

# Top tips for outsourcing your IT

Outsourcing IT can be a smart money-saving exercise for manufacturing outfits large and small as well as having a positive impact on overall production.



BY JAMIE WARNER

**M**anufacturing, distribution or warehousing organisations distinguish themselves from other businesses by often having multiple office and warehouse locations. From an IT perspective this makes outsourcing the support, maintenance and consulting requirements a viable alternative since an in-house IT manager or administrator can not be in two places at once to service the needs of all users.

There are also complexities in the systems and infrastructure required to run these firms such as SAP, Exact or Great Plains for accounting, finance and production; Microsoft Exchange for email and communication; SolidWorks 3D CAD design software; Microsoft Dynamics AX an enterprise resource planning software and many more.

This often makes it difficult for internal IT resources to have all the skills and qualifications necessary to manage the infrastructure and is the reason why many organisations look to outsource the management of some or all of these key systems to ensure business continuity and cost containment.


Outsourcing doesn't necessarily mean you should replace all your internal IT resources.

Business needs differ based on size, whether you're trying to reduce costs or simply enhance and improve IT support efficiency. You can complement your internal IT manager by outsourcing day-to-day HelpDesk support - this allows them to focus on projects and bigger picture items.

Alternately, you outsource your entire IT&T requirements if this fits your business model and objectives.

Either way, it is vital to be aware of what to know: the pitfalls, what to look out for, and the advantages.

Here are the top 10 things to heed when looking to outsource your IT:

- 1. Value.** In tough economic times outsourcing should provide an affordable alternative to full-time staff, so look for value. For the same cost (or less) of one full time level 2/3 support technician, you can complement your internal IT manager or replace junior staff with a full IT department. This gives you access to a much larger array of technical and consulting skills.
- 2. Services.** Choose a company that can provide the full suite of services: HelpDesk, desktop support, maintenance, consulting, project management and procurement.
- 3. Systems.** Outsourcing your IT support should give you access to systems you wouldn't normally have, such as ticketing systems, server and network monitoring, remote support, maintenance reports, and procurement systems.
- 4. Skills and references.** Find out what other businesses they support, get client feedback, and ensure that feedback is good. Also, look for a company that has direct experience in your industry and with the systems you use. Get some examples of recent projects completed and the scope of the solutions they can offer. The right company should be able to provide entry-level IT solutions through to "Rolls Royce" solutions without cutting corners.
- 5. Proactive supplier.** Outsourcing implies you are entrusting something which isn't your core strength to someone else, so be sure to choose a supplier capable of providing proactive advice and consulting, which will enable business continuity and assist your business objectives.
- 6. Forward thinking.** It is important to choose a company that has a proven track record in implementing systems designed to last three to five years and that takes into consideration future technology trends.
- 7. Communication.** Be sure the company you choose can articulate its services clearly, verbally and in writing, as this will indicate how good the support staff and engineers, your first point of contact, will be. A common frustration about IT support companies is lack of communication, poor communication, or no communication at all.
- 8. Relationship.** Whichever company you choose, you will have to work with its staff regularly. So choosing the one that also matches your culture and company requirements is important to a successful long-term relationship.
- 9. Growth.** In the current climate, choose a company that is growing and has built a stable and successful business model. It is a long-term partnership, and it makes sense to partner with someone who will be with you in the long term.
- 10. Key areas.** The key IT areas you should be mindful of when making your choice that relate to any business are: redundancy, security, backup, disaster recovery, anti-virus and anti-spam, archiving and storage, network design, Internet/VPN, hosting, email, communications, and support and maintenance. 

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