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# **I.T. Buyers Guide**



# **What You Should Expect To Pay For I.T. Support For Your Small Business**

(And How To Get *Exactly* What You Need  
Without Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees  
And Bloated Contracts)

## **Read this guide and you'll discover:**

- ✓ The three most common ways I.T. services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying I.T. services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses I.T. companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.
- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.
- ✓ 21 revealing questions to ask your I.T. support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail and data.

**From the Desk of: Kurt Johnson**  
**President**  
**Computer Maintenance Service, Inc.**

If you are the CEO of a small to medium business in the Chicagoland area that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the I.T. support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can **trust**.

My name is Kurt Johnson, President of Computer Maintenance Service, Inc. We've been providing I.T. services to businesses in the Chicagoland area for over 30 years. You may not have heard of us before, but I'm sure you're familiar with one or more of our great clients we have worked with over the years.

**One of the most common questions we get from new perspective clients calling our office is "What do you guys charge for your services?"** Since this is such a common question – and a very important one to address – I decided to write this report for three reasons:

**1.**

I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways I.T. services companies' package and price their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.

**2.**

I wanted to bring to light a few "industry secrets" about I.T. services contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating I.T. services providers that can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.

**3.**

I wanted to educate business owners on how to pick the **right** I.T. services company for their specific situation, budget and needs based on the **VALUE** the company can deliver, not just the price, high OR low.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible, so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

Kurt Johnson

## About The Author

At 17, Kurt Johnson and his brothers were living with their mother in Illinois, when she left and moved to Connecticut. Fresh out of high school, Kurt felt lost, with no time to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. He found a path forward to becoming a mechanic to support himself and family.

A quick learner, Kurt started in an apprentice program and became a journeyman mechanic in a year and a half.

The wages and benefits were great, he was a member of the mechanics union, he liked his job and he was good at it. But after 10 years in the field, he needed a bigger challenge and wanted to have his own business. That's when he and his wife, Jeanne, stumbled into the world of IT and started CMS part-time in their home basement.

In 1991, Kurt left his day job to give CMS his full attention – a decision he has never regretted. Today, Computer Maintenance Service is a trusted, fast-growing IT services firm serving small to medium-sized businesses throughout the Chicagoland area. Kurt also brings his passion for making IT work successfully for businesses to his local community. He's has served as a board member of the Technology Commission for his village which is charged with making decisions on strategic IT policy issues.



# Comparing Apples To Apples: The Predominant I.T. Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one I.T. services company with another, you need to understand the three predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to “fix” your problem when something “breaks.” Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem, like fixing a problem with your e-mail, or it may encompass a large project, like a network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.
- **Managed I.T. Services.** This is a model where the I.T. services company takes the role of your fully outsourced “I.T. department” and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, cyber security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network.
- **Software Vendor-Supplied I.T. Services.** Many software companies will offer I.T. support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t help you and will often refer you to “your I.T. department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full I.T. services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.



When looking to outsource your I.T. support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the “managed I.T. services” and “break-fix” models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both.

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# Managed I.T. Services Vs. Break-Fix: Which Is The Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You've probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I couldn't agree more – and that's why it's my sincere belief that some form of managed I.T. is essential for every small to medium business.



In our company, we offer different plans to fit the needs of our clients. In some cases, where the business is small, we might offer a very basic managed services plan to ensure the most essential maintenance is done, then bill the client hourly for any support used. For our smallest clients, they often find this the most economical. But for some of our midsized organizations, we offer a fully managed approach where more comprehensive I.T. services are covered in a managed plan. By doing this, we can properly staff for their accounts and ensure they get the fast, responsive support and expertise they need.

The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent I.T. person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific I.T. project to complete that your current in-house I.T. team doesn't have the time nor expertise to implement (such as migrating to a cloud-based solution, implementing a cyber security plan, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general I.T. support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of "cure" for problems that could have easily been avoided with an "ounce" of prevention.

## Why Regular Monitoring And Maintenance Is Critical For Today's Computer Networks

The fact of the matter is computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on I.T. systems and the data they hold – not to mention the *type* of data we're now saving digitally – has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations that work around the clock to do one thing: hack into your network to steal data or money or to hold you ransom.

As you may know, ransomware is at an all-time high because hackers make millions of tax-free dollars robbing one small business owner at a time. But that's not their only incentive.



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Some will attempt to hack your network to gain access to bank accounts, credit cards or passwords to rob you (and your clients). Some use your computer network to send spam using YOUR domain and servers, host pirated software and, of course, spread viruses. Some even do it just for the “fun” of it.

And don't think for a minute these cybercriminals are solo crooks working alone in a hoodie out of their basement. They are highly organized and well-run operations employing *teams* of hackers who work together to scam as many people as they can. They use advanced software that scans millions of networks for vulnerabilities and use readily available data on the dark web of YOUR usernames, passwords, e-mail addresses and other data to gain access.

Of course, this isn't the only I.T. danger you face. Other common “disasters” include rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (still a BIG reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your I.T. infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information, such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed I.T. services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency I.T. services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

## Should You Just Hire A Full-Time I.T. Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 100 employees to hire a full-time I.T. person for a couple of reasons.

First of all, no one I.T. person can know everything there is to know about I.T. support and cyber security. If your company is big enough and growing fast enough to support a full-time I.T. lead, you probably need more than one guy. You need someone with help-desk expertise as well as a network engineer, a network administrator, a CIO (chief information officer) and a CISO (chief information security officer).



Therefore, even if you hire a full-time I.T. person, you may still need to supplement their position with co-managed I.T. support using an I.T. firm that can fill in the gaps and provide services and expertise they don't have. This is not a bad plan; what IS a bad plan is hiring one person and expecting them to know it all and do it all.

Second, finding and hiring good people is difficult; finding and hiring skilled I.T. people is incredibly difficult due to the skill shortage for I.T.. And if you're not technical, it's going to be very difficult for you to interview candidates and sift and sort through all the duds out there to find someone with good skills and experience. Because you're not technical, you might not know the right questions to ask during the interview process or the skills they need to do the job.

More often than not, the hard and soft costs of building an internal I.T. department for general I.T. support just don't provide the best return on investment for the average small to midsize business. An internal I.T. department typically doesn't make sense until you have closer to 100 employees OR you have unique circumstances and need specialized skills, a developer, etc., but not for day-to-day I.T. support and maintenance.

## Why “Break-Fix” Works Entirely In The Consultant’s Favor, Not Yours

Under a “break-fix” model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your I.T. firm. The I.T. services company has no incentive to prevent problems, stabilize your network or resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour when things stop working; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON’T want.



Under this model, the I.T. consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem – one who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician might resolve in a fraction of the time. There is no incentive to properly manage the time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they’re ethical and want to keep you as a client, they *should* be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that’s akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they’ve worked to make sure you aren’t getting overbilled, and since you often have no way of really knowing if they’ve worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for I.T. projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

## What Should You Expect To Pay?

**Important!** Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent I.T. industry survey conducted of over 750 different I.T. services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most I.T. services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget and situation.



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## Hourly Break-Fix Fees:

Most I.T. services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$150 and \$250 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

If they are quoting a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an I.T. consulting firm for a project, I suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what “success” is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way toward avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.
- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant’s. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for “unforeseen” circumstances. The bottom line is this: it is your I.T. consulting firm’s responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly.

**Warning! Beware the gray areas of “all-inclusive” service contracts.** In order to truly compare the “cost” of one managed I.T. services contract with another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN’T included AND the SLA (service level agreement) you are signing up for. It’s VERY easy for one I.T. services provider to appear less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you’re getting.

## Managed I.T. Services:

Most managed I.T. services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. In Chicagoland area, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$50 to \$300 per server, \$25 to \$200 per desktop and approximately \$5 per smartphone or mobile device. Pricing is usually even higher in the downtown area.

If you hire an I.T. consultant and sign up for a managed I.T. services contract, here are some things that SHOULD be included (make sure you read your contract to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly, if not daily, for urgent and emerging threats
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Monitoring workstations and servers for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Documentation of your network, software licenses, credentials, etc.
- Multi-factor Authentication for network and email accounts

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a “scam” or unethical UNLESS the managed I.T. services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware (ex. new servers), PCs, laptops, etc.
- Software licenses
- Special projects

The following are 21 questions to ask your I.T. services provider that will clarify exactly what you're getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you, then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

## 21 Questions You Should Ask Your I.T. Services Company Or Consultant Before Hiring Them For I.T. Support

### Customer Service:

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**Q1**

#### When I have an I.T. problem, how do I get support?

**Our Answer:** When a client has a problem, we "open a ticket" in our I.T. management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document and resolve client issues. However, some I.T. firms force you to log in to submit a ticket and won't allow you to call or e-mail them. This is for THEIR convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your ONLY option for requesting support.

Also, make sure they HAVE a reliable system in place to keep track of client "tickets" and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be EASY for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy. Calling, e-mailing or submitting a ticket via our portal puts your I.T. issue on the fast track to getting resolved.

**Q2**

#### Do you offer after-hours support, and if so, what is the guaranteed response time?

**Our Answer:** Any good I.T. company will answer their phones LIVE (not voice mail or phone trees) and respond from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every weekday. But many CEOs and executives work outside normal "9 to 5" hours and need I.T. support both nights and weekends. Not only can you reach our after-hours support any time and any day, we GUARANTEE a response time of two hours or less for normal problems, and within 30 minutes for problems marked "emergency," such as a network being down or a critical problem that is significantly impacting your ability to work.



Q3

## Do you have a written, guaranteed response time for working on resolving your problems?

**Our Answer:** Most I.T. firms offer a X-minute response time to your call during normal business hours. Be very wary of someone who doesn't have a guaranteed response time **IN WRITING** – that's a sign they are too disorganized, understaffed or overwhelmed to handle your request. Our written, guaranteed response time is two hours or less. A good I.T. firm should also be able to show you statistics from their PSA (professional services automation) software, where all client problems (tickets) get responded to and tracked. Ask to see a report on average ticket response and resolution times.



Q4

## Will I be given a dedicated account manager?

**Our Answer:** Rest assured, from initial call to final resolution, you will work with a dedicated account manager who will know you, your business and your goals. We do have a comprehensive TEAM approach to fielding calls, expedite critical issues, and handle concerns. This way your issues are resolved in the most efficient and timely manner.

Q5

## Do you have a feedback system in place for your clients to provide "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" ratings on your service? If so, can I see those reports?

**Our Answer:** If they don't have this type of feedback system, they may be hiding their lousy customer service results. If they **DO** have one, ask to see the actual scores and reporting. That will tell you a lot about the quality of service they are providing. We are very proud of our positive client feedback scores and will be happy to show them to you.



## I.T. Maintenance (Managed Services): \_\_\_\_\_

Q6

## Do you offer true managed I.T. services and support?

**Our Answer:** You want to find an I.T. company that will proactively monitor for problems and perform routine maintenance on your I.T. systems. If they don't have the ability to do this, or they don't offer it, we strongly recommend you look somewhere else. Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them **BEFORE** they turn into bigger problems.

## What is **NOT** included in your managed services agreement?

**Our Answer:** Another “gotcha” many I.T. companies fail to explain is what is NOT included in your monthly managed services agreement that will trigger an invoice. Their so-called “all you can eat” option is RARELY true – there are limitations to what’s included and you want to know what they are BEFORE you sign.

It’s very common for projects to not be included, like a server upgrade, moving offices, adding new employees and, of course, the software and hardware you need to purchase.

**But here’s a question you need to ask: If you were hit with a costly ransomware attack, would the recovery be EXTRA or included in your contract? Recovering from a cyber-attack could take HOURS of high-level I.T. expertise. Who is going to eat that bill? Be sure you’re clear on this before you sign, because surprising you with a big, fat bill is totally and completely unacceptable.**

Other things to inquire about are:

- Do you offer truly unlimited help desk? (Make sure you are not nickel-and-dimed for every call.)
- Does the service include support for cloud services, such as Microsoft 365?
- Do you charge extra if you have to resolve a problem with a line-of-business application, Internet service provider, phone system, leased printer, etc.? (What you want is an I.T. company that will own the problems and not point fingers. We are happy to call the vendor or software company on your behalf.)
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- If our employees had to work remote (due to a shutdown, natural disaster, etc.), would you provide support on their home PCs or would that trigger a bill?
- If we were to get ransomed or experience some other disaster (fire, flood, theft, tornado, hurricane, etc.), would rebuilding the network be included in the service plan or considered an extra project we would have to pay for? (Get this IN WRITING. Recovering from such a disaster could take hundreds of hours of time for your I.T. company’s techs, so you want to know in advance how a situation like this will be handled before it happens.)

Our managed services agreement is completely transparent and what is or is not covered is included in the scope of work and the managed services agreement depending on the level of agreement that is chosen.



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## Q8

### Is your help desk local or outsourced?

**Our Answer:** Be careful because I.T. firms may outsource this critical function. As a result, you may get a tech who is not familiar with you, your network, previous problems and personal preferences. Or worse, they may not be as qualified. This can be frustrating and lead to the same problems cropping up over and over, longer resolution time and you having to spend time educating the tech on your account.

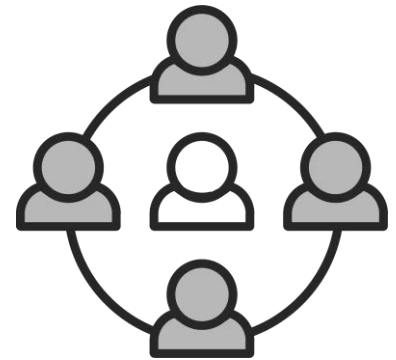
Fortunately, we provide a dedicated technician to your account who will get to know you and your company, as well as your preferences and history. When you work with our local help desk technician, they'll be more capable of successfully resolving your I.T. issues and handling things the way you want.

## Q9

### How many engineers do you have on staff?

**Our Answer:** Be careful about hiring small, one-person I.T. firms that only have one or two techs or that outsource this critical role. Everyone gets sick, has emergencies, goes on vacation or takes a few days off from time to time. We have more than enough full-time techs on staff to cover in case one is unable to work.

ALSO: Hiring a "super" MSP that has a revolving door of junior untrained technicians can be a huge mistake. Many of these companies are SALES focused. They concentrate on volume and billable hours and not the good of the client. This is important or you'll be constantly frustrated with techs who are learning on your dime, continually starting over to resolve a known issue or may screw up something because they don't understand, haven't been properly trained, or have a blueprint of your computer network.



## Q10

### Do you offer documentation of our network as part of the plan, and how does that work?

**Our Answer:** Network documentation is exactly what it sounds like: the practice of maintaining detailed technical records about the assets you own (computers, devices, software, directory structure, user profiles, passwords, etc.) and how your network is set up, backed up and secured. Every I.T. company should provide this to you in both written (paper) and electronic form at no additional cost and update it on a regular basis.

Why is this important? There are several reasons:

First, it shows professionalism and integrity in protecting YOU. No I.T. person or company should be the only holder of the keys to the kingdom. Because we document your network assets and passwords, you have a blueprint you can give to another I.T. person or company to take over if necessary.

Second, good documentation allows the engineers working on your account to resolve problems faster because they don't waste time fumbling their way around your network trying to find things and uncover accounts, hardware, software licenses, etc.

Third, if you had to restore your network after a disaster, you'd have the blueprint to quickly put things back in place as they were.

*Side note:* You should NEVER allow an I.T. person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current I.T. person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

## Q11

### Do you meet with your clients regularly as part of your managed services agreement?

**Our Answer:** To us, there's nothing more important than face-to-face time with our clients. Therefore, we make it a priority to meet with all our clients at least annually (sometimes more often) to provide a "technology review."

In these meetings, we provide you with the status updates of projects you're working on and of the health and security of your network. We also make recommendations for new equipment and upgrades you'll be needing soon or sometime in the near future. Our meetings with you are C-level discussions (not geek-fests) where we openly discuss your business goals, including your I.T. budget, critical projects, compliance issues, known problems and cyber security best practices.



Our goal in these meetings is to help you improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and ensure your organizational productivity stays high. This is also your opportunity to give us feedback on how we're doing and discuss upcoming projects.

## Q12

### If I need or want to cancel my service with you, how does this happen and how do you offboard us?

**Our Answer:** Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many I.T. firms hold their client's hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

We would never "force" a client to stay with us if they are unhappy. Therefore, we make it easy to cancel your contract with us. Our agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations everyday, so we keep your business.

Note: Some third-party vendors require us to sign term agreements with them to resell their services to our clients (usually for a discount on their pricing). These will be noted and the terms will be highlighted in our scope of work in any agreement with have with you.

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### Q13

## What cyber security certifications do you and your in-house team?

**Our Answer:** It's important that your I.T. firm have *some* type of *recent* training and certifications, and they should be able to answer this question, which demonstrates a dedication to learning and keeping up with the latest cyber security protections. If they don't have any, and they aren't investing in ongoing training for their engineers, that's a red flag. Some business owners won't invest in training and give this excuse: "What if I spend all this money training my employees and then they leave us for another job?" Our response is "What if you DON'T train them and they stay?"



Our technicians must meet minimum requirements such as time on the job and certifications to obtain a position with our company. You can feel confident knowing that our people are incentivized to perform continually training. Self improvement and advancement is also extremely important to our company's culture.

### Q14

## How do you lock down our employees' PCs and devices to ensure they're not compromising our network?

**Our Answer:** As above, the question may get a bit technical. The key is that they HAVE an answer and don't hesitate to provide it. Some of the things they should mention are:

- 2FA (two-factor authentication)
- Advanced end-point protection and EDR, NOT just antivirus
- Protective DNS and advanced firewall strategies
- Employee initial and on-going cyber awareness training

Because a combination of these lockdown strategies is essential to protecting your network and data, we employ ALL of these for our clients. Effective cyber security should never compromise between choosing this OR that. It should feature every weapon in your arsenal.

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## Q15

# What cyber liability and errors and omissions insurance do you carry to protect me?

**Our Answer:** Here's something to ask about: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days, to lose data or get hacked, who's responsible? What if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office? Or damages your property while there?

In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance, workers' compensation and cyber liability – and don't be shy about asking them to send you the policy to review!

If you get hit with ransomware due to their negligence, someone has to pay for your lost sales, the recovery costs and the interruption to your business operations. If they don't have insurance to cover YOUR losses of business interruption, they might not be able to pay, and you'll have to end up suing them to cover your costs. If sensitive client data is compromised, who's responsible for paying the fines that you might incur and the lawsuits that could happen? No one is perfect, which is why you need them to carry adequate insurance.

True story: A few years ago, a company that shall not be named was slapped with several multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases, they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line, make sure the I.T. firm you're hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

Rest assured, we make it a priority to carry all the necessary insurance to protect you, including. Simply ask, and we will be happy to show you a copy of our policy.



## Q16

# Who audits YOUR company's cyber security protocols and when was the last time they conducted an audit?

**Our Answer:** Nobody should proofread their own work, and every professional I.T. consulting firm will have an independent third party reviewing and evaluating their company for airtight cyber security practices.

There are many companies that offer this service, so who they use can vary (there's a number of good ones out there.) If they don't have a professional cyber security auditing firm doing this for them on a regular basis, or if they tell you they get their peers to audit them, DO NOT hire them. That shows they are not taking cyber security seriously.

You can be confident in the effectiveness of our cyber security because we are audited by an independent third party.

To Schedule Your **FREE** Assessment,  
please visit [cmsnetworking.com](https://cmsnetworking.com) or call our office at 708-478-2530.

## Q17

### Do you have a SOC and do you run it in-house or outsource it? If outsourced, what company do you use?

**Our Answer:** A SOC (pronounced “sock”), or security operations center, is a centralized department within a company to monitor and deal with security issues pertaining to a company’s network.

What’s tricky here is that some I.T. firms have the resources and ability to run a good SOC in-house (this is the minority of outsourced I.T. firms out there.) Others cannot and outsource it because they know their limitations (not entirely a bad thing).



But the key thing to look for is that *they have one*. Less experienced I.T. consultants may monitor your network hardware, such as servers and workstations, for uptime and patches, but they might not provide security monitoring. This is particularly important if you host sensitive data (financial information, medical records, credit cards, etc.) and fall under regulatory compliance for data protection.

Rest assured, we do have an outsourced SOC to provide proactive security monitoring for our clients to better prevent a network violation or data breach.

## Backups And Disaster Recovery:

## Q18

### Can you provide a timeline of how long it will take to get my network back up and running in the event of a disaster?

**Our Answer:** There are two aspects to backing up your data that most business owners aren’t aware of. The first is “fail over” and the other is “fail back.” For example, if you get a flat tire, you will likely fail over by putting on the spare tire to get to a service station where you can fail back to a new or repaired tire.

If you were to have a disaster that wiped out your data and network – be it a ransomware attack or natural disaster – you want to make sure you have a fail-over solution in place so your employees could continue to work with as little interruption as possible. This fail-over should be in the cloud and locked down separately to avoid ransomware from infecting the backups as well as the physical servers and workstations.

But, at some point, you need to fail back to your on-premise network, and that’s a process that could take days or even weeks. If the backups aren’t done correctly, you might not be able to get it back at all. So, one of the key areas you want to discuss with your next I.T. consultant or firm is how they handle both data backup AND disaster recovery. They should have a plan in place and be able to explain the process for the emergency fail-over as well as the process for restoring your network and data with a timeline.

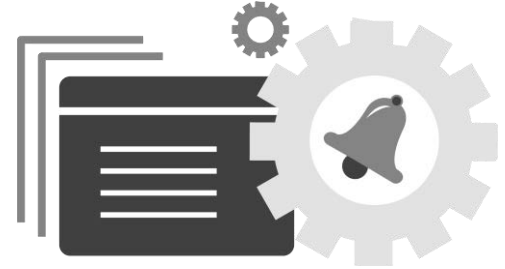
In this day and age, regardless of natural disaster, equipment failure or any other issue, your business should ALWAYS be able to be operational with its data within hours, and critical operations should be failed over immediately.

We understand how important your data is and how getting your team up and running quickly is essential to your business success. Therefore, in the event of any disaster, we can confidently get your network back up and running with minimal downtime.

## Q19

# Do you **INSIST** on doing periodic test restores of my backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

**Our Answer:** A great I.T. consultant will place eyes on your backup systems every single day to ensure that backups are actually occurring, and without failures. However, in addition to this, your I.T. company should perform a monthly randomized “fire drill” test restore of some of your files from backups to make sure your data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the **WORST** time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.



If you don't feel comfortable asking your current I.T. company to test your backup OR if you have concerns and want to see proof yourself, just conduct this little test: Copy three unimportant files onto a thumb drive (so you don't lose them) and delete them from your server. Make sure one was newly created that same day, one was created a week earlier and the last a month earlier. Then call your I.T. company and let them know you've lost three important documents and need them restored from backups as soon as possible. They should be able to do this easily and quickly. If not, you have a problem that needs to be addressed immediately!

Verifying your backups daily and testing them on a regular basis is a cornerstone of a successful overall I.T. strategy. These are the lengths we go to for all our clients, including multiple random “fire drill” test restores to ensure ALL your files are safe because they are always backed up.



**TIP:** The 3-2-1 rule is that you should have three copies of your data: your working copy, plus two additional copies on different media (local and cloud), with at least one being off-site for recovery. That rule was developed when tape backups were necessary because cloud backups hadn't evolved to where they are today. Today, there are more sophisticated cloud backups and BDR (backup and disaster recovery) devices. Therefore, we recommend three copies of your data.

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## Q20

### If I were to experience a location disaster, pandemic shutdown or other disaster that prevented me from being in the office, how would you enable me and my employees to work from a remote location?

**Our Answer:** If Covid taught us anything, it's that work-interrupting disasters CAN and DO happen when you least expect them. Fires, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes can wipe out an entire building or location. Covid forced everyone into lockdown, and it could happen again.

We could experience a terrorist attack, civil unrest or riots that could shut down entire cities and streets, making it physically impossible to get into a building. Who knows what could be coming down the pike? Hopefully NONE of this will happen, but sadly it could.

That's why you want to ask your prospective I.T. consultant how quickly they were able to get their clients working remotely (and securely) when Covid shut everything down. Ask to talk to a few of their clients about how the process went.

Here's how we handled our clients' needs when it seemed everyone needed to work remotely, get laptops and implement security measures almost overnight. Early in 2020 during the start of Covid we had one of our clients' employees get a case of covid in their office which spread like wildfire. Hoping to control the spread they closed their offices. We quickly moved 82 people to remote working by installing VPN clients and securing their remote computers and phones so work could continue with minimal interruption.



## Q21

### Show me your process and documentation for onboarding me as a new client.

**Our Answer:** The reason for asking this question is to see if they HAVE SOMETHING in place. A plan, a procedure, a process. Don't take their word for it. Ask to SEE it in writing. What's important here is that they can produce some type of process. Further, they should be able to explain how their process works.

One thing you will need to discuss in detail is how they are going to take over from the current I.T. company – particularly if the current company is hostile. It's disturbing to me how many I.T. companies or people will become bitter and resentful over being fired and will do things to screw up your security and create problems for the new company as a childish way of getting revenge. (Sadly, it's more common than you think.) A good I.T. company will have a process in place for handling this.

If you consider us as your next I.T. services firm, we will gladly share our new client onboarding process and documentation. I think you'll be impressed.

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## Other Things To Notice And Look Out For: \_\_\_\_\_



### **Are they good at answering your questions in terms you can understand and not in arrogant, confusing “geek-speak”?**

Good I.T. companies won't confuse you with techno-mumbo-jumbo, and they certainly shouldn't make you feel stupid for asking questions. All great consultants have the “heart of a teacher” and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. As you interact with them in the evaluation process, watch for this.

Our technicians are trained to take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what this one client had to say:



I have worked with CMS as my computer consultant since 1994. It has been a good relationship. CMS keeps my computers and programs running; they make suggestions about uses and equipment so that my office stays as current as one can in the fast-paced technological world. When it is an emergency, they get right on it. Best of all, neither Kurt nor Jeanne laugh when I ask those really dumb IT questions.



– Jim Stortzum, Attorney



### **Do they and their technicians present themselves as true professionals when they are in your office? Do they dress professionally and show up on time?**

If you'd be embarrassed if YOUR clients saw your I.T. consultant behind your desk, that should be a big red flag. How you do anything is how you do everything, so if they cannot show up on time for appointments, are sloppy with paperwork, show up unprepared, forget your requests and seem disorganized in the meeting, how can you expect them to be 100% on point with your I.T.? You can't. Look for someone else.

Our technicians are true professionals who you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot be there on time (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

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## Do they have expertise in helping clients similar to you?

Do they understand how your business operates the line-of-business applications you depend on? Are they familiar with how you communicate, get paid, service your clients or patients and run your business? We have several manufacturing, medical, dental, accounting, legal, and property management clients. Here's what a few of our clients had to say:



“

We hired Computer Maintenance Service to maintain our computer needs for my office. They are always quick to respond and fix any issues we have. We are very pleased with this company and recommend them. All the techs are a pleasure to work with and have always been right on with their maintenance. Thank you both so much for your continued work in keeping this office running.

– **Edward Jaquays, Attorney, Law Office of Edward Jaquays**

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“

As the owner of a company the last thing I want to do is deal with a malfunctioning computer network. Not only does Computer Maintenance Service, Inc. allow me peace of mind on my network but has also designed and installed a state of the art camera surveillance system along with a new phone system. When I have a need or a concern, I call CMS. With the implementation of the diverse applications, state of the art equipment I can view my company camera systems on my cell phone. If needed, I can work anywhere there is an internet connection. Not only do they fully support the hardware end they are knowledgeable and support software applications as well. I have worked with all the staff at CMS from the receptionist to the owner and they have always done a great job for KWM Gutterman

– **Kenneth Minor, Sr., CFO, KWM Gutterman, Inc.**

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## A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your I.T. support. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information is to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

**The next step is simple:** call my office at 708-478-2530 and reference this letter to schedule a brief 10- to 15-minute initial consultation.

On this call we can discuss your unique situation and any concerns you have and, of course, answer any questions you have about us. If you feel comfortable moving ahead, we'll schedule a convenient time to conduct our proprietary Multi-Point I.T. Systems Assessment.

This Assessment can be conducted 100% remotely with or without your current I.T. company or department knowing (we can give you the full details on our initial consultation call). **At the end of the Assessment, you'll know:**

- ✓ Where you are overpaying (or getting underserved) for the services and support you are currently getting from your current I.T. company or team.
- ✓ Whether or not your systems and data are *truly* secured from hackers and ransomware, and where you are partially or totally exposed.
- ✓ If your data is *actually* being backed up in a manner that would allow you to recover it quickly in the event of an emergency or ransomware attack.
- ✓ Where you are unknowingly violating industry-specific compliance regulations.
- ✓ How you could lower the overall costs of I.T. while improving communication, security and performance, as well as the productivity of your employees.

**Fresh eyes see things that others cannot** – so, at a minimum, our free Assessment is a completely cost- and risk-free way to get a credible third-party validation of the security, stability and efficiency of your I.T. systems.

**To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,**  
please visit [cmsnetworking.com](https://cmsnetworking.com)  
or call our office at 708-478-2530.

With appreciation,

Kurt Johnson, President  
Computer Maintenance Service, Inc.



# See What Other Business Owners Are Saying:

## CMS lets us get back to what we do best

The single biggest benefit we have experienced working with CMS as our IT management firm has been the ability to have a complete hands-off approach to our IT concerns. CMS provides great service with either a quick phone call or email with the confidence that our security and functionality is their primary concern. Our company started off small with minimal IT management needed, so we took care of all our IT needs internally. We have been blessed with growth over the years and recognized that we needed to enlist a firm that would take on the IT management burden. This allowed us to focus our energy on what we do best as a company.

If you are on the fence, on whether to choose CMS as your IT management firm, I would encourage you to talk to Kurt and his team. Tell them your concerns, tell them your struggles. Let them evaluate your company and offer the best package that works for YOU...not a cookie cutter solution that is easy, but one that fits you and your needs

– Neil Spader, President, Walco Tool & Engineering



## We were able to quickly recover after a cyberattack

Please allow me to pass along my recommendation for the services of CMS. I met with Kurt back in 2019 when our company was working with a different Managed Service Provider who was challenged to provide us the service level that we were looking for. Kurt made a personal commitment to represent our IT needs to the best of his team's abilities and it is my strong belief that his team did just that.

In addition to taking on cost-savings projects like ethernet cabling and a new phone system, CMS also dramatically improved the help desk support that we were getting, including committing to 24/7 support whenever we asked for it. CMS was instrumental in helping us recover from a cyberattack that occurred in May 2021 and they helped us merge our file sharing networks so that employees from two companies could all access shared files. CMS helped us to implement MFA (multi-factor authentication) successfully and scored well on an independent, third-party cybersecurity audit we commissioned at the end of 2021.

CMS helped our business to take a big step from having outsourced IT services to a model in which we support all IT services from within. As a company with 250+ employees and five locations, our business needs simply required us to make those investments to properly support existing day to day activity levels. CMS was a very good partner for us and the personal touch that Kurt & Jeanne have instilled in their business and their teams was very much appreciated. I recommend CMS for any company looking to improve their IT support and for a wide range of special projects that Kurt and his team are capable of handling.

– Kevin Gerhard, Chief Operating Office, Pax Holdings – Manufacturing Division



# A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

1

**We Respond Within 2 hours or less** We know you're busy and we have made a sincere commitment to making sure your computer problems get fixed FAST. And since most repairs can be done remotely using our secure management tools, you don't have to wait around for a technician to show up.

2

**No Geek-Speak.** You deserve to get answers to your questions in PLAIN ENGLISH, not in confusing technical terms. Our technicians will also not talk down to you or make you feel stupid because you don't understand how all this "technology" works. That's our job!

3

**100% No-Small-Print Satisfaction Guarantee.** Quite simply, if you are not happy with our work, we'll do whatever it takes to make it right to YOUR standards without charging you for it. And if we can't make it right, the service is free.

4

**All Projects Are Completed On Time And On Budget.** When you hire us to complete a project for you, we won't nickel-and-dime you with unforeseen or unexpected charges or delays. We guarantee to deliver precisely what we promised to deliver, on time and on budget, with no excuses.

5

**Lower Costs, Waste And Complexity With Cloud Solutions.** By utilizing cloud computing and other advanced technologies, we can eliminate the cost, complexity, and problems of managing your own in-house server while giving you more freedom, lowered costs, tighter security and instant disaster recovery.

6

**We Won't Hold You Hostage.** Many I.T. companies do NOT provide their clients with simple and easy-to-understand documentation that outlines key network resources, passwords, licenses, etc. By keeping that to themselves, I.T. companies hold their clients "hostage" to scare them away from hiring someone else. This is both unethical and unprofessional. As a client of ours, we'll provide you with full, written documentation of your network and all the resources, software licenses, passwords, hardware, etc., in simple terms so YOU can understand it. We keep our clients by delivering exceptional service – not by keeping them in the dark.

7

**Peace Of Mind.** Because we monitor all our clients' networks 24/7/365, you never have to worry that a virus has spread, a hacker has broken in or a backup has failed to perform. We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your customers and running your business, not on your I.T. systems, security and backups.

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