

# Understanding Managed IT Services

**Everything You Need to Know  
About Working with an MSP**

Welcome to your comprehensive guide to understanding managed services providers (MSPs). This resource combines essential insights from our blogs and access to our detailed MSP Buyer's Guide as well as other helpful checklists to help you better understand and take advantage of managed services, whether you're exploring managed services for the first time or considering a switch to a new MSP.

**In this ebook:**

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**The Exigent Method**

At Exigent, we have a strategy that combines long-term vision with quarterly agility, ensuring we're always prepared to innovate and overcome challenges by aligning resources with our strategic vision. We apply that same strategy with clients: The Exigent Method.

We uncover your business aspirations, identify key tactical areas, and pinpoint potential obstacles. This collaborative process allows us to tailor a precise IT roadmap—one that uses the right solutions to empower your business with the exact technology stack it needs to execute on your long-term vision.

- Step One: Build your foundation with Assurance Managed Services
- Step Two: Layer on advanced solutions unique to your industry and organization
- Step Three: Craft an IT roadmap that turns technology into a tool for your long-term business success

## Is Your Organization Ready for Managed Services?

Transitioning to managed IT services is a strategic decision that can transform how your organization handles technology. However, some businesses aren't sure whether they need managed services or not. Here are key indicators that your business might benefit from partnering with an MSP:

- **Frequent IT Issues:** If daily operations are disrupted by IT problems, an MSP can provide proactive monitoring and resolution. Businesses have reported up to a 40% reduction in downtime after switching to managed services.
- **Unpredictable IT Costs:** Managed services offer predictable monthly fees and reduce financial surprises, allowing better budgeting. MSPs also provide advanced notice when legacy hardware or software needs replaced, and help with procurement for better pricing.
- **Security is Overwhelming:** Too many businesses are stymied by cybersecurity, an issue too complex to handle in-house. An MSP's expert engineers can alleviate this burden.
- **Lack of IT Staff:** SMBs rely on non-IT employees to manage technology, which can reduce productivity and cause frustration. MSPs let your team focus on their core responsibilities.
- **Strategic Growth Goals:** MSPs align IT with business goals, driving innovation and scalability. If your current technology cannot support future plans, an MSP might be the solution.

## Hold On. What Does "Managed Services" Really Mean?

Before we go any farther, let's define managed services and address some FAQs:

- **What are managed services?** Managed services provide comprehensive IT support for a predictable monthly fee. MSPs resolve issues through tickets, emails, or calls and use proactive tools like remote monitoring to minimize downtime. They offer a partnership with a knowledgeable team familiar with your environment and business goals.
- **How much do managed IT services cost?** MSPs offer managed services via an annual agreement that is billed monthly. Many MSPs offer two to three levels of support, depending on your needs. For example, at Exigent, our Resolution level provides "all you can eat" remote support, while our Complete level adds on-site support to that remote service. MSPs typically charge \$100 to \$250 per user per month, depending on support levels.

## Hold on. What does “managed services” really mean? continued

- How do costs compare to in-house IT? Managed services reduce downtime and improve productivity, saving costs compared to an in-house team. CompTIA research shows that managed IT services can help businesses save up to 25% on IT costs.



*For more in-depth information, check out our blogs:  
[Show Me the Money!](#) and [Average IT Costs for SMBs](#)*

- What does a typical managed services contract include? Annual contracts outline support levels, such as remote and onsite assistance, response times (SLAs), and included services. Note: cybersecurity needs may require customized solutions.



*[Learn more about tiers of support and SLAs](#)*

- Will an MSP work with my IT team? Yes, through a “co-managed IT” model. This allows internal teams to focus on specific issues or projects while MSPs fill skill gaps or offer additional support. A [co-managed model](#) offers larger companies flexibility and scalability at an affordable price.
- Can MSPs handle industry-specific software? Yes. MSPs quickly learn the ins and outs of even highly specialized applications. Be prepared for a learning curve, but usually, the team will be able to support almost any software your organization uses.
- Do MSPs provide 24/7 helpdesk services? Most MSPs offer round-the-clock service, though response times vary after hours and on weekends or holidays. Ask your MSP about their process at each level of managed services they offer.
- How big does a business need to be for MSPs? Realizing the benefits of managed services isn’t tied to size or type of business, but rather the demands on your technical environment. However, businesses usually don’t enjoy full benefits and cost savings until they have about 15 users.



*If you want more FAQs, [check out our “IT Essentials” page.](#)*

## Key Benefits of Working with an MSP

Partnering with a qualified MSP offers:

- **Proactive IT Support:** Prevent issues before they disrupt operations. For example, businesses have reported a 30% improvement in uptime with proactive monitoring.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Streamlined services at predictable costs. Research from industry organization CompTIA has consistently shown that most organizations save as much as 25% on IT costs with an MSP engagement.
- **Enhanced Security:** Robust protection against cyber threats, including regular security audits and compliance assistance. MSPs also empower existing cybersecurity solutions through monitoring, maintenance, and optimization required for peak protection.
- **Scalability:** Support for growth and evolving technology needs. MSPs can assist with cloud migrations and implementing new technologies like automation tools.
- **Expert Guidance:** Access to specialists who stay current on IT trends.

Features	Managed IT Services	Break-Fix Model
<b>Cost Structure</b>	Predictable monthly fee	Unpredictable, often high per-incident costs
<b>Proactive Support</b>	Continuous monitoring and issue prevention	Reactive—problems are addressed after they occur
<b>Downtime</b>	Minimized with proactive maintenance	Higher risk of extended downtime
<b>Scalability</b>	Flexible solutions that grow with your business	Limited scalability—requires frequent adjustments
<b>Security</b>	Advanced tools to monitor and address vulnerabilities and gaps in coverage	Security only addressed when issues arise
<b>Response Time</b>	Guaranteed service-level agreements (SLAs)	Unpredictable response times
<b>IT Strategy</b>	Strategic roadmap aligned with business goals	No strategic support—focused only on fixes
<b>Technology Updates</b>	Regular updates and improvements	Updates applied only when requested or necessary
<b>Business Focus</b>	Frees you to focus on your core business activities	Distracts with recurring IT issues
<b>Support Availability</b>	24/7/365 monitoring and remote support	Limited availability—usually business hours only

## Signs It's Time to Switch MSPs

If your current MSP isn't meeting expectations, it might be time for a change. Common red flags include:

- **Reactive Support:** Issues addressed only after disruptions occur, leading to preventable downtime and frustration. For example, if your team frequently experiences repeated IT outages without proactive solutions, this is a clear signal your MSP is underperforming.
- **Slow Response Times:** Delayed support leads to prolonged disruptions. Imagine waiting several days for critical system repairs—this not only hampers productivity but also damages client relationships.
- **Lack of Transparency:** Unclear pricing or reporting hinders trust. If your invoices are hard to decipher or you're frequently surprised by hidden fees, it may be time to look elsewhere.
- **Security Gaps:** Your provider isn't proactive about cybersecurity. For instance, has your MSP conducted a recent risk assessment or provide updates on emerging threats? If not, your organization could be at significant risk.
- **Poor Alignment:** If your provider fails to offer tailored strategies or understand your industry-specific needs, it indicates a lack of commitment to your long-term success.
- **Employee Frustration:** Frequent complaints about unresolved tickets or poor communication from the MSP can highlight deeper service issues.
- **Inflexibility:** If your MSP cannot scale or adapt to new technology trends, such as cloud migration or automation, your business growth might be constrained.



*Next Steps: Use these criteria to evaluate your MSP's performance or request a third-party IT audit to identify service gaps and confirm areas where your MSP falls short. Use these criteria to evaluate your current MSP's performance.*

## Overcoming Hurdles When Switching MSPs

Switching MSPs can feel daunting but is manageable. Here's how to address the most common concerns:

- **Fear of Disruption:** Transitioning IT services can evoke concerns about downtime or interruptions. However, reputable MSPs have proven onboarding processes to minimize disruption. This includes careful planning, setting clear timelines, and conducting migrations during off-peak hours to ensure business continuity.

## Overcoming Hurdles When Switching MSPs *continued*

- **Data Security:** Businesses often worry about data loss or breaches during the transition. A trustworthy MSP will have robust data migration strategies, including multiple backups and redundant systems, to safeguard your sensitive information. Ask your new provider to explain their security protocols and provide documentation on how they protect your data during and after migration.
- **Contractual Obligations:** Review contracts for termination fees; some MSPs offer incentives, such as delayed billing or service credits, to ease the financial burden of transitions.
- **Cost Concerns:** Compare current costs with potential efficiency and security gains.
- **Uncertainty:** Mitigate risks by requesting client references and case studies from potential MSPs.



*Pro Tip: Look for an MSP with a track record of seamless transitions, strong references, and transparent communication. Expect a service level agreement process document such as Exigent's from any reputable MSP.*

## Choosing the Right MSP

Key questions to ask potential MSPs:

- Do they offer advanced cybersecurity solutions? For example, ask if they provide next-generation firewalls, endpoint protection, or regular vulnerability assessments. Do they have experience with compliance standards like SOC 2 or HIPAA?
- Are their support services available 24/7/365? Inquire about response times for different types of tickets, how they prioritize urgent issues, and whether their support team is in-house or outsourced overseas.
- How do they handle proactive monitoring and maintenance? Look for specific processes, such as automated patching, and regular system health checks, and understand their methods for addressing issues before they escalate.
- Can they scale with your business needs? Ask for examples of how they have supported companies during periods of growth, like adding new locations, expanding remote work capabilities, or adopting cloud solutions.
- What's their approach to aligning IT strategy with business goals? Request details about how they conduct business reviews and create IT roadmaps tailored to your industry and objectives.



Download our MSP Buyer's Guide for detailed selection criteria.

## What to Expect When You Onboard with an MSP

Onboarding is critical for a successful MSP partnership. Expect:

- **Comprehensive Assessment:** A full audit of your IT environment, identifying vulnerabilities and improvement areas
- **Dedicated Support Team:** An onboarding specialist to guide the process.
- **Clear Communication:** A roadmap outlining each step, from initial assessments to tool installations and go-live.
- **Seamless Transition:** Proven processes to minimize disruptions and ensure secure data migration.



*Pro Tip: Request a detailed onboarding roadmap from your MSP to understand timelines and milestones. [See Exigent's overview!](#)*

## Maintaining a Strong MSP Partnership

Foster a productive MSP relationship by:

- **Communicating Regularly:** Schedule check-ins to discuss goals and performance.
- **Providing Feedback:** Help refine services with insights.
- **Leveraging Resources:** Use training materials and tools.
- **Participating in Reviews:** Engage in quarterly business reviews to assess progress and plan future initiatives.

## Conclusion & Resources

Working with an MSP can transform your IT operations, providing stability, security, and strategic support. By understanding your needs, evaluating potential partners, and fostering a strong relationship, you can ensure a successful partnership that empowers your business to thrive.

- For more insights, download our [MSP Buyer's Guide](#)
- Read more in-depth information about each of these topics in our Exigent [TechWise blog](#).
- Contact us to learn about the [Exigent Method](#) and our [Assurance Managed Services](#).

