saving relationship that gave clients access to greater technical knowledge than they had on staff. It kept the basics functioning.

NEXT CAME STRATEGY AND EXPERIENCE.

As technology became more sophisticated, so did managed service providers. Keeping the basics functioning is important, but helping clients utilize technology so that it gets them to their goals is transformative. Providers began contributing to tech strategy, helping businesses find ways to improve processes, better utilize data, and generally get more efficient at what they do.

TODAY, MULTISOURCE SERVICE INTEGRATION IS ESSENTIAL.

The complexity of technology today means that no one can be great at everything. As a result, especially effective providers bring critical vendor relationships and the ability to oversee all the elements of your technology solutions. They're adept project managers, first-rate communicators, and agile problem-solvers. They provide the oversight and accountability to keep your strategy on track through the experts most skilled at each element of your projects.

Known as multisource service integration, this approach gives you even greater value from your technology by seamlessly integrating data analytics, business intelligence, and other highly specialized services without devoting the time and resources those pursuits would require if you didn't have a skilled technology partner.

Nobody can be the best at everything. Multisource service integration is a humble approach to providing the best service in a seamless way. With this approach, you benefit from the expertise of many, while still having just one partner's hand to shake.



I was really nervous about moving away from having someone in-house. I didn't want to be nickel and dimed. Our provider brought a team of professionals with different types of experience that I couldn't get in-house. I had an entire team I could rely on and an all-in price whether we call once a month or 100 times a month. And they're proactively managing our IT issues, not waiting until there's a problem."

TINA ALLEN

CEO, EYE SURGEONS OF INDIANA



\$84,300

Median annual salary
of U.S. IT professionals.

That figure is nearly
double the overall
median annual wage—
\$44,400.

[COMPTIA.ORG](https://www.comptia.org)

8%

Average annual increase
in technology salaries—
more than double the
overall rate, 3%.

[FORTUNE.COM](https://www.fortune.com)

Great Reasons to Work with an **IT Managed Services Provider**

Although there's no one right formula for the services a provider offers, there are certainly elements you need to look for as a baseline.

- ✓ Greater technical expertise
- ✓ Round-the-clock availability
- ✓ More effective use of IT budget
- ✓ Freeing your teams to focus on core business operations
- ✓ Addressing underutilized technology and lagging tech strategy
- ✓ Specific expertise for your industry
- ✓ Clear metrics tied to performance

And, yes, there can be downsides

- ✗ Your provider isn't in your office and—in many instances—isn't anywhere near it
- ✗ Accountability may suffer when you rely on an outsourced team rather than an internal specialist
- ✗ To gain expertise, you give up some measure of control
- ✗ Hidden costs can arise if you haven't evaluated your contract carefully



In a Crowded IT Field, Finding the Wrong Partner Is All Too Easy

Most IT managed services clients switch vendors as soon as their contract is up.

Choosing a partner based on cost is one sure way to end up with the kinds of problems that businesses most often cite as reasons for leaving:

- ⊗ Data breach
- ⊗ Unrecoverable data after an incident
- ⊗ Recurring issues
- ⊗ Poor response times
- ⊗ Inadequate communication

81%

Percentage of companies understaffed in technology and business operations. 67% of these were actively working to hire IT staff.

[COMPTIA.ORG](https://www.comptia.org)

46%

Companies that reported rising salary expectations made hiring difficult.

[COMPTIA.ORG](https://www.comptia.org)

What to Look For in an IT Managed Services Provider

Although there's no one right formula for the services a provider offers, there are certainly elements you need to look for as a baseline.

CYBERSECURITY

Hands down, protecting data is the number one concern of organizations everywhere. And it's a complicated undertaking that includes not just vulnerability management but infrastructure, governance, compliance, disaster recovery planning, and employee training. Make sure you work with a provider who can speak clearly and in great detail about protecting your data—and who has a track record of success.

EXPERT HELP DESK

Look for first-call resolution from experts who are available 24/7/365. Bonus: A team based nearby and tailored to you means that you get to know the people you're working with—and they understand your business.

CONTRACT FLEXIBILITY

Give your partnership plenty of leeway with flexible contract terms, including shorter contract periods, minimized vendor lock-in periods, and ability to change vendors with minimal termination fees.

ENHANCED SERVICE

Working with a provider who addresses your issues and ensures security is the threshold. Better providers also work with you to identify potential for technology to facilitate your business and help you reach your goals. They work with you on strategy so that you utilize technology most effectively in service of your mission.

WIDE-RANGING SKILLS AND PARTNERSHIPS

If you only have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Some IT managed services providers have limited partnerships that confine the solutions they offer or contracts that incentivize them to hold you back. Look for a provider who has a range of partnerships and skillsets that enable them to create the right solution for you rather than the one that's easiest for them. For example, because many providers charge per-server fees, they'll steer clients away from cloudbased solutions, even if those solutions would be most effective.

ACCESS TO SPECIALIZED SKILLS

Inevitably, technology issues touch on specialized areas like data architecture or application development. The ideal provider will bring ready access to specialists who can address your needs in a quick and cost-effective manner.

CULTURE

Your provider is going to become part of your team, albeit remotely. Do their values align with yours? Their approach to their work and what it can do are just one element of achieving a good fit. You want a partner who is supportive, who can clearly communicate and guide you through technical undertakings, and who shows a lot of passion for the work. There are too many providers out there to work with someone who doesn't fit your culture. Take the time to find alignment.



Setting the Stage for **Your Search**

If you knew what you needed, you'd do it yourself, right? Although by definition one side of the client-provider relationship has a hefty information advantage, you can take steps before you start your search to streamline the process and help find the right partner. Expect an adept provider to delve more deeply into your needs and even unearth a lot of points you hadn't considered. It's common for perceived problems not to be the actual technical problem, and a smart provider can help you find the distinction.

WHAT'S YOUR PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR ENLISTING AN IT PARTNER?

If you're ready to expand and need your technology to meet expanded processes, you're not going to benefit from the provider who doesn't have experience with strategy. Take a close look at your frustrations and successes, and talk to your teams about their technology wish lists. Think bigger picture, too: People often are surprised to find that what they had long viewed as an organizational limitation is simply a technology problem waiting to be solved.

WHERE IS YOUR COMPANY GOING?

Your goals are a critical part of your technology decision-making. Be ready to delineate your mission and a prioritized list of the goals for your organization. The provider who can support a major growth initiative and a dispersed remote workforce, for instance, has specialized skills that you need to establish upfront.

People often are surprised to find that what they had long viewed as an organizational limitation is simply a technology problem waiting to be solved.

HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE RELATIONSHIP?

Failing to detail communication expectations and reporting at the start derails many provider relationships. More than half of clients who leave their IT managed services provider report being frustrated by poor communication.

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

Coming into the discussion with a clear and realistic idea of what your budget allows gives you a more solid ground for comparing services. You're going to find quite a range of fees as you evaluate providers. And fees aren't necessarily an indication of who's going to provide the best service for your organization.



Questions to Ask **Potential IT Managed Services Providers**

There's no magic formula for finding the right partner, but there certainly are a lot of important points to consider. These questions provide a solid start.

STRATEGY AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- When have you assisted a business in selecting technology that has proven to be a valuable long-term investment?
- Upon introducing new technology to a business, how do you ensure successful end user adoption?
- What does your team do to keep up with the latest technology trends in order to provide businesses with the best possible recommendations?
- How do you assist clients in leveraging technology to achieve their business goals?

STABILITY AND SECURITY OF IT ENVIRONMENT

- What do proactive monitoring and maintenance mean to you?
- What tools will you use to manage my environment remotely?
- How often will you proactively communicate with our team?
- What network and physical security systems and protocols do you have in place?
- What documentation will I receive?
- Do you perform periodic test restores on backups?
- Describe your disaster recovery plan. How often do you test it?
- Are you adequately insured in case an unforeseen event demands resources beyond what you have on hand?

Questions to Ask Potential IT Managed Services Providers

INFRASTRUCTURE, SYSTEMS, AND PROCESSES

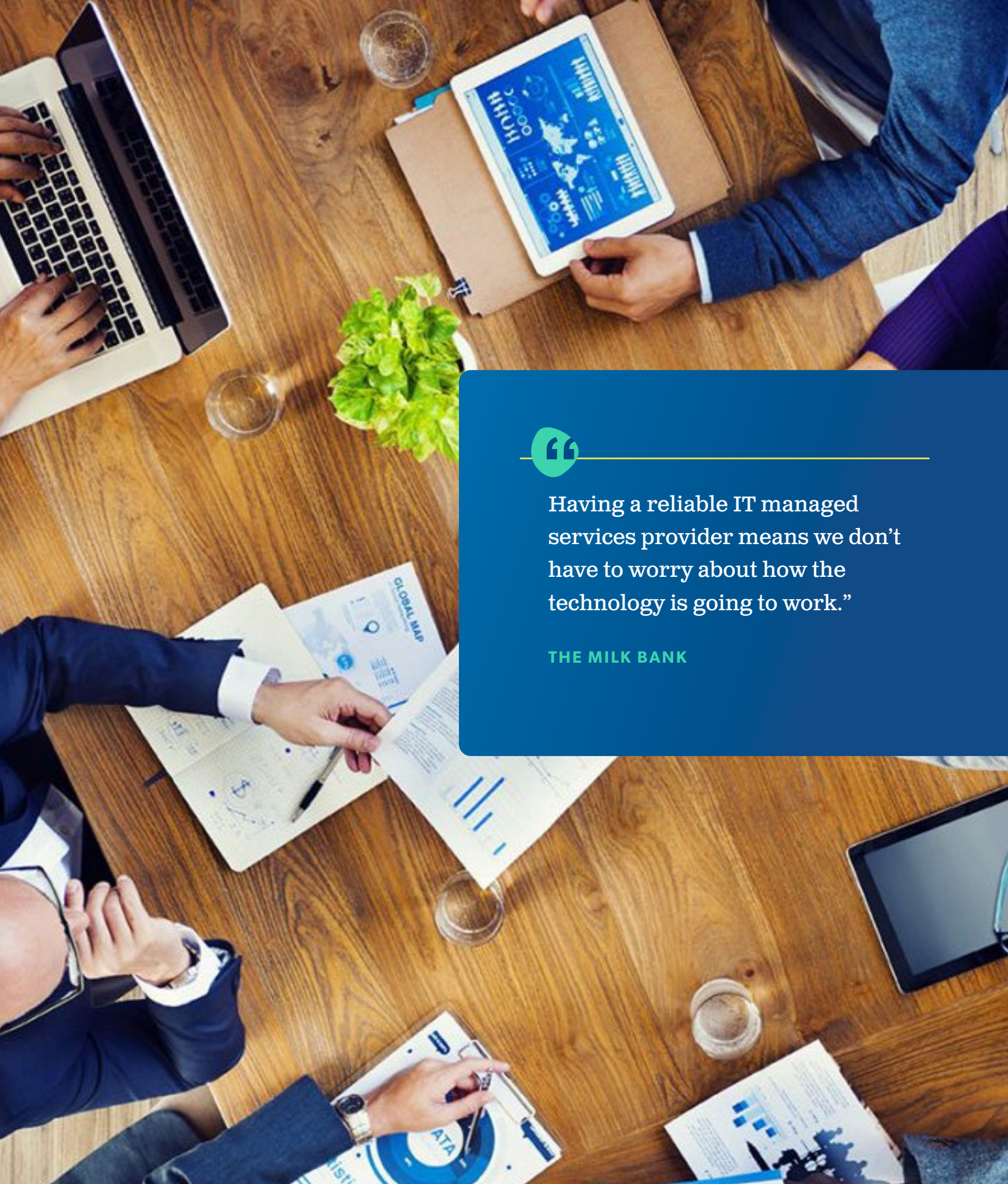
- How will you manage my existing infrastructure? What experience do you have with our systems?
- How do you envision transitioning from our current team to yours?
- How will you handle system migration?
- What processes do you follow when dispatching a technician or engineer to address an issue?
- If your organization is subject to specific industry regulations, be sure to ask: How do you support regulatory compliance audits?

ELIMINATING DAY-TO-DAY IT CHALLENGES

- How will our team communicate and ensure resolution of common day-to-day IT challenges? Provide an example scenario.
- How are issues prioritized and how does your ticketing system function?
- How do you measure customer satisfaction?
- What metrics are used to track client service? How are these communicated with us?
- Who are the resources that will be providing service to us? Are we consistently in contact with the same resources who know and understand our business?

TIP

Ask who your day-to-day contacts will be—and then ask to meet them. If a potential provider doesn't want to facilitate those relationships right off the bat, it very likely means you are never going to talk to the same person twice. Your IT environment is more secure when you work with a small team that gets to know you and your business.



Having a reliable IT managed services provider means we don't have to worry about how the technology is going to work."

THE MILK BANK



Contracting for an **IT Managed Services Experience**

The standard contracting method for IT managed services providers is a service-level agreement, or SLA. It outlines the services to be provided and defines metrics for acceptable performance. An SLA usually includes

- ✓ Key performance indicators like system uptime and problem response and resolution times
- ✓ Escalation procedures
- ✓ Cost/service tradeoffs
- ✓ Communication and benchmarking schedule
- ✓ Dispute resolution process

An SLA focuses on technical performance, which means it identifies certain commoditized and quantifiable elements of the service as hallmarks of success. That's pretty limiting. Technology, wisely utilized, meets your benchmarks but also brings benefits you might not have imagined. And so relying on simple metrics as a measure of success leaves a lot of potential untapped.

Technology is art and science, but SLAs focus only on the science. Smarter providers meet their metrics not as a measure of success but on their path to success. Their objective is to help the organizations they work with achieve the outcomes they want. They're focused on the experience their work provides.

An experience-level agreement, or XLA, shifts focus to the outcomes an organization wants to achieve and details the measures by which the provider will help them get there. Starting with those outcomes in mind, providers take stock of the steps that will help clients reach their goals, recommending incremental, prioritized improvements according to resources.

Getting a quick response when your backup failed is great; having a partner in technology that helps your business thrive is transformative.



We are more confident than ever about our business continuity, and our IT director can actually take a vacation now. Our IT managed services provider helped us create an IT plan that integrated with our business and would allow us to operate better, make us more profitable, deliver more services, and better deliver those services to our clients.”

HEALTHCARE CLAIMS MANAGEMENT

A Few Words **About** **Coverage and Guarantees**

Getting your contract right the first time isn't easy if you're new to the IT managed services realm. Some of the common, critical elements follow.

BILLING MODEL

If you're considering managed services, predictable monthly costs are probably part of the draw. Find out about how your prospective partner charges. A fixed fee is probably going to get you more value than an hourly fee.

SERVICES COVERED

You're going to find a wide range here, and determining what you want and what's unnecessary is worth some careful thought. Ask whether onsite calls are included, for instance, so that you aren't caught off guard by add-ins. Service needs vary, but finding proactive services is almost universally beneficial. A provider who anticipates and mitigates issues is infinitely more valuable than one who simply reacts. Avoiding downtime altogether is far less expensive than even the quickest response.

GUARANTEED RESPONSE TIME

In addition to uptime guarantees, a solid support contract will include SLAs that define acceptable time frames for a provider to respond to problems and requests.

TERMINATION OPTIONS

Most providers write annual contracts, which is great for keeping your costs predictable but uncomfortable if the relationship isn't working. It's worth ensuring you have acceptable options for early termination, just in case.

CHANGE CONTROL AND DOCUMENTATION

Formal processes give you the security that your provider is maximizing your resources, reliably documenting change, and can show clear need and benefit relating to change. You'll want to detail these expectations in writing.

TIP

Talk with references. Nobody's going to connect you with an unhappy client, but even talking with a true believer will give you a better sense of how a potential provider really works.

BEST WISHES...

We get it: Considering technology strategy is about as appealing as oral surgery.

Unless you're us. **We live for IT.**

We hope this guide gives you what you need to go forth confidently and find an IT managed services provider who supports your business.

AND AN INVITATION

If you'd like to learn more—and get specific recommendations for your organization—get in touch.

We'll come to you for a free, two-hour technology workshop that shows you how these tips relate specifically to the work you do, your current IT systems, and the future of your business.

RESULTANT.COM/CONNECT