Outsourcing your IT Service Desk: IT Challenge or Business Opportunity?

Viewpoint

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Introduction

Maintaining a competitive advantage in today's economy means that businesses must be flexible enough to adapt to market conditions - reducing costs while increasing productivity, as well as making sure they have access to cost-effective, highly skilled resources.

More and more organisations are looking to outsource business processes and functions like IT support and services, allowing them to focus on core competencies in addressing the growing complexities of markets they operate in and customers they serve.

IT outsourcing is not a new trend in the UK - it has in fact existed for over 30 years, with businesses seeking external expertise for numerous IT processes, projects and job functions. When it comes to IT support, many businesses see outsourcing as a cost effective way to keep a critical business function running at a lower cost than they themselves could provide.

Whilst a reduction in costs may be the initial force driving investigation into outsourcing, it is usually the selection of the right IT outsourcing partner - one which not only helps to reduce costs but to deliver innovation and a proactive, problem solving approach - that delivers long-term value for most businesses.

At Wanstor, we are specialists in providing IT support services for small and medium sized businesses across the UK. Quite often, the complexities of managing and supporting a multi-vendor, multi-user IT environment, combined with the cultural nuances of IT, demand a sophisticated delivery and support strategy - one based on a proactive partnership approach to business, and managed by an organisation that takes the time to truly understand your business needs from an IT support perspective.

In order to gain maximum business value from the outsourcing of IT support, it is imperative that there is a common understanding at the executive level about the impact of outsourcing and the relationship between IT support provider and business processes supported by that provider. At Wanstor we believe the key to success is a unified seamless delivery model that leverages IT delivery and support capabilities through common processes and a single point of local accountability.

This document explores the opportunities and challenges associated with the outsourcing of IT support. It offers IT and business executives a balanced and realistic approach for maximizing the benefits of this outsourcing and the applicability of this service to their business.

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What is the IT support outsourcing opportunity for your business?

At Wanstor, we provide over 150+ businesses across the UK with IT support. From our experience of helping these businesses over the past 15 years, we have gathered feedback on what leads organisations to choose Wanstor as their IT partner for support services. The primary benefits businesses find when they partner with Wanstor for IT support services include:

Cost Savings: Outsourcing IT support to Wanstor has been proven to reduce our customers IT support bills by over 20% in the majority of cases, compared to pure internal support costs. This is because Wanstor has a readily available set of service desk agents experienced in dealing with varying call volumes in a dedicated IT support environment.

Your business pays only for what is needed, without incurring the expense of employees experiencing service downtime. All Wanstor first line agents are highly trained and have proven to reduce time to resolution of IT problems by 10% to 30% over internal support staff. This means your own employees are back to work sooner with their IT issues resolved in a timely and efficient manner.

Effective IT and Business Performance: The outsourcing of IT support operations plays a valuable role in helping businesses build high-performance IT teams that enable business strategy by optimising performance, maximising value and lowering risk.

By partnering with Wanstor for IT support, your IT team and your business can leverage skills from a larger pool of professional IT resources who are able to bring economies of scale and a broader knowledge of support issues. This will help your IT team achieve specific SLAs and improve the quality of project outcomes.

Focus on Core Business: In addition to freeing up IT resource to focus on core business values and strategic initiatives, building the outsourced channel allows for a transfer of information in both directions. This enables proactive and reactive measures to be taken in continuously improving the IT services both your business and customers receive.

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Challenges to overcome for an effective IT support outsourcing model

Customers depend on IT support services being managed efficiently, relying on an IT partner's high availability and continuity whilst expecting swift resolution of any issues that may arise. They expect that service desk agents possess an intimate working knowledge of the IT environment and require control of total ownership costs relating to the IT support service.

With proper planning, risks can be assessed so as to derive real benefit for each and every business under consideration. From our 15 years of experience, some of the challenges facing business when deciding to outsource IT support include:

Organisational Challenges: Outsourcing of IT support services can impact on an organisation's structure, with changes to both job roles and user expectations. Adopting an appropriate change management strategy is essential, with new changes clearly communicated and managed in order to minimise resistance and engender support for new structures.

Security and Legal Risks: Security poses a significant challenge for any IT support service. The IT support service provided by a partner will need access to confidential company information and intellectual property. In meeting this head-on, providers need to demonstrate not only sensitivity to the issue, but consideration for - both legally and physically - complete privacy of information.

Outsourcing of Operations: When executed correctly, the outsourcing of IT support operations can reduce operational costs, increase business flexibility, improve employee performance and strengthen competitive advantage. This in turn allows businesses to generate greater returns and respond swiftly to fluctuating economic conditions, competitive challenges and new opportunities. It is indisputable that remote support, delivered by a specialist partner, can save your business both time and money once the initial transition and transformation plan has been completed.

At Wanstor, we can work with you to deliver a cost-effective IT Support service that responds to users needs and helps business teams achieve their objectives.

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Selecting the right IT support partner

Establishing good relations with a chosen IT support partner will enable your business to improve performance of its own IT team, whilst leading to significant reductions in support costs.

> ## With so many firms now offering outsourcing for IT Support, your first consideration should be service quality.

As IT outsourcing gains popularity, so the number of firms offering outsourcing as a service continues to grow. When evaluating whether to outsource an IT service desk or not, quality is key. Based on our extensive experience, we believe that the following factors must be considered for critical success before any IT outsourcing decision is made:

Customer Interface: Daily communication between customer and IT service provider is essential in ensuring that coordination of both required services and oustanding issues takes place, in setting key performance measures and in handling the various nuances of intercultural exchange. A common trust in the quality and responsiveness of this interface is important if a company is to free itself from involvement in behind-the-scenes operational details.

Processes: Distributed IT teams are bonded by process and the tools that support them, simplifying a customer's ability to both measure and seek improvement as time passes. The quality of any IT service desk process can be judged by the methodologies that support it along with the provider's process maturity. A formal communication structure and responsibilities which are clearly defined become critical if you want only minimal backstage operational involvement.

Governance: Consider project and programme management provided by your IT support partner: are service levels managed efficiently? Are work efforts consistently on track? Common management across entire outsourcing models will yield the greatest reward. Effective IT support outsourcing should provide a single point of contact for accountability, and serve as a repository for best practices. It requires expertise in budgeting, risk management and communications, along with the ability to execute tasks and accurately track performance across multiple delivery options.

Resources: Any outsourcing model that distributes tasks across multiple locations must consider resources. Existing skills, hiring profiles, training programmes, retention programmes and learning capabilities should be evaluated.

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The outsourced IT support solution must support rapid growth with capable personnel and effectively address any changes in resourcing requirements.

In selecting an IT support partner, the following factors must be considered in order to guarantee a successful relationship with your outsourcing provider:

Cultural Fit: Compatibility between the hiring company and the outsourcing firm's standards of quality.

Maturity and Stability of Operations: The outsourcing firm's ability to mitigate risk.

Ability to Bridge Cultural and Process Gaps: The outsourcing firm's ability to manage diversity and understand cultural differences.

Flexibility of Service Provision: The outsourcing firm's ability to scale and shift resources where necessary.

Process and Metrics Driven: The outsourcing firm's commitment to process, methodology and performance measures.

At Wanstor, we believe an IT support partner to be just that - a partner, and not only a supplier. By partnering with your business, we work with you to understand which IT functions are best performed internally, and which should ideally be handled externally.

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A quick checklist for choosing your IT support partner

As this is a high level introductory document covering the outsourcing of IT support, we hope to have highlighted opportunities and challenges associated with services under discussion. To help get you started on your roadmap to outsourcing IT support, a checklist of essentials from your IT support partner can be found below.

Quality: Does the provider undertake regular quality assessments? Is there compatibility between hiring company and outsourcing firm when it comes to quality standards?

Technology: Do they demonstrate the appropriate level of technical knowledge in relation to your IT environment? How mature is their overall IT support offering, and what technologies does it cover? Do your potential IT partner's staff have an understanding of the environment containing the technology they will be responding to?

Logistics: How committed is your IT partner to process, methodology and those performance measures which align to your business goals? Do they possess a consistent and transparent IT service delivery model? How agile is the provider in shifting and scaling resources as and when required?

Security: Is there a formalised and documented approach to security for implementation within your existing IT environment? What programme exists for the purposes of risk mitigation? Does the partner have a track record for providing relevant IT security solutions within similar business environments?

Motivation: How dedicated is this partner to your business? Do they understand your own measures of success? Do they have the staff in place to help solve employee IT problems? Are their staff proactive in the approach to IT management? Do they have a proven history of long term customer satisfaction? Is there investment in training to ensure staff are kept abreast of the latest technological trends, hardware and operating systems?

Leadership: Does your chosen IT partner possess experience in leading IT teams, reporting to senior stakeholders and managing IT roadmaps and projects? Do they have relevant management certification related to IT?

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Final Thoughts

The outsourcing of IT support is a proven business strategy. The complexities of managing and supporting an IT infrastructure, combined with cultural nuances, demand a sophisticated delivery and support strategy that is based on robust and resilient foundations, yet dynamic and flexible enough to accommodate changing business needs.

By partnering with Wanstor for IT support, the direct benefits to your business will include a reduction in costs, an increase in both turnover and employee flexibility, and an improvement in IT and business performance. This will in turn position your business with a competitive advantage through better IT processes, more productive IT staff and ultimately better turnaround of IT issues. When evaluating whether to outsource or not, quality remains key.

At Wanstor, we manage IT support for over 150+ businesses across the UK, and have been doing so for more than 15 years. All of our engineers are fully qualified, and we are ISO 27001 accredited - meaning that you can be confident we will deliver IT support which truly enables your business, your users and the customers that you serve.

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