

BUYER'S GUIDE

MSP EVALUATION CHECKLIST

10 criteria to evaluate before you choose a managed service provider.



EVERY INTERACTION MATTERS.

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START HERE

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Work through each section before your first vendor call.

For each criterion, use the questions as a guide and record the provider's responses in the notes field. The **What to look for** line describes what a credible answer sounds like, so you can tell the difference between a capability that's been built and one that's being described.

At the end, check the warning signs list. One is worth a follow-up. Two or more is worth walking away.

THE 10 CRITERIA

- 01 Service Desk Quality and Response Time
 - 02 Cybersecurity Posture and Compliance Coverage
 - 03 Technical Depth in Your Specific Stack
 - 04 SLA Specificity and Accountability
 - 05 Vendor Partnerships and Ecosystem Access
 - 06 On-Site and Field Support Capability
 - 07 Scalability and Flexibility of Engagement
 - 08 Strategic Reporting and Business Alignment
 - 09 References and Client Retention
 - 10 Onboarding and Transition Process
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01 SERVICE DESK QUALITY AND RESPONSE TIME

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Does the MSP provide 24/7/365 service desk coverage?
- ☐ What is their average response time and first-call resolution rate?
- ☐ Are agents HDI-certified or trained to ITIL standards?
- ☐ Are after-hours calls answered by live technicians, or routed offshore or through automation?
- ☐ Does the MSP support multiple time zones and languages for global teams?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

SLA commitments with specific response time targets and documented escalation paths. “24/7 availability” is not a commitment. Ask what happens at 2 a.m. and who answers.

NOTES

02 CYBERSECURITY POSTURE AND COMPLIANCE COVERAGE

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Is cybersecurity built into the managed services model or purchased separately?
- ☐ Does the MSP hold SOC 2, ISO 27001, or NIST-aligned certifications?
- ☐ How does the MSP handle your industry’s compliance requirements?
- ☐ What are their internal security controls: access management, password policy, breach history?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

An MSP that can name your compliance framework without being prompted and can show their own internal controls, not just their clients’.

NOTES

03 TECHNICAL DEPTH IN YOUR SPECIFIC STACK

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Does the MSP have documented expertise in your core applications (Oracle ERP, EBS, OCI)?
- ☐ What certifications and partner tiers do they hold (Oracle, Microsoft, AWS)?
- ☐ Can they provide case studies from organizations with similar environments?
- ☐ Do their tools integrate with your existing IT infrastructure?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Verifiable depth, not broad familiarity. Ask for a technical discovery session before any contract discussion. If they resist, that tells you something.

NOTES

04 SLA SPECIFICITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Does the SLA define uptime commitments, ticket resolution times, and first-call resolution rates?
- ☐ What remedies apply if SLA targets are missed?
- ☐ Can you review a sample SLA before the sales process advances?
- ☐ How is SLA performance tracked and reported?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Specific, measurable commitments with contractual accountability. Phrases like “we aim for rapid response” are marketing, not operations. Request the sample SLA before any follow-up meeting.

NOTES

05 VENDOR PARTNERSHIPS AND ECOSYSTEM ACCESS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Does the MSP maintain active partnerships with your key vendors (Oracle, Microsoft, AWS)?
- ☐ Do those partnerships translate to certified support, pricing advantages, or dedicated escalation paths?
- ☐ Are partnership tiers current and verifiable?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Partnerships that map to your actual technology stack. A logo wall with vendors you do not use is not a differentiator.

NOTES

06 ON-SITE AND FIELD SUPPORT CAPABILITY

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ If on-site support is needed, does the MSP have a local presence or regional dispatch capability?
- ☐ What is their typical on-site response time for your locations?
- ☐ Does on-site coverage extend to branch offices or remote sites?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A direct answer with specific geography and timing. “We can arrange something” is not a support model. For organizations with multiple sites, confirm coverage explicitly before signing.

NOTES

07 SCALABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF ENGAGEMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Can the engagement scope expand without requiring a new procurement process?
- ☐ Does the MSP offer co-managed models for organizations that want to retain internal IT staff?
- ☐ Are contracts structured to accommodate growth or restructuring?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Flexibility written into the contract, not promised verbally. If adding a service line requires renegotiation, you will pay for that friction every time your needs evolve.

NOTES

08 STRATEGIC REPORTING AND BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Can the MSP provide a sample executive report before you sign?
- ☐ Does reporting map IT performance to business outcomes, or only to technical metrics?
- ☐ Does the MSP offer quarterly business reviews and IT roadmap support?
- ☐ Do they proactively surface modernization opportunities, or only respond to incidents?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A sample executive report produced on request, before the contract. Providers that cannot show this before you sign will not produce it after. Monthly ticket-volume summaries are the floor, not the deliverable.

NOTES

09 REFERENCES AND CLIENT RETENTION

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Can the MSP provide references from organizations of similar size, industry, and IT complexity?
- ☐ What is their client retention rate?
- ☐ What do references say about the transition period and ongoing service quality?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

References from organizations with environments comparable to yours. Name-brand logos from unrelated industries are not evidence. Call the references and ask specifically about the first 90 days.

NOTES

10 ONBOARDING AND TRANSITION PROCESS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- ☐ Does the MSP have a documented onboarding and cutover plan?
- ☐ Can they provide a sample transition timeline?
- ☐ How do they handle knowledge transfer from a previous provider?
- ☐ What does the first 90 days look like, specifically?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A structured plan with defined milestones and named owners. Weak onboarding is the most consistent source of early dissatisfaction with a new MSP, and it is almost always visible in the pre-sale process.

NOTES

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

CHECK FOR WARNING SIGNS

Walk away if you see two or more.

Review this list after your evaluation calls. One warrants a follow-up question. Two or more means the provider is selling above their capability.

- ⚠ Unable to produce a sample SLA or executive report before contract
- ⚠ Cannot name your industry's specific compliance framework without prompting
- ⚠ "We do everything" positioning with no documented depth in your core stack
- ⚠ Heavy discount pressure early in the sales process, without transparency on scope
- ⚠ References are recognizable company names from unrelated industries
- ⚠ No structured onboarding or transition plan available to review

One: ask a follow-up question. **Two or more:** walk away.

REQUEST A CONSULT

NEED HELP EVALUATING YOUR OPTIONS?

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Named in the Gartner Market Guide for Oracle Cloud Infrastructure Professional and Managed Services.

