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MANAGED SERVICES

Virtually all businesses, regardless of size or industry, have significant information technology (IT) needs. Unfortunately, many businesses don't have the technical know-how, the personnel or the manpower to service these needs effectively. This is where a managed service provider can help.

What Are Managed Services?

Just about any IT-related activity qualifies as a potential managed service. These include, but are not limited to:

- Data Backup and Recovery
- Network management
- Software Support and Maintenance
- Hardware Maintenance and Support
- Security

Many of these services can be handled outside of a contracting company's internal network structure

Managed Service Providers

A managed service provider is a company that assumes control of IT-related services for any contracting entity—typically a business—on either an ongoing or as-needed basis, depending on the specific requirements of the client. Sometimes managed service providers take over all of a client's IT responsibilities; occasionally only certain functions are taken up by the managed service provider.

In effect, contracting a managed service provider creates a fully staffed IT department for a small company, if that's what the client wants or feels it needs.

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IT Problems: Endemic to Modern Business

Essentially all businesses rely on information technology to a greater or lesser extent, but that reliance grows with every passing month, as does its complexity. That complexity naturally gives rise to greater and greater problems. Many businesses, particularly small ones with limited personnel and little if anything in the way of IT expertise, find themselves spending ever growing hours troubleshooting problems rather than working on the substance of their business.

Problems related to, for instance, network down time, have a doubly crippling effect on many businesses. Not only does the compromising of the network infrastructure make it difficult for workers to perform their jobs—dependent as they are on smooth network functioning—but personnel resources must be diverted to the onerous task of network repair and maintenance. And that is a job for which most, if not all, workers are less than expert.

Many small and medium sized companies simply don't have the necessary resources at hand to deal efficiently with the IT problems that seem to crop up on a daily basis.

How Managed Service Providers Can Help

Contracting for necessary services with a managed service provider can effectively produce an expert IT department where one didn't exist. By taking responsibility for such tasks as network stability and data backup and recovery, a managed service provider can ensure that needed IT systems—hardware and software—continue to function smoothly, solving complex problems before they spiral out of control. When a problem does crop up, an IT expert can solve it much more quickly, with far fewer negative consequences, than an inexperienced team. Meanwhile,

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the client's workers can focus on their own areas of expertise—the substance of the business itself.

And, of course, the managed service provider will only take on those tasks that the client requests. For those IT areas where the client wants to retain control, it does. The client never surrenders its IT assets and the systems management process remains entirely transparent.

A Technical Solution for Small and Medium Sized Businesses

While most large businesses have the assets and economies of scale necessary to fund and maintain IT departments, filled with experts, that's rarely the case for small and medium sized businesses. For them, outsourcing some or all of their IT woes to a managed service provider may make good sense.

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Houston | Dallas | Austin | Dubai

Corporate Headquarters

6110 Clarkson Lane | Houston, Texas 77055 |
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