



WHAT ARE THE EIGHT POINTS THAT
MAKE A GOOD MANAGED SERVICE
PROVIDER?

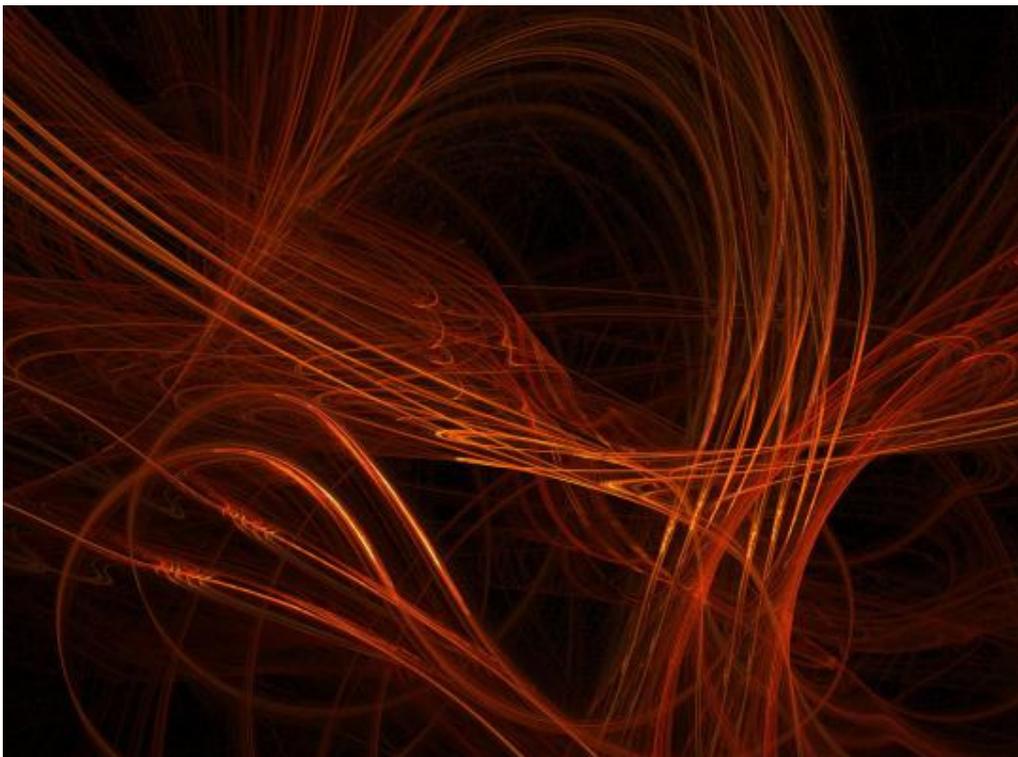
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INTRODUCTION

ICT has gone through many changes in its short life and it will continue to change and morph far into the future. These changes and what is happening at present, small and medium business in many respects have had to play catch-up in regards to productivity, stability and data security. For small and medium Business and not for profit organisations (SME) this process of catch-up can be very expensive, confusing and sometimes even hard to control.

Having limited resources within the SME, the cost of having a full time ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) person on staff has to be not only justified but also show some level of return on investment to the business. The size of the business dictates that most small businesses cannot afford to have an ICT person on staff dedicated only to that component of the business. The role of computer management usually reverts to the person with the most technical expertise (“I know computers “ type staff member), which then has a detrimental effect on their other jobs because they are more interested in the fun and shiny things not the boring normal business related work .

A managed service provider (MSP) or a managed service security provider (MSSP) can help as a proactive solution for your business by supplying high level Business ICT support through a number of processes.

But what is the business trying to achieve by outsourcing this most crucial of business components?

Project billing based on hours, days, or any time unit should be considered unethical because it is in conflict with the SME level of service:

The SME is best served when issues are resolved and improved quickly, but the service provider is best served when the time involved is lengthy.

Solving a problem or improving a condition in a half-day is extraordinarily valuable for the SME, but deprives the service provider of a significant financial gain who is billing by the time unit.

Time-based billing is based on the inherent notion that one's time is valuable.

We often hear "You're the first consultant to propose a single monthly fee," or "We're accustomed to evaluating hourly fees for our ICT support" and our response to that is, "Exactly, that's what makes us different and popular with clients. We have removed the uncertainty and questionable investments entirely." Here are some reasons that our approach works entirely in your favour...

A value-based fee is always in an SME's best interest.

- There is a cap on your ICT investment. With either a monthly management fee for all support costs or a single project fee for the complete project the SME knows exactly what is to be spent and there are no surprises.
- There is never a "meter running." You do not have to worry each time our help is requested that we are in your office for an hour, a day, or a week.
- You are no longer in the position of making an investment decision every time you may need our help. Otherwise, you are trying to determine the impossible: I.E. Is this an issue that justifies a \$2,000 visit or a \$500 phone call? With your ICT you should never be in that position.
- Your staff and users feel free to use our assistance and to ask for our help without feeling they have to go to someone for budgetary approval.
- If we find additional work that was unanticipated but must be performed, we can do it without having to come to you for additional funds. Normally In those instances, legitimate, additional work is viewed as padding out the project and an attempt to generate addition hours or days.
- If you as a business find additional, related work that must be done, you can freely request it without worry about increased costs.

- The overall, set fee, in relation to the monthly costs of the support to be delivered, is inevitably less of a proportional investment than hourly billing.
- The quality approach is assured, since the fee is set and paid.
- If we decide that additional resources are necessary, there is no cost to your business and we can employ additional help as we see fit.
- This is the most uncomplicated way to work together. There will never be a debate about what is billable time (e.g., travel, report writing) or what should be done on site or off site.

Based upon the above ideas let's look at the benefits of a Trouble Free Technology environment through a managed service delivery model and how it will better your business:

SME BUSINESS IS TRYING TO KEEP TECHNOLOGY COSTS MANAGEABLE.

We all know how most ICT support companies make their money. Some ICT support companies charge an hourly rate and then dispatch a technician to your office when something breaks and has to be fixed. In the Industry this is called "Break/Fix" and is probably the most expensive way of outsourcing an ICT service. Furthermore, no matter what happens when the technician is on your site you are paying for the privilege of having that expertise, whether the technician is a high level or a novice you are paying for them to be there. Not only are you paying to have a technician on site who could be in training but because you have to pay for the visit you have to make decisions for your business based on the costs. You may have a number of small problems that although not critical are wasting your staffs time and energies to initiate workarounds but could cost your business substantially if they were fixed. This reflects in the business in a number of ways, bad morale and reduced productivity are just an example of the impact of these problems.

Other outsourcing companies seem to have very hard to understand systems that always cost you more than what you agreed on. Some have tokens that reflect an hourly cost and still others allow for their clients to

purchase up front hours at a discounted cost. You may already have an agreement with an outsourcing company that does that.

WHAT DOES AN SME NEED?

There are a number of things that a SME needs when it comes to outsourcing their computer management and business IT support:

- A single monthly cost for the entire ICT infrastructure. That includes all computers, laptops, users, servers, phones, printers, routers and management.
- Helpdesk, on site and off site support for your business between the hours of 0830 – 1700 is included. There is provision to add in other hours or out of hour's requirements depending on YOUR business requirement. Furthermore if we receive a call after hours we will always say that if we fix this now there will be an additional cost but if you delay it till tomorrow or Monday we will fix it as a part of the agreement.
- Always-available (0830 – 1700) technical support through email, fax, phone or remote management. 24/7 support can be factored in depending on **YOUR** business requirements.
 - Computer fails – receive call and access computer through remote management system and talk user through the problem. If it cannot be rectified then dispatch technician. (no additional cost)
 - Road warrior / home user cannot connect to the network – apply remote management software to system and diagnose problem. (no additional cost)
 - Server problem – remote management and monitoring software allows secure access. If it cannot be fixed then a technical support member is dispatched to site. (no additional cost)
 - Working on a tender – contact us 48 hours prior to requiring to have technical support available. (may involve additional costs)

- This is what R & I Consulting supplies with its Trouble Free Technology Service. Between 0830 – 1700 all technical support for your business is covered. No matter what the problem there is always a technical support person available.

SME BUSINESSES ARE TRYING TO KEEP TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS MANAGEABLE.

SME's have a bigger problem with controlling their computer and networking purchasing than large organisations and enterprises just because of their size. A SME purchase will often be due to requirement within the business, adding more staff, needing a bigger printer or getting a better phone system will often be due to necessity. The problem is that without that "strategic plan" based on the business the new hardware or software may be incompatible with the business environment.

For instance if a SME purchases a computer with a home based operating system installed then it will have major problems integrating it into their business. This usually happens when the system is purchased from a retail shop or a business who's main customer's base is home users. Other problems that arise could be a business with 10 computers adding another and not being able to have all computers accessing the correct shares on all of the computers. Disaster recovery problems could be associated with having different information all over all the office computers and not having a central location for all that data.

SME BUSINESSES NEED A READY SOURCE OF GOOD BUSINESS RELATED TECHNICAL FACTS

This is where good solid advice comes into the fore when it comes to creating a manageable ICT system for your business.

R & I Consulting implements technology that will benefit your business. We do not recommend a specific technology because we get a monetary benefit from the supplier but we recommend it because we know it works, it is what your business requires or it is the best product for that solution. R & I Consulting are vendor agnostic and we propose and supply all vendors equipment that we believe have the capability to help our clients.

What this means is that you and your business benefit from our ability to supply and install products that will do the best job or are the best solution for a specific problem.

SME BUSINESSES NEED A WAY TO MONITOR AND MANAGE CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Being proactive is a critical component of the support methodology that R & I Consulting delivers to our clients. By being proactive we are looking to your business as a part of ours. We do not like have our technology fail so we ensure that it doesn't that then gets translated into keeping your business systems going in a proactive environment.

A proactive business environment means that all critical components are monitored and checked constantly. 365 days of the year (and the extra day every 4 years), we monitor your business system with our agent based monitoring system. The agent tells us when your server is running out of space, whether the patching has been done or if a service has stopped. With a system of warnings and traps, we ensure that systems do not fail but if they do we are on it straight away even out of hours.

This monitoring information is also used to generate monthly reports that are delivered to your business. These reports show trends and warnings within your business ICT environment and allows management to make informed decisions.

SME BUSINESSES NEED ACCESS TO LARGE ENTERPRISE TECHNICAL RESOURCES WITH REDUCED COST.

An SME has limited resources when it comes to the management of their businesses ICT components. This creates a problem when it comes to getting or using the best available systems for their business.

By outsourcing to a computer management company an SME can gain expertise that is only available through either high cost to the business or large enterprise ICT systems. An outsourced ICT contract will give an SME this level of service.

The business needs to improve the business bottom line through proactive and cost effective computer service.

Proactive ICT services allow any SME to not have business assets that are unavailable. Whether it is a total melt down of the system that takes all users off line for an extended period or the receptionist cannot print to a specific printer your business is suffering.

In a break / fix situation your business has to wait for you to realise you have a problem, for the technician to get on site and for the technician to resolve the problem and get you working again. This situation can cost you not just in the repair cost but also the soft costs associated with your business. These soft costs include having all of your staff sitting around doing nothing while the system is repaired. Revenue generation will drop and business costs can sky rocket when no one is doing their job.

By paying for an outsourced, managed services or computer management solution, you are protecting your business with a proactive system of management and monitoring. If you think of it like getting a service for your car – you do not wait for your car to break but you have it serviced regularly to ensure that it does not break. Checking the oil and making sure there are no leaks protects your car so a similar service for your business technology ensures that it does not fail when you need it the most.

SME BUSINESSES NEED A FILTERING MECHANISM FROM THE SALES HYPE

SME and Business management can be inundated with sales calls from people selling you technology that they, the salesman, believe will help your business. Most of the time when there is a new implementation of technology into a business there are major teething problems and the integration of these technologies can mean that you have to purchase other equipment to make it all work.

Would you rather have a way for your business to profit from improvements in technology without all of those problems that could come from the changes? As a bonus for our Trouble Free Technology stance, we look to improve your interaction with these vendors by getting their sales pitches and asking the technical questions to ensure their product will not have any

additional costs or hidden “gotcha’s”. This ensure that there are no hidden costs and we guarantee that there will not be any extra cost.

Being Vendor agnostic, if a product will better your business we will find that it will benefit our other clients so we would endorse the product that they are selling. This way we make sure that the implemented system is a part of our Trouble Free Technology systems.

SME BUSINESSES NEED THE PROTECTION OF A SOLID SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA).

If your business is protected by a solid Managed Service Agreement (MSA) or Service Level Agreement (SLA) you and your business knows exactly where it stands in regards to your computer and network management. You know what is covered and what is protected under the SLA and you have guarantees of response times and the provider knows when they will be paid and what resources that have to apply to your business.

CONCLUSION

A good managed services provider will ensure that your business is stable, productive and safe. By applying good business and ICT best practice and ensuring that, **all** of your staff has ready access to a help desk no matter how silly the request may seem strange but we guarantee that it will ensure that all of the staff are productive and happy.

A value-based standard fee is always in your business and organisations best interest.

- There is a cap on your ICT investment. Your business knows exactly what is to be spent and there are no surprises.
- There is never a "meter running." You do not have to worry each time our help is requested that we are in your office for an hour, a day, or a week.
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- This is the most uncomplicated way to work together. There will never be a debate about what is billable time (e.g., travel, report writing) or what should be done on site or off site.

Business ICT Support is no longer based on reactive and break fix solutions. All business requires proactive support and a direct line to a helpdesk during the critical working hours of the business. If you do not have a help desk, on site and off site technical support for all of your staff between 0830 – 1700, that will not cost you additional money then you need to look at someone that does supply that sort of solution.

Computer management and stability for a business will have a direct relation to the staff productivity and morale. If the technical support for your business does not deliver a stable and proactive environment that you and your staff can rely on then look elsewhere.

