IT Buyer's Guide

For Northeast Ohio

Small Businesses

DIRECT CONNECT
COMPUTER SYSTEMS

What You Should Expect To Pay For IT Support For Your Business

(And How To Get *Exactly* What You Need Without Unnecessary Extras, Hidden Fees And Bloated Contracts)

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The three most common ways IT service companies charge for their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.

- ✓ A common billing model that puts ALL THE RISK on you, the customer, when buying IT services; you'll learn what it is and why you need to avoid agreeing to it.

- ✓ Exclusions, hidden fees and other "gotcha" clauses IT companies put in their contracts that you DON'T want to agree to.

- ✓ How to make sure you know exactly what you're getting to avoid disappointment, frustration and added costs later on that you didn't anticipate.

- ✓ 17 revealing questions to ask your IT support firm BEFORE giving them access to your computer network, email and data.

From the Desk of: Jim Conley
Owner/President
Direct Connect Computer Systems, Inc.

If you are the CEO/Owner of a small business in Northeast Ohio that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your company, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent firm you can **trust**.

My name is Jim Conley, Owner of Direct Connect Computer Systems, Inc. and co-author of *How to Find the 'Best-Fit' IT Management Company for Your Business*. We've been providing IT services to small businesses in Northeast Ohio for over 30 years. We understand your unique challenges, needs and workflow and can put in place solutions to increase productivity and reduce downtime. You may not have heard of us before, but maybe you're familiar with one or more of the businesses that are clients of ours. A few of their comments are enclosed.

One of the most common questions we get from new prospective clients calling our office is "What do you guys charge for your services?" Since this is such a common question – and a very important one to address – I decided to write this report for three reasons:

1. I wanted an easy way to answer this question and educate all prospective clients who come to us on the most common ways IT service companies package and price their services, and the pros and cons of each approach.

2. I wanted to bring to light a few "industry secrets" about IT service contracts and SLAs (service level agreements) that almost no business owner thinks about, understands or knows to ask about when evaluating IT service providers that can end up burning you with hidden fees and locking you into a long-term contract when they are unwilling or unable to deliver the quality of service you need.

3. I wanted to educate business owners on how to pick the **right** IT service company for their specific situation, budget and needs based on the *VALUE* the company can deliver, not just the price, high OR low.

In the end, my purpose is to help you make the <u>most informed decision possible,</u> so you end up working with someone who helps you solve your problems and accomplish what you want in a time frame, manner and budget that is right for you.

Dedicated to serving you,

Jim Conley

About The Author

Direct Connect Computer Systems has been providing technology solutions to Northeast Ohio small businesses for over 30 years. One of our proudest accomplishments has been the handful of businesses we're still servicing over 27 years! As a veteran- and family-owned business, we pride ourselves in being a trustworthy IT support source for our clients, giving them peace of mind and systems that just work!

As an entrepreneur and passionate IT expert, Jim Conley founded **Direct Connect Computer Systems** in 1992 with a goal to directly connect small businesses to the appropriate computer technologies by providing reliable and professional IT services in Northeast Ohio.

Jim developed his passion for technology while in the U.S. Army in the early 1980s. After enlisting as an infantryman, he spent much of his time in the Army working on computers within administrative units. After four years, he returned home and worked in banking as an IT program analyst, and around the same time, he also followed his passion for music and opened the first record store in Geauga County. He went on to work for a local computer sales and service company in downtown Cleveland, and got a first-hand look at small businesses and their need for technology services.

Armed with extensive IT experience and bit by the entrepreneurial bug, Jim had an itch to open his own technology firm – which he did with **Direct Connect Computer Systems**. Throughout all the changes in technology over the last quarter century, Jim and Direct Connect have become trusted advisors and IT management authorities for hundreds of businesses in Northeast Ohio.

Jim shared his considerable experience and longevity in the IT industry as the co-author of the book *How to Find The 'Best-Fit' IT Management Company for Your Business*. He wrote the book to provide business owners with a foundation to help them make the right decision when choosing a technology consultant who can help contribute to the success of their organization, and navigate constantly changing technology, a dizzying number of choices and an alphabet soup of acronyms.

As a hands-on owner, Jim believes in delivering exceptional service and value that raises the standards for all consultants in the industry as part of building long-term business relationships with technology providing a true competitive advantage.

Comparing Apples To Apples:
The Predominant IT Service Models Explained

Before you can accurately compare the fees, services and deliverables of one IT services company with another, you need to understand the three predominant service models most of these companies fit within. Some companies offer a blend of all three, while others are strict about offering only one service plan. The three predominant service models are:

- **Time and Materials.** In the industry, we call this "break-fix" services. Essentially you pay an agreed-upon hourly rate for a technician to "fix" your problem when something "breaks." Under this model, you might be able to negotiate a discount based on buying a block of hours. The scope of work may be simply to resolve a specific problem, like fixing a problem with your e-mail, or it may encompass a large project, like a network upgrade or move that has a specific result and end date clarified. Some companies will offer staff augmentation and placement under this model as well.

- **Managed IT Services.** This is a model where the IT services company takes the role of your fully outsourced "IT department" and not only installs and supports all the devices and PCs that connect to your server(s), but also offers phone and on-site support, antivirus, cyber security, backup and a host of other services to monitor and maintain the health, speed, performance and security of your computer network.

- **Software Vendor-Supplied IT Services.** Many software companies will offer IT support for their customers in the form of a help desk or remote support for an additional fee. However, these are typically scaled-back services, limited to troubleshooting their specific application and NOT your entire computer network and all the applications and devices connected to it. If your problem resides outside of their specific software or the server it's hosted on, they can't help you and will often refer you to "your IT department." While it's often a good idea to buy some basic-level support package with a critical software application you use to run your business, this is not enough to provide the full IT services and support most businesses need to stay up and running.

When looking to outsource your IT support, the two service models you are most likely to end up having to choose between are the "managed IT services" and "break-fix" models. Therefore, let's dive into the pros and cons of these two options, and then the typical fee structure for both.

To Schedule Your **<u>FREE</u>** Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

Page 5

Managed IT Services Vs. Break-Fix:
Which Is The Better, More Cost-Effective Option?

You've probably heard the famous Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I couldn't agree more – and that's why it's my sincere belief that the managed IT approach is, by far, the most cost-effective, smartest option for small businesses.

The cost of managed IT services varies depending on the types of services a business needs. There are many IT services that you can outsource for maintenance, repair, support and security.

In a managed services world, a Managed Service Provider (MSP) will take over the management and maintenance of the network for the business. They take care of all network problems and outages, as well as security and backups to ensure continuity. We like to call it being 'proactive' and not 'reactive'.

I do not think the break-fix approach is a good idea for general IT support for one very important, fundamental reason: you'll ultimately end up paying for a pound of "cure" for problems that could have easily been avoided with an "ounce" of prevention.

Why Regular Monitoring And Maintenance Is Critical
For Today's Computer Networks

The fact of the matter is computer networks absolutely, positively need ongoing maintenance and monitoring to stay secure. The ever-increasing dependency we have on IT systems and the data they hold – not to mention the *type* of data we're now saving digitally – has given rise to very smart and sophisticated cybercrime organizations that work around the clock to do one thing: hack into your network to steal data or money or to hold you ransom.

As you may know, ransomware is at an all-time high because hackers make millions of tax-free dollars robbing one small business owner at a time. But that's not their only incentive.

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

Some will attempt to hack your network to gain access to bank accounts, credit cards or passwords to rob you (and your clients). Some use your computer network to send spam using YOUR domain and servers, host pirated software and, of course, spread viruses. Some even do it just for the "fun" of it.

And don't think for a minute these cybercriminals are solo crooks working alone in a hoodie out of their basement. They are highly organized and well-run operations employing *teams* of hackers who work together to scam as many people as they can. They use advanced software that scans millions of networks for vulnerabilities and use readily available data on the dark web of YOUR usernames, passwords, email addresses and other data to gain access.

Of course, this isn't the only IT danger you face. Other common "disasters" include rogue employees, lost devices, hardware failures (still a BIG reason for data loss), fire and natural disasters and a host of other issues that can interrupt or outright destroy your IT infrastructure and the data it holds. Then there's regulatory compliance for any business hosting or touching credit card or financial information, medical records and even client contact information, such as email addresses.

Preventing these problems and keeping your systems up and running (which is what managed IT services is all about) is a LOT less expensive and damaging to your organization than waiting until one of these things happens and then paying for emergency IT services to restore your systems to working order (break-fix).

Should You Just Hire A Full-Time IT Manager?

In most cases, it is not cost-effective for firms with fewer than 25 employees to hire a full-time IT person. You can outsource this function of your business far cheaper and with a lot less work; but you DO want to hire a professional to perform basic maintenance just as you would take your car in for an oil change. **And if you truly understand the cost of your TIME and factor in employee productivity, the managed IT services model is considerably less expensive over time than the unexpected costs associated with the "break-fix" model.**

Why "Break-Fix" Works Entirely In The Consultant's Favor, Not Yours

Under a "break-fix" model, there is a fundamental conflict of interests between you and your IT firm. The IT services company has no incentive to prevent problems, stabilize your network or resolve problems quickly because they are getting paid by the hour when things stop working; therefore, the risk of unforeseen circumstances, scope creep, learning curve inefficiencies and outright incompetence are all shifted to YOU, the customer. Essentially, the more problems you have, the more they profit, which is precisely what you DON'T want.

Under this model, the IT consultant can take the liberty of assigning a junior (lower-paid) technician to work on your problem – one who may take two to three times as long to resolve an issue that a more senior (and more expensive) technician might resolve in a fraction of the time. There is no incentive to properly manage the time of that technician or their efficiency, and there is every reason for them to prolong the project and find MORE problems than solutions. Of course, if they're ethical and want to keep you as a client, they *should* be doing everything possible to resolve your problems quickly and efficiently; however, that's akin to putting a German shepherd in charge of watching over the ham sandwiches. Not a good idea.

Second, it creates a management problem for you, the customer, who now has to keep track of the hours they've worked to make sure you aren't getting overbilled, and since you often have no way of really knowing if they've worked the hours they say they have, it creates a situation where you really, truly need to be able to trust they are being 100% ethical and honest AND tracking THEIR hours properly (not all do).

And finally, it makes budgeting for IT projects and expenses a nightmare since they may be zero one month and thousands the next.

What Should You Expect To Pay?

Important! Please note that the following price quotes are industry averages based on a recent IT industry survey conducted of over 750 different IT services firms. We are providing this information to give you a general idea of what most IT services firms charge and to help you understand the VAST DIFFERENCES in service contracts that you must be aware of before signing on the dotted line. Please understand that this does NOT reflect our pricing model or approach, which is simply to understand exactly what you want to accomplish FIRST and then customize a solution based on your specific needs, budget and situation.

To Schedule Your __FREE__ Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

Page 8

Hourly Break-Fix Fees:

Most IT services companies selling break-fix services charge between $95 and $150 per hour with a one-hour minimum. In most cases, they will give you a discount of 5% to as much as 20% on their hourly rates if you purchase and pay for a block of hours in advance.

If they are quoting a **project**, the fees range widely based on the scope of work outlined. If you are hiring an IT consulting firm for a project, I suggest you demand the following:

- **A very detailed scope of work that specifies what "success" is.** Make sure you detail what your expectations are in performance, workflow, costs, security, access, etc. The more detailed you can be, the better. Detailing your expectations up front will go a long way toward avoiding miscommunications and additional fees later on to give you what you REALLY wanted.

- **A fixed budget and time frame for completion.** Agreeing to this up front aligns both your agenda and the consultant's. Be very wary of loose estimates that allow the consulting firm to bill you for "unforeseen" circumstances. The bottom line is this: it is your IT consulting firm's responsibility to be able to accurately assess your situation and quote a project based on their experience. You should not have to pick up the tab for a consultant underestimating a job or for their inefficiencies. A true professional knows how to take into consideration those contingencies and bill accordingly.

Managed IT Services:

Most managed IT services firms will quote you a MONTHLY fee based on the number of devices they need to maintain, back up and support. In Northeast Ohio, that fee is somewhere in the range of $150-$300 per server, and $130-$175 per desktop/laptop, depending on the services needed.

If you hire an IT consultant and sign up for a managed IT services Service Level Agreement (SLA), here are some things that SHOULD be included:

- Device monitoring and management (not LogMeIn)
- Windows security and 3rd party updates, like Java and Adobe
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Data backup monitoring, local and offsite
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Monitoring workstations and servers for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Documentation of your network, software licenses, credentials, etc.

The following services may **NOT be included** and will often be billed separately. This is not necessarily a "scam" or unethical UNLESS the managed IT services company tries to hide these fees when selling you a service agreement. Make sure you review your SLA carefully to know what is and is NOT included!

- Hardware purchases, i.e., servers, workstations, laptops, etc.
- Software and licenses purchases
- Special projects

Warning! Beware the gray areas of "all-inclusive" service contracts. In order to truly compare the "cost" of one managed IT services contract with another, you need to make sure you fully understand what IS and ISN'T included AND the SLA (service level agreement) you are signing up for. It's VERY easy for one IT services provider to appear less expensive than another UNTIL you look closely at what you're getting.

The following are 17 questions to ask your IT services provider that will clarify exactly what you're getting for the money. Some of these items may not be that important to you, while others (like response time and uptime guarantees) may be critical. Make sure you fully understand each of these items before making a decision about who the right provider is for you, then make sure you get this IN WRITING.

17 Questions You Should Ask Your IT Services Company Before Hiring Them For IT Support

Customer Service:

Q1   When I have an IT problem, how do I get support?

Our Answer: When a client has a problem, we "open a work order" in our IT management system so we can properly assign, track, prioritize, document and resolve client issues. However, some IT firms force you to log in to "submit a ticket" and won't allow you to call or email them. This is for THEIR convenience, not yours. Trust me, this will become a giant inconvenience and thorn in your side. While a portal is a good option, it should never be your ONLY option for requesting support.

Also, make sure they HAVE a reliable system in place to keep track of client "tickets" and requests. If they don't, I can practically guarantee your requests will sometimes get overlooked, skipped and forgotten.

Requesting support should also be EASY for you. So be sure to ask how you can submit a problem to their support desk for resolution. We make it easy. Calling or emailing us puts your IT issue on the fast track to getting resolved.

Q2   Do you offer after-hours support, and if so, what is the guaranteed response time?

Our Answer: Any good IT company will answer their phones LIVE (not voice mail or phone trees) and respond from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every weekday. But many Partners work outside normal "9 to 5" hours and need IT support both nights and weekends. Not only can you reach our after-hours support any time and any day, we GUARANTEE a response time of 60-minutes or less for normal problems, and within 30-minutes for problems marked "emergency," such as a network being down or a critical problem that is significantly impacting your ability to work.

Q3   Do you have a written, guaranteed response time for working on resolving your problems?

Our Answer: Most IT firms offer a 30-minute or 60-minute response time to your call during normal business hours. Be very wary of someone who doesn't have a guaranteed response time IN WRITING – that's a sign they are too disorganized, understaffed or overwhelmed to handle your request. Our written, guaranteed response time is 60-minutes or less. A good IT firm should also be able to show you statistics from their PSA (professional services automation) software, where all client problems (tickets/work orders) get responded to and tracked. Ask to see a report on average response and resolution times.

Q4   Do you provide detailed billing that clearly explains what we are paying for?

Our Answer: A lot of IT firms bundle their services together and charge one price per person or device. With this model, there's no way to know what services you're paying for per person/device. We provide line item information to show what services and costs are associated with each person/device so you never have to second-guess what you are paying for.

Q5   Do you take time to explain what you're doing and answer our questions in terms that we can understand?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to work with people that are not in the IT industry and will take time to answer your questions in simple terms.

IT Maintenance (Managed Services):

Q6   Do you offer true managed IT services and support?

Our Answer: You want to find an IT company that will proactively monitor for problems and perform routine maintenance on your IT systems. If they don't have the ability to do this, or they don't offer it, we strongly recommend you look somewhere else. Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q7 — What is <u>NOT</u> included in your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: Another "gotcha" many IT companies fail to explain is what is NOT included in your monthly managed services agreement that will trigger an invoice. Their so-called "all you can eat" option is RARELY true – there are limitations to what's included and you want to know what they are BEFORE you sign.

It's very common for projects to not be included, like a server upgrade, moving offices, adding new employees and, of course, the software and hardware you need to purchase.

<u>But here's a question you need to ask</u>: If you were hit with a costly ransomware attack, would the recovery be EXTRA or included in your contract? Recovering from a cyber-attack could take HOURS of high-level IT expertise. Who is going to eat that bill? Be sure you're clear on this before you sign, because surprising you with a big, fat bill is totally and completely unacceptable.

Other things to inquire about are:

- Do you offer truly unlimited help desk? (Make sure you are not nickel-and-dimed for every call.)
- Does the service include support for cloud services, such as Microsoft 365?
- Do you charge extra if you have to resolve a problem with a line-of-business application, Internet service provider, phone system, leased printer, etc.? (What you want is an IT company that will own the problems and not point fingers. We are happy to call the vendor or software company on your behalf.)
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- If our employees had to work remote (due to a shutdown, natural disaster, etc.), would you provide support on their home PCs or would that trigger a bill?
- If we were to get ransomed or experience some other disaster (fire, flood, theft, tornado, hurricane, etc.), would rebuilding the network be included in the service plan or considered an extra project we would have to pay for? (Get this IN WRITING. Recovering from such a disaster could take hundreds of hours of time for your IT company's techs, so you want to know in advance how a situation like this will be handled before it happens.)

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900.

Q8 Is your help desk local or outsourced?

Our Answer: Be careful because smaller IT firms may outsource this critical function. As a result, you may get a tech who is not familiar with you, your network, previous problems and personal preferences. Or worse, they may not be as qualified. This can be frustrating and lead to the same problems cropping up over and over, longer resolution time and you having to spend time educating the tech on your account.

Fortunately, we provide a dedicated technician to your account who will get to know you and your company, as well as your preferences and history. When you work with our local help desk technician, they'll be more capable of successfully resolving your IT issues and handling things the way you want.

Q9 How many engineers do you have on staff?

Our Answer: Be careful about hiring small, one-person IT firms that only have one tech or outsource this critical role. Everyone gets sick, has emergencies, goes on vacation or takes a few days off from time to time. We have more than enough full-time techs on staff to cover in case one is unable to work.

ALSO: Ask how they will document fixes, changes, credentials for your organization so if one tech is out or unavailable, another can step in and know your network settings, history, previous issues, etc., and how those issues were resolved. This is important or you'll be constantly frustrated with techs who are starting over to resolve a known issue or may screw up something because they don't understand or have a blueprint of your computer network.
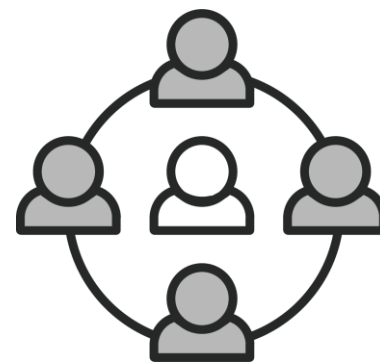
Q10 Do you offer documentation of our network as part of the plan, and how does that work?

Our Answer: Network documentation is exactly what it sounds like: the practice of maintaining detailed technical records about the assets you own (computers, devices, software, directory structure, user profiles, passwords, etc.) and how your network is set up, backed up and secured. Every IT company should provide this to you in both written (paper) and electronic form at no additional cost and update it on a quarterly basis.

Why is this important? There are several reasons:

First, it shows professionalism and integrity in protecting YOU. No IT person or company should be the only holder of the keys to the kingdom. Because we document your network assets and passwords, you have a blueprint you can give to another IT person or company to take over if necessary.

Second, good documentation allows the engineers working on your account to resolve problems faster because they don't waste time fumbling their way around your network trying to find things and uncover accounts, hardware, software licenses, etc.

Third, if you had to restore your network after a disaster, you'd have the blueprint to quickly put things back in place as they were.

All our clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q11 Do you meet with your clients regularly as part of your managed services agreement?

Our Answer: To us, there's nothing more important than face-to-face time with our clients. Therefore, we make it a priority to meet with all our clients at least semi-annually (sometimes more often) to provide a "technology business review."

In these meetings, we provide you with the status updates of projects you're working on and of the health and security of your network. We also make recommendations for new equipment and upgrades you'll be needing soon or sometime in the near future. Our meetings with you are where we openly discuss your business goals, including your IT budget, critical projects, compliance issues, known problems and cyber security best practices.

Our goal in these meetings is to help you improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and ensure your organizational productivity stays high. This is also your opportunity to give us feedback on how we're doing and discuss upcoming projects.

Q12 If I need or want to cancel my service with you, how does this happen and how do you offboard us?

Our Answer: Make sure you carefully review the cancellation clause in your agreement. Many IT firms hold their clients hostage with long-term contracts that contain hefty cancellation penalties and will even sue you if you refuse to pay.

We would never "force" a client to stay with us if they are unhappy for any reason. Our "easy out" agreements make us work that much harder to exceed your expectations every day so we keep your business.

To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

Q13 — How do you lock down our employees' PCs and devices to ensure they're not compromising our network?

Our Answer: As above, the question may get a bit technical. The key is that they HAVE an answer and don't hesitate to provide it. Some of the things they should mention are:

- 2FA (two-factor authentication)
- Advanced end-point protection
- Ransomware protection
- Application whitelisting

Because a combination of these lockdown strategies is essential to protecting your network and data, we employ ALL of these for our clients. Effective cyber security should never compromise between choosing this OR that. It should feature every weapon in your arsenal.

Q14 — Can you provide a timeline of how long it will take to get my network back up and running in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: There are two aspects to backing up your data that most business owners aren't aware of. The first is "fail over" and the other is "fail back." For example, if you get a flat tire, you would fail over by putting on the spare tire to get to a service station where you can fail back to a new or repaired tire.

If you were to have a disaster that wiped out your data and network – be it a ransomware attack or natural disaster – you want to make sure you have a fail-over solution in place so your employees could continue to work with as little interruption as possible. This fail-over should be in the cloud and locked down separately to avoid ransomware from infecting the backups as well as the physical servers and workstations.

But, at some point, you need to fail back to your on-premise network, and that's a process that could take days or even weeks. If the backups aren't done correctly, you might not be able to get it back at all. So, one of the key areas you want to discuss with your next IT consultant or firm is how they handle both data backup AND disaster recovery. They should have a plan in place and be able to explain the process for the emergency fail-over as well as the process for restoring your network and data with a timeline.

In this day and age, regardless of natural disaster, equipment failure or any other issue, your business should ALWAYS be able to be operational with its data within six to eight hours or less, and critical operations should be failed over immediately.

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

Q15

Do you INSIST on doing periodic test restores of my backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: A great IT consultant will place eyes on your backup systems every single day to ensure that backups are actually occurring, and without failures. However, in addition to this, your IT company should perform a monthly randomized "fire drill" test restore of some of your files from backups to make sure your data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to "test" a backup is when you desperately need it.

If you don't feel comfortable asking your current IT company to test your backup OR if you have concerns and want to see proof yourself, just conduct this little test: Copy three unimportant files onto a thumb drive (so you don't lose them) and delete them from your server. Make sure one was newly created that same day, one was created a week earlier and the last a month earlier. Then call your IT company and let them know you've lost three important documents and need them restored from backups as soon as possible. They should be able to do this easily and quickly. If not, you have a problem that needs to be addressed immediately!

Q16

Show me your process and documentation for onboarding me as a new client.

Our Answer: The reason for asking this question is to see if they HAVE SOMETHING in place. A plan, a procedure, a process. Don't take their word for it. Ask to SEE it in writing. What's important here is that they can produce some type of process. Further, they should be able to explain how their process works.

One thing you will need to discuss in detail is how they are going to take over from the current IT company – particularly if the current company is hostile. It's disturbing to me how many IT companies or people will become bitter and resentful over being fired and will do things to screw up your security and create problems for the new company as a childish way of getting revenge. (Sadly, it's more common than you think.) A good IT company will have a process in place for handling this.

To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900.

Q17

If I were to experience a location disaster, pandemic shutdown or other disaster that prevented me from being in the office, how would you enable me and my employees to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: If Covid taught us anything, it's that work-interrupting disasters CAN and DO happen when you least expect them. Fires, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes can wipe out an entire building or location. Covid forced everyone into lockdown, and it could happen again.

We could experience a terrorist attack, civil unrest or riots that could shut down entire cities and streets, making it physically impossible to get into a building. Who knows what could be coming down the pike? Hopefully NONE of this will happen, but sadly it could.

That's why you want to ask your prospective IT consultant how quickly they were able to get their clients working remotely (and securely) when Covid shut everything down. Ask to talk to a few of their clients about how the process went.

Here's how we handled our clients' needs when it seemed everyone needed to work remotely, get laptops and implement security measures almost overnight.

> *Direct Connect provided prompt and professional service at the onset of the pandemic. We had ZERO interruption to our staff and more importantly our need to service our clients.*
>
> *– Joseph K. Rosalina, Esq.*
> *-Gabriella Russo Rosalina*
> *Russo, Rosalina & Co. LPA*

To Schedule Your FREE Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900.

Other Things To Notice And Look Out For:

Do they and their technicians present themselves as true professionals when they are in your office? Do they dress professionally and show up on time?

If you'd be embarrassed if YOUR clients saw your IT consultant behind your desk, that should be a big red flag. How you do anything is how you do everything, so if they cannot show up on time for appointments, are sloppy with paperwork, show up unprepared, forget your requests and seem disorganized in the meeting, how can you expect them to be 100% on point with your IT? You can't. Look for someone else.

Our technicians are true professionals who you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally and show up on time, and if they cannot be there on time (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

Do they have expertise in helping clients similar to you?

Do they understand how your business operates the line-of-business applications you depend on? Are they familiar with how you communicate, get paid, service your clients and run your business? We work with businesses with typically 10-25 workstations in the manufacturing, architect and engineering industries, as well as legal and finance. The reason we work so well with them is because they want a trustworthy and experienced team that will increase productivity and reduce downtime. They want someone who is highly responsive to their issues. They want systems that just work! This is why we have customers who have been with us over 27 years!

Here's what a few of our clients had to say:

A.I.M.
Advanced **I**nnovative **M**anufacturing, Inc.

" *If you're looking for a highly responsive IT firm, don't look any further than Direct Connect.*

Direct Connect saves us valuable production time and money by monitoring and managing our systems and getting us back up as soon as possible if something fails. "

– Joe Hawald, Owner
A.I.M.

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

“ “

We needed a professional IT firm to manage our rapidly growing business. Relying on internal staff (non-IT) to manage our technology was making for a chaotic work environment.

Direct Connect offered us a Managed Services Plan that would take care of all of our technology needs, with unlimited support, for a fixed monthly price. We liked the idea of being able to budget for our IT expenses with no surprises. Now our technology is supporting our business.

”

-Lisa Ristagno
Pete & Pete Container Service Inc.

“ “

Since hiring Direct Connect, we finally have peace of mind that our IT infrastructure has been updated and stabilized and is running to its full capacity. We now have 'technical experts' that always research the best methods that consider not only the current matter they are solving, but also the future expansion of our systems. Direct Connect will earn your trust, don't over analyze.

”

– Bobbie St. Marseille
American Foam Products

“ “

Technology is not my strong suit so when I need help, Direct Connect is always there. The team shows patience, is always quick to solve the issues at hand, and their depth of knowledge runs deep.

If you're on the fence about choosing an IT firm, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by going with Direct Connect. I'm delighted with how easy they are to work with!

”

-Liz Griffiths, CFP
Intera Financial Planners, LLC

A Final Word And Free Offer To Engage With Us

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when hiring a professional firm to outsource your IT support. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information is to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by incompetent or unethical firms luring you in with cheap prices.

The next step is simple: call my office at (216) 382-4900 and reference this letter to schedule a brief 10 to 15-minute initial consultation.

On this call we can discuss your unique situation and any concerns you have and, of course, answer any questions you have about us. If you feel comfortable moving ahead, we'll schedule a convenient time to conduct our proprietary Network Assessment.

This Assessment can be conducted 100% remotely with or without your current IT company or department knowing (we can give you the full details on our initial consultation call). **At the end of the Assessment, you'll know:**

✓ Where you are overpaying (or getting underserved) for the services and support you are currently getting from your current IT company or team.

✓ Whether or not your systems and data are *truly* secured from hackers and ransomware, and where you are partially or totally exposed.

✓ If your data is *actually* being backed up in a manner that would allow you to recover it quickly in the event of an emergency or ransomware attack.

✓ Where you are unknowingly violating HIPAA or PCI compliance.

✓ How you could lower the overall costs of IT while improving communication, security and performance, as well as the productivity of your employees.

Fresh eyes see things that others cannot – so, at a minimum, our free Assessment is a completely cost- and risk-free way to get a credible third-party validation of the security, stability and efficiency of your IT systems.

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment, please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**

With appreciation,

Jim Conley, Owner/President
Direct Connect Computer Systems, Inc.

Why Direct Connect?

1   **We Specialize in Working with Small Businesses.** We've been supporting Northeast Ohio small businesses for over 30 years and understand the day-to-day challenges you face in the IT world. Our IT services were built for businesses who want peace of mind and systems that just work!

2   **Live Phone Support and Guaranteed Response Time.** We answer our phones live 7-days a week, guaranteeing a 60-minute response time.

3   **Peace of Mind.** Which means you get systems that just work! You never have to worry that a virus has spread, or a backup has failed to perform while we're monitoring your network 24/7/365. We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your clients and running your business, not on your IT systems, security and backups.

4   **Risk-Free and Easy to Do Business With.** Which means if you are not completely convinced we are the right IT company for you at any time, we will transition you to one that is, for free, no questions asked. We prefer to do business with a hand-shake, and not lock you into long-term contracts.

5   **Lower Costs, Waste And Complexity With Cloud Solutions.** By utilizing cloud computing and other advanced technologies, we can eliminate the cost, complexity, and problems of managing your own in-house server while giving you more freedom, lowered costs, tighter security and instant disaster recovery.

6   **We Won't Hold You Hostage.** Many IT companies do NOT provide their clients with simple and easy-to-understand documentation that outlines key network resources, passwords, licenses, etc. By keeping that to themselves, IT companies hold their clients "hostage" to scare them away from hiring someone else. This is both unethical and unprofessional. As a client of ours, we'll provide you with full, written documentation of your network and all the resources, software licenses, passwords, hardware, etc., in simple terms so YOU can understand it. We keep our clients by delivering exceptional service – not by keeping them in the dark.

7   **Security is Paramount.** Which means we've got your back! At Direct Connect, we follow and enforce Security Best Practices for all of our customers, as well as internally. We continually educate our team and our customers on cyber security to keep networks safe.

To Schedule Your <u>FREE</u> Assessment,
please visit **www.DirectConnect.net/cyberaudit** or call our office at (216) 382-4900**.**