



BUYER'S GUIDE TO MANAGED NETWORK SERVICES

Key Considerations
When Evaluating Your
Organization's Network
Support Options



This guide helps business owners understand the importance of professional management of their computer networks, the potential to outsource some or all of these core functions, and gives guidelines for entering into a managed services agreement.

Computer Networks Support Critical Business Processes

Today's businesses depend on increasingly complex computer networks to support critical business processes. Virtually every thing we do in business today depends on our computer networks. While computer networks and the Internet have enabled many small and medium businesses to grow rapidly, when any component of the network is down, business comes to a grinding halt. This can be devastating to a small business.

Networks Are Becoming More Complex

At the same time computer networks grow in importance, they grow in complexity. What used to be a fleet of desktop computers hard-wired to a few servers and printers now includes mobile devices, multifunction printer/scanners. Connectivity includes Wi-Fi networks and cellular data. Some applications remain in house while many applications are now being moved to the cloud. Each of these devices require management, maintenance and support.

Volumes of Mission-Critical Data Continue to Grow

Small business networks also support growing amount of critical data. This data needs to be backed up and protected with a disaster recovery strategy. Access needs to be controlled.

National or Global Client Bases

In today's world it common for small and medium businesses to have clients in multiple time zones across multiple continents. You may not be in your office 24 hours a day, but your network servers are humming around the clock. Your employees may be accessing company resources from home or from a hotel. This means someone needs to be looking after your computer networks 24 hours a day.

Voice Communication is Online

Many small businesses depend on Voice Over IP Communication (VoIP) for their phone systems. An increasing amount of communication is done over Skype, WebEx or Go-To-Meeting. All of these critical customer communication tools require a network that is operating with sufficient bandwidth.



Increased Risks Faced by Small and Medium Businesses

Viruses, Malware and Corporate Espionage

At the same time, there are a growing number of threats to your business. Computer viruses threaten to lock up your computers. Malware may capture keystrokes in the background, exporting critical customer data like credit card numbers to criminals overseas. Corporate espionage from large domestic or foreign competitors may threaten your critical information. Unmonitored networks and devices without updated virus protection could lead to major business losses.

Growing Regulatory Requirements

Most of today's government regulations insist on privacy of information. Whether you are dealing with medical information or simple customer financial information, you need to have processes to keep this information private.

Increased Legal Risk

Unfortunately we live in the most litigious society in the history of the world. The discovery process requires that companies be able to produce both paper and digital information. Businesses that are not able to produce emails, documents and other customer communication in a legal proceeding may face the risk of losing a case or having to settle out of court. Negligence in having a backup strategy is not an excuse. It is critical that small businesses have a process to backup and store historical business information.

Technology Requires Support

Here's the challenge small and medium businesses face. Technology requires attention and support. If it is not taken care of, you face the risk of short-term outages that bring your business to a halt damaging your customer service or risks from unsecured data getting into the wrong hands creating legal risk.

On a smaller scale, the simple distraction of key employees spending hours trying to resolve a computer problem causes other core business processes to be delayed, harming productivity in a business with a limited staff to begin with.

In this world, hard drives will crash. Software will lock up. Networks will go down. Servers will require maintenance. Hackers will try to gain access to your critical information.



▶ **THE QUESTION FOR
THE BUSINESS OWNER:**
*How will you handle these
inevitable situations?*

COMPLEX NETWORKS

MISSION-CRITICAL DATA GROWTH

NATIONAL OR GLOBAL CLIENT BASES

ONLINE VOICE COMMUNICATION

VIRUSES, MALWARE & ESPIONAGE

GROWING REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

INCREASED LEGAL RISK

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Small and Medium Businesses Are At a Disadvantage

Small and medium size businesses are at a disadvantage because they do not have the resources to support a full Information Technology (IT) staff. Large businesses are able to dedicate resources to make sure that their networks are online and secure.

Large Businesses Have IT Departments

Look inside most large companies and you'll find an IT department that includes:

- A Network Operations Center (NOC) that monitors all of their networks and devices 24 hours a day
- A staff that provides proactive management of software security patches and antivirus updates
- A server team that monitors servers, creates virtual servers and manages cloud applications
- A help desk that is able to answer end user questions about their computers and applications
- A field support team that handle PC, tablet, printer and scanner repairs
- Deployment teams that are able to configure new devices and deploy them on the network
- Strategy teams led by a Chief Information Officer that are looking for new technologies to support the business strategy

The Risks of No IT Person On Staff

Most small businesses do not have a full time IT person on staff. As a result, they cobble together support from some of their hardware vendors to take care of problems. Help desk support for broken computers is usually delegated to the "most technical" employee in the building, distracting them from their core job role. This can hurt a small business with a limited staff. Network monitoring, security updates and virus software updates are often ignored leading to a major risk of downtime or information theft. Backups may not be done consistently leading to a potential disaster.

The Limitations of One IT Person On Staff

Medium sized businesses may have an IT person on staff. However, asking one person to do all of these tasks is nearly impossible. In many cases, this person gets distracted by day-to-day end user problems and struggles to complete the most high-leverage task of finding and implementing new technologies to improve the business.



▶ **A BETTER ALTERNATIVE:** **MANAGED NETWORK SERVICES**

24/7/365 MONITORING

PROACTIVE RESPONSE TO ALERTS

HELP DESK SERVICES

ON SITE REPAIRS

TECHNOLOGY ROADMAP

A Better Alternative: Managed Network Services

Small and medium sized businesses can now take advantage of a better alternative: Managed Network Services (MNS). Operating as a virtual IT Department, a MNS partner can bring the benefits of a large company IT department to any business with a computer network. Partnering with a MNS company can fill in the missing pieces of your network, helping you keep your company up and running and protecting you from threats.

Here are some of the components you could be taking advantage of:

24 Hour Monitoring

In today's web-enabled global economy your company never sleeps. You may only be open during traditional business hours but your network is humming around the clock. Monitoring of your network ensures that problems are noticed and resolved. That means that even if something happens in the middle of the night, you can rest assured that someone is taking care of the issue while you sleep.

Proactive Response to Alerts

Many alerts go ignored in small businesses. Maybe software updates need to be applied to Windows. Virus software may need to be updated. Maybe the server operating systems need to be updated. Maybe the printer that produces all of your invoices is almost out of toner. A MNS partner can make sure all of these issues are taken care of proactively.

Help Desk Services

When one of your employees has a computer problem they can call the help desk instead of distracting the "tech-savvy" employee that is working in a core area of your business. The help desk is staffed by professionals that spend their entire day resolving computer issues. Chances are that they will be able to take care of the issue much faster than the person in your office. And, if the issue is truly serious, they will be able to escalate it so it can be resolved instead of simply putting a band-aid on it.



On Site Repair

There are times when you need someone to come and fix a device. Whether a new hard drive needs to be installed, a printer is jamming, a new employee needs a computer installed or someone shatters the glass on their iPad. These are the times you need someone with some technical skill to take care of the problem.

Technology Roadmap

As technology continues to evolve small businesses need to keep up with the latest innovations. Sometimes its hard for a small business owner to know what to implement and when to do it. A MNS partner can help you develop a technology roadmap. They can take care of installing new technology and removing the old devices. They can also offer acquisition strategies that allow you to pay for your technology over time instead of investing capital that could be used for core business initiatives.

Why Businesses Use Managed Network Services

Here are some of the main reasons that small businesses are adopting MNS.

Let's Them Focus On Their Business

Small businesses have limited staff resources. An MNS partnership lets them extend their staff with a virtual IT department. For less than the cost of a full time employee they get access to a full team of IT professionals. Keeping the network online and updated means that employees can focus their efforts around growing the business and serving clients.

Fuels Productivity and Growth With World Class Technologies

Our economy is fueled by innovation. A good MNS partner will help you keep pace with your larger competitors by allowing you to implement the latest technologies in your business.

Enhances Security

Instead of worrying about the security of your critical business and client data, you can rest assured that a team of people is paying attention to your data 24 hours a day. Instead of wondering if your data is backed up, it can be duplicated and secured on a remote server so that a fire or natural disaster wouldn't cripple your operations.

Secures Critical Applications and Transactions

Implementing the latest security patches and virus updates helps reduce



the risk that your data can be compromised. Even one Trojan virus on a single PC in your network could put your company at risk. Keeping security patches updated helps reduce that risk.

Addresses Problems Proactively

Rather than letting small problems become big problems, computer problems can be addressed while they are small. Monitoring devices on the network allows issues to be taken care of in advance. This could be a critical software update on one of your servers. Or, it could be automatically ordering toner for one of your departmental multifunction printers.

Maps Out a Technology Upgrade Plan

In an unmanaged IT environment, upgrades are often the result of a hardware or software failure. In this way, expenditures are reactive and time sensitive so you can get your systems back up and running as quickly as possible. With this model there is very little room for long term planning and budgeting as decisions are done in piecemeal rather than strategically with careful consideration to how they will affect other decisions down the line.

No matter the size of your organization you need IT support.

Technology will continue to evolve. As your needs change, your MNS partner can work with you to determine when and how to implement new technologies. This keeps you from surrendering competitive advantage to larger companies that have the benefit of CIO and a full IT department.

Reduces The Number of Vendors

The proliferation of new technologies has led to a growing number of vendors to manage. Understanding, processing and paying invoices from multiple hardware retailers, service providers and supply companies leads to unnecessary and redundant costs. It also can reign in individuals purchasing technology that may be inappropriate or over-priced. Partnering with a MNS company can help you streamline your accounts payable, reducing overhead expenses.



Selecting a MNS Partner

There are a number of things to consider when selecting a MNS partner.

Network Operations Center

You need a partner with a fully staffed Network Operations Center (NOC) that can monitor your network 24 hours a day. Some smaller MNS operations only have a few employees. They may say they offer 24-hour service, but that really means that they have someone who will get a text in the middle of the night that wakes them up when there is a problem. You need a partner with a team of people on-point watching your network 24 hours a day.

Field Service Team

In addition to the NOC, the partner needs to have a separate field service team that can come to your offices to resolve problems with hardware like network servers, PC's, printers, multifunction systems and scanners. The best scenario is a team that is already familiar with your employees and locations. Look for a company with a large field support staff and a track record of fast response.

Help Desk Support

Many end user computer problems can be quickly resolved through a call or chat with a help desk. You need a partner with a help desk staffed by knowledgeable employees that are able to resolve issues so your team can get back to work.

Technology Breadth

These days your computer network includes a growing variety of devices beyond traditional PC's. In your office you have input/output devices like scanners, printers, multifunctional systems, VoIP phones and even mailing equipment. In the field you have tablets and smart phones. In the cloud you have a variety of hosted applications. You need a partner that is familiar with as many of these devices as possible.

Experience and Reputation

There are many one-man MNS operations popping up as small businesses look to manage and secure their networks. Look for an established business that has a track record of providing excellent service in your local market. Many times the best way to find this kind of business is look for vendors that already service your technology and are familiar with the way you operate.

Technology Acquisition Options

Over time you will need new technologies. You will need to upgrade your servers, add new PC's or tablets and refresh your output devices. Look for a partner that can help you acquire these devices with flexible terms.



Service Level Agreement

Your MNS partner should provide you with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that clearly outlines their performance expectations including response times, what is monitored and how you will be invoiced. Take time to discuss this with your provider in detail so you have a mutual understanding of how you will work together.

Small/Medium Business Focus

Look for a partner that works with small businesses. A MNS partner that provides desktop support to Fortune 100 companies may not understand your specific needs. Find a partner that knows what small and medium sized businesses need. Look for a partner that cares about their reputation in the local market.

A Win-Win For Small Business

Managed Network Services offers small and medium sized businesses the benefits of a large company's IT department without the overhead, helping improve security, maintain productivity and reduce risks. As networks become more complex and more critical, small and medium sized businesses should consider the benefits of outsourcing some or all of the functions discussed in this guide to an MNS partner.

ABOUT USHERWOOD OFFICE TECHNOLOGY

Usherwood Office Technology is a leading regional provider of Information Technology solutions and services throughout the Northeast since 1976. We are headquartered in Syracuse, NY with branch sales and service offices in Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Burlington, Jamestown, Potsdam, Plattsburgh, Rochester, Utica, Watertown, and West Lebanon. In those 40 years Usherwood has grown to over 130 employees serving 7,000 clients across five states.

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