

A manageable concept

How managed services can enhance and improve your company's IT **Interviewed by Troy Symphon**

By most accounts, there's much improvement to be had in information technology (IT) management. Some companies think their IT departments are fine as they are, while others don't think about it at all. Many settle for average performance because they don't know things can be better.

But, there is an answer: managed services, a basket of services that supports the IT needs of corporate customers. A managed services provider can provide all the services required by enterprise organizations to small and medium-sized businesses. It's a collection of IT support services that avoids and mitigates business impacts that result from IT failures.

"The knowledge of a managed services team ensures that the skill sets needed are available," says Craig Davis, executive vice president of SLPowers. "Using a freelancer or internal IT person guarantees that they will handle issues that they're not qualified to support."

Smart Business spoke with Davis about managed services and how they can save your company time, money and headaches.

What are common misconceptions concerning IT?

Virtually every company in America believes they have a cost-effective and practical IT management solution, yet very few find an ideal balance between the level of service and cost. This is because either the IT staff misinforms the C-level people or because they simply don't understand the ROI that efficient IT can provide them. Many people we meet operate companies that run IT on a shoestring budget, squeezing out every last ounce of life from hardware and software, operating IT on the philosophy of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.' These companies treat IT only as a cost, and, more often than not, they ignore the true cost that operating inefficiently has on their bottom line. Many others think they're already running their IT departments efficiently and are unwilling to accept that IT can lead the organization to new levels of productivity and profitability. Why are so many CEOs content to settle



Craig Davis
Executive vice president
SLPowers

for highly inefficient IT management methodologies? Because they and their IT staffs simply don't know any better.

How can managed services help with these problems?

Managed services is a method of IT service delivery through which you can provide the same or more value to a customer as an internal IT department delivers in a large enterprise but in a pay-only-for-what-you-need model that makes financial sense for even the small business owner. The purpose of IT, in a very general sense, is to automate or enable business processes, thereby allowing an organization to do something that otherwise couldn't be done or alternately would cost exponentially more to accomplish. So it's ultimately about creating productivity and value — and the function of the IT support staff with respect to that value is twofold: to ensure that existing systems continue to appropriately support and enable the business processes and to recommend and deliver new solutions that will help drive more productivity and value in new ways.

CRAIG DAVIS is the executive vice president for SLPowers in Boca Raton, Fla. Reach him at cdavis@slpowers.com or (561) 395-1308 x4222.

What makes a good managed services program?

A good managed services program is designed to be a collection of IT support services that avoids and mitigates business impacts that result from IT failures. While IT enables great leaps in productivity, it is also a source of incredible business risk. While we have database systems that allow us to store and retrieve limitless aspects of customer information, that information is vulnerable. A failure to manage the vulnerabilities may result in huge amounts of IT downtime, information loss and theft or worse — civil or even criminal penalties. An effective managed services program manages these types of risks, effectively reducing the threat to an 'acceptable' level to the customer where cost and the level of risk intersect on an ROI chart. Managed services providers offer many types of services to their customers — in a cost-effective and highly scalable way.

Why is a managed services program better than an internally staffed IT department or a freelance technician?

More services and knowledge than one person is capable of. Managed services programs retain expertise across a broad spectrum of IT specialties, guaranteeing that the solutions and skills needed are available. They invest heavily in enterprise-class diagnostic and monitoring tools, and the cost can be spread over hundreds or thousands of customers, saving the company and its customers a lot of money. This allows for the automation of common management tasks, such as backup management, anti-virus and security management, and results in substantial cost savings over the freelancer or internal IT person models. Services are completely scalable. As the economy changes and companies grow or downsize, managed services programs scale service levels to reflect only what the customer needs or can afford. <<

Insights **Technology** is brought to you by SLPowers