The Essential Guide to Managed Service Providers

Explore the advantages of partnering with a modern, strategic MSP, and how to find one aligned with your business goals.

Table of CONTENTS

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- Top MSP 500 - Elite 150
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A look at the history behind Managed Service Providers (MSP)s?

THE EARLY 2010'S:
The Good Old Days

THE LATE 2010'S:
The Era of Upgrade Fatigue

2020:
The New Anything-But-Normal

Looking back at MSPs of the 2010s, Mobility was getting off the ground at this point but not quite in orbit. VMware clusters were on-trend and present in abundance. Sixty-six blocks were ending their conversion into on-premises VoIP systems. VDI was gaining steam in the enterprise. If you were a medium-to-large business without some VDI in play, you were behind the curve.

Then the upgrade and management fatigue set in, the continued maintenance of the platform alone could be burdensome and risky. The business had adopted the elasticity of virtualization, meaning more servers; more to secure; more to poke through the firewall; more to manage.

The growing responsibilities also meant greater shared outcomes on the vendor's side. It meant more things outside of vendor control that they had to support. The later years of the 2010s were sprinkled with organizations moving some business applications to the cloud and eliminating collaboration workloads by migrating them to Office 365.

Then in 2020, the pandemic completely shifted the workforce to a remote state, and our homes became the new normal for work. Organizations reacted swiftly, ramping up on VPNs, moving file servers into Teams, and looking at Intune as a viable solution because they no longer had on-premises connectivity to end-users.

IT leaders all harness MSPS in different ways and business needs shift over time.

IT leaders must identify MSPs that adopt the flexibility of cloud services and other technologies to empower connected workforces or risk falling behind the competition.

There are several reasons organizations use a Managed Service Provider (MSP). We all hire service providers to do something for us, hoping that the provider has the capabilities we don't have. Generally, these can be framed around three t's: time, talent, and trouble.

TIME

When it comes to time, an MSP can accelerate the time to value and save the client's staff a lot of time and resources spent in the execution phase of Digital Transformation and daily maintenance.

TALENT

IT leaders hire sharp, sophisticated IT team members who have the capabilities and experience to perform their essential core, day-to-day responsibilities. However, it would be a waste of money for most companies to hire a full-time expert in a highly specialized area—risking under-utilizing the resource after the completion of the Digital Transformation initiative.

TROUBLE

Alleviating trouble is critical. Reduced risk is chief among the reasons for selecting a service provider. An MSP can provide vendor (e.g., installer, trainer, manufacturer, etc.) management to eliminate the risk of 'failure to perform' and project management to ensure that expected project deliverables stay on time, within budget, and at the quality expected. Clients primarily seek to hire an organization or individual who has expertise their organization doesn't possess already.

A volatile market fresh with disruption and fast-emerging cybersecurity threats is reshaping how organizations manage their IT in-house.

New security threats have changed how all of us manage IT. Now, more IT leaders are sharing that they used to harden the network and lockdown end-user devices—along with access to services and information—in a way that limits their ability to serve their own customer needs. It's become necessary to limit or eliminate that behavior of locking down access to services and information proves to be damaging to the business relationship with clients. For example, as clients request or demand, they can do business online or with one of the organization's associates—whether via mobile app, company website, or social media.

Now that edge devices are the 'new network perimeter,' significantly broadens the threat as the attack surface grows. CIOs and CISOs share that a chief concern is that traditional IT Security Protections (e.g., lock-down, training, testing, and simulation) sometimes fail to secure their endpoints. With threats such as ransomware and phishing scams, everyone feels as if they're being attacked every day, and they don't know what to do about it.

OUT OF 342 SECURITY PROFESSIONALS RECENTLY SURVEYED:

83%
Felt more overworked going into 2020 than they did a year earlier

82%
Had IT teams that were understaffed

85%
Felt that it had become more difficult to hire skilled security professionals

Organizations can engage an MSP or Managed Security Services Provider (MSSP) to extend their IT Security capabilities. Most in-house IT teams don't have the time to monitor and manage their systems and are at a loss of how to ensure protection at all levels of their systems and data and ensure detection of threats within their network.

An accelerated move to the cloud to support a fully connected workforce is changing mentalities around using managed service providers.

A swift paradigm shift in the way we work virtually overnight, along with the continuous movement to the cloud, has changed the mentality around Managed Services. On the most basic level, some organizations are concerned and confused about where to begin their journey to the cloud. Other companies attempted to move workloads to the cloud without outside support. Organizations that tried working independently found that for some workloads, performance suffered, or service level agreements (SLAs) weren't met by their provider.

That's why more organizations see the benefits of offloading the management and maintenance of the hardware, software, and services they need. *But they didn't know what to do.*

However, with guidance and the support of a Managed Cloud Services Provider, IT leaders understand—for select workloads, for which Cloud computing is appropriate—they are convinced they can gain benefits (e.g., fixed costs, predictable performance, enhanced capabilities, and a quicker time to value) that they were promised.

Technology decision-makers further understand that using an MSP, in tandem with the cloud, they can more effectively select and collaboratively implement the right solution to better serve their clients' needs with a more robust, intuitive customer experience while decreasing their time to market.

Getting answers to the questions that matter the most.

Q. IS HAVING A MANAGED SERVICE PROVIDER IMPERATIVE TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND KEEPING PACE IN A RELENTLESS MARKETPLACE?

Digital Transformation includes so much more than what an organization must change technologically. It encompasses everything that an organization must change (i.e., technology, people, and processes) to remain viable, relevant, and trustworthy.

Having an MSP working in tandem with or independently of an internal IT organization empowers Organizational Executive Leadership and Line of Business (LOB) leadership to achieve desired business outcomes. Because MSPs bring an objective and fresh perspective to help everyone on the team effectively examine and dissect the organization's Critical Success Factors (CSFs). All while discovering how to gain the desired outcomes to support those CSFs with an IT solution.

Q. WHAT'S THE KEY BENEFIT IN IDENTIFYING AND PARTNERING WITH THE RIGHT MSP?

Having an MSP can help an IT team get out of its way. All while speeding up time to value delivered by entirely successful and complete desired business outcomes. As the global workforce went remote overnight, services needs for organizations grew for everything from day-to-day management operations to workforce collaboration, monitoring, and more. The remote workforce sparked a pivot for modern MSPs to reevaluate their strategies to ensure they supported their clients.

There is no shortage of MSP options out there. According to a recent MicroAge survey, while more than 78% of IT leaders surveyed see their MSPs impacting business growth, more than half lack support with the cloud, cloud services, and security—all critical areas for any thriving, competitive organization. That's why partnering with a modern MSP is so vital.

WHAT IS A MODERN MSP?

01 **PROACTIVE AND REACTIVE**

First, they stay alert to trends in the market to anticipate your evolving and changing needs proactively. After moving to a remote workforce, there was an unprecedented jump in cloud services, AI, automation, and more edge technologies. If you're the client of a modern MSP, you would've experienced a seamless pivot to a remote, connected workforce with service providers and the chops to assess the tech stack necessary. Modern MSPs always look ahead to the future.

02 **A STEP AHEAD OF THE GAME**

Second, if you're working with a modern MSP, you'll probably know because they never stop innovating—identifying the most secure, reliable, and current technologies for their client base.

03 **SEAMLESS AUTOMATION AND MONITORING**

Next, they save you time and work by automating device management. Your company resources and devices span across locations, each with different vulnerabilities. If your MSP isn't bringing up InTune or thinking about implementing it successfully, they are probably not modern. Also, they prioritize monitoring. A current MSP harnesses resources that integrate priority alerts to flag any potential issues or internal red flags to clients. A modern MSP with a robust monitoring system can respond faster to changes to prevent unnecessary outages.

04 **EMBRACING CHANGE FOR GOOD**

Lastly, they are open to change because, as you probably already know, if you're reading this guide, the status quo just isn't cutting it anymore for IT leaders. Rather than port everything to the cloud as-is, a modern MSP optimizes migration to empower automation and collaboration.

Unleash game-changing insights and services and a potent competitive edge with a modern MSP.

➤ A modern MSP has moved beyond a 100% on-premises approach, asking, "is active directory still serving us?"

➤ Modern MSPs constantly advances technologies and security to stay ahead of or at least on top of a volatile marketplace ripe with compliance changes and industry shifts.

➤ Partnering with a modern MSP that meets technology leaders where they are—on the cloud—and helps them proactively mitigate new, emerging threats across the cybersecurity landscape is mission-critical to maintaining a competitive edge while promoting business resilience and agility.

What's the MicroAge difference?

MicroAge®
The Digital Transformation Experts

MicroAge combines a powerful mix of technology services and solutions, backed by vendor-certified engineers and an acclaimed panel of experts to deliver the competitive edge technology leaders need to lead in a disruptive, digital age. MicroAge is recognized annually on the Tech Elite 250, Solution Provider 500, and MSP 500—Elite 150 lists of top-performing technology integrators, strategic and managed service providers, and IT consultants. Learn more at MicroAge.com.