Outsourcing IT Support:
Six Trends That Will Impact Your Decision

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Nothing ever stands still in the world of IT. With new technologies, economic shifts, industry changes, and other factors constantly influencing the landscape, IT business decisions are far from easy.

Many IT executives perceive the choice of whether to outsource all or part of their company's managed services roster as purely a dollars-and-cents decision. Yet either directly or indirectly, a number of trends have critical roles to play in the decision. Here are six that should be carefully considered:

1. Tight labor market

The ability to adequately staff positions at help desks, repair depots, network and systems monitoring, and endpoint management has never been more difficult. When positions are left unfilled, best practices are neglected and training time suffers.

Many organizations attempt to cover staffing shortfalls by asking experienced IT engineers to take on more responsibility. It's easy to assume that salaried IT workers can simply add a few periodic tech support calls to their list of daily duties, or to oversee KPIs for a few systems. Support and monitoring services, however, heavily influence a company's IT brand perception, both internally and externally. Slow and/or inadequate responses cause everyone needless headaches and can significantly damage IT's perception across the enterprise.

There's another factor at stake. When trained IT personnel are saddled with services that could otherwise be delegated, deadlines on critical projects are not being met. Engineers and technicians who know they are in high demand eventually realize they're not enjoying their jobs because their most important skill sets are being underutilized.

A quality managed services provider (MSP) can solve these issues by making technicians available who are continually trained in issues specific to the enterprise, as well as in industry best practices. Performance is tied to SLAs including first call resolution and customer satisfaction scores—and hiring challenges become a thing of the past.

2. Consumerization of IT

This trend is not completely new, but its impact is still being felt in a big way. Employees have expectations that their workplace devices will operate 24/7—and customers and employees alike have little patience for apps and systems that underperform.

While the impact of IT consumerization is mostly indirect, it weighs heavily on the outsourcing decision. Many senior IT executives don't fully consider the negative impact of poor IT support; such performance strains consumer relationships and lowers employee morale. In particular, low-quality support means employees can't get their work done in a timely manner. Frustrations mount, productivity suffers, and eventually workers give up and leave. Whether the result is low sales or high employee turnover, no one wants these circumstances to be traced back to hardware and/or software support issues.

A recent study states that the rationale for IT outsourcing leans toward cost savings (26%), quality improvement (21%), skills access (19%), financial flexibility and market time (11%).

Source: KPMG

3. Shadow IT

The trend for "rogue" technology activity outside IT is often caused by insufficient support. When IT is unable to adequately support technology across the enterprise, departments will often do their own thing—and almost always without the IT's knowledge, authorization, or control.

Whether the activity is a simple tap on the shoulder of a knowledgeable co-worker or the development of wildcat applications, the result is counterproductive. Even a simple software workaround hurts, since the solution never enters the help desk knowledge base. By definition, Shadow IT operates outside the system—which means no one is sharing solutions. The larger enterprise doesn't learn from individuals, nor is there continual improvement. Even if a single pocket within the organization is doing great things and figuring out how to resolve things faster, cheaper, and better, that knowledge is siloed.

By contrast, a managed services provider offering top-quality personnel and best practices discourages Shadow IT activity. It improves enduser satisfaction by resolving issues quickly, often through first call resolution. Furthermore, the data it collects from end-users becomes a valuable source of IT insight. Security is improved, regulatory infractions and lessened—and best of all, a stronger relationship is built between IT, customers, and the entire organization.

4. Digital transformation

The confluence of the Internet of Things, cloud computing, big data, digital assistants, artificial intelligence, social media, and smart devices is having an immense impact on the future of IT. Business models and entire industries are being transformed as people work, transact business, make purchases, and discover new services via their smart phones and other untethered devices.

In this environment, people expect immaculate performance— which is why outsourcing to a centralized provider makes sense. Around-theclock system and network tracking is imperative, so that developing issues are addressed before they become major concerns. A qualified MSP can catalogue data from incident reports and trouble tickets, making a useful repository that can inform future deployments.

Devices that work properly for employees are also essential to digital transformation. Minutes matter— when problems arise, solutions are needed on the spot. The solutions and repairs an MSP can provide will make all the difference in the rollout of tools and services brought about by the digital transformation process.

5. Vendors as partners

It used to be that IT service providers operated with a Chinese takeout approach: pick the items you want from the menu, and we'll deliver. Today, the world is a lot more complex—and good vendors have evolved into full strategic partners.

As IT goals have become more substantial and interdependent, vendors must add value. The best ones do by helping their customers understand issues, and finding solutions. Sometimes it even requires the vendor to take a short-term hit in revenue,

because the solution lowers the service volume that is tied to compensation. Smart MSPs, however, realize the result is a stronger long-term relationship.

Top quality service providers are concerned with their customers' business. If they have the latitude to step up and tell their customer that an upcoming deployment will encounter capacity issues with a particular data warehouse or server farm, the result benefits everyone. Those kinds of partners deserve a seat at the table during the early stages of project development—and forward-thinking enterprises are giving it to them.

6. Innovation

The demands of business require new ideas and improved ways of doing things from every corner of the enterprise. IT is no exception. But if IT is sidetracked with the day-to-day responsibilities of infrastructure support, it won't have the human and technical resources available to focus on innovation.

A managed service provider can free IT to be more creative and develop the solutions that move an enterprise forward. It also supports development by capturing information about existing and new applications and services. By feeding this information back to IT and providing analytics, it can do the work IT hasn't the time or bandwidth to accomplish.

Once IT fully understands the major trends that affect the insource/outsource decision, a shift in perspective takes place. The choice becomes strategic, rather than purely tactical. The operational, competitive, and financial advantages become apparent—not to mention the ability to strengthen IT's brand within the enterprise.

The indirect costs of outsourcing are less quantifiable—but they are real. When combined with the measurable costs of hiring and training staff, keeping up with industry best practices, maintaining support infrastructure, and dealing with emergencies large and small, the true value of qualified IT support becomes clear. Nothing ever stands still in the world of IT—and with a proper service provider as partner, those changes become much easier to bear.