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THE 2024

MANAGED IT SERVICES BUYER'S GUIDE

Created for you by

THE **FULCRUM** GROUP
One Technology Solution: Yours

THE 2024
MANAGED IT SERVICES BUYER'S GUIDE

CHAPTER 1

The 5 big technology revolutions affecting businesses like yours

Hello, my name is David Johnson and I'm Co-Owner of The Fulcrum Group.

Wow... what a crazy few years it's been for business owners and managers like you and me.

Whether you're doing well today or having to fight for every bit of business you can get, you have definitely seen the dramatic changes in the technology we all rely on.

I believe we're in the middle of a series of massive and interrelated technological revolutions. **There are 5 areas in particular that I see are directly affecting the clients my team and I help:**

Revolution: AI

Go back a couple of years to November 29th 2022 and to most people, AI was a science fiction concept... something that would happen "in the future". Then the next day ChatGPT was released to the public, and the AI explosion started.

AI tools have been in development for many years, but it's only been recently that many people have become aware of them – and have been able to directly access them through their browsers. You've experimented with ChatGPT, Google's Bard, or Microsoft's Copilot, right? Even if you haven't, your business is already benefiting from AI built into the tools you use every day.

It's been such an exciting start to this revolution... and who knows what insane developments are on the way for us. Learn more about AI through Educational Guide about AI.

Revolution: Hybrid working

The Covid Pandemic of 2020 accelerated something that was starting to gain traction: People want the option to work from home or the office. Or from Starbucks.

Technology now makes it so easy to work from anywhere. You just need to be very aware of the security implications, and make sure your people can communicate well and be fully productive wherever they choose to work.
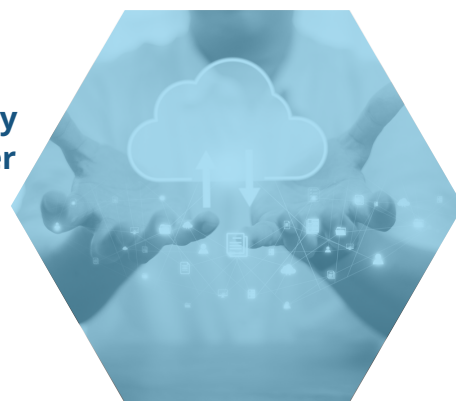
The tools for this are developing at an astonishing rate, and it's always worth reviewing how your business communicates and collaborates.

REMOTE

HYBRID

IN - OFFICE

Revolution: Cloud computing

The idea of being able to work anywhere, any time, on any device, is so easy because of the cloud. Can you remember the bad old days when you couldn't access data unless you were in the office? Unthinkable now. Check out Educational Guide on Cloud Migration Strategy.
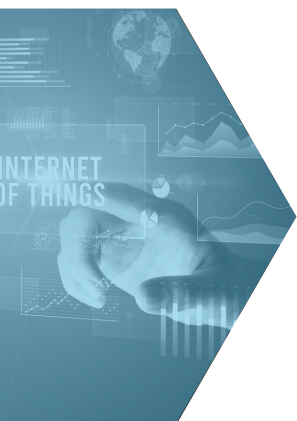
But as the data has been freed, so we must take greater care of it. The cloud liberates us and also puts us at a dramatically increased risk of cybercrime. More on that in a second.

Revolution: Internet of Things

The day your refrigerator was allowed to go online was surely the day you realized eventually EVERYTHING will be online. Experts predict there'll be 30 billion devices online by 2030.

Great for helping us check how many eggs we have left while we're at the store, but there are huge cybersecurity implications too, which affect any business which allows devices to be connected to its network.

Revolution: The greatest security risk ever known

This is the revolution that weaves through all the other revolutions... because any time there is change, it creates an opportunity for cybercriminals. And change is constant right now.

I've never seen as many threats to small businesses like yours as I see today. It's increasing year after year. If you saw everything I saw, you'd be excused for not sleeping well at night.

I'm not exaggerating. Cybercriminals are getting smarter and smarter. They're using automated tools to target all businesses, all the time. It really does only take one person to click one bad link in a phishing email, and you've unwittingly let them in to your entire business. You won't even know they're there until they strike, often weeks later. Read our latest Educational Guide on Protecting Your Business from Cybersecurity Threats.

There is very clear and solid cybersecurity 'best practice' that you should make sure everyone on your team sticks to, and I'm constantly assessing new cybersecurity tools to help keep my clients safe. I'd be happy to talk these through with you.

Things are changing at such a fast pace, it's too easy to feel you are falling behind. Even as technology experts, my team and I have to work hard to stay on top of everything that's happening.

Let me make it easy for you with a simple technology strategy I believe you should focus on: **Defend** and **Invest.**

Defend is about protecting your business from cybercriminals. The amount of cybercrime is constantly increasing, to levels never seen before. It's really scary!

Invest is about making sure technology is powering your business forward, not holding it back.

I suspect that you're reading this guide because you're not 100% happy with your current IT support company and are looking to change.

Of course, I'd like you to switch to us!

I've written this guide to help you understand how a trusted IT support partner behaves, and what great IT support looks like.

I'll explain why we genuinely partner with our clients and refuse to become just another supplier. I'll also explain why it's critical you put your IT strategy and data security at the very core of your long-term business planning.

If you're ready to talk before reading further, turn to to arrange a conversation. And let's see how we can partner to help your business this year.

David Johnson
Vice President
The Fulcrum Group

CHAPTER 2

Why business owners &
managers switch IT partners

I hear from a lot of businesses who are unhappy with their current Managed IT provider.

These are the top 10 reasons people want to make the switch to a new and improved IT support partner:

REASON TO SWITCH 1)
YOU'RE NOT SEEING BUSINESS RESULTS

Return on Investment is everything, especially right now. You need to be able to see at a glance exactly how hard your IT partner is working for you, and what benefit that work is bringing to your business.

An IT support partner should not only provide a detailed IT strategy for the long and short term, they should also give you a set of metrics which you can measure results by.

And these metrics should be relevant and important to your business. Not a standard set issued by the IT support partner, not made difficult to read with jargon. I've heard too many stories of IT companies providing very vague metrics that are impossible to decipher. Stay away!

REASON TO SWITCH 2)
POOR COMMUNICATION

This can cover a whole range of issues... from it taking far too long for them to acknowledge problems... to them not letting you know when updates are taking place... or not getting back to you when they say they will...

If we were talking about any other kind of supplier, these gripes might seem a little petty. But as we know, without working technology, your business can't run as it's supposed to. And these little gripes become huge issues.

Again, this is another way for you to distinguish an IT support provider from an IT support partner.

You need a responsive IT support partner who:

- Acknowledges issues promptly

- Keeps you in the loop with everything that you need to know, and

- Does what they say they'll do when they say they'll do it

Just as your success is their success, your failure is their failure. So the faster an issue can be resolved, the better it is for both parties.

REASON TO SWITCH 3)
THEY DON'T TAKE DATA SECURITY SERIOUSLY

Yes, you read that correctly.

There are some IT support providers – whose job is to keep your data safe and secure – that don't do the same thing within their own business.

They don't make it a priority to keep themselves educated on the latest scams and threats, so they can't keep you up to speed.

And they won't go out of their way to ensure every part of your data is as safe as it can be. Or that your software is 100% up to date all the time.

I know... this scares me too...

Is this really a company you'd want to be responsible for keeping your business safe from the growing number of data breaches?

REASON TO SWITCH 4)
THEY WON'T GO OUTSIDE OF THEIR CONTRACT

"Sorry, we don't cover that."

Ever heard that from your IT support provider? Lots of businesses have, but if the request relates to your technology, it should be a red flag.

"We don't cover that" suggests a real lack of concern for your business, and that's not what a partner is about.

A partner actively spends time looking at new ways to improve your network, your data security and your infrastructure. They won't be working rigidly to a one-size fits all contract.

And that's just the point. One size doesn't fit all, because every business is unique. Even two businesses on the same street, selling the same product or service will have a different way of working. They'll use different software and devices, have different people working with them, and importantly, have different goals.

You need an IT support partner that will take your goals as their own and do as much as they can to help you reach them.

REASON TO SWITCH 5)
THINGS TAKE TOO LONG TO FIX

Understandably, many problems can't always be fixed immediately. Some issues take a while to get to the bottom of, other problems are rare and may take a little more diagnostic work.

But in these situations, good communication is key.

It might take you a while to see a resolution, but if your IT support partner is keeping you updated at each step, you're confident it's in hand.

However, if your support request is still waiting for a response three days later... you've got a problem.

And would you believe that some issues never get fixed at all? Or that one thing gets fixed only to break something else?

This is technology we're talking about. It goes wrong. it doesn't always work the way we want it to.

But you absolutely should not be facing issue after issue, waiting days to have problems resolved. You should not face silence when you need help.

All that waiting means downtime for your business. Where's the value in that?

REASON TO SWITCH 6)
THEY NEVER ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

When you take on an IT support partner, it's vital that both businesses take responsibility for their side of the agreement.

Failing to do so causes a huge lack of trust, and means that the relationship is going nowhere.

I've heard from business owners who have reported an issue to their IT support provider, only to be told that it's their fault that the issue came about!

(despite them following advice and instruction from that same IT support provider)

I've also heard from business owners who have reported issues to their IT support provider, only to be told that they need to contact someone else (such as a software supplier) about the problem.

The idea of an IT support partner is that you trust them to deal with their area of expertise, while you get on with yours. If they're passing the buck when you face a problem, you're not getting the benefit of a support partner at all.

REASON TO SWITCH 7)
THEY CONFUSE YOU WITH TECH TALK

If technology wasn't complicated, everyone would be able to take care of their own business infrastructure without a problem.

However, the truth is quite the opposite. It's full of strange words and concepts, and everything changes every 7 minutes! (it seems that way anyway).

It's a minefield if you don't know what you're doing.

The hallmark of a good IT support partner is that they take this complication and make it look easy. Better still, they "uncomplicate it for you." They explain things to you without sounding like they're speaking a foreign language.

Again, it all comes down your connection as partners. If you can't communicate properly with each other, how fruitful is this relationship really going to be? The likelihood is that it'll leave both sides frustrated, and your business won't be able to make the most of the technology it has.

REASON TO SWITCH 8)
YOU'RE NOT LEARNING

We're not expecting your IT support partner to teach you their job. You don't need to be an expert in IT - that's what you're paying someone to do for you. However, there should be a certain element of learning when you partner with an IT company.

For example, you need to learn about cybersecurity, how to avoid scams and how to protect your data.

If you're told "Let us worry about that", it should ring alarm bells. You can't expect to keep your organization safe from a data breach or data theft if you don't know what you're trying to protect yourself from.

It's also important that your IT support partner explains what they're doing. You really do want to have a basic understanding of how your infrastructure works or is set up for you. This will help you to help yourself when a minor issue occurs.

REASON TO SWITCH 9)
THEY'RE ALWAYS PUSHING NEW HARDWARE

Many of our clients complain that their previous IT support providers spent more time pushing new equipment than they did on the fundamentals.

It's nice to have the very latest technology in your business, but it's certainly not the most vital thing. There are lots of other things to consider before upgrading equipment and devices. Especially today when value and return on investment are critical.

Of course, your business will need a certain level of equipment for you to operate the way you need to, but you probably already have most of the things you need. I find that for most businesses, it's far more important to get the infrastructure right before we even consider your hardware. Additional devices, for example, are sometimes nice to have rather than crucial.

A good IT support partner will help you to create an IT roadmap, which should detail at which points in the years ahead you need to budget for upgrades or additional devices.

REASON TO SWITCH 10)
YOU'VE OUTGROWN THEM

Now, this last one isn't necessarily a bad reason to switch IT support partners. Sometimes, your business simply grows too big for a smaller IT company to deal with.

That's great news for you. The difficult part can be knowing when to make the switch, especially when you're working with a company that you like.

It's worth keeping in mind that if:

- Your support requests aren't being responded to as quickly as you need them to be

- The recommendations on how best to use technology to grow your business have stopped

- Or you need a higher level of support

... it's in your best interest to find a new IT support partner.

If you've noticed you need more support, your IT support partner has probably noticed too. In fact, if they're good partners, they may even discuss this with you first. Trust me when I say there will be no hard feelings; no company wants to be out of its depth with clients.

If you've ever felt any of these gripes, maybe now is the right time for you to make the switch too?

When you place your technology at the heart of your business growth strategy, you see why it's important to have a partner you can trust.

No business is perfect. Inevitably we get some things wrong for our clients some of the time because we're human too.

But because my team and I have partnerships with our clients, we're able to have adult conversations and change course quickly. We don't have to spend unnecessary time repairing relationships, instead we can set the correct expectations and resolve issues quickly.

CHAPTER 3

Why you should be highly skeptical of all IT support companies

You probably don't know what you don't know about IT. Does that make sense?

I think that's a fair assumption for me to make.

And why should you concern yourself with the latest tech news, software, and support updates? You're too busy doing what you do best.

You probably already read your industry magazines, blogs, visit trade shows, go to conferences, and attend training... you're an expert in your field. That's what experts do. You certainly don't have the time to do all of that for your IT as well.

Would you expect your clients to know as much about your area of expertise as you do? Of course not. That's why they hire you, isn't it?

The same goes for us.

We totally absorb ourselves in the highly technical, high speed, rapidly changing world of technology. We genuinely love it and pride ourselves on having a level of expertise that most people don't.

You'd be shocked how many people consider themselves IT experts, simply because they know their way around computers. However, in reality, great IT support companies operate on a completely different level – with better knowledge, tools, and systems.

The biggest problem with IT support is that it's an unregulated industry. There's no governing body that people must pass through to be allowed to call themselves an IT support company, no industry standard that must be met, no guidelines on how the business must operate.

Just about anybody... **literally anybody**... can set themselves up and say they're an IT support company.

This is why I say you should be highly skeptical of all IT support companies.

Without asking the right questions, you don't know if you're putting your trust – and the security of your business data - in the hands of a reputable, honest company... or someone working alone out of a room in his parents' house.

Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with a small support operation. Everyone must start somewhere, and if you're a one-man band with minimal IT requirements, that could be the most cost-effective solution for you.

However, if you own or manage an established, growing business, with staff and more than one computer, you'll need more than one person working from their folks' house can provide.

So how do you avoid choosing the wrong IT support company?

Firstly, look for solidity. You need to check they have the right qualifications, accreditation, and experience. Remember, it's an unregulated industry, so you really need to do the legwork if you want to end up with the best possible IT partner.

Next, ask them some difficult questions.

You don't want to see your potential new IT partner squirm, but you do want to make sure that they are going to deliver what you need. And asking difficult questions is the only way to be sure that you're making the right choice.

ASK THEM: *"How quickly will problems be fixed?"*

Obviously, this one will depend on the scale of the problem, but you need to know time frames based on severity. How long will it take your proposed IT support partner to acknowledge your issue in the first place? How long do they expect it'll take to get someone working on the problem?

Look at different scenarios. If you can't access your software, how long should it take to get you logged in? How long could it take to get your business up and running if you suffer a ransomware attack?

You also need to understand the approach your potential new partner will take. Do they have processes and procedures they stick to when issues arise, or are they winging it? Can they tell you about the worst problem they've encountered and how they dealt with it?

Remember, it's not the problem that you're judging them on, but rather how they responded to it. This can tell you a lot about their professionalism, knowledge, and ability to remain calm in a crisis.

"What do you do proactively to make sure my team have fewer interruptions?"

Downtime is a business killer.

You'll have seen it for yourself at some point, either in your own business or one you were working for. The internet goes down, for example, and people can't access the software they need to do their jobs. The office descends into chaos. Even those who aren't reliant on the internet stop doing what they're doing. The coffee machine goes into overdrive. Everyone forgets about their job for a while and makes the most of an unofficial break.

But then when things are up and running again, people don't immediately get back to business. Conversations are finished, systems are rebooted, everyone needs to regain their focus. And that often takes even more time. So what should have been a 15-minute interruption loses you 90 minutes of work.

And that's if it's a minor problem.

What can your IT support partner do to minimize this downtime?

Will they be working away in the background, making the necessary checks to ensure that most of these little blips don't arise? Can they assure you that most updates and maintenance will be done outside of working hours?

Do they have any other solutions that will mean your business maintains productivity while essential work is taking place?

ASK THEM: *"Tell me about the specific people who'll be taking care of us."*

Though it's an important question, many businesses overlook this side of things when it comes to working with a partner.

It's good to know about the actual people you'll be working with, the people behind the business.

How does your proposed IT support partner assign your account manager or Virtual CIO (vCIO), for example? Do account managers/vCIOs have an area of business expertise? Do personalities jive together? Or do you simply get assigned to the person with the smallest workload?

Will you always be speaking to the same person? What happens if that person is on vacation or ill? Who will be doing your strategic IT reviews and building your technology roadmap? Who do you talk to if you're not happy?

This question is a great way for you to get to know more about the company you're hoping to work with, but it's also a great way for you to figure out if their people are the right match for yours.

ASK THEM: *"Can you explain something deeply technical to me?"*

With this question, I'm not suggesting that you try to learn the ins and outs of building an IT infrastructure from the ground up. Rather, it demonstrates your potential IT support partner's ability to explain things to you in simple, understandable English, not tech-speak.

Can they explain a really complicated, technical process to you in a way that you can understand? Do they get frustrated if you ask too many questions? Do they brush you off with 'you don't need to know the technicalities of that'?

It's vital, if you are partnering with someone, that you can communicate with each other clearly, without any confusion or breakdown.

It also demonstrates their ability to educate you.

ASK THEM: *"How will you keep on top of the constant changes in my business?"*

It's no secret that successful businesses deal with a lot of change. From adding new staff members, to tweaking the product or service you offer, it's likely that your business is forever changing things. It's the way we grow.

In fact, your business probably looks very different now to how it looked just 12 months ago.

So how would your proposed IT support partner cope with that? How much do they need to know about these changes? Will it affect what they're doing for you?

It should. Remember, you're looking for a partner here, not just another supplier. It's part of their role to be able to make recommendations based on how you're working, to suggest better software to use, a smoother network, more appropriate security.

If they can't keep track of how many people are working for you, or the ways you deliver your service, how can they suggest ways to grow, improve – and especially, stay secure?

Look for a new partner that takes an active interest in the changes happening within your business. Perhaps even arrange regular catch-up sessions to ensure they're on top of everything that's going on.

There are lots of other questions that you should be asking, but I feel these are the 5 that will tell you the most about your potential partner.

CHAPTER 4

Don't take our word for it: here's what our clients say

I've spent a long time in this guide educating you how to buy an IT support service. I've covered all the bases, and by now you should really know what you want and need in your own IT support partner.

But it's all very well me, the owner of the business, telling you how an IT support partner can change your business.

It's time you heard from some of my clients about the reality of working with us.

The Fulcrum Group
1670 Keller Pkwy #130, Keller, TX

4.8 ★★★★★ 26 reviews ⓘ

P

Peggy Zilinsky
3 reviews

★★★★★ 2 hours ago **NEW**

The tech support team with the Fulcrum Group are truly amazing. They never disappoint. They are very professional, knowledgeable and courteous. I highly recommend this organization.

← Reply 👍 Like

> **Response from the owner** just now
> Peggy, thank you for the awesome review! Our team of Fulcrumaniacs appreciates it very much!

Daphne Berry
3 reviews

★★★★★ 2 weeks ago **NEW**

The Fulcrum Group is amazing! Not only is their service top notch, but their culture is also second to none. They really put their clients first. Each and every person I work with is respectful, communicative, and knowledgeable. The … More

👍 Like

> **Response from the owner** 2 weeks ago
> Thanks Daphne! Our hard-working Fulcrumaniacs appreciate it!

BJ Williams
Local Guide · 13 reviews · 16 photos

★★★★★ 2 months ago

These guys ROCK! Very professional and extremely friendly. Easy to talk to and don't treat you like your a hassle. Would recommend doing business with!

👍 Like

> **Response from the owner** 10 months ago
> Thanks, BJ! Our Fulcrumaniacs appreciate the kind words!

CHAPTER 5

What to do next

I hope you've found this guide useful, and it's covered many of the questions you've had about choosing a new IT support partner.

Perhaps it's made you look at your IT support in a different way?

Good news – we're currently taking on new clients again. That's why I wrote this guide.

I'd really love to talk to you about your business.

If you're serious about working with a new IT support partner to improve your business and contribute to long-term growth, this is your next step:

Book a complimentary 30 minute virtual meeting to discuss getting better IT results.   Meet with David Johnson

You'll see my live calendar on that page.

You and I can check that our businesses are a good fit, and arrange a longer video call, or physical meeting (whichever is most appropriate).

Of course there's no obligation to buy anything, ever.

I'm looking forward to speaking to you, and learning about your business.

David Johnson
Vice President
The Fulcrum Group

THIS IS HOW YOU CAN GET IN TOUCH WITH US:

🌐 **www.fulcrum.pro**

in **www.linkedin.com/company/795291**

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One Technology Solution: Yours

Get in touch with us:
CALL: 817.337.0300 | **EMAIL** sales@fulcrumgroup.net