

Demystifying IT

Demystifying Managed Services

When it comes to outsourcing IT, the question for business owners is rarely whether to do it, but rather 'what to do, how to do it all, and who to do it with?'. And let's not forget the key question of 'how much?'

Leaning on over 20 years' experience working with SMEs, AdEPT takes a look at the growing Managed Service sector – cutting through the noise and hype to explore the real world issues that matter to you.

Responding to a changing world

There's nothing so sure as change in the world of technology. It was ever thus. The difference is that now the velocity has changed. Technologies, architectures and delivery models are evolving faster than ever before. And it's creating problems for IT and business leaders across the UK.

Responding to a changing world (continues)

We're seeing huge investments in, for example, the Internet of Thing (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning. Don't be fooled into thinking these innovations are the preserve of big corporates. And don't assume they translate into the world of the Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) world. They absolutely do. Whether we're talking a simple remote monitoring service for construction sites, or the rather more advanced use cases around chatbots and customer experience, both IoT and AI are very much small business technologies of today.

Cloud computing is a big deal too, of course: although most businesses are talking about multi-cloud environments or 'hybrid' where public & private cloud's work in harmony.

78% of SMEs expect to increase their use of cloud services in the year ahead.*

This represents a seismic shift in how technology and applications are being procured, consumed and managed – offering a level of agility unmatched by on-premise infrastructure. That's not to say that everything's cheaper in the cloud. There's certainly less capital expenditure, but the longer-term costs of licencing can be high – particularly if your business fails to monitor and manage usage and performance.

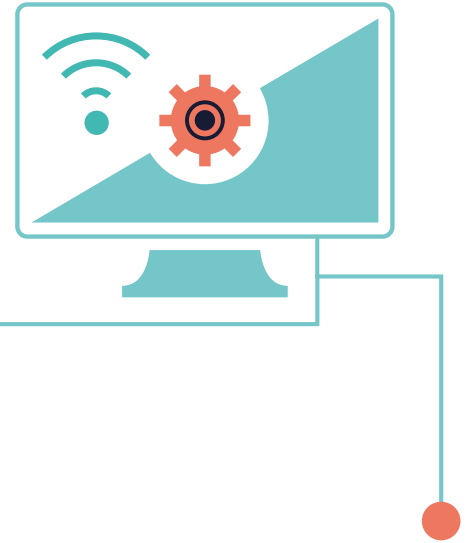
As we see from Dec 2018 research from Computing, sponsored by AdEPT, SaaS is still by far the most popular way to embrace public cloud. Indeed, SaaS remains the largest segment of the public cloud, at least in terms of revenues.** The best known and well utilised SaaS is arguably Microsoft's O365 from which revenues now outstrip those generated by traditional licencing options.

	Considering	Trialing	Test & dev	Production
SaaS e.g. O365	13%	9%	8%	71%
IaaS e.g. MS	36%	16%	15%	34%
Azure, AWS	23%	14%	12%	51%
PaaS e.g. Google App Engine, Azure etc.	32%	19%	21%	28%
Serverless e.g. Lamda, Azure Functions	54%	17%	13%	17%
Cloud Business Process Services (BPaaS) Eg. Payroll, procurement etc	38%	12%	11%	40%
Cloud Management & Security Services Eg. IBM Cloud Orchestrator	65%	12%	8%	16%
Cloud Back up and DR (DRaaS) eg.StorageCraft, Datto	43%	18%	14%	26%

While the benefits of cloud are well understood, the research also found that many organisations remain uneasy. Migration to cloud services, if badly managed, can be an incredibly complex and costly business. An experienced partner is a must.

* Cloud Control, Computing Research, Dec 2018

** <https://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3871416>



As we move further into this world of everything as a service (XaaS), virtual desktops and software-defined networks, a host of operational requirements and challenges appear: everything from mobile device management, through burgeoning software estates and licence optimization issues, to the explosion of Shadow IT as users download their favourite personal and professional apps onto their work devices. All of which can create a security nightmare.

Finally, we have all the business issues that impact technology – data protection (GDPR), compliance, demographic shifts in the workplace and so on. Whether by accident or design, these wider considerations are combining with today's tech trends to create intensely complex and hard to control environments, and constituencies of ever more demanding users. IT needs a bit of support!

For smaller businesses, particularly those with larger competitors, simply staying 'up-to-date' can mean being left behind. And with technology now a massive and powerful enabler of efficiency, productivity and change, being left behind can have far-reaching consequences that extend across the organisation.

The key to staying current is continually exploring new opportunities for improvement and trialling new tech to assess business outcomes. Once you're certain of positive impact, it needs to be deployed as part of an integrated and planned strategy, with user adoption at the core.

Just 32% of organisations have executed cloud as part of a corporate-wide strategy.*

* Cloud Control, Computing Research, Dec 2018

The business case for action

To steal a much used reality TV analogy, the world of IT in business often reflects 'a journey'. The majority of smaller businesses start out managing their own IT. This makes a lot of sense.

Inevitably though, as the business grows, so do the demands on the IT function – there's a need to manage an ever-growing volume of networks, apps, devices, data and users, etc.

Over time keeping the lights on swallows more and more budget. Resource and skills issues put the planned 'workplace transformation' initiative on hold. Our once agile technology environment has become bloated as workers download (and businesses pay for) apps and services they don't use or need.

After a while this complex world becomes the 'new normal'. That is, until some part of the (now) legacy network has a catastrophic collapse, or until a competitor opens new offices that threatens market share. You'd respond if you could –

doing the same in their territory. But your IT is now a constraint not an enabler – it can't support that kind of business agility.

In this negative scenario it's fairly straightforward to prove the business case for bringing in a partner to help you out. But why wait for things to fall over before taking action?

For many small and medium businesses, there's a positive upside to being proactive. Not least because, by leveraging the skills and experience of a Managed Services Partner (MSP), money can be saved, business can be protected, processes improved, and more 'visible' initiatives delivered to drive tangible business value.

With cloud security the biggest issue for companies considering adoption*, technology partners can play a key role in allaying concerns and securing virtual environments.

And it's a risk that deserves attention. It's estimated that, on average, a cyber incidence costs an organisation \$369,000** with loss of critical data, intellectual property and source files that can cost a company its reputation, let alone financial loss. Research also suggests that 27.9% of organisations will have a data breach in the next two years, with 61% reporting a cyber-attack in the past year. The risk is likely, and potentially significant. In any risk assessment High Risk x High Likelihood = High Priority! Pro-active maintenance reduces this risk.

* Cloud Control, Computing Research, Dec 2018

** Hiscox Cyber Readiness Report 2019

Identifying your support requirements

Outsourced or Managed IT services mean different things to different people. For example, anyone adopting a cloud app or service is technically 'outsourcing' the delivery, management and security to the provider. Microsoft's Office 365 is a good example here.

Indeed, most IT workloads, processes and operations can be outsourced to a third-party provider. What you do, how and when you do it, and how much support you choose are all key questions. The answers, of course, change depending on the very specific (and ever changing) needs of your business, your internal capabilities, and a hundred other considerations. It's not a decision to be taken lightly or in haste.

Security, skills shortages and the complexity of multi-cloud environments are the Top 3 challenges experienced by SMEs when adopting cloud.*

Which is why it can help to bring an expert in to analyse your existing environment and consult on scoping out your requirements. You don't know what you don't know. Until you do. Then, fully informed, you can develop a route forward.

5 top reasons for SMEs to embrace managed services

- 1 Simplify IT/network operations
- 2 Generate TCO savings
- 3 Inject greater IT flexibility/agility
- 4 Enhance business performance
- 5 Mitigate the risk of technology change

5 top business benefits realised through managed services

- 1 More reliable IT operations and % reduced downtime
- 2 Proactive maintenance and problem solving
- 3 Improved security and compliance
- 4 Fewer tasks
- 5 Reduced numbers of rogue users and shadow IT

Exploring your options

Going beyond reactive break/fix support services, today's Managed Service Providers (MSPs) offer a wide range of support across the customer lifecycle – from fully managed IT services that encompass day to day telephone and remote technical support, through proactive network monitoring from Network Operations Centres (NOC), to onsite engineer support. As an MSP ourselves, offering clients a wider range of technical and business services, including:

Cloud

- Hosted Exchange and desktop
- Hosted AVAYA Telephony
- Hosted Backup / DR
- Hosted Mail filtering
- Website / DNS hosting

Data centre

- Connecting directly to over 530 carriers ISP's and ASP's
- Triangulated presence
- High Availability by design
- Industry leading hardware and software
- Cisco network architecture
- VPS / Colocation

Voice

- Inbound and Outbound Communication
- DECT
- AVAYA
- Inbound contact centre

Unified Comms

- Voice, Video, Conferencing
- Instance Messaging
- Presence
- Computer Telephony Integration (CRTI)
- Wifi

Network

- MPLS
- Cisco Specialist
- Wireless Solutions
- LAN/WAN Management
- Proactive Monitoring
- Firewalls

While the technical focus areas may change – swapping datacentre for cybersecurity or cloud – most MSPs broadly offer the same portfolio of solutions and services. It's a fact that can make evaluating and selecting the best partner something of a major challenge.

What to look for in a provider

If you're looking to profit from the support an effective MSP brings, here's our guide to what to look out for.



Get covered. IT is in essence a commoditised market with a plethora of products to choose from: Windows or Apple? iOS or Android? AWS or Azure? Often, it's not one or the other but both, with multiple additional third-party solutions being integrated for good measure. It goes without saying that your IT support provider needs to be able to give comprehensive support whatever deployment you have, not just certain aspects of it.

Assure availability. Not the network kind. The 'pick up the phone and solve my problem when I call' kind of availability. You need to know your IT support partner is going to be available when you need them so emergencies can be resolved promptly before damage can be done - even if it's out of traditional business hours.



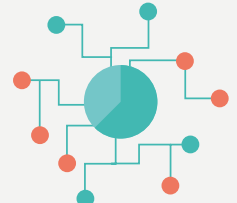
Be proactive. IT support needs to be proactive. MSPs need to ensure your users are learning and not repeating the same mistakes. They should also be advising on futureproofing and strategy, ensuring your business is geared up for what's coming next. A reactive partner is a risk not worth taking.



Similar is not the same. Not all MSPs offer the full spectrum of what you should expect, and some (like ourselves) offer a little more. Look for a support partner capable of offering as much of what you need as possible i.e., broadband, wireless, telephony, online security, remote backups. Not only will you be covered, chances are you'll enjoy economies of scale and lower per user support and maintenance costs.



Reputations and relationships. Multiple different services/solutions can mean multiple different support partners - all of whom have to be managed. Your IT support partner should have the knowledge, understanding and resources to manage it all - under a single contract with defined SLAs. While awards and accreditations can be a good indicator of ability, it pays to take time to get it right!



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A Network Security Project Case Study

How We Delivered Compliance to a London-based Law Firm

The Challenge

- Replace the clients' antiquated network security with a highly advanced solution.
- Ensure the clients' IT is fully compliant with data security requirements.
- Give the IT staff better overall control of network security and provide them with an additional level of network security intelligence.

The Solution

- Identify all network security weaknesses by conducting a thorough Vulnerability Assessment
- Replace the legacy firewall with a more advanced model.
- Apply an additional layer of network security and network intelligence through the implementation of WatchGuard Gateway Anti-virus and WatchGuard Dimension.
- Replace the outdated desktop Anti-virus solution with Sophos Endpoint Protection.

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Outsourced IT Services Case Study

IT Manager Support

How We Provide Ongoing IT Manager Support for a Digital Marketing Agency in Cambridgeshire.

The Challenge

- Relieve the in-house IT Manager from the additional pressures that have been placed on them following recent business growth.
- Ensure the IT network remains consistent, reliable and up-to-date to enable the company to successfully meet its goals.
- Provide an alternative service solution to employing an additional IT Expert that is both cost-effective and efficient.
- Provide ongoing IT Consultancy for the IT Manager on an ad-hoc basis.

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Infrastructure as a Service Case Study (IaaS)

How we helped a growing accountancy firm to reduce their operational costs and unify their IT systems.

The Challenge

- Consolidate all business data from two separate working offices to a central location that can be easily accessed by the staff at both offices.
- Standardise all the applications and operating systems that were being used by the staff throughout the organisation.
- Setup a single email platform for both offices.
- Upgrade the IT systems in the Milton Keynes office that were badly outdated.
- Ensure that the correct data protection and network security solutions were in place across both offices in order for them to remain compliant.
- Achieve the above while mitigating the capital expenditure that is associated IT infrastructure upgrades.

Illustrating success

Don't just take our word for it. Over the years, AdePT have established a long list of satisfied clients. Please click on the case studies above to discover how AdePT have helped a number of businesses with different projects...

Call AdEPT today
to see how we can
liberate your business.

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