

## The Experts: Technology

# Consider using a 3rd-party IT provider

I don't have to tell you how tough it is out there. We see the news and hear the dire statistics daily. Businesses we have grown up with are either downsizing or closing their doors for good. Employees are being let go and those lucky enough to keep their jobs are overburdened with extra work at no extra pay. If big companies cannot survive this



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economic crisis, how can small and medium-sized businesses expect to continue, much less grow and prosper?

Add to this mix the necessity to stay ahead of the rapid changes in technology. This is no small feat. Once businesses find themselves finally understanding and getting used to their new operating system, or whatever happens to be the latest technology du jour, a newer, faster and more advanced model comes along and suddenly their tools are obsolete. Of course, this is to be expected. But when these changes happen practically overnight, it truly is hard to keep up, much less afford! It is even more difficult to maintain when also dealing with the increasingly sophisticated and invasive methods being used by hackers, worms and viruses.

What if your business is the victim of a disaster? It is possible. In the last year alone, several Hampton Roads' businesses sustained damage from tornados, fires and major storms. If a catastrophe occurred, how quickly could you access e-mail, vital records or customer data? If you have ever calculated the cost of just one hour of downtime, then you know the costs are astronomical. What would happen if you lost data vital to your day-to-day operations?

Given the current state of the economy, how can your business survive any, or all of these scenarios? Believe it or not, your best bet may be to hand these worries over to someone else.

Imagine this. How wonderful would it be if you could focus on your core business and not have to worry about technology? What if you could go to work each day secure in the knowledge your information technology system is running at optimal efficiency, everything is backed up, on budget, on time and virus-free by an expert staff using the most sophisticated technology available? This doesn't have to be a dream. This can be your everyday reality. And, it can happen almost immediately.

Today, more and more businesses are ridding themselves of their technology concerns by outsourcing them to a third-party IT provider. This strategic move is known as managed services and is becoming

a business necessity by changing the way organizations across all industries conduct their IT operations.

Instead of operating in a reactionary mode by contacting a computer company only when a "break-fix" emergency occurs and then paying top dollar for the call, businesses can instead partner with a managed services provider by entrusting them with their all IT requirements and receiving proactive 24x7x365 remote support for a fixed monthly cost. This model deploys a more efficient and effective IT environment, while reducing expenses and increasing cash flow. Cost savings are realized through a reduction in IT staffing and other associated expenses, including training and certification.

When partnering with a managed services provider, organizations are also assured the highest compliance standards will be employed, resulting in increased operational efficiency and providing stable, predictable and secure environments for uninterrupted business continuity.

Networks are proactively monitored, help-desk access is immediately available, patch management and the most advanced anti-virus software are deployed, and backup and disaster recovery solutions are in place.

At the same time, managed services providers are proactively looking for potential IT issues. Key operational trends, bottlenecks and spike times are continuously analyzed to ensure peak business performance. This means more issues can be resolved before they affect productivity. Managed services is about prevention, not about resolving issues after they have happened.

As an added value, managed service providers will also manage their client's infrastructure vendor relationships. Whenever the most complex issues occur, managed service providers are in immediate contact with service vendors to remedy the problem.

Without having vendors or an IT staff to manage, organizations are free to focus on their core business and leave the IT to the experts.

We live in a day and age when we hear about business decisions that truly make you scratch your head and wonder what people were thinking.

Not so with managed services. This model provides fixed monthly rates, mitigated risk, proactive support, client confidence, peace of mind and saves money. Plain and simple, managed services just makes good business sense.

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