Managed IT Services

Eliminating technology pains in small and mid-size businesses

Having a complete IT department is not a viable option for most small and mid-size businesses (SMBs), and very few companies can afford to deploy even one full-time professional IT employee. Fortunately, there is an emerging service known as "Managed IT Services" to help.

For small and mid-size businesses (SMBs) in today's high-tech society, Information Technology (IT) has become a significant consideration. Business owners and managers are under constant pressure to conduct business more efficiently and improve the productivity of its employees, while at the same time reduce costs. In addition to these normal business challenges, many SMBs are frustrated by the difficulties of dealing with new emerging computer-related technologies.

Implementing new technology is a challenging job for SMB owners and managers, and can cause numerous difficulties in day-to-day operations. Computers often are struck with problems such as spam, viruses, malware and other security threats, and server and email access malfunctions cause employees to sit idle. Company systems often do not operate at their optimal level to fully satisfy the business needs, and a huge amount of downtime is experienced waiting for technicians to come and solve each problem. These small system disruptions and downtime add up, and greatly affect the revenue and profitability of the company. The bottom line is: most SMBs today do not experience the best performance possible from their computers systems and Information technology.

The business growth of SMBs is often slowed down by lack of handling of IT infrastructure properly. Instead of focusing on revenue generating and business-building activities, SMB owners and managers are stuck trying to find so-

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lutions for technology problems. As smaller companies are increasingly becoming more dependent on IT systems, it has become very crucial to find cost effective ways to manage technology. Growth-oriented companies need a well-organized IT infrastructure so that they can focus on the business instead of trying to solve IT failures. However, having a complete IT department is not a viable solution for most SMBs, and very few companies can afford to deploy even one full-time professional IT employee. Fortunately, there is an emerging service known as "Managed IT Services" that is proving to be quite helpful in managing technology for SMBs.

What are Managed IT Services?

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Managed IT services are provided by an outside firm or IT consulting company. These days, a growing number of IT firms, value added resellers, and telecom carriers are providing so-called "managed services." This is where a specified set of services are provided for a flat monthly fee — often charged per user or per computer or per device.

In some cases, the Managed Services Provider (MSP) may only include a subset of their services in the flat monthly fee — such as only remote monitoring or remote helpdesk services. Other services are billed extra, typically on an hourly-rate basis. In other cases, the MSP may include all or most of their services in the flat monthly fee, for example: proactive monitoring & alerting; remote helpdesk support; regularly scheduled planned onsite visits; special onsite visits; purchasing assistance, needs assessment and solution design, and periodic strategic IT review and longer term planning.

Types of services

There is growing variety of services that are provided by Managed IT Service Providers (MSPs). Broad categories include the following:

- Computer & Server Support
- Data Backup & Disaster Recovery
- Network Security
- Custom Software Solutions
- Remote Network Monitoring
- Technology Evaluation & Planning

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The following table outsides more information about some of the broad managed services categories.

Monitoring and Alerting

Remote monitoring of the critical components of a network such as servers, firewalls, desktops and laptops is provided by many managed service providers. Typically there is a small software application (often called an "agent") that runs on the computers that communicates regularly with a centralized monitoring server at the IT provider. With monitoring and automatic alerting systems, issues are revealed and resolved while they are small—before they can significantly impact network performance and become bigger business problems.

Computer & Server Support

Regular maintenance and monitoring of company computers is essential to optimized desktop performance. IT consulting companies offer various solutions for ensuring that computers are functioning properly and are protected against all of the latest technology threats and disasters. Consultants also provide troubleshooting services and recommendations to prevent the same problem from happening again. Solutions also include server installation and administration.

Data Backup & Disaster Recovery

Backing up data is essential and should not be ignored, yet many SMBs do not regularly perform backups. The managed services provider can monitor and manage and test backups. Additionally, some MSPs offer remote backup tools and facilities, where a backup of files is made multiple times per day and stored on an onsite appliance. Then, the data is also transferred via the Internet to a secure, offsite data center facility. This technology and service provides multiple backup and recovery points per day, and also eliminates the need to rotate between different tapes or removable disks, the need to remember to take them offsite and bring them back onsite, and the media costs.

Network Security

SMBs need computer and network security even more than large businesses. This is because small businesses are often the primary target of hackers who can more easily attack the smaller networks. IT consulting companies provide tools and practices such as spam management and firewall management to help protect the businesses from spam, viruses, hackers and intrusions from the Internet.

Technology Evaluation & Strategic Planning

Many SMB owners and managers employ an "ad-hoc" approach to dealing with technology, with no long term plan for future technology needs. IT consulting companies can periodically conduct a comprehensive assessment of your technology, review new options and technologies, and recommend improvements or changes to maximize technology effectiveness for the business.

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Break/Fix model vs. Managed Services: Key Benefits of Managed Services

Many SMBs use the “break/fix model” of technology management: when technology fails, a consultant is called in to fix the problem and the company pays a fee for the service—typically on an hourly rate basis. This break/fix method is problematic it results in repeated downtime and lost productivity. Another problem with this model is that consultants are not motivated to keep the client’s network and systems running efficiently—because the more problems and technology break downs that occur, the more money the consultant makes.

SMB owners should consider the “Managed IT Services” solution for several reasons. Managed services provide affordable solutions to the complex technology problems of small and mid-size businesses for a fixed monthly fee. Technology experts are fully focused on keeping the systems of the company up and running at their best, because repeated technology failures means higher costs to them. Therefore, the managed services model is beneficial to both the client and the technology expert — SMBs have the advantage of lower overall costs and better services, while technology experts get reliable monthly income from multiple clients to fund the people, training, tools and other resources needed to deliver the services.

With managed services, SMBs have access to IT professionals with broad backgrounds and experiences, as well as their network monitoring and managements tools. By letting IT consultants manage their technology, SMBs can keep their network protected against the latest security breaches, as well as reap the benefits of a larger team of IT professionals working proactively for their company. With remote monitoring and maintenance of the network, technology problems are resolved before they can disrupt the business, and network and hardware performance is greatly improved, with a significant decrease in network downtime. This increased efficiency leads to increased employee productivity and optimized return on investment (ROI).

Conclusion

Managed IT Services help small and mid-size business owners and managers by simplifying IT operations and improving the reliability of their networks, for a fixed monthly fee that is easy to plan and budget. Instead of spending time worrying about technology, they can stay focused on running and growing their businesses.

To find out more about Managed IT Services, call the experienced, certified professionals at Wolf Consulting, Inc. at 724-325-2900, or visit www.WolfConsulting.com.

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