

White Paper

Why Break-fix Is Dead When It Comes to IT Support

How Small-medium Companies Get More from Technology with Support Services Designed for the 21st Century



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Break-fix: A 20th Century business model for IT Support

The market for break-fix IT services has become very well established over the past three decades or so. As a business model, the break-fix approach to IT support was a continuation of how business services for supporting office automation had always been delivered; in the pre-PC era, from paper shredders to photocopiers, when machines went wrong you simply summoned support and maintenance services on-demand. Service and support was supplied ad-hoc and the customer paid each time service was required.

As the PC appeared and the steadily proceeded to take over the desktop of the working environment, the break-fix service model was simply transposed on to computing devices. Although there have been variations to refine and optimise the process, the method has essentially remained unaltered.



As the cloud has revolutionised the way businesses provision productivity and digital services over the last 10 years, break-fix has become a less and less appropriate way to approach support and maintenance issues. Indeed, many think it is going to go the way of the dinosaurs!

In this guide, we discuss the benefits of sourcing support and maintenance services for digital technology as a Managed Service.





IT Support for 21st Century Businesses

Businesses of different sizes have different support requirements. Essentially, when it comes to identifying the support requirement, it's horses for courses and this is generally related to the size of the business in question.

Micro and small businesses of up to 9 people may have a very basic requirement. Often this might not extend beyond a need to have a PC fixed quickly when it breaks so they can carry on using Office 365 and other cloud applications to carry on conducting business.

Mid-market and larger, enterprise scale businesses with 250+ employees are usually highly structured and everything tends to be departmentalised. An internal support team may be fully self-sufficient or it may provide a first line of support; however, access to hardware spares and the right skills is not a given, and fixes for physical faults are often outsourced through very specific Service Level Agreements (SLAs), contracts designed to provide the cover that is appropriate. The specific clauses in the agreement reflect how critical the item that needs to be fixed is to the business.



This leaves the remainder, which may be defined as small businesses of 10 - 49, and medium businesses of 50 - 249 employees. However, within these conventional headcount-based definitions of business size are those with 10 - 100 employees. This segment has more complex technology requirements and a more business-critical dependency on IT, far exceeding those of smaller businesses.

However, they are unlikely to be as self-sufficient as larger businesses. Quite frankly, in this space, which encompasses in excess of 200,000 UK companies, the 'business process' of waiting for something to break and then fixing it is too risky. In the 21st Century there simply needs to be a better alternative to break-fix. A more considered approach is needed to ensure there is access to the right levels of service to meet the needs of the business.



Enabling Seamless, Fully Productive Home Working

When evaluating the advantages of home working, some of the primary considerations are centred on the question of productivity. Today's cloud technologies provide a solid platform for seamless and fully productive home working, allowing businesses to fully exploit the benefits.

Access to files and resources

24/7/365 access to files, databases and any technology resource available to the rest of the business.

- Enables anytime working patterns to suit the requirements of individual
- Allows hours of work flexibility to meet business needs such as delivery deadlines
- Accommodates requirements for time shift for globally dispersed workers

Collaboration

Enables collaborative working with customers, co-workers and delivery partners using tools such as:

- Outlook and its extended groupware features
- SharePoint and other Microsoft technologies such as Skype for Business (see below)
- Social enterprise software tools such as the eXo platform



IT Support as a Managed Service

Holistic and end-to-end

For many businesses IT Support is the common denominator that underpins how the different elements of IT function. Internet, email, servers, storage, database applications and desktop productivity are all united by the need for good support. If we apply the Managed Services idea to the requirement for holistic support across the entire technology fabric of a business then we develop a vision for IT Support as a Managed Service.

Such an approach is end-to-end, avoids any gaps and ensures the entire technology fabric of the business is completely under the care of a single responsible service provider.

Seeing the technology fabric of the business holistically, the MSP understands the way people, business and technology fit together and is able to deliver more value from the IT resources in which the business has invested.



Familiarity and the 'IT Guy'

To ensure service is delivered by a friendly, familiar face, it is highly desirable to have someone that takes responsibility for each particular client. This purpose is not best achieved by a hands-off account manager. It is best served by attaching a hands-on 'IT Guy', an experienced systems engineer, where he or she takes personal responsibility for the relationship.

Hands-on personal service, consistently delivered by the same trusted and familiar face enables continuity and allows knowledge accumulated over many contacts to be used to accelerate troubleshooting and problem solving.



Identifying 'hidden' Technology Challenges

The technology fabric of a business often develops organically and unpredictably. If there's an immediate project need, the 6 month budget can go out of the window as things may suddenly move from the 'Nice to Have' to the 'Essential' column of the CAPEX plan. Sometimes watercooler moments may contain nuggets of information about forthcoming technology requirements that may not be formally recorded elsewhere. From the IT perspective, organic development can be challenging.

One of the best ways to get a heads up is to have the IT Guy embedded within the business, working alongside the internal team, participating on informal lunchtime exchanges or more formal review meetings. Keeping an ear to the ground and listening to the internal team provides the close working relationship and the information the MSP needs to react in a more timely and effective ways to get the best out of technology.





An IT Strategy for Entrepreneurial Businesses

If the technology fabric may be subject to organic development, the same is often true for the core business activities of many small and medium businesses in the 10 – 100 employee bracket. They are often conceived, built and run by entrepreneurial leaders. Frequently business models are modified to exploit new market opportunities or to pull back from those that are drying up. Their challenges change regularly and so the business changes regularly; consequently, everything needs to be flexible.

To match this requirement the IT strategy needs to be developed in parallel. IT needs to be flexible to accommodate growth through M&A as well as direct investment; enable remote working; and absorb employee preferences to use their own smartphones and tablets and laptops, the so-called Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) phenomena.



Eliminating 'Shadow IT'

Shadow IT is where users resort to using their own software or websites to obtain the functionality and tools to help them on their work. Whether it is to get something done faster, more easily or at a higher standard, the reason they feel they need to do this is because the company or the IT department has failed to provide them with the appropriate tools for the job.

The problem with Shadow IT is the company loses control of where data is stored, transmitted and taken offline on USB drives, smartphone and tablets, compromising security. Imagine a leading auto manufacturer finding out its latest concept car designs are being shared with authorised partners via Dropbox because secure FTP upload tools were not working?

Shadow IT is a widespread practice, especially in smaller firms. You can't grow a business like that and you certainly wouldn't be able to sell one. Avoiding situations in which Shadow IT thrives means listening to users and providing fully-featured and up-to-date systems that include the functionality required.

The IT Guy embedded and with his or her ear to the ground is invaluable in identifying instances of Shadow IT; more importantly they listen to staff, provide an independent point of view, and are able to convey the technology requirements to senior management.



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Reward Schemes

Incentivised schemes that reward performance are high more usually the preserve of sales teams. However, they also have a role to play in motivating non-sales staff involved in end-point service delivery.

A CSat (Customer Satisfaction) survey links IT Guy remuneration to performance. From the outset of the relationship, the technical expert understands that the client's experience of the IT Support that is delivered as a Managed Service is to play a direct role in determining performance bonuses.

IT Support for the Way Businesses Work Today

IT Support as a Managed Service fits very well with the needs of today's small and medium businesses of 10 - 100 employees. Delivering IT support under this business model enables companies to get the best value from their investment in technology while avoiding the business risks of the break-fix approach to IT Support.

- End-to-end service that looks after the entire technology fabric used by the business
- Personal service delivery from a friendly, familiar hands-on technical expert
- Uncovers hidden technology challenges that derive from organic processes
- Fits with the need for business flexibility to accommodate changes to the core business
- Takes control of Shadow IT and determines the use of technology in the business
- Links IT Guy remuneration to performance and customer experience



Why is HTL Support a Preferred Technology Support Provider

HTL provides a range of services to support the use of technology in today's businesses. Whether it is infrastructure and user support, internet connectivity or voice communications, we provide the high degree of personalised service that enables clients to obtain more value from business technology. Each client is assigned a dedicated lead engineer who project manages the account and normally attends to all requests for support.

Websites are increasingly important. As the focal point for marketing and for inbound lead generation, or for e-commerce, we are able to support websites, to ensure they continue to meet the needs of our clients' businesses.

Our ability to re-configure our services to act as your IT department operating under your IT Director or other internal sponsor, or to work alongside and support your internal support function means we are vastly experienced in tailoring support to the specific requirements of each client.





About HTL Support

HTL Support was initially founded in 2009 by Managing Director Justin Dean, to provide specialist IT support and IT consultancy services to financial services sector clients. Since its launch, HTL has rapidly evolved to offer a full range of cutting-edge, integrated and flexible products and services to a worldwide client base across all industries. Our experience and professionalism has been endorsed both by our clients and by many of the world's leading hardware and software manufacturers.

All companies need to know that their IT support provider is not going to let them down when it comes to important projects. We will always find the right solution and are equally happy either functioning as project managers for your internal IT department or providing an experienced team to work under your own IT Director or project leader.



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