ComputerAge

HOW TO CHOOSE

A MANAGED VoIP NETWORK SERVICE PROVIDER

COULD MANAGED NETWORK SERVICES BE RIGHT FOR YOU?

There comes a point when every organization must make a decision about its network management. For small and midsize businesses: Should we really be managing our network ourselves? For larger enterprises: Which aspects of network management should we outsource?

If your business has a network that meets any of the following criteria, then it is time to consider managed network services:

> Connects multiple offices, stores, or sites

> Is growing beyond the capacity of current access lines

> Must provide secure connectivity to mobile and remote employees

> Could produce cost savings by integrating voice and data traffic

> Needs to be ready for more traffic from video and other high-bandwidth applications

> Is becoming more difficult to manage and ensure performance and security, especially given limited staff and budget resources

In a managed network services solution, you outsource the day-to-day operation and management of your network to a managed service provider. Outsourced network management offers a viable option for most growing companies:

A managed services provider can consolidate, integrate, and manage all of these network services—giving organizations cost-effective ways to connect their business locations to each other, the Internet, and business partners.

WHY NOT MANAGE YOUR OWN NETWORK?

Of course, it is possible—but not always easy or cost-effective—for organizations to internally manage their own networks.

Business Factors:

> Reducing network overhead costs while increasing network services

> Implementing a global network security policy management

> Supporting dynamic business growth with restricted budgets and staffing levels

> Needing to respond quickly to time-to-market demands

> Implementing new technologies to maintain competitiveness

> Supporting new business operations and markets or integrating acquisition

Network Operations:

> Managing, maintaining, and upgrading network infrastructure and management systems

> Delivering high-quality, hiqh-availability network services to meet 24-hour demand

> Defining and monitoring Quality of Service (QoS) and Class of Service (CoS) parameters to prioritize voice traffic and ensure call quality

> Securing data, transactions, and communications to keep up with the latest security threats, as well as meeting privacy and security regulations

> Delivering services to more remote offices and workers

Staffing:

> Finding, recruiting, and retaining certified network professionals

> Helping staff stay current with new technologies and skills

> Focusing employees on core competencies and mission-critical processes, rather than network support

Given the difficulty of these challenges, outsourcing network management is rapidly becoming the preferred alternative for many organizations.

WHICH PROVIDER IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

After deciding to explore managed services, the next step is finding the right managed network services provider. With so many types of providers offering a range of services and management models, the choices can be confusing. Understanding the different types of service providers is the first step in making the right decision for your organization.

IT managers may initially think of the large telecom carriers as potential managed network services vendors. It is important to note that although large carriers sell hosted network services to small and mid-size businesses, their real focus is on large enterprises networks. Even for large enterprises with geographically-dispersed locations, services, and network needs, the managed network services offered by large carriers may not be the best-fit or the most cost-effective solution.

At the other end of the managed services spectrum are small "boutique" providers that offer hosted services under a Bring Your Own Bandwidth (BYOB) model, where customers arrange for network links and equipment. This model does not provide the benefits of a provider's dedicated MPLS network or support for network-based QoS and managed security services.

For most organizations, the right MSP can be found in the middle of the spectrum—in an MSP that maintains its own network and offers an extensive array of managed services. With this type of MSP, you can choose if you want fully managed network access, voice or security services, or a combination of individual services that match your business needs and internal network management resources. In addition, this type of MSP can scale its services to fit as your organization's needs evolve.

BEST PRACTICES CRITERIA

When searching for an MSP, you will likely find several companies to consider. How do you evaluate these providers and their service offerings to make the best choice? The following best practices and the worksheet on page 7 provide helpful decision-making criteria.

Service Offerings

The MSP should focus on understanding your unique service needs and meeting them with a business orientation that goes beyond offering all customers a "cookie cutter" solution. The provider should offer network connectivity in a variety of access speeds from DSL to DS3, allowing you to select the right speed for each user or remote location. The broadband access service should offer a high-speed "always on" connection in a nationwide connectivity solution that is easy to deploy, manage, and support.

The MSP should also offer business-class hosted voice services in a range of equipment and feature packages with low start-up costs and affordable monthly fees. To ensure superior quality on voice calls, the MSP should maintain high QoS levels for voice traffic and guaranteed levels of service uptime.

Network, Voice and Security Operations Capabilities

The service provider should support and proactively monitor its data, voice, and security services on a 24/7/365 basis from multiple redundant Network Operations Centers (NOCs) and Security Operations Centers (SOCs). A dedicated support infrastructure ensures that the network services perform to their maximum potential, and that customers receive timely and responsive technical support.

The provider should also give customers complete visibility into network status and performance via a Web-based customer information portal, so great service is extended to self-service capabilities.

Certified Professionals and Industry Partnerships

Delivering high-quality managed network services requires highly knowledgeable and skilled network professionals, as well as partnerships with leading equipment and network capacity vendors. Ask a potential MSP about the professional certifications held by its employees and its participation in vendor partnership programs.

The Importance of Service Level Agreements

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are a valuable tool for assessing how well a managed services provider maintains high levels of network performance and availability. These measurements guarantee overall network uptime, as well as response and resolution times for network problems. For greater confidence in the provider's performance, look for an MSP that backs SLAs with customer credits when targets are missed.

OFFERS SIMPLE, INEXPENSIVE SETUP AND MANAGEMENT

More than ever, businesses are achieving increased operational efficiencies while lowering network costs by using managed data, voice, and network security services.

Some of the benefits of relying on a managed services provider include:

Cost Savings:

> Predictable monthly fee for network and management services; pay only for the networking services used

> Cost savings of up to 50 percent by consolidating voice and data services onto a single network

> Access to leading network technologies and management expertise, without high capital expenditures or ongoing investments in upgrades, IT staffing, and maintenance resources

> A single point of contact reduces network costs and simplifies vendor management for IT staff

> Using outsourced expertise avoids the costs of developing management and reporting capabilities

Simplified Management:

> Proactive management of network services through 24/7/365 monitoring of connectivity and equipment, automatic fault notification, and responsive trouble management

> IT staff remains free to focus on strategic activities, instead of network support

> Well-defined SLAs guarantee response and resolution times for network problems to minimize impact on users

MPS SELECTION CRITERIA WORKSHEET

Selection Criteria	Computer Age	MSP #2	MSP #3	MSP #4	MSP #5
Service Offerings					
Broadband Services:					
T1 & Bonded T1	√				
DS3/OCx	√				
Ethernet	√				
DSL	√				
Cable	√				
Fiber Access	√				
Broadband Wireless	√				
Managed WiFi	√				
Voice Services	√				
SSL VPN	√				
MPLS Site-to-Site VPN	√				
Managed Network Security	√				
Worldwide Broadband Access	√				
Professional Services:					
Project Management	√				
Equipment Installation & Support	√				
Network Coverage & Capability					
National Coverage	√				
Integrated Voice & Data	√				
Supports Class of Service	√				
Network Operations					
24/7/365 Network Monitoring	√				
Automated Problem Alerts	√				
Trouble Management	√				
Sophisticated NMS & OSS	√				
Redundant NOC	√				
Customer Portal	√				
Security Operations					
Sophisticated Security Systems	√				
Intrusion Detection	√				
Redundant SOC	√				
Certifications & Partnerships					
Certified network staff	√				
Vendor & Network Partners	√				
Service-Level Agreements					
Offers Specific SLAs	√				
Customer Credits	√				

WHY Computer Age

As a leading provider of secure access and managed network solutions, Computer Age combines the best broadband connectivity, voice, VPN, cloud, Internal networks, and security technologies with unmatched network design, deployment, monitoring, management, reporting, and support capabilities.

Computer Age managed network services reduce the cost and complexity of securely connecting remote sites and users to your network while providing a single point of contact for network operations and management.

The Value of Industry Certifications

The strength of an MSP is determined in part by the skill and knowledge of its employees—especially those who design, operate, and manage the network services. Amongst our technical operations and engineering employees, nearly 20% hold at least one vendor or industry certification. and That number jumps to nearly 50 percent in our networks, security, and voice network design engineering teams. These certifications are an important indicator of expertise, because they provide objective validation of an individual's depth of training and experience in solving complex network issues.

Visit https://www.2computerage.com/voip to learn more, or contact a Computer Age Business Consultant today at 813-877-55222.

NEXT STEPS