



We Manage Small Business IT
www.managedit.sg

What Every Business Owner Must Know
Before Hiring an IT Consultant or
IT Services Company



Choosing the wrong IT Consultant or IT Services Company, to support you and your technology assets can be incredibly frustrating and expensive, and it is often riddled with unsolved problems, frequent downtime, data loss and unanswered phone calls!

This guide attempts to give you an inside into the IT industry and how you can protect yourself from appointing the wrong IT Services Company to serve you.

Read this guide and you will learn:

- The secrets of the IT industry, what service providers don't want you to ask and will never tell you
- 20 revealing questions that will help you sift out unethical or incompetent IT Consultants
- 4 costly misconceptions most business owners have about IT maintenance and management, all of which are designed to save YOU, the business owner, money and time
- 5 mistakes to avoid when appointing an IT Consultant or IT Services Company
- Why "cheap" and "lowest price" isn't the bargain they always seem to be

This guide is part of an educational series provided by:

Managed IT

We Manage Small Business IT

<http://www.managedit.sg>

+65 67488 776



From the desk of:

Roy Ong

Principal Consultant

Managed IT

Dear Business Owner,

Choosing and appointing an IT Consultant or IT Services Company isn't easy. There are many horror stories about the incompetent individual, sent to your office to carry out a task that he or she is incapable of doing. Or what about the age-old complaints where the problem has been told to the service provider for days without resolution, feedback nor attendance. I am sure if you pick this up with your peers, friends and colleagues, you will no doubt get a earful of responses and probably a very lively conversation on the failings of these IT Consultants.

To be fair, incompetent and unethical businesses plague every industry. Think of any industry and I am sure you will be able to come up with a few examples. It is usually these businesses that make a "name" for themselves as they go out of their way to take advantage of unsuspecting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine if the service provider has the ability, the knowledge or even the right ethical considerations for job at hand.

In many cases, these service providers tend to price themselves lower than average so as to entice the unsuspecting business owner. It is the same in our IT industry.

Lower prices tend to mean more sign-ups from unsuspecting business owners. However, after the initial sign-up, recommendations from these IT Service Companies tend to be excessive, sometimes driven by greed (to make up for the loss from the initial sign-up) but on most occasions, it is usually because they don't have the knowledge, skills nor competency to do the job right the first time. This leads to more resources, time and effort that they need to spend on your problem and hence the increased costs - but of course, they won't tell you all that up-front!

From misleading information, unqualified individuals, to poor management, terrible customer service and even downright deception, we have seen it all. We know that these businesses exist because in our years in the industry, we have had to clean-up after them, taking over the disasters they create when clients come knocking on our doors.

The problem is ... and here's the biggest and most embarrassing secret of our IT industry:

Unlike many industries, ours is **not regulated and we do not have a professional services body that manages and ensures the qualify of the service providers.**

**This means that ANYONE can claim that they can manage technology assets.
ANYONE!**

Quick fact = If you ask around, many existing IT companies where started because the owners themselves were laid-off or fired from their job and could not find work anywhere else. Maybe shocking but its very very true!

In Singapore, we have come to accept that professional service providers, doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants, educators are all heavily regulated. In the recent times, we have also seen the likes of food establishments, hawkers, motor vehicle repair shops, electricians, plumbers, property agents and even security guards been regulated.

But what about our IT industry?

Till date, it still remains unregulated and there are no laws and no professional body to protect the consumer, to ensure that the IT service provider is of a certain standard.

This is why it is so important to learn and understand how to properly evaluate and choose your IT Consultant and IT Services Company.

Anyone, with a little IT knowledge, can claim to be an expert, promoting themselves to business owners and getting jobs that might be way above their expertise and know-how. While they can honestly be trying to do a good or great job, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your technology assets' speed and performance or in extreme cases, might result in loss of data and files, causing you losses in productivity and man-hours.

It Is simply these reasons that we have chosen to come up with this guide to try and help raise the standards of our IT industry.

It is in hope that by educating you, the business owner, the client, we hope your knowledge will not only guard you from these incompetent, unprofessional, unethical IT companies but more importantly, your knowledge will require these IT companies to up-scale, bringing about an overall improvement in the IT industry.

Always Dedicated To Serving You

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Ong".

Roy Ong and The Team at Managed IT

Questions You Should Ask Any IT Consultant or IT Services Company Before You Hire Them

Background, General Terms and Customer Service Essentials

Find out how long they have been in the industry.

Our answer: The number of years that the business has been operational isn't of immediate concern. It should really be a lead-on question to find out if the team is sufficiently experienced. An inexperienced team could be disadvantaged when managing your technology assets.

Do they answer their phones or do you always have to leave a voice mail?

Our answer: Our phone lines are open 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. In addition, all clients have access to our individual direct dial extensions, which automatically forwards to our mobiles if unanswered. We believe in providing our clients with all the necessary utilities to report their problems. Any downtime is unexpected and we do our best not to inconvenience them any further.

Do they have a guaranteed response time to your calls for service?

Our answer: On paper, we place a Service Level Agreement of within 4 hours for a critical fault and next business day for non-critical faults. However, in reality, we understand that if you are not able to access your line of business applications, that means a huge loss of productivity. We try our best to avoid hiding behind the walls of the SLA and its all hands on deck to resolve your issue at the soonest.

Do they answer questions in technobabble?

Our answer: The IT Company's job is to deal with the technical details. We will take the time and effort to explain the technology in terms that you will understand. We do not expect you nor any of your colleagues to be technically savvy, nor expect you to understand "geek talk".

Background, General Terms and Customer Service Essentials

Do they consistently and proactively offer new ways to improve the performance of your technology assets?

Our answer: Ensuring that you get the most out of your technology assets is something that we place high on our priority. We carry out quarterly review sessions, where we highlight issues that we solved and also present ways in which technology can help in the operations, lower cost and improve productivity. It is also during these meetings that we have a chance to deal with any upcoming issues and provide a means of negating any potential risks and side-effects.

Will they customize their services to fit your needs?

Our answer: We present our services in what we feel is best suited for our audience. However, we are ready to customize our services as required. We understand and appreciate the uniqueness of each business and will never coax any owner into accepting a solution that is not best suited.

Do they guarantee to complete projects on budget?

Our answer: Projects that we undertake are fixed priced, inclusive of all professional work and fees. We do not undertake projects that are based on time and materials which may result in ambiguity. The risk is on us to finish the project on time, on schedule and within costs.

How much do they charge? Is everything costed or are there unseen add-ons?

Our answer: In many circumstances, cost is relative to the service offering. While others might charge a smaller fee, the devil is in the details. While it is our belief that one should not merely judge on price alone, we are mindful that every extra dollar counts. As such, we have taken extra care to clearly list all monthly charges and services included. In addition, we also list out what is not included and its related costs. All in a name of transparency so that you are able to make an informed decision.

Do they carry out 24x7 remote monitoring of your technology assets to keep them updated with the latest security and virus patches, in an effort to pro-actively minimize downtime and problems?

Our answer: All our contracted machines are monitored 24x7. Our remote monitoring mechanisms allows us to watch over your technology assets to constantly look out for developing problems, security issues, missing patches and updates, so that we can address them at the soonest opportunity before they turn into issues that might result in your downtime.

Do they have other staff who are familiar with your network and assets in case your regular technician goes on leave or gets sick?

Our answer: Your organization is assigned with a dedicated Service Consultant so that he is able to quickly identify and resolve issues due to his familiarity with your set-up. At the same time, we expect all our Service Consultants to be cross-trained so that they are able to cover each other in times of need. As a fail-safe, all documentations and service calls are kept up-to-date so that any of our Service Consultants will be able to take over when called upon.

Do they document your technology assets?

Our answer: Every client will be provided with a copy of the documentation that we create. This usually details all the assets, passwords, user information and configuration settings. Any changes will be updated quarterly, during the technology review and guidance meet-up. As this documentation provides an inside into your organization, we recommend that only key personnel have access to this.

**Note: You should always have a copy of all the critical technology information of your organization. If your existing service provider does not provide you with one, please request for a copy at the soonest. No professional service provider should retain critical information at your expense.*

**Management and
Maintenance of your
Workstations,
Network and Servers**

Do they provide any reports that show the work that has been done on our machines?

Our answer: All clients get a detailed report that shows the overall health status of their technology assets. This report is also important to us as it is a means of an assurance, informing the client of the work that we have been doing in preventing downtime even when our Service Consultants do not appear on-site.

Do they provide a monthly flat fee service? Is there any fine print that they should let you know about?

Our answer: We pride ourselves in providing our clients with a budgeted expense. Our one-flat-fee contract does just that. It is all inclusive with unlimited telephone, email, remote and on-site support. We do understand your concerns as we have seen a number of variations in the service offerings by our peers. They seem to be lower in price but the devil is in the details. If you are comparing service offerings, perhaps the following would be of consideration:

- Is there provision for unlimited telephone, email, and remote support?
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- Is there provision for unlimited on-site support?
- Are both the hardware and software of technology assets managed?
- Are technology assets monitored 24x7?
- Is there a quarterly meet-up with technology review and guidance?
- Is there a consequence for early contract termination?
- In event of a major disaster, would the recovery work be charged extra?
- Are upgrades, moves, adding, removing users chargeable? If so, what are the charges?

**Management and
Maintenance of your
Workstations,
Network and Servers**

Backups and Disaster Recovery

Do they check to see if your backup is working?

Our answer: We monitor your backups on a daily basis. In fact, we insist on it. Data is critical to many businesses and we want to rest easy knowing that backups have been carried out successfully. For many of our Service Consultants, data backup and the checking of backup jobs are high on their priority and are usually the first task they undertake at the start of the day. We strongly recommend all our clients to have facilities for carrying out both on-site and off-site remote backups and will do our utmost to ensure that all backups are done properly and successfully.

Do they carry out periodical test restores of your backups?

Our answer: The success of data backups is in the restore. However, we understand that some client data can be sensitive and as such, would only undertake a restore at the request of the client. It is in our interest to ensure that all backup jobs are running successfully and will do the necessary to maintain a high probability of a successful restore.

Do they backup your technology asset configurations?

Our answer: Yes we do, especially those with critical and custom configuration settings. Your up-time is important to us and we will undertake any measure that can help in the prevention of downtime or aid in the recovery process.

Where are they based? Are all their technical staff based locally or outsourced to a 3rd party?

Our answer: We are proud to be a Singapore based business. All our staff are Singaporeans and we do not outsource any day-to-day technical work. While working on projects, we may require the expertise of our partners but rest assured that their quality of work and delivery are under our purview and we will be fully responsible for them.

Do their technical staff maintain current vendor certifications and participate in on-going training?

Our answer: Technology is rapidly changing and our Service Consultants do undergo internal and external training to keep themselves up-to-date. We are extremely fortunate to have a great team. Our people are our greatest assets. They provide the intelligence, the expertise and the teamwork that determines our very existence. Challenging them and upgrading them remain high on our priorities.

Are they familiar with your business application and your unique line of business?

Our answer: We have a vast array of clients and they represent a broad cross-section of industries (accounting, chemicals, consumer business, electronics, engineering, environment, financial, legal, logistics and supply chain management, marine and offshore engineering, oil & gas, precision engineering, professional services). As your managed IT service provider, we will own and manage your business application. We will work with your application or software vendors to ensure that all necessary details and areas are covered, ensuring a high up-time for your business.

**Technical Expertise
and Support**



When something goes wrong with your internet access, email, phone system, printers, servers, network, workstations, what is their typical response?

Our answer: Our service consultants are on-hand to receive the 1st reports from you or your colleagues. We will work to own the problem and to provide rectification. If problem rectification are beyond our scope, we will provide the necessary hand-holding and necessary follow-ups. As your managed IT service provider, we strive to be your first and only call for service and will work to get you back on-time at the soonest.

**Technical Expertise
and Support**

With the questions and information presented above, we certainly hope that you, the business owner, will be better positioned to appoint a IT Consultant or IT Services Company that will be best suited for your operations and your organization.

If there are any queries, please feel free to contact us.

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<http://www.managedit.sg>
+65 67488 776