

What Every Business Owner Must Know About IT Support Services & Fees



How to get the exact IT support you need, without overpaying.

Provided by:
Robert Cleary
President/CEO
508-205-1114
www.ClearComIT.com

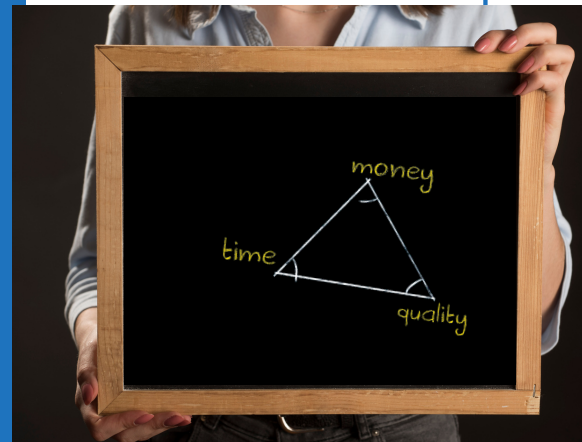


The Small Business Owner's Guide to IT Support and Services

How to Get the *Exact* IT Support You Need
Without Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees,
and Bloated Contracts

Contents:

- The three most common ways IT services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying IT services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- Exclusions, hidden fees, and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.
- How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration, and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.
- 19 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail, and data.





**From the Desk of Rob Cleary
President/CEO
ClearCom IT Solutions, Inc.**

If you are the owner/manager of a small/medium business that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your organization, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can **trust**.

My name is Rob Cleary, President of ClearCom IT Solutions, Inc. We've been providing IT services to businesses nationwide for over 20 years.

Most prospective clients come to us because they struggle to find a reliable partner to help them solve their technical support issues promptly. Although it's not the first question that comes up during our conversations, **pricing inevitably enters the discussion** as a critical point to cover. Since pricing is tied closely to the quality of the support you should expect to receive, I decided to write this report.

Many prospective clients who come to us are only familiar with one specific way of working with an IT person. This report will educate you on the most common ways IT services companies package and price their services and the pros and cons of each approach.

We'll discuss specifics about IT services contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about. Unfortunately, most business owners don't understand or know to ask about these areas when evaluating IT service providers. If ignored, they can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the service you need.

Most importantly, I want to educate business leaders on how to pick the right IT services company for their specific situation, budget, and needs based on the **VALUE** the company can deliver, not just the high or low price.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible, so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner, and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Cleary". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rob Cleary



About Rob Cleary

In 2001 Rob Cleary founded ClearCom IT Solutions, Inc, an IT company specializing in servicing small-to-mid-sized businesses in the Worcester County MA and Northeast Connecticut area.

He has extensive knowledge and expertise in network security, disaster recovery, proactive network monitoring, and maintenance. Rob and his team are proud to service a wide range of businesses including Manufacturing, Municipalities, Law firms, Non-Profit agencies and many more.

Rob has always had a passion for technology and as ClearCom IT continues to grow, his passion for business growth & development has never been stronger. In 2016 Rob was selected and ranked among Worcester Business Journal's 40 under Forty. Rob also serves on the boards of Leicester Business Association & Spencer Exchange Club and as technology advisor for the David Prouty High School's vocational-technical program.



About ClearCom IT Solutions

In 2001, Rob Cleary founded ClearCom IT Solutions while a senior at Nichols College in Dudley, MA. Initially starting out servicing residential customers, Rob saw a growing need for small businesses to have reliable IT support. In 2005 ClearCom IT shifted to focus solely on business clients.

ClearCom IT fills the gap between having a technical support company and understanding your business, therefore; striving to be your technology partner, not just a technical support company. ClearCom IT aims to deliver excellence in the latest network technologies and provide proactive professional customer service.

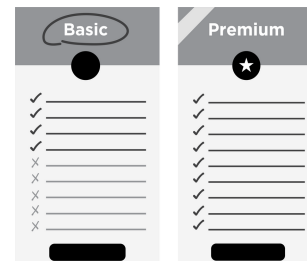
In 2015, ClearCom IT Solutions reached a significant milestone: 100% of its service agreements had been renewed over the past decade. This achievement positioned the company as one of the leading IT providers in Central New England.

We continue to grow and now serve clients nationwide.

Comparing Apples To Apples: The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services, and deliverables of one IT services company with another, you need to understand the three predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to “fix” your problem when something “breaks.” Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem, like fixing a problem with your e-mail, or it may encompass a large project, like a network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.
- **Managed IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your fully outsourced “IT department” and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, cyber security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance, and security of your computer network.
- **Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t help you and will often refer you to “your IT department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.



When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the “managed IT services” and “break-fix” models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both.

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Managed IT Services Vs. Break-Fix: Which Is The Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You've probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I couldn't agree more – and that's why it's my sincere belief that some form of managed IT is essential for every business.



In our company, we offer different plans to fit the needs of our clients. In some cases, where the business is small, we might offer a very basic managed services plan to ensure the most essential maintenance is done, then bill the client hourly when onsite support is needed. Our smallest clients often find this the most economical solution. For most of our mid-sized and larger organizations, we offer a fully managed approach where more comprehensive IT services are covered in a fully-managed plan. By doing this, we can properly staff for their accounts and ensure they get the fast, responsive support and expertise they need.

The only time I would recommend a "time and materials" approach is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn't have the time nor expertise to implement (such as migrating to a cloud-based solution, implementing a cyber security plan, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of "cure" for problems that could have easily been avoided with an "ounce" of prevention.

Why Regular Monitoring And Maintenance Is Critical For Today's Computer Networks

The fact of the matter is computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold – not to mention the type of data we're now saving digitally – has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations that work around the clock to do one thing: hack into your network to steal data or money or to hold you ransom.



As you may know, ransomware is at an all-time high because hackers make millions of tax-free dollars robbing one small business owner at a time. But that's not their only incentive.

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Some will attempt to hack your network to gain access to bank accounts, credit cards or passwords to rob you (and your clients). Some use your computer network to send spam using YOUR domain and servers, host pirated software and, of course, spread viruses. Some even do it just for the “fun” of it.

And don't think for a minute these cybercriminals are solo crooks working alone in a hoodie out of their basement. They are highly organized and well-run operations employing teams of hackers who work together to scam as many people as they can. They use advanced software that scans millions of networks for vulnerabilities and use readily available data on the dark web of YOUR usernames, passwords, e-mail addresses, and other data to gain access.

Of course, this isn't the only IT danger you face. Other common “disasters” include improperly trained employees, lost devices, hardware failures (still a BIG reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters, and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records, and even client contact information, such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

Should You Just Hire A Full-Time IT Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 200 employees to hire a full-time IT person for a couple of reasons.

First of all, no one IT person can know everything there is to know about IT support and cyber security. If your company is big enough and growing fast enough to support a full-time IT lead, you probably need more than one guy. You need someone with help-desk expertise as well as a network engineer, a network administrator, a CIO (chief information officer) and a CISO (chief information security officer).



Therefore, even if you hire a full-time IT person, you may still need to supplement their position with co-managed IT support using an IT firm that can fill in the gaps and provide services and expertise they don't have. This is not a bad plan; ***what IS a bad plan is hiring one person and expecting them to know it all and do it all.***

Second, finding and hiring good people is difficult; finding and hiring skilled IT people is incredibly difficult due to the skill shortage for IT. And if you're not technical, it's going to be very difficult for you to interview candidates and sift and sort through all the duds out there to find someone with good skills and experience. Because you're

not technical, you might not know the right questions to ask during the interview process or the skills they need to do the job.

More often than not, the hard and soft costs of building an internal IT department for general IT support just don't provide the best return on investment for the average small to midsize business. An internal IT department typically doesn't make sense until you have closer to 200 employees OR you have unique circumstances and need specialized skills, a developer, etc., but not for day-to-day IT support and maintenance.

Why "Break-Fix" Works Entirely In The Consultant's Favor, Not Yours

Under a "break-fix" model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to prevent problems, stabilize your network or resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour when things stop working; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON'T want.

Under this model, there is no incentive to properly manage the time of the technician working with you or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they're ethical and want to keep you as a client, they should be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that's akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, who now has to keep track of the hours they've worked to make sure you aren't getting overbilled, and since you often have no way of really knowing if they've worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

What Should You Expect To Pay?

Important! Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted of over 750 different IT services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget, and situation.

Hourly Break-Fix Fees:

Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$100-\$250 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

If they are quoting a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what “success” is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations upfront will go a long way toward avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.
- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this upfront aligns both your agenda and the consultant's. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for “unforeseen” circumstances. The bottom line is this: it is your IT consulting firm's responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly.

Managed IT Services:

Most managed IT services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up, and support. In Central MA, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$150-\$250 per server, \$50-\$150 per desktop, and approximately \$25 per smartphone or mobile device.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services contract, here are some things that SHOULD be included (make sure you read your contract to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly, if not daily, for urgent and emerging threats
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- 24/7 Monitoring workstations and servers for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Documentation of your network, software licenses, credentials, etc.
- Remote helpdesk support
- Strategic technology planning

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a “scam” or unethical UNLESS the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware purchases (ex. new servers, PCs, laptops, etc.)
- Software licenses
- Security services/licenses
- Hardware assembly/configuration
- Migrations
- Special projects

Warning! Beware of the gray areas of “all-inclusive” service contracts. In order to truly compare the “cost” of one managed IT services contract with another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN'T included AND the SLA (service level agreement) you are signing up for. It's VERY easy for one IT services provider to appear less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you're getting.

The following are 19 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you're getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance, and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you, then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

19 Questions You Should Ask Your IT Services Company Or Consultant Before Hiring Them For IT Support

Customer Service:

1.

When I have an IT problem, how do I get support?

Our Answer: When a client has a problem, we “open a ticket” in our IT management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document, and resolve client issues. However, some IT firms force you to log in to submit a ticket and won't allow you to call or e-mail them. This is for THEIR convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your ONLY option for requesting support.



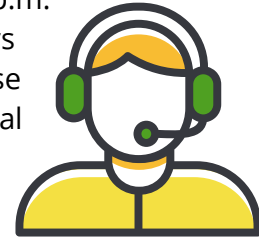
Also, make sure they HAVE a reliable system in place to keep track of client “tickets” and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped, and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be EASY for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy. Calling, e-mailing, or submitting a ticket via our client portal puts your IT issue on the fast track to getting resolved.

2.

Do you answer your phones live or do I have to leave a voicemail and wait for someone to call me back?

Our Answer: We answer our phones live from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and all clients can enter a critical ticket for emergency, after-hours support if a problem arises, including on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.



3.

Do you have a written, guaranteed response time for working on resolving our problems?

Our Answer: We guarantee to have a technician working on a problem within 60 minutes or less of your call/ticket submission. 70% of all tickets are generally responded to within 30 min.

4.

Do you take the time to explain what you are doing and answer my questions in terms that I can understand (not geek-speak), without making me feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the "heart of a teacher" and will take the time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. The chemistry between our friendly, polite, & good-natured team and our clients is as important as the skills and service they provide.

"I'm NOT a computer guy, **I don't know the technical lingo** and I sometimes struggle finding answers to technical questions. The office **staff and techs at ClearCom IT are very patient and great at asking the right questions to direct me where I need to be.** Other companies I have worked with in the past would talk over my head or use terms I didn't understand."

Chris Travinski – Operations Manager, Southbridge Tire Co., Inc. - client since 2017

5.

Do you consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve our network's performance, or do you wait until we have a problem to make recommendations?

Our Answer: All of our clients are assigned to a dedicated Client Success Manager. Smaller firms may not offer this due to staff limitations, and the owner may tell you they will personally manage your account. While that sounds like great customer service, the owner is usually so busy that you'll only be given reactive support instead of proactive account management. Rest assured, from the initial call to the final resolution, you will work with the SAME dedicated account manager who will know you, your business, and your goals.

We conduct quarterly (or annually, depending on company size) review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies, and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient, and competitive.

"Our Client Success Manager meets with us regularly to discuss how our business needs intersect with our technology, making honest, open suggestions regarding our services so we can work more efficiently and securely. Therefore, **we clearly understand what changes need to happen before they become a critical problem.** As a non-profit organization, this is very important as we forecast future expenses."

Damaris Jones – Director of Program Development and Operations - Tapestry Health Systems - client since 2022

6.

How do we know we can trust your tech support team and feel comfortable essentially handing them the keys to our business?

Our Answer: When you allow anyone into your computer systems you are entrusting them with your most valuable business asset – your company/client data. You should be able to have faith that whoever is working on your systems will keep your data confidential. Everyone on the ClearCom IT team signs a confidentiality agreement which extends to cover our clients. In addition, all our support specialists, account managers, and leaders have completed the Level 4 Criminal Justice Information System Security & Awareness training and certification, as well as gone through rigorous, federal background checks & fingerprinting for your safety and peace of mind.

7.

What cyber liability, errors and omissions insurance, and workers' compensation insurance do you carry to protect me?

Our Answer: Here's something to ask about: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days, to lose data or get hacked, who's responsible? What if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office? Or damages your property while there?



In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance, workers' compensation, and cyber liability – and don't be shy about asking them to send you the policy to review!

If you get hit with ransomware due to their negligence, someone has to pay for your lost sales, the recovery costs, and the interruption to your business operations. If they don't have insurance to cover YOUR losses of business interruption, they might not be able to pay, and you'll have to end up suing them to cover your costs. If sensitive client data is compromised, who's responsible for paying the fines that you might incur and the lawsuits that could happen? No one is perfect, which is why you need them to carry adequate insurance.

True story: A few years ago, a company that shall not be named was slapped with several multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying, and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases, they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line, make sure the IT firm you're hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

Rest assured, we make it a priority to carry all the necessary insurance to protect you. Simply ask, and we will be happy to show you a copy of our policy.

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IT Maintenance:

8.

What is NOT included in your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: Another “gotcha” many IT companies fail to explain is what is NOT included in your monthly managed services agreement that will trigger an invoice. Their so-called “all you can eat” option is RARELY true – there are limitations to what’s included and you want to know what they are BEFORE you sign.

It’s very common for projects to not be included, like a server upgrade, moving offices, adding new employees, and, of course, the software and hardware you need to purchase.

But here’s a question you need to ask: If you were hit with a costly ransomware attack, would the recovery be EXTRA or included in your contract? Recovering from a cyber-attack could take HOURS of high-level I.T. expertise. Who is going to eat that bill? Be sure you’re clear on this before you sign because surprising you with a big, fat bill is totally and completely unacceptable.

Other things to inquire about are:

- Do you offer a truly unlimited help desk? (Make sure you are not nickel-and-dimed for every call.)
- Does the service include support for cloud services, such as Microsoft 365 or Gmail?
- Do you charge extra if you have to resolve a problem with a line-of-business application, Internet service provider, phone system, leased printer, etc.? (What you want is an I.T. company that will own the problems and not point fingers. We are happy to call the vendor or software company on your behalf.)
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices? If our employees had to work remotely (due to a shutdown, natural disaster, etc.), would you provide support on their home PCs or would that trigger a bill?
- If we were to get ransomed or experience some other disaster (fire, flood, theft, tornado, hurricane, etc.), would rebuilding the network be included in the service plan or considered an extra project we would have to pay for? (Get this IN WRITING. Recovering from such a disaster could take hundreds of hours of time for your IT company’s techs, so you want to know in advance how a situation like this will be handled before it happens.)



9.

Do you insist on remotely monitoring our network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions, and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data, and other issues?

Our Answer: You want to find an IT company that will proactively monitor for problems and perform routine maintenance on your IT systems. If they don't have the ability to do this, or they don't offer it, we strongly recommend you look somewhere else. Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues, and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

10.

Is your help desk local or outsourced?

Our Answer: Some smaller IT firms may outsource this critical function. As a result, you may get a tech who is not familiar with you, your network, previous problems, and personal preferences. Or worse, they may not be as qualified. This can be frustrating and lead to the same problems cropping up over and over, longer resolution time, and you have to spend time educating the tech on your account.

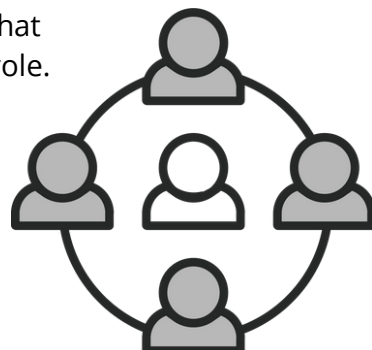
We provide our own in-house help desk team and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's important for keeping your data secure. We also assign a dedicated Client Success Manager to your account who will get to know you and your company, as well as your preferences and history.

11.

How many engineers do you have on staff?

Our Answer: Be cautious working with a smaller IT firm that only has one or two techs or that outsources this critical role. Everyone gets sick, has emergencies, goes on vacations, or takes a few days off from time to time. We have more than enough full-time techs on staff to cover in case one is unable to work.

ALSO: Ask how they will document fixes, changes, and credentials for your organization so if one tech is out or unavailable, another can step in and know your network settings, history, previous issues, etc., and how those issues were resolved.



12.

Do you offer documentation of our network as part of the plan, and how does that work?

Our Answer: Network documentation is exactly what it sounds like: the practice of maintaining detailed technical records about the assets you own (computers, devices, software, directory structure, user profiles, passwords, etc.) and how your network is set up, backed up, and secured. Every IT company should provide this to you in both written (paper) and electronic form at no additional cost and update it on a quarterly basis.

Why is this important? There are several reasons:

First, it shows professionalism and integrity in protecting YOU. No IT person or company should be the only holder of the keys to the kingdom. Because we document your network assets and passwords, you have a blueprint you can give to another IT person or company to take over if necessary.



Second, good documentation allows the engineers working on your account to resolve problems faster because they don't waste time fumbling their way around your network trying to find things and uncover accounts, hardware, software licenses, etc.

Third, if you had to restore your network after a disaster, you'd have the blueprint to quickly put things back in place as they were.

All our clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current I.T. person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

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13.

Do you meet with your clients quarterly as part of your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: To us, there's nothing more important than face-to-face time with our clients. Therefore, we make it a priority to meet with all our clients at least quarterly (sometimes more often) to provide a "technology review." In these meetings, we provide you with status updates on projects you're working on and on the health and security of your network. We also make recommendations for new equipment and upgrades you'll be needing soon or sometime in the near future. Our quarterly meetings with you are C-level discussions (not geek-fests) where we openly discuss your business goals, including your IT budget, critical projects, compliance issues, known problems, and cyber security best practices.



Our goal in these meetings is to help you improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and ensure your organizational productivity stays high. This is also your opportunity to give us feedback on how we're doing and discuss upcoming projects.

14.

When something goes wrong with our Internet service, phone systems, printers, or other IT services, do you assist us with getting everything back running again?

Our Answer: We feel WE should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

15.

If I need or want to cancel my service with you, how does this happen and how do you offboard us?

Our Answer: Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many IT firms hold their clients hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

We would never "force" a client to stay with us if they are unhappy for any reason. Therefore, we make it easy to cancel your contract with us, with zero contention or fines. Our "easy out" agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations every day so we keep your business.

Backups & Disaster Recovery:

16.

Can you provide a timeline of how long it will take to get my network back up and running in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: There are two aspects to backing up your data that most business owners aren't aware of. The first is "failover" and the other is "failback." For example, if you get a flat tire, you would fail over by putting on the spare tire to get to a service station where you can fail back to a new or repaired tire.



If you were to have a disaster that wiped out your data and network – be it a ransomware attack or natural disaster – you want to make sure you have a failover solution in place so your employees could continue to work with as little interruption as possible. This failover should be in the cloud and locked down separately to avoid ransomware from infecting the backups as well as the physical servers and workstations.

But, at some point, you need to fail back to your on-premises network, and that's a process that could take days or even weeks. If the backups aren't done correctly, you might not be able to get it back at all.

So, one of the key areas you want to discuss with your next IT consultant or firm is how they handle both data backup AND disaster recovery. They should have a plan in place and be able to explain the process for the emergency fail-over as well as the process for restoring your network and data with a timeline.

In this day and age, regardless of natural disaster, equipment failure, or any other issue, your business should ALWAYS be able to be operational with its data within six to eight hours or less, and critical operations should be failed over immediately.

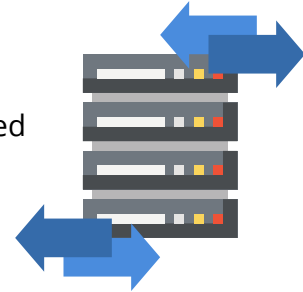
We understand how important your data is and how getting your team up and running quickly is essential to your business's success. We will work with you to discuss your specific requirements and needs to determine the best solution to get you back up and running in the quickest way possible.

To Schedule Your **FREE** Assessment, please visit www.clearcomit.com/it-assessment/ or call our office at 508-205-1114.

17.

Do you INSIST on doing periodic test restores of my backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: A great IT consultant will place eyes on your backup systems every single day to ensure that backups are actually occurring and without failures. However, in addition to this, your IT company should perform a monthly randomized “fire drill” test restore of some of your files from backups to make sure your data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.



If you don't feel comfortable asking your current IT company to test your backup OR if you have concerns and want to see the proof yourself, just conduct this little test: Copy three unimportant files onto a thumb drive (so you don't lose them) and delete them from your server. Make sure one was newly created that same day, one was created a week earlier and the last a month earlier. Then call your IT company and let them know you've lost three important documents and need them restored from backups as soon as possible. They should be able to do this easily and quickly. If not, you have a problem that needs to be addressed immediately!

Verifying your backups daily and testing them on a regular basis is a cornerstone of a successful overall IT strategy. These are the lengths we go to for all our clients, including multiple random “fire drill” test restores to ensure ALL your files are safe because they are always backed up.



TIP: Ask your IT provider about the “3-2-2” rule of backups, which has evolved from the “3-2-1” rule. The 3-2-1 rule is that you should have three copies of your data: your working copy, plus two additional copies on different media (tape and cloud), with at least one being off-site for recovery.

That rule was developed when tape backups were necessary because cloud backups hadn't evolved to where they are today. Today, there are more sophisticated cloud backups and BDR (backup and disaster recovery) devices. Therefore, we recommend three copies of your data - your working copy plus two backups. Store two backups locally but on different mediums (such as a second server and backup or BDR device). Additionally, both copies are sent redundantly to different cloud storage solutions for extra protection.

18.

If I were to experience a location disaster, pandemic shutdown, or other disaster that prevented me from being in the office, how would you enable me and my employees to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: If Covid taught us anything, it's that work-interrupting disasters CAN and DO happen when you least expect them. Fires, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes can wipe out an entire building or location. Covid forced everyone into lockdown, and it could happen again.



We could experience a terrorist attack, civil unrest, or riots that could shut down entire cities and streets, making it physically impossible to get into a building. Who knows what could be coming down the pike? Hopefully, NONE of this will happen, but sadly it could.

That's why you want to ask your prospective IT consultant how quickly they were able to get their clients working remotely (and securely) when Covid shut everything down. Ask to talk to a few of their clients about how the process went.

19.

Show me your process and documentation for onboarding me as a new client.

Our Answer: The reason for asking this question is to see if they HAVE SOMETHING in place. A plan, a procedure, a process. Don't take their word for it. Ask to SEE it in writing. What's important here is that they can produce some type of process. Further, they should be able to explain how their process works.

One thing you will need to discuss in detail is how they are going to take over from the current IT company – particularly if the current company is hostile. It's disturbing to me how many IT companies or people will become bitter and resentful over being fired and will do things to screw up your security and create problems for the new company as a childish way of getting revenge. (Sadly, it's more common than you think.) A good IT company will have a process in place for handling this.

If you consider us as your next IT services firm, we will gladly share our new client onboarding process and documentation. I think you'll be impressed.

A Final Word and Free Offer to Engage With Us

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your IT support. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information is to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by hiring the wrong IT partner for your organization.

The next step is simple: call my office at 508-205-1114 and reference this letter to schedule a brief 10- to 15-minute initial consultation.

On this call we can discuss your unique situation and any concerns you have and, of course, answer any questions you have about us. If we feel there is something we could help you with, we'll schedule a convenient time to conduct an IT network and security assessment.

This Assessment can be conducted 100% remotely with or without your current IT company or department knowing (we can give you the full details on our initial consultation call). At the end of the Free Assessment, you'll know:

- Where you are overpaying (or getting underserved) for the services and support you are currently getting from your current IT company or team.
- Whether or not your systems and data are truly secured from hackers and ransomware, and where you are partially or totally exposed.
- If your data is actually being backed up in a manner that would allow you to recover it quickly in the event of an emergency or ransomware attack.
- How you could lower the overall costs of IT while improving communication, security, and performance, as well as the productivity of your employees.

Fresh eyes see things that others cannot – at a minimum, our free Assessment is a completely cost- and risk-free way to get a credible third-party validation of the security, stability, and efficiency of your IT systems.

Dedicated to serving you,



Rob Cleary

To Schedule Your **FREE**
Assessment,
please visit
[www.clearcomit.com/it-
assessment/](http://www.clearcomit.com/it-assessment/)
or call our office at
508-205-1114

HERE'S WHAT A FEW OF OUR CLIENTS HAVE SAID:

Saved Us from Hundreds of Hours of Downtime



"ClearCom IT's help-desk and remote capabilities have **freed up a tremendous amount of my time** that used to be spent troubleshooting with an IT professional on the phone. In the 5 years I've worked with ClearCom IT Solutions they have always been professional and prompt. Every time I call for support, a knowledgeable IT professional **answers the call** and ensures that my issue is resolved. Their remote support staff has saved us hundreds of hours of downtime. **For our mid-size company that has no on-site IT support, ClearCom IT Solutions offers exactly what we need.**"

Don Sauer – VP of Finance - Sanderson Macleod, Inc = client since 2015.

Keeps Us Running Smoothly, Even from A Distance



"When we were looking for someone to manage our computers and network infrastructure, we were a bit hesitant about using a remote company. However, ClearCom IT Solutions came highly recommended and has **proven that a remote IT relationship is not an obstacle**. They provide great service any time we submit a support request and come onsite for any larger projects when needed. Everyone we work with at ClearCom IT is very knowledgeable and their experience with our ERP system (IQMS/Delmiaworks) has been very helpful in keeping us running smoothly.

Partnering with ClearCom IT **enhanced our company's security and backup capabilities**, keeping us safe and secure. They have proven to be a great asset to our company. I recommend reaching out to them if you need a new IT team. Regardless of the physical distance, they are by your side during any technology issue you have."

Nick Tarlton – Controller, Bull Engineered Products – client since 2017

Complete trust & Confidence



"We were initially hesitant to change IT companies because we didn't want to go through the pain of switching providers. However, **the transfer over to ClearCom IT Solutions was so much easier than we anticipated**. ClearCom IT has been absolutely stellar on all levels. I cannot say enough good things about them. We have complete trust & confidence that the team will handle our issues with the utmost care & in a very timely response. Our Staff Is Thrilled!!

If you want an IT partner who **responds to your needs quickly and actually FIX your issues**, not just band-aid them together, give ClearCom IT a call. Their team is the best!

Jennifer Vibber – Office Manager - Spear Management Group, Inc. = client since 2021

THE CLEARCOM IT DIFFERENCE!

8 reasons why our partners choose ClearCom IT to keep their businesses running securely and reliably, and why you should too!

1. Fast Response – Enter a service ticket at any time for support from our help desk or give us a call. We answer our phones within the first two rings, so you are not lost in voicemail, waiting for someone to call you back when you have a problem preventing you from working.

2. No Tech Speak – You'll talk with one of our knowledgeable support specialists who will speak with you in easy-to-understand language, patiently explaining things, so you will understand the problem as they fix it.

3. CJIS/HIPAA Security Trained/Vetted Team – All our team members are HIPAA certified and have completed the Level 4 Criminal Justice Information System Security & Awareness training and certification. Additionally, they have all gone through rigorous federal background checks & fingerprinting for your safety and peace of mind.

4. Highly Reputable – Respected industry leaders since 2001. Named one of the top 10 IT companies in Central MA by Worcester Business Journal & ranked among the top 501 Global Managed Service Providers for the past seven years. Our clients agree - proven with a 99.7% year-over-year contract renewal rate.

5. Personal Relationships – You'll get an IT partner that is large enough to handle any tech problem you throw at us yet small enough to give you the attention you deserve. The chemistry between our friendly, polite, & good-natured team and our clients is as essential as the skills and service they provide.

6. Experience & Business Savvy – We've worked with various industries from 1-2 person businesses to several hundred – ranging from service, manufacturing, retail, non-profits, and municipalities. This experience positions us as our clients' trusted adviser & IT partner, rather than just a managed services provider. We review your current and future business needs, evaluate the best IT solutions/infrastructure needs/data backup & recovery plans for your specific business, and create a recommended IT strategy & execution roadmap.

7. Pro-Active Solutions – Proactive maintenance is completed daily to achieve optimal network stability. Additionally, we monitor your systems 24/7 and are alerted to any issues that come up. We will more than likely have them repaired/restored before you even realize there was a pause for concern.

8. Single Point of Contact – There's no need to have multiple providers. ClearCom IT can handle all your IT issues, including but not limited to hardware, software, & infrastructure, managing vendor relationships for internet connectivity, license renewals, & other technology needs. You focus on your business; we'll focus on your IT.