THE BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE TO
SELECTING AN IT SERVICE PROVIDER

What every business owner needs to know about hiring a responsive, reliable, and trustworthy IT company.

By: Craig Pollack

Technology & Business Advocate

fpa TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, INC.

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Author: Craig Pollack

Email: craig.pollack@fpainc.com

Website: https://www.fpainc.com

Phone: 818-501-3390

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What to Expect from This IT Services Business Advisory Guide

I think you'd agree that you can't trust your company's critical data, systems, and operations to just anyone. Choosing the wrong computer company to support your network can not only be incredibly frustrating and expensive, but it also can cost you in other significantly impactful ways (downtime, loss of productivity, loss of sales, data loss, and theft — not to mention expensive repair bills, etc.).

> **The purpose of this guide is to help you assess, evaluate, and then decide on which IT service provider you should work with. It provides the most meaningful questions to ask before giving anyone access to your company's network.**

In this resource, you will learn:

- ✔ The "dirty little secret" most people in the IT services industry don't want you to know.

- ✔ The difference between someone who provides IT services and someone who offers IT security services — and what each job entails.

- ✔ 31 revealing questions that will help you identify and separate the unethical and incompetent computer repair and support technicians from the competent professionals and what to avoid when hiring an IT service company.

- ✔ Five costly misconceptions that you may have about computer maintenance that you need to understand before picking up the phone.

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- ✔ Why doing business with the lowest cost "IT guy" is not the bargain they may appear to be.

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About the Author

CRAIG POLLACK

TECHNOLOGY & BUSINESS ADVOCATE

As Founder & CEO of FPA Technology Services, Inc., Craig has created one of the most preeminent IT Service Providers in the Southern California area. With more than 25 years of technology and business experience, Craig has become one of the area's leading authorities on how small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs) can leverage and secure their technology most effectively to achieve their business objectives.

With a background in business systems and application development, Craig has provided the vision, strategy, and leadership for FPA's unique, one-of-a-kind business culture, which is branded as "IT The Way It's Supposed to Be!" — delivering advanced technical solutions with a service level unheard of in the industry. In addition, Craig also acts as a key trusted advisor for a number of select clients — providing expertise for FPA in the Investment Counsel, CPA, Business Management, and Manufacturer & Distributor vertical markets.

Craig holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science focused on Business Systems Design from California State University Northridge. Craig began his professional career more than 25 years ago working with clients modifying accounting packages, creating custom financial applications, and integrating websites and web-based applications.

Craig is married with three kids and, when not working on the business or personal development, he enjoys his free time playing guitar, hockey, tennis, and wakeboarding.

Contact Information

Craig Pollack - Founder & CEO
FPA Technology Services, Inc.

craig.pollack@fpainc.com

https://www.fpainc.com

818-501-3390

Introduction

Choosing the right IT Services Provider isn't easy. There is no shortage of horror stories I've heard from clients about incompetent computer repair "gurus" who bungled jobs and created more problems than they solved as a result of their lack of morals or gross incompetence. However, this issue is not limited to businesses; I'm sure that if you asked, you would likely hear a lot of the same (unfortunate) kinds of stories from family members, friends, and colleagues who've experienced similar situations.

The reason for this is that the computer consulting industry, like many other industries, is young and largely unregulated, giving incompetent or unethical computer guys free range to take advantage of trusting business owners who can't determine their competency. Yes, you read that right: **unlike many other service industries, the computer consulting industry is NOT regulated.** This means that virtually anyone can claim to be a "expert" regardless of whether they have the experience, training, or knowledge to back things up.

From what I've seen, too many of our competitors (if you could call them this) started out **because their owners were fired or laid off from their IT jobs and couldn't find work at reputable companies.** While sometimes these self-proclaimed "IT professionals" intentionally mislead customers because they want to make a quick buck without caring about the quality of the services they offer, more often it's simply because they lack the necessary skills and competency to do the job right. Unfortunately, they won't tell you this up front. We call these kinds of people "techs," borrowing from Harvard professor David Maister's idea that, "the opposite of a professional isn't unprofessional — it's a technician."

With more than 25 years in the industry, we've seen and heard it all — everything from companies providing misleading information, to hiring unqualified engineers, to poor management, to offering terrible customer service. We know these unscrupulous companies exist in abundance because many of our clients have come to us looking for someone to help them clean up the disasters they caused. Even when some of these computer companies honestly try to do a good job, their inexperience or incompetence can cost your business thousands of dollars in lost productivity, performance, and outright lost fees paid.

The hard part isn't determining and staying away from the obviously bad companies. The hard part is finding and staying away from those companies that aren't so apparently bad. These are the companies that look good to the untrained eye, but will cost you way more in hidden costs over the lifetime of the relationship.

It's for these reasons, that we decided to create this resource. The information in this guide aims to provide you with useful information to help you identify unethical or incompetent IT Service Providers while at the same time help raise the standards of the computer support industry as a whole. At FPA, our goal is to provide our clients with world-class service and support while adhering to the highest level of professionalism. It's *"IT The Way It's Supposed To Be!"*

Chapter 1

What is an IT Service Provider?

You're having issues with your technology. You need support. You need someone to come fix things. You need to make sure everything's running. You need to ensure everything's safe and secure. You need to make sure all of your information is getting backed up. You have a new computer and need someone to set it up for you. You're moving and need to get everything set up in the new location. You need to move to the cloud. You need to know what to do with your technology to get you to the next level.

There are a number of different reasons for why you need IT help — all of these and more.

So, how are you going to address this? Do you have someone on staff who knows IT? If not, should you hire an IT guy? Does this even make sense anymore? If not, should you hire a company? How do you go about hiring a company? You likely have so many questions.

Historically, you might have called your "IT guy" for answers. If you "outgrew" your guy, you might call your IT company. Or, you might call your computer consultant.

Simply put, these days an IT Service Provider is a company that you create a business relationship with to provide you with a technology related service of some kind — be it support, maintenance, repair, new installations, strategy, or expertise in a number of other areas. There's been many different naming conventions over the years — Value Added Reseller (VAR), Computer Consultant, or Technology Service Provider. Generally speaking, within the industry these days, IT Service Provider is what we call ourselves.

Now, depending on how a company delivers their services and charges for them, they might call themselves a managed service provider (MSP). "Managed Services" is a way to deliver ongoing support services for a fixed fee. This is the direction the industry is moving toward more and more these days.
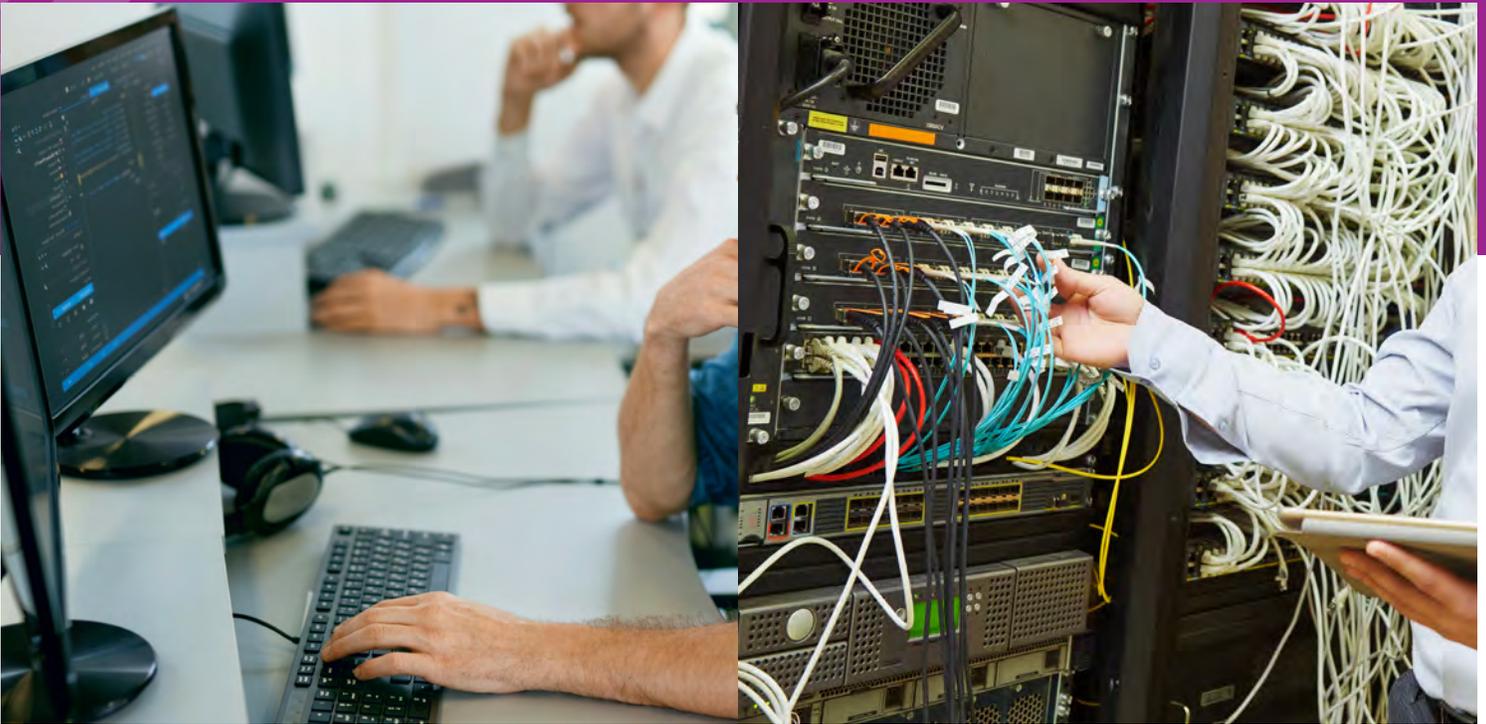
Chapter 2

How to Differentiate an IT Service Provider from an IT Security Service Provider

When it comes to IT management and IT security for your organization, there's a significant difference between the types of professionals that you need for each task. While some companies can deliver both of these types of services, most don't have the capabilities to do so effectively. Increasingly, companies are saying that they can do both — but too often these companies lack the staff with the right expertise in place to perform both roles adequately.

> *At FPA, something we frequently do with prospective and new clients is help them understand the differences between a managed service provider and a managed security service provider (MSSP), and what each service entails.*

At FPA, something we frequently do with prospective and new clients is help them understand the differences between a managed service provider and a managed security service provider (MSSP), and what each service entails. Although these two services sound very similar, there are significant differences in what each is required to deliver as well as how they can deliver them.

What is a Managed Service Provider?

At its core, an MSP is a professional IT services company that works to ensure your network's performance and uptime are optimal. As such, they perform a variety of traditional IT-related functions, including:

- Ensuring optimal network usability and performance (making sure data and information systems are available to employees and customers)

- Performing recurring patching and software updates

- Monitoring network performance and uptime addressing alerts before they become more impactful issues

- Performing general maintenance of your computers and other physical hardware

- Addressing end-user helpdesk support requests

- Performing network maintenance and administration services

- Managing and overseeing basic security components (running the firewall, anti-virus, and anti-spam systems)

- Providing strategic IT planning and budgeting services

Providing IT services via the Managed Service model is by far the most effective and efficient way to ensure that your systems remain up and running reducing costly downtime.

What is a Managed Security Service Provider?

An MSSP, on the other hand, is really your cybersecurity guru. While they do perform network monitoring, it's a different type of monitoring known as Security Incident and Event Monitoring (SIEM), which is used to identify potential security breaches. Rather than focusing on system performance and uptime, their job is to ensure network resources and information is secure by identifying and addressing any gaps in your defenses or cybersecurity threats to your organization.

Some of their responsibilities include:

- Creating and implementing security policies and procedures

- Ensuring IT security compliance within industry regulations

- Managing your intrusion detection and intrusion prevention systems (IDS/IPS)

- Providing end user training throughout your organization to increase employee cyber awareness

- Managing email security

- Performing internal and external network penetration testing and vulnerability assessments

- Performing network security monitoring

- Performing Dark Web Monitoring

Luckily, when you partner with FPA, you gain access to a dedicated team of professionals providing both Managed IT Services and Managed Security Services. One Company — One Integrated Approach — One Call.

31 Questions To Get Answered Before Selecting Your Next IT Service Provider

Choosing the right IT Service Provider to help you address your technology needs can be challenging. Like I said, for most people IT is a black box — who knows what goes on in there? This isn't your area of expertise. That said, it's understandable that you may not know the right questions to ask to be able to effectively evaluate and select the right technology partner for your business. You need a way to get the honest answers you need to know. For this, we've put together this list of questions for you to ask. So, here you go...

The Company

Q1 **How long has the company been in business?**

💬 *Our Answer*

This is a really important question to ask because it gives you an idea of what you can expect from a prospective IT Service Provider in terms of their experience and expertise. Have they been in business for a few months? A few years? While it's true that every Managed Service Provider's business has to start somewhere, it doesn't mean that they have to learn from trial and error by working on YOUR systems.

Even when inexperienced IT service and security techs honestly try to do a good job for you, their lack of experience can cost you dearly in terms of network speed, performance, and the risk of diminished cyber protection for your network, servers, and related computer systems.

At FPA, we've been serving the greater Los Angeles area for more than 25 years. We're a tried and true company with decades of experience in IT services and IT security management. We have the knowledge, experience, and expertise to serve your business at the level you expect and deserve. Big enough to get the job done, small enough to care.

Q2 How many full-time employees do they have?

💬 *Our Answer*

When you're working with some companies, you may be surprised to discover that there are only a handful of people (or even just one person!) running the entire operation. So, what happens when people go on vacation, get sick, or quit? You need to know that there is a team of people who are able to still perform the tasks and functions you hired them to do.

At FPA, we currently have approximately 25 full-time employees. We have a Network Operations Center (NOC) and helpdesk full of trained full-time IT services and IT security experts. And we have a team of Technical Account Managers and vCIO's with years of experience.

Q3 How is the company organized?

💬 *Our Answer*

Too many IT Service Providers are unstructured in their approach to delivering service. Often times they have the same staff providing end-user help desk support as patching machines as doing project work. This leads to a significantly lower quality of overall service, more ongoing issues, and higher costs.

At FPA we're organized in the most efficient and effective way with certified staff performing specific specialized tasks depending on the expertise needed. The help desk staff only perform help desk support. The NOC staff get great at dealing with machine issues and performing updates. Our vCIOs are experienced in helping our clients develop and implement their overall IT strategies. This ensures each area is delivering the highest level of service possible.

Q4 Do they measure and report on client happiness and client service satisfaction?

💬 Our Answer

Unfortunately, too many companies simply do the bare minimum and don't really care about the overall happiness or satisfaction of their clients — they just want to get things done and get paid.

At FPA, we believe in client happiness. So much so, we benchmark and request feedback after every remote ticket, onsite visit, and project. We utilize the Net Promoter Score concept to ensure we stay on top of our client relationships and provide the best possible service. We like to say we're a technology company in the relationship business with "Take Care of the Client" as our primary core value.

Our Client Satisfaction Rating is:

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ **98.3**

It's 98.3 out of 100 for our Live Technical Support!

Q5 Is their business growing?

💬 Our Answer

This one is pretty straightforward: ask about the growth rate of their business. On one side of the coin, if the company is growing, it can be a sign that they are making clients happy and are not only retaining clients but gaining new ones (as well as hiring additional staff to handle the workload). However, it can also mean that they're growing too quickly and may not be able to keep up with the workload. If this is the case, the IT services you receive from them could suffer as a result.

Or, on the other side of the coin, if they're shrinking in terms of the number of clients or staff they have because they're all jumping ship, then it could be a sign that something is wrong and you should stay clear of the wreckage.

At FPA, we believe in doing "more for less" in terms of the number of clients we retain. We focus our energies on our existing clients to build long-term relationships with them that are based on trust and mutual respect. We do all that can be done for them to serve them to our greatest capacity. This is demonstrated by the fact that we have clients who have been with us since we first started in 1991!

Q6 **Do they have a clearly defined new hire training process for their staff, including ongoing performance development plans?**

Our Answer

At FPA, we hire for character, train for skill, and retain for greatness! Our hiring process is known for being stringent, and it is challenging for people to make it onto our team. Before even getting to the interview portion of the hiring process, we have an intense screening process including three different online assessments.

Beyond that, all of our staff are required to complete certifications in our FPA University (FPAU) program. We also provide a training expense budget to every professional staff member as part of their annual performance development plan. Our goal is to hire, retain and develop our staff to be the best IT support team possible.

Q7 **Do they have a "Checklist Mentality" when it comes to their approach? Have they offered to show you their "New User Setup Checklist" or "User Exit Checklist" process documents?**

Our Answer

Some companies like to "wing" it when it comes to the services they provide. They're disorganized, and as such, they may forget or miss some important processes or tasks that need to be followed or completed.

At FPA, we not only have set processes to follow, we have literal checklists that we cross off as we go through the process to make sure that everything is done right the first time. We also show our clients these checklists to ensure that they understand what is involved and how these processes benefit their businesses.

Q8 Do they have a defined approach for how their relationship with you will work?

Our Answer

When companies fly by the seat of their pants and don't define their expectations of you and what they will be responsible for, it can create a lot of frustration, chaos, and inefficiency for everyone involved.

At FPA, we're all about building relationships and trust with each of our clients. As such, our goal is to assume complete responsibility for IT issues our clients experience. As a firm and as individuals, we accept this responsibility and by focusing on finding solutions and solving problems rather than pointing fingers and assigning blame. We also understand the value of communication and endeavor to keep our clients informed every step of the way so everyone is on the same page.

Q9 How transparent is their pricing model?

Our Answer

Trying to get pricing out of some companies is like pulling teeth — it's incredibly difficult, frustrating, and often times painful. They may charge using a time and materials (T&M) method rather than having a set price for specific services or projects —- which can drive up your costs and also delay when the service will be completed.

At FPA, our mature IT service offerings, quotes, and invoices break down the cost for each service and what's involved with providing them. You'll know all costs upfront, and there are no hidden costs or surprise fees that will suddenly appear after the work is completed.

Q10 Are you viewed as a "customer" or a "client" by their company?

💬 *Our Answer*

Too many companies in our industry refer to the people they do business with as "customers." To us, there is a significant difference between a customer and a client. A customer is someone you try to sell something to; a client is someone you have a relationship with. We refer to all of our clients as "clients." It's in our DNA. Listen closely to how our competitors refer to you. While this may seem subtle, it's the foundation for how we view the relationship, which sets us apart from our competitors.

Q11 Do they outsource any of their services? And, if so, are any of those services outsourced to a company overseas?

💬 *Our Answer*

When you partner with an IT Service Provider, do you know who's really touching your computer systems? Make sure you ask. Some companies man their help desks with remote helpdesk staff. Others will have partnered with company who has a U.S. office, but will outsource their Network Operations Center, helpdesk, IT security, IT services, or other functions to companies overseas. This means that you or your employees may find yourselves talking to someone in India when you call for help with end-user functions or when getting help with network monitoring and maintenance issues.

At FPA, we have our own true Network Operations Center (which proactively performs network maintenance and monitoring, and responds to alerts). Our NOC, is located in our Woodland Hills office, is manned by full-time FPA staff who are dedicated to performing these functions. This means that every time you call, you will reach someone who resides and works here in the United States who is happy and eager to help.

Q12 Do they answer their phones live or will you have to leave a voicemail and wait for someone to return your call?

Our Answer

Reputable companies have someone available to answer your calls the majority of the day. At FPA, we answer our phones live during extended business hours (7 a.m.-7 p.m.) and have on-call staff to respond to emergency after-hours support requests should an issue arise at any time, including weekends. We do this because we understand that many CEOs and executives find their most productive work times are outside normal hours. If they cannot access their computers and can't get a hold of anyone to help them, it can be incredibly frustrating.

Q13 Do they have a written guaranteed response time to your calls?

Our Answer

Not all companies do this. At FPA, we guarantee that we will have someone working on your issue within 60 minutes of your initial call. This is written into every service agreement we give to clients because it's standard procedure.

Q14 Do they have the ability to explain what they are doing and to answer your questions in terms you can understand (not "geek-speak"), or do they come across as arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer

No one likes to be spoken down to, so it can be frustrating when support engineers come across as condescending. FPA's support staff is trained to have the "heart of a teacher," meaning that they are happy to answer your questions and to explain everything in simple terms. One of our mantras at FPA is "teach a man to fish." As your trusted technology partner, our goal is to make you and your team as self suffient as possible.

Q15   Do they proactively and consistently offer new ways to improve your network's performance or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?

💬 *Our Answer*

Sadly, many MSPs are reactive rather than proactive. At FPA, we're proud of our approach of providing regular, recurring Quarterly Business Review meetings with each client. We use these meetings as touchpoints to build and run each client's technology plan, looking for new and different ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiency, and plan for potential issues that may be on the horizon. With these meetings, our goal is to strategically and proactively help our clients be more profitable, efficient, and competitive.

Q16   Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?

💬 *Our Answer*

A lot of companies' invoices are vague and may not provide you with a breakdown of the costs. At FPA, we provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why, and when so you never have to guess what you are paying for. And, we go through every invoice with a fine-tooth comb before sending it out.

Q17   Do they carry adequate errors and omissions insurance, as well as Workers' Compensation, insurance, to protect YOU?

💬 *Our Answer*

In our highly litigious society, you need to make sure that the company you hire is adequately insured with both Errors and Omissions insurance, Workers' Compensation as well as cyber liability and cyber crime insurance. Don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies! After all, if they create a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, are they held responsible, or are you? Or, if one of their staff gets hurt at your office, who's likely to be the one who will end up paying?

Q18 Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and within budget?

💬 Our Answer

I hate to say it, but we've seen way too many companies stall or delay projects in an effort to try to charge extra money. Many dishonest or incompetent computer guys underquote the effort it will take just to get the work, only to deliver change orders throughout the project, upping the cost to you. Sometimes, they want to bill you hourly, which gives them free reign to nickel-and-dime you, as well as take as much time as they want to complete a project. At FPA, projects can be billed on a "Not to Exceed" basis or at a fixed price and are guaranteed (in writing) to be completed on time and within budget.

Network Monitoring and Maintenance

Q19 Do they insist on remote monitoring for your network 24/7/356 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions, and security patches up-to-date and to prevent issues from resulting in costly downtime, viruses, lost data, and other issues?

💬 Our Answer

For too many companies, the answer is "no" because they're simply reactive in their approach to IT and their inability to see the value for you, the client. More often than not, the "no" is because of their lack of staffing, expertise, or inability to invest in the needed technology and training. Sometimes you may get a "yes," only to find out months later that they're not doing it — or doing it haphazardly — because of these same reasons.

At FPA, our answer is "yes." Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network scanning for performance issues, security threats, and other problems so we can address them before they turn into more significant problems. We patch and perform updates to our clients' systems thoroughly and consistently. And, our in-house experts do the work themselves, meaning that we do not outsource to any third parties.

Q20 Do they consistently provide you with a monthly report that shows all the updates, security patches, and statuses of every machine on your network? This way you know that your systems are secure and up to date, and that support issues are being addressed.

💬 *Our Answer*

Every month, we provide our clients with detailed reports showing an overall health score of their network and the updates to their operating system patches, antivirus, security settings, and other important network checks (like hard drive space, backups, speed, and performance, etc.). We provide additional reports detailing all of the ongoing support issues, as well as the status of open issues, maintenance renewals, etc. These reports are also available on our proprietary Client WebPortal (along with all of the other documentation we provide to you as a client of FPA).

Q21 Is it their standard procedure to provide you with written network documentation detailing critical information (network diagrams, network inventory, software licenses, passwords, user information, etc.), or do they keep the "keys to the kingdom" to themselves?

💬 *Our Answer*

This is one of the more unscrupulous behaviors we've seen out there. It's amazing the amount (or lack thereof) of documentation new clients don't have when we take them over. Too often, we're starting from scratch to gather all of this information. There have even been times where we've had to crack Administrator passwords because the old IT guy didn't know it or wouldn't hand it over.

At FPA, all clients receive this information in written and electronic forms at no additional cost. We constantly update this material on an ongoing basis to ensure the key people within your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network. Again, all of this information is available to you at any time via our Client WebPortal.

Note: You should never allow an IT Service Provider to have this much control over you and your organization. If you suspect that your current IT person is withholding this information (as a means of job security), get rid of them (and we can help to ensure you don't suffer any adverse effects). This behavior is unethical and dangerous to your organization!

Q22 Do they have multiple "techs" who are familiar with your network in case your regular "tech" goes on vacation or gets sick?

💬 Our Answer

Few things are worse for an organization than having an IT emergency when your go-to person is out of town or out of the country. You will never have these issues as an FPA client. First and foremost, we don't have "techs" — we are technical, but we are all professionals. And second, yes: Our systems, processes, methodologies, and organizational structure all ensure that our experts are familiar with your particular network. We have detailed network documentation about everything related to your technology (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and have everything we've ever done documented in our network documentation system. All secure and encrypted. And all of this is available to our clients via our Client WebPortal.

Q23 When they offer an "all-inclusive" support plan, is it truly all-inclusive, or are there loopholes buried in the fine print?

💬 Our Answer

At FPA, our "all-inclusive" support plan is just that — all inclusive.

One of the more popular service plans offered by other firms today is an "all-inclusive" or "all-you-can-eat" managed services plan. These are a good thing because they can save you a lot of money in the long run. However, be sure that you understand what is and is not included. Some things to consider when reviewing an MSP's service plan include:

- ✓ Is phone/email help desk support included or extra?
- ✓ What about network upgrades, moves, or adding/removing users?
- ✓ Is hardware and/or software included?
- ✓ Is third-party software support included? (This is a must!)
- ✓ What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?

- ☑ What if you are not happy with their services? What sort of guarantee(s) do they offer?

- ☑ If the hardware and software are included, what happens if you cancel the contract?

- ☑ Is offsite data backup included? And, if so, to what degree?

- ☑ If you have a major disaster, is network restoration included or extra?

- ☑ What about onsite support calls? Or support to remote offices?

- ☑ Does support for remote devices used to access the company's network after hours included, or does that cost extra?

Not that everything listed needs to be included. The main point is to know what is or is not part of the deal before entering into the contract so you can accurately compare "apples to apples" when evaluating two or more different companies with different plans and costs.

Data Backups and Disaster Recovery

Q24 **Do they insist on monitoring offsite and onsite backups or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?**

💬 Our Answer

Tape backups are archaic for a reason and are against any current industry standard best practices because they are incredibly unreliable. At FPA, we insist that all of our managed service clients utilize our backup and disaster recovery (BDR) solution to ensure a quick and painless way to recover from a server crash or other disaster.

Q25 **What is their overall approach to BDR? Do they consistently review the backups to ensure they are operational and perform periodic test restores to make sure the data is not corrupt and can be restored in the event of a disaster?**

💬 *Our Answer*

Too many of our competitors have a "set it and forget it" mentality. Make sure whoever you select to work with has a tried and true approach to ensuring your backups are consistently complete, comprehensive, and fully functional.

At FPA, we understand how critical backups and business continuity is for our clients. We monitor backups and receive alerts in real time. Regardless of not receiving an alert, we review the backups weekly to confirm that full and complete backups have been performed. Monthly "fire drills" are run, performing a test restore from backup data to make sure our clients data can be recovered in the event of an emergency.

Q26 **Do they insist on backing up your network before performing any project or upgrade?**

💬 *Our Answer*

This is a critical concern that many MSPs skate over. At FPA, we always backup your network as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem. We believe in being cautious and applying the belt and suspenders approach.

Q27 **If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored quickly and/or enable you to work from a remote location?**

💬 *Our Answer*

All of our clients receive a simple disaster recovery (DR) plan for their data and network. While we encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.

Technical Expertise and Support

Q28 **Do their engineers maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training or are they learning on your dime?**

💬 *Our Answer*

Our staff members are required to keep the most up-to-date vendor certifications in all the hardware and software we support. We are certified with Microsoft, VMware, Dell, Cisco, SonicWALL, ESET, Citrix, and many others. In addition to training serving as a key component of individual performance goals, every employee is given a training budget (in terms of money and time) as part of their compensation plan. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent, 99% of the engineers who apply do not make it through (and, guess who's hiring them?).

Q29 **Do their engineers arrive on time and act and dress professionally?**

💬 *Our Answer*

Sad to say, some engineers show up to clients' offices late and wearing casual clothing that would lead to you believe they would rather be lounging at home. Our staff, on the other hand, are genuine professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. FPA computer and network experts always dress professionally and show up on time; if they cannot (for some unforeseen reason), we always notify you immediately. We believe in proactive communications and ensure that every team member acts accordingly. As far as we're concerned, these are the minimum requirements for delivering professional service.

Q30   Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?

💬 Our Answer

Some companies will do the bare minimum required. At FPA, we own the problems with all line of business applications for our clients. While that does not mean that we can fix faulty software, it does mean that we will liaison between you and your vendor to resolve issues you have to make sure these applications run smoothly.

Q31   When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT systems, do they own the problem or do they say "that's not our problem to fix?"

💬 Our Answer

When it comes down to it, some companies breed the culture that they don't care or don't want to go above-and-beyond the bare minimum. At FPA, we believe that we should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own. That's part of what "world-class service and support" is about.

Are you currently looking for a new IT Service Provider? We've also created an Evaluation Tool that can help you assess any IT Service Provider you're considering.

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fpa TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, INC.

Chapter 4

The 5 Most Costly Misconceptions about IT Services

Not everyone is an IT services expert, so this means that there are sometimes misconceptions about what effective IT services entail or what the expectations are of a Managed Service Provider.

Knowing this, we've put together this list of 5 of the most common (and costly) misconceptions about IT services to help clear up any misunderstandings:

1. My Network Doesn't Need Regular Monitoring and Maintenance

Hands down, this is one of the most dangerous and costly misconceptions that business owners have. This type of mindset frequently stems from the fact that they have been fortunate enough to avoid a major disaster. However, this false ideology about network maintenance and monitoring is similar to someone thinking they don't need to wear a seat belt when driving a car because they've never had an accident. It rarely benefits anyone and can result in painful (and expensive) treatments and extensive recovery time.

Computer networks are complex and dynamic systems that require regular updates and preventative maintenance to stay up and running without issues. Just like with an automobile, if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission, and perform other regular maintenance on your car, it will eventually break down. The same can be said about what happens to IT systems without proper updates and maintenance.

A few critical updates that need to be performed weekly, if not daily, include:

- Security patch applications: With new viruses and hacker attacks cropping up daily, this is a critical part of maintaining your network

- Antivirus updates and monitoring

- Firewall updates and monitoring

- Data backup monitoring and test restores

- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers

- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure

- Spam filter installation and updates

- Spyware detection and removal

- System optimization to maximize uptime and performance speed

If your existing or prospective IT Service Provider doesn't insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, do not hire them! A lack of regular system maintenance is the primary reason most people end up losing valuable data and incurring exorbitant repair bills. If they aren't offering you these services, you need to find someone else to support your computer or network.

There are usually only two reasons why they won't make this recommendation: 1) They are inexperienced and simply don't know enough to make the recommendation, or 2) they know it but are profiting from your costly computer issues and want to continue making money by making you require their services. Either way, this is not the kind of IT Service Provider who is able or willing to help your business grow and be more successful and profitable.

2. My Neighbor's Kid/Relative/Friend Knows Computers and Can Take Care of My IT Issues

Paying an armchair IT "tech" to fix your IT service issues may save you a few bucks upfront, but I can virtually guarantee that it will cost you significantly more in the long run. "Knowing a guy who knows a guy" who does something with computers doesn't mean that they can provide quality IT services. We frequently receive calls from business owners who desperately need our help to clean up the mess that was caused by an inexperienced friend, neighbor, or relative who tried to help.

Unless the person you have working on your machines does computer repair and support work for a living, it's a high probability they won't have the knowledge or experience to help. And, do you really want to have a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and computer network? I sincerely hope not. As with everything in life, you get what you pay for. That's not to say that you should break the bank hiring the biggest and most expensive company out there. However, it does mean that you shouldn't choose a company based solely on price; AND, you shouldn't be willing to allow just anyone to work on anything as business critical as your computer network.

3. If All Computer Companies Are Equal Then My Best Option is the Cheapest One

It's human nature to want to get the best deal possible, but at what cost? As we mentioned above, cheaper doesn't necessarily equate to higher value — and this is especially true of IT services. You get what you pay for. And lower cost really will mean ending up spending more and receiving less value in the long run.

> " *High-quality IT professionals are not cheap because — just like any other professional service provider — and they recognize their worth.*

High-quality IT professionals are not cheap because they invest in the right tools, systems, and training — just like any other professional service provider — and they recognize their worth. Only companies who will work at a cheap rate are those that are desperate for the work or are just starting out and are grossly inexperienced.

Some companies hire newbie technicians who are inexperienced, untrained, or (quite frankly) just bad because they get to pay them very little. Others hire unscrupulous individuals who don't share your morals or ethics.

Lack of experience and/or unethical practices can cost you more in the end because:

They improperly diagnose your issues, which means that the wrong things get fixed without addressing the real issue, or lie about the issue to charge you more money. A perfect example of this happened in Los Angeles a few years ago: An undercover TV reporter visited eight LA computer repair shops with a perfectly working computer — they simply disconnected a cable in the back (a fix that the average support engineer would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several of the shops improperly diagnosed the issue and wanted to charge anywhere from $59 to over $275 to fix it!

Inexperienced support engineers can take three to five times longer to repair an issue as an experienced engineer, which costs you extra labor time.

Their inexperience can result in additional damage to your computer or network.

These issues cost you not only money, but time as well. The longer your computer or network is down, the more revenue your business loses. And, with your client data, accounting records, email, and other critical data at stake, do you really want to trust the lowest-priced shop to work on your IT systems?

At FPA, we believe that most people want value for their money and simply want the job done right. While I know we're not the least expensive MSP on the market, I also know that we're not the most expensive either. We decided a long time ago that we would rather deliver on value than on price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for more than 25 years, still have clients who've been with us since day one, and continue to grow!

4: An Honest Computer Company Can Give a Quote Over the Phone

If I had a nickel for every time I've heard variations of this statement over the years... I would be a wealthy man. Simply put, I wish it were true, but it's not. Just like a quality physician, an honest and professional IT Service Provider needs to assess your technology footprint before they can quote any costs over the phone.

On a related note: Some IT companies will quote you a cheap rate over the phone to get in the door, but then will jack up the rates once they get in your office by taking three times as long, selling you add-ons and up-sells, etc. Again, the difference between a mature IT Service Provider delivering a quality managed service solution and one who's not.

5: Keeping IT Services In-House Means Better Results & Lower Costs

This statement is false on so many levels. While it's true that having all of your operations under one roof can provide you with a greater sense of control, it doesn't guarantee better service, network performance, or security. It also can be more expensive as well. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, professionals in computer and information technology careers easily make between $80,000 to $105,000 — with the salaries alone of many experienced technicians topping six figures (plus any benefits and paid training).

When you partner with a quality MSP, like FPA, you gain access to greater resources and a dedicated team of experts while enjoying a much small price tag.

Why Choose FPA

We believe that every business relationship boils down to one important question: Who do you trust? For many prospective clients — particularly those that have been taken advantage of by some of the unscrupulous IT Service Providers out there — trust is something that must be earned, and we understand that.

Our approach and experience in nurturing our relationships with clients is based on establishing mutual trust and understanding. We continually go above and beyond to earn our clients' trust each and every day, and our word is our bond.

There are many aspects of our company and approach to IT services that set us apart from other companies. A few of these include:

Reliability:

Since 1991, we have been serving the greater Los Angeles area and aren't going anywhere anytime soon.

Communication:

One of our mantras at FPA is to answer clients' questions before they ask them. We believe so much in this proactive approach that we even integrate this ideology into our staff's classes at FPAU!

Technical Expertise:

Our staff aren't just "book smart." While we're certified by most of the major technology players — Cisco, Citrix, Dell, ESET, HP, Microsoft, SonicWALL, VMware, etc. as well as the leading industry groups (CompTIA, ICCA, and the MSPAlliance, just to name a few), experience has been our greatest teacher and ensures that we know what we're doing.

Vertical Market Expertise:

We are experts working with Registered Investment Advisors, CPAs and Business Managers, Manufacturers and Distributors, and Non-Profits and have been for years. One of our strengths is leveraging everything we've learned about your industry to benefit your specific business. Furthermore, our company culture is a "culture of constant learning and improvement," which means we're always encouraging one another to grow and learn new skill sets and industries. This mindset allows us to ensure we understand your specific business and any industry-specific requirements it may have.

Full-Time Remote HelpDesk Support:

Time is critical when you have IT issues. That's why we have a fully-staffed remote support helpdesk manned by fully-trained experts available when something goes wrong. Anything we can do remotely, we do remotely. Our helpdesk is staffed by full-time FPA employees in our California office. Our 7 a.m. - 7 p.m. PST hours means we work when you do, and our one-hour callback guarantee means we're there when you need us.

One Source for All Your IT Needs:

Why make five calls to different service providers when you can just make one? From network support to cyber security, to budgeting and planning, to running Microsoft licensing audits, to IT infrastructure upgrades and cloud migrations, we have teams on staff who do everything.

A Team Approach:

When you partner with FPA, we assign a dedicated team of people to you so that you'll never be dependent on one person. Never again will you be without IT support the next time someone goes on vacation, gets sick, or quits. Our industry standard Professional Services Automation system enables our team to provide the best level of support because we have all the key aspects and documentation related to your network or application saved in our internal client system, which makes the information accessible to our entire team anytime, anywhere.

Stability and Continuity:

In an era marked by change and consolidation, we have stayed constant. Our average employee has been with us for more than five years, and we only hire full-time employees.

We've been here for our clients since 1991, and we'll continue to be here to provide them with the best service. If you want to partner with a company that you know will be there for you, FPA is the right choice for your business.
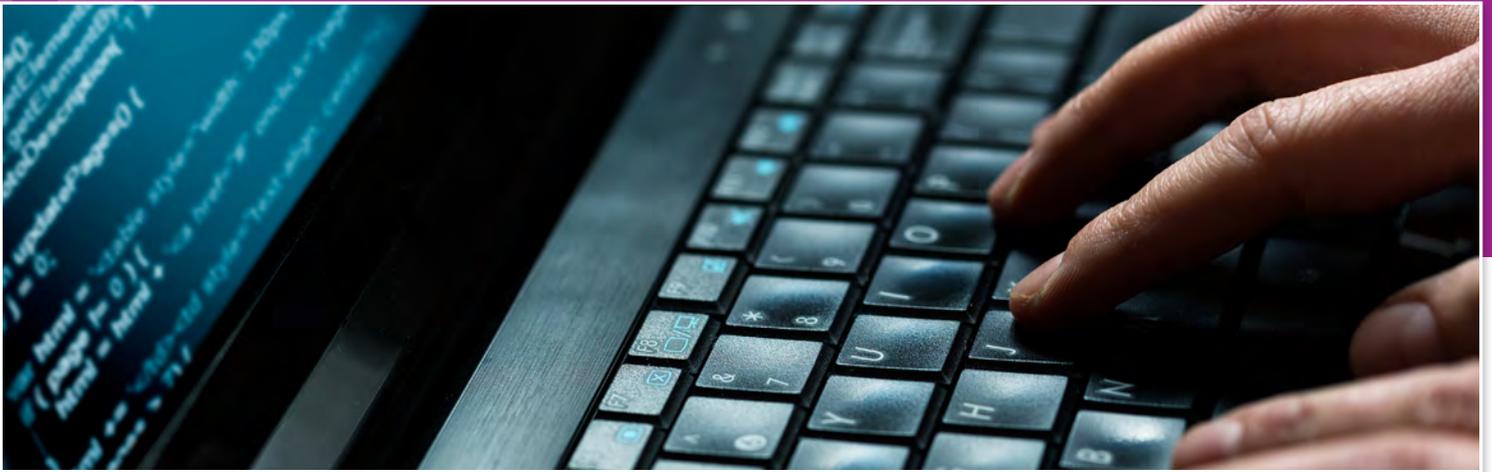
Conclusion

Now you understand the difference between the IT services provided by a managed service provider, as well as some of the questions you should ask before signing the dotted line with any MSP.

ITSP Evaluation Tool

Download FPA's Evaluation Tool for Selecting an IT Service Provider to help you decide who you should work with when evaluating an IT Service Provider.

Download Now

We also invite you to review the available security services on our website. We have a variety of IT resources, including guides, eBooks, white papers, report cards, and video webinars for business across several industries.
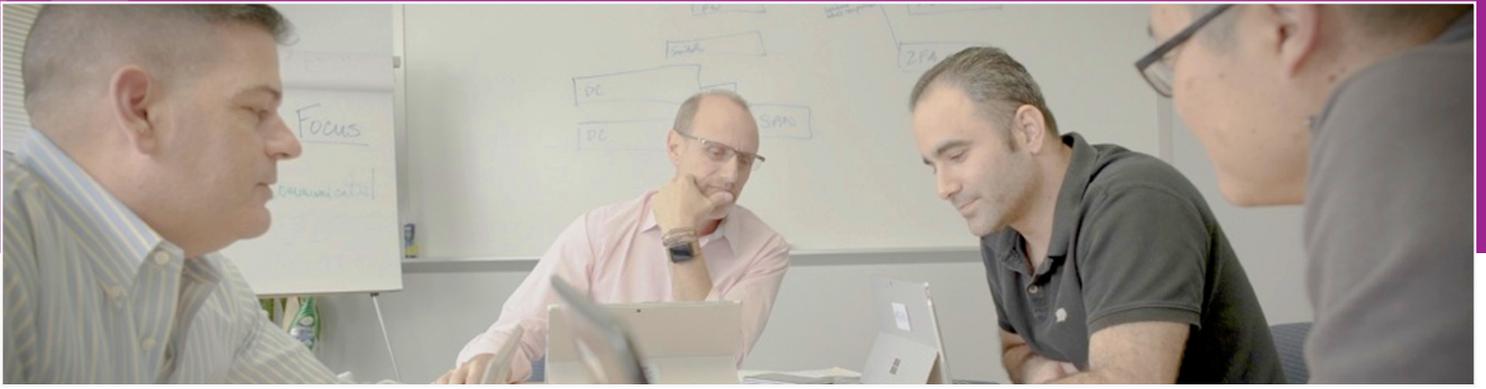
Learn More

FPA Technology Services, Inc. has provided outsourced IT services to growing businesses in the southern California area since 1991. With our "business first" approach, we pride ourselves on being a trusted technology advisor helping clients leverage technology to achieve their business objectives.

By providing a "one-stop-shop" of IT services to organizations and with a "Business Before Technology™" approach, our goal is to completely remove technology as an item of worry for our clients.

Everything we do revolves around this focus:

- Network Monitoring
- Maintenance
- Onsite Support
- HelpDesk
- Backup
- Cybersecurity
- Virtualization
- Business Continuity

"We focus on your IT, so you can focus on your business!"

Want to learn more about why our clients love working with us?

Read Our Testimonials

Want to see our clients' success stories and what you can accomplish working with us?

Read Our Case Studies

I hope you found the information in this book to be useful. I would like to continue a conversation with you on how to best leverage technology to achieve your business objectives. I encourage you to schedule a founder's call with me by clicking below. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

- Craig Pollack, Founder & CEO

Schedule Your Call

FPA Technology Services, Inc. | Phone: 818-501-3390 | Website: https://www.fpainc.com

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