



IT Services Buyer's Guide

Ontario 2023

Information about the most common IT services and products, and what to look for when shopping for a new IT company.

Choosing IT Services

What is IT?

Standing for "information technology," IT is the work of taking care of office technology. Computers and phones require a lot of planning and upkeep, and everyone who uses them needs a helping hand from time to time.

The right IT partner can act as a Chief Information Officer or operations expert for you. They can help you achieve your goals. Trust and confidence in your IT team is critical.

If you are looking for a new IT company, they will be able to guide and support you through any transitions. Read on for more information about what to look for in the IT world.

Key Factors



1 Customer service

Relationships and trust are important. Consider the IT company's customer service model, agility, responsiveness, and internal company culture.

3 IT products

In addition to regular services, many IT companies also sell hardware (computers, networking equipment, cameras) and phone systems.

2 IT services

The most common services include tech support, cyber security, virtual desktops, and special projects (e.g. audits, training, custom software).

4 Price

Prices vary. Ask for a detailed quote for all IT-related costs. Understand what products and services are included.



Calculating Costs

- All IT companies calculate pricing differently
- Consider your monthly costs, plus annual costs
- Consider capital costs (computers, servers, networking) that may appear every few years
- Ask for a detailed quote that includes all IT-related costs

Cost Guidelines

- If calculated hourly, IT support costs range from \$90-\$300 per hour
- If calculated per person per month, IT support costs range from \$35-\$250 per person per month
- Review the IT company's products and services, and understand what is included in pricing

Tech/IT support Help desk

The humans who help you

Technology is complicated. Basic programs now include more lines of code than there were parts in the first moon rocket. Everyone needs help from time to time.

What to look for

- Transparency
- Response and resolution times
- Hours of operation
- Where the team is physically located
- Whether and how the company focuses on reducing help desk inquiries



Cyber security

📄 How to mitigate your risk affordably

The cyber security threats you are reading about are real. More and more businesses and organizations are being targeted by hackers. Cyber attacks make a lot of money. Protect yourself by ensuring that the IT company is proactive about cyber security (including multi-factor authentication, an important and affordable security measure).

99.9%

96%

Microsoft says **multi-factor authentication** (a security system using your mobile phone) protects against 99.9% of "bot" attacks. According to Google, it also prevents 96% of bulk phishing attacks and 76% of targeted attacks

What to look for

- Multi-factor authentication on all your systems
- How the IT company identifies what needs to be protected
- How they detect breaches
- How they respond to breaches
- The IT company should be able to answer your cyber security questions on the spot



Working data backups

Critical for your protection

You need access to at least one, but preferably two backup copies of all your data, in case of disaster such as fire, cyber attack, or even accidental data deletion.

What to look for

- Data backups that copy to a third party
- One copy is with an immutable cloud provider (where your data can't be deleted or changed by anyone for a certain amount of time)
- Tested, working backups



Computer monitoring and maintenance

Use a secure system

A computer monitoring and maintenance tool is necessary for a modern IT company to do its work in an organized and secure fashion, but only if the system itself is secure.



What to look for

- Ask how the IT company addresses security concerns in remote monitoring systems (hint: have a reliable and secure RMM provider, use different tools for management and backup systems, have immutable backups as a last resort)
- Documentation and passwords are stored separately from production system access

Remote desktops Virtual desktops

A new way to work

Whether you are working in the office or remotely, virtual desktops are rising in popularity. Virtual desktops are a secure way to access your work files from any computer. However, they are sometimes undersold based on performance, so make sure you're getting fast enough servers from cloud providers.

What to look for

- Server speed
- Whether your servers will be shut down at any point in the day
- How many server reboots there will be weekly
- Public or private cloud? Public is best for extreme compliance requirements. For offices with fewer than 150 employees, private cloud will be simpler and more performant.



Virtual desktops vs. working out of web browsers

☐ Options differ by office size

For smaller businesses and organizations, it is tempting to have staff to work out of browser-based software such as SharePoint and Dropbox. However, a data migration from SharePoint to a cloud server, for example, is not an easy process. It's worth considering whether you will need a more comprehensive IT system.



What to look for

- For newer or smaller businesses and organizations, make the decision based on work flow and goals rather than straight cost
- As your office grows, consider whether your browser software has all the features you require
- Whether the IT company will be able to migrate you from browser software to a virtual desktop system if necessary

Moving away from in-house servers

📄 Upgrading for security and cost savings

The purchase and use of in-house data servers has been declining due to security and maintenance concerns. Instead, offices have been moving to "the cloud," renting servers in data centres. This has the added benefit of cost savings, with smaller monthly fees rather than large capital costs every few years.

🌐 What to look for

- A migration project plan and timeline (how and when does the IT company plan to clean out your old server room)



Co-managed IT/ Assisting internal IT teams

☐ Benefits of combining internal and external IT

More offices are bringing in external IT companies to help internal IT teams. From support for backups and disaster recovery to Office 365 management and special projects, external IT providers offer year-round reliable levels of staffing capacity, as well as operational and technological efficiencies at scale.



What to look for

- Whether an external team can bring operational, technological, and financial efficiencies
- Opportunities for an external team to give your internal team breathing room to focus on day-to-day maintenance and support

Special projects

Getting projects over the finish line

Many IT companies do special projects. These can include audits (a review of IT systems, or checking invoices to reduce costs, for instance), networking or camera equipment installations, custom software development, technology training, help with technology transitions.

What to look for

- Whether the IT company has experience in your industry
- A good understanding of your office's work flow, and how to meet your requirements



Phones

Modern phone systems

VOIP, or “voice over internet protocol” is a replacement for traditional phone lines. It was invented in the 90s, and started becoming popular in the 2010s. At \$8–\$45 per person per month, VOIP phone systems cost much less than traditional phones. One of the most useful VOIP features is a mobile app, so you can make and receive work calls anywhere. You can still choose to have desk phones and/or conference phones (e.g. for board rooms).

What to look for

- Whether the IT company has worked with VOIP providers
- Level of support for your existing phone system
- If you need to upgrade your phone system, a project plan and quote from the IT provider



Printers

□ Printer problems

Printers: can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em. Unlike many other types of office equipment, printers are not typically something you source directly from an IT company. Printer products and services are provided by printer companies. However, your IT provider may be able to assist you with printer issues through your IT help desk.



What to look for

- Shop for printers based on price and features
- The IT company should be able to work with any printer vendor
- Ask the IT company about the most common printer problems and how they troubleshoot printer issues

Customer Service

When looking for an IT company, consider their customer service model, and how it aligns with your needs. Are they helpful? Knowledgeable? Trustworthy? Kind? Do they have positive references from existing clients? Think about their company culture, and whether it is a good fit for you.

Company Culture

- Review the IT company's website and "About Us" pages
- Consider the company's values, whether they share them publicly and where they align with yours
- Inquire about team size and whether you will have a dedicated account manager
- Ask for references

How to Find an IT Company



There are approximately 150,000 IT companies globally (the industry term is "managed service providers"). With our ability to work remotely, you aren't limited to companies in your area. However, you may want to consider a company with a staff member or consultant who is able to travel to you if necessary. Here is how many offices search for an IT company:

- Ask industry colleagues and associations
- Do a web browser and/or social media search
- Read IT company websites
- Have a meeting with company management
- Ask for client references

5+ Questions to Ask Any IT Company

1. On experience: Who is the CEO? Who is head of the help desk/IT support team? What is their educational and professional background?
2. On security: What are your cyber security policies? Who is responsible for data backups?
3. On accountability: Who is responsible for IT products that don't work? How do we know you will do what you say you are going to do?
4. Is there a service contract locking us in? What are the terms?
5. How well do you know your suppliers and products? Do you know how to implement and maintain those products?

You may be interested in a particular solution for your office such as emergency backups or cloud desktops. If so, ask any IT support company to provide an example of a client for whom they've already rolled out the solution.

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Thanks for reading

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Feel free to reach out with questions about office technology.



We are local to Toronto and Hamilton, serving clients across Ontario and Canada.



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