



Information Technology, LLC.
The IT Experts

Get the Most out of Your Managed Services Provider

WHITE PAPER

Abstract

As the new world of automation drives the change of pace in technology, commitment to the next wave of technology for businesses is necessary to remain competitive and secure. All master craftsmen demand excellent tools to complete their work. They know that the best tools allow them to focus on creating their next masterpiece rather than being sidetracked, frustrated, or limited by the tools they are using. The computers, software, and office equipment you use are the tools you use every day to create your greatest masterpiece: your business. If the technology in your office is not simplifying your business and making it easier for you to get more done with fewer employees, it surely is costing you a lot more than, for example, the price of a server. We understand that technology is truly a hard cost to quantify; however, there certainly is a cost, and depending on your business operations and how you use the computers and technology in your office, the cost may be significant.

Managed services have flourished recently as the IT solution for small and medium businesses. With levels of ever-increasing complexity in IT, these businesses turn to managed service providers (MSP) and value-added resellers who offer managed services to take the place of expensive IT staff. For businesses interested in offering managed services or providers who are looking to improve their offering, taking some time to consider the technology they're using and the way they are offering those technologies is a great way to be more successful. This white paper defines what a MSP is and the role it plays in your company's technology, outlines the steps to get the most out of a MSP, and shares three key points in how Saalex Information Technology (SaalexIT) differentiates from other MSPs.



WHAT IS A MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER AND HOW DID IT ALL STARTED?

As a definition, managed services allow a business to offload IT operations to a service provider, known as a managed service provider (MSP). The managed service provider assumes an ongoing responsibility for 24-hour monitoring, managing and/or problem resolution for the IT systems within a business.

The companies who have helped service small networks in the past have been hamstrung by the lack of tools to help with the problem. Maintenance was break-fix only, meaning when something broke, the company called and they came running to fix it... *hopefully*. As time went on, the best of the support people developed procedures and programs to periodically come on-site to do a system review of logs and user information looking for hints of issues before they become big problems. The problem of course, was

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that the support people could only see what was happening on that particular day. If something happened later, they would never know about it unless the customer called.

Additionally, the only professional test of the backup system was on the visit, which frequently resulted in days or more of missed backups. The system was prone to other human errors when the on-site technician, trying to be accommodating, would take care of the “end user” symptoms and would not have time to address the “real issues”. This created a constant battle for the technicians as they tried to convince customers that they were only causing themselves more dangerous problems down the road by not being practical.

At the same time, the hardware and software vendors were adding new and better ways for systems to signal problems as early as possible. Simple Network Management Protocol had been developing since the early 90’s and was being applied to PCs. The first systems that could watch these tools and turn all the data into usable information were complex to manage, were geared only to large networks, and were prohibitively expensive for small business.

In 2005, systems started to mature, allowing smaller companies to take advantage of the same features and benefits as the large companies. This technology started the managed services movement. Finally, managed services were available for small to medium sized businesses.



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THE ROLE OF MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDERS

The complications of simply running a business these days has elevated the role of MSPs and has allowed them to provide managed services with proactive, IT services that protects businesses without them having the need for a dedicated staff or the sheer luck required by a break-fix approach.

The managed services software that is in place today allows providers to work towards two major goals: ensuring network symptoms or risks sends an alert to the MSP before the event occurs and addressing every alert that is considered an important event. The more closely a MSP can get to these two goals, the more perfectly they can achieve a truly managed service and the more they can get away from having an “everything is an emergency” situation. And they provide all of this with a single predictable and reasonable pricing. Considering how costly the break-fix approach can be when technical issues pile up or during a state of technological emergency, it’s no surprise that the managed services industry is a growing one.

GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR MSP

As small to mid-sized business (SMB), you can take some relatively pain-free steps to get the most out of your MSP. As a MSP, SaalexIT encourages you to follow these steps to find the right MSP for you.



1. DEVELOP TRUST BY ASKING QUESTIONS

For some SMBs, the appeal of managed IT services is the ability to offload a critical business need and focus finite resources elsewhere in the company. But owners and executives that completely turn off their brain's tech sector are setting themselves up for frustration. Trust between company stakeholders and the MSP is key. The most straightforward path to an honest relationship: Ask questions of any prospective MSP early and often:

1. What kind of infrastructure, applications, and other technologies do you typically support?
2. What kind of tools do you use internally for things (like helpdesk and other functions)?
3. Are your written agreements easy to read?
4. How do you respond to different types of customer requests?

Do a bit of homework to ensure you understand and are comfortable with their approach. Don't worry--you need not get stuck in the weeds.



2. TREAT YOUR MSP AS A VIRTUAL CIO

For some SMBs, the decision to outsource is fairly simple because there is no internal IT department. For others, there's likely at least one person charged with managing the company's technology. Don't let that cause any territorial fears around job security--this inevitability leads to negative outcomes.

Clearly define roles and responsibilities up front. A good MSP will be willing to defer to an in-house IT executive, without stepping on toes. Let them know how they can best do that. Some good examples are work overflows, vacation coverage, and other supporting roles--or the "call on us when you need us" approach. Avoiding an adversarial position from the outset will give the MSP a chance to prove its value--and if it doesn't, you will be able to make an informed, well-reasoned change.

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3. COMMUNICATE ON A REGULAR BASIS

Have meetings with your MSP on a regular basis. This doesn't mean daily or even weekly--you can still realize the upside in outsourcing and focus your energies elsewhere. But treat your MSP in a similar manner to an internal department. Keep them in the loop as appropriate about strategic plans, changes, and other information that could impact the company's technology needs. Doing so enables the MSP to anticipate and adapt rather than constantly play catch-up. We suggest monthly or quarterly reviews, though the timetable will depend on your business.



4. PRIORITIZE SECURITY

One of the biggest technology risks inside SMBs today is security--or lack of it. Among other problems, this can lead to the MSP spending countless hours addressing security issues that result from a lack of awareness or care. They could be using those resources in more strategic ways on your behalf.

Even if you outsource some or all of your IT needs, smart security starts internally.



5. ACT FAST IF PROBLEMS SURFACE

Things never go perfectly, even with an outside IT provider. If issues do arise, address them immediately with the provider. Bring it up right away so that the MSP has some way of looking at the situation--and the proper amount of time to provide answers and mitigate whatever it is.

Raising issues quickly and escalating--and giving them an appropriate amount of time to be resolved--will often lead to a positive resolution. And if it doesn't, you--and the MSP--will have hard evidence that it might be time to explore other options. Hopefully, it doesn't get to that point, but when it does, you know that you have done what you can to ensure it's an amicable split and you can fire your MSP without incurring a lot of pain.

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THE SAALEXIT DIFFERENCE

Put in simple terms, SaalexIT is a MSP that discovers and fixes problems before issues can negatively affect its clients. The SaalexIT Experts ensure its clients have a well-maintained, proactively serviced computer network configured with proactive support such as network monitoring, patch management, and desktop optimization.

SaalexIT emphasizes partnership and service throughout every customer relationship because it recognizes that decisions about security are critical business matters that do not go away after the purchase. SaalexIT appreciates its advisory role with its customers and its business mission is to ensure that customers can count on SaalexIT from the initial set-up to ongoing technical support.

SaalexIT's fully managed IT service offering is a comprehensive IT management suite that covers every aspect of business IT networking. Over the past few years, Saalex IT has worked with many organizations to better manage their IT networks. Regardless of the IT business need, SaalexIT's managed services have got you covered. Here's why:



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KEY 1: SAALEXIT THINKS ABOUT YOUR TECHNOLOGY

In the end, we know that the technology we deploy to our clients will make or break their business. No matter how fast or friendly our service is, no matter how low our prices are, if our technology lets our clients down, we know that we have let our clients down. That's not a position anyone wants to be in.

We take the time to look at our client base and their technology needs. We have determined the features and services our clients need. We do have multiple solutions in play to answer a variety of different client needs, but we also have one standardized solution that has proven to serve nearly all of our clients just as well. This standardized solution cuts our licensing costs drastically, which is carried onto cost-savings for our clients. When we have to add different solutions to work with client environments, we consider the amount of control we have over the solution, how it integrates with our client's IT environment, and evaluate its business case.

SaalexIT has deployed a technology strategy based off our technologies and experience. We have looked at best practices for our technologies and developed executable plans that make sense to our technicians. We strive to automate everything we can (as long as it makes sense of course!). Our technicians understand not only how to deploy the technologies we have selected but why we use them so they are prepared to answer client questions about the solutions we offer.



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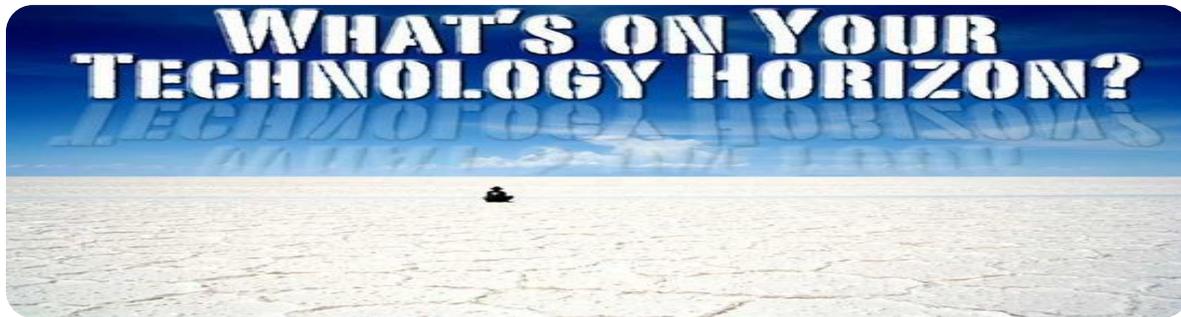
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KEY 2: SAALEXIT STANDS BY OUR SOLUTIONS

SaalexIT has spent time with potential clients and attempted to understand not only their needs, but their attitudes about IT issues. Many potential clients are hesitant about buying into a long-term relationship that will ensure their IT health. We understand if MSP is not perceived to be the right model for the client, then we will acknowledge it.

With that said, SaalexIT takes every opportunity we can to educate potential clients about the value of our managed service offering. We are prepared to share statistics, case studies, and any other data we have that demonstrates how our service may very well save their business and will certainly save them money. We also are prepared to demonstrate we have the right technology, by leveraging that technology in our service offerings and can talk convincingly about what our MSP can do and what it has done for other clients.



KEY 3: SAALEXIT LOOKS TO THE HORIZON

SaalexIT understands that there is always a fine line between keeping our service offering on the cutting edge and introducing new, untried technology into our business that can cause serious problems. But as an MSP, we walk that line as it is important that we constantly stay up to date with the newest trends. Whenever we learn about a new innovation in technology, we hold it up against our current offering and see whether it fits. If it does, we make plans to test it on a limited scale before rolling it out in our regular service.

Part of keeping up to date with our technology also means making sure our technicians understand how our current technologies work. We work with the vendors of our selected technologies to stay up to date with the most recent versions and training. The IT industry is growing and changing so fast, making it very easy for an MSP to get stuck with outdated technology.

We also keep an eye on our clients' evolving businesses as well. We take into consideration new technologies could offer that would help them and look into how our MSP can help them grow. We know that in the long run, the health of our MSP is a reflection of the health of our clients.

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Call SaalexIT today for a free IT Network Assessment!

Saalex Information Technology, LLC (SaalexIT) is a trusted partner in IT support and services, providing technology solutions that are designed to take your business to the next level. No matter what your IT requirements are, the SaalexIT experts can create, implement and support a technology strategy that will fit your business and budget.

Call us (800) 584-6844 or email at sales@saalexIT.com to discover why many businesses count on us for dependable IT solutions today.

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