SOUTHERN IT
NETWORKS

Buyer's Guide:

How to choose an IT provider

Introduction

Choosing an IT provider can be complex, but with our simple step by step guide, you can discover how to choose the perfect partner for your business.

Give your business the best chance to succeed by supplying them with the ultimate technology platform.

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Chapter 1

Why the need for an IT provider is more crucial than ever

How everything changed forever in 2020

Since the pandemic, the way businesses have worked has done a total 360. The typical office life and usual economic landscape were relatively regular, and now thousands of companies have become remote, with no office culture, and the economy has suffered immensely.

This has caused businesses to realise the need for a technology system that can support them and their employees, whatever the future holds. Whether this means increased remote work or a hybrid office and remote approach. Technology is only getting better, and we are living in the technology era, where software is becoming more innovative and helping businesses become more proactive, efficient and productive every day.

But what all organisations need is a technology provider who can supply them with the best technology solutions to help their business grow, succeed, and ultimately stay ahead of the curve.

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Chapter 2

Did you know that your business plan needs an IT strategy?

**You've got a business plan.
Do you have an IT strategy?**

You have a business plan, great, but does it include an IT strategy? And if it does even better, but have you updated it recently? Your business is constantly evolving and scaling.

Therefore, your business plan and IT strategy should too. Your IT Strategy should work in harmony with your business plan, highlighting how technology will support your business to achieve its goals, both short and long term.

Did you know that your business plan needs an IT strategy?

How can an IT provider help?

IT providers are here to be your partner in business and help support you every step of the way, thinking and planning for your business needs constantly. They will:

- ✓ Proactively monitor, support, maintain and improve your entire IT infrastructure.

- ✓ Provide regular IT audits.

- ✓ Offer detailed roadmaps for the future, outlining what exactly will happen over the coming years, the investments to make, what can be delayed if needed and do this all cost-efficiently.

Overall, it is the in-depth planning carried out by your IT Partner that enables them to get to know your business inside and out, what makes it tick and where more attention is needed. Your IT provider will work with you, it's a partnership, and this cannot be stressed enough.

Your IT Partner should get to know your business just as well as you do, that's how strong their commitment should be to you.

Look at your current IT infrastructure
First things first, look at your current technology resources. What works well and what needs to be improved. Make a note of it all and work out their value to your business.

Next, talk to your team, get their opinion
Your IT strategy should be a group discussion. Your employees use your technology resources every day. They know what works well and what doesn't.

What works for your business, and what needs to be improved?
Now you've spoken to your team; you can start creating a list of what needs to be improved technically, what's missing and what works for you.

If you already have an IT provider, ask for their recommendations
Already have an IT provider? They will have expert knowledge on IT strategies, get their advice and recommendations. This will help point you in the right direction.

Make a roadmap and discuss your priorities
Now you have all your recommendations; you can start making a roadmap of everything needs to be completed; this will help you budget better and avoid unexpected costs. Start with your high priorities and work out your short- and long-term goals.

Get an IT provider
It can be a complex process formulating a detailed IT strategy. That's where an IT provider comes into play. They can help this complex process become seamless and ensure you are creating the best strategy for your business.

Chapter 3

Why do businesses change IT providers?

Why business owners & managers switch technology partners

Changing IT provider isn't entirely uncommon; sometimes, you just don't get what you signed up for. Especially with the effects of the pandemic on businesses, that support was needed more than ever.

But some companies were left in the dark, and that support vanished into thin air. They needed an IT provider who was equipped for any outcome, including a team who could support them with remote working solutions immediately.

But there are many reasons companies and business owners decide to change IT provider, below are just a few.

Why do businesses change IT providers?

You've outgrown them.
Is it your time to make the switch?

This isn't necessarily their fault, but your business may have simply outgrown them, and it's time for you to move to an IT provider who can support your needs and help you scale. And that's good news for you; your business is growing and moving on up. And that could be your indicator to make the switch, just as the above points are too.

- ✓ If your support requests aren't sorted quickly, and communication is lacking.

- ✓ If there is little advice, recommendations or roadmaps on how to improve your business.

- ✓ Or if you need more support in general

This is your hint to start hunting for a new technology partner. Technology is the beating heart of your business after your team; if you can't rely on it to support your employees, customers and operations, how can you continue to operate successfully? Therefore, your technology partner needs to be the best possible.

Not seeing the business results promised
ROI is essential. You need to see what value your IT provider is bringing you. This should be delivered to you in metrics, so you are aware of what has been promised; being vague is a red flag.

They won't go outside their contract
You want an IT partner who will actively put that extra bit of effort and time in to help your business. Your business is not a 'one size fits all', so don't let it be treated like one; your business is unique, so your services should be too.

Communication isn't quite up to scratch
Communication is everything. If you aren't being told what's being done, how are you supposed to know? Your IT partner should acknowledge issues in time, keep you in the loop and do what they promise.

Cybersecurity isn't a priority
Cybersecurity should be every IT provider's priority. If your data isn't safe, your business is vulnerable. Check out their cybersecurity credentials before you sign, especially Cyber Essentials.

Things take too long to fix
Of course, certain things can take longer. However, this needs to be communicated. If you are left in the dark and waiting for days, that means downtime, and where is the value for you?

Too much jargon
Technology is complex, which is why IT providers exist; it's a minefield to battle through. What makes a good IT provider is someone who can take a complex matter and show you simply what it is and the solutions without excessive jargon; it'll only leave you frustrated if not.

They don't accept responsibility
Taking responsibility for both sides each party has agreed to is essential. This means trust is established; without trust, a partnership with your IT provider will never work. They need to hold up their hands and accept responsibility.

You're not learning
You don't need to know everything, but there should be a level of education in this partnership, for example, teaching staff about fishing scams and instilling awareness. It's also crucial for you to be aware of what your IT provider is doing.

They're constantly pushing new services
It's great to have the latest and best technology for your business as it will only help. However, it's not always vital, and it may not be the right time for your business or the right solution. Advice on how to improve your operations is excellent, but this should span over the years and certainly not be pushed.

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Chapter 4

The main reason you need an IT provider? Keep your business safe.

Protect the essential thing in your business

The cyber security landscape has significantly changed and evolved, especially during the pandemic, and it's pretty scary. Now many of us are working from home or flexible working, the need for secure remote and on-site setups is vital. With all our data now stored on the Cloud, we can access it wherever and whenever we need it, which opens immense flexibility.

However, we think that our data is safe and recoverable, which it is to an extent. But there is a danger, and these risks should not be taken lightly.

Cyber criminals are always after your data, and you are more vulnerable outside the office environment, and cyber crime is getting worse every day. Malware, for example, is malicious code placed on a device or network to steal, corrupt or infect your data and it can take a while to notice. But there are even scarier cyber-attacks out there.

Ransomware is getting worse

Ransomware is terrifying. You do not want to run into this form of cyber-attack. Anyone can be targeted for ransomware, but SMB's are the most common. Ransomware infiltrates businesses most commonly through malicious emails, posing as your colleague or your bank. Avoid, avoid, avoid. Your IT provider should educate you and train your team to be prepared to mitigate these attacks. Regular cyber-security training should be offered.

Cyber-attacks have increased over 600% in the past year

Unfortunately, no business can ever be 100% protected from every cyber-attack out there, but you can be prepared and put the right solutions in place to ensure your business can bounce back. Your IT provider will supply you with a range of products and services, which will work together to keep your business secure. And these solutions will be unique to your organisation.

Antivirus software is no longer enough

Antivirus software is no longer enough to keep your business protected; threats and hackers are becoming increasingly sophisticated, so your IT provider should supply you with more robust solutions. Your IT provider should ensure that you are Cyber Essentials certified, which will help protect you and mitigate up to 96% of common modern day threats. Ensure that keeping your business protected is not only your priority, but your IT providers priority too.
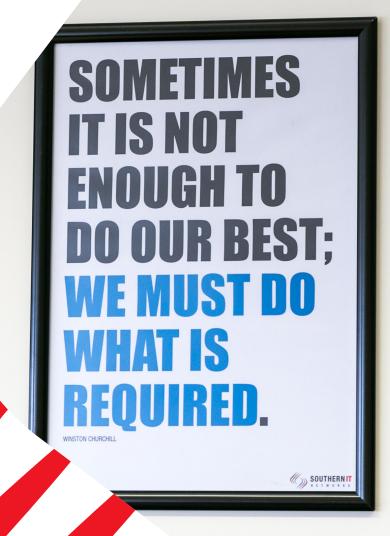
Chapter 5

What to ask your IT provider

Why you should be highly sceptical of all IT support companies

The technology landscape is vast, with various areas that one can specialise in and different skills and knowledge that can be acquired. The danger with IT professionals is that there is not a regulated body for it to pass through to call themselves an IT support company. No industry standards need to be met, no guidelines, so that means anyone can call themselves an IT support company.

Which can be a little scary. But don't worry, as long as you make sure to ask the following questions and do your research, selecting a reputable and accredited IT provider is accessible.

SOMETIMES IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO DO OUR BEST; WE MUST DO WHAT IS REQUIRED.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

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Why do businesses change IT providers?

How quickly will my problems be fixed?

Fixing your problems should be their priority. Different problems take different times to solve, but your provider of choice must be transparent and honest. It's how your IT provider responds that's important.

What solutions and actions do they take to keep your business operating smoothly?

Ensuring that your staff work uninterrupted is essential, and downtime is kept to a minimum. What will your IT provider do to guarantee this for your business?

Do they have a dedicated account manager?

You must get introduced to who you will be working with properly. Do you have a dedicated account manager? Your relationship needs to be looked after and fostered to ensure that you are always happy.

Can they explain everything they do?

Technology, as mentioned before, can be confusing, but can they explain exactly what they are doing to you on a high level, so you can understand precisely the changes that will be occurring to your organisation. This will also show that they can help educate you and your employees.

Can they keep up with your business growth and changes?

Change is essential for your business to succeed. So, your IT provider needs to be able to scale alongside you and provide solutions that can support the changes within your business so you can continue to grow and achieve your business goals.

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Chapter 6

What to note about how IT support works

What every IT support company wishes you knew about IT

This information will help make your life easier and understand a little bit more about what we do as IT providers, for you, our clients.

Outsourced IT support is better value for money

Hiring in-house has its benefits, but there are drawbacks. With in-house IT staff, you ask them to do several specialised jobs and support your entire workforce all at once. That's a lot. Outsourcing may cost a little more, but you have access to multiple IT experts with a range of specialised skills and knowledge in all IT.

Beware of one-man IT businesses

They may be cheaper and promise to look after your business. But as their clients grow, they won't be able to dedicate as much time to you as once promised. Going for a dedicated outsourced team means that you will get the service and quality that your business deserves. They will have the tools, accreditations and expertise to look after your organisation successfully.

Your technology will need constant monitoring and maintenance; the job is continuous

Your devices, computers and other technology need constant maintenance because software is forever changing. It's getting better every day, so it is only natural that your IT provider will make those changes so your systems can run smoother, which will benefit your workforce. Your systems should be monitored 24/7; make sure you get this. A lot of what your IT provider does is in the background, and that's good; monitoring and maintenance are ongoing.

There's a structure to the way they do things

The support triangle is similar to the hardware triangle. This means that quality, price and speed are all equal. So, whether it's speed or quality you want, the other two will always match. Of course, you spend what you can afford, but if you require quality and speed, the price will match it. This is of course a vice versa scenario as well, so if you specifically set out to find cheap support, you can expect quality and speed to reflect this.

A long-term partnership is key to ensuring your business is best protected

Working with people short-term means you are not going to achieve the goals that are set out. The benefits of a long-term partnership with an IT provider means we get to work closely with you, learn more about your priorities and goals, ensure your IT services are custom to you, build an infrastructure that grows alongside your company and, overall, keep you better protected.

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About Us

Who are Southern IT, and how can we help with IT support?

If you're looking for a great IT Company with a stellar reputation, who'll give you world-class service and never let you down, then you've found the right place.

Do you know how most IT companies promise the world, then disappoint? What we do is care. Truly, Madly Deeply Care.

- ✓ We'll never ever let you down.
- ✓ All calls answered by an engineer
- ✓ 90% of issues fixed in 15 minutes or less
- ✓ Peace of mind for your most critical business systems.

Our *5 promises* to you

⚡ *Lightning Fast Response Times*

? *No Geek Speak*

🗺 *The Best IT Support in the South East*

☹ *No Unexpected Surprises*

🕐 *On Time & On Budget*

Who we partner with to deliver the best service

CYBER RESILIENCE CENTRE FOR THE SOUTH EAST
TRUSTED PARTNER

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Ready to start your IT journey with Southern IT?

Let's discuss your IT needs

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