

So you have taken your business IT requirements onto your business plan and have developed an existing or new relationship with an IT professional or company outsource. What can you do within your organisation to ensure you maximise cost effectiveness of this outsourcing. In our last article we spoke about mutually beneficial relationships. The better organised you are the more helpful you are to subcontracted professionals when supporting your systems, which obviously is in your interest.

A fellow IT services business owner passed me a list of sarcastic comments based on typical extreme and unrealistic requests from customers on IT support staff. Every business service sector has such a list. From this however I have distilled some real and serious points, which may seem very obvious but are often forgotten in the heat of the moment when things go wrong and you just want to continue with your business.

➤ All software products and in particular Microsoft Windows and office products which are the most used, have hundreds and thousands of configuration peculiarities some documented and some not. For this reason, in some senses, unless you have a very well organised and managed IT infrastructure maintenance and support program, you will not have two identical setups of this software. Troubleshooting can be undetermined. This must be distinguished from limited skills troubleshooting, but must be accepted and understood in a trusting relationship we discussed in a previous article.

➤ When a problem occurs and you report it, be accurate about its source and its effect. The "system doesn't work" does not help anyone. It is understandable that this may be the ultimate effect to your business, but the reason for a request for support is not just to unload your frustration at the inability to operate (although this can be conveyed in a qualitative sense to help prioritise) but to correct the problem as soon as possible, and the more accurate information about the problem you can impart the better.

➤ Extending from the above, be accurate about the level of priority

care of measuring the performance, and the service level agreement (SLA) will provide the necessary response levels or redress for your business if performance is not achieved. This was addressed in a previous article.

➤ If the maintenance and support agreement does cover for this already, then take the responsibility to ensure you or a colleague understands where data is stored in your PC for the various applications, and what applications are required.

➤ As far as possible assign one person within your organisation to have the responsibility to act as a point of contact on trivial matters. Depending on the

time this is expected to take of the working day it should be added to their job description and therefore appraisal processes. As part of your business plan you should assess whether any tasks undertaken by an employee at least at a basic level, may save you in callouts for trivial matter. As an advocate of subcontracting IT managed services, we are talking here about minor issues like checking network connectivity, ADSL connection, cable connections, changing toners and cartridges. It could extend to acting as a part of the reporting process, which may assist with key details of the problem and hence help its resolution

➤ Overheating is an increasing problem leading to problems. Well manufactured or built PCs should not have problems under normal conditions, however remember to consider where the PC base unit is located and provide adequate ventilation for the PC and the power supply in particular. This is particularly important at the time of refurbishment or moving into new offices. Make sure there are plenty of network and mains points which will avoid cables across office floors.

➤ Be very robust about downloading of unnecessary files. Additionally monitoring of an ideally agreed and maintained corporate anti-virus, anti-spyware and anti-spam strategy and product or service and online streaming. Needless to say the latter will affect the

speed of the Internet for all. This is best done as part of a strong company IT policy, which is part of the employees contract. One should not panic about IT threats but at the same time there are many which can be very inconvenient to your business operation. I should add that against popular opinion viruses are as such an inconvenience to IT professionals as they are to our clients, if not more. Viruses tend to act in waves and imagine all our clients calling at the same time and expecting immediate response.

Many of you reading this will be well aware of most or all the points. The problem however is in the implementation of what you know to be the requirement. Working together with contracted IT professional companies, can ensure that these strategies are not only implemented, but they are maintained, improved on as things change and also ensure continuity throughout the year.

## Can you help IT?

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the problem requires. Remember that your IT professional has to plan a number of tasks either for your own organisation or as part of their working day, and requires prioritising in the best interest of the organisation as a whole. A properly agreed support and maintenance agreement will take

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