

IT support company selection guide





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Introduction

The business IT landscape is changing: technology now plays a bigger role in a firms' success (or failure) than ever before. Cloud technology and BYOD adoption continue to grow as firms recognise the innovation, productivity and costs benefits they can bring; meanwhile, cyber risk continues to remain high on the agenda.

This has led many firms to realise their traditional IT support arrangements no longer truly support their business goals – they treat technology as an operational concern rather than a strategic one. Instead of reactive support for managed devices and software, firms require proactive partnerships with IT experts that can help them navigate the cloud, improve productivity and address security risks.

In this guide, we look at some of the factors you should consider when choosing an IT support company in light of this changing landscape.

“ For SMBs, cloud adoption now stands at 79%, with a further 14% developing future cloud plans. The biggest challenge for those new to the cloud is security (cited by 32%). ”

[The Rightscale State of the Cloud Report 2017](#)



A vision for the cloud

Does your IT support company fully embrace the cloud? Or is it unwilling or reluctant to help you make the move, pointing to the benefits of maintaining a hosted or on-premises solution?

The reality for IT support companies is that the cloud disrupts their traditional revenue streams, where supporting and updating software or maintaining servers and infrastructure generated the bulk of their income. Whilst some have chosen to embrace and align their services with cloud technology (such as the software-as-a-service versions of the Microsoft Office suite), others have made the move reluctantly and with a limited offering – or not at all.

If you are reading this guide, then you may have already identified that moving to the cloud will help with your business objectives – whether that be innovation, productivity, improved security or more. If so, it makes sense to choose an IT support company that not only understands the growing role of cloud technology but embraces it fully, and has a vision for moving customers' IT out of the server room and into the cloud.

You should therefore look for a company that has the knowledge and expertise to deliver this move (with a proven and verifiable track record in doing so), as well as the ability to make the most of customers' on-premises infrastructure to ensure the greatest possible return from any past IT investments. Ask for case studies and other evidence that they do more than simply pay lip service to cloud solutions, too.



Vendor partnerships

One of the attractions of working with an IT support company has always been to take advantage of partnerships with top hardware and software vendors, for reasons of cost benefits, tailored support and access to a pool of expertise on a given technology or solution.

If cloud is on the agenda, it therefore makes sense to pay attention to the partnership that your IT support company has with cloud vendors. Make sure you consider the following issues:

- ❑ Are they a Jack of all trades and master of none? Or do they specialise in a certain offering that ties in with your needs?
- ❑ What is their partnership status with the desired vendor and what additional benefits will this confer to you as their client (such as exclusive insight into upcoming features or fast-tracking of issues)?
- ❑ How extensive is their experience of working with the cloud technology provider? What evidence do they have to support this?

For example, Microsoft Gold Partnership status can only be attained by IT support companies with a high level of Microsoft implementations – a status which provides exclusive access to Microsoft account managers, technical support and strategy advisers. This not only fast tracks complex migrations and speeds up issues with software, but gives exclusive insight into new and upcoming features. So, if you intend to move your firm to Office 365, it makes sense to choose a Microsoft Gold Partner rather than a company without the same track record.



Support for BYOD

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is an IT strategy that is fast gaining traction in the corporate world, enabling agile and flexible working at low cost – along with the productivity gains that come from allowing employees to work whenever, wherever, on whatever device.

However, whilst BYOD may bring opportunities for businesses that embrace the idea of the more connected and empowered employee, it also presents additional security risks. There is inherently less control over personal devices compared with business-owned devices, and it can be difficult to prevent the use of unsecure or untested applications, connections to unknown WiFi networks, or even device loss or theft in the BYOD world.

Banning the use of BYOD is not the answer either: in the absence of a BYOD policy employees are likely to find their own workarounds (known as “shadow IT”), especially when faced with time pressures where every minute counts.

Your IT support company should have experience in dealing with the modern phenomenon of BYOD working and have innovative solutions to the unique challenges it presents. Secure access to email and documents should be a given, as should the ability to work and collaborate on files whilst on-the-go and save them in the cloud. Innovative solutions such as Microsoft’s Enterprise Mobility Suite, for example, can segregate private and work data – meaning access to the latter is always secure, and only the latter will ever be remotely wiped in the event of a lost or stolen device.

“ [One study](#) showed that 83% of CIOs had experienced employees accessing the cloud in some manner without authorisation from their IT department. ”



Security controls

Cybercrime is a bigger risk to SMEs than ever before, with over half of medium businesses and a third of small businesses having experienced a breach or attack within 12 months according to a [government survey](#).

The survey shows that the costs to business are wide and varied: in addition to the cost of implementing additional security measures (a financial consequence for 55% of firms), many were also affected by the time taken to deal with breaches (42%), impact on day-to-day activities (31%) and an inability to provide goods or services (12%).

It is therefore vital to choose an IT support company that is serious about IT security and can put in place the best possible defences against cyber-attacks. These include:

- ❑ The Cyber Essential Scheme. Implementation of these government-recommended steps offers an excellent starting point for a secure modern workplace.
- ❑ Additional security measures. These include multifactor authentication to prevent password theft, email security measures such as encryption and fool-proof solutions that can guard against employees opening harmful emails, and controlling user access to documents to prevent unauthorised access and sharing.

- ❑ ISO/IEC 27001:2013 (ISO 27001). Certification to the internationally recognised ISO 27001 standard demonstrates that an organisation is following information security best practices.
- ❑ User training. Human error is one of the biggest causes of cyber security breaches. Training on issues such as how to recognise phishing emails is therefore indispensable.

“ 51% of medium firms and 33% of small firms experienced a cyber security breach or attack in the past year. ”

[Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2016](#)

“ 63% of confirmed data breaches involved weak, default or stolen passwords. ”

[Verizon's 2016 Data Breach Investigations Report](#)



True 24/7 support

With the rise of cloud, remote working and BYOD, working around the clock is more common and many growing companies have geographically distributed workforces. Customers may also require access to web-based resources at all hours.

If this applies to you, true 24/7 support from your IT support company is vital – otherwise, an after-hours outage could lead to significant loss of revenues, whether through lost productivity, reputational damage or missed business opportunities.

Many IT support companies will claim to offer 24/7 support but it is important to clarify what this means and consider how this affects your business. Are their offices staffed around the clock to respond to calls and support tickets, or do they have a self-service troubleshooting portal – and possibly one or two staff on call at night – and not much else?

“ Can your IT support company promise and deliver on fast response times in their Service Level Agreements, with 95% of responses within the hour? ”



Proactive training

Too often, companies make the move to the cloud and find that their return on investment is hindered by their employees becoming frustrated with the software – possibly for the reason of simple unfamiliarity – leading to inevitable pushback. Or they implement robust security systems and policies, only to find that they are thwarted by employees who fail to follow basic security measures.

The key to avoiding such issues lies in offering the right kind of training to employees. Instead of offering training booklets that employees will place in a drawer to be read when they have time (which never materialises), make sure your IT provider can offer a training programme that breaks things down into short and helpful sessions for maximum learning retention.

Security training should include onboarding workshops to guide employees through your cloud software features and help them to identify and guard against common security risks. Following training, employees should be provided with ongoing support and a forum to raise any issues that they encounter.



Industry track record

For many firms, the changing IT landscape raises industry-specific concerns regarding security and compliance. For example, solicitors and barristers must abide by the Codes of Conduct and guidance issued by the Solicitors Regulatory Authority or Bar Council in respect of data protection and confidentiality issues in adopting the cloud, whilst financial firms face scrutiny by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Certain industries will also present with their own unique set of requirements in terms of document management, CRM systems and workflows.

If this applies to you, it is vital that you choose an IT support company that understands your industry background and can deliver a solution tailored to those needs. Check their references to ensure that they have sufficient industry know-how to ensure you maximise your return on investment from the cloud.



About Doherty

Founded in 1991, Doherty Associates is an IT support and managed services company that has embraced cloud solutions since they were in their infancy. We focus on implementations of Microsoft cloud services, including Office 365 and Azure, as we believe they represent some of the most flexible, user-friendly, secure and innovative cloud solutions for SMEs on the market. This focus has enabled us to achieve Microsoft Gold Partnership and pass on the benefits that this status brings to our customers.

As an IT support company based in London but with a global presence, We are on hand to help you day and night, with a dedicated team to monitor our systems 24/7 and ensure business continuity.

We also have a proven track record in delivering Office 365 to regulated sectors such as law and financial services, and the trust and confidentiality required in these industries is reflected in how we do business. Just ask any of our customers, who would be only too happy to provide a reference.

“ Doherty Associates adheres to strict Service Level Agreements, with 95% of issues responded to within one hour. ”

Key services we offer include:

Comprehensive IT support


- 24x7 fully managed service desk
- Log and track tickets with Doherty support app
- Unlimited service desk access – no hidden costs
- Remote diagnostics for quicker resolution
- Fully managed desktop Anti-malware included
- Regular patching to keep you safe
- Mobile device support, including remote wipe technologies

Critical device monitoring

- 24x7 proactive server monitoring
- Office 365 and Azure services monitoring
- Fully managed server patching
- Firewall & ISP monitoring and management
- 3rd party vendor liaison
- Emergency on-site support for priority one incidents
- Malware monitoring and alert response

Deskside training clinic

- On ramp education sessions to get you started
- Tips and advice for safer computing
- Power use sessions going beyond the basics
- Smarter working tips, so that you know what to use and when
- Ask Me sessions



Request a free IT audit

For expert advice on the Cyber Essentials scheme, your cloud readiness and more

[Click here](#)