How to Choose a Long-Term Managed Services Provider Partner

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, technology is a driving force for competitive advantage. This makes selecting and partnering with the right managed services provider (MSP) more critical than ever. It's essential to evaluate their capabilities and overall alignment with your business while remaining open to all the possibilities the right partner could bring to your company.

Use this guidance to assess potential MSPs and find a partner to help you manage your complex technology infrastructure and critical business applications. It will also help address the emerging challenges that limit the value of your technology investments.

1. **Assess the MSP's strategic thinking**

2. **Ensure they can map technical metrics to business outcomes**

3. **Look for broad, deep technology coverage**

4. **Be prepared for a long-term partnership**

5. **Balance innovation and stability**

6. **Insist on next-level customer service**

7. **Seek innovation in services management**

8. **Ask about cybersecurity integration**

9. **Probe for technology future-proofing**

10. **Design wins with creative consumption models**

Assess the MSP's strategic thinking

As technology takes center stage in corporate planning, you'll need a mature MSP to take a consultative approach. It should go beyond simple support ticketing and system monitoring to include a focus on understanding your business strategies, goals, and desired outcomes.

Assess your MSP's ability to help you develop and execute short-term services and long-term technology road maps. It should be able to collaborate with multiple lines of business on these technology strategies.

Ensure they can map technical metrics to business outcomes

An MSP must be able to map technical performance metrics to strategic goals. Server uptime is essential, but application performance, user experience, and customer satisfaction metrics are more relevant when assessing how well your technology operations support business success.

Clearly define the KPIs that connect technology performance and business goals. These could range from call resolution times to software user feature adoption. Consider structuring outcome-based incentives as part of your MSP contract.

This holistic approach will help ensure the managed services provider translates technical performance into tangible business value.

Look for broad, deep technology coverage

You can only measure the performance of end-to-end business processes with an aligned view of technology infrastructure and business application use. A capable MSP will offer end-to-end visibility and control across your entire technology portfolio, from desktops, servers, and software to IoT devices, networking, and beyond.

Full infrastructure coverage will enable the MSP to execute your strategic goals down to the hardware level across all parts of your infrastructure with no blind spots.

Be prepared for a long-term partnership

Today's advanced MSP agreement is far more than a transactional relationship. It develops into a partnership over time as both parties become more aligned.

Find an MSP that takes a multi-year view of your business objectives. It should have a structured approach to continuous improvement that supports this long-term vision. The MSP will conduct regular reviews that continually assess performance and look for enhancement opportunities across the delivered service and all areas of the contract.

Balance innovation and stability

Stable, reliable operation is the bedrock of an MSP contract. This is non-negotiable. A strategic approach means more than just keeping the servers running today; it means envisaging how optimizing existing technology and using new technologies can fulfill business goals tomorrow. That requires an awareness and practical understanding of emerging technology innovations.

MSP should have close partnerships with strategic technology partners and suppliers, giving them access to the latest innovations while ensuring you can depend on installed equipment to keep doing its job.

Insist on next-level customer service

Modern service providers should use advanced technology to ensure a smooth, seamless user support process when problems occur.

Improved customer service relies heavily on effective back-end integration of IT service management and administrative workflows. It benefits from streamlined interfaces where information is entered just once, actioned quickly, and then followed up after the fact.

Evaluate an MSP's use of AI-powered automation, advanced ticketing workflows, and natural language interfaces to handle fundamental first-tier support issues. Insist on using satisfaction and experience metrics in KPI reporting.
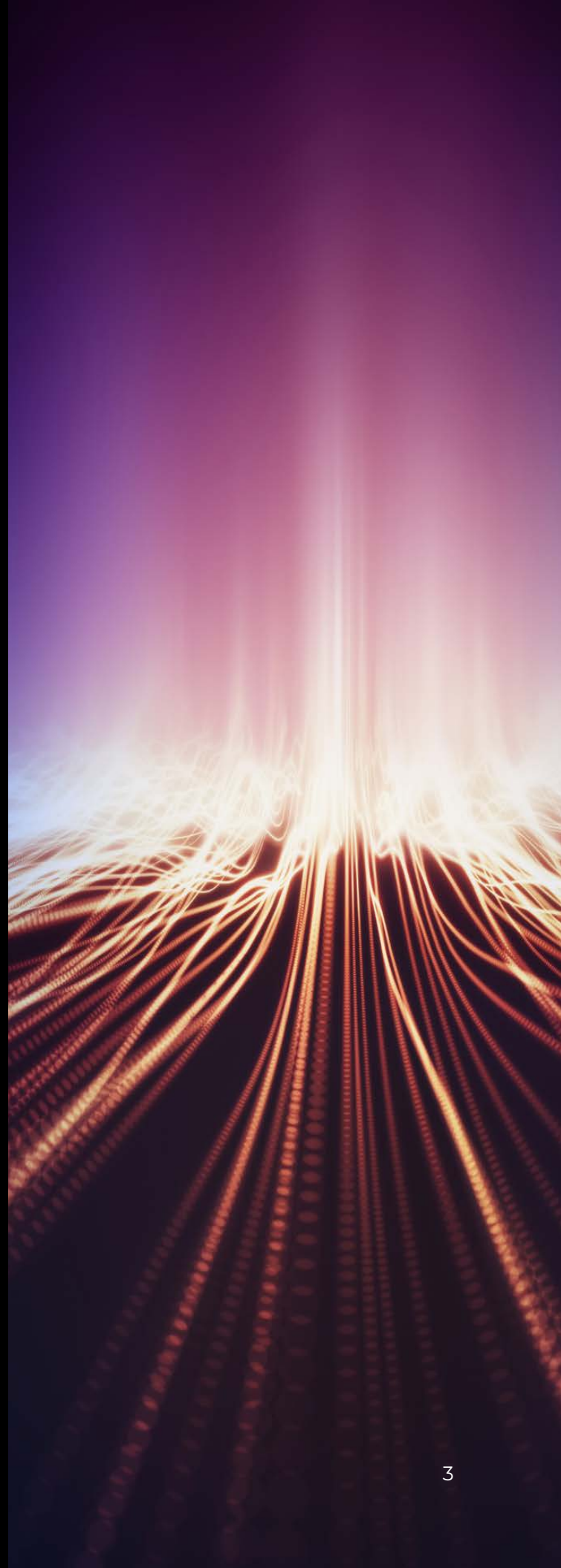
Seek innovation in services management

Although the MSP should have world-class support workflows, the ultimate goal is to reduce the need for support tickets and enhance end-user experience. This also involves exploring ways to use technology investments to increase top- and bottom-line revenue.

Advanced infrastructure management tools should automate root cause analysis and end-to-end problem resolution. A progressive MSP can use technologies like these to make your infrastructure self-healing, solving problems before they become apparent. Streamlined processes can reduce time-to-market for new products and services, while smarter data usage can help customers gain insights into customer behavior, market trends, and operational efficiencies.

Ask about cybersecurity integration

Look for providers that follow secure-by-design principles, integrating security from the ground up rather than treating it as an afterthought. Inquire about their ability to converge security and network services into a unified offering, reflecting the inextricable link between security and technology operations in today's landscape.

A competent MSP should also offer a broad portfolio of security services, like risk assessment, incident response, and compliance with relevant security and privacy regulations. They should have robust processes for continuous monitoring, threat detection, and timely patching and updates.

Probe for technology future-proofing

Managed services needs are rapidly expanding beyond traditional IT components and applications into IoT deployments. This is also changing the face of industrial control systems (ICS), which were once stand-alone networks but are now integrated with other networks.

An MSP that integrates and manages these environments can better support your company now and into the future. Look for a partner with specific expertise in specialized areas such as these and a future-looking philosophy when designing solutions and services for your business.

Design wins with creative consumption models

Look for flexible service consumption models that provide necessary technology solutions and service levels while supporting your operational and financial requirements. One example is 'as-a-service' offerings, where the MSP owns all the equipment to support the service (such as networking, WI-FI, or contact center systems). It owns, installs, and configures the equipment and/ or software while managing it throughout the entire life cycle, including software upgrades and future hardware replacement. You pay a set monthly cost for the outcome the 'as-a-service' offer provides over the duration of the contract.

This arrangement minimizes the need to firefight technical issues, makes it easier to plan your financial budget, and frees you to concentrate on areas of strategic improvement.

Black Box's managed service solutions are powered by its long-term partner, Cisco. Black Box is a Cisco Gold Integrator specializing in providing end-to-end solutions for customers with unique expertise in solving complex business problems. Cisco brings multi-faceted technology offerings that complement Black Box's fulfillment capabilities. These include observability, software-defined network control, edge-based networking, and integrated security across a company's WAN, branch, and multi-cloud environments.

To learn more, visit the Black Box website at www.blackbox.com. Follow the company on X, formerly known as Twitter @blackbox_ns. Black Box® and the Double Diamond logo are registered trademarks of BB Technologies, LLC.

BLACK B◇X®

Black Box® is a trusted IT solutions provider delivering cutting-edge technology solutions and world-class consulting services to businesses around the globe. The breadth of our global reach and depth of our expertise accelerate customer success by bringing people, ideas, and technology together to solve real-world business problems. Our IT infrastructure solutions, services, and products enable secure, flawless connectivity and meaningful collaboration for businesses in every major market sector on six continents.

Learn More

CISCO
Partner

Cisco Enterprise networking solutions offer a comprehensive range of products and services for connectivity, security, and management. These include high-performance switches and routers, advanced Wi-Fi solutions, and SD-WAN technology to optimize and secure WAN connections. These solutions enhance network performance, ensure robust security, and provide scalable infrastructure for businesses.

Learn more