The 2027

IT SERVICES BUYER'S GUIDE



A straight-talking guide to choosing a managed IT partner. What to look for, what to watch out for, and the questions that separate a real partner from a vendor.

Written for growing businesses across the Twin Cities and Medical Alley.

Tech River

www.techriver.com

The 2027

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Chapter 1:
The 5 big technology revolutions affecting businesses like yours

Hello, my name's Corey Calvin, owner of Tech River.

We've been supporting Twin Cities businesses since 2008, and a big part of our client base is medical device and life sciences companies. The last few years have changed how every one of those businesses runs on technology. Whether you're scaling fast or protecting margin, you've felt it.

I believe we're in the middle of a series of massive and interrelated technological revolutions.

There are 5 areas that I see are directly affecting the businesses my team and I look after:





Revolution 1) AI

Go back a few years to late 2022. And to most people, AI was still a science fiction concept... something that would happen "in the future". Then ChatGPT was released to the public, and the AI race started.

AI tools have been in development for years. But it's only been recently that many people have become aware of them, and have been able to access them through their browsers.

You're using Microsoft's Copilot, ChatGPT, or Claude, right? Most businesses are now using AI in some form, even if it's just built into the tools they have.

Perhaps you use them for research, to find answers more easily, generate images or create documents?

Or maybe you rely on AI to summarize calls or pull meeting notes together. Many people are benefiting from AI built into the tools they use every day.

It's been an exciting start to this revolution. And it's already moving to the next stage: AI that can figure out what needs to be done, and then get on and do it without being asked.

This is known as agentic AI. Where could that save your team hours every week? And just as important, what guardrails need to be in place first? The real question for 2027 isn't whether your people are using AI. It's whether company data is going into tools you haven't approved. For a regulated company, an AI tool that can read design history files, complaint records, or patient information is a data governance decision, not just a productivity one.

How could that improve your business?



Revolution 2) Hybrid Working

The big shift back in 2020 accelerated something that was already gaining huge traction: People want the option to work from home or the office. Or the coffee down the street.

Not everyone gets that choice. If you run a production floor, a lab, or a warehouse, part of your team has to be onsite. That makes your technology a mix of both worlds, and both need to be secure.

Technology makes it so easy to work from anywhere. You just need to be very aware of the security implications, and make sure your people can communicate and be productive wherever they choose to work.

The tools for this are developing at an astonishing rate. So, it's always worth reviewing how your business communicates and collaborates.



Revolution 3) The Cloud

The idea of being able to work anywhere, any time, on any device, is so easy because of the cloud. Can you remember the bad old days when you couldn't access data unless you were in the office? Unthinkable now.

But as the data has been freed, so we must take greater care of it. The cloud both liberates us and puts us at a hugely increased risk of crime. More on that later.



Revolution 4) Internet of Things

The day your refrigerator was allowed to go online was surely the day you realized eventually EVERYTHING will be online. Industry analysts at IoT Analytics forecast about 39 billion connected IoT devices worldwide by 2030.

In a business, that means badge readers, conference room displays, lab instruments, and production equipment, all sitting on your network. Every one of them is a door that needs to be locked.



Revolution 5) The greatest security risk ever known

This is the revolution that weaves through all the other revolutions... because any time there is change, it creates an opportunity for cybercriminals. And change is constant right now.

I've never seen as many threats to normal businesses like yours as I see today. It's increasing year after year.

I'm not exaggerating. Cybercriminals are getting smarter. They're using automated tools to target all businesses, all the time. It really does only take one person to click one bad link in a fake email, and you've unwittingly let them into your entire business. You won't even know they're there until they strike, often within hours, sometimes not for weeks.

The fundamentals aren't a secret: multifactor authentication on every account, systems patched on a schedule, backups you've actually tested restoring, admin access limited to the people who need it, and regular security training for everyone. Most breaches we see trace back to one of those being skipped. And I'm constantly assessing new cybersecurity tools to keep my clients safe. I'd be happy to talk these through with you.

Things are changing at such a pace, it's too easy to feel you are falling behind. Even as technology experts, my team and I work hard to stay on top of everything that's happening.

Let me make it easy for you with a simple technology strategy I believe you should focus on: **Defend and Invest.**

Defend is about protecting your business from cyber criminals

Invest is about making sure technology is powering your business forward, not holding it back

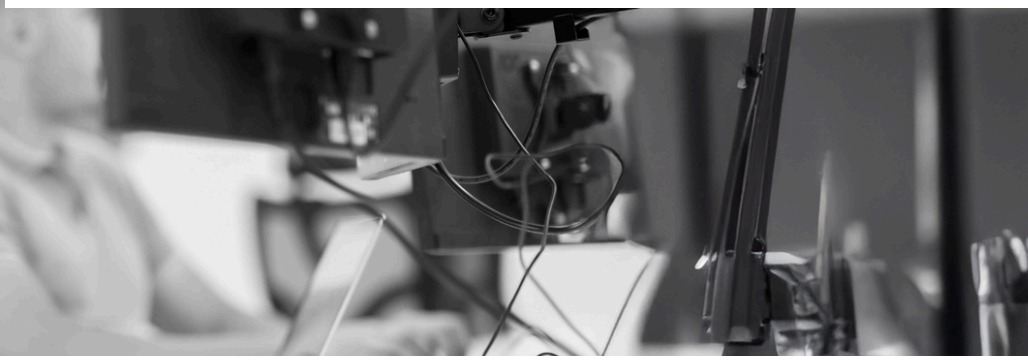
I've written this guide to help you understand how a trusted IT support partner behaves, and what great IT support looks like.

The fundamentals aren't a secret: multifactor authentication on every account, systems patched on a schedule, backups you've actually tested restoring, admin access limited to the people who need it, and regular security training for everyone. Most breaches we see trace back to one of those being skipped.

I'll explain why we genuinely partner with our clients and refuse to become just a supplier. I'll also explain why it's critical you put your IT strategy and data security at the core of your long-term business planning.

If you're ready to talk before reading further, jump to chapter 10 to arrange a conversation. **Let's see how we can partner to help your business.**







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Chapter 2:
You've got a business plan.
Do you have an IT strategy?

When did you last update your IT strategy?

If you don't have one, or you haven't given it much thought over the last few years, now's the time to develop one.

If you use any technology in your business, whether that's a few dozen laptops and Microsoft 365, or a validated manufacturing environment across multiple sites, a proper IT strategy will be your best friend. It's the foundation for growing your business. It can mean the difference between surviving a period of uncertainty and thriving through it.

OK, I'm biased! But I cannot stress enough how important a well thought out IT strategy is for any successful business.
Your IT strategy should work alongside your business plan, detailing the ways your technology will accelerate progress towards your goals and objectives. It should consider both long and short term targets and leave room for change where necessary.

And while it's called an IT strategy, it's not actually about your technology. Sure, you'll have plans for the technology and devices that you use, and those you want to use in future. But really, the strategy is about your business, and how your technology can help you to achieve everything you'd like to, in the easiest possible way.

A great starting point is to look at your current IT infrastructure.



- What works well?
- What would you like to improve?
- As your business grows, will your technology grow with you, or will you need to look at new software, networks, and even phone systems?

Speak to your people. What do they think works well, and what would they change if they could? Are there parts of your infrastructure that hold them back? Could you save time if you switched over to different software, or if one application could communicate with another one?

When you're working with a proactive IT support partner, they'll be able to help you identify the right hardware and software. They'll make recommendations based on the way you work, and the ways you want to work. They should even be able to spot potential issues you haven't noticed and suggest simpler ways of doing things.

A technology roadmap as part of your strategy will help you to budget better and know what you'll need to invest in, and when. It'll stop surprise costs and random invoices you weren't expecting.

It can seem complicated to do this yourself. But if you're working with an IT support partner, this is something they should be involved with.

Now, more than ever, every spend needs to be justified. Every investment needs to work hard for your business. You want value for money from everything you do.

Create a range of metrics to help you track how well your infrastructure is working for you. Your team might like the way a certain system works. But if you're not getting a return on your investment then it's not working as well as you might think.

Your IT support partner should also get involved with regular strategic reviews. It's up to you how often you do these, but I would recommend every 6 months. You should look at what's going well and what's taking longer than you'd like it to.

If you're FDA-regulated, your roadmap also has to account for validation. Upgrading or replacing a system that holds quality records isn't just an IT project. It can trigger change control and revalidation under 21 CFR Part 11 and the QMSR. A good partner plans upgrades around your quality calendar, not after the fact.

And this is why I keep talking about an IT support partner. Not an IT support company. Not an IT support provider. A **partner.**

Imagine an office building. It has a janitor who comes in every evening and cleans up the mess that people make.

That's how lots of IT support companies work. They just clean up the mess.

We prefer to work as a facilities manager. This person is constantly thinking and planning. They schedule what maintenance the building needs. They look at what they can proactively do to stop it falling into any level of disrepair.

Yes, there's still an element of managing the janitors and making sure they've done their job. But a facilities manager is proactive enough to stop most of the problems happening in the first place.

That's what an IT support partner does. We take a proactive approach. We do as much as we can in the background to stop things from going wrong in the first place.

Of course, some things will still go wrong. Unfortunately, that's inevitable when it comes to fast moving technology and data. But that's when the clean-up work happens, and things get fixed. All the proactive work means that we need to clean up a lot less than an IT support company which doesn't work proactively.

What my team and I like to do for our clients is to create ongoing technology roadmaps. It means that both you and I know exactly:



- What will be happening over the next 2 to 3 years
- What technology investments you need to make

And there are no surprises. Pair the roadmap with fixed, all-inclusive pricing for your support, and your IT costs become something you can actually budget year to year.

This roadmap also allows us to see what can be delayed (if there's a problem), what investments are critical and, if you're ahead financially, what can be brought forward.

In large part, it's our partnership that allows this in-depth planning to take place. We get to know your business as if it's our own. We're constantly working with you on your business and learning about you and your team.

This commitment makes it easy for my team and me to help you because we know (just as well as you do) where your business is going.



Chapter 3:
Why business owners &
managers switch IT partners

I hear from a lot of businesses who are unhappy with their current IT support provider.

These are the top 10 reasons people want to make the switch to a new and improved IT support partner:



Reason to switch 1) You're not seeing business results

Return on investment is everything. Especially right now. You should be able to see clearly how hard your IT partner is working for you, and what benefit that work is bringing to your business.

An IT support partner should not only provide a detailed IT strategy for the long and short term, but they should also give you a set of metrics which you can measure results by.

And these metrics should be relevant and important to your business. Not a standard set issued by the IT support partner, made difficult with jargon. I've heard too many stories of IT companies providing vague metrics that are impossible to decipher. Avoid!

#2

Reason to switch 2) Poor communication

This can cover a whole range of issues... from taking too long for them to acknowledge problems... to them not telling you when updates are taking place... or not getting back to you when they say they will...

If we were talking about any other kind of supplier, these gripes might seem petty. But as we know, without working technology, your business can't run as it's supposed to, and these little gripes become huge issues.

Again, this is another way for you to distinguish an IT support provider from an IT support partner.

You need a responsive IT support partner who:

- **Acknowledges issues in good time**
- **Keeps you in the loop of everything you need to know, and**
- **Does what they say they'll do, when they say they'll do it**

A lot of communication problems are really structure problems. When every request goes into a call center queue, you explain your environment from scratch every time. At Tech River, you work with a dedicated engineer who already knows your systems, your people, and your history.

#3

Reason to switch 3) They don't take data security seriously

Yes, you read that correctly.

There are some IT support providers, whose job is to keep your data safe and secure, that don't do the same thing within their own business.

They don't make it a priority to keep themselves educated on the latest scams and threats. They can't keep you fully protected.

And they won't go out of their way to ensure every part of your data is as safe as it can be. Or that your software is 100% up to date all the time.

I know... this scares me too...

Is this really a company you'd want to be responsible for keeping your business safe from the growing number of attacks and data breaches?

#4

Reason to switch 4) They won't go outside of their contract

"Sorry, we don't cover that."

Ever heard that from your IT support provider? Lots of businesses have. But so long as the request relates to your technology, it should be a red flag.

"We don't cover that" suggests a real lack of concern for your business, and that's not how a partner behaves.

A partner actively spends time looking at new ways to improve your network, your data security and your infrastructure. They won't be working rigidly to a one-size fits all contract.

And that's the point. One size doesn't fit all, because every business is unique. Even two businesses on the same street, selling the same product or service will have a different way of working. They'll use different software and devices, have different people working with them and, importantly, have different goals.

You need an IT support partner who will take your goals as their own and do as much as they can to help you reach them.

This is a big reason we use fixed, all-inclusive pricing. You shouldn't have to wonder whether a request is going to show up on an invoice before you pick up the phone.

#5

Reason to switch 5) Things take too long to fix

Some problems can't always be fixed immediately. Now and then issues take a while to get to the bottom of. Other problems are rare and may demand more diagnostic work.

But in these situations, good communication is key.

It might take a while to see a resolution. But if your IT support partner is keeping you updated at each step, you're confident it's in hand.

Whereas if your support request is still waiting for a response three days later... you've got a problem.

And what if some issues never get fixed at all? Or one thing gets fixed only to break something else?

This is technology we're talking about. It goes wrong. It doesn't always work the way we want it to.

But you absolutely should not be facing issue after issue, waiting days to have problems resolved. You should not face silence when you need help.

All that waiting means downtime for your business. Where's the value in that?

#6

Reason to switch 6) They never accept responsibility

When you take on an IT support partner, it's vital that both businesses take responsibility for their side of the agreement.

Failing to do so causes a huge lack of trust. And means the relationship is going nowhere.

I've heard from business owners who have reported an issue to their IT support provider, only to be told that it's their fault that the issue arose!

(despite them following advice and instruction from that company)

I've also heard from business owners who reported issues to their IT support provider, only to be told that they need to contact someone else (such as a software supplier) about the problem. A good partner manages those vendors for you, whether it's your ERP or QMS vendor, your phone provider, or your ISP. You shouldn't have to referee.

The idea of an IT support partner is that you trust them to deal with their area of expertise, while you get on with yours. If they're passing the buck when you face a problem, you're not getting the benefit of a support partner at all.

#7

Reason to switch 7) They confuse you with tech talk

If technology wasn't complicated, everyone would be able to take care of their own business infrastructure without a problem.

However, the truth is quite the opposite. It's full of strange words and concepts, and everything changes every 7 minutes! (it seems that way anyway).

It's a minefield if you don't know what you're doing.

The hallmark of a good IT support partner is that they take this complication and make it look easy. Better still, they make it sound easy. They explain things to you without sounding like they're speaking a foreign language.

Again, it all comes down to your connection as partners. If you can't communicate properly with each other, how fruitful is this relationship really going to be? The likelihood is that it'll leave both sides frustrated, and your business won't be able to make the most of the technology it has.

#8

Reason to switch 8) You're not learning

We're not expecting your IT support partner to teach you their job. You don't need to be an expert in IT, that's what you're paying someone else for. However, there should be an element of learning when you partner with an IT company.

For example, you need to learn about cybersecurity, how to avoid scams, and how to protect your data.

If you're told "let us worry about that", it should ring alarm bells. You can't expect to keep your organization safe from a data breach or data theft if you don't know what you're trying to protect yourself from.

It's also important that your IT support partner explains what they're doing. You want to have a basic understanding of how your infrastructure works or is set up for you. This will help you to help yourself when a minor issue occurs.

#9

Reason to switch 9) They're always pushing new hardware

Clients who come to us from other providers often tell us their old provider spent more time pushing new equipment than they did on the fundamentals.

Of course, there's nearly always a genuine upgrade available... an operating system that's had its day, or tired old hardware that can't keep up. So for some, a hardware refresh really is overdue.

And it's nice to have the very latest technology in your business. But it's certainly not vital. There are lots of other things to consider before upgrading equipment and devices. Especially today when you expect value for money and a return on investment.

Yes, your business will need a certain level of equipment for you to operate the way you need to, but you probably already have most of the technology you need. I find that for most businesses, it's far more important to get the infrastructure right before we consider your hardware. Additional devices, for example, are sometimes nice to have rather than crucial.

A good IT support partner will help you create an IT roadmap, which should detail when in the years ahead you need to budget for upgrades or additional devices.

#10

Reason to switch 10) You've outgrown them

This last one isn't necessarily a bad reason to switch IT support partners. Sometimes, your business just grows too big for a smaller IT company to deal with.

That's great news for you. The difficult part can be knowing when to make the switch. Especially when you're working with a company that you like.

It's worth keeping in mind that:

- **If your support requests aren't being responded to as quickly as you need them to be**
- **Or the recommendations on how best to use technology to grow your business have stopped**
- **Or you need a higher level of support**
- **Or your provider can't keep up with your compliance requirements**

For regulated companies, this often shows up during an audit. An auditor asks for evidence of access reviews, tested backups, or system change records, and your provider can't produce it. That's not a gap you want to discover in front of an auditor.

... it's in your best interest to find a new IT support partner.

If you've noticed you need more support, your IT support partner has probably noticed too. In fact, if they're good partners, they may even discuss this with you first. Trust me when I say there'll be no hard feelings. No company wants to be out of its depth with clients.

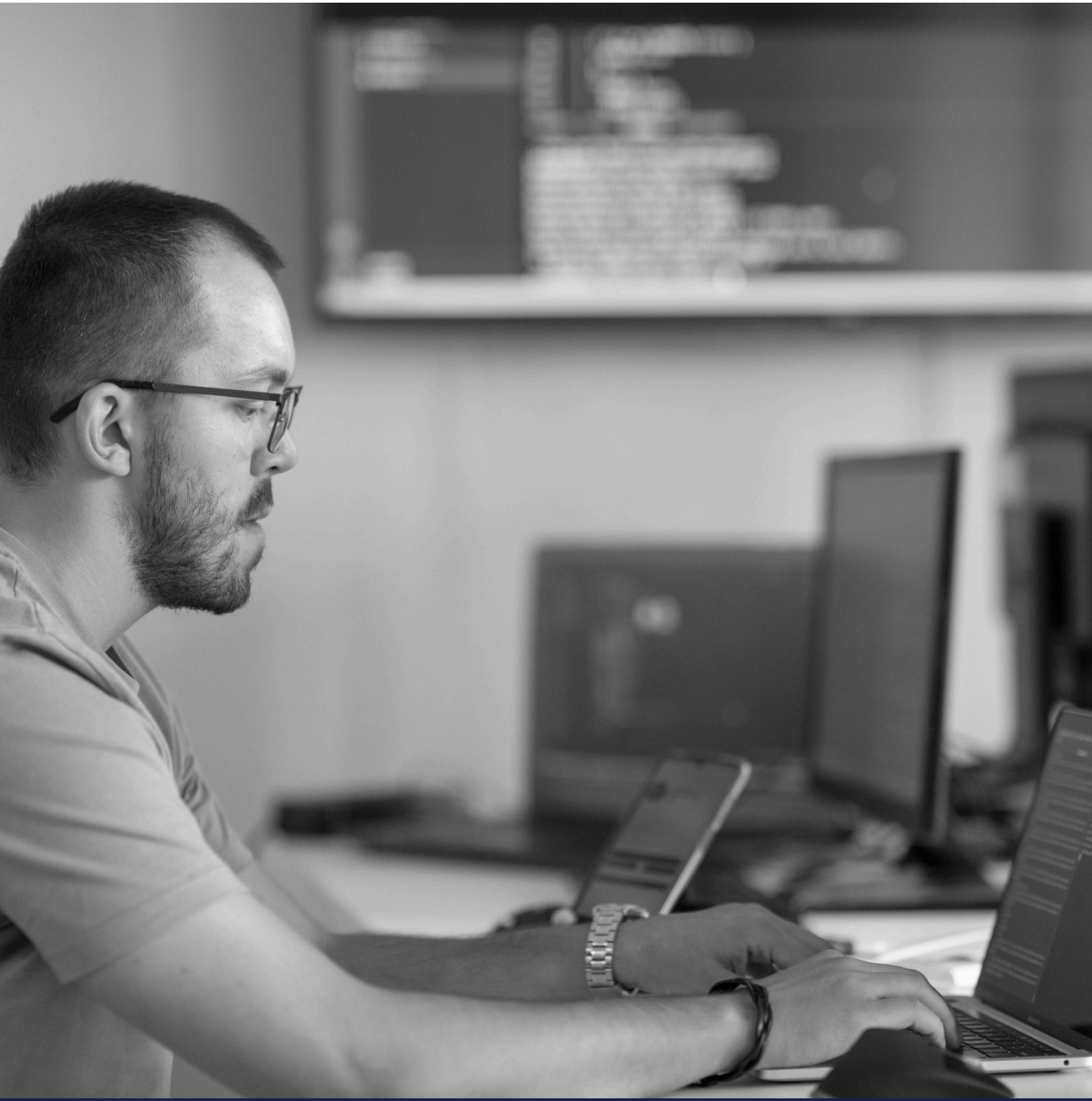
If you've ever felt any of these issues, maybe now is the right time for you to make the switch too?

When you place your technology at the heart of your business growth strategy, you see why it's important to have a partner you can trust.

No business is perfect. Inevitably we get some things wrong for our clients some of the time, because we're human too.

But because my team and I have partnerships with our clients, we're able to have adult conversations and change course quickly. We don't have to spend unnecessary time repairing relationships. Instead, we can set the correct expectations and resolve issues quickly.





Chapter 4:
Protect the most important thing in your business

Hint: It’s your data

As we’ve seen over the past few years, being able to work anywhere, any time, on any device is liberating.

Working flexibly like this means that businesses can reduce their costs, attract the best candidates for jobs and have a happier workforce too.

But as our devices get smarter and more powerful, they’re also becoming more disposable. You can do most things on your phone now, right? And how often do we lose or break them?

The thing is, because your data lives in the cloud and not on the device, a lost phone or laptop is a minor inconvenience, as long as it's set up properly. That means the device is encrypted, managed, and can be wiped remotely, and your data is backed up somewhere other than the service you work in

A lost phone is now merely a minor inconvenience and a small financial cost. And it’s not just phones this applies to; your tablet and laptop work the same way.

This flexibility is amazing. However, it also has its risks; number one being that any time you take your device away from the office, you’re potentially opening your data to anybody. The sad and scary truth is that there are many cybercriminals who are trying very, very hard to access your data. And even take it away from you.

You’ve probably heard about malware before. Malware, or malicious software, is code placed on a device or network with the aim of infecting, stealing, or corrupting your data.

Essentially, a hacker can create malware to do exactly what they want, once it's within your network. Once it's there, it can take you some time to notice what's happened. And it can be very difficult to remove.

But there's something scarier: Ransomware. This is the fastest growing cybercrime right now. And if you're not taking all the right precautions, it's likely that you'll fall victim to this devastating form of cyberattack at some point.

As the name suggests, ransomware is a kind of malicious software that encrypts your data so you can't access it. The hackers then hold you to ransom and, to regain access you must pay a fee.

The ransom is often only the start. In Sophos' 2025 State of Ransomware survey, the average cost to recover from an attack was $1.53 million, and that's before any ransom payment. Downtime, investigation, rebuilding systems, and lost business add up fast

Ransomware is terrifying. Trust me when I say you want to avoid this at all costs.

Attackers use automated tools that scan for weaknesses everywhere. They don't check your headcount first. Mid-sized businesses are attractive because they hold valuable data but often lack the people to watch for attacks. In the same Sophos survey, 63% of victims said a resourcing problem, like a lack of expertise or staff, contributed to the attack.

Cybercriminals know this is a group that typically doesn't spend enough time or money on cybersecurity.

And the attacks are getting more sophisticated each year.

Ransomware usually gets in one of three ways: an unpatched system, stolen login credentials, or a phishing email. For the third year running, Sophos found exploited vulnerabilities were the top technical root cause.

And before your jaw drops that someone, especially someone in your own business, would be naive enough to click a link in a scam email, you need to know how sophisticated these emails are. AI has changed the game for scammers, too. AI now writes phishing emails that are near impossible to spot, and voice/video deepfakes are being used to impersonate people you know.

These emails will look just like genuine emails from someone you know or expect messages from, such as the IRS, your bank, even a department within your own company. And they not only look like the real deal, but the email address may be a close copy too.

They work because they ask you to do something relatively simple; click to update your details, for example. Even looking with a suspicious eye, it can be hard to spot that something is wrong.

Once an attacker is in, they don't always strike straight away. Sometimes they move fast, launching the attack within hours. Other times they'll sit quietly inside your network for weeks, even months, waiting for the right moment. That's for several reasons.

Firstly, the longer a hacker lurks within your network, the harder it is for you to detect them. Usually, hackers enter through one device that's connected to a network. Then they investigate your network for other weaknesses. Better for them to have control over as many devices as they can. This can make it virtually impossible to kick them out once the attack has started.

That's what makes ransomware so difficult to deal with. And it's why prevention is always better than cure.

You need to be aware of the signs of a hacker in your network. Both you and your IT support partner should look out for:



- Unexpected new administrators appearing on your network
- Software being disabled
- New software being downloaded
- Remote access sessions lasting for days at a time

A great IT support partner will always recommend everyone in your business has regular cybersecurity training. After all, your people are your first line of defense from cyberattack. Software alone won't offer a good level of protection. You need software and humans.

It's important to understand this: You can never be 100% protected from malware, ransomware, and other forms of attack. That's impossible, because it's a non-stop game where the criminals are always inventing something new, and the data security world must catch up.

You can lock things down so tightly that nobody can get any work done, and we don't recommend it.

You see, when you lock down **everything** to make your data security watertight, you can accidentally frustrate and annoy your staff. They'll have lots of extra layers of protection to go through, more steps in an already busy workload. And more to remember.

What that means in the real world is that they'll skip steps and look for ways to bypass security. Which puts your business at greater risk.

Think of it like a door to an office. If you have seven big locks and a biometric scan just to open it, eventually people will get frustrated and just prop the door open!

To remove the frustration, we use layered security: several tools that work together, plus single sign-on and smart access rules, so your people deal with fewer prompts and passwords while your data stays better protected.

Chapter 5:
Why you should be highly skeptical of all IT support companies

If you run operations, quality, or finance, IT probably isn't your day job. And even if you lead IT, you can't be an expert in everything.

And why should you concern yourself with the latest tech news, software, and support updates? You're too busy doing what you do best.

You probably read your industry magazines, blogs, visit trade shows, go to conferences, and attend training... you're an expert in your field. That's what experts do. You certainly don't have the time to do all of that for your IT as well.

Would you expect your clients to know as much about your area of expertise as you do? Of course not. That's why they hire you, right?

The same goes for us.

We totally absorb ourselves in the highly technical, high speed, rapidly changing world of technology. We genuinely love it and pride ourselves on having a level of expertise that most people don't.

You'd be shocked how many people consider themselves IT experts, simply because they know their way around computers. However, great IT support partners operate on a completely different level, with better knowledge, tools, and systems.

The biggest problem with IT support is that it's an unregulated industry. There's no governing body that people must pass through to be allowed to call themselves an IT support company. No industry standard that must be met. No guidelines on how the business must operate.

Just about anybody ...*literally anybody*... can set themselves up and say they're an IT support company.

This is why I say you should be highly skeptical of all IT support companies.

Without asking the right questions, you don't know if you're putting your trust, and the security of your business data, in the hands of a reputable, honest company... or someone working alone out of a bedroom in their parents' house. A bedroom warrior as I like to call those guys.

Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with bedroom warriors. Everyone must start somewhere (that's where I started), and if you're a one-man band with minimal IT requirements, that could be the most cost-effective solution for you.

However, if you own or manage an established, growing business, with an established, growing business with dozens or hundreds of people depending on their systems every day, you'll need more than one person working from their bedroom can provide.

So how do you avoid choosing the wrong IT support company?

Firstly, look for solidity. You need to check they have the right qualifications, accreditation, and experience. Remember, it's an unregulated industry, so you really need to do the research if you want to end up with the best IT partner.

There's an irony here. IT providers aren't regulated, but if you're a medical device company, you are. Under the QMSR, which now incorporates ISO 13485, supplier controls and outsourced processes get real scrutiny, and the FDA can review your supplier audit reports. If your IT provider supports the systems that hold your quality records, many quality teams treat them as a supplier to qualify and monitor. Ask whether your provider understands that, and whether they can hand your quality team what it needs.

Next, ask them some difficult questions.

You don't want to see your potential new IT partner squirm. But you do want to make sure they're going to deliver what you need. **And asking difficult questions is the only way to be sure that you're making the right choice.**

Ask them: *"How quickly will problems be fixed?"*

Obviously, this will depend on the scale of the problem, but you need to know time frames based on severity. How long will it take your proposed IT support partner to acknowledge your issue in the first place? How long do they expect it'll take to get someone working on the problem?

Look at different scenarios. If you can't access your software, how long should it take to get you logged in? How long could it take to get your business up and running if you suffer a ransomware attack?

You also need to understand the approach your potential new partner will take.

Do they have processes and procedures they stick to when issues arise, or are they winging it? Can they tell you about the worst problem they've encountered and how they dealt with it?

Remember, it's not the problem that you're judging them on, but how they responded to it. This can tell you a lot about their professionalism, knowledge, and ability to remain calm in a crisis.

Ask them: *"What do you do proactively, to make sure my team has fewer interruptions?"*

Downtime is a business killer.

You'll have seen it for yourself at some point, either in your own business or one you were working for. The internet goes down, for example, and people can't access the software they need to do their jobs.

The office descends into chaos. Even those who aren't reliant on the internet stop doing what they're doing. The coffee machine goes into overdrive. Everyone forgets about their job for a while and makes the most of an unofficial break.

But then when things are up and running again, people don't immediately get back to business. Conversations are finished, systems are rebooted, everyone needs to regain their focus. And that often takes more time. What should have been a 15 minute interruption loses you 90 minutes of work.

And that's if it's a minor problem.

So, what can your IT support partner do to minimize this downtime? Will they be working away in the background, making the necessary checks to ensure that most of these little blips don't arise? Can they assure you that most updates and maintenance will be done outside of working hours?

Do they have any other solutions that will mean your business maintains productivity while essential work is taking place?

Ask them: *"Tell me about the specific people who'll be looking after us."*

Though it's an important question, many businesses overlook this side of things when it comes to working with a partner.

It's good to know about the people you'll be working with.

How does your proposed IT support partner assign your account manager, for example? Do account managers have an area of sector expertise? Do they match you on how your personalities may work together? Or do you simply get assigned to the person with the smallest current workload?

Who is my dedicated engineer, and will I talk to the same person every time? When I call, does it go to someone who knows my environment, or into a call center queue? How often will someone be onsite? Who covers when my engineer is on vacation? Who builds my technology roadmap? Who do I talk to if I'm not happy?

This question is a great way for you to get to know more about the company you're hoping to work with. But it's also a great way for you to figure out if their people are the right match for yours.

Ask them: *"Can you explain something deeply technical to me in a way I'll understand?"*

With this question, I'm not suggesting that you try to learn the ins and outs of building an IT infrastructure from the ground up. Instead, it demonstrates your potential IT support partner's ability to explain things to you in English, not tech-speak.

Can they explain a really complicated, technical process to you in a way that you can understand? Do they get frustrated if you ask too many questions? Do they brush you off with 'you don't need to know the technicalities of that'?

If you are partnering with someone, it's vital that you can communicate with each other clearly, without any confusion or breakdown.

It also demonstrates their ability to educate you about the things that matter.

Ask them: *"How will you keep on top of the constant changes in my business?"*

It's no secret that successful businesses deal with a lot of change. From adding new staff members, to tweaking the product or service you offer, it's likely that your business is forever changing things.

It's the way we grow.

In fact, your business probably looks very different now to how it looked 12 months ago.

So how will your proposed IT support partner cope with that? How much do they need to know about these changes? Will it affect what they're doing for you?

It should. Remember, you're looking for a partner here, not just another supplier. It's part of their role to be able to make

recommendations based on how you're working. To suggest better software to use, a smoother network, more appropriate security.

If they can't keep track of how many people are working for you, or the ways you deliver your service, how can they suggest ways to grow, improve – and especially, stay secure?

Look for a new partner who takes an active interest in the changes happening within your business. Perhaps even arrange regular catch-up sessions to ensure they're on top of everything that's going on.

Ask them: *"Have you supported a company like mine through an audit?"*

If you're FDA-regulated or ISO 13485 certified, ask whether they've supported a client through an FDA inspection or a registrar audit. Can they produce evidence of access reviews, backup testing, and change control when your quality team asks? Do they understand why you can't just push an update to a validated system?

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There are lots of other questions that you should be asking. But I feel these are the 6 that tell you the most about your potential partner.

Chapter 6:
What every IT support company wishes you knew about IT

Before you glaze over and flip past this chapter, I'll add my disclaimer here: I'm not about to bore you with technical jargon or tech speak. Please don't panic!

What I am going to talk about are the basic things that, if every client knew them – would make our lives a lot easier.

#1

Your setup needs constant monitoring and maintenance. It's not a one-off job

Computers and other devices ask you to update them all the time. And that's because things are constantly changing.

The same applies to your network and infrastructure. Software is always changing, operating systems are being tweaked, and hardware deteriorates. It never ends!

It's virtually unheard of in professional IT circles that an IT setup isn't constantly monitored and maintained. If 24/7 monitoring isn't part of the agreement, walk away. You will start seeing issues before the ink on the contract is dry.

Most IT support companies do it all in the background and you never hear about it. In fact, a great IT support partner will spend a lot of its time monitoring what's going on within your system, and fixing issues before you know you have a problem.

You'll never notice its going on. And really, that's exactly what you want; monitoring and maintenance you don't notice.

#2

The support triangle is like the hardware triangle

This is a fun concept to learn about buying hardware.

Picture a triangle in your mind. The three equal sides of the triangle represent quality, speed, and price.

If you make one side longer, then all the sides will lengthen to keep the triangle together. For example, if you pick a faster computer, typically the quality and price will also increase.

IT support has an identical triangle with the same three sides: Quality, speed, and price.

If you buy cheap IT support, it'll be slow and lower quality. And vice versa.

Ideally, you'll look at what you can afford to spend on IT support and go with the top of your budget. Pay attention to how you're paying, too, not just how much. Hourly and block-hour billing means your provider earns more when things break. With fixed, all-inclusive pricing, we do better when your systems run smoothly. Our incentives match yours

#3

Beware the bedroom warriors

Let's go back to them for a moment.

Picture a guy, sitting in his bedroom, carrying out your IT support service. He hasn't got the overheads we have, so of course his service will be a lot cheaper.

But remember the triangle, his speed will be slow, and he won't have access to the professional IT tools, because they're expensive.

If you choose a bedroom warrior to provide your IT support, doing everything himself, that's fine. Providing you're his only client. One person should be able to carry out the IT support, maintenance, and monitoring that a business like yours requires.

But what happens when he gets another client?

And another? And then realizes, because he's cheap, he needs even more clients just to make a decent living?

The quality of the service you receive falls, as does the speed in which he reacts to your problems. It's possible he'll stop doing the proactive work for you, because one person cannot service many clients properly.

Yes, you pay more for a larger business with an office, team and all the tools. But you also know that they're set up to keep service levels high, no matter how many clients they take on.



We ask for a long-term partnership to protect you more than us

We don't want to work with people short-term.

We don't take on ad-hoc work or one-off crisis cleanups.

We only work with businesses as part of a long-term partnership.

Why?

Well, obviously, it's good for us to build our own business around long-term clients.

But the real benefit of long-term partnerships comes from the investment we're able to make in our clients, so that we know you inside out. It means we can:

- **Work more closely with you**
- **Learn about your priorities and take an active part in getting you closer to your goals**
- **Customize your infrastructure and IT strategy around where you're heading, rather than where you currently are**
- **Build an infrastructure that grows with your business**
- **Keep you better protected, because we can take an honest and strategic approach when we work in a trusting partnership**

When you work with someone on a short-term basis, it's impossible to do this.

A long-term partnership means we'll be as invested as you will be. Because we genuinely care about your business. If you're doing well, we are too. It's why we've been doing this since 2008, and why we've never lost a client to a competitor. The only clients who have left us did so because they were acquired or went out of business.

#5

Outsourced is better value for money. And helps you access better expertise than the same spend in-house

As you're reviewing your IT support, it's probably crossed your mind that you could hire an in-house employee.

There's a big downside to be aware of. When you have an in-house person, you're asking them to do several different specialized jobs, and support a huge number of people, all at the same time.

Compare the full cost of one in-house IT generalist (salary, benefits, training, tools, and the risk they leave) with a team that covers security, cloud, networking, and compliance. One person can't be an expert in all of it, and when they're on vacation, so is your IT.

Chapter 7:
How to help your internal IT people, if you have them

Many of the businesses we work with have their own IT people. Others have a senior leader, often in operations, finance, or quality, who owns IT without having an IT background.

If that's you, the risk is real.

Not because you lack the skills, but because if something goes badly wrong, like a ransomware attack, the responsibility lands on you.

Luckily, there is a solution to protect both you and the business. It's called co-managed IT support.

You retain your in-house IT people. And we help them with whatever support they need, at whatever level.

The best way to describe our help is to imagine a donut, with your internal IT person in the middle.

Yes, it's a big donut!

They benefit from support all round:



- **At the bottom:** Help with handling the low-level stuff that's important but can be overwhelming, such as being the help desk for your staff, monitoring the network, rolling out updates
- **At the sides:** Support at their skill level to help them cope with their workload, and to have direct access to an experienced IT team to bounce ideas off
- **From above:** High level strategic advice and long-term planning

Our job is to complement your internal IT people, adding in the partnership and strategic overview. So, there's plenty of high-level thinking and support on tap.

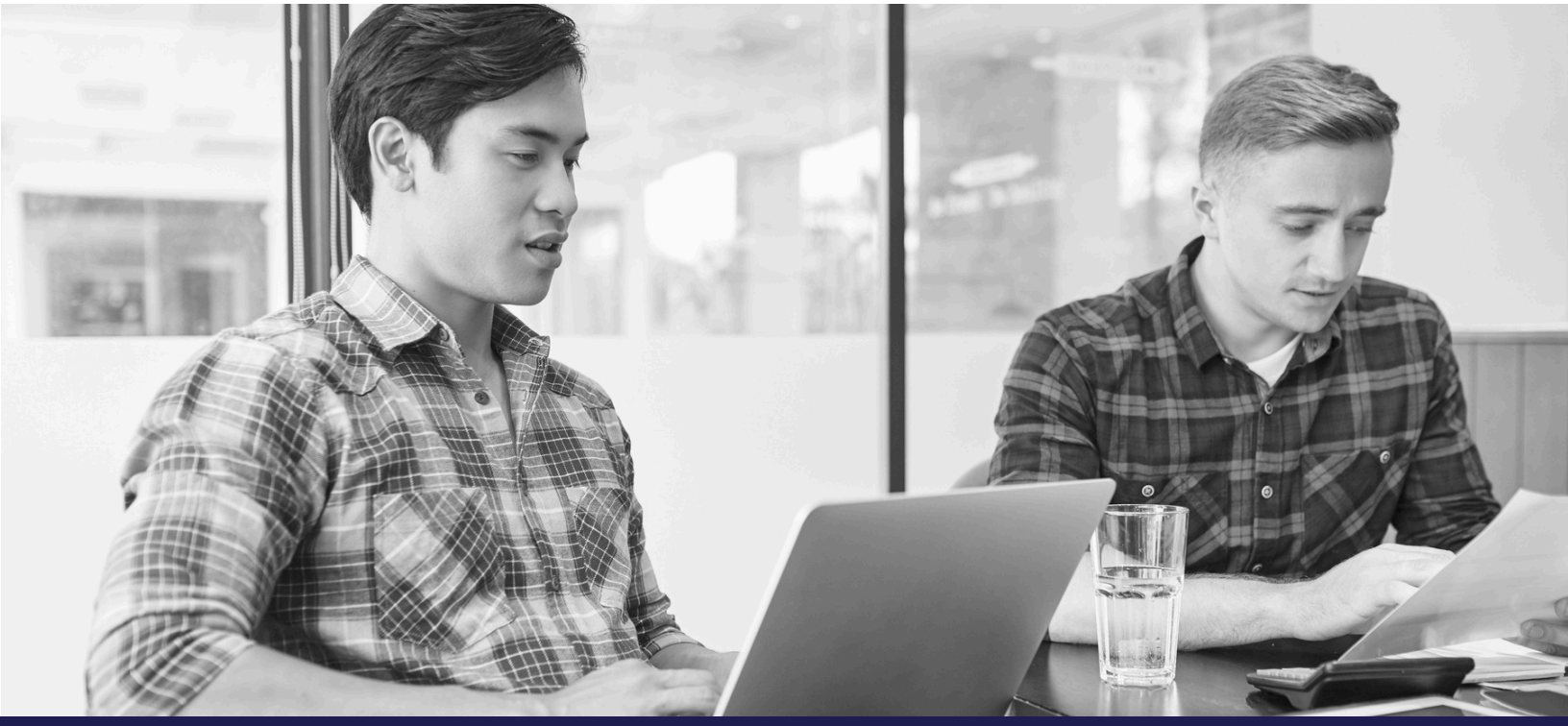
This gets the most out of your internal resource, and fully protects you, as the person with ultimate responsibility.

For regulated companies, co-managed IT also means a second, documented set of hands when audit season comes around, so your internal team isn't carrying it alone.

Some IT managers see outsourced IT support partners as a threat.

→ *We are **not a threat.*** ←

Our job is to make you, and your internal IT people look great and operate seamlessly. When you look great, so do we, everyone wins!



Chapter 8:

Don't take our word for it: Here's what our clients say

I've spent a long time in this guide educating you on how to buy an IT support service. I've covered all the bases. And by now you should know what you want and need in your IT support partner.

But it's all very well me, the owner of the business, telling you how a great IT support partner will change your business.

It's time you heard from some of my clients about the reality of working with us.

Tech River has provided our Managed IT for three different life science companies since 2008. They are very resourceful, responsive and cost-effective with the ability to scale services for growing organizations. I highly recommend Corey and his team at Tech River.

Bob Paulson | CEO Sonex Health

Tech River provides outstanding IT Services! They provide proactive strategic insights into what we should be implementing for cybersecurity to protect our data. They are always available and fast to respond to requests for support.

I would highly recommend them to any small to mid-size company!

Mike Kujak | CEO Francis Medical

We are a medium-sized electrical contractor. Ultimately, we chose Tech River because they promised a higher level of customer service than the others—and they've certainly delivered. Tech River's team has exceeded our expectations on every front, fulfilling all their commitments and consistently outperforming. The level of customer service and performance they provide is exceptionally rare in today's market.

Dan O'Neil | Owner O'Neil Electric

We have partnered with Tech River for over a decade, their forward thinking approach and super responsive support are why I've referred them on numerous occasions. Corey and his team show they actually care about your company and its success. It's good to know I can rely on Tech River to protect our business.

Greg LaSalle | Principle Tapestry Management



Chapter 9:
What will happen during your first 90 days

If you're ready to explore working with us, here's some important information you need to know.

When we begin to work together, the first 90 days are the most critical.

My team and I will be working on three key areas:



I hope and expect to work with you for years to come in our partnership. So, my goal in these first 90 days is to set you up for success.

You'll know:

- **What we can and can't do, with realistic expectations**
- **What we need from you and**
- **How to be a great partner**

We'll survey everything and examine every tiny part of your current IT setup. The more we know the better. All the answers are fully documented in our secure systems.

We'll even ask about your website hosting and examine any specialist software you use. Even if we're not directly supporting these things, we still want to know how it works and who's supporting it. At some stage in our relationship, you're going to ask us about it, so, we need to know about every single service or third-party vendor you're currently using.

Of course, it will mean there's a little work for you and your team, but I promise it will be worthwhile. And you'll only need to do it once.

Once my team has all the information, they'll strategically analyze it to make sure they understand every aspect of your technology. Any IT support company that doesn't do this is not doing their job properly.

Then we're going to talk to your people, from department leads to the folks on the front line.

We'll find out what their existing IT problems are, what frustrates them and what makes their job more difficult. We'll also review anything your previous IT support provider told them couldn't be done, fixed, or created. There's no promise we can make it happen, but of course, we'll try.

Your first 90 days are about stabilizing and documenting everything, and getting your whole setup to the level it needs to be (and where it will stay).

Then, and only then, you and I begin our strategic, forward-thinking work together. This is a unique process for every client. I can tell you more about it when we talk.

Here's what to do next.

Chapter 10:
What to do next

I hope you've found this guide useful, and it's covered many of the questions you've had about choosing a new IT support partner.

Perhaps it's made you look at your IT support in a different way?

I'd really love to talk to you about your business.

If you're serious about working with a new IT support partner to improve your business and contribute to long-term growth, this is your next step:

Book a 15 minute, no obligation video call with me at https://www.techriver.com/contact/

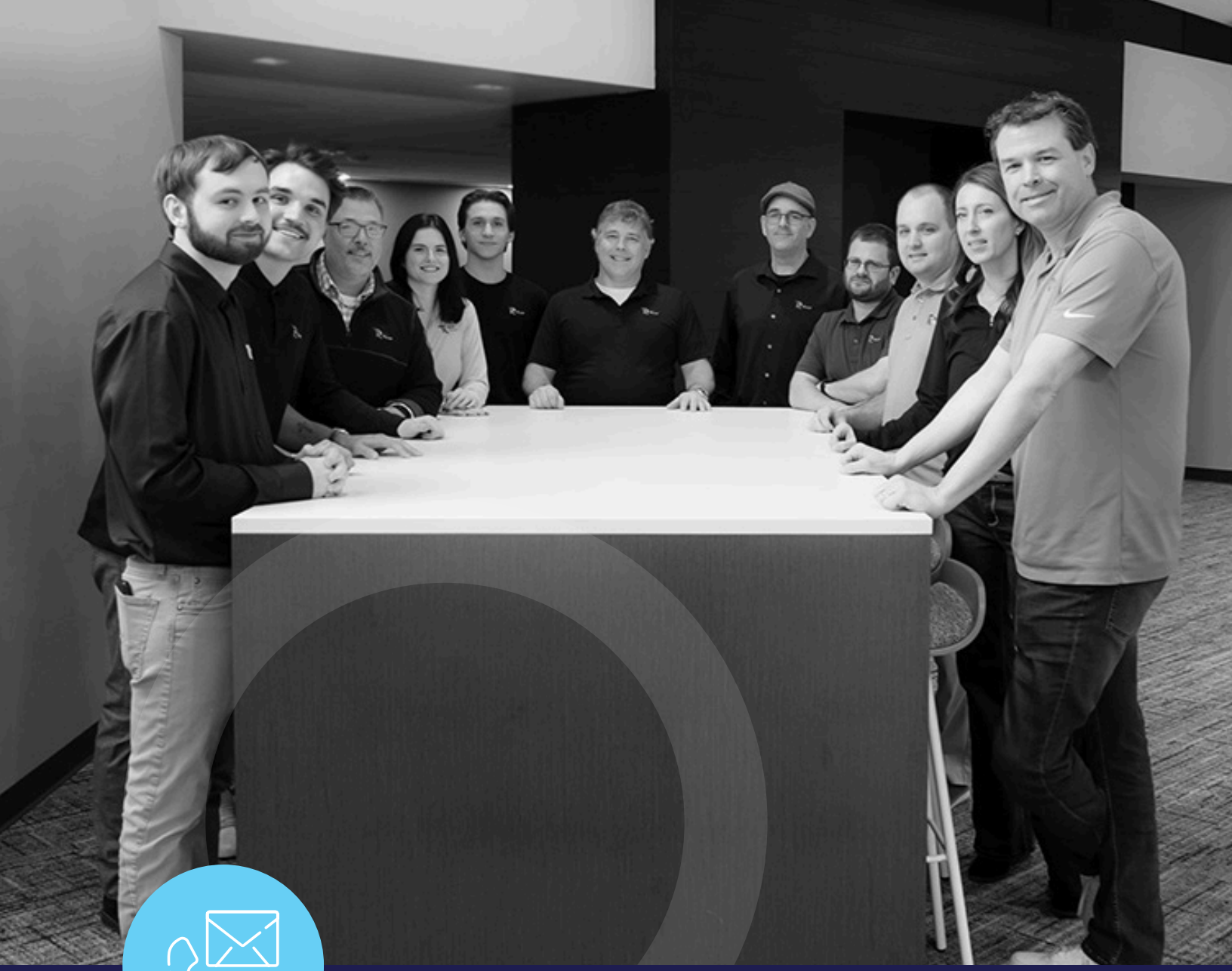
You'll see my live calendar on that page.

You and I can check that our businesses are a good fit and set up a longer conversation, by video or in person at your office, whichever works best for you.

Of course there's no obligation to buy anything, ever.

I'm looking forward to speaking with you and learning about your business.





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