WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN MSP

eStorm Australia's Complete IT Services Buyer's Guide

eStorm
AUSTRALIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS AN MSP?

Managed service provider, managed IT services, IT service management, MSP—what does it all mean exactly?

This guide will help you discover what exactly an MSP is, whether you need an MSP, and how to choose the best MSP for your business.

A Brief History of MSPs

Between 1990 and 1997, computer ownership progressed from a luxury to a necessity. By the mid 90s almost every office worker had access to a computer, internet and an email account. As a result, the need for technical support grew exponentially. Business owners were finding it difficult to keep up with the ever-evolving technological advances (and the inevitable issues that arose when things went wrong) so, new career paths opened up for the technically savvy: IT technicians and consultants.

IT consultants were hired by business owners to assess their IT infrastructure and provide enterprise-level technological strategies. In the same vein, IT technicians were employed on an as-needed (or break/fix) basis to fix issues within systems and networks. This as-needed basis proved far from optimal, as the technicians could only fix what was broken when they were onsite.

To keep up with demand, many IT consultancies adopted the term 'Managed Service Provider' and began hiring computer engineers with a variety of skill-sets to provide comprehensive IT support to their clients.

So . . . What is an MSP?

While new technologies have emerged (such as cloud computing and mobile device management) the core objective of Managed Service Providers remains the same – to provide comprehensive and preventative IT support and services to businesses and organisations.

Essentially, an MSP is an outsourced subscription-based IT department for your business. They take over the management of your business IT systems with the goal of reducing costs and improving the effectiveness of your business operations.

Think of an MSP or IT service management as "IT Support as a Subscription." Similar to your Netflix or Spotify subscription, you pay a fixed monthly fee and gain access to a wide range of expert IT services designed to help your business.

Outsourcing your IT to a Managed Service Provider means the days of banging your head against your desk searching for the ever-elusive answers to your technological problems are well and truly in the past. The entire goal of managed IT services is to help your business run more effectively. MSPs will take on the burden of your IT infrastructure and undertake day-to-day maintenance, upkeep, and functionality of your IT services and equipment, and any issues that arise are swiftly taken care of in order to get your daily operations back on track as soon as possible.

The role of a Managed Service Provider is dependent on what the specific needs of your company are. There is no one size fits all approach, therefore your chosen MSP should thoroughly evaluate your current IT infrastructure to produce a solution that is suitable for your business. A well-rounded and established MSP should have a variety of services available to you, including:

IT SUPPORT

Computer systems crashing, software not functioning properly, computers running slowly – you know what this can do to productivity. One of the reasons you may be considering an MSP is for ongoing IT support. An IT support plan provides access to basic monitoring/prevention and comprehensive 24/7 help desk and onsite support. IT support services can also include maintenance of your systems, device setup, creating new user profiles and managing your accounts and passwords.

The main goal of IT support services is to minimise downtime and have business operations running smoothly. Onboarding an MSP means you'll have fully qualified IT technicians just a click or call away, and response times within the hour, so your staff are no longer spending valuable work hours searching for fixes to IT problems.

For more info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/managed-it-services/

SOFTWARE & HARDWARE

Your MSP can assess your needs and requirements to design and implement a device or software procurement strategy that is cost-effective and tailored to your needs.

MSPs often have close relationships with software and hardware providers. These close partnerships will allow your service provider to deliver the best possible prices for new technology that is tailored to your budget.

Along with these partnerships, MSPs can provide strategies and suggestions for applications and software that enhance workflow, communications and business intelligence. They will also be able to manage your subscriptions, patches, and security updates, plus handle the setup, deployment, or migration of new software across your IT infrastructure while you sit back and reap the benefits.

For more info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/hardware-software-procurement/

IT SECURITY

MSPs can provide dedicated monitoring and assessments of your IT security alongside managed IT services. As cyber threats continue to evolve, it's important that your business' cyber security is reviewed on a regular basis. Many MSPs are capable of providing mitigation strategies, security consulting and auditing, and risk management solutions to ensure a comprehensive approach to keeping all aspects of your cyber security current and impenetrable.

For more info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/cybersecurity-services/

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

While professional services may not be included in your monthly subscription, they can come in handy if you are needing additional assistance. Professional services can include assessing and auditing your IT infrastructure to see what can be improved on, professional IT consulting to assess your IT needs, back up and disaster recovery strategies, cyber security auditing and risk assessments, and datacentre deployment.

COMMUNICATIONS

It's important for businesses to communicate with clients and other employees in a way that is seamless, convenient, and cost-effective. A poor communications system can lead to downtime during outages and unnecessary complexity when trying to get in touch with clients.

While there are multiple options for communications, the most popular are PBX and cloud voice solutions. PBX solutions are the more traditional option for telephony in businesses, while cloud telephony is becoming increasingly popular as it offers a unified and centralised hub for communications.

If you are considering either setting up a new PBX system or transitioning to cloud telephony, an MSP can be a great help in this process. Forget about waiting in phone lines with your telephony provider or trying to figure out why you have an outage – your MSP will do all of this for you, on top of managing any subscriptions and adding new phone lines as you onboard new employees.

For more info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/business-telephony/

CLOUD SERVICES

MSPs often offer a variety of cloud and hosting solutions.

Cloud computing refers to the online delivery of computer resources through a remote data centre, removing the need for onsite hardware and servers. Most businesses operate on a hybrid solution, with applications stored across multiple cloud and in-house platforms. As this can become difficult for businesses to maintain, MSPs can offer additional support as part of your service agreement.

A managed service provider will watch over your cloud environment and manage cloud deployments so you do not have to train or employ staff, allowing you to focus on what you can achieve with the cloud rather than researching and obtaining the knowledge to run and maintain it.

More info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/managed-cloud-services/

NETWORK SERVICES

Managing your internet and network connectivity can be a serious hassle. A solid and reliable business internet connection is the backbone of your daily operations, so it's important you choose wisely. But with options like ADSL, ethernet to fibre, mobile, and NBN, it can be difficult to assess what is right for your business. Plus, waiting in phone queues to get information from potential internet providers can be frustrating when your focus could be applied elsewhere.

A professional and experienced MSP can help you decide which connectivity solution is appropriate for your business. They will design, develop and implement robust network services to ensure a strong, flexible, and secure connectivity environment, and will continue to monitor your system for outages and dropouts.

For more info visit: https://www.estorm.com.au/managed-network-services/

All in all, an experienced and professional MSP should offer all of the above IT solutions so you can get the most of your partnership. An MSP that has gaps in their skill-sets and knowledge means you may find yourself needing to hire another service provider to fill in the gaps, costing your more in the long run. The aim of an MSP shouldn't be just to provide basic support when you need it, but to give you comprehensive access to resources and solutions so your business can continue to grow effortlessly.

Comparing IT Services

When it comes to the management and support of your IT systems and networks, there are a few solutions that you can consider. The most popular of these are Inhouse IT, Break/Fix (or fee-for-service) and of course, Managed Service Providers. Each of these come with their own pros and cons, and while a solution may work for one company, your needs may require another.

MSP?
Break/Fix?
Inhouse?

OPTION 1 — INHOUSE IT TEAM

Advantages: Many businesses find that having an onsite IT technician or team employed is in their best interests. This is especially true for larger companies who face regular login issues, software installations, and printer mishaps. Inhouse technicians will have an intimate knowledge of your systems and the technology used on a daily basis, thereby increasing the chances of a quick resolution and the prevention of issues in the future. Inhouse employees will also have a greater personal investment in ensuring the job is done correctly and in the event of a crisis, their set annual wage means sudden remediation costs will not balloon.

Disadvantages: The costs of hiring an inhouse technician can veer towards uneconomical. Full-time IT technicians on an annual salary will be paid even when there are no issues or repairs to be completed. On top of this, hiring an experienced IT specialist can cost upwards of $65k a year, and you may find that most technicians have a speciality (such as networking, software, or cybersecurity) which means you may need to hire another technician to fill in the gaps.

Conclusion: If you are a large business with a constant need for technological services at any given moment, then an inhouse IT technician may be suitable for you. However, hiring only one technician to support all of your IT needs can be overwhelming for your employee, so you may consider onboarding an MSP to help manage your IT infrastructure and provide basic monitoring of your systems and security, thus creating a hybrid approach (what is otherwise known as Co-Managed Services).

BREAK/FIX

Advantages: The break/fix solution is fairly self-explanatory; something breaks, and an IT technician comes to fix it. There are little-to-no upfront or monthly costs involved, and break/fix companies generally charge on an hourly basis. This is an enticing option for smaller companies who find themselves only needing the aide of an IT technician when something goes wrong.

Disadvantages: The disadvantages of a break/fix company come from the lack of monitoring or preventive maintenance. What this essentially means is that they are paid to resolve issues, not prevent them. Comparatively, an inhouse IT technician or MSP can generally pick up on issues in your network or system before they become a serious problem. You may also find that when an issue occurs, you are added to a waitlist until someone can come out and resolve the problem. This leads to frustrating downtimes that can be detrimental to your business operations.

Conclusion: Smaller businesses who find they only need IT support for the occasional issue that arises may consider the break/fix method. However, keep in mind while it may seem like a cost-effective solution, without regular maintenance and monitoring your IT repair costs can add up quickly and cost more in the long run.

MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDERS

Advantages: MSPs are becoming the most popular IT solution for businesses large and small due to their scalability. MSPs offer help desk support and 24/7 monitoring, so if an issue arises someone is always available to provide a solution. On top of this, they will constantly monitor your systems and your security to ensure they are picking up on issues and resolving them before you even notice, thus saving you downtime. They operate on a monthly cost basis (usually per user or employee) and can assist with anything from printer issues to phone line outages and cyber security monitoring.

Disadvantages: It is very important that you conduct thorough research into the MSP you choose. Some MSPs only offer remote support, which can cause frustration if the issue is not easily resolved without someone coming onsite to assist in person. Thoroughly read through your service agreement as some MSPs will hit you with hidden fees or costs, and check what is and isn't included in your agreement so you can make an informed decision.

Conclusion: MSPs are an attractive IT management option as the costs are scalable depending on your business's needs. However, MSPs may not be the best option for smaller businesses who rarely need IT support, and larger organisations may find they still need to hire an inhouse technician to keep up with minor problems like computer/software and printer issues that often arise regularly in organisations with a large number of IT systems and technology.

MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION

The question of whether an Inhouse IT technician, Break/Fix solution or MSP is one most business's find themselves asking when they get to the point of needing an IT solution. In short, determining which is right for you is dependent on several factors – the size of your company, your budget, and your current infrastructure. The best thing you can do is consider the costs involved with each and outweigh the benefits and disadvantages.

The team at eStorm is happy to discuss your individual IT needs to see if onboarding an MSP is right for your business. We encourage you to contact us (on either 07 3120 0640 or at admin@estorm.com.au) for a no obligations assessment of your current IT infrastructure and the specific solutions you require when it comes to IT support.

MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER

- Antivirus Updates/Monitoring
- Optimising systems
- Spam filtering and email protection
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Software and hardware

BREAK/FIX

- Pay as you go
- Little-to-no monthly or upfront costs
- Charge on an hourly basis
- Perfect for occassional breaks or fixes

INHOUSE IT TEAM

- Immediate response time
- Full control of task prioritisation
- Personal investment in your business
- Intimate knowledge of your systems
- Annual salary

- NEED FOR GREATER TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

- SYSTEMS GETTING TOO COMPLEX TO MANAGE INTERNALLY

- WANT TO FOCUS INTERNAL RESOURCES ON CORE BUSINESS OPERATIONS

- NEED TO REDUCE COST OF INTERNAL IT SUPPORT

- WANT HELP USING TECHNOLOGY TO DRIVE BUSINESS FORWARD

- NEED EXPERTISE SPECIFIC TO INDUSTRY VERTICAL

Do I Need an MSP?

So now you know what an MSP can do for you, you're probably asking yourself – do I need an MSP?

There are many indicators to deciding whether it is time to onboard an MSP. Some businesses find they are struggling to keep up with updates and network management, placing their systems at risk for outages or breaches. Or perhaps you've found that your internal IT team is struggling to keep up with demand, resulting in a reactive approach rather than a proactive one. No matter what your current needs are, here are some signs you may be ready to onboard an MSP.

1. You experience regular downtime

If you are having regular downtime due to systems crashing, software lags, or simply needing to search for a solution to minor IT issues, then it's a serious sign that you may need to outsource some of your IT. Just one hour of downtime can cost up to thousands of dollars, and in the long run this is just plain uneconomical. An MSP can restructure your IT so it is efficient and streamlined and will monitor your systems to prevent issues from occurring before you get the chance to notice them.

2. You don't have a cyber security strategy

Cyber security threats are on the rise, so it is absolutely essential that businesses have a solid and effective cyber security strategy in place. An MSP can design a custom risk mitigation strategy for your company using the latest cyber technology and will continue to monitor and update your systems for threats.

3. Inneficient support

As your business grows, the complexity of your IT systems grows with it. This can cause issues for inhouse IT staff, who may want to focus on important IT projects but find themselves falling behind as they struggle to keep up with demand for support internally. Additionally, as technology evolves your in-house team may lack the knowledge to effectively fix IT problems they have no experience in.

MSPs are constantly keeping up with the latest technologies, thus they have the ability and knowledge to answer queries and provide support when needed so your IT team can focus on more important projects. With just one click or call, your MSP is available to provide onsite or remote assistance to quickly resolve issues.

4. No backup plan

Having no backup plan means that in the event of a system outage, black out, or ransomware attack, all of your data could be lost. It is essential to have multiple backups of your data in both the cloud and on a hard drive, otherwise you risk losing your data and compromising its security. This can be devastating for a business of any size. An MSP can devise a safe and secure backup strategy and monitor it both in the cloud and on a physical copy.

5. Need for technical expertise

With so many new applications and software being brought out, it can be hard to keep up with your subscriptions/licences or decide what is suitable for your business. On top of this, there are a multitude of apps and technology that can help drive business growth, but it can be difficult to discern which are fads and which will actually benefit your business.

Fortunately, MSPs are knowledgeable on all the latest software and apps. They can assess your needs and requirements to determine which applications can drive your business forward and assist with its continued growth. Plus, they are able to handle all your licensing and subscriptions so you no longer have to keep track of them.

Choosing an MSP

You've decided it's time to onboard an MSP, but how do you choose the right one? As the need for MSPs grows, so does the selection pool. Choosing an MSP is a massive decision and should not be taken lightly. Extensive research and comparisons are a must. Think about it as hiring a new employee – you wouldn't just choose the first person who walks into your door. You probably have a serious vetting process, with a multitude of prerequisites and questions to ask, and several possible candidates.

The first step in choosing an MSP is narrowing down your options. A big part in this decision is figuring out whether you want someone who is local. A local MSP is able to provide onsite support, whereas those that are not local will only be able to offer remote desktop support. Once you've made this decision, do a thorough check into their reviews, testimonials, and case studies. If these all check out, you can move on to assessing their suitability.

1 Clear Communication

One of the most important things to note when choosing an MSP is how and when they communicate. If they are taking a while to respond to emails or calls when you begin contact, it may mean they are too busy to respond or that their consistency with communication is subpar.

The benefit of onboarding an MSP is the fixed monthly costs. Make sure you check your SLA (Service Level Agreement) thoroughly before signing. Are there any hidden costs? What happens when your equipment needs to be upgraded or replaced? A quality MSP will be upfront with these costs, along with the costs of installing new technologies and the total cost of ownership for the technology solutions (including software and licences) they suggest.

2 Adaptability

As your business grows, so will your technology, software, and IT support needs. One of the best benefits of an MSP is the fact that you don't need to hire more employees to keep up with demand.

However, an inexperienced MSP may not have the capacity to support you as your needs grow. Before signing on, ensure that your MSP is flexible and able to adapt to new projects or requirements.

3 Demonstrable Consistency & Knowledge

Maintaining consistent results and delivery is important. Your potential MSP should be able to show examples of their policies and processes and how these translate into different business examples. If they are unable to explain what they do, how they do it, and why it is effective, then you may question their validity.

Additionally, your MSP should possess a deep understanding of the processes and solutions they are offering, with examples or case studies to back up their claims.

CONCLUSION:

Deciding who to trust with your IT infrastructure is a daunting decision. However, doing the appropriate research into a potential MSP means you forego any issues in the future. Don't be afraid to ask questions! If the MSP gets annoyed or frustrated, move on. This is not a company you want to be associated with.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does their onboarding process entail?

- Do they provide 24/7 support? If not, what are their emergency costs?

- Do they have references or case studies?

- Do they provide detailed invoices?

- What's not included in their managed services?

- Do they have a guaranteed response time?

- How experienced are their technicians?

- How flexible/scalable is the company?

- What is their response time to support enquiries?

- Do they provide onsite support, remote support, or both?

- How often do they provide progress reports?

- How can you get in contact with them when support issues arise?

WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

Every MSP is different, and it's not a bad idea to shop around and find one that suits your budget. A good MSP will be able to tailor their services to your budget. Some companies market themselves as 'managed IT services' but are really a glorified break/fix company, offering zero maintenance or monitoring. If a company's costs seem too good be to true, it probably is. Always ensure you are getting what you pay for.

Now obviously a company with a more robust IT infrastructure will be expected to pay more for their managed services. Figuring out whether the costs are inline with benefits can be difficult to ascertain, and the decision to go with either an inhouse IT team or MSP is difficult. However, in our 15 years of experience we can safely say that there is always a solution for your business.

Managed IT Services Pricing Models

PER DEVICE PRICING MODEL

PER USER PRICING MODEL

TIERED PRICING MODEL

Per device:

This model offers a flat-fee cost for each device within your company that you may require support for, regardless of how many people use the device.

While this option may seem attractive, you may find yourself with more devices than you originally thought. The benefit is that it is relatively easy to modify the monthly service fee as you remove or add devices.

Tiered Pricing:

Many MSPs incorporate a tiered pricing model into their solutions. They will offer several bundled service packages that increase in price for more comprehensive services. For instance, a basic package may include remote and phone support, patch management, and virus removal, a mid-range package may include onsite visits, and the most expensive package may include after hours or weekend support.

Per user:

This model is based on how many users your MSP monitors and supports. Generally your MSP will consider most of your employees as users. If your employees use multiple devices, you will find considerable savings in this model.

The per user pricing model is generally the most common used by MSPs.

COSTS:

Generally, you will find that prices vary significantly among MSPs, however you can expect fees to range between $50 to $300 per user per month, with most pricing falling between the $100 to $150 range.

Some MSPs offer a basic plan, offering add-ons a la carte while others provide an all-inclusive plan of services and coverage.