



The Right IT Stuff: Finding and Working with the Best Information Technology Services Partner for Your Small Business

Do you often feel stuck in the computer abyss when it comes to managing your company's needs for web or information technology services? Businesses with fewer than 50 or 60 employees often find themselves struggling to keep pace with their basic web and computer support services and miss out on effective small business IT solutions.

Without the guidance of an information technology services provider, small businesses can end up wasting time and money on computer support services because they aren't in touch with the best technology tools and practices for small business IT solutions. Even zero-employee companies can benefit immensely from a computer support services partner who shows them how to standardize their practices, save money with the right hardware or software and develop effective websites.

Putting Out Fires – Who Needs Dedicated Computer Support Services Anyway?

The approach often taken by small organizations when it comes to information technology services is one of putting out fires. No one has time to update the website, the network is cobbled together with wiring strung across the floor, and you're not sure when the last backup really ran. Then, a hard drive starts going click-click. You call that guy you occasionally use for computer support services, "Joe-I-Fix-Anything-PCs," to get the computer booting. That's when to your horror you discover that the tape in the drive since last Tuesday wasn't really backing up and the click-click is the sickening sound of your QuickBooks data being eaten by the dying hard drive.

There is a Better Way: A Solutions Partner for Web and Information Technology Services

It isn't that "Joe" can't spot you some quick computer support services and get you up and running again. It's the point that the "bargain" hard drive failed without warning, your data wasn't backed up and you didn't even have a centralized data management practice to begin with. Wouldn't it have been great to avoid all the headaches by using best-practice guidelines for business management and making informed purchase decisions? That's where a good small business IT solutions provider comes in, not only to avoid disaster but to save money. For example QuickBooks could be integrated with your shipping and credit card processing which saves three employees 30 hours a week in order fulfillment. Then you might implement a web solution for online orders which integrates with QuickBooks. A good information technology services partner makes computer support services a value proposition.

Small Business IT Solutions – Hiring a Partner

So what's the best way to find a great web or information technology services partner to work with and then get the most out of that relationship?

1. Look for a company that specializes in small business managed IT solutions

Computer support services companies that specialize in small business will be more in tune to your particular needs and challenges. They will understand budgetary constraints for computer support services and the need to use resources very efficiently. Because technology developers and manufacturers are now seeing a large and relatively untapped market of small business customers, there are some terrific tools emerging for small organizations. A technology partner focused on small business IT solutions and information technology services will help your company grow and succeed.

Today, managed IT services that includes 24/7 monitoring and remote support brings many cost efficiencies to business and allows your technology support to be proactive instead of reactive. Most of these service delivery models are also fixed fee. This means you don't pay when your network is down.

2. Do you need a local information technology services partner?

Not necessarily. If the goal here is to find a provider of information technology services to help you manage your website, make purchase decisions and facilitate projects, it doesn't have to be local. With sophisticated remote tools and web-based collaboration, many problems and projects can be addressed remotely. The key is to find a good fit. For onsite service such as network installation or hardware swaps, a good solutions partner can identify and schedule local computer support services as needed or works with a nationwide network experts for repairs, rollouts or other onsite computer support service. If the company isn't local, ask what provisions it has in place for onsite service.

3. Personalized computer support services

One of the stigmas attached to the tech industry and a common complaint about providers of computer support services is lack of personalization. A good provider of information technology services wants to get to know you, your processes and your employees. The staff should ask questions about what your company does and who the key contacts are to gain a feel for your organization's culture. Likewise, access to the provider's staff and resources is equally important. The relationship is going to be much more effective when that company has a mandate for personalized service and an open door to communications.

4. Due diligence

Think of hiring a solutions partner for information technology services like you would hiring someone for your staff. Look for a company that is seeking a long-term partnership. Ask for references. Then find out how long the company has been in business, who you will have access to for a problem or project and how the provider charges for its computer support services.

5. Cohesive approach and good facilitation

The partner that you select should want to take a cohesive approach to understanding your business or organization and help you come up with a customized plan for your technology and web needs, be it a long-range strategy or a specific project. The difference between "Joe-I-Fix-Anything-PCs" and a provider of complete information technology services and solutions is someone who can do a good discovery about your organization and its goals facilitate the project and help bring together

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providers for the components outside their expertise. Also, a one-stop shop can provide you with benefits. Keeping your hardware and software purchases, web and computer support services together can provide you economies of scale combined with the convenience of single point of support and access to someone who knows your business.

How to Get the Most Out of the Relationship

6. Identify key problems, goals and areas to improve efficiency

Once you partner with a provider of information technology services and solutions, the first and most important step is an analysis of problems. The more you can communicate about your company, current practices and areas to improve, the more effective your solutions partner can be in coming up with a computer support services plan designed to keep things running smoothly, maximize your assets and move your organization forward.

7. Set up best practices in your business

Typically the biggest challenge small organizations face in being successful is getting out of their own way, seeing the big picture and making the changes necessary for improvements to happen. A good small business IT solutions partner can help you set up best practices to get most out of your investment in information technology services. However, making sure those practices are implemented and followed rests squarely on your shoulders, not on those of your computer support services provider.

8. Avoid costly mistakes - Don't make impulse purchases

Whereas large companies tend to have a formal evaluation and approval process in place for making technology purchases, many smaller organizations make impulse purchases. Let the company you've hired for information technology services do its job and provide you its expertise on purchases. If the company resells hardware and software at competitive rates, purchasing from it can be worthwhile. You'll have a single point of purchase for computer support services, and the company can recommend hardware and software from manufacturers it has partnerships with and expertise on as well. All of that translates to added benefit to you.

9. Choose managed information technology services designed for business

Small organizations have a tendency to operate off the cuff, looking for freebies or grabbing cheap services not really designed for business. This approach to information technology services can come back to bite you. If you want to grow your business, approach your needs for computer support services like a bigger organization would. If your IT partner makes recommendations on computer support services that you think you can find cheaper elsewhere, take a hard look at what you are getting and how it can really benefit your business. Once you weigh all the benefits, you may find the value to your business growth and offerings far outweighs the cost.

10. Can I still do it myself?

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Working with a good provider of information technology services doesn't mean you can't do anything yourself. In fact, a reputable and innovative IT company should educate you on how to better manage your technology needs and investments. There are still a lot of day-to-day tasks you can and should do within your organization, depending on your skill level, time and desire. The point is to keep your computer support services partner in the loop and use their expertise and input on major technology decisions.

Conclusion

So, what's in it for you? By partnering with a provider of information technology services, you'll find a more thought out, comprehensive approach to small business IT solutions that can increase efficiency, save you money, generate revenue, and help your business succeed.

About The Launch Pad

The Launch Pad shares insight through research studies, white papers, newsletter articles and most importantly feedback from our clients to help small businesses and organizations succeed with technology and on the web. Our team has been helping businesses and organizations develop and manage cost effective technology solutions aimed at growing small business since 1992 expanding our capabilities and services with the growth of the web to include managed hosting, website design and development and domain registration.

Your pursue your vision... we'll manage the technology

We encourage you to contact us for information about technology and web opportunities for your organization:

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About the Author

Ilene Rosoff is the President and Founder of The Launch Pad, a Florida-based technology company specializing in IT and Web solutions for small local and national clients, from 20 to 200 employees. Ilene is a published author and speaks throughout Florida to small business, schools and non-profits on best practices for using technology solutions in their organizations. Use the fax-back form below to set up a complimentary technology audit and review for your organization or visit launchpadonline.com and request an IT or web project proposal.

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- Review employee and network downtime

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