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Guide to Comparing Service Proposals

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Introduction

Over the last few years it has become apparent that when reviewing proposals from different IT providers, a company can have difficulties in assessing whether the services offered are actually the same.



This document is designed to provide guidance to customers on some of the most often quoted areas of confusion and to help clarify the some of the key differences between service offerings.

By using this guide customers can ensure that services on offer will meet their business needs and requirements.

Topic	Explanation	Advice
Hardware Break / Fix Services		
Hardware Break / Fix Services	<p>In the past many hardware break / fix contracts were based on response only; meaning how many hours from logging a call is it before an engineer arrives and starts working.</p> <p>Now the standard service is based on a fix time; meaning how long after reporting a failure will it be fixed. Dependant upon the critically of the equipment the normal levels are 4 hour fix or 8 hour fix</p>	<p>Check that the quote is for 4 or 8 hour fixes i.e. problem resolution not 4 or 8 hour response.</p> <p>Ensure the provider can support your equipment ask for evidence of their success at delivering break / fix services.</p> <p>Does the charge cover all parts and all labour and if not what are the additional charges.</p>
Break / Fix contract versus Manufacturer warranty	<p>Manufacturers generally provide a warranty on their products.</p> <p>Typically the service level for delivering warranty service does not guarantee a response or fix within the stated target service levels.</p> <p>Warranty service is provided during normal business hours, excluding local holidays, and is based on commercially reasonable efforts by the vendor or a selected Service Provider.</p>	<p>In real terms customers must assess the importance of their systems, if they can afford to be down for 1-3 days then the warranty maybe sufficient; otherwise entry into a break / fix contract with clear fix commitments.</p>





Topic	Explanation	Advice
Helpdesk Support		
Technical Capability & Resources	<p>Helpdesks services vary dramatically, in the worst cases they don't have dedicated staff and the helpdesk is just anyone who happens to answer the phone.</p> <p>Others provide a non-technical simple call logging service, which means delays getting to talk to someone who can actually help.</p> <p>The quality of the Helpdesk will make a huge difference to how good the service actually is.</p>	<p>Ensure that the Helpdesk staff are dedicated technical staff. If unsure, ask to visit the helpdesk during normal working hours, and that there is a single point of contact.</p> <p>Check what qualifications they have.</p> <p>Ask for evidence on the last three months Helpdesk performance statistics; average call queuing / answering times, first time fix rates, % fixed by the helpdesk, performance against SLA, escalation process</p>
Hours of Service	Many Helpdesk operate Monday – Friday 09:00 to 17:00. Is this good enough for your company?	Question normal or standard working hours and what the options, and costs, are for extended hours of cover
Onsite Support		
Send an engineer or fix remotely?	Different companies deliver support services in different ways. Some are still very "field based" and send engineers to investigate and resolve problems rather than remotely fix them. Remote fixing can mean much improved resolution times, as there is no travel time.	Ask for evidence of the percentage of problems that are fixed remotely, check average response and fix times, check capability, qualification and skills of the engineers responsible for this service
Onsite Call Costs	Some contracts are all inclusive others involve unlimited onsite attendance and travel charges	Make sure that the selected contract level is clearly understood and doesn't involve additional hidden charges





Topic	Explanation	Advice
Remote Managed Services		
Smart Technology	<p>Many service organisations claim to provide remote monitoring and alerting services.</p> <p>These services vary from an individual logging in once a week to "have a look" through to very sophisticated systems management and monitoring tools.</p>	<p>Ask for a demonstration of how the service is delivered and establish if the service offered will actually deliver the necessary level of support.</p> <p>Is the service monitoring 24 x 7 and how quickly will issues be actioned.</p>
Monitoring frequencies	Any service that does not operate in real time may leave systems in a failed state until the next time it's checked	Clearly understand how are problems identified, how long after a failure will the problem be identified, recognise how that could that impact your business operations
What can be covered	Does the service just cover server hardware or anything that responds to a "ping" or is it more comprehensive? It is possible to monitor virtually all the systems within the infrastructure not only to ensure that they are operating but also to pre-empt failures	<p>Get a clear understanding of what the service provides and what systems can be covered.</p> <p>Identify which of your systems are business critical and how the service on offer will fully protect those systems.</p>
Downtime avoidance	A good monitoring tool and associated proactive reporting service will enable customers to avoid system failures and associated downtime.	Understand the importance to the business of high system availability and whether the service on offer will actually reduce systems downtime.
Pro-activeness	One of the advantages of the best remote managed service offerings is that a team of IT professionals are constantly assessing your systems and providing expert feedback based on proven experience	<p>What feedback and advice do you receive as part of the service?</p> <p>How qualified / experienced are the service analysts?</p>

Availability monitoring

Performance and predictive failure monitoring

Scheduled onsite engineering time for proactive maintenance, add/move/change, user education (I-Care +)

Proactive remote maintenance

Predictable IT spending patterns

Flexible and tailored levels of service



Topic	Explanation	Advice
Remote Managed Services		
Reporting and trending	Understanding and receiving feedback on the service is vital to accessing how well the service is operating.	<p>Make sure you understand what reports are included as standard, which are available at additional costs and how often and how relevant the contents are to your business</p> <p>Do they show trends over several months and include details of investigations into likely underlying causes of persistent problems?</p>
Contract Performance		
SLA	Establishing and agreeing the service is essential to ensure that both parties have a clear understanding of the service. This should be documented in a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA)	<p>Is the SLA clear and comprehensive?</p> <p>Does it meet the business needs?</p>
Flexibility	Business needs change so it's important that any service can be adjusted to meet these changes.	Check how flexible the service can be and what's involved in making changes to the cover provided.
Customer satisfaction measurement	At the end of the day it is very important that the customer is satisfied with the service provided	Establish what processes are in place to measure and ensure customer satisfaction and understand the escalation and complaint procedure
Service Management	The technical capability is obviously very important but without good service management and procedures the service is likely to fail	Does the organisation work to established quality standard (ISO9001) and industry best practices (ITIL).

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**For further information on Deverill
Ltd or any product or service
please contact us at:-**

**Deverill Ltd
Phoenix House
Marshes End
Upton Road
Poole
Dorset
BH17 7AG**



01202 785000



marketing@deverill.co.uk



www.deverill.co.uk