OUTSOURCING YOUR IT SUPPORT RESOURCE

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If your organisation is considering outsourcing your IT support requirement, read this whitepaper to ensure you get it right.

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Executive summary

Outsourcing helps you work smarter

As IT has become more and more embedded into our businesses and organisations, powering most activities in the workplace, IT support has become a business critical function.

However, having a dedicated IT service desk in-house, dealing with support tickets, monitoring the network and systems, and performing daily checks, back ups etc., is not always viable.

Unless your organisation consistently has high demand for a service desk function, with multiple support tickets per day, an in-house service desk team can be expensive to run. That is why many IT managers and their teams have to step up to the support role as well as delivering more strategic IT projects.

This solution often creates a variety of internal problems including poor response times, dissatisfied employees (both within the IT department and across the organisation), and strategic projects stalling because of lack of resources.

For these reasons, amongst others, the solution is to outsource IT support and invest in a scalable service that meets your organisation's requirements. Outsourcing IT can bring costs down, while maintaining the service level and giving your organisation access to skillsets that might not be available internally.

This whitepaper is for organisations and their IT teams that want to outsource their IT support requirement. It explores key considerations such as whether you require 24/7 IT support, and the pros and cons of outsourcing offshore and onshore.

We start this exploratory guide by posing the question in or out; should you be investing in IT support in-house or outsourcing to a 3rd party provider?

Contents

In-house vs.
outsourcing

The in-house vs. outsourcing conundrum

The conundrum of whether or not to invest in in-house IT support or to outsource this requirement to a 3rd party, is the same weighty decision organisations have to make for many other areas of their business. For example, do you outsource your marketing, recruitment, payroll etc.?

As any business leader knows, delegating the jobs that take you away from what you do best is a key factor in your success, and this applies to your IT department too. Why use up a valuable team member's time as the nominated IT support analyst, when that time would be better spent being more productive and profitable in their actual role?

In-house IT support: the pros and cons

That said a dedicated IT support team has its advantages. Your IT team will have specialist knowledge of your systems, they'll be on hand to resolve issues quickly and efficiently, and they'll also be part of your team and understand your company culture, ethos and goals.

However, this does not come cheap. Salaries, training and CPD will stack up quickly, especially if you're running an IT department of several staff. Conversely, if you don't have the manpower you could be looking at substantial costs in technical support if your IT manager is on holiday or off sick when a problem occurs.

The benefits of outsourcing

Outsourcing your service desk function may be a decision based on an operational requirement to provide the right level of IT support needed, however it also delivers strategic benefits.

Focus

Outsourcing frees up time for the people within your organisation - to focus on strategic goals and growth.

If delivering IT support is not a core competency for your IT team, i.e. you do not have service desk analysts internally, outsourcing allows them to focus on the activities they have been recruited for.

Flexibility

Outsourcing is also a very flexible option. The biggest benefit of outsourcing is that you are able to get access to expert support for a defined period of time to perform a task without a long- term commitment.

This flexibility is also seasonal which means you can scale up or down quickly and accordingly – Ideal for temporary or short term operations - such as seasonal fulfilment, tax preparation or upgrading your infrastructure. A service desk is often outsourced because those providers are better equipped to handle high volumes of calls on demand. It provides longer-term service desk needs as you gain operational efficiencies and skills that you would have a difficult time replicating in- house.

Cost

Internal IT support is not cheap. On average IT managers' earn £40,000 + per year, but depending on the size of the organisation and IT requirement, one IT role may not

be enough. Factor in normal working hours, holidays, unplanned absences and other staffing costs, and it becomes clear why the decision to use IT managed services is often driven by cost considerations.

Free up the 'IT scapegoat'!

As smaller organisations grow, they often find that a key member of staff ends up becoming the 'IT scapegoat'.

Known to be good with computers, the IT scapegoat gets bombarded with requests for help whenever anything goes wrong, distracting them from their actual job.

If your sales manager spends more time helping staff with computer problems than selling, then you know it's time to make some changes.

- The cost-effective answer is outsourced IT support,

- You can make monthly payments to an outsourced IT support company,

- And your staff spend their time focusing on their jobs.

Does your business need 24/7 IT service desk support?

Global markets need 24/7 support

Whether your organisation has customers overseas or employees working across different time zones, 24/7 IT support is increasingly a prerequisite for succeeding in global markets.

Digital transformation has made it even easier for small businesses and multinationals alike to do business around the clock, and employees and customers no longer adhere to 'normal business hours'.

Businesses considering or already operating overseas need a robust IT infrastructure to support these goals. As staff move further away from your home country's time zone, their support requirements increase. Customers and team members need access 24/7.

- Does your current IT partner provide that level of support?
- How do you ensure your business is 'always up,' anywhere in the world?

End User Support (EUS) is one area where delays can be costly. Getting the right support is easy when your service desk is in the same country. But what about when staff are halfway around the world?

Support for remote workers too

As well as distributed teams in other countries we are also seeing a shift to more flexible working here in the UK. Organisations recognise the value of allowing employees to work from home or remote offices, and manage their hours in a way that works best for them.

Many studies have shown how flexible working can increase productivity and performance, and of course technology has been the driving factor in facilitating this move.

However, without support in place this vision of a more productive and engaged workforce can fall down.

- What if a key employee cannot access the organisation's network out of normal office hours to get on with an important task?
- Or your business traveller cannot get the information they require when away at a conference or meeting clients around the country?

24/7 IT support is not just for global organisations, it's also important for business continuity for many local businesses operating in an 'always up', digitally connected world.

Service desk outsourcing: onshore or offshore?

Not all IT service desk providers are the same!

There are those that are small teams or one-man bands, and larger providers like Cloud Business. There are providers who focus solely on the service desk function, and others that offer a range of IT support and consultancy services.

And there are also onshore service desk providers and offshore providers.

What benefits does each model bring to businesses, and what are their failings?

Cost savings

Both IT outsourcing models can save organisations money compared to running an in-house IT service desk. This is especially true if you need to operate your service desk outside of local business hours, for example if you have offices in different time zones, and if your organisation has a high demand for IT support – due to the economies of scale and lower staffing costs.

If cost savings are a significant priority for your organisation, the offshore model offers additional savings. These service providers operate in countries with lower salaries, such as Asia and Eastern Europe, and this is perhaps their biggest USP.

Company knowledge

IT service providers will have any number of clients for whom they provide service desk support. Here at Cloud Business we know that this can be disconcerting if the user calls and the service desk team do not have your company information at their fingertips. To have confidence in the service, clients like to know that the service desk analyst understands the business, and can support their employees knowledgeably. They don't want to feel like they're just a number.

While offshore providers may keep background information on their clients, generally onshore service providers are in a much better position to embed themselves within an organisation and get a unique insight into the business. With regular client meetings and perceptive reporting, this is a factor where onshore providers beat offshore hands down.

Staff turnover

The ability to become part of an organisation's extended IT team is another differentiator between onshore and offshore. Many companies want a single point of contact for all their IT issues and requests, someone who is knowledgeable about their business and understands instantly how their IT issues impact on this.

In countries offering lower wages staff turnover rates can be high, as a small increase in salary with a different employer can make a significant difference to the individual. This means that it becomes difficult for the offshore service provider to maintain a consistent level of service in terms of single point of contact, and knowledgeable client-centric staff.

Compliance

Another key area that must be addressed when weighing up the pros and cons of onshore or offshore. Those organisations operating in highly regulated sectors may find that offshore is not an option at all.

Even if your organisation has no geographic restrictions on where you can outsource IT services, you may find your clients do – many regulated organisations need the companies they work with to be compliant too, otherwise they can't do business with them.

Cultural differences

While service desk analysts working for offshore providers are highly trained, educated, have excellent English - often having had elocution lessons - there can still be a disconnect culturally. This may result in misunderstandings when a end user asks for specific support and the analyst delivers that support off the script rather than truly understanding what the user needs.

However, if the support needed is predictable and rarely deviants from typical requests and issues, offshore can provide this in a cost effective way. Dialect can also be an issue if the end user finds it difficult to understand the service desk analyst, or is unsure if they have made themselves clear. This is not an issue unique to offshore providers; regional dialects within the UK can also be a challenge!

Onshore or offshore?

While onshore appears to be the winner in this particular analysis, offshore does have its' place. Cost is obviously the most significant factor, and if this is an important consideration for your business the offshore model can help you make these savings.

Yet when it comes to value adding factors such as customer satisfaction, the ability to support more client-specific IT issues, and working with a provider who becomes an integral part of your IT team, onshore delivers on all these fronts.

Finding an IT service provider: Questions to ask

Having addressed whether your organisation requires 24/7 IT support, and explored the options onshore and offshore, what questions should you ask potential service providers?

We recommend drawing up a shortlist based on recommendations from business contacts, suppliers and partners first. A trusted recommendation from someone who has some insight into your organisation is always a good start. Also look for industry accreditation and quality assurance certification to ensure high levels of service and compliance with quality standards.

You'll also want to ascertain what companies provide services in your area, and consider whether it is important to you to use a provider that is local to you.

Having drawn up a shortlist of potential companies, here are some key questions to ask them before taking it any further:

How large is your company?

Get an idea of the size of the company. Do they have the right infrastructure to meet your needs?

A larger company will have a wide spread of expertise, whereas a smaller provider is likely to offer a more bespoke and personal service. However, a one-man band will present you with the same issues as having an IT manager in-house – what if they go on holiday, what cover will you have then?

What can you do for me?

Ask your shortlist what they could do for you based on information you provide about your core objectives and the main issues you face. This will naturally give you an idea of whether they can do what you need, but it can also throw up some new possibilities and perhaps a different and more beneficial approach.

What service levels do you offer?

1st line, 2nd line, 3rd line and 4th? Emergency, pay-as-you-go, contract? Many IT service providers offer different levels of service to meet different budgets.

Can you tailor your service to my organisation?

A flexible approach to service levels is always a plus point as no two companies are the same, or have exactly the same requirements.

What do your Service Level Agreements (SLAs) look like?

Make sure that they are contractually obliged to respond in an acceptable period of time, this will help you identify the service level you require.

Will I have a dedicated point of contact?

You'll want to build a strong relationship with the provider and so it helps if you have a single point of contact. This way they'll get to know your business that much better and become part of your extended team.

Do you have on and remote site options?

For some organisations having dedicated IT support onsite is a necessity. This can still be a cost effective option compared to employing an IT support manager in-house, and they come with the added back up of an expert service provider.

What training and development do you implement in your company?

Technological advances happen overnight and therefore it is important to find a provider who keeps their employees' training up-to-date. With this in place they will continuously improve your service too.

What is and what isn't included in the service contract?

One of the benefits of outsourcing IT is being able to forecast your monthly spend, however you must be clear on what is included and what isn't if you want to avoid any surprises.

What's your company culture like?

Ideally your IT support will integrate seamlessly into your organisation and therefore you will want to find a provider you can partner with.

Finally, here's a bonus question:

What else can you do for me?

A proactive partner who is able to suggest other ways to improve your systems, and find alternative IT solutions for your organisation is an asset.

You might not be ready to implement their suggestions straightaway, but if you decide to in the future it makes sense to go with someone who already understands your business, existing systems and IT infrastructure.

How quickly can I outsource IT services?

Overworked IT teams can reduce everyone's productivity. One of the biggest challenges for growing companies is knowing when to outsource IT.

When an IT team is overworked and under-resourced, the strain is felt across the whole company. IT keeps everything running, so when they're unable to respond as quickly to immediate problems or move forward with long-term projects, it's time to consider outsourcing.

Working with a dedicated IT partner is an effective and practical solution to internal capacity issues. Whether you need service desk support (usually first and second line), or you have bigger projects in mind, how quickly you can move IT over to an external provider is one of the most common questions we get asked.

Here is what you need to know to make that transition easy:

Who will manage the transition?

During any handover, there needs to be someone internally and externally responsible for moving services and solutions over to an outsource partner. Make sure that person has the capacity for this project and, especially when you are moving frontline support over, staff know how and when they can start getting the support they need from the IT partner.

Awareness is one of the main challenges; otherwise, staff will continue calling or emailing your in-house team which will cause delays to problems getting fixed. A lack of awareness creates a bottleneck, especially since in-house teams might be tempted to try and solve problems themselves. Ensure there is a date when the external IT outsourcing partner will take over, and a clear set of communication options that staff all know. This should make the transition easier.

Trial project or trial month?

It should never take long for an IT partner to take over from an internal team. Normally, they should be equipped to scale up or down according to existing client needs, so taking on a new client should be a smooth process. One way to test the theory is a trial project or trial month. Agree for the company to provide a limited amount of support for a fixed number of hours/cost.

This way you test whether your potential IT partner can deliver according to marketing claims and Service Level Agreements (SLA).

Passwords, access and security

When moving from in-house to external, one of the main challenges is ensuring an IT partner can gain access to the systems and software they need to manage IT services. Put together a list of every system, computer and device you are entrusting them with and the relevant list of passwords.

With GDPR, IT providers are more stringent than ever over security and data protection permissions. You may need to confirm agreements to allow access and control, and then an external IT partner should review data security process and systems to assess where there are any potential compliance failings.

Conclusion

Partnering with the right IT service provider can deliver significant cost savings, drive efficiencies within your organisation and, crucially, allow your IT team to focus on more strategic activities. Yet, not all outsourcing partnerships work and so it is essential that all parties understand the level of service needed, and what will be delivered.

Outsourcing partnerships fail for a number of reasons. These include choosing providers based on the lowest price, not ability to deliver the right service; failing to understand exactly what the service level is and, the provider, not managing your expectations adequately; poor communication, lack of flexibility and outsourcing the wrong functions.

Perhaps the biggest mistake that some organisations make is failing to recognise the IT service provider as a strategic partner. Managed Service providers can become a valuable partner, contributing to the success of your organisation. The rewards of this approach can be considerable.

Don't miss out on this opportunity!

Cloud Business would welcome the opportunity to discuss your organisation's IT support requirement and help you work smarter. Contact our team for an informal discussion today.

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or Email:
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About Cloud Business

At Cloud Business we are committed to ensuring all our customers and stakeholders succeed. Our highly qualified technical staff and specialised business processes facilitate the ongoing success of our customers' businesses.

We are dedicated to supporting our clients to achieve their business goals.
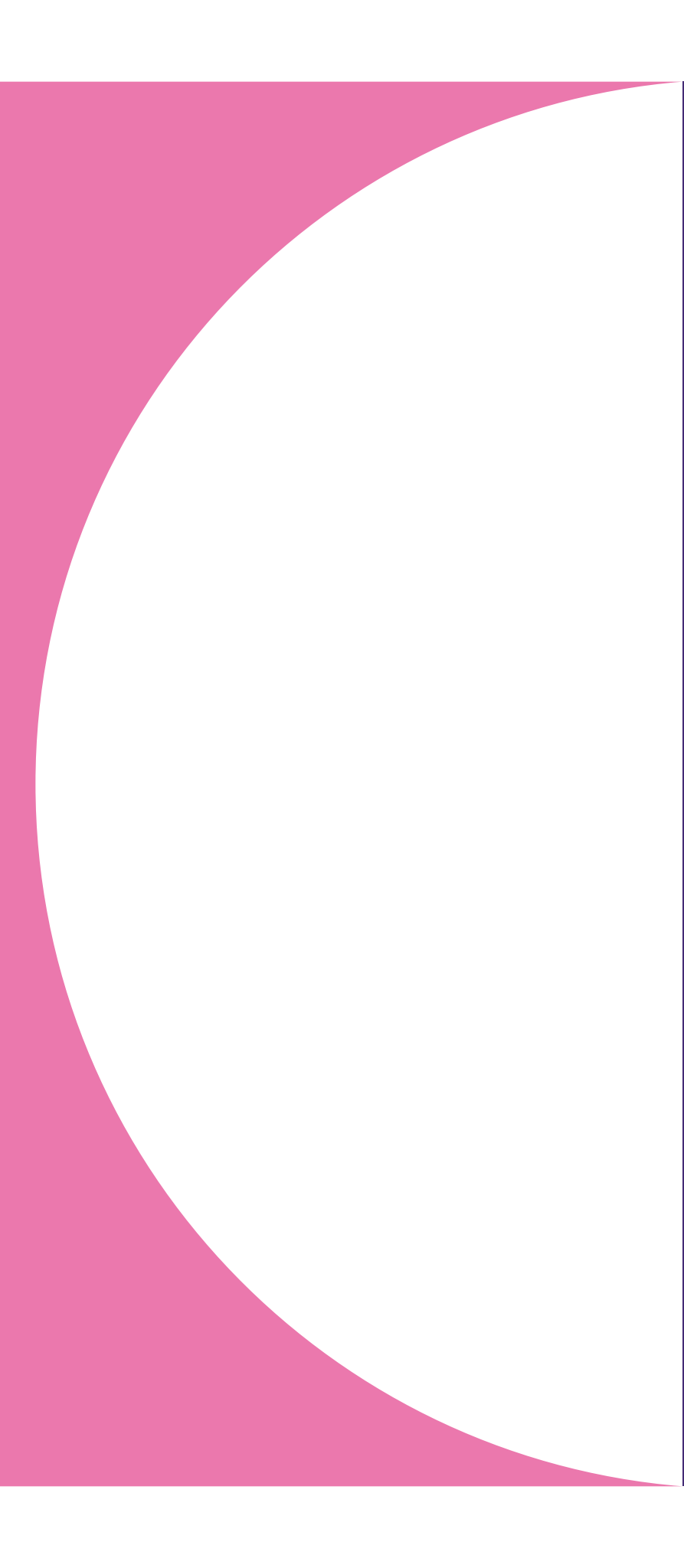
We never stop learning. We continue our drive for excellence and we have learnt to consistently invest, remain focused and be agile to stay at the forefront of technology.

We focus on the fundamentals

- More than 20 years of process and procedure refinement

- Long-term organic growth

- Real financial stability with a significant equity to debt ratio

- ISO-9001 certified quality frameworks which result in our on-time, on-budget delivery track record

- ISO 27001 accreditation for information security

Our people put your people at the heart of our IT services, giving you the freedom to become the business you want to be.

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