



# Best Practice Guide: Selecting an MSP

# Executive Summary

Your company has decided to work with a Managed Services Provider (MSP) to streamline your processes and optimize your IT environment, but now you face an even more difficult choice—which MSP to partner with moving forward.

The tech industry is full of new and experienced MSPs offering a diverse range of services, so before you start requesting and reviewing proposals, think about the qualities you value in a service provider. Every business has different needs, and many of the determining factors you consider are likely to be unique to your organization. Despite your specific needs, there are a number of standard criteria that apply to selecting an MSP.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Skills

Your MSP should offer a wide range of skills that build onto the existing skillset of your internal IT team. Partnering with an MSP is a unique opportunity to close skills gaps, and it provides convenient access to specialists and experts when your IT projects need an advanced perspective.

Generally speaking, your MSP should be well-versed in:

- Troubleshooting
- Networking
- Hardware/Software maintenance
- IT management
- Analytics

In addition to these baseline skills, be sure to consider an MSP who provides excellent customer service. You may also want to review the certifications that your MSP's employees hold.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Experience

You will rely on your MSP to guide you through challenging circumstances, so look for an MSP who has been through similar situations with previous clients. In fact, consider MSPs who have a variety of experiences across multiple industries.

The more experienced your MSP is, the more prepared they are to help you tackle expected and unexpected IT challenges. Do some research about how long potential MSPs have been in the industry, and ask for references from the MSP's current and past clients. Make sure to choose an MSP with:

- Experience in recurring IT services versus simply project work
- Demonstrated success with previous MSP engagements
- Experience with a variety of monitoring and reporting tools



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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Proactive Methodology

While maintaining your IT environment, the best way to resolve issues is to stop them from occurring. Many MSPs take a reactive approach, emphasizing break-fix methodology. However, if you want to avoid down time, seek a proactive MSP who uses data analytics and root cause analysis to identify patterns in your environment and prevent potential problems. The benefits of a proactive MSP include:

- Fewer interruptions to productivity
- Consistent spending at a lower cost
- A healthier IT environment

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Ability to Answer Specific Questions

Your MSP doesn't just need to understand IT; they need to understand your IT environment. So, when you start asking prospective MSPs questions, make sure you ask them about concrete aspects of your business environment. A specific question warrants a specific answer, so avoid MSPs who communicate in generalizations. Do not hesitate to ask challenging questions. It's also a good sign if an MSP asks you specific questions about your business requirements.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Managed and Responsive Service Level Agreement

MSPs take responsibility for their services through Service Level Agreements (SLAs)—agreed-upon standards that define service quality, scope, responsibility, and delivery time. These SLAs foster transparent relationships and build trust between the MSP and the customer, which leads to effective and sustainable engagements.

While most MSPs operate under SLAs, not all MSPs boast SLAs that are both managed and responsive. Managed and responsive SLAs allow the customer's standards to grow with the service, meaning that the MSP is held responsible for the services as they are happening, not as they were initially defined.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Accessible IT Services

Choose an MSP who is going to be available when you need them and, ideally, choose an MSP that offers onsite services and 24/7/365 support. By working with an MSP who has a high level of availability, you will benefit from:

- Faster response times to unexpected issues
- Fault tolerance
- More predictable costs
- Greater flexibility in the service delivery model
- Direct monitoring of SLAs and service quality

In addition to the benefits above, onsite MSPs are capable of integrating more seamlessly into your corporate culture.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Holistic Approach

Many MSPs focus intently on technology, but it is difficult to suggest meaningful process improvements without considering the other half of the equation: people. You depend on your employees to help your company reach its goals, so make sure that your MSP values them as much as you do. Choose an MSP with a strong customer service methodology, who fosters useful relationships between people and technology.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Alignment with Industry Best Practices

Choosing an MSP who understands and observes industry standards, such as ITIL, can give you confidence that you are receiving high-quality service. These best practices are typically considered fundamental to building successful relationships between the MSP and the client, and they help to provide a stable, operational framework in a consistently shifting industry.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Scalability

One of the primary reasons for engaging with an MSP is to establish processes that will help your company grow, so make sure that you choose an MSP partner who is equipped to provide services on an increasing scale as your company evolves and your goals change.

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# MSP Selection Criteria

## Service Governance

Work with an MSP who has an established governance framework. This framework will define the key players from both organizations, explain their responsibilities, and establish an ongoing schedule of service reviews to ensure that the MSP and client remain accountable for their responsibilities (such as SLAs).

Selecting an MSP with an established governance model will help you:

- Assure consistency and visibility in service quality
- Drive ongoing process improvement
- Discover issues and enact changes quickly

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# Your Approach:

## Build an Effective RFP

A Request for Proposal (RFP) is an important tool for selecting an MSP, as it clearly establishes your goals for prospective partners. It includes the estimated scope of work, expected timelines and budget restrictions, information about your company's values, technical requirements, and even desired SLAs that you'd like your MSP to meet. Put simply, your RFP identifies the problem that you need your MSP to solve, and it challenges competing MSPs to propose solutions.

Before you sit down to compose your RFP, gather the key decision makers at your company and define a clear approval process. Work with this team to determine your requirements and come up with a game plan to make the process run more smoothly once you begin receiving responses.

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# About Milestone

At Milestone, we've been transforming IT since 1997, when President and CEO Prem Chand founded Milestone Technologies, Inc. Back then, Prem's goal was to solve a growing problem for Silicon Valley businesses: IT relocation. Nearly two decades later, we are growing as quickly as the high-tech industry, with more than 1,700 employees serving a substantial client base—currently over 200 companies in 18 countries. Today, Milestone's goal is to shape the way technology is delivered. Every solution we provide is driven by experienced people who are determined to understand your business goals and align your network to help you achieve them, ultimately streamlining your path to success.



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