

The Executive PERSPECTIVE



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John has decades of experience in the IT industry, holding previous leadership positions at Dataflex Corporation and CompuCom Systems.

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Exclusive Interview:

Why Companies Need to Invest in Quality IT Support

IT managed services are nothing new—and yet the changes IT organizations are currently facing are putting a dramatic new face on the value-add of managed services providers (MSPs). John Raos, Vice President at Innovative Technology Solutions, gives his perspective on how today's MSP can become an essential ally to an IT organization.

What can quality IT managed services do for an enterprise?

It really goes to end-user productivity. A quality IT managed services provider can handle the day-to-day blocking and tackling to keep infrastructure up and running. Many businesses try to accomplish in-house what a managed services provider does, but they can't make the necessary investments on a regular basis. Nor can they commit to continuous improvement and process development—which are all things a quality outsourcer does, because it's their job.

Where is the biggest bang for the buck in IT managed services?

There's no question companies have a range of options for the cost of IT managed services. But if the decision is based on cost alone, the full picture isn't being considered. A low-cost solution—even if it's satisfied internally—can result in an environment where employees and

customers are frustrated with IT service quality, and that can have an immense indirect cost. Many IT executives don't factor in the frustrations poor IT can cause in employee morale and the ability to complete daily tasks. People eventually leave for a place where they have the support they need to get their job done. What's more, when services are managed in-house, you have very expensive resources—highly trained IT staff—handling issues and resolving calls. Soon you're missing deadlines and underutilizing labor at the same time you're dissatisfying employees. So when decision-makers get outside of the purely tactical question of direct cost and look at the more strategic, visionary aspects, they understand the bang for the buck.

Does a managed services provider play a more strategic role for its customers than in the past?

Absolutely—at least good ones can. I'll give you an example. For software developers, the vast majority of projects generate a user interface, so if there is a problem with software, it generates a call to the service desk. So having a closed-loop process is a huge value. If someone is there to say, "Here are the things you did as a developer, and here are the types of calls that were generated," it produces truly valuable data. This kind of strategic information

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wasn't available before, and it's something an MSP can provide. The best service providers add strategic value from the earliest stages of a project—and they prove it by proactively bringing something to the table without being asked. They'll say, "Here we noticed this or that, something that can be an improvement. I know you didn't ask us, but here is some food for thought, here are some ideas." So as an MSP, if you want a seat at the table you have to earn it.

Let's talk about some specific issues. Digital Transformation is a huge trend these days. Can IT managed services help companies embrace this change?

Yes, and in many ways. Most transformation initiatives require immaculate performance—data, software, and in the case of internal projects, devices. People expect immediate information, right? They need things to work because minutes matter. And when they have a problem, they need immediate solutions because they're so dependent on real-time performance.

So you don't want them to call someone who goes through a checklist of scripted solutions. You need someone who makes investments in best practices, who offers continuous improvement and invests in training so you have a highly skilled person available then and there. That's what a managed service provider brings. So when you have a managed service provider for whom it's their job, that's when digital transformation starts to succeed.

Another trend is "Shadow IT," or the autonomous development of applications and services by line-of-business managers and even end users. How can managed services help with Shadow IT?

There are multiple aspects here, and they start with whether Shadow IT is regarded as a positive or negative. Many organizations see Shadow IT as a hindrance. In those enterprises, when you don't have good control over IT, a centralized function that works well, you'll have different parts of your organization building and doing their own thing, which can be horribly inefficient. And IT may not even realize it because they're not tracking the cause and impact of Shadow IT. Then there are other organizations that believe innovation suffers when creative solutions outside of IT are blocked. Either way, it's critical to have the best managed service option in place because otherwise you're not sharing knowledge, you're not learning, you're not training, you're not solving problems in the most efficient way possible.

That leads to a really important question: How can an IT managed services provider help its customers innovate?

As we just noted, IT innovation is no longer confined to the IT department. But if IT is saddled with the blocking and tackling needed to support infrastructure, it's not going to have the cycles necessary to focus on innovation itself. When a quality MSP is put to work, it frees IT to do the development projects and the innovation.

An MSP can also create a support structure as the enterprise is deploying those leading-edge ideas. It develops the knowledge and captures the information about adoption, as well as provide support. As a partner, we can feed back validation data that tells whether that new technology or project or process is working. We can also provide analytics—fielding one thousand calls a month for a one-minute problem is a lot different than one hundred calls a month that reveal an issue in a production environment. A lot of organizations don't get down to the level of data that a strong MSP can quantify.

The best situations are when, as a quality MSP, a provider is brought in under a consulting arrangement. The initial assessment allows the provider to build a roadmap and show what the improvements might look like from an ROI perspective. It also allows the provider to suggest guarantees based on the roadmap. When the doors and windows are opened to discussion, everyone benefits.

