

An SME Checklist to Selecting the Right Cloud Managed Service Provider

Align your business with growth opportunities and IT service offerings from the right provider to accelerate your productivity and agility. Use this nine-point checklist tailored for small and mid-sized businesses to find the best provider for your organisation.

Managing your IT infrastructure can be costly, both in CapEx and internal overheads. By simplifying and streamlining your processes and reducing resources, you can focus on strategic business initiatives, optimise costs, and leave the day-to-day management to your CMSP.



1 Why go for a cloud managed services provider?

You want to align your business with growth opportunities and IT service offerings that can accelerate your productivity. Ask yourself, why do I need a cloud managed service provider? Here is the answer.

A Experience

A cloud managed service provider has worked with multiple clients with varied cloud services providers and gained unique cloud experience that your in-house teams might not have. This experience enables them to solve complex problems quickly and efficiently.

B Integrated Cloud Services

A cloud managed service provider knows exactly how you can implement new cloud services, which is the correct cloud platform for your workloads and the strengths and weaknesses of various platforms. They'll know how your company can take advantage of each service your cloud vendor offers to benefit your specific projects.

C Reduced Operational Costs

Companies that use MCSPs save money over the long term because they don't have to assume any operational or capital expenses pertaining to maintaining their cloud network infrastructures. Organisations also save money because they don't have to find and hire people with the skills necessary to maintain their infrastructures.



2 When is the right time to hire a managed service provider?

There are various scenarios when you realise you need to hire a cloud managed service provider. They are:

- Your IT costs are skyrocketing
- You want to grow strategically
- You have limited IT staff
- You require extra support for remote workers
- You need help migrating
- You're experiencing excessive downtime
- You lack hardware, software and system monitoring
- You're out of compliance

3 How to Evaluate Your Next IT Solutions Provider

The nine-point checklist to follow before choosing your cloud managed service provider. Make sure your new provider offers you the following:

Always available, friendly and talented staff

Look for a reputable company with good experience, outstanding client references and current certifications. Their staff should know the latest technologies, have strategic depth in critical areas, and commit to continuous learning. You want a firm that demonstrates specialisation in several vital areas with multiple staff members. One person is not going to know everything. There are simply too many moving parts in today's digital economy.

Their staff should be available 24 hours per day, seven days a week, including (and some retail businesses will say especially) holidays. They should be able to articulate clearly and provide you with their official policy on handling errors, risks, and issues and explain customer escalation options available to you so that you can work together to resolve serious problems as soon as they flare up.

Security and Compliance

Security and compliance should be at the top of your list when it comes to evaluating MCSPs. These components are some of the most difficult for organisations to manage. The right provider can help you ensure significant improvements over what you might be able to create on your own.

Strong Service Availability

As your company expands, you may see an increase in IT expenses for on-premise equipment and software licences. To reduce these costs as you scale up, consider using a managed services provider (MSP) or cloud services provider (CSP).

For example, if your business operates in two regions, the first of which uses its favourite POS system while the second region uses a different POS system with inventory control. Adopting a single SaaS POS system eliminates all the headaches associated with servers, middleware, backups, and compatibility between the two systems. You can now dynamically provision the application to your users with the cloud. For example, you could add inventory features for 20 employees for twelve months or scale back on financial functionality for ten users for six months during off-peak times. When reviewing SaaS hosts, check how many 9's of availability a given application or data warehouse supports. The best typically offer 99.95% or better uptime.

Competitive Pricing

It's beneficial to learn about a company's fee structure in advance. Try to get a competitive bid from three similar firms. Be wary if you find out that they make a profit by marking up the prices of software, hardware, or other equipment. In many cases, you may not be aware of the value they provide in that price margin or other hidden costs that they must endure.

In general, because the equipment is collocated, the vendor shouldn't pass on costs directly to you. Multiple tenants share these costs. You could check prices online for similar hardware or software and determine if the pricing is reasonable.

Look for compelling offers with a la carte pricing, special packages, subscriptions, and flexible options.

Maintenance, Patch Updates, Upgrades, and Rollback

Your vendor should manage upgrades and configuration changes. Ensure that they keep you and your teams apprised of any upcoming upgrades so everyone can plan accordingly. It may be worth paying a little extra for the vendor to provide users with uninterrupted, real-time upgrades. Additionally, you want a SaaS applications provider that will automatically revert to the last known working version if an issue pops up.

The ideal provider can network and service performance on-demand and without additional charges for provisioning new or changed resources. Steer clear of providers that say they have to interrupt your services to add or subtract resources.

Make sure your contract has separate sections that clearly identify how often you can expect the following services:

- Malware and Anti-Virus Scans
- Spyware Detection and Removal
- Spam Filtering
- Disk Integrity, Partitioning, and Defragmentation
- Backups
- Storage Utilisation



Clear Service Level Agreements

In your contract, look for specific language regarding coverage and response times for the types of IT issues that commonly affect your business. For example, if your voice IP phone system goes down, look for a clause that states who is responsible for monitoring the issue and how quickly you can expect a response. If a network switch fails, how quickly will service be restored? What financial incentives or penalties exist for slow service response times? Negotiate for availability guarantees and penalties in your SLA. You don't want to be locked in with a provider with a history of outages.

Verify that they offer a written service level commitment clause that describes how they handle issues by severity or impact level. Critical issues or emergencies require a committed service response. Other important clauses of the SLA include change management, processes and controls, access policies, and infrastructure resource management.

Customer Experience Transformation

Cloud services transform the customer experience, providing the transparency customers want and the buyer-focused services they need. Through a partnership-based cloud-centric approach, you can deliver exceptional hyper-personalised, omnichannel and real-time experiences.

Shared Service Options

When a small business grows, or a mid-size business wants to expand, a key decision must be made when it comes to the data centre. Are you going to keep paying those invoices, bills, and accounts payable to buy storage, software, servers, routers, switches, and other communications hardware? Don't forget the cost of power, HVAC, and office space lease expenses.

You could go directly to a cloud provider or contract out to a managed services provider; however, some providers can accommodate a unique arrangement where you continue to own and configure your equipment but share the operating costs and floor space with other businesses. You might try this collocation arrangement temporarily.

For example, you need more space but want to continue managing your own equipment and protecting your client or proprietary data sources. Another reason companies choose to share services as tenants in a collocated data centre is the affordable offsite backup and disaster recovery.

Post-deployment Support

Ask your vendor if they provide cloud management services end to end, including monitoring and notification, provisioning and orchestration, configuration management, governance, security, application performance management and optimization services. They can tailor these services to suit your business's unique needs through dedicated and shared delivery models ensuring cost savings, improved agility, a better user experience and enhanced security.

Final Words

Managed services providers enable you to outsource your IT support needs to another company. Rather than investing in costly technology, infrastructure, and staff, you can hire an MSP to do the heavy lifting for you.

Working with a cloud managed services provider like Ether helps future-proof your business. Ether gives you access to an experienced team of technical experts — at a fraction of the cost. Our managed services help you achieve the agility required for an increasingly digital world and we can help you integrate a combination of accelerators, platforms and strategic partners to modernise your core business applications. We help you drive efficiencies, unlock new business opportunities and provide richer customer experiences

If you need to decrease downtime, improve security, reduce risk and maintain compliance guidelines, partnering with Ether can help you realise your organisation's unique cloud advantage.

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