IT Tips for smaller businesses:

Is break-fix or managed services better for your business?

It is a fact of life that most businesses, large or small, will require IT support to some degree. There are several ways that smaller businesses can engage with IT services companies. Two of the most popular are 'Break-Fix' and 'Managed Services'.

The question is, which of these is better for a smaller business? At PT Solutions, we provide IT support to smaller businesses in the way that suits their business. We can provide both break-fix and managed service support so are well placed to give an unbiased guide to the pros and cons of each approach.

What does Break-Fix actually mean?

Essentially, when an IT support business provides break-fix support to a customer, they are providing a fee-based service which relies on the customer contacting the IT services company when repairs or support are required. These services are provided on a time-and-materials basis, with an agreed hourly rate plus the cost of parts, software, or equipment. These arrangements are not usually tied to a Service Level Agreement to govern response times but are charged based on the severity of the issue and the time taken to fix the problem.

And what are Managed Services?

A managed services approach is more akin to having your own team of IT specialists that know your business, infrastructure, and systems. They are often involved in your technology strategy moving forwards and constantly monitor your IT and communications infrastructure with the aim of preventing system down-time. Having an outsourced team operating in this way is usually paid for through a monthly fee built around an agreed Service Level Agreement (SLA).

So, which is better for a smaller business?

At PT Solutions, we know that not all businesses have the same IT requirements, and that no single solution will be better for all. That's why we offer both. A managed services option, and a break-fix option based on purchasing blocks of our time in advance.

When we engage with a new customer, we take the time to work out which of the options will be most appropriate for each business and make tailored recommendations but for the purposes of this document, we will look at the pros and cons of each approach – based on the solutions that we offer.

Break-Fix (or Block Time as we refer to it)

As stated above, buying IT services when things go wrong has the benefit that you are not making a long-term commitment to your IT services provider, you simply engage with them when things break or need to be updated, and they are investigated and fixed. This approach can suit very small businesses who may not want to commit a set budget to IT support, may be less concerned about IT down-time and may not be quite as concerned about IT security (although they clearly should be).

An hourly rate is usually set for support time and other hardware, or software costs are incurred and paid for on an ad hoc basis. In this approach, hourly rates can be high, so companies like PT Solutions, will offer discounts on blocks of time bought in advance. This allows the business to allocate a budget for expected IT support and benefit from discounted rates, while retaining flexibility and avoiding set monthly fees. This hybrid solution can also deliver priority access to skilled IT resources, guaranteed response times and systems monitoring.

At PT Solutions, we will also support our block-time customers with free IT strategy and development plan consultancy, access to our team for opinions and advice, and access to Helpdesk365 (ZenDesk).

There are, however, several down-sides to this approach. One of the most important is that however many additional support services we wrap around the blocks of time, our response can only ever be reactive. We will do our best to minimise down-time, but this is an inevitable consequence of this approach. PT Solutions is a bit different here, but with other break-fix providers, your lack of commitment to a monthly support contract also means that you may be towards the back of the queue compared to those with agreed SLAs – and that's exactly where you don't want to be when things go wrong. Your business-critical systems could be down, and you will have no idea when they will be fixed and how much it will cost.

What's the difference with Managed Services?

Essentially, it is a different approach to supporting your IT infrastructure. Employing a highly skilled and professional team of IT and communications specialists in-house is well beyond the need and resources of most smaller companies. That's not to say, however, that their IT needs may be any less business critical. Engaging with a managed services provider (MSP) which has a focus on smaller businesses, such as PT Solutions, is the best way to access enterprise-class IT services and support at an affordable cost.

To get the most out of your MSP, you should regard them as a strategic partner, able to take responsibility for establishing an appropriate IT and communications infrastructure, supporting and

maintaining your systems, updating and upgrading them as required, and planning the development of your IT resources as your business evolves. The focus on systems management, monitoring and preventative maintenance should be aimed at proactively reducing the amount of IT issues and consequential downtime you suffer.

In addition, you will have access to all the IT security resources that many smaller businesses know they should have but don't have the expertise or resources to fully engage with. A holistic approach to IT security delivers an array of protections ranging from basic patch management and staff training to sophisticated intrusion detection and prevention systems.

The prevalence of cloud-based and managed services means that with minimal capital expenditure a small business can effectively outsource their IT department entirely, or supplement internal resources, as appropriate for their business. With services paid for at a set monthly fee against an agreed SLA, businesses often find that their overall IT expenditure is reduced while the quality, professionalism and consistency of their IT support function is dramatically improved.

So how do you choose the right option for your organisation?

Well, the answer to that really depends on your individual business. At PT Solutions, we have taken the original break-fix model and enhanced it with many additional services that deliver benefits formally only available as managed services. So, this model can provide very professional and cost-effective support to smaller businesses without then being penalised financially for their lack of commitment to an ongoing contract.

The growth in cloud services available at low monthly costs has been a game-changer, however. Truly enterprise-class comprehensive IT and communications support can now be delivered to even the smallest companies through MSPs like PT Solutions. So there really is a choice for all businesses now. At the end of the day, we are here to guide our customers towards the solution that is best for them and whether that is through our hybrid block-time model or through a managed services approach, we can guarantee that you will get the support your business needs both now and into the future.

To find out more about our various IT services and support options, give us a call on 02380 111844, email us at info@ptslimited.co.uk, or contact us through our website at www.ptslimited.co.uk.

About PT Solutions

At PT Solutions, we deliver IT support in the way that small and medium sized businesses actually need it. We focus on the essential, business-critical services that you really should have and deliver Enterprise-Class Managed Services, Microsoft Cloud Technologies and complete IT Security at a low monthly cost. But what sets us apart is our proactive approach; our system health checks, monitoring and proactive intervention ensure that we identify vulnerabilities and weaknesses then proactively manage them, so they never interfere with the smooth operation of your business.