

## **The Tucson Business Owners' Guide To IT Support Services And Fees**

### **What You Should Expect To Pay For IT Support For Your Business**

(And How To Get *Exactly* What You Need Without  
Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees And Bloated Contracts)

#### **Read this guide and you'll discover:**

- ✓ The 3 most common ways IT services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying IT services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.
- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.
- ✓ 18 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, e-mail and data.

#### **Provided as an educational service by:**

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## Never Ask An IT Services Company, “What Do You Charge For Your Services?” Instead You Should Ask, “What Will I *Get* For My *Money*?”



Greg Durnan  
CEO AcaciaIT

Dear Colleague,

If you are the CEO or owner of a business in Southern Arizona that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can **trust**.

My name is Greg Durnan CEO of AcaciaIT. We’ve been providing IT services to businesses in Tucson and surrounding areas for over 27 years now.

**One of the most common questions we get from new prospective clients calling our office is “What do you guys charge for your services?”** Since this is such a common question — and a very important one to address — I decided to write this report for 3 reasons:

1. I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways IT services companies package and price their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
2. I wanted to bring to light a few “industry secrets” about IT service contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT service providers that can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.
3. I wanted to educate business owners on how to pick the **right** IT services company for their specific situation, budget and needs based on the **VALUE** the company can deliver, not just the price, high OR low.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the most informed decision possible so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

Greg Durnan

## Comparing Apples To Apples: The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company to another, you need to understand the 3 predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all 3, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The 3 predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this “break-fix” services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to “fix” your problem when something “breaks.” Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem (like removing a virus), or it may encompass a large project like a computer network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.
- **Managed IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your “IT department” and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network.
- **Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it’s hosted on, they can’t help you and will often refer you to “your IT department.” While it’s often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the “managed IT services” and “break-fix” models. Therefore, let’s dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both.

## Managed IT Services Vs. Break-Fix: Which Is The Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You’ve probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” I couldn’t agree more — and that’s why it’s my sincere belief that the managed

IT approach is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for any business. The only time I would recommend a “time and materials” approach is when you already have a competent IT person or team proactively managing your computer network and simply have a specific IT project to complete that your current in-house IT team doesn’t have the time or expertise to implement (such as a network upgrade, installing a backup solution, etc.). Outside of that specific scenario, I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you’ll ultimately end up paying for a pound of “cure” for problems that could have easily been avoided with an “ounce” of prevention.

## **Why Regular Monitoring And Maintenance Is Critical For Today’s Computer Networks**

The fact of the matter is, computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold — not to mention the *type* of data we’re now saving digitally — has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations and who work around the clock to do one thing: compromise your networks for illegal activities.

In most cases their intent is to access financial information and passwords to rob you (or your clients), create fake identities for credit card fraud, etc. In other cases they may want to use your computer network to send illegal spam, host pirated software, spread viruses, etc. And some do it just for the “fun” of being able to make computer systems inoperable. These criminals work around the clock in teams, constantly finding and inventing new ways to get around your antivirus software and firewalls; that’s why you have to remain ever vigilant against their attacks.

Of course, this doesn’t even take into consideration other common “disasters” such as rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (which are the #1 reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there’s regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information such as e-mail addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

## **Should You Just Hire A Full-Time IT Manager?**

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for companies with under 50 employees to hire a full-time IT person, because you can outsource this function of your business far cheaper and with a lot less work; but you DO want to hire a professional to perform basic maintenance just as you

would hire an attorney to handle your legal matters or an accountant to prepare your taxes. **And if you truly understand the cost of your TIME and factor in employee productivity, the managed IT services model is considerably less expensive over time than the “break-fix” model.**

## Why “Break-Fix” Works Entirely In The Consultant’s Favor, *Not Yours*

Under a “break-fix” model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to stabilize your computer network or to resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON’T want.

Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician may have resolved in a fraction of the time. There is no incentive to properly manage the time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and to find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they’re ethical and want to keep you as a client, they *should* be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that’s akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they’ve worked to make sure you aren’t getting overbilled; and since you often have no way of really knowing if they’ve worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

## What To Look For In A Managed IT Services Agreement And What You Should Expect To Pay

**Important!** Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted of over 750 different IT services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget and situation.

**Hourly Break-Fix Fees:** Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between \$100 and \$175 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

If they are quoting a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I would suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what “success” is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, work flow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way in avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.
- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant’s. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for “unforeseen” circumstances. The bottom line is this: it is your IT consulting firm’s responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly.

**Managed IT Services:** Most managed IT services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. In <<City>>, that fee is somewhere in the range of \$X to \$Y per server, \$X to \$Y per desktop and approximately \$Z per smartphone or mobile device.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services contract, here are some things that SHOULD be included (make sure you read your contract to validate this):

- Security patches applied weekly for urgent and emerging threats
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and testing
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a “scam” or unethical UNLESS the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your contract carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware, such as new servers, PCs, laptops, etc.
- Software licensing such as Office 365
- On-site support
- Compliance needs (HIPAA, PCI, ITAR)
- Special/Additional security packages

**Warning! Gray areas of “all-inclusive” service contracts.** In order to truly compare the “cost” of one managed IT services contract to another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN’T included AND the “SLA” or “service level agreement” you are signing up for. It’s VERY easy for one IT services provider to appear far less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you are getting.

The following are 21 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you’re getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time, adequate insurance and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you; then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

## **18 Service Clarification Questions You Should Ask Your IT Services Firm Before Signing A Contract**

### **Customer Service:**

**Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voicemail and wait for someone to call you back?**

**Our Answer:** We answer our phones live from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and have an emergency after-hours service we can provide as part of our services so they may call if a problem arises, even on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can’t get hold of anyone to help them, it’s incredibly frustrating.

**Q2: Do they offer a written, guaranteed response time for emergency service?**

**Our Answer:** We guarantee to have a technician working on any emergency problem within 60 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it’s standard procedure.

**Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across as arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?**

**Our Answer:** Our technicians are trained to have the “heart of a teacher” and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what Dave Perry had to say:

**“AcaciaIT saved my lunch!”**

When my computer locked Kyle from AcaciaIT calmly and patiently went about the many processes to resuscitate it. We nearly lost the patient, but he brought it back to life. Then, once things were operational, he remoted in to make changes in my e-mail preview to keep the bad stuff out. It's been smooth sailing ever since. Thank you, Kyle and Acacia IT.

**Dave Perry**

President / CEO

Greater Oro Valley Chamber of Commerce

**Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?**

**Our Answer:** We conduct “QBR's” quarterly business review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive.

**Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?**

**Our Answer:** We provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.

**Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect YOU?**

**Our Answer:** Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance AND workers' compensation — and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

True Story: A few years ago Geek Squad was slapped with multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing,



copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases, they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line: make sure the company you are hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

## **Maintenance Of Your Network:**

**Q7: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24/7/365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?**

**Our Answer:** Yes; our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

**Q8: Do they provide you with access to their ticketing system so you can checkup on tickets and verify completion of issues?**

**Our Answer:** All clients are invited to access our ticketing system to follow up on tickets, look up old completed tickets, check status or submit new tickets so they can keep track of what is happening with their computers and networks.

**Q9: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with network documentation detailing what software information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the "keys to the kingdom"?**

**Our Answer:** All clients have access to our electronic documentation site at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

**Q10: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?**

**Our Answer:** Yes; our technicians work in teams so they are constantly appraised of our clients current network and computer changes and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client's account, any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off.

## **Backups And Disaster Recovery:**

**Q11: Do they INSIST on monitoring an off-site as well as an on-site backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?**

**Our Answer:** We do not allow our clients to use tape backups because tape backups are incredibly unreliable. We make sure all of our clients have at minimum file level offsite cloud backups. More advanced backup systems are also available that allow us to actually spin up a down server on the backup device (please ask about our levels of backup when considering us)

**Q12: Do they INSIST on doing periodic test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?**

**Our Answer:** Our Datto backup systems do an auto restore of files on a weekly basis, testing different areas of the backup for recovery of files.

**Q13: Do they insist on backing up your network BEFORE performing any type of project or upgrade?**

**Our Answer:** We do, or we verify your current backup, and that's simply as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.

**Q14: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or enable you to work from a remote location?**

**Our Answer:** All clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. We encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.

## **Technical Expertise And Support:**

**Q15: Is their help-desk U.S.-based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?**

**Our Answer:** We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's important to keeping your data secure.

**Q16: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training — or are they learning on your dime?**

**Our Answer:** Our technicians are given an annual stipend for training and certifications to either recertify or get new certifications they are interested in and will help our clients. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent, 99% of the technicians who apply don't make it through. (Guess who's hiring them?)

**Q17: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?**

**Our Answer:** Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

**Q18: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?**



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**Our Answer:** We own the problems with all lines of business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software — but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you. We also ask that you add us as your IT provider on these accounts so that we can speak directly with their tech support when it is needed.

## **A Final Word And Free Network Assessment Offer To Show You Holes In Your Existing Network And Help You Lower Your IT Maintenance Costs**

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your IT support to. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

**If you feel this information has been useful and you would like to evaluate your current network, we would be happy to perform a free network assessment.**

This assessment usually takes about an hour of your time. We will go over your network setup, backups and security to verify your systems security and reliability.

This assessment is completely free of charge and obligation. Just give us a call and setup an appointment.

Looking forward to your call!

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