25 Critical Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Managed Service Provider

Your business relies on networks and other technology systems that work 24/7. You need a Managed Service Provider (MSP) that keeps your systems running 24/7, protects you from external threats, and responds quickly when problems arise.

Here are 25 questions you should ask any MSP firm you're considering.

☐ **Do you offer flat fees and, if so, how do you define what's included in your service and what's not?** Too many MSPs nickel-and-dime their clients to death. Businesses may balk at a flat fee. But in our experience, you get better service and budget certainty with a flat-fee provider.

☐ **Can you provide documentation that specifically outlines the processes and systems you implement for your clients?** If the answer is no, they probably don't have adequately documented systems in place, and that means trouble. Without documentation, things fall through the cracks and mistakes happen.

☐ **If we hire you, will you create, update and share with us detailed documentation of our network and customized systems?** Every client is different so a good MSP will adjust its systems to fit your needs. Why document it? See the item above.

☐ **Do you allow short-term (i.e. monthly) contracts? If not, do you define the terms under which we can opt-out of a long-term contract?** You don't want to get stuck in a long-term contract with an MSP that doesn't deliver. A good MSP will keep you as a client because they've earned it, not because they've locked you into contractual prison.

☐ **Do you regularly test backups and data restoration for both onsite and cloud storage?** Here's a true horror story about a company that lost critical data because the backups were corrupt (and the IT guy never tested them). Your MSP must have systems in place to avoid this nightmare.

☐ **Do you support Third Party Software**?
Which applications do you support? And if we have an application which you have not previously supported, are you willing to learn and support it?

☐ **Do you resell products WITHOUT mark-up?**
If you mark-up products, do you reveal to clients the mark-up amount?

☐ **Do you have a well-documented onboarding process?**
How long does it take and what are some of the key details?

☐ **Can you provide at least five references and testimonials from current customers?** If they can't connect you with happy customers, you won't be a happy customer.

☐ **Do you have a system to ensure that only specifically designated "administrators" have access to our network and its documentation?** You don't want any-old-employee to have access to your network, do you?

☐ **Do you ensure maximum uptime for our systems?**
What systems and steps do you put in place to minimize downtime? And what guarantees do you offer if you don't meet the standard?

☐ **Do you use third-party contractors for any services you offer? If yes, please describe.** You need to know who's handing these critical tasks. Don't let your MSP offload the work without letting you know (and without first vetting those who will do the work).

☐ **Do you establish redundant network backups -- both onsite and offsite?**
When your network goes down, how long will it take to recover?

☐ **Do you explain your work to clients in plain English and let them know the impact your actions will have on their business?** Too many tech guys talk in lingo and treat you like you're stupid when you ask questions. Give it to me straight, in words I can understand.

☐ **Does a person answer your phone during business hours?**
If a client leaves a message during business hours, do you respond within one hour?

☐ **Do you assign a dedicated account representative to each client?**
If yes, how often will we see this person and what value will they bring to our business?

☐ **Do we have to manage your progress on projects, or do you provide frequent updates, status reports, and follow-up calls and e-mails?** This is critical. You deserve to know how things are going as projects proceed. If your MSP can't do this, you need a new MSP.

☐ **Do you have technicians who are specifically trained and certified to service the critical operating systems, databases, and hardware that we rely on?** Choose an MSP that knows your technology now. You don't want them to learn on the job.

☐ **Do you have a documented process to protect customers' networks and cloud storage from cyber criminals and hacking?** The keyword here: Documented. Again, if it isn't documented, the system has holes. And when it comes to security, you don't want holes!

☐ **Do you remotely monitor (24/7) your customers' networks, security settings, malware/virus protection, and software patches? If not, how do you ensure your customers' network is secure and up-to-date at all times?**
This is related to the item above. 24/7 monitoring is critical. Don't let your MSP skimp on this.

☐ **Do you proactively offer recommendations to improve customer's networks and systems (beyond simply monitoring and then reacting if something goes wrong)?** You want a technology *partner* who will help you improve your systems, manage your technology budget smartly, and ultimately operate your business most efficiently. They're the experts. You want them to offer advice and guidance, not simply react when things are broken.

☐ **Do you provide invoices that explain in detail the services you provided?** We've all dealt with the vague, pricier-than-expected invoice. Not fun. Your MSP should make all charges clear and minimize the uncertainty.

☐ **Do you announce/schedule in advance service visits and arrive on time?** Please, don't just show up and expect we'll be happy to see you. That's especially true during a pandemic.

☐ **Do you have a system to document processes so you can serve a client quickly -- even if the primary technician for the account is not available?** We know. We already talked a lot about documentation. We're repeating this on purpose. It's important -- not just to prevent things from slipping through the cracks, but also to ensure smooth knowledge transfer. You don't want critical knowledge stuck in someone's head -- especially when that head is lying on a beach 1,000 miles away from your office.

☐ **Do your employees maintain certifications and participate in ongoing training?** Certifications matter. Sure, maybe we've heard about the kid who's self-trained and now builds supercomputers in his basement. But that doesn't mean you want a self-trained (or not-so-trained) technician poking around your critical business systems. You want to manage my tech? Prove that you know what you're doing, and prove that you're up-to-date with the latest training.

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