

A BUYER'S GUIDE FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

I.T. Buyers Guide

What you should expect to pay for I.T. support, and how to sort through the confusion of contracts, services and pricing.

*Bolted on. **Built in.***

READ THIS GUIDE TO DISCOVER

What You Should Expect To Pay For **I.T. Support** For Your Business

How to sort through the confusion and complexity of I.T. services companies' contracts, services and pricing, so you avoid hiring the wrong one.

- The **3 most common ways** I.T. services companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.
- A common billing model that puts **all the risk on you** when buying I.T. services: what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.
- Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses I.T. companies put in their contracts that you **don't want to agree to**.
- **5 ways** "cheaper" I.T. firms hide the true cost of their services in their contracts.
- **21 critical questions** to ask your I.T. support firm before signing an agreement.

Ready to skip ahead?

Leave us a message and we'll call you back, or send you an invite to a complimentary 10 to 15 minute consultation.

LEAVE A MESSAGE

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FROM THE DESK OF WILL MCCABE

Never ask an I.T. services company, "What do you charge?"

Instead, ask "What will I get for my money?" and know what to look for and what to avoid.

Dear Colleague,

One of the most common questions we get from prospective clients is "What do you guys charge for your services?" Since it's such a common and important question, I decided to write this report. There are three reasons why choosing your I.T. company on fees alone can lead to overpaying, even when prices appear cheaper initially, and to serious risk to your organization.

01 There is no such thing as "standard" pricing.

Services that look identical can be packaged in radically different ways. That is why it is impossible to compare I.T. providers on fees alone. This report explains the most common pricing models so you can make an informed choice.

02 "Dirty little secrets" hide in cheap contracts.

SLA clauses that "cheaper" firms use to make fees appear lower can put you at high risk for cyber-attacks. Most leaders do not know what to look for, which is exactly how cheaper firms get away with it.

03 Buy on value, not on price.

This guide will help you pick the right I.T. services company for your specific situation, budget and needs based on the value they can deliver, not just price, high or low.

My goal is to help you make the most informed decision possible so you end up working with someone who solves your problems in a time frame, manner and budget that's right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

Will McCabe · Managing Partner · Vencer Group Inc.

■ SECTION 1 • SERVICE MODELS

Comparing Apples To Apples

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one I.T. services company to another, you need to understand the three predominant pricing and service models most companies offer.

01 Time and Materials (Hourly) • Break-Fix

You pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to "fix" your problem when something "breaks." Most charge in the **\$200 to \$340 CAD range**. Scope ranges from a single problem to large projects like software upgrades, cyber-protection rollouts, or office moves.

02 Managed I.T. Services (MSP)

An MSP takes on the role of your fully outsourced I.T. infrastructure: troubleshooting, device setup and support, security, backup, vCIO leadership, and more. Most managed I.T. service contracts cover:

- Installing and setting up applications such as Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, SharePoint, etc.
- Setting up and managing network, device and data security against hackers, ransomware and viruses.
- Backing up your data and assisting in recovery in the event of a disaster.
- Providing a help desk and support team for employees with I.T. problems.
- Monitoring and maintaining the overall health, speed, performance and security of your network daily.
- Providing vCIO and fractional IT leadership: technology roadmaps, IT budgeting, and quarterly strategy reviews.

03 Vendor-Supplied I.T. Services

Many software vendors offer pared-down support limited to their specific application only. It's often a good idea to buy basic support for a critical line-of-business app, but this is **not sufficient** to provide full I.T. services, cybersecurity, backup and end-user support.

■ SECTION 2 • CHOOSING A MODEL

Managed I.T. Services vs. Break-Fix

The advantage of break-fix is that you only pay when you need it. But if you handle sensitive data, these become serious risks:

✗ **Break-fix gets very expensive when you have multiple issues, or a major problem like ransomware.**

The I.T. company will take longer to troubleshoot and fix issues than if they were familiar with your environment and had systems in place to prevent escalation.

✗ **Hourly billing works in your I.T. company's favor, not yours.**

The consultant can assign a junior tech who may take 2 to 3 times as long to fix what a senior tech would fix quickly. There is no incentive to fix problems fast; the incentive is to drag it out.

✗ **You are more likely to have major issues.**

One main reason businesses choose an MSP is to prevent major issues. As Ben Franklin said: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

✗ **You can't budget for I.T. services.**

You could end up paying more if you constantly call for urgent emergency support and have no way to plan for it.

✗ **You won't be a priority for the I.T. company.**

All I.T. firms prioritize managed clients over break-fix clients. You get called back when they can afford to, meaning you could be down for days. The I.T. company has no incentive to address root causes, just to fix immediate problems and more cost.

✗ **Without active maintenance, your chances of getting hacked go up exponentially.**

Thinking "nobody wants to hack us" or "we're 100% in the cloud" is a dangerous mindset. Without a professional I.T. company maintaining your security, your exposure grows daily.

Hiring an MSP to manage your I.T. environment is, by far, the most cost-effective option for businesses with **15 or more employees**, or who handle critical operations and sensitive data.

A NOTE ON SCOPE

The service levels described in this guide reflect a **Keystone** (fully managed) engagement, where Vencer owns I.T. as a complete business function. Under a **Dynamic** (co-managed or fractional) engagement, the same level of delivery cannot always be guaranteed - it depends on the individual agreement and how responsibility is shared with your team.

What Should I.T. Services Cost?

IMPORTANT

The price quotes below are **industry averages** based on a recent survey by Service Leadership, an independent consulting firm. This does not reflect Vencer's specific pricing and may not reflect your unique situation.

Hourly Break-Fix: Most I.T. companies charge between **\$200 and \$340 CAD per hour** with a one-hour minimum.

Managed I.T. Services Pricing

Most MSPs quote a **monthly fee per user**. According to Service Leadership:

\$200

CAD / USER / MONTH (LOW END)

\$340

CAD / USER / MONTH (HIGH END)

These fees are expected to rise due to constant inflation and a tight I.T. labour market.

"Operationally mature" MSPs typically charge more because they deliver better cybersecurity and compliance services, include CIO services and dedicated account management, and can afford to hire knowledgeable techs. If an MSP is charging \$200 CAD/user/month, you need to question what they are **not** providing.

Project Fees

For one-time projects, fees vary widely. Always demand:

- > **A detailed scope of work** that specifies what "success" is: document expectations on performance, workflow, costs, security and access.
- > **A fixed budget and time frame for completion:** be wary of hourly estimates that allow billing for "unforeseen" circumstances.
- > **Clear ownership and escalation paths:** you should know who is accountable and how scope changes are handled in writing.

■ SECTION 3 • BUYER BEWARE

5 ways "cheaper-priced" I.T. firms hide the **true cost**

The "cheapest" provider can end up costing far more due to carve-outs, hidden fees, and inadequate solutions you will later need to upgrade.

01 Grossly Inadequate Compliance & Cybersecurity Protections

Insurance companies now require **employee cyber awareness training, MFA, and advanced endpoint protection** just to provide cyber liability coverage. Vencer includes these as standard.

02 Inadequate Backup & Disaster Recovery

Your MSP should include daily backups of servers, workstations, and cloud apps like Microsoft 365. Backups must be **immutable** (un-corruptible by hackers); many insurers now require this.

03 Carve-Outs For On-Site & After-Hours Support

Many firms charge extra for after-hours and on-site visits. Vencer offers tiered coverage, and our higher tiers include on-site and after-hours support so you are not billed for every request. Make sure you understand what your tier covers before you sign.

04 Nonexistent Vendor Liaison & Support

Some I.T. firms charge hourly to resolve issues with phone systems, ISPs, printers, and other devices on your network. As a Vencer client, all of that is **included**.

05 Cheap, Inexperienced Techs & No Account Manager

Smaller MSPs can't afford **dedicated account managers**, meaning you depend on the owner, who is extremely busy, to watch your account, find brewing problems, and plan upgrades.

BUYER BEWARE

To truly compare MSP contracts, your SLA should clearly define: services included, guaranteed response times, extra fees (on-site, after-hours), contract/cancellation terms, price protection, and payment terms.

■ SECTION 4 • THE 21 QUESTIONS

21 Questions to ask before signing a contract

Get answers to all of these **in writing**.

CS Customer Service

- Q01

How do you request support?

Our answer: At Vencer, we offer multiple channels: a live help desk, a dedicated support portal, and email, so you're never without a way to reach us, even when your internet is down.
- Q02

Do you have a written, guaranteed response time?

Our answer: The number one frustration we hear is "they never return our calls." We put clear response-time commitments in every SLA and track performance in real time.
- Q03

Do they explain things in plain language, not "geek-speak"?

Our answer: Our technicians are trained to have the "heart of a teacher" and explain everything clearly. Just look at our client reviews to see how our team communicates.
- Q04

Do they create an I.T. Roadmap and meet with you quarterly?

Our answer: We conduct quarterly strategy meetings to find areas of high risk and opportunities to improve productivity, lower costs and align I.T. with business goals.
- Q05

Do they bill properly with clear invoices?

Our answer: Our invoices show exactly what work was done, why and when. Every invoice is reviewed for accuracy before it's sent, with no surprise catch-up billing.
- Q06

Do they carry adequate insurance?

Our answer: We carry cyber liability and errors & omissions insurance. If your I.T. company doesn't carry insurance, any damages become your liability. Always ask for proof of coverage.
- Q07

Do they have a dedicated account management team?

Our answer: If it's "the owner," ask how they'll dedicate time to you while running the company. Make sure a dedicated team is watching your account.

SC Cybersecurity & Compliance

- Q08 Do they insist on security that meets modern standards?**
Our answer: Strong security is fundamentally about risk management, protecting your operations, your data, and your ability to keep working when something goes wrong. We don't allow clients to operate without adequate security in place, and we align to your regulatory and privacy obligations like PIPA and PIPEDA where they apply.
- Q09 Do they provide quarterly reports on updates, patches, and machine status?**
Our answer: Every quarter, clients get a detailed health score report. We reassess security, stability and compliance to ensure we're watching critical operations and details.
- Q10 Do they provide written network documentation?**
Our answer: All clients receive this at no additional cost. If your current I.T. company keeps you in the dark about what equipment, licenses and passwords you have, you're being held hostage.
- Q11 Do they understand the frameworks that apply to your business?**
Our answer: We have deep experience supporting Alberta businesses across the frameworks that matter to regulated sectors, including PIPA, PIPEDA, SOC 2, and PCI DSS, with deep fluency in engineering and energy. We bring that context so compliance becomes an integrated part of your operation rather than a fire drill.
- Q12 Have they reviewed your cyber liability insurance application?**
Our answer: All carriers require strict cybersecurity protections before they'll cover you. If your I.T. company hasn't reviewed your policy, your claim could be denied. We find gaps all the time when reviewing new clients' networks.

BR Backups & Data Recovery

- Q13 Do they insist on immutable backups?**
Our answer: The only kind of backup you should have is an **immutable backup**, meaning it cannot be changed or corrupted by ransomware. Cyber insurance now requires this too.
- Q14 Do they perform periodic test restores to verify backups actually work?**
Our answer: We perform weekly, monthly, and quarterly disaster recovery testing at different depths to ensure backups are working as expected. The worst time to find out a backup is when you desperately need it.
- Q15 Do they back up your network before any project or upgrade?**
Our answer: Yes, as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.
- Q16 Do they have a written disaster recovery plan?**
Our answer: All our clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. At minimum, your network is covered if something happens.

TS Technical Expertise & Service

Q17 Is their help desk in-house, or outsourced overseas?

Our answer: We provide our own in-house help desk. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, and critical for keeping your data secure.

Q18 Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications?

Our answer: Our technicians maintain certifications across our core stack: endpoint security, RMM, Microsoft 365 and Azure, plus ongoing cybersecurity and compliance training in PIPA and PIPEDA.

Q19 Do their technicians conduct themselves professionally?

Our answer: Our technicians are trained in customer service, communication and high standards. They won't confuse you with geek-speak or talk down to you. If they show up on-site, you'd be proud to have them there.

Q20 Can they support your line-of-business applications?

Our answer: We own the problems with line-of-business applications for our clients. We'll act as the liaison between you and your vendor to make sure these applications work reliably.

Q21 When something goes wrong with internet, phones, printers, do they own the problem?

Our answer: We feel **we** should own the problem so you don't have to. That's just plain old good service, and something many computer guys won't do.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Are you done with frustrating I.T. problems?

The next step is simple: leave a message at **1-888-271-6230** or email **will.mccabe@vencergroup.com** and we'll call you back or send you an invite for a brief 10 to 15 minute consultation. We'll conduct our proprietary Vencer I.T. Systems And Risk Assessment to show you where your real risk sits, whether your backups actually work, how much visibility you have across your I.T., and where there's room to run leaner and with clearer accountability.

Schedule your **FREE Assessment, No Cost, No Obligation**

LEAVE A MESSAGE

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ABOUT VENCER GROUP

Bolted on. Built in.

Your IT team, wherever your business operates.

We're builders and operators. **Calgary-rooted. Canadian-reaching. Internationally capable.** With multiple engagement models, 24/7 locally staffed NOC/SOC protection, and field-specific support options.

Founded 2006. Nineteen years operating IT for founders, boards, and operators. Zero client breaches in eleven years. Active client work on four continents right now.

Vencer was built from decades of experience across mergers, divestitures, technology transitions, and daily operations. Every scaling moment, every M&A close, every inflection point, encoded into how we build and how we show up.

19

YEARS OPTIMIZING IT

11

YEARS WITHOUT A BREACH

4

CONTINENTS DELIVERED

24/7

SUPPORT AND MONITORING

Let's talk. **One conversation. No pitch.**

Thirty minutes. Coffee, Zoom, or however works.

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NOTES, METHODOLOGY & LEGAL

How we sourced the numbers in this guide.

PRICING DATA

The \$200-\$340 CAD per user per month range cited in Section 2 is drawn from Service Leadership's industry benchmark surveys of managed IT service providers. Service Leadership is an independent consulting firm that tracks MSP pricing, packaging, and operational maturity across North America. Their data represents industry averages, not Vencer's own pricing. Actual pricing varies by service scope, geography, staffing model, and vendor stack. Where a specific MSP's fees fall inside or outside this range is a signal about their operational model, not a verdict on the firm.

THE 'OPERATIONALLY MATURE' DEFINITION

Section 2 references 'operationally mature' MSPs. Service Leadership defines operational maturity through documented benchmarks on tooling standardization, service delivery structure, technical debt management, and financial discipline. In practice, operationally mature MSPs tend to charge more because their fixed costs, training, tooling licenses, senior staff, are higher, and their outcomes tend to be more predictable.

THE 21 QUESTIONS

The 21 questions in Section 4 are drawn from our own field experience across managed IT engagements and M&A due diligence work. They are not scored or weighted, they are the questions we would ask if we were the buyer, not the seller.

WHERE OUR LAWYERS SMILE

This guide is educational. It is not legal, financial, procurement, or specific IT advice for your organization. Pricing ranges are industry averages, not commitments. Recommendations are general frameworks, not decisions. Vendor practices cited (both good and cautionary) are illustrative of common patterns, not accusations against any specific provider. Before selecting or terminating an IT services relationship, consult your own advisors and match the framework to your particular situation. Vencer Group is happy to help, that conversation is a scoped engagement, not this document.



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