



**From the Desk of: Timothy D. Ricketts**

**President, T. Daniels Consulting**

Dear Colleague,

If you are the CEO of a business that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT 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**.

**One of the most commons questions we get from new prospective 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 3 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 IT 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 IT service contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT service 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*** IT 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,

**Timothy D. Ricketts**

**President, T. Daniels Consulting**



## Comparing Apples to Apples: The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company to another, you need to understand the 3 predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all 3, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The 3 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 removing a virus), or it may encompass a large project like a computer 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 IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your “IT 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, 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 IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT 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 IT 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 IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the “managed IT 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.



## **Managed IT 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 the managed IT approach is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for any small business. The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn't have the time or expertise to implement (such as a network upgrade, installing a backup solution, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT 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 IT 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 and who work around the clock to do one thing: compromise your networks for illegal activities.

In most cases their intent is to access financial information and passwords to rob you (or your clients), create fake identities for credit card fraud, etc. In other cases they may want to use your computer network to send illegal spam, host pirated software, spread viruses, etc. And some do it just for the "fun" of being able to make computer systems inoperable. These criminals work around the clock in teams, constantly finding and inventing new ways to get around your antivirus software and firewalls; that's why you have to remain ever vigilant against their attacks.

Of course, this doesn't even take into consideration other common "disasters" such as rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (which are the #1 reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business



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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 IT 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 IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

## Should You Just Hire A Full-Time IT Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 300 employees (sometimes more or less depending on the individual company's needs) to hire a full-time IT person, because you can outsource this function of your business far cheaper and with a lot less work; but you DO want to hire a professional to perform basic maintenance just as you would hire an attorney to handle your legal matters or an accountant to prepare your taxes. **And if you truly understand the cost of your TIME and factor in employee productivity, the managed IT services model is considerably less expensive over time than the "break-fix" model.**

## 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 IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to stabilize your computer network or to resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour; 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 IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician may have resolved 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 to 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



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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 IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

## What to Look For In a Managed IT Services Agreement and What You Should Expect To Pay

**Important!** Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted of over 750 different IT services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT 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.

**Hourly Break-Fix Fees:** Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$100 to \$200 plus per hour with charges equal to one to several hours 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 IT consulting firm for a project, I would 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, work flow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way in 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 IT 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.



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**Managed IT Services:** Most managed IT services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. That fee is somewhere in the range of \$40 to \$500 per server, \$10 to \$100 per desktop and approximately \$5 per smartphone or mobile device. All depends on level of service included.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT 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
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Web-Protection and monitoring

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a “scam” or unethical UNLESS the managed IT 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, such as new servers, PCs, laptops, etc.
- Software licenses
- On-site support

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

- The following are 20 questions to ask your IT 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.

## **20 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them To Support Your Network**

### **Customer Service:**

**Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?**

Any reputable computer consultant will answer their phones live from at least 8:00 am to 5:00 pm and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many CEOs and executives work outside normal hours and find it to be the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

**Q2: Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your calls?**

Your computer consultant must guarantee to have a technician working on your problem within a certain timeframe after you call. If they can't guarantee a certain response time, then be prepared to work on their timeframe and not yours when a problem does arise. A written guaranteed response time should be standard in every service agreement you sign.

**Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across as arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?**

Good technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take the time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms.

**Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?**

Your computer consultant should routinely conduct quarterly review meetings with you to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Their goal should be to help you be more profitable, efficient and competitive with these meetings.

**Q5: Do they provide detailed service orders/invoices that clearly explain the work performed and is it accessible 24/7 online?**





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Do you hate it when your computer service company sends you a bill and you have no idea what work was done? This is completely unacceptable behavior. You should demand that your computer consultant provides you with detailed descriptions that show what work was done and when so you never have to guess what you are paying for. You should also have access to it online 24/7 so you can review when you want at your convenience.

**Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers compensation insurance to protect YOU?**

Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for an unreasonable amount of time or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance AND workers compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

True Story: A few years ago Geek Squad was slapped with multi-million dollar lawsuits from customers for the bad behavior of their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying, and distributing personal information they gained access to on customer's 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 company you are hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

**Maintenance of Your Network:**

**Q7: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?**

A remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues, and other problems so your computer consultant can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems and network downtime.

**Q8: Do they provide you with a weekly report that shows all the updates, security patches, and status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?**

Demand a detailed weekly report that shows an overall health score of your network and the updates to your antivirus, security settings, patches and other important network checks (like hard drive space, backups, speed, and performance, etc.). Even if you don't read through the report every week, it's important to know that this is happening.

**Q9: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written, network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the "keys to the kingdom?"**





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Every business should have this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. Your computer consultant should also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them. This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

### **Q10: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?**

Since they are keeping detailed network documentation and updates on your account, any of their technicians must be able to pick up where another one has left off.

### **Q11: If they offer an “all-inclusive” support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are their “gotchas” hidden in the fine print?**

The most advanced computer consulting firms today offer an “all-inclusive” or “all-you-can-eat” managed services plan. These are actually a good thing because they'll save you a lot of money in the long run – HOWEVER, make sure you REALLY understand what is and isn't included. Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/e-mail help desk included, or extra?
- What about network upgrades, moves, or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3<sup>rd</sup> party software support?
- What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you're not happy with their services? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- If the hardware and software are included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are offsite backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about onsite support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?

### **Backups and Disaster Recovery:**

### **Q12: Do they INSIST on monitoring an offsite as well as an onsite backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?**

I would never allow any business these days to use tape backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We recommend a multi-layered approach using both on-site and off-site backup



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providing for both fast access on-site recovery and necessary redundancy for complete disaster recovery if the office site experiences full inaccessible failure.

**Q13: Do they INSIST on doing periodical test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?**

Your computer consultant should perform minimally a quarterly “fire drill” and perform a test restore from backup 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.

**Q14: Do they insist on backing up your network BEFORE performing any type of project or upgrade?**

This is a simple precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.

**Q15: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they offer a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or enable you to work from a remote location?**

At a minimum, you should have a simple disaster recovery plan for your data and network. I would also encourage you to do a full disaster recovery plan for your office, but at a minimum, your computer network will be covered should something happen.

**Technical Expertise and Support:**

**Q16: Is their help-desk US based or outsourced to an overseas company?**

An in-house help desk helps to ensure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it’s important to keeping your data secure.

**Q17: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in on-going training – or are they learning on your dime?**

Any technician working on your network should be up to date on the vendor certifications on your network (i.e. Microsoft, Dell, etc.). Our experience is that the vast majority of technicians out there these days are woefully undertrained. Also, look for a company that is “Certified”. This ensures the company has multiple engineers with certifications and the company has additional access to live support and product resources that “non-Certified Partners” do not have. For example; our company is a **Microsoft Certified Partner with Silver Small Business Cloud Accelerate**. This ranks us in the top 5% of all Microsoft Partners worldwide.

**Q18: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?**

Any technicians working on your network is a part of your staff while they are there. Are the technicians you’re used to dealing with true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office? Do they dress professionally and show up on time?



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**Q19: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?**

Any computer consultant should own the problems with all of your line of business applications. That doesn't necessarily mean that they can fix faulty software – but they SHOULD be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you.

**Q20: Do they have experience with industry-standard database programs like “Microsoft SQL” and report writers like “Crystal Reports”?** Many “line of business” software packages use them and your computer consultant should be able to help so that you don't have to try and resolve any of these related issues on your own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

## **A Final Word and Free Assessment Offer to Show You How to Eliminate System Slowness, Crashes and Viruses and Drastically Lower Your IT Maintenance Costs**

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 IT support to. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

## **VALUABLE HASSLE-FREE COMPUTER SUPPORT COUPON FOR FREE 27-POINT PROBLEM PREVENTION NETWORK AUDIT**

**Don't let computer problems take over your business! If you are a business owner with five or more PCs, I'd like to offer you a FREE 27-Point Problem Prevention Network Auditto:**

Diagnose any ongoing problems or concerns you have with the computers on your network.

- Scan for hidden viruses, spyware and loopholes in your network security that could allow hackers and other cyber criminals to access your confidential information.



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- Check your system backups to make sure they are not corrupted and can be recovered in case of an emergency.
- Review your network configuration and peripheral devices to ensure that you are getting the maximum performance and speed from your machines.
- Review your server file logs to look for looming problems or conflicts that can cause unexpected downtime.
- Check that all security updates and patches are in place.

**HASSLE-FREE COMPUTER SUPPORT**

**COUPON (\$997 Value) Call T. Daniels Consulting at 810-629-0131 and just say that you want the FREE 27-Point Problem Prevention Network Audit.**

No duplicate coupons or copies will be accepted. This offer can't be sold, traded or combined with any other offer