

The 2021 / 2022

IT Services Buyer's Guide



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WHERE TO START
TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

The 2021 / 2022 IT Services Buyer's Guide

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A microscopic view of several viruses, likely coronaviruses, against a teal background. The viruses are spherical with a textured surface and numerous spike-like protrusions. One virus is in sharp focus in the foreground, while others are blurred in the background. A yellow chevron points to the right, positioned to the right of the chapter title.

CHAPTER 1

HOW EVERYTHING HAS
CHANGED FOREVER IN 2021

Last year, everything changed for everyone the world over.

Much of our contact with friends, family, and colleagues has become virtual. Masks became commonplace, and we developed a sense of germaphobia that we didn't imagine possible.

Toilet paper and hand sanitizer became the most desired products, and it was like gold dust for a while - as was toilet paper, but let's not get into that now.

Not only did our personal lives change, but businesses had to adapt to an entirely new way of working as well. And fast.

Because Covid-19 meant that people were essentially confined to their homes for the best part of the year, employees were packed off to their home offices if they were lucky, or dining tables if they weren't. So our homes became workspaces and our schools. And for many of us, the change to remote working has become permanent.

It's safe to say that the world of business changed in a big way. And it's unlikely ever to go back to how it was before if anyone can even remember how it was before.

That's no bad thing. However, it's becoming clear that Covid sped up a process that's been happening for years anyway.

As IT support experts, we've been telling our clients for years to get set up so that anybody can work on any device, anywhere. Fortunately, the majority of our clients had that infrastructure in place before March 2020. However, the move to working from home made many realize what a simple shift it was for their business systems to adapt around remote working.

I genuinely believe that we've seen between 5 and 10 years' worth of business technology change since Covid hit. And this will undoubtedly continue throughout 2021 and beyond.

There's been plenty of other change all around us.

Last year online shopping surged (no wonder Jeff Bezos is so happy right now) while bricks & mortar retail declined. There's been a considerable reduction in hospitality, too, mainly because we can't have the same lifestyles that we did before March 2020.

Sadly, countless well-known brands have already suffered the effects and have gone under or are at risk of doing so this year.

Our government has spent trillions on support and looking after businesses. But, unfortunately, this help can't continue forever, which will inevitably see redundancies and more business loss.

Combined, it seems as though we are heading for a Great Recession. Of course, for you as a business owner, this isn't necessarily something you need to be scared of. Recessions bring opportunities for many as well as threats for some. But we should all certainly be aware of what's on the horizon.

This year, your business will need to get value for money from absolutely everything it does. And one of the first, most vital areas to consider is your IT infrastructure, and importantly, your IT support partner.

The first lockdown last year showed many businesses that their IT support partners were not partners at all.

When it came to the crunch, these IT support companies were just another supplier with no real commitment to their clients. As a result, we've heard from companies whose IT support just disappeared in March and subsequent lockdowns afterward.

Just when they needed IT support and expertise the most... BANG... into thin air they went. They were too busy or too unprepared for such an event.

And getting a business full of people set up to work from home is no mean feat, especially without the know-how. There is so much to consider, with security being of vital importance. Businesses have been left exposed with huge data security holes because of the rushed setup.

Unfortunately, one thing that's been learned the hard way was the importance of good IT for a business. Because we've all seen or heard exactly how bad IT can disrupt – or even finish – a business.

With devices are getting smarter and smarter and software's becoming more intelligent. We only need to look at how we use our phones today compared to five years ago to see how things have changed.

Yes, data is becoming more transient, and it's easier to access it on just about any device, from wherever you are. While this has endless positives, it also means that data security is increasingly more critical.

Over the past few years, we've witnessed an enormous rise in something called ransomware. I'll explain what this is in more detail later in the guide. But for now, know that you want to avoid it.

As everything I've talked about here evolves, our businesses and business functions become increasingly reliant on good IT. And great IT support.

I suspect 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 that 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, jump to chapter 11 to arrange a conversation.

And let's see how we can partner to help your business this year.

CHAPTER 2

YOU'VE GOT A BUSINESS PLAN. BUT
DO YOU HAVE AN IT STRATEGY?



When did you last update your companies IT strategy?

Hopefully, it's something you've made changes to over the past 12 months to consider the impact of Covid.

If you don't have an IT strategy or haven't given it much thought over the last year, now is definitely the time to get on with it.

If you use any technology in your business, whether that's something as simple as a cash register or a full-blown network for 5 locations, a proper IT strategy will be your best friend. It's the foundation to growing your business. It can mean the difference between surviving a time of uncertainty and thriving through it.

OK, there's a big chance I'm biased! But I cannot stress enough how vital a well-thought-out IT strategy is for any successful business.

Your IT strategy should work alongside your business plan, detailing the ways your technology will accelerate progress towards your goals and objectives. It should consider both long and short-term targets and leave room for change where necessary (if nothing else, 2020 has taught us just how quickly we might need to adapt).

And while it's called an IT strategy, it's not actually about your technology. Sure, you'll have plans for the technology and devices you use and those you aspire to use in the future. But, in reality, the strategy is about your business and how your technology can help you achieve all the things you'd like to, in the easiest way possible.

A great starting point is to take a look at your current IT infrastructure. What works well, and what would you like to improve? Then, as your business grows, will your technology grow with you, or will you need to look at new software, networks, and even phone systems?

Speak to the people working in your business. What do they think works well, and what would they change if they could? Are there parts of your infrastructure that hinder what you're doing? For example, could you save time if you switched over to different software, or if one app could communicate with another one?

When you're working with an IT support partner, they will be able to help you identify the proper hardware and software. They will make recommendations based on the way you work and the ways you want to work. They should even be able to spot potential issues that you hadn't noticed and suggest a more straightforward way of doing things.

A technology roadmap as part of your strategy will help you budget better and know what will be new and when. It'll stop those surprise costs and random invoices you didn't budget for.

It can seem a little complicated to do this yourself. But if you're working with an IT support partner, this is something they should be getting involved in too.

Now, more than ever, every spend needs to be justified. Every investment needs to work hard for your business. You want value for money from everything you do.

Create a range of metrics to help you track how well your infrastructure is working for you. Of course, it's nice that your team likes the way a particular system works. But if you're not getting a return on your investment, then it's not working as well as you might think.

Your IT support partner should also get involved with regular strategic reviews. It's up to you how often you do these, but I would recommend that at least every six months, you should look at what's going well and what's taking longer than you'd like it to. A few adjustments may be all it needs to get you back on track towards hitting your goals.

And this is why I keep talking about an IT support partner. Not an IT support company. Not an IT support provider. A true partner.

Imagine an office building. It has a cleaner who comes in every evening and cleans up the mess that people make. That's how lots of IT support companies work. But, first, every day, clean up the mess.

We prefer to work as a facilities manager. You see, a facilities manager is constantly thinking and planning. First, they schedule what maintenance the building needs. Then, they look at what they can proactively do to stop the building from falling into any level of disrepair.

Yes, there's still an element of managing the cleaners and ensuring they've done their job. But they're proactive enough to stop most of the problems happening in the first place.

That's what an IT support partner does. We take a proactive approach. We do as much as we can in the background to stop things from going wrong in the first place.

Of course, things will still go wrong. Unfortunately, that's inevitable when it comes to fast-moving technology and data. But that's when the clean-up work happens, and things get fixed. That proactive work means that we need to clean up a lot less than an IT support company that doesn't work proactively.

What we like to do for our clients is to create ongoing fluid technology roadmaps. It means that both you and I know:

- Precisely what will be happening over the next 2 to 3 years
- Exactly what technological investments do you need to make
- And there are no surprises. It's all planned and regular strategic reviews

help us all to move in the right direction

Our roadmap also allows us to see what can be delayed (if there's a problem), what investments are critical, and similarly, if you're ahead of things financially, what can be moved forward.

In large part, it's our partnership that allows this in-depth planning to take place. We get to know your business as if it's our own. We're constantly working with you on your business and learning more about you and your team.

This commitment makes it so easy for us to help you because we know (just as well as you do) where the business is going.

CHAPTER 3

WHY BUSINESS OWNERS &
MANAGERS SWITCH IT PARTNERS



You probably won't be surprised to learn that many businesses unhappy with their current IT support provider last year.

And that's putting it politely!

Some of these businesses were seething, and I don't blame them.

They'd put a considerable amount of trust in their provider. They were made promises of better devices, more suitable software, a smoother working network. And it wasn't delivered.

Then, just when these businesses needed IT to support the most when the country was being locked down in March last year... there was radio silence.

Their support vanished maybe because the IT support company wasn't large enough to transition all of their clients to home working simultaneously. Or because they weren't prepared to do it at the speed that was required.

These IT support providers worked reactively, extinguishing fires when they started (and unfortunately, some started themselves). So this meant they didn't have anything in place for the strategy of "anyone can work anywhere, on any device," which left huge security holes many are facing just now.

Businesses were left on their own and did what they could with "Shadow IT."

But it's not only the pandemic that's caused businesses to become frustrated with their IT support provider. We have been taking calls from people wanting to switch IT support since we started our business over 20 years ago. But, as with many other things, the pandemic made this need to change more urgent.

What are the **top 10 reasons** that people want to make the switch to a new and improved IT support partner?



REASON TO SWITCH #1

YOU'RE NOT SEEING THE PROMISED BUSINESS RESULTS

Return on investment is everything. Especially right now. It would be best if you saw exactly how hard your IT partner is working for you at a glance. 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 by which you can measure results by.

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



REASON TO SWITCH #2

POOR COMMUNICATION

Yes, this covers 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, the business can't run as it's supposed to. And these minor gripes become huge issues.

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

It would be best if you had a responsive IT support partner who:

- Acknowledges issues in good time
- Keeps you in the loop with everything that you need to know
- 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 YOUR DATA SECURITY SERIOUSLY

Yes, you read that correctly.

Some IT support providers – whose job it is to keep your data safe and secure – 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. They can't or won't keep you up to speed.

And they won't go out of their way to ensure every last 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 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 BEYOND THEIR CONTRACT

How many times have you heard, "Sorry, we don't cover that."

Ever heard that from your IT support provider? Lots of businesses have. But so long as 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, data security, and infrastructure. As a result, 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 companies on the same street selling the same product or service will have a different way of operating. They'll use different software and devices, have other people working with them, and importantly, have different goals.

It would help if you had an IT support partner who will take your goals as their own and do as much as possible to help you reach them.



REASON TO SWITCH #5

THINGS TAKE TOO LONG TO FIX

Understandably, some problems can't 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 vital.

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

Whereas if your support request is still awaiting 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 the technology we're talking about. Of course, it can go wrong, and it doesn't always work the way we want it to. But you absolutely should not be facing issue after issue and waiting days to have problems resolved. It would be best if you did not meet with silence when you need help.

All that waiting means downtime for your business. So, where's the value for money in that?



REASON TO SWITCH #6

THEY NEVER ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY & OWNERSHIP

When you take on an IT support partner, both businesses must take responsibility for their side of the agreement.

Failing to do so causes a considerable 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 problem arose! (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 TALK DOWN TO YOU AND CONFUSE YOU WITH TECH TALK

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

However, the truth is quite the opposite (and becoming more interdependent on many other items). It's full of strange words and concepts, and everything changes every 7 minutes! (yes, some things seem that way, but in reality, it changes very quickly).

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 make it sound easy. They explain things to you without sounding like they're speaking a foreign language.

Again, it all comes down to your connection as partners. If you can't communicate properly with each other, how fruitful will this relationship be? The likelihood is that it will 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

Ok, so we're not expecting your IT support partner to teach you their job. And, you don't need to be an expert in IT - that is why you're paying someone to do for you. However, there should be a certain element of learning and sharing when you partner with an IT company.

For example, you need to learn the deep and dark secrets of cyber-security, avoid scams, and how to protect your data.

If you have been told, "Let us worry about that," it should ring alarm bells (it is your data, after all). 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 essential that your IT support partner explains what they're doing. You really do

need to have a basic understanding of how your infrastructure works or is set up for you. And, yes, this will help you to help yourself when an issue does occur.



REASON TO SWITCH #9

THEY'RE ALWAYS PUSHING NEW HARDWARE or SOFTWARE

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 latest technology in your business, but it's certainly not vital, and you should focus on the basics first. Before upgrading equipment and devices, there are many things to consider, especially in today's business environment when the value for money 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 it's far more critical for most businesses 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 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 wrong reason to switch IT support partners. But, sometimes, your business grows too big for a smaller IT company to deal with.

That's great news for you. The tricky 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
- Or... the recommendations on how best to use technology to grow your business have stopped or do not apply to your business.
- Or... you need a higher level of support than you are getting.

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

If you've noticed you need additional support, your IT support partner has probably noticed too. If they're good business 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, perhaps 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 will quickly see why it's essential 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 we have partnerships with our clients, we can have adult conversations and change course quickly. As a result, we don't have to spend unnecessary time repairing relationships; instead, we can set the correct expectations and resolve issues quickly.

CHAPTER 4

PROTECT THE MOST IMPORTANT
THING IN YOUR BUSINESS



As we've seen over the past few years, being able to work anywhere, any time, on any device is essential.

We've been shifting to this way of working over the last 10-years, but 2020 went faster than anyone expected.

Today, this is how many of us are working and how it will be in the future, regardless if it's a pandemic or not. Working flexibly like this means that businesses can reduce their costs; attract the best candidates for jobs, and have a happier workforce too.

But as our devices get more intelligent and more powerful, they're also becoming more disposable. As you'll know, you can do most things on your smartphone now. And how often do we lose or break them?

The thing is, because everything is stored safely in the cloud (yes, that vast server where you store your data, in multiple locations around the globe), if you lose your phone, it's no big deal. First, you get a new one and restore your files from your backup. Then, just like magic, you have a new device that contains all the data your old one had.

A lost phone is now merely a minor inconvenience and a small financial cost. And it's not just phones; this applies to almost everything. For example, your tablet and laptop work the same way, although with additional risk.

This flexibility is fantastic. However, it also has its risks. Number one is that any time you take your device away from the office, you're potentially opening up your data to anybody. The sad and scary truth is that there are countless gangs of cyber-criminals who are trying very, very hard to access your data. And even take it away from you.

You've probably heard about malware before. Malware, or malicious software, is code placed on a device or network to infect, steal, or corrupt your data. Essentially, a criminal can create malware to do precisely what they want once it's within your network. It's a pain because once it's there, it can take you a while to notice what's

happened. And it can be tricky to remove.

But there's something scarier: Ransomware. This is the fastest-growing cybercrime right now. And if you're not taking all the proper precautions, you will likely fall victim to this devastating form of cyber-attack at some point.

As the name suggests, ransomware is a kind of malicious software that encrypts your data so you can't access it. The hackers then literally hold you to ransom to regain access – you must pay a fee.

For example, they might ask for \$75,000 - in Bitcoin, of course - within 3-days. If you fail to pay, this fee doubles. So if a week goes by, you can kiss your data goodbye forever.

Ransomware is terrifying. Trust me when I say that you want to avoid this at all costs.

And while absolutely anyone can become a victim of ransomware, it's usually small and medium-sized businesses targeted. Cyber-criminals know this is a group that typically doesn't spend excessive time or money on cyber-security.

I don't want to bore (or scare) you with statistics, but it's worth you knowing it is estimated that 48% of businesses were attacked with ransomware in 2019. And while there are no figures yet, it's a safe bet to assume that figure rose dramatically in 2020.

The most common way for ransomware to get on your device or network is by someone clicking a link in a suspicious email. And before your jaw drops that someone - especially someone in your own business - would be naive enough to click a link in a scam email, you need to know these emails are sophisticated nowadays.

Yes, these emails will look like dead ringers for genuine emails from someone you know or expect mail from the IRS, your bank, even a department within your own company. And they not only look like the real deal, but the email address may be a very close copy too.

These emails work because they ask you to do something relatively simple; click to update your details, for example. However, even looking with a critical eye, it can be hard to spot something wrong.

Once that ransomware has been installed, there's not always an immediate attack. In most cases, it takes between 60 to 100 days for anything to happen. Sometimes even longer. That's for many reasons.

Firstly, the longer the criminal is lurking within your network, the harder it is for you to detect them. Usually, hackers enter through one device that's connected to the network. Then, slowly they investigate, as to not raise any suspicions, your network for additional weaknesses. Better for them to have control over as many devices as they can. They can also make it virtually impossible to kick them out once the attack has started.

This is what makes ransomware so difficult to deal with. And it's why prevention is always better than cure.

You need to be aware of the signs of a hacker in your network. Both you and your IT support partner should look out for them:

- Unexpected new administrators appearing on your network
- Software being disabled
- New software being downloaded
- Remote access sessions lasting for days at a time

Of course, there are many technical things to look for; but that will give you a good start.

A good IT support partner will always recommend that everyone in your business has regular cyber-security training. After all, your people are your first line of defense from cyber-attack. Software alone won't offer a good level of protection. You need software and humans.

Understand this, though: You can never be 100% protected from malware, ransomware, and other forms of attack. That's impossible because it's a non-stop game where the criminals constantly invent something new, and the data security world has to catch up.

It can be 99.99% protected, but you may be surprised to learn that we don't always agree with going that far.

You see, when you lock down **everything** to make your data security watertight, what you can inadvertently do is frustrate and annoy your staff. They'll have lots of extra layers of protection to go through, more steps in an already busy workload, and more to remember.

And what that means in the real world is that they'll skip steps and look for ways to bypass security, which puts your business greater at risk.

Think of it as a door to an office. If you have seven big locks and use a biometric scan to open them, eventually, people will get frustrated and just prop the door open!

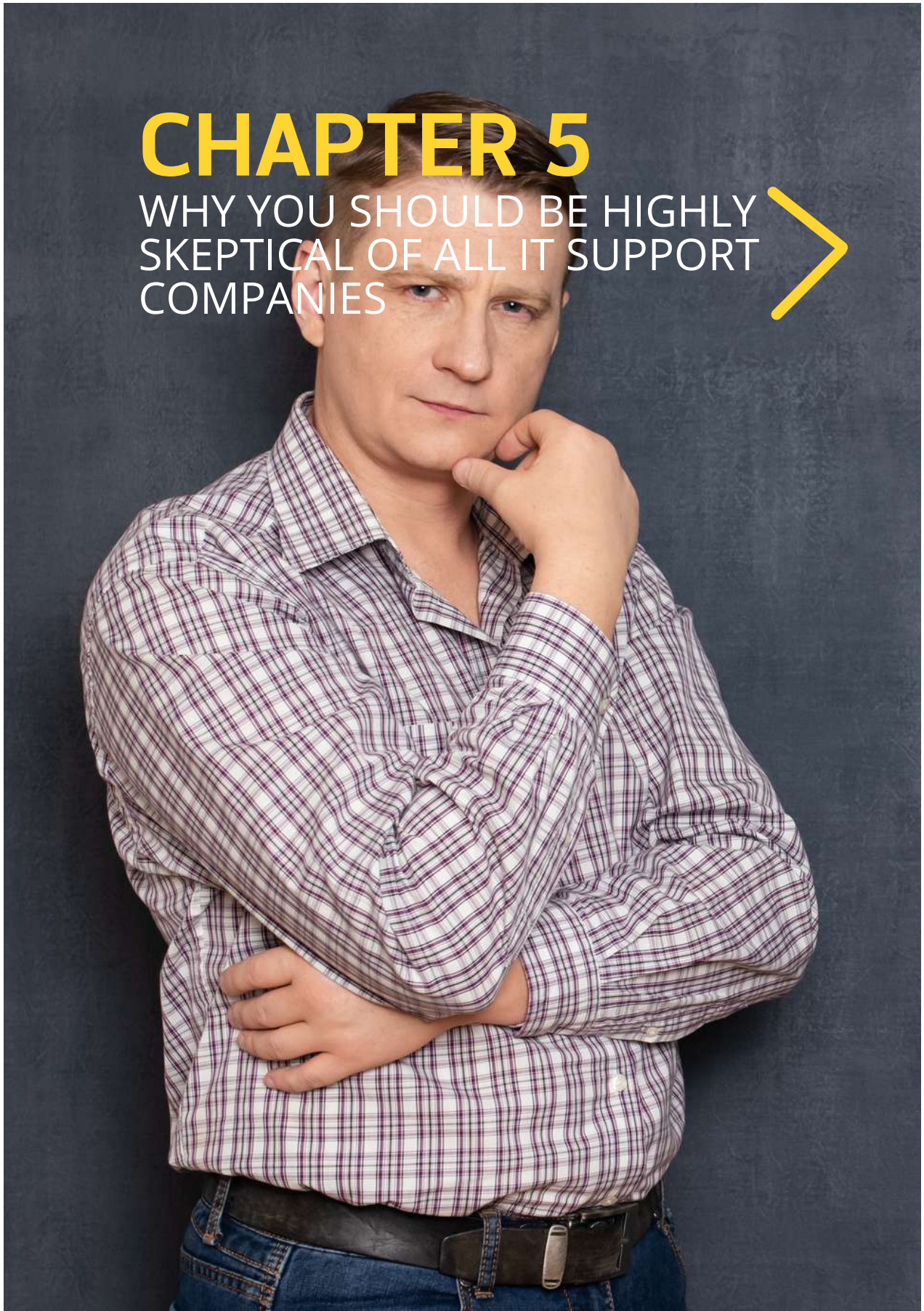
To remove the frustration and hassle, we use what we call "blended security."

Where we pull together several products and services, which work together to protect you, it means fewer codes and passwords for your staff and an increased level of security for your data.

And the most significant part is that every blend will be different, depending on the business it's for. That way, we can customize security perfectly for each client, based on their specific requirements and how they want to use it.

CHAPTER 5

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.

But, you certainly don't have the time to do all of that for your technology too.

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 have absorbed ourselves in the highly technical, high-speed, rapidly changing world of technology. Yet, 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, great IT support companies operate on a completely different level with better knowledge, tools, and systems.

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

Just about anybody... literally, I mean 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 bedroom in his parents' house. A bedroom warrior, as I like to call those guys.

Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with bedroom warriors. However, everyone has to start somewhere, and if you're a one-person 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 bedroom can provide. Remember what I said about IT support companies leaving their clients in the lurch when we were thrown into lockdown...

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

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

Next, you ask them some difficult questions.

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

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

This one will depend on the scale of the problem, but you need to know timeframes based on severity. For example, 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.

ASK: "What do you do proactively to make sure my team has 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. For example, the internet goes down, 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 proposed IT support partner do to minimize this downtime?

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

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

ASK: "Tell me about the specific people who'll be looking after us."

Though it's a fundamental question, many businesses overlook this side of things when 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, for example?

Do account managers have an area of sector expertise? Do they match you on how your personalities may work together? Or do you get assigned to the person with the least workload?

Will you always be speaking to the same person? What happens if that person is on holiday 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 an excellent way for you to know more about the company you're hoping to work with. But it's also a perfect way for you to figure out if their people are the right match for yours.

ASK: *"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. Instead, it demonstrates your potential IT support partner's ability to explain things to you in English, not tech-speak.

Can they explain a 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'?

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

It also demonstrates their ability to educate you.

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

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

Realistically, your business probably looks very different now compared to how it looked 12 months ago (even without the pandemic-related changes).

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. Let's remind ourselves that 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. For example, 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 how 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 five that will tell you the most about your potential partner.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT EVERY IT SUPPORT COMPANY
WISHES YOU KNEW ABOUT THE TASK
OF DELIVERING IT SUPPORT



*What I would like to talk about are a few basic concepts:
If every client knew them – it would make our lives a lot easier.*

Before you glaze over and flip past this chapter, I'll add my disclaimer here:

**I am not about to bore you with technical jargon
or gobbledygook - just items to think about.**



#1: YOUR NETWORK NEEDS CONSTANT MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE; IT IS NOT A ONE-TIME JOB & YOUR DONE

**Computers and a multitude of other devices ask you to update them all the time.
And that's because things are constantly changing.**

The same applies to your network and infrastructure. Software is constantly changing; operating systems are being tweaked, and hardware deteriorates. It never ends; therefore, the trick is all about how it is managed.

It's virtually unheard of in professional IT circles of an IT setup that isn't constantly monitored and maintained. So if you're not offered 24/7 monitoring and maintenance as part of your IT contract, run your fastest mile and get as far away as possible. I promise you will start seeing issues before the ink on the contract is dry.

Most professional IT support companies do this all in the background, and you simply never hear about it or see it in action. However, a great IT support partner will spend a great deal of time monitoring what's going on within your system and fixing issues before you even realize you have a problem. At Where To Start, we call this "Proactive Problem Prevention," which is at the core of our services.

When correctly done, you'll never notice it is going on. And really, that's precisely what you want; monitoring and maintenance you don't even see; you will reap all of the benefits, however.



#2: THE SUPPORT TRIANGLE IS LIKE THE HARDWARE TRIANGLE

This is an exciting concept to learn about when buying hardware.

Picture a triangle with three equal sides. The sides of the triangle represent quality, price, and performance.

If you make one side longer, then all the sides will lengthen to keep the triangle equal. So, for example, if you need a faster computer, typically the quality and price will also need to increase.

IT support has an identical triangle with the same three sides: Quality, price, and performance.

If you buy cheap IT support, it'll probably be slow and lower quality. And vice versa.

Ideally, you'll look at what you can realistically afford to spend on IT support and make that the top of your budget. That's because you understand that IT support is an investment into your business. Get your IT setup and your business IT strategy right, and it makes hitting business goals so much easier.

I believe in the concept of *"With a properly running IT department, the company will follow."*



#3: BEWARE OF THE BEDROOM WARRIORS

Let's go back to them for a moment.

Picture a guy sitting in his bedroom, carrying out your IT support service. But, of course, they haven't got the overhead we have, so their service will be a lot cheaper, right.

But remember the triangle – their speed will be slow, and they won't have access to the professional IT tools as we do because they can be expensive. Still, at the same time, they save an incredible amount of time when troubleshooting because we are also monitoring, managing, and automating via them too.

If you choose a bedroom warrior, doing everything themselves, to provide your IT support – that's fine. However, providing you are their only client. Realistically, one person should carry out the IT support, maintenance, and monitoring required by a business like yours if you were their only client.

But what happens when he gets another client?

And another? And then realizes that he needs even more clients to make a decent living? It becomes a never-ending cycle.

The quality of the service you receive will fall. As does the speed at which they react to your problems. They will also stop doing the proactive work because one person cannot service many clients properly.

Yes, you will pay more for a business with an office, processes, and all the tools & automation to keep everything running. But you also know that they're set up to keep the service levels high, no matter how many clients they take on.



#4: WE STRIVE TO BUILD A LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP TO PROTECT YOU MORE THAN US

We don't want to work with organizations on a short-term basis.

We refuse to do ad-hoc work and one-off crisis management that is not healthy for both parties.

We wish to work with businesses as part of a long-term partnership where both parties benefit from it.

Why?

Well, it's good for us to build our own business around long-term clients. It's a great business model if we're honest.

But the real benefit of long-term partnerships for us comes from the investment we're able to make in our clients. So that we know you inside out, it means we can:

- Work more closely with you.
- Learn about your priorities and take an active part in getting you towards your goals
- Customize your infrastructure and IT strategy around where you're heading rather than where you currently are
- Build an infrastructure that grows with your business
- Keep you better protected because we can take an honest and strategic approach when working as part of a trusting partnership.

When you work with someone on a short-term basis, it's impossible to do this.

A long-term partnership means we'll be as invested as you will be. Because we genuinely care about your business. If you're doing well, we are too.



#5: OUTSOURCED IS A BETTER VALUE FOR THE MONEY. AND IT HELPS YOU HAVE ACCESS TO DIFFERENT SET OF EXPERTISE THAN YOUR IN-HOUSE STAFF

As you're reviewing your IT support requirements, it's probably crossed your mind that you could hire an in-house employee (or add the tasks onto an existing staff person).

There's a big downside to be aware of. When you have an in-house person, you're asking them to do several different specialized jobs, support many people simultaneously, and possibly do their "normal," all at the same time.

Someone that can do that without having some breakdown would be hard to find! But, indeed, they'd soon learn to cut corners to get home on time each day.

When you outsource this work, you might pay a little more than an in-house person (but not when compared to their fully loaded burdened cost to outsourced IT resources). But in reality, you're gaining access to multiple resources with a broad range of skills and specialties. And they don't go home until the work is done.



CHAPTER 7

HOW TO HELP YOUR INTERNAL
IT PEOPLE, IF YOU HAVE THEM

*This chapter is
OPTIONAL if you do
not have an
Internal IT Staff.*

Sometimes, the businesses we work with have internal IT people. And a senior member of staff who takes on responsibility for IT, without actually having a background in IT.

If that's you, then you should be scared, terrified, in fact.

Not because you don't have the skillset. But because the IT goes badly wrong – I'm talking ransomware attacks or similar, large-scale problems.

Luckily, there is a solution to protect both you and the business. It's called co-managed IT support.

You retain your in-house IT people. And we help them with whatever support they need, at whatever level.

The best way to describe we help to imagine a ring donut with your internal IT person in the middle. Yes, it's a giant donut!

They benefit from support all around:

- At the bottom: Help to handle the low-level stuff that's important but can be overwhelming. Such as being the help desk for your staff; monitoring the network; rolling out updates
- At the sides: Support at their skill level to help them cope with the workload, and have direct access to an experienced IT team to bounce ideas off.
- From above: High-level strategic advice and long-term planning.

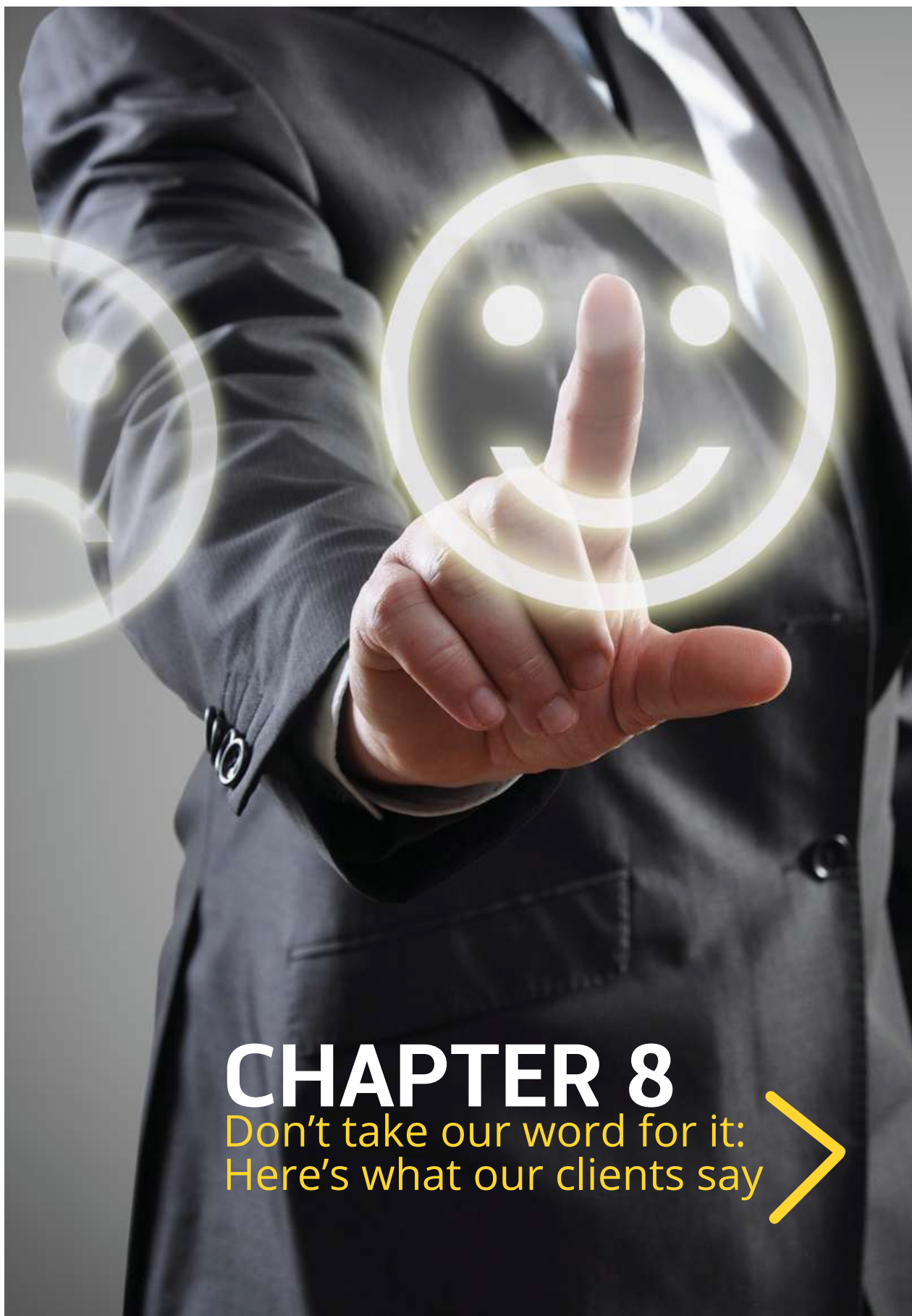
Our job is to compliment your internal IT people. But add in the partnership and strategic overview. So there's plenty of high-level thinking and support on tap.

This gets the most out of your internal resource. And also fully protects you as the person with ultimate responsibility.

Some IT managers see outsourced IT support partners, as a threat.
We are not a threat.

Our job is to make you and your internal IT people look great and operate brilliantly.

When you look great, so do we – we all win!



CHAPTER 8

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

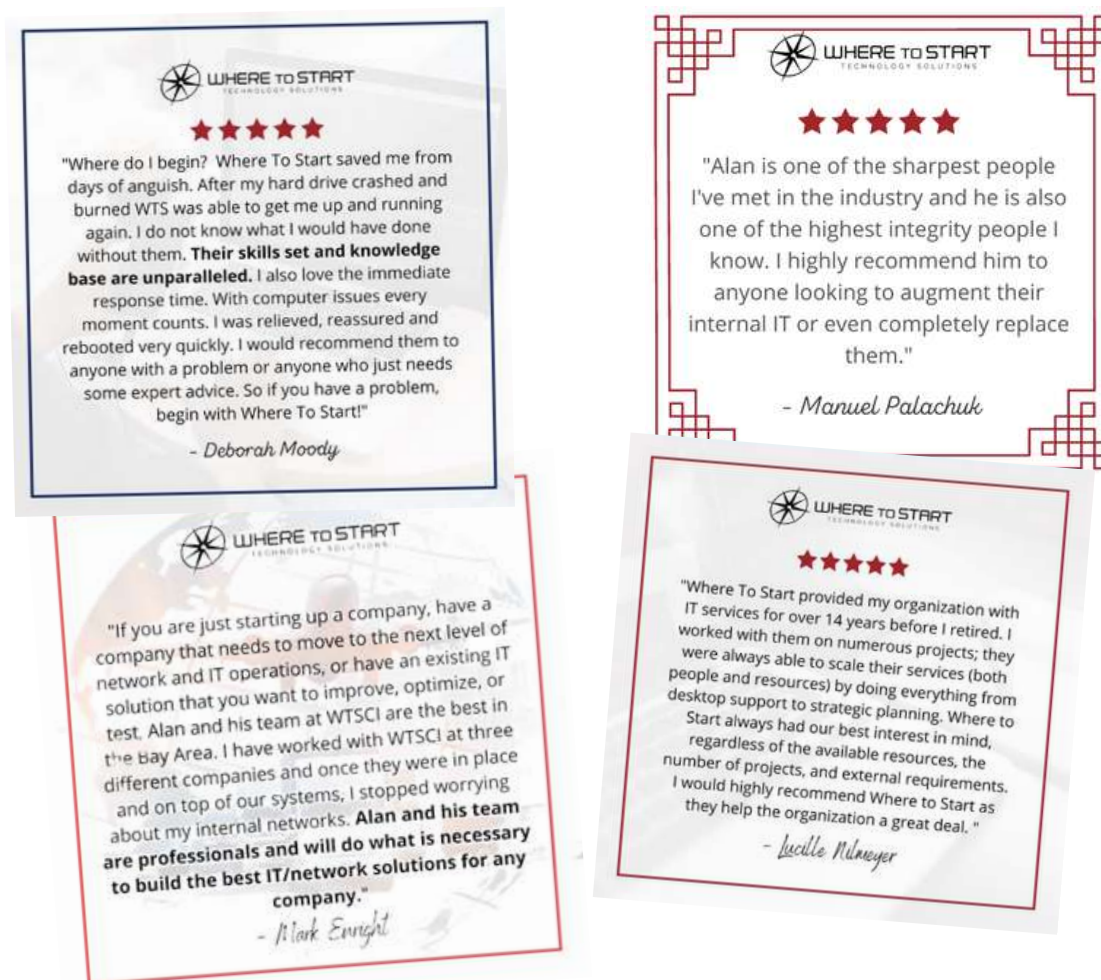


I've spent a long time in this guide educating you on how to buy IT support services.

I've covered all of the bases, and by now, you should know what you want and need in your own IT support partner.

But it's all very well me, the business owner, 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.



CHAPTER 9

RASM™ - Our Mojo



At Where To Start we focus on:

- ✓ *Saving our clients' Money*
- ✓ *Helping you Make more Money*
- ✓ *Reducing Risk for our clients*

How? We use RASM™



Where To Start's approach revolves around delivering on the promise of **RASM™** to solve technology issues within your business

Reliability results from increased
Accountability, the application of simple & reasonable
Security precautions along with proactive
Management of your systems within your environment.

We accomplished this via the application of industry best practices along with an understanding of how information moves throughout your organization. Based on this insight, we can assist your team in making informed decisions that have your companies' best interests in mind while achieving the stated goals.

*We use the guiding principle of **RASM™** in everything we do. It is part of our core, from choosing the services we offer to partners we rely on, it is how we do business and have done so for many years!*

I love our clients. They always have such beautiful things to say about us.

Let me now properly introduce myself and my business.

I've always loved computers. Some of my earliest memories are of me messing with my Commodore 64 (if you're too young or too cool to know, that's an ancient computer, and it was the first one I owned).

As the years went by, the computers got more sophisticated, and my fascination grew. Any free time I had was spent using a computer, writing software, or learning about them and how they ran.

When the internet became commonplace, my interest in IT deepened. The world opened up to me, and I loved all the new things to learn and practice.

You could say a career in IT was a fairly obvious choice for me.

After studying and achieving a Design Engineering degree, I started working for a major telecom carrier, working on and designing the public network, which led to working full-time with computers. I enjoyed the work and its challenges: Problem-solving, creative solutions, seeing the difference I was making for the company and its customers. It was very fast-paced and gratifying at the same time.

But while I loved my job and the people I worked with, I was becoming frustrated with how the company did things (and, to be truthful, the internal politics). It didn't put the clients first. It wasn't part of the role to help our clients grow and improve. The customer wasn't at the heart of everything that was being done. And to me, that was wrong.

One day, something just clicked inside me. I realized that I needed to go and do this for myself. To find my clients and help them in the same way that I would help my own business. To make a difference in what they did.

After working with several organizations, I handed in my notice in 2001 and took the step to set up Where To Start. I haven't looked back since!

Today we've grown in exactly the way I'd hoped for in 2001. I have a team now (with internal and external resources), and I am also very active in the peer community. As a result, we have helped dozens and dozens of businesses in the area see us as a trusted IT support partner.

We are personally invested in every business we work with, celebrating their success as if it were our own. Because really, it is.

I know that we've played a part in helping each business to reach its goals and hit its targets. And that's a great feeling. In addition we feel we have done our part to get them there.

WHAT WILL TYPICALLY HAPPEN DURING YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS



If you're ready to explore working with us, here's some important information you need to know.



As we begin to work together, the first 90 days are the most critical.

Together the team and I will be working on three key areas to start:

- 01 Learning as much as we can about your business
- 02 Fixing any outstanding problems left behind by your old IT company
- 03 Creating your technology strategy

I hope and expect to work with you for years to come in our partnership. My goal in these first 90 days is to set you and your business up for success.

You'll know what we can and can't do, with realistic expectations, what we need from you.

And how to be a great partner.

We'll survey absolutely everything and examine every tiny part of your current IT setup. The more we know, the better. All answers are fully documented in our secure systems (yes, you will have access to them).

We'll even ask about your website hosting and examine any specialist software you use to ensure we don't miss anything.

Even if we're not directly supporting these things, we still want to know how it works and who's supporting it. At some stage in our relationship, you're going to ask us about it. We need to know about every service or third-party vendor you're currently using, especially when transitioning from another IT Service provider.

Of course, it will mean there's a bit of work for you and your team. But I promise it will be worthwhile. And you'll only need to do it once.

Once the team has all the information, they'll strategically analyze it. To make sure they understand every aspect of your technology and the who\what questions can be answered. Any IT support company that doesn't do this is simply not doing their job properly and leaving you unsupported.

As part of this process, we're going to talk to your team - every single one of them.

We'll find out what their existing IT problems are, what frustrates them, and what makes their job more difficult than it should be. We'll also review anything your previous IT support provider told them couldn't be done, fixed, or created. There are no promises here that we can make it happen. But of course, we'll try.

Your first 90 days are going to reset everything. And then get your entire IT setup back up to the high level it needs to be operating at (and where it will stay). Then, if we can't, we will put a prioritized plan to address it when appropriate.

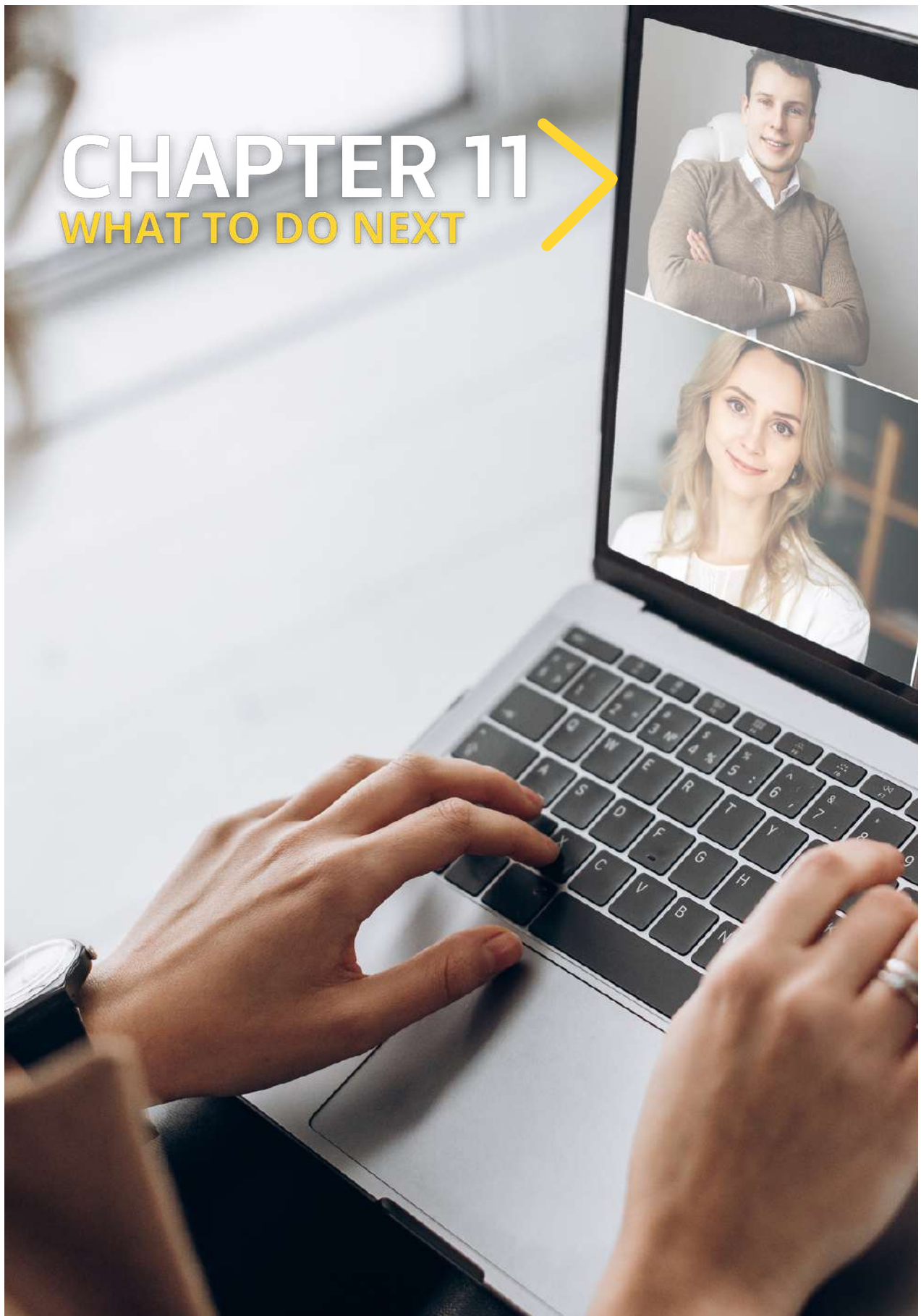
Then – and only then – you and I begin our strategic, forward-thinking work together.

Yes, this is a somewhat unique process for every client. I can tell you more about it when we talk and as I learn more about your company.

Here's what to do next.

CHAPTER 11

WHAT TO DO NEXT



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

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

The good news – we're currently taking on new clients again. That's is one of the reasons why I wrote this guide.

I'd 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:

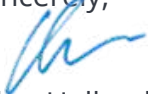
Book a 15 minute, no-obligation video chat with me at <https://www.WTSci.com/AlanHelbush>

(You'll see my live calendar on that page, so it will be easy to choose a time convenient for both of us).

If our businesses are a good fit for each other, you and I can arrange a more extended video call or physical meeting (whichever is most appropriate at the time).

Of course, there's no obligation to buy anything, ever.
I'm looking forward to speaking to you and learning about your business.

Sincerely,




Alan Helbush
Where To Start, Inc.

*Thank you for
your time and
consideration.*



 www.WTSci.com

 [https://www.linkedin.com/company/
where-to-start-technology-solutions](https://www.linkedin.com/company/where-to-start-technology-solutions)

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