CHOOSING AN IT SUPPORT COMPANY

ENLINEA LTD : IT SUPPORT ACROSS SCOTLAND, INCLUDING GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH

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We're conscious our potential customers are faced with a wide array of options when looking to choose a new support provider. Companies providing IT support range from simple PC repair shops through to international IT consulting firms. Charges and services offered can vary widely, however, its key to make sure you are considering both cost and quality.

If your company has only 3 or 4 PCs and no server then the choice for IT support can be quite vast – there are many people and companies with the skills required to support a PC. However, if you have a server or many servers relied upon for business functions then the side-effect of poor IT support can be very costly. Even with 5 staff unable to access a critical application or server the costs of downtime can outweigh the savings made with cheap IT support in a matter of hours.

Here are some points we think you should ask before appointing an IT Support Provider:

1. Check what each provider actually includes in their costs. Many support companies are keen to stress a very low monthly fee but then charge extra for things like on-site support or don't include any kind of SLA. It's important to make sure you compare like for like when comparing costs. It's also very common to restrict the number of on-site visits within a set period.

2. What are their qualifications? If you use predominantly Microsoft products you should expect their engineers to be Microsoft Certified. Senior engineers or consultants would normally have a degree in an IT related discipline.

3. Supply of Equipment. Many companies make much of their revenue through supplying equipment. As advisors to your company though they should be considering what is the best option for you - not what they make the biggest margin on.

4. Are they really an IT Support Company? Following on from point 3, many companies from telephone resellers to HR agencies now bolt on support services to their core business. Look for a company who has IT Support as their primary focus.

5. Check out their website. They're a technology company so you should expect their website to be top notch. Expect features such as a user portal where you can login and view past issue history of your contract.

6. Trial Period. Its common for support companies to insist on a 12 month contract - ask for a break option after 3 months. If they're as good as they say they are this shouldn't be an issue.

7. On-site visits. Most forward thinking support companies will do a large percentage of support work remotely. However, on-site support is still an essential service - find out how quickly they will come on-site if you need them. Do they have a reliable fleet of vehicles for their engineers?

8. References. As with most service companies you should be able to obtain good references from long standing clients - i.e. companies who have been using the support services for years and are satisfied with the results.

9. Who are their existing clients? Check they have existing clients who might have similar or more demanding requirements than your own.

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10. Company Trading Status. Find out how long they have been trading for and what their financial status is. If they have a solid financial status then you can expect them to still be in business when you need them!

11. What is their office like? Do they have the infrastructure and organisational skills to cope?

12. Service Level Agreements. Do they have any, and more importantly do they stick to service level agreements? Check with references what response and resolutions times for issues (including on-site visits).

13. Knowledge of existing technology. Are the staff knowledgeable about what you're using? Even a great engineer doesn't know everything - do they have a wide selection of different people who can help each other as a team? Do they know a lot about PCs but not very much about your multi-site server setup?

14. Knowledge of new technology. Do they keep up to speed with new developments and staff training. If they don't understand areas such as VoIP or latest version of Windows Server they won't be able to help or advise you on these areas.

15. Covering all IT bases. Check the range of services they offer and that you won't be calling one company for one thing and another company for a different issue. Even if they don't have skills in house the company might have partners who can provide service under their direction.

16. Complaints. No company is perfect and problems can arise - can you speak to someone who will take your issue seriously and make sure its resolved?

17. Cost vs Quality. Its always easy to find someone who will do a job cheaper at the time. A good support company will resolve the issue, find out why it occurred and work to prevent it happening again - they'll also be annoyed they didn't find it before you did! This might be more expensive in the very short term but over the longer term you'll see the benefits.

18. Your specific software. Many companies will run one or more specific applications - perhaps for database or accounting. Its possible the IT support company will not be experts on these products but check they are willing to liaise with the software vendor when required.

19. Do they have relevant insurances? Do they have relevant liability and indemnity cover?

We hope enlinea will have a favourable response to these points, however, even in cases where we don't feel we're a good fit for your requirements we'll do our best to point you in the right direction.

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