

# Selecting an IT support provider

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Your IT is likely to be one of the biggest investments your organisation will make. So it follows that you'll want to make sure that the support you put in place is appropriate for your needs – not just in terms of quality, but also in terms of the 'fit' for your organisation of the provider delivering the services. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' for outsourced IT support services, and some providers are going to be a better match for your organisation than others.

However, before you get down to the detail, compatibility and chemistry with your provider, you need to think through your requirements to make sure you will get the support you need, where and when you need it.

Start by looking at your systems and what your users will need from a support provider in the long term. Is all your IT going to be physically in one building, or externally hosted, or something in-between? If it's going to be in your building, how many users will there be, what sort of support will they need, and at what level? If you've migrated to a cloud-based system, much of your hardware may now be hosted at a data centre, and as part of the hosting arrangement much of the "behind the scenes" monitoring, support and maintenance of the infrastructure is likely to already be provided by the hosting provider. Once you've considered all of that, you will need to decide the depth of your support requirements, and this could well depend on what in-house IT expertise you have. First, second and third line support are all traditionally available – but you may not need all of them.

**First-line support** is the first point of contact for logging an IT problem. It usually consists of telephone support, calls being dealt with in a 'triage' way, and possible resolution of minor problems using remote access tools (unless it is something like giving you a new password, or explaining how to put in the right one).

**Second-line support** goes a bit further and will typically get you a call-back within a specified period (which will be stated in the Service Level Agreement that you have agreed with the provider) and is often accompanied, in the event of physical hardware problems, by a guarantee to either fix the problem or replace faulty equipment.

**Third-line support** gives you access to specialists, for example if you encounter a particularly tricky problem that requires in-depth technical expertise. It also often includes services for network support and routine systems administration and maintenance.

Many organisations outsource second and third-line support as a matter of course, but whether you also require first-line support will depend in part on how much IT expertise you have in-house. Those with little or no in-house support will probably need to outsource everything. Some of the software you use will already have a service arrangement built into it, but others won't, so check and build-in the support you will need.

The size of your organisation will also probably contribute towards determining how much you might want to outsource and how much you can deal with using internal resource. However, size brings with it other issues. As in-house capability increases, the sophistication of the relationship with third-party supporters also grows and this can mean that your in-house IT department spends a lot of its time managing these complex relationships.

Increasingly, managing external suppliers will require some involvement from the SMT, and that can mean a step change in the complexity of the relationship. Some organisational changes will happen over time, so when you're negotiating your contracts with your provider, keep in mind that, although you start with precise detail about what you need, you will want to make adjustments and changes throughout the duration of the contract. Make sure your contract can keep step with your organisation's changing needs. Make sure it includes a requirement for regular reviews with a senior member of staff to ensure that service levels are being achieved and that you can correct things that are going wrong before they spiral out of control.

Getting that nice snug fit with a support partner can be a complicated procedure and although you personally might know your organisation inside out, you may need help to make sure your outsourced partner also covers all the relevant points.

Adapta helps many organisations make the right choices. We understand the complexity and change that charities in particular are exposed to, the costs and constraints and the decision-making processes involved. We know how to help organisations think through their requirements before going out to tender and how to get the necessary detail built into the contract. We know what to look at in the contract and how to ensure it meets your requirements. Because we know what matters, we can find the right supplier and help you agree a healthy arrangement that will last for the long term. Visit [www.adaptaconsulting.co.uk](http://www.adaptaconsulting.co.uk) for more details.