A QUICK GUIDE TO REVIEWING YOUR IT SUPPORT – POST COVID-19

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COVID has placed an unprecedented strain on business and IT infrastructure

The business of selecting a new IT support company can be challenging at the best of times but post COVID-19 it has become an even more important decision.

COVID-19 itself has created an unprecedented level of disruption and change for almost all businesses.

Initially companies have been reacting to the unprecedented level of challenges created by staff lockdown at home, social distancing, the inability of employees to access office and the urgent need for almost all staff to have remote access to IT systems. And our anecdotal research – from discussions with prospective customers – is that businesses have had a wide variety of experiences in term of the quality of support from their IT providers at this key time.

But how do you look forward from an IT planning perspective?

But what happens if you have had a poor experience as part of this process? And at some point, you are going to turn your attention to finding an IT support provider that is better placed to support you post COVID-19 and beyond?

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We have created this eBook to provide a useful over guide to help you navigate the process and in particular:

- How to **spot the 7 surefire signs** that you need to re-assess your IT support now

- What **business benefits you can expect to gain** from improving your IT performance

- A **checklist of 10 key questions to ask a prospective IT provider** that will help you assess whether they are the right fit for you going forward

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7 surefire signs that you need to re-assess your IT right now

Your IT response to COVID-19 has highlighted serious "holes" in current arrangements

The impact of COVID-19 has had a, more or less, consistent effect on businesses across the board – but the way that IT services providers have stepped up to help client businesses during the crisis has varied widely.

In fact, our own anecdotal research and discussions with prospective new customers points to the face that the way that IT services companies were able to respond effectively to the crisis was less than consistent. Providers who had been proactive prior to COVID in terms of ensuring that their customers had the capability to quickly move businesses to remote operating models – through the use of remote team collaborations software, remote monitoring capability and even adequate disaster and recovery plans – and transition them quickly to remote working models that kept their businesses running effectively.

However, for a raft of other businesses the experience hasn't been so good. And the pressures of COVID-19 has only served to highlighted flaws in existing IT arrangements that now need urgently addressed. Including whether your current IT provider is really up to scratch.

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"Poor". Or perhaps even "no" IT strategy

If you are thinking, "what's an IT strategy" then this should already be a warning sign for you.

The very nature of modern business makes your IT a competitive weapon – and if you are not leveraging it to the full you can be sure that your competitors are. Or will be soon. Particularly in a post-COVID environment where remote working, customer support and product and service delivery are becoming the new norm.

Your customers are going to demand it. And they will be quick to jump ship if you can't deliver effectively. So, if your current IT provider isn't already talking to you about a forward plan and strategy for IT they should be.

One that aligns with your wider business goals to ensure that your IT supports your growth and development plans for the future.

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Reason to reassess #3

Increasing and unsustainable amounts of time spent on IT issues & "fixes"

At the most fundamental level IT is there to serve your business and not the other way around.
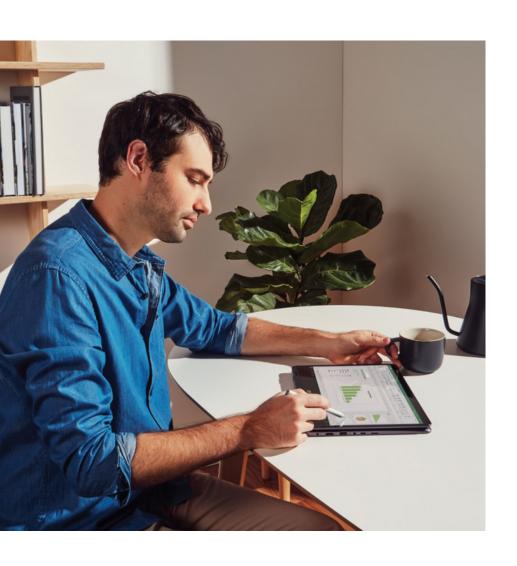
Technology should be an enabler for your business, not a roadblock. Whether you want to make your existing IT work harder, minimize IT downtime or define a migration path to the cloud.

If you are increasingly frustrated with an ever increasing amount of time spent on costly and time-consuming IT issues – which includes everything from continually fixing recurring issues, underline supporting and working around legacy IT systems, to working across a raft of disjointed data silos – then there is every likelihood your IT set up isn't fit for business purpose.

And if IT issues are beginning to get in the way of your more important work-related tasks you have probably hit a tipping point. Which is a big warning sign that it's time to review your current IT support arrangements.

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Increasing employee – and customer - frustration with the impact of downtime

In previous times, IT downtime was an annoyance in your business. Something that you had almost come to expect due to the very nature of IT infrastructure and that your staff would grudgingly work around.

However, in a much more competitive business environment – and COVID-19 is serving to highlight this in across a raft of business sectors – it can also be a killer for your business. When your IT systems, computers, emails, servers, software and networks aren't working properly your business will slow to a crawl. Which not only creates frustration and loss of productivity amongst your staff, it also means customers will quickly find alternatives to your products and services as your competitiveness is affected.

In short. Eliminating downtime for businesses these days simply isn't optional. It can have severe financial consequences and you your IT support provider simply has to have a plan to mitigate against it.

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Reason to reassess #5

You are becoming more worried about IT security-related issues

One of the major impacts of COVID-19 has been how much more prevalent remote working has become for employees in general. As the situation has called for it.
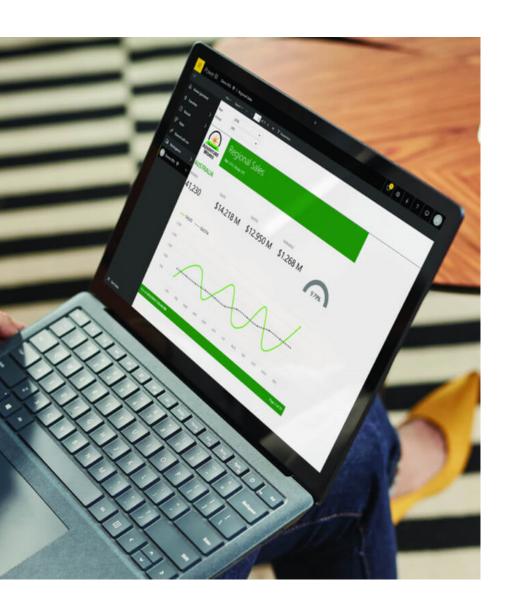
On the positive side of things, the flexibility of Cloud-based apps like Microsoft Teams has enabled business to quickly allow employees remote access – across a range of devices including desktop, laptop, table and mobile. But the flip side of this is the trade-off in IT security.

And Cybersecurity incidents have become more and more common for small and medium-sized businesses, making it critical to know how to prepare and respond. Pre COVID -19 a study by the Better Business Bureau found that 23% of small businesses (≤ 250 employees) reported having been the target of a cyberattack, with nearly half of those occurring in the preceding 12 months. And COVID-19 has only accelerated this trend.

If your experience with your existing IT support provider has left you worrying more about the potential security threat from opening up your network than the business benefits of flexible working capability then maybe it is time to look around.

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The absence of a Business Continuity & Disaster Recovery plan

If there is one thing that COVID-19 has highlighted, it's the need to constantly be planning for any business eventuality. And the same applies to your IT strategy.

Leaving aside the immediate need to plan for additional Coronavirus "waves" and other potential future pandemics, your business can also potentially fall prey to a wide range of natural and man-made disasters. Ranging from cyber-attacks, to malicious data encryption, electrical storms or floods - or even employee inflicted disasters.

The actual source of the disaster itself very often can't be predicted in advance. What does matter is that you have a plan in place to ensure your IT continuity in the face of the challenge. One that has you up and running again in a matter of hours – and keeps your business running throughout.

Business continuity is a key component of your overall business strategy. It is very often not pleasant to think about, but you are better off preparing proactively now, rather than scrambling to find a solution after it is too late. And if your current provider is talking to you about a solution – then maybe it is all too late.

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The realisation that the "new normal" post-COVID 19 calls for a completely new IT approach

If you have read points 1 to 6 above and your head has been consistently nodding as you worked through point by point, then there is every likelihood that the realization is dawning that you need another approach to your IT strategy and support.
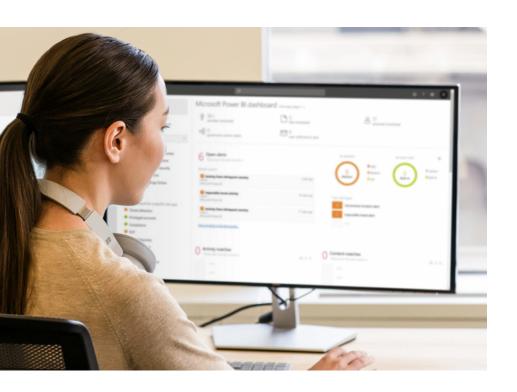
In the following sections we take a closer look at the sort of business benefits you can expect from making improvements in the way your IT supports our business. And leave you with a checklist of key questions you can use to ask a prospective IT provider – and ensure that you get a solution that is right for you.

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How improving IT improves your business performance too

So if you understand the need to to review your IT support requirements, what sort of benefits can you expect from doing it? It's important to consider that the working landscape was changing even before the impact of COVID-19 as some of these headline stats show:

2x Small companies are twice as likely to hire remote employees[1]

52% of the global workforce works from home at least once per week[1]

6x as many small businesses agree that dynamic team structures will become the norm[2]

Lack of tools and data mean salespeople only sell 36.6% of the time

60% of employees say that mobile technology makes them more productive

59% of Finance Directors would like better data to aid analysis and decision making
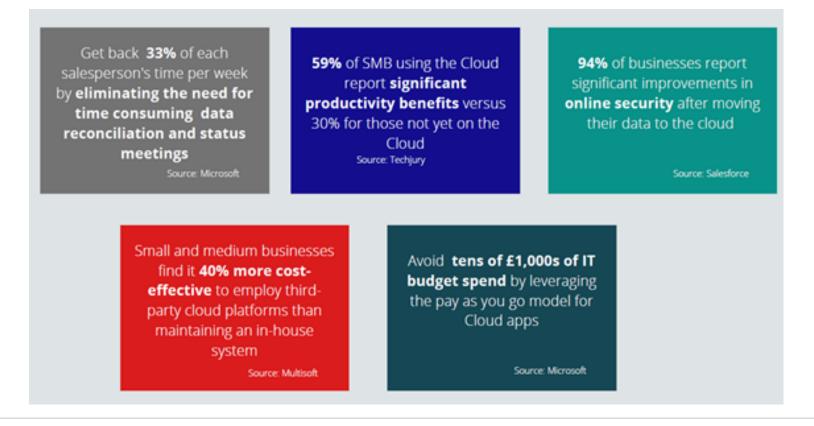
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The focus is turning again to how IT adds business value

With the advent of COVID-19 there has been an element to getting back to basics on the IT front. Trying to ensure the basics are in place for employees – like laptops, remote access to the company network and basic sharing capability in place. But as businesses begin to emerge from their own version of lockdown the focus turning back to adding more business value through the use of IT.

The good news is that the availability of cost-effective, proven, Cloud-based apps means you can relatively quickly make this happen right across your business from sales & marketing to finance and customer services.

And the business rewards are impressive. Here, a**re just some of the benefits** you can expect:

Get back **33%** of each salesperson's time per week by **eliminating the need for time consuming data reconciliation and status meetings**

Source: Microsoft

59% of SMB using the Cloud report **significant productivity benefits** versus 30% for those not yet on the Cloud

Source: Techjury

94% of businesses report significant improvements in **online security** after moving their data to the cloud

Source: Salesforce

Small and medium businesses find it **40% more cost-effective** to employ third-party cloud platforms than maintaining an in-house system

Source: Multisoft

Avoid **tens of £1,000s of IT budget spend** by leveraging the pay as you go model for Cloud apps

Source: Microsoft

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8 key questions to ask a prospective IT provider in the "new normal"

And selecting the right IT provider to help YOUR business to tap into business benefits like this is going to be key for your success.

So, in the next section we have given you a checklist of the 8 key questions you need to be asking – to ensure you make the choice that is right for your business.

Question #1

How will your approach to IT support help my business objectives?

This is a great place to start – particularly in the highly disrupted environment your business is operating in.

They key thing to remember as you assess their response is that technology should be an enabler for your business, not a roadblock. Whether you want to make your existing IT work harder, minimize IT downtime or get the best out of cloud-based business applications the focus needs to be on "what will this deliver for us".

So, a highly proactive approach and the expertise needed to support your business. Not just your IT is essential.

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How will you get my remote employee teams working together effectively?

This is a big one. And it's probably an issue you have been wrestling with in recent months.

The impact of COVID-19 with social distancing requirements and lack of access to business premises has had an unprecedented knock-on effect in term of providing the technology solutions needed to get remote employees working together quickly again.

The use of innovative collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams have been at the heart of our approach to enabling our customers – even prior to COVID-19. So, it was already "baked" in to the way we worked. So, ask your prospective IT provider how long they have been supporting customers with this type of approach.

And the benefits of Teams itself – the core chat, meeting and messaging capability – are only the core part of the business value. The real value in Teams is when you connect it up with other tools like Microsoft Planner, your CRM and a wide variety of 3rd party applications - like Salesforce, Zoho and Sage for example.

So, ask for examples of this type of proactive use of the technology to support business customers.

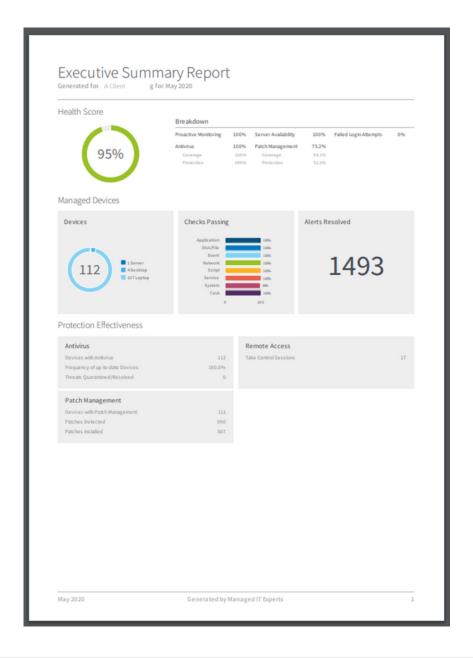## How will you ensure my IT systems are running effectively?

This is a great question to get an initial feel for how proactive their approach to IT monitoring and supporting your business is going to be.

If their eyes glaze over at the question it might be time to move on very quickly! But at a base level you want to hear that they are going to use remote monitoring technology to monitor the health and status of your IT infrastructure – from server monitoring to technical glitches and hacking attempts. In a COVID impacted environment it is essential to know that they have the capability to monitor and support you effectively at arms-length with minimal onsite visits.

This is also a great time to dig a little bit deeper on things like SLA's, how quickly they will respond to problems and requests. And how you are able to report issues directly to them.

The other key thing here is to establish how proactive their approach is to finding and fixing problems like potential hard-drive failure. Ideally you want to hear they are using predictive technology that finds and remedies problems – before you are even aware there is an issue.

And before it's all too late.

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Can you help me with my overall IT strategy and planning?

Whatever your new supplier undertakes to do for you has to be in the context of an overall plan that is specific to your business.

However, forward-thinking providers will include advice on IT strategy as part of their service too which helps significantly with aligning business and IT strategy, accurate budgeting, feedback and review etc. For example, at Managed IT Experts we take a structured approach to onboarding all customers that includes:

- **Business level assessment** – where we assess what it is you need to achieve from a business perspective using independent business process mapping tools and our expertise

- **Review of your existing IT infrastructure** – initial assessment of your existing business software applications and systems to give a "big picture" view of the good and bad in your current set up

- **From there we create a plan specifically for your business** – which includes regular Quarterly Business Reviews that provide transparency and the opportunity for feedback and review on both sides

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Who exactly will be looking after my business?

It's important to clarify before you put pen to paper exactly WHO is going to be working to support your business.

And you are going to need a well-rounded team to ensure that your IT initiatives are a success. You are going to want to be sure that you will have access to a broad team that has both Business and IT expertise and includes an Account Manager, IT Director, Operations Manager, Senior IT Engineers and helpdesk staff.

Asking a question like this early in your evaluation process can ensure there aren't any surprises later on when you are struggling to get responses to problems and issues.

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What happens if I have a disaster recovery situation in my business?

This was an important question to be asking Pre COVID-19 but Post-COVID it becomes an essential hygiene factor in your decision-making process.

If your prospective supplier doesn't have this capability in their services armoury in the new business environment you are working in then at the very least it is a serious red "x" against their name. If not an instant decision to remove them from the review process.

Areas to probe on here are:

- How do you help your customers prepare for unforeseen disasters and recovery situation?

- Is this a documented process?

- How quickly do you aim to have were them back up and running?

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How much is this going to cost?

Now we come to one of the key questions in all of this. What does the potential bill for this look like?

An open-ended approach to solving IT issues is a recipe for disaster. For both parties in an IT support relationship! So, if your prospective supplier suggests some initial project work as a means to "getting things started and see how things go" it might be time to shut the discussion down there and then.

A professional IT provider who is using structured scoping and assessment techniques, IT strategy planning, automated monitoring and support and regular business reviews is going to be able to provide accurate – and backed up reasoning – for any costings they are proposing.

So, make sure that you ask the difficult question here. A good IT provider will welcome it and the comfort it provides both parties.

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Tell me about the type of work you do for customers

This one is key.

Many IT providers will tell you what they can do for your business and lay out potential solutions for your problems. But it's important to ask how they have solved similar problems for other customers.

As a first step, visit their website to get a feel for the kind of work they have done for other customers. Case studies and testimonials will give you a feel for a number of key things – how they work, areas of expertise, specific business issues they have addressed for customers on a consistent basis and what their customers ACTUALLY say about the work that was done.

Talk to us

Regardless of where you are in your IT journey, we can get you firmly on the road to leveraging the full value of the Cloud.

Managed IT Experts is a **Microsoft Silver Partner** with over 15 years experience of providing proactive IT and digital support to small and medium sized businesses.

Call us now. Call us on 01383 722 225 or email consultation@manageditexperts.co.uk