Business Owners & Managers I.T. Buyers Guide

By Mike Mendez, Owner, IT Instructor,
IT Author & Speaker

- Pricing Methodologies
- 21 Critical Questions
- Critical Points For Any Businesses IT
  Systems & Support

I go Over All The Details on IT Costs & Services For Your Business in This FREE Report! Call my Cell if You Have Any Questions: 913-832-0557

What You Should Expect To Pay For I.T. Support For Your Business

(And How To Get *Exactly* What You Need Without Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees And Bloated Contracts)

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The three most common ways I.T. services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.

- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying I.T. services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.

- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses I.T. companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.

- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.

- ✓ 21 revealing questions to ask your I.T. support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail and data.

From the Desk of: Mike Mendez
CEO, Owner & IT Author
AccurIT Systems

If you are the Owner, Administrator, Manager or C-Level Executive of a Business in the Kansas City Metro and surrounding area that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the I.T. 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**.

My name is Mike Mendez, CEO and Owner of AccurIT Systems and author of the *Business Owners & Managers I.T. Buyers Guide*. We've been providing I.T. services to businesses in the Kansas City area for over 20 years. You may not have heard of us before, but I'm sure you're familiar with one or more of the other area businesses that are clients of ours. A few of their comments are enclosed.

One of the most common 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 three 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 I.T. 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 I.T. services contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no healthcare business stakeholder thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating I.T. services 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 healthcare business stakeholders on how to pick the **right** I.T. 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 <u>most informed decision possible,</u> 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,

Mike Mendez, CEO and Owner
AccurIT Systems

About The Author

Mike Mendez is CEO of AccurIT Systems/HealthIT and has over 30 years of experience in the field of Information Technology (IT). Mike started his IT career while in high school, providing IT support services and selling business software and peripherals and then went on to earn his B.S. degree from The University of Kansas (KU). Mike later applied and was accepted to one of the top Masters programs in the country at the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMED). During his time at KUMED he was hired as a part time web developer and technology support specialist for KUMED computer systems and information technology to help pay for his education.

Deciding to further pursue his career and education in IT, Mike enrolled in courses at Johnson County Community College (JCCC) which had one of the top IT programs in the country and worked as a Systems Engineer for JCCC's Information Technology group. Mike became an IT Instructor and taught Business and Industry evening courses in Microsoft Systems, Cisco Systems Networking, IT Systems Cybersecurity, IT Network Cybersecurity and Network Systems Design to working professionals for over 5 years. During this same time, he was a lead Senior Systems Engineer for Alexander Open Systems (AOS), the largest IT consulting firm in the Midwest servicing fortune 1000 companies. Throughout his career, Mike has authored many IT Systems and IT Security educational articles and has presented at numerous speaking engagements on a variety of IT topics.

Mike founded AccurIT Systems in 2002 and has worked with over a 1000 businesses in multiple industries throughout his career ranging from small medical offices like Carondelet Orthopaedic Surgeons (Apex) and dental practices like Bhargava Family Dentistry to large organizations like KUMED and Honeywell. AccurIT Systems has received many awards for it's outstanding IT services and support and was recognized as a **Top IT Support Company in Kansas City in 2019 and Best Managed IT Services Provider in Kansas City 2022.**

Mike remains very active in the community and with JCCC in helping to develop appropriate work curriculum and is a member of the JCCC Technology Advisory Board. Mike holds certifications as a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE), Cisco Systems Certified Network Associate and Axent IT Systems Security Specialist. When Mike is not working on all things IT he enjoys traveling to the Yucatan of Mexico and exploring the ocean, ruins and cenotes.

Comparing Apples To Apples:
The Predominant I.T. Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one I.T. services company with another, you need to understand the three predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three 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 fixing a problem with your e-mail, or it may encompass a large project, like a 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 I.T. Services.** This is a model where the I.T. services company takes the role of your fully outsourced "I.T. 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, cyber 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 I.T. Services.** Many software companies will offer I.T. 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 I.T. 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 I.T. services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

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

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Managed I.T. 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 some form of managed I.T. is essential for every Healthcare Industry business.

In our company, we offer different plans to fit the needs of our clients. In some cases, where the business is small, we might offer a very basic managed services plan to ensure the most essential maintenance is done, then bill the client hourly for any support used. For our smallest clients with 5 or fewer FTEs (fulltime employees), they often find this the most economical. But for most of our clients greater than 5 FTEs, lets call it 6-10 or more FTEs, we offer a fully managed approach where more comprehensive I.T. services are covered in a managed plan. By doing this, we can properly staff for their accounts and ensure they get the fast, responsive support and expertise they need.

The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent I.T. person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific I.T. project to complete that your current in-house I.T. team doesn't have the time nor expertise to implement (such as migrating to a cloud-based solution, implementing a cyber security plan, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general I.T. 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 I.T. 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 that work around the clock to do one thing: hack into your network to steal data, PHI/PII or money or to hold you ransom.

As you may know, ransomware is at an all-time high because hackers make millions of tax-free dollars robbing one small business owner at a time. But that's not their only incentive.

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Some will attempt to hack your network to gain access to bank accounts, credit cards or passwords to rob you (and your clients or patients). Some use your computer network to send spam using YOUR domain and servers, host pirated software and, of course, spread viruses. Some even do it just for the "fun" of it.

And don't think for a minute these cybercriminals are solo crooks working alone in a hoodie out of their basement. They are highly organized and well-run operations employing *teams* of hackers who work together to scam as many people as they can. They use advanced software that scans millions of networks for vulnerabilities and use readily available data on the dark web of YOUR usernames, passwords, e-mail addresses and other data to gain access.

Of course, this isn't the only I.T. danger you face. Other common "disasters" include rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (still a BIG reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your I.T. infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business 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 I.T. 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 I.T. services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

Should You Just Hire A Full-Time I.T. Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 100 employees to hire a full-time I.T. person for a couple of reasons.

First of all, no one I.T. person can know everything there is to know about I.T. support and cyber security. If your company is big enough and growing fast enough to support a full-time I.T. lead, you probably need more than one guy. You need someone with help-desk expertise as well as a network engineer, a network administrator, a CIO (chief information officer) and a CISO (chief information security officer).

Therefore, even if you hire a full-time I.T. person, you may still need to supplement their position with co-managed I.T. support using an I.T. firm that can fill in the gaps and provide services and expertise they don't have. This is not a bad plan; what IS a bad plan is hiring one person and expecting them to know it all and do it all.

Second, finding and hiring good people is difficult; finding and hiring skilled I.T. people is incredibly difficult due to the skill shortage for I.T.. And if you're not technical, it's going to be very difficult for you to interview candidates and sift and sort through all the duds out there to find someone with good skills and experience. Because you're not technical, you might not know the right questions to ask during the interview process or the skills they need to do the job. On this point as we will cover later , this is also a BIG question you'll want to ask when hiring an IT services company: What experience does/do the founder(s) or owner have?

More often than not, the hard and soft costs of building an internal I.T. department for general I.T. support just don't provide the best return on investment for the average small to midsize business. An internal I.T. department typically doesn't make sense until you have over 100 employees OR you have unique circumstances and need specialized skills, a developer, etc., but not for day-to-day I.T. support and maintenance.

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 I.T. firm. The I.T. services company has no incentive to prevent problems, stabilize your network or resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour when things stop working; 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 I.T. consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem – one who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician might resolve 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 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 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 I.T. projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

What Should You Expect To Pay?

Important! Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent I.T. industry survey conducted of over 750 different I.T. services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most I.T. 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 I.T. services companies selling break-fix services charge between $165 and $250 per hour with at least a one-hour minimum for base level support. 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 I.T. consulting firm for a project, I 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, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way toward 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 I.T. 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. The ONLY exception to this rule would be a problem with a 3rd party vendor that then changes the scope of work or involves additional hours from your IT consultant to resolve. Even then there should be a clear process for what will happen in your proposal should these type of changes occur. (ie, a change order)

Managed I.T. Services:

Most managed I.T. services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on some or all of the following: the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support, the number of locations you have and the total number of computer based users. In the greater Kansas City Metro Area, that fee is somewhere in the range of $200 - $400 per server, $50 - $75 per desktop/laptop and approximately $10 - $25 per printer, smartphone or mobile device. Likewise, if priced on a per user model (not both, devices OR users) you should expect to pay somewhere between $115 - $200+ per user supported. This largely depends on the services and software being offered known as the "stack".

If you hire an I.T. consultant and sign up for a managed I.T. 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
- Monitoring workstations and servers for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Documentation of your network, software licenses, credentials, etc.
- Vendor management – handling all your tech vendor calls and needs to get you out of the middle of "geek speak".

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a "scam" or unethical UNLESS the managed I.T. 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 (ex. new servers), PCs, laptops, etc.
- Software licenses
- Special projects, i.e. NEW computers, printers. software or major migrations. (EHR/EMR)

Warning! Beware of the gray areas of "all-inclusive" service contracts and "cheap" pricing.
In order to truly compare the "cost" of one managed I.T. services contract with another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN'T included AND the SLA (service level agreement) you are signing up for. It's VERY easy for one I.T. services provider to appear less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you're getting. Beware of "lowball" offers as these companies may be cutting out critical software that keeps your company safe or even worse not allocating for the proper markup that allows them to staff adequately to service you properly and most importantly quickly!

The following are 21 questions to ask your I.T. 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 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.

21 Questions You Should Ask Your I.T. Services Company Or Consultant Before Hiring Them For I.T. Support

Experience & Customer Service:

Q1 **What is the experience of the owner, principle or founder?**

Our Answer: This is a critical question and so it's number one on my list. You know the old saying: " You don't know what you don't know." Nothing can truer than that statement EXCEPT for : "You can't properly manage what you don't know." If the experience of the owner, principle or founder of your IT services company is weak or worst of all nonexistent this should be a huge red flag. This person or persons are the leaders of the company. How can they properly source the best technical staff, manage the selection of critical IT software responsible for keeping your business safe or provide the highest level of IT support response your business deserves when they've never done it themselves? Having been an "IT salesperson" or even an "IT person at XYZ company" provides them with little at best to none at worst experience in knowing the ins and outs of providing IT services and support to multiple business like yours.

As founder of HealthIT (a division of AccurIT Systems) you can rest assured that experience is our primary strong point. I started off in IT working on technical support issues for end users and then joined the largest IT services firm in the Midwest (AOS) servicing hundreds of Kansas City area businesses and thousands of users. Before leaving AOS to start my own firm in 2002 I rose to the top of the ladder and became a lead Senior Systems Engineer over seeing a group of over 50 engineers. At this same time, I was teaching IT courses at night in Microsoft, Cisco, Networking and IT Security to thousands of IT professionals around Kansas City that were looking to advance their IT skill sets. We have been servicing healthcare businesses and other businesses for over 20 years in Kansas City. Feel free rereview my bio on page 8 or on our website for more information about me or give me a call on my cell if you have any questions: **913-832-0557**

Q2 **Do you have a written, guaranteed response time for working on resolving your problems?**

Our Answer: Most I.T. firms offer a 60-minute or 30-minute response time to your call during normal business hours. Be very wary of someone who doesn't have a guaranteed response time IN WRITING – that's a sign they are too disorganized, understaffed or overwhelmed to handle your request. Our written, guaranteed response time is an industry leading **7 minutes** for critical issues and 60 minutes or less for the lowest priority issues. A good I.T. firm should also be able to show you statistics from their PSA (professional services automation) software, where all client problems (tickets) get responded to and tracked. Ask to see a report on average ticket response and resolution times.

Q3 — When I have an I.T. problem, how do I get support?

Our Answer: When a client has a problem, we "open a ticket" in our I.T. management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document and resolve client issues. However, some I.T. firms force you to log in to submit a ticket and won't allow you to call or e-mail them. This is for THEIR convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your ONLY option for requesting support.

Also, make sure they HAVE a reliable system in place to keep track of client "tickets" and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be EASY for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy. Calling, e-mailing or submitting a ticket via our portal puts your I.T. issue on the fast track to getting resolved.

Q4 — Will I be given a dedicated account manager?

Our Answer: It's important that your I.T. firm does account management and meets with you on a regular basses to discuss how things are going in your account and to make recommendations that further optimize the efficiencies of your business operations. We make sure the senior partners are meeting with you regularly to take care of those critical "non-support" related needs. Rest assured, from initial call to final resolution, you will work with the SAME dedicated account manager who will know you, your business and your goals.

Q5 — Do you have a feedback system in place for your clients to provide "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" ratings on your service? If so, can I see those reports?

Our Answer: If they don't have this type of feedback system, they may be hiding their lousy customer service results. If they DO have one, ask to see the actual scores and reporting. That will tell you a lot about the quality of service they are providing. We are very proud of our positive client feedback scores and will be happy to show them to you or feel free to visit our Google Business page to see our numerous 5 star reviews!

I.T. Maintenance (Managed Services):

Q6 — Do you offer true managed I.T. services and support?

Our Answer: You want to find an I.T. company that will proactively monitor for problems and perform routine maintenance on your I.T. systems. If they don't have the ability to do this, or they don't offer it, we strongly recommend you look somewhere else. Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

What is <u>NOT</u> included in your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: Another "gotcha" many I.T. companies fail to explain is what is NOT included in your monthly managed services agreement that will trigger an invoice. Their so-called "all you can eat" option is RARELY true – there are limitations to what's included and you want to know what they are BEFORE you sign.

It's very common for projects to not be included, like a server upgrade, moving offices, adding new employees and, of course, the software and hardware you need to purchase.

<u>But here's a question you need to ask</u>: **If you were hit with a costly ransomware attack, would the recovery be EXTRA or included in your contract? Recovering from a cyber-attack could take HOURS of high-level I.T. expertise. Who is going to eat that bill? Be sure you're clear on this before you sign, because surprising you with a big, fat bill is totally and completely unacceptable.**

Other things to inquire about are:

- Do you offer truly unlimited help desk? (Make sure you are not nickel-and-dimed for every call.)
- Does the service include support for cloud services, such as Microsoft 365?
- Do you charge extra if you have to resolve a problem with a line-of-business application, Internet service provider, phone system, leased printer, etc.? (What you want is an I.T. company that will own the problems and not point fingers. We are happy to call the vendor or software company on your behalf.)
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- If our employees had to work remote (due to a shutdown, natural disaster, etc.), would you provide support on their home PCs or would that trigger a bill?
- If we were to get ransomed or experience some other disaster (fire, flood, theft, tornado, hurricane, etc.), would rebuilding the network be included in the service plan or considered an extra project we would have to pay for? (Get this IN WRITING. Recovering from such a disaster could take hundreds of hours of time for your I.T. company's techs, so you want to know in advance how a situation like this will be handled before it happens.)

Our managed services agreement is completely transparent and covers very clearly what's included and what are additional cost. We also implement separate individual agreements for project work so you know exactly what your project costs are going to be before you get a bill. Upfront and clear understanding of how things are going to be billed in <u>writing</u> is what you should be looking for from your I.T. service provider.

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Q8 Is your help desk local or outsourced?

Our Answer: Be careful because smaller I.T. firms may outsource this critical function. As a result, you may get a tech who is not familiar with you, your network, previous problems and personal preferences. Or worse, they may not be as qualified. This can be frustrating and lead to the same problems cropping up over and over, longer resolution time and you having to spend time educating the tech on your account.

Fortunately, we provide a dedicated technician to your account who will get to know you and your company, as well as your preferences and history. When you work with our local help desk technician, they'll be more capable of successfully resolving your I.T. issues and handling things the way you want.

Q9 How many engineers do you have on staff?

Our Answer: Be careful about hiring small, one-person I.T. firms that only have one or two techs or that outsource this critical role. Everyone gets sick, has emergencies, goes on vacation or takes a few days off from time to time. We have more than enough full-time techs on staff to cover in case one is unable to work.

ALSO: Ask how they will document fixes, changes, credentials for you organization so if one tech is out or unavailable, another can step in and know your network settings, history, previous issues, etc., and how those issues were resolved. This is important or you'll be constantly frustrated with techs who are starting over to resolve a known issue or may screw up something because they don't understand or have a blueprint of your computer network.
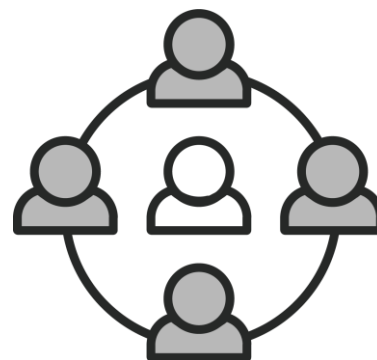
Q10 Do you offer documentation of our network as part of the plan, and how does that work?

Our Answer: Network documentation is exactly what it sounds like: the practice of maintaining detailed technical records about the assets you own (computers, devices, software, directory structure, user profiles, passwords, etc.) and how your network is set up, backed up and secured. Every I.T. company should provide this to you in both written (paper) and electronic form at no additional cost and update it on a quarterly basis.

Why is this important? There are several reasons:

First, it shows professionalism and integrity in protecting YOU. No I.T. person or company should be the only holder of the keys to the kingdom. Because we document your network assets and passwords, you have a blueprint you can give to another I.T. person or company to take over if necessary.

Second, good documentation allows the engineers working on your account to resolve problems faster because they don't waste time fumbling their way around your network trying to find things and uncover accounts, hardware, software licenses, etc.

Third, if you had to restore your network after a disaster, you'd have the blueprint to quickly put things back in place as they were.

All our clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We 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 I.T. person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current I.T. person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q11 — Do you meet with your clients quarterly as part of your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: To us, there's nothing more important than face-to-face time with our clients. Therefore, we make it a priority to meet with all our clients at least quarterly (sometimes more often) to provide a "technology review."

In these meetings, we provide you with the status updates of projects you're working on and of the health and security of your network. We also make recommendations for new equipment and upgrades you'll be needing soon or sometime in the near future. Our quarterly meetings with you are C-level discussions (not geek-fests) where we openly discuss your business goals, including your I.T. budget, critical projects, compliance issues, known problems and cyber security best practices.

Our goal in these meetings is to help you improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and ensure your organizational productivity stays high. This is also your opportunity to give us feedback on how we're doing and discuss upcoming projects.

Q12 — If I need or want to cancel my service with you, how does this happen and how do you offboard us?

Our Answer: Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many I.T. firms hold their clients hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

We would never "force" a client to stay with us if they are unhappy for any reason. Therefore, we make it easy to cancel your contract with us, with zero contention or fines. Our "easy out" agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations every day so we keep your business.

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Cyber Security:

Q13 — What cyber security and IT certifications do you and your in-house team have?

Our Answer: It's important that your I.T. firm have *some* type of *recent* training and certifications, and they should be able to answer this question, which demonstrates a dedication to learning and keeping up with the latest cyber security protections. If they don't have any, and they aren't investing in ongoing training for their engineers, that's a red flag. Some business owners won't invest in training and give this excuse: "What if I spend all this money training my employees and then they leave us for another job?" Our response is "What if you DON'T train them and they stay?"

You can feel confident that our in-house technicians have among the most advanced cyber security and IT training and certifications available. In fact our techs spend on average 8 hours a week in IT training related functions including cyber security, cloud systems technologies, Microsoft systems and applications, disaster recovery/data protection systems and more!

Q14 — How do you lock down our employees' PCs and devices to ensure they're not compromising our network?

Our Answer: As above, the question may get a bit technical. The key is that they HAVE an answer and don't hesitate to provide it. Some of the things they should mention are:

- 2FA (two-factor authentication) solutions.
- Advanced end-point protection, NOT just antivirus.
- Advanced Unified Threat Management (UTM) firewalls, NOT basic routers with firewall functions. Look for "UTM".
- Ringfencing or Whitelisting applications – this allows your critical programs (like QuickBooks) to run **without** you having to call the I.T. support desk every other day when the program requests an update. These technologies (Ringfencing and Whitelisting) identify those programs as safe and let them proceed while the rest of your system is locked down and secure.

Because a combination of these lockdown strategies is essential to protecting your network and data, we employ ALL of these for our clients. Effective cyber security should never compromise between choosing this OR that. It should feature every weapon in your arsenal.

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Q15   What cyber liability and errors and omissions insurance do you carry to protect me?

Our Answer: Here's something to ask about: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days, to lose data or get hacked, who's responsible? What if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office? Or damages your property while there?

In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance, workers' compensation and cyber liability – and don't be shy about asking them to send you the policy to review!

If you get hit with ransomware due to their negligence, someone has to pay for your lost sales, the recovery costs and the interruption to your business operations. If they don't have insurance to cover YOUR losses of business interruption, they might not be able to pay, and you'll have to end up suing them to cover your costs. If sensitive client data is compromised, who's responsible for paying the fines that you might incur and the lawsuits that could happen? No one is perfect, which is why you need them to carry adequate insurance.

True story: A few years ago, a company that shall not be named was slapped with several multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' 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 I.T. firm you're hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

Rest assured, we make it a priority to carry all the necessary insurance to protect you, including errors and omissions, workers' comp and cyber liability insurances. Simply ask, and we will be happy to show you a copy of our policy.

Q16   How are you staying current with cyber security threats to keep your clients safe?

Our Answer: By asking this question you can determine if the firm you are interviewing has a plan in place to identify, assess and act on cyber security threats. These threats change constantly, almost daily and your I.T. company should have a process in place to keep your business safe.

We are partnered with multiple vendors that are leaders in the cybersecurity space like Microsoft, RocketCyber and Calyptix Security to ensure that we are notified of emerging and "zero day" (previously unknown vulnerability) threats. We deploy our proprietary "Triple A" three step process of: **"1. Awareness 2. Assessment 3. Action"** in order to mitigate any potential cyber security threats to our clients.

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Q17

Do you have a SOC and do you run it in-house or outsource it? If outsourced, what company do you use?

Our Answer: A SOC (pronounced "sock"), or security operations center, is a centralized department within a company to monitor and deal with security issues pertaining to a company's network.

What's tricky here is that some I.T. firms have the resources and ability to run a good SOC in-house (this is the minority of outsourced I.T. firms out there.) Others cannot and outsource it because they know their limitations (not entirely a bad thing).

But the key thing to look for is that *they have one.* Less experienced I.T. consultants may monitor your network hardware, such as servers, the network and workstations, for uptime and patches, but they might not provide security monitoring. This is particularly important if you host sensitive data (financial information, medical records, credit cards, etc.) and fall under regulatory compliance for data protection.

Rest assured, we are partnered with one of the nations top SOC providers to provide proactive security monitoring 24/7/365 for our clients to better prevent a network violation or data breach.

Backups And Disaster Recovery:

Q18

Can you provide a timeline of how long it will take to get my network back up and running in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: There are two aspects to backing up your data that most business owners aren't aware of. The first is "fail over" and the other is "fail back." For example, if you get a flat tire, you would fail over by putting on the spare tire to get to a service station where you can fail back to a new or repaired tire.

If you were to have a disaster that wiped out your data and network – be it a ransomware attack or natural disaster – you want to make sure you have a fail-over solution in place so your employees could continue to work with as little interruption as possible. This fail-over should be in the cloud and locked down separately to avoid ransomware from infecting the backups as well as the physical servers and workstations.

But, at some point, you need to fail back to your on-premise network, and that's a process that could take days or even weeks. If the backups aren't done correctly, you might not be able to get it back at all. So, one of the key areas you want to discuss with your next I.T. consultant or firm is how they handle both data backup AND disaster recovery. They should have a plan in place and be able to explain the process for the emergency fail-over as well as the process for restoring your network and data with a timeline.

In this day and age, regardless of natural disaster, equipment failure or any other issue, your business should ALWAYS be able to be operational with its data within six to eight hours or less, and critical operations should be failed over immediately.

We understand how important your data is and how getting your team up and running quickly is essential to your business success. Therefore, in the event of any total disaster, we can confidently get your network data back up and running in 48 hours or less.

Q19 Do you INSIST on doing periodic test restores of my backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: A great I.T. consultant will place eyes on your backup systems every single day to ensure that backups are actually occurring, and without failures. However, in addition to this, your I.T. company should perform a monthly randomized "fire drill" test restore of some of your files from backups 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.
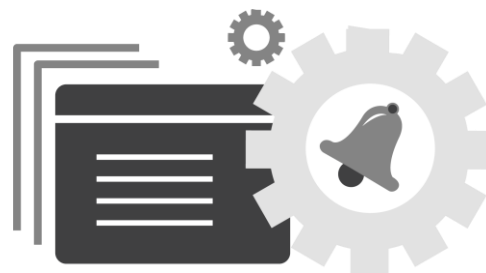
If you don't feel comfortable asking your current I.T. company to test your backup OR if you have concerns and want to see proof yourself, just conduct this little test: Copy three unimportant files onto a thumb drive (so you don't lose them) and delete them from your server. Make sure one was newly created that same day, one was created a week earlier and the last a month earlier. Then call your I.T. company and let them know you've lost three important documents and need them restored from backups as soon as possible. They should be able to do this easily and quickly. If not, you have a problem that needs to be addressed immediately!

Verifying your backups daily and testing them on a regular basis is a cornerstone of a successful overall I.T. strategy. These are the lengths we go to for all our clients, including multiple random "fire drill" test restores to ensure ALL your files are safe because they are always backed up.

TIP: Ask your I.T. provider about the "3-2-2" rule of backups, which has evolved from the "3-2-1" rule. The 3-2-1 rule is that you should have three copies of your data: your working copy, plus two additional copies on different media (tape and cloud), with at least one being off-site for recovery. That rule was developed when tape backups were necessary because cloud backups hadn't evolved to where they are today. Today, there are more sophisticated cloud backups and BDR (backup and disaster recovery) devices. Therefore, we recommend three copies of your data, two stored on different devices locally, 1 offsite in the cloud and 1 redundant copy in another cloud data center separate from the primary cloud location. 3-2-2

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Q20

If I were to experience a location disaster, pandemic shutdown or other disaster that prevented me from being in the office, how would you enable me and my employees to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: If Covid taught us anything, it's that work-interrupting disasters CAN and DO happen when you least expect them. Fires, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes can wipe out an entire building or location. Covid forced everyone into lockdown, and it could happen again.

We could experience a terrorist attack, civil unrest or riots that could shut down entire cities and streets, making it physically impossible to get into a building. Who knows what could be coming down the pike? Hopefully NONE of this will happen, but sadly it could.

That's why you want to ask your prospective I.T. consultant how quickly they were able to get their clients working remotely (and securely) when Covid shut everything down. Ask to talk to a few of their clients about how the process went.

Here's how we handled our clients' needs when it seemed everyone needed to work remotely, get laptops and implement security measures almost overnight. We leveraged our partners to get laptops and even desktops ordered for our clients quickly and deployed them. With our vendor management process, we had phones rerouted quickly to cell phones. Our advanced UTM firewall allowed for quick provisioning of secure virtual private network (VPN) connections from employee's homes – it was like they were in the office!

Q21

Show me your process and documentation for onboarding me as a new client.

Our Answer: The reason for asking this question is to see if they HAVE SOMETHING in place. A plan, a procedure, a process. Don't take their word for it. Ask to SEE it in writing. What's important here is that they can produce some type of process. Further, they should be able to explain how their process works.

One thing you will need to discuss in detail is how they are going to take over from the current I.T. company – particularly if the current company is hostile. It's disturbing to me how many I.T. companies or people will become bitter and resentful over being fired and will do things to screw up your security and create problems for the new company as a childish way of getting revenge. (Sadly, it's more common than you think.) A good I.T. company will have a process in place for handling this.

If you consider us as your next I.T. services firm, we will gladly share our new client onboarding process and documentation. I think you'll be impressed.

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Other Things To Notice And Look Out For:

Are they good at answering your questions in terms you can understand and not in arrogant, confusing "geek-speak"?

Good I.T. companies won't confuse you with techno-mumbo-jumbo, and they certainly shouldn't make you feel stupid for asking questions. All great consultants have the "heart of a teacher" and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. As you interact with them in the evaluation process, watch for this.

Our technicians are trained to take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what this client had to say:

> " I have been working with AccurIT Systems for over a year and have enjoyed working with each one of the team members! They have been responsive to all our company issues and have done a wonderful job explaining needed steps and actions they take. I have only had to leave two voicemails with them as every other time they have answered and taken care of me and my team. Happy to have them as our support! **— Karlee Bulla** "

Do they and their technicians present themselves as true professionals when they are in your office? Do they dress professionally and show up on time?

If you'd be embarrassed if YOUR clients saw your I.T. consultant behind your desk, that should be a big red flag. How you do anything is how you do everything, so if they cannot show up on time for appointments, are sloppy with paperwork, show up unprepared, forget your requests and seem disorganized in the meeting, how can you expect them to be 100% on point with your I.T.? You can't. Look for someone else.

Our technicians are true professionals who you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot be there on time (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

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Do they have expertise in helping clients similar to you?

Do they understand how your business operates and the line-of-business applications you depend on like QuickBooks and other critical applications? Are they familiar with how you communicate, get paid, service your clients or patients and run your business? We have serviced several businesses in and around the Kansas City area for over 20 years. The reason we work well with them is because we understand the importance and risks of properly maintained IT networks and computers, how to deliver state of the art cyber security solutions to protect their businesses from devastating attacks and most importantly the need for them to get Kansas City's fastest IT support. Here's what a few of our clients had to say:

> " AccurIT Systems proposed a solution for optimizing and networking our practice management software. My dental practice computer systems have never run better! I'm now able to access key patient data throughout the office instead of being tethered to the front desk. Thank you AccurIT Systems for keeping my critical IT systems On Target while allowing me to focus on what's important to me…my patients! **— Dr. Neil Bhargava, Owner, Bhargava Family Dentistry**

> " How would I describe AccurIT Systems? In a word: Amazing. AccurIT Systems is living proof that you CAN have great service at a reasonable price without sacrificing quality. You would be crazy to hire anyone else to support your computer network. **— Joyce Swenson, Administrator, South Kansas City Surgical Center**

> " We have been with AccurIT Systems since 2004 and have found they meet our IT needs completely. They are responsive and make cost effective recommendations as to equipment needs and software upgrades.
>
> AccurIT Systems is professional and compassionate about their industry – thus making a "win – win" situation for our office.**– Bill Hussey, Administrator, Carondelet Orthopaedic Surgeons**

A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

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

The next step is simple: call my office at **913-257-3878** or directly on my cell at **913-832-0557** and reference this letter to schedule a brief 10- to 15-minute initial consultation.

On this call we can discuss your unique situation and any concerns you have and, of course, answer any questions you have about us. If you feel comfortable moving ahead, we'll schedule a convenient time to conduct our proprietary IT Systems Assessment.

This Assessment can be conducted 100% remotely with or without your current I.T. company or department knowing (we can give you the full details on our initial consultation call). **At the end of the Assessment, you'll know:**

✓ Where you are overpaying (or getting underserved) for the services and support you are currently getting from your current I.T. company or team.

✓ Whether or not your systems and data are *truly* secured from hackers and ransomware, and where you are partially or totally exposed.

✓ If your data is *actually* being backed up in a manner that would allow you to recover it quickly in the event of an emergency or ransomware attack.

✓ Where you are unknowingly violating IT security requirements and/or cyber security insurance requirements that can void your policy.

✓ How you could lower the overall costs of I.T. while improving communication, security and performance, as well as the productivity of your employees.

Fresh eyes see things that others cannot – so, at a minimum, our free Assessment is a completely cost- and risk-free way to get a credible third-party validation of the security, stability and efficiency of your I.T. systems.

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With appreciation,

Mike Mendez, CEO and Owner
HealthIT (a division of AccurIT Systems)

See What Other Business Owners Are Saying:

Rapid expansion! We provided cost effective solutions for refitting their office IT environment to meet their growing needs.

AccurIT has been amazing. They have helped my organization grow during a period of explosive growth. They were flexible and willing to adjust services to match our needs at the time (even when we didn't always know what our needs were). They speak geek and English! Most importantly, they make sure they do what YOU need, not what they need. I have never felt like they are trying to up-sell me on tech I don't need. No matter the size of your organization, they can help! **– Mark Solomon, IT Coordinator**

Catastrophic storm failure! After suffering a complete loss, we provided rapid recovery with our advanced backup technology.

I have been working with AccurIt Systems for over 5 years now and they are fantastic! It is nice to have a company that cares about protecting your data as much as you do! Mike and the rest of the team are always very responsive and go above and beyond for all of our IT needs! **– Stephanie Garver, Office Administrator**

Left 'high and dry' by their IT guy! We stepped in to secure and maintain their systems.

After being left without our in house IT guy we were literally flying blind, AccurIT Systems stepped in and made it such an easy transition . I couldn't be more pleased with the professionalism and mannerism of their entire team. **– Lisa Knight, Office Manager**

No one home. After repeated attempts to get IT support with only e-mail as the option, they had enough. We took over and now they have the fastest IT support in Kansas City!

AccurIT is a great company to work with! They are easy to reach and very responsive when we have issues. They know us and the details about our setup, and always have solutions for what we need. Very highly recommend AccurIT Systems! **– Susan Bedsaul, Property Manager**

A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

1   **We Respond Within 7 Minutes Or Less.** The average amount of time it takes for one of our clients to get on the phone with a technician who can start working on resolving their problem is 3.5 minutes. We know you're busy and we have made a sincere commitment to making sure your computer problems get fixed FAST. And since most repairs can be done remotely using our secure management tools, you don't have to wait around for a technician to show up.

2   **No Geek-Speak.** You deserve to get answers to your questions in PLAIN ENGLISH, not in confusing technical terms. Our technicians will also not talk down to you or make you feel stupid because you don't understand how all this "technology" works. That's our job!

3   **100% No-Small-Print Satisfaction Guarantee.** Quite simply, if you are not happy with our work, we'll do whatever it takes to make it right to YOUR standards without charging you for it. And if we can't make it right, the service is free.

4   **All Projects Are Completed On Time And On Budget.** When you hire us to complete a project for you, we won't nickel-and-dime you with unforeseen or unexpected charges or delays. We guarantee to deliver precisely what we promised to deliver, on time and on budget, with no excuses.

5   **Lower Costs, Waste And Complexity With Cloud Solutions.** By utilizing cloud computing and other advanced technologies, we can eliminate the cost, complexity, and problems of managing your own in-house server while giving you more freedom, lowered costs, tighter security and instant disaster recovery.

6   **We Won't Hold You Hostage.** Many I.T. companies do NOT provide their clients with simple and easy-to-understand documentation that outlines key network resources, passwords, licenses, etc. By keeping that to themselves, I.T. companies hold their clients "hostage" to scare them away from hiring someone else. This is both unethical and unprofessional. As a client of ours, we'll provide you with full, written documentation of your network and all the resources, software licenses, passwords, hardware, etc., in simple terms so YOU can understand it. We keep our clients by delivering exceptional service – not by keeping them in the dark.

7   **Peace Of Mind.** Because we monitor all our clients' networks 24/7/365, you never have to worry that a virus has spread, a hacker has broken in or a backup has failed to perform. We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your customers and running your business, not on your I.T. systems, security and backups.

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