

MSP comparison checklist

Use this simple checklist to compare managed IT providers side by side. It helps you ask clear questions about support, security, backups, contract terms, and price before you choose.

What this is	A free, plain-language checklist from a matching service — not an IT vendor.
How to use it	Work through each item, jot your answers, and use them to compare providers.
Cost	Free. Matching is always free for businesses.

What this checklist helps you do

If you have never bought managed IT before, most proposals can look similar at first. This checklist gives you a plain way to compare what each provider actually includes, what costs extra, and what responsibilities stay with you.

An MSP, or managed services provider, is a company that remotely supports and helps maintain your business technology. Some focus on basic help desk support. Others include stronger security, planning, and vendor coordination. The goal here is not to find the cheapest line item. It is to understand what you are getting.

This tool is especially useful if you are reviewing two or three options at once. Put each provider in its own column. Then go item by item and mark included, extra cost, not offered, or unclear. If something is unclear, ask follow-up questions until it is plain.

If you want help finding options to compare, NodeBridge IT can help you find an independent managed IT provider. Our service is free for businesses. We only collect basic business and contact details.

How to use the checklist

Start with your own business needs, not the provider's sales deck. Write down your headcount, locations, work-from-home needs, industry requirements, main business apps, and any current pain points. A 12-person office with one site will not need the same service model as a 75-person company with remote staff and compliance rules.

Ask every provider the same core questions. That keeps the comparison fair. Request written answers in a proposal, statement of work, or service summary. If they use technical terms, ask them to explain in plain English.

Look at the whole package. A lower monthly price can mean slower response times, fewer security tools, less backup help, or more extra charges. A higher price is not automatically better either. The

right fit depends on your devices, risk level, workflow, and support expectations.

You can also review our guides and services pages before you compare providers. That can make meetings easier if this is your first time buying managed IT.

The side-by-side MSP comparison checklist

Use the list below as your scorecard. You do not need every item, but you should understand each one. If a provider avoids clear answers, that is useful information too.

Support and scope. What users, devices, and locations are covered? Does support include laptops, desktops, printers, Wi-Fi, Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, line-of-business apps, and vendor coordination? What is excluded?

Service levels. Ask for the SLA, or service level agreement. This is the document that explains target response times, service hours, and how urgent issues are prioritized. Ask what happens after hours, on holidays, and during local emergencies.

Security basics. Ask what protections are included. MFA, or multi-factor authentication, means users verify sign-in with a second step beyond a password. EDR, or endpoint detection and response, is software that watches business devices for suspicious activity. An endpoint is any connected device like a laptop, desktop, or mobile phone. Patching means keeping software and operating systems updated with fixes. Ask whether these are included, optional, or billed separately.

Monitoring and tools. Ask if they use RMM, or remote monitoring and management software. This is the tool many providers use to watch device health, install updates, and support systems remotely. Ask what they monitor, how often they review alerts, and what actions they take when they find a problem.

Backups and recovery. Ask what data is backed up, how often, where it is stored, how long it is kept, and who checks it. If they mention a 3-2-1 backup approach, that means keeping 3 copies of data, on 2 different types of storage, with 1 copy offsite. Ask how recovery is tested. No honest provider promises zero data loss in every scenario, so ask for realistic recovery expectations.

Planning and advice. Ask whether strategic guidance is included. A vCIO, or virtual Chief Information Officer, is an outside adviser who helps with budgeting, planning, and technology decisions. Some providers include a few planning meetings per year. Others charge extra.

Compliance and documentation. If your industry has rules, ask what support they provide. HIPAA is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which affects many healthcare-related businesses. PCI means the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard, which matters if you handle card payments. SOC 2 is a reporting framework many software vendors use to show they follow certain security and privacy controls. Requirements vary by industry and state, so ask what they can help document and what they do not handle.

Contract and billing. Ask about term length, auto-renewal, annual increases, setup fees, onboarding fees, project work, hardware, cloud licenses, and exit terms. Clarify whether pricing is per user, per

device, flat fee, or mixed. Get a clear list of what is included in the monthly price and what can trigger extra invoices.

- Covered users, devices, offices, and remote workers
- Business hours, after-hours support, and urgent issue handling
- Included security tools such as MFA, EDR, patching, and email protection
- Backup scope, retention, testing, and recovery process
- Vendor coordination for internet, phones, printers, software, and cloud apps
- Onboarding cost, contract length, cancellation terms, and annual price changes
- Reporting, account reviews, and access to planning help such as a vCIO

How to compare price without getting confused

Managed IT pricing is often shown as a monthly cost per user, per device, or as a blended package. For small and mid-sized US businesses, you may see rough ranges from about \$100 to \$250 per user per month for ongoing managed IT, sometimes higher if security, compliance, or multiple locations are involved. These ranges are not quotes.

The real number depends on headcount, device count, security needs, business apps, support hours, and your area. A provider that includes stronger security, backups, and faster response may cost more than one that covers only basic help desk tasks.

When you compare price, ask each provider to break out recurring monthly fees, one-time setup or onboarding, project work, cloud licenses, hardware, and anything billed separately. The cheapest proposal on page one can become the most expensive if key items are excluded.

A good comparison question is simple: "For a normal month, what is included, what is optional, and what usually leads to extra charges?" If they can answer that clearly, you are getting somewhere.

What to do with your answers

After you fill in the checklist, look for patterns. You are not just comparing technology. You are comparing clarity, fit, and working style. A provider who explains things plainly, documents scope clearly, and answers hard questions directly may be easier to work with over time.

Mark anything that is still unclear. Then send one follow-up email to each provider with the same questions. This gives you a cleaner apples-to-apples comparison. If a proposal still feels vague, ask for a revised scope before you sign anything.

Finally, choose based on business fit. Consider responsiveness, communication, coverage, security basics, backup approach, planning help, and total cost. No honest provider can promise perfect uptime or an unhackable network, so focus on practical protections, clear responsibilities, and realistic expectations.

If you want a simpler starting point, NodeBridge IT can connect you with an independent managed IT provider that fits your size, needs, and location. We are a free matching service, not an MSP, and we do not access your systems or ask for passwords.

Quick answers

How many MSPs should I compare?

Usually two or three is enough. That gives you a real comparison without creating too much extra work.

What if I do not understand the technical terms in a proposal?

Ask the provider to explain each term in plain English and show whether it is included, optional, or extra cost. If they cannot explain it clearly, that is a concern.

Is the cheapest MSP usually the best value?

Not always. Lower pricing can mean fewer services, weaker security basics, slower response, or more add-on charges. Compare total value, not just the headline number.

Should backups always be included?

Many businesses need some form of backup, but the right setup depends on your systems, cloud apps, and recovery needs. Ask exactly what is backed up, how often, and how recovery is tested.

Can NodeBridge IT review my network or log into my systems?

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