5 DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

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Loads of businesses decided during lockdown that it was time to move to a new IT support company.
Because of the way they were treated when lockdown happened, and while they were working from home.

Now those businesses are taking action on their decisions. We've been talking to lots of potential new clients recently.

Finding a new IT support company for your business can be a bit like dating. You'll definitely meet some unusual people, before you find your perfect match.

And just as when you're dating, it's likely that you'll find yourself asking a lot of questions. After all, you don't want to get stuck with someone who promises you the earth but fails to deliver.

So how do you feel about asking those awkward questions early on, before you make a commitment?

Obviously you don't need to broach the subject of marriage and babies (joke). But it's really important that you find out a lot more than how much their services cost and what capabilities they have.

Especially while we're working in unusual circumstances, and taking into account social distancing.

But what are the right questions that will tell you the most about your potential new IT support company? And how will their answers help you to determine if you're a good match?

Here are what we believe to be the five most important questions you can ask an IT company to learn more about them.

1. "WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR LOOKING AFTER ME, DAY TO DAY?"

Does the IT support company have account managers? Will you be speaking to the same person each time you call, or is it the luck of the draw who you get?

If the IT support company does assign an account manager to each client, how do they assign them? Will they match their skills with your needs? Do they judge which personalities will get on the best? Or is it just a random decision based on who has the highest or lowest workload?

It's really important that you have consistency from your IT service provider. Ideally, you'll usually speak to the same person or small group of people who know your history and set up in detail. It's hugely frustrating when you have a problem, to have to go over background information before you can begin a resolution.

Will this same person be responsible for any site visits too? If you always speak to Dave on the phone, but James comes into the office to work on your devices, will he always have the most recent information to hand? Would Dave be able to sort something out speedily over the phone if he had first hand knowledge of where everything is and how your office is set up?

And what precautions are they taking when it comes to site visits? Do they have a new protocol for wearing PPE to protect both themselves and your employees? Are they ensuring they leave anything they've worked on clean and sanitised?

What about helping out those employees who are shielding, or living with someone who is? Is there a process for keeping them safe if they need to work on their device?

What experience does your account manager have?

It's brilliant that they're up to date on the latest devices, malware and software protection, but what about when you're running an older system? Will they be able to help when problems occur with that too?

2. "DO YOU SPECIALISE IN ONE SECTOR?"

While an IT support company may work across many sectors, it's important to find out if the bulk of their work focuses on one sector.

For example, if they typically work with call centres, how will the service they provide translate to your estate agency? The set up is very different. How well will they understand your needs?

If they're used to working with large organisations, how does what they do adapt to a smaller business? Do their solutions differ depending on need or will they recommend the same devices and software to everyone? Should you expect the costs to be similar to those a large corporation would pay, or will they be tailored to your requirements?

Likewise, if they're used to dealing with small businesses, how will they cope if your business grows?

You should also ask if one client makes up more than 50% of their business. It might sound quite intrusive, but what would happen to your support should that one client go away? Would the IT support company go under? And what would happen if that one client had an issue at the same time as you? Would they become a priority, leaving your business to come grinding to a halt while their problem is solved first?

3. "WHAT'S YOUR CUSTOMER RETENTION RATE?"

**Any business worth its salt should know this.
How long does a client typically stay with them?**

In the world of IT support, customer retention should be high. If an IT support company delivers what it promises to deliver, is easy to communicate with, and charges a fair price for this, a customer is unlikely to leave them for someone else. It's simply too much hassle if they're happy with the service.

If their retention rate isn't high, why not? Can they give you a reasonable explanation?

It's probably a good idea to look at the figures from before lockdown. It's likely that most

IT support companies have seen a small drop in clients over recent months due to economics changing.

Don't be afraid to ask for references either. If you're looking to employ an IT support company that you can have a long working relationship with, you want to be sure you're making the right decision. Speak to a couple of their current clients to find out what they like about the company, what they'd change, and if there's anything that they have an issue with.

4. "HOW MUCH OF YOUR REVENUE COMES FROM FIXING PROBLEMS AS OPPOSED TO ANTICIPATING THEM?"

It used to be the case that businesses would wait until there was a problem before getting in touch with its IT support company. That meant the staff would be held up while things were put right, leading to a loss of productivity for everyone.

Today, we all realise that prevention is better than cure. So where possible, things are put in place to reduce the risk of a disaster happening within your network. Updates are made on time; regular back-ups are taken; and we run 24 hour monitoring so that we can act immediately should we need to. Often, problems are fixed before you even know you have a problem.

Of course, you can never protect your business 100% when it comes to the failing of technology. But you can make sure you're taking every possible step to try.

So if your IT support company is making more money from fixing problems, it probably means that they're not spending enough of their time on preventative measures. In turn, that means you'll be spending more money than you need to on keeping your business safe.

5. "WHAT'S THE WORST IT DISASTER YOU'VE EVER HAD TO DEAL WITH?

Now, this may sound like a trick question, but actually, you don't want to hear them tell you they've never had one - if they do, you know
they're not entirely honest and they're probably not the company to work with!

Anyone who has worked in IT for any amount of time will usually have dealt with a disaster of some scale. Knowing why it happened and the steps that were taken to resolve it will tell you more about a company than them listing all of their good points.

What was their plan of action? Did they already have something in place to deal with this type of problem or did they just wing it? If it were to happen again, would they be able to follow the same process?

Who was responsible for each step along the way, and how long did it take to resolve?

You can learn a lot about a company from how they answer this question. If they're happy to go into detail and answer your questions, it shows they're open and honest. If they're a little cagey with the details it might be a red flag. It's really important that you can trust a company when it's dealing with one of the most integral parts of your business.

PICKING A NEW IT SUPPORT COMPANY IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS YOU CAN MAKE

It really is worth asking the right questions to find the IT support company that fits best with your business. Would you really be comfortable entrusting your most valuable assets (your productivity, staff happiness, and data) with a company that leaves you with unanswered questions or concerns?

Make sure you're happy with the responses you receive, and the proposed plan of action for your business. Remember that the company you employ could mean the difference between a security breach being handled quickly and efficiently, with minimal damage to your business. And one that costs you a fortune and potentially loses you clients.

If you're in the market for a new IT support service we'd love to hear from you - and we're not afraid to answer those awkward questions!

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