# HOW TO CHOOSE

YOUR IT PROVIDER
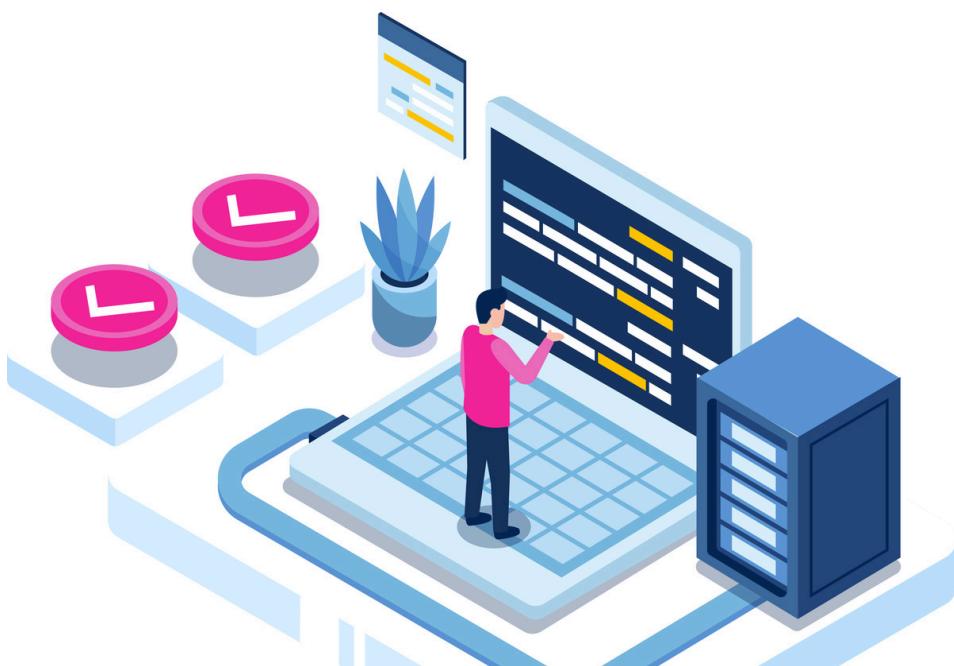
A Quick-Start Guide to Choosing the MSP That's Right for You and Your Business

AQUEITY

We're on top of IT

HOW TO CHOOSE
YOUR MSP

A Quick-Start Guide to Choosing the MSP That's Right for You and Your Business

AQUEITY
We're on top of IT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend of Aqueity,

As a business leader, you understand that technology is the backbone of your company's performance, productivity, and reputation. And if you're reading this guide, you have likely experienced firsthand how the wrong IT partner can slow operations, stall growth, and expose your organization to unnecessary risk. Downtime, security gaps, sluggish support, and a lack of fresh ideas are not just IT issues—they are business issues. The wrong MSP doesn't just impact your systems; it impacts your profitability, your customer experience, and your competitive position.

The right IT partner should be more than a vendor—they should be a strategic advantage that helps you move faster, operate smarter, and stay ahead of what's coming next. With technology advancing at an unprecedented pace, innovation, AI integration, scalability, and security are no longer "nice to have"—they are mission-critical to protecting your business and driving long-term growth. Choosing the right MSP isn't just an operational decision; it's one of the most important business decisions you'll make.

This guide is built to help you make that decision with confidence. Inside, you'll find clear criteria, red flags to avoid, green flags that signal true partnership, and essential questions to help you cut through buzzwords and sales decks. By the time you're done, you'll know exactly how to evaluate an IT provider —and how to determine whether they're capable of supporting your business today and leading you into the future.

Dan Dunn
CEO
Aqueity, Inc.

CHAPTER 1

The Three Types of IT Support Models
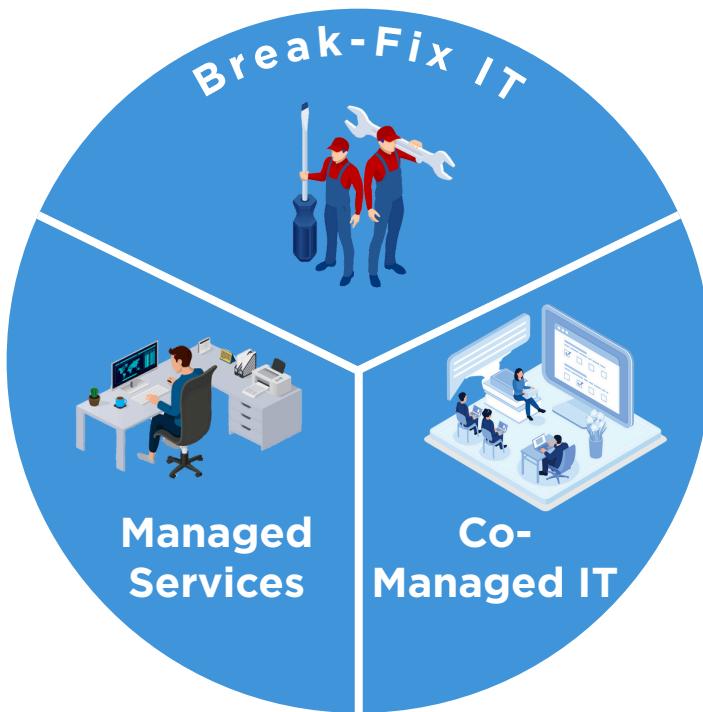
THE THREE TYPES OF IT MODELS

When you're looking for an IT provider, you'll find that most companies are supported by one of three IT support models: Break/Fix, Managed Services, and Co-Managed IT. Each support model has its place, but educating yourself on and choosing the best model for your business ensures minimal stress and fewer issues later.

1. BREAK-FIX IT

The Break/Fix Model, otherwise known as the Reactive Model, is a type of IT support model that ensures you pay only when something breaks. As a result, you'll have help when something inevitably goes wrong.

However, because your IT provider only shows up when something breaks, small issues quickly turn into major problems.

Without a managed services agreement, companies often discover too late that backups haven't been running, security patches are outdated, or licenses have expired. Then a server fails or an audit uncovers gaps, and what should have been a simple fix becomes costly downtime, data loss, and emergency fees; all of which are far more costly than paying for proactive management.

2. MANAGED SERVICES

That brings us to Managed Services, the Proactive MSP Model. Unlike the Break/Fix approach, this model is designed to prevent problems before they disrupt your business. Instead of waiting for something to go wrong, your IT partner continuously monitors, maintains, and supports your environment so issues are identified early or avoided entirely.

The MSP model shifts you from unpredictable hourly costs to a predictable flat monthly fee, which is typically more cost-effective in the long run. That single fee includes the core services your business relies on: monitoring, security, help desk support, backups, and ongoing updates. With proactive coverage in place, nothing is left to chance.

You also gain consistency and accountability that reactive providers cannot offer. Your systems follow a defined roadmap, maintenance is performed on schedule, and your IT environment evolves in step with your business—not in response to emergencies.

This level of discipline and visibility reduces risk, strengthens security, improves performance, and gives your leadership team the confidence that technology will support your company's growth rather than hold it back.

3. CO-MANAGED IT

The Co-Managed IT Model, often called the Partnership Model, creates a shared responsibility structure between your internal IT team and an MSP.

Your team handles day-to-day support and on-site needs, while the MSP provides strategic guidance, advanced tools, escalated support, documentation, and 24/7 monitoring. Each side focuses on its strengths, creating a balanced, high-performing IT operation.

This approach is especially valuable for mid-sized businesses that want to expand their IT capabilities without hiring a full team.

Co-Managed IT gives you flexibility, resilience, and a deeper bench of talent without the complexity of building it all in-house.

Plus, it protects you from the risk of relying on a single internal expert. So, if that person leaves, takes PTO, or faces an unexpected absence, your MSP maintains the documentation, knowledge resources, and processes to ensure continuity, documentation, and coverage, thus ensuring your business' operations never stall.

CHAPTER 2

Why Businesses Switch IT Providers

Doesn't Know Your Business

Outdated Technology

Constant Issues

Slow Response Times

Rising Costs

WHY BUSINESSES SWITCH IT PROVIDERS

Switching IT providers is almost never about price. Companies make a change when the risks become too high, the frustration too deep, or the trust too damaged to continue.

Red flags often build slowly; missed tickets, weak security, and poor communication all add up until leadership realizes their MSP is holding the business back. If you are reading this guide, there is a good chance you are feeling some of these pain points yourself. Here are the most common warning signs that signal it may be time for you to move on to a different provider:

- Help desk staff are friendly but ineffective, often blaming other vendors

- Tickets frequently vanish or linger for weeks—creating a "black hole" where issues never get resolved

- Your provider does not understand your business or industry, so recommendations feel generic and disconnected

- You lack true strategic guidance, so you remain stuck in constant firefighting instead of planning, improving, and modernizing

- Your MSP is invisible, so you only hear from them when it is time to renew, upsell, or justify their contract

- Security is handled reactively with late patches, outdated tools, and issues reported by employees before your IT provider even notices

- You have outgrown your MSP, resulting in slow response times, lack of attention, and a clear mismatch in capacity

- Outdated tools, outdated advice, and outdated processes—your provider simply hasn't kept up with modern IT standards

- Your internal team ends up doing the MSP's job—chasing tickets, documenting issues, troubleshooting, or managing tasks the provider should handle

- You're always the one raising concerns—your IT partner never brings proactive ideas, alerts, or improvements unless you ask first

THINKING ABOUT SWITCHING IT PROVIDERS?

A great MSP should feel like a true extension of your team—invested in your long-term success, bringing proactive ideas, and taking real accountability for results. Exceptional IT is not just about fixing problems; it is about transforming how your business operates.

If your current provider is not delivering on those expectations, you are not alone. Many organizations reach this crossroads. The good news is that making a switch is often far easier, faster, and less disruptive than most leaders expect.

If you are considering a change in IT providers, use the **red flags**, **green flags**, and **MSP scorecard** on the following pages of this guide to evaluate your current situation objectively. These tools are designed to help you identify where your provider is falling short, where they are delivering value, and whether the gaps are significant enough to warrant action.

By scoring your MSP using these resources, you will gain clarity on whether or not now is the right time to make a change in your current MSP partnership. If you decide to look for a different MSP, the following chapter outlines what to look for in a partner who can support your business more effectively moving forward.

RED FLAGS VS. GREEN FLAGS

As you evaluate providers, you'll notice patterns. Here are a few things to watch for:

Red Flags:

▶ Quoting without discovery

▶ No documentation of processes

▶ Overly technical answers that dodge the question

▶ Hidden fees for basics that you should be included

▶ No exit strategy if you decide it is time for your company to make a change

Green Flags:

✓ Detailed discovery before quoting

✓ Transparent, all-inclusive pricing

✓ Preventive maintenance & security focus

✓ Clear onboarding & offboarding playbook

✓ Ability to explain complex topics simply

QUICK-COMPARE WORKSHEET

Use the worksheet on the next page to compare your current provider or potential providers. Score each provider up to 10 points. The higher the score, the better the fit.

Are You Getting the IT Partnership You Deserve?

This scorecard will reveal if your current MSP is driving results or if it's time for a change.

Does your MSP...	Current Provider		AQUEITY
Understand your industry's IT needs—with real experience to back it up?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Build a forward-looking **IT roadmap** that stays aligned with your business goals?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Help create and actively **manage your IT budget** throughout the year?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Conduct regular strategic business reviews that go beyond ticket reports?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Deliver fully configured laptops for new hires—ready to **work on day one**?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Provide personalized support from **people who know your business**—not just a helpdesk queue?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Offer enterprise-grade cybersecurity AND train your team to **avoid costly mistakes**?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Offer **flexible agreements**—or are you stuck in a long-term trap?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Guide your business in using **AI and automation** to grow and innovate?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Measure and share **client satisfaction** with you every month—or just assume you're happy?	Yes ☐	No ☐	✔
Total Number of Yeses Checked: _____			**10**

How Did You Score?

8 - 10 Yeses: You're in great shape—is your provider Aqueity?

5 - 7 Yeses: Some solid support, but room for strategic growth.

0 - 4 Yeses: It's time to rethink your IT partnership.

Scan me to book a **FREE** consultation

Time to discover what extraordinary IT support really looks like.

www.aqueity.com | info@aqueity.com | (630) 769-8700

22

CHAPTER 3

What a Great MSP Partnership Looks Like

WHAT A GREAT MSP PARTNERSHIP REALLY LOOKS LIKE

When evaluating MSPs, it's—of course—important to identify which MSPs are REALLY not a fit for you and your company. However, it is just as important to recognize what an exceptional MSP looks like. The right IT partner isn't simply "not bad"—they actively elevate your operations, strengthen your security posture, and help your business move faster. These green flags reveal when an MSP is truly aligned with your needs and positioned to support your growth.

- Issues are resolved quickly and consistently, with full transparency into ticket status, root causes, and follow-through.

- The help desk takes true ownership, coordinating with third-party vendors, escalating when needed, and ensuring problems are actually fixed—not just passed around.

- Your MSP is visible and engaged, with regular check-ins, onsite visits, and proactive reviews—not just renewal conversations.

- Security is handled proactively, with real-time monitoring, scheduled patching, and clear communication about emerging threats and mitigation steps.

- The MSP scales with your growth, providing the capacity, staffing, and expertise needed as your business expands, not slowing you down.

- They understand your industry and operations, offering recommendations tailored to your workflows, compliance needs, and competitive landscape.

- You receive strategic guidance, including technology roadmaps, quarterly business reviews, budgeting support, and forward-looking recommendations that keep you ahead of problems—not reacting to them.

PREPARING FOR A CLEAN IT HANDOFF

One of the biggest fears about switching IT providers is the transition. Handled poorly, it creates disruption and finger-pointing. But handled well, it's seamless. Here's how you can prepare for the best handoff possible:

- Create a full inventory of your company's devices, applications, and licenses

- Make sure all administrator logins belong to the company-not the old provider

- Verify backups are recent, tested, and stored securely

- Review exit clauses in current contracts to avoid penalties

- Set a timeline with milestones for each step of the transition

NOTE:

THE RISK OF SKIPPING STEPS

If admin rights are not transferred, you may be locked out of your own systems. If backups are not tested, you could discover corruption when it is too late.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK PROVIDERS

The difference between a strong IT partner and a weak one often comes out in the answers to simple questions. Here are some to ask, and what good vs. bad answers sound like:

- **Service Model** - "What's included in your monthly fee?"

  - ✅ *Good: Clear list including monitoring, patching, backups, help desk, after-hours.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "Unlimited support" - without defining what counts as support.*

- **Security** - "How do you prevent, detect, and respond to threats?"

  - ✅ *Good: 24/7 monitoring, documented incident response, regular vulnerability scans.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "We install antivirus software, and you should be fine."*

- **Strategy** - "How do you help clients plan for the future?"

  - ✅ *Good: Quarterly reviews, 12-month roadmaps, budgeting support.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "We'll let you know if something changes."*

- **Service Model** - "Who is accountable for outcomes—and how do we escalate issues?"

  - ✅ *Good: Clear list including monitoring, patching, backups, help desk, after-hours.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "Unlimited support" - without defining what counts as support.*

- **Security** - "How do you prevent, detect, and respond to threats?"

  - ✅ *Good: 24/7 monitoring, documented incident response, regular vulnerability scans.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "We install antivirus software, and you should be fine."*

- **Strategy** - "How do you help clients plan for the future?"

  - ✅ *Good: Quarterly reviews, 12-month roadmaps, budgeting support.*

  - ❌ *Bad: "We'll let you know if something changes."*

KEY IT TERMS

Backup - Copies of data for recovery

Business Continuity - Ability to keep working during disruption

Cloud - Apps and storage hosted online

Compliance - Meeting legal and industry security rules

Endpoint - Any device connected to your network

Encryption - Locking data so it can't be read without a key

Firewall - Security filter for network traffic

BMFA - Extra login step beyond a password

Patch - Update to fix security flaws

Phishing - Fake emails stealing credentials

Ransomware - Malware that locks files until ransom is paid

Remote Desktop - Using your work computer remotely

SaaS - Software delivered over the internet

SLA - Contract promise for support response times

SOC - Security Operations Center for monitoring

VPN - Secure internet tunnel for remote work

Vulnerability Scan - Automated test for weaknesses

Zero-Day - Newly found security hole without a fix

Uptime - How often systems are available

Dark Web - Hidden internet where stolen data is sold