



The Ultimate MSP Buyer's Guide



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BONUS MATERIALS!



**Net Friends MSP
Evaluation Tool**



MSP Pricing



**Determining How an MSP
Can Best Support You**



Chronic Tech Headaches? You Are Not Alone.

Many businesses struggle with:



Hourly support that is reactive and transactional

Internal staff are not IT experts and find IT frustrating

Lack of strategy or roadmap for IT, so it is hard to see a path forward

Time and patience eaten up contacting vendors and internet service providers

Costs are irregular and hard to predict with IT

General sense that systems are vulnerable to attack or unplanned downtime

If any of these ring true, you will benefit from an MSP!



Embracing a Managed Service Provider (MSP)

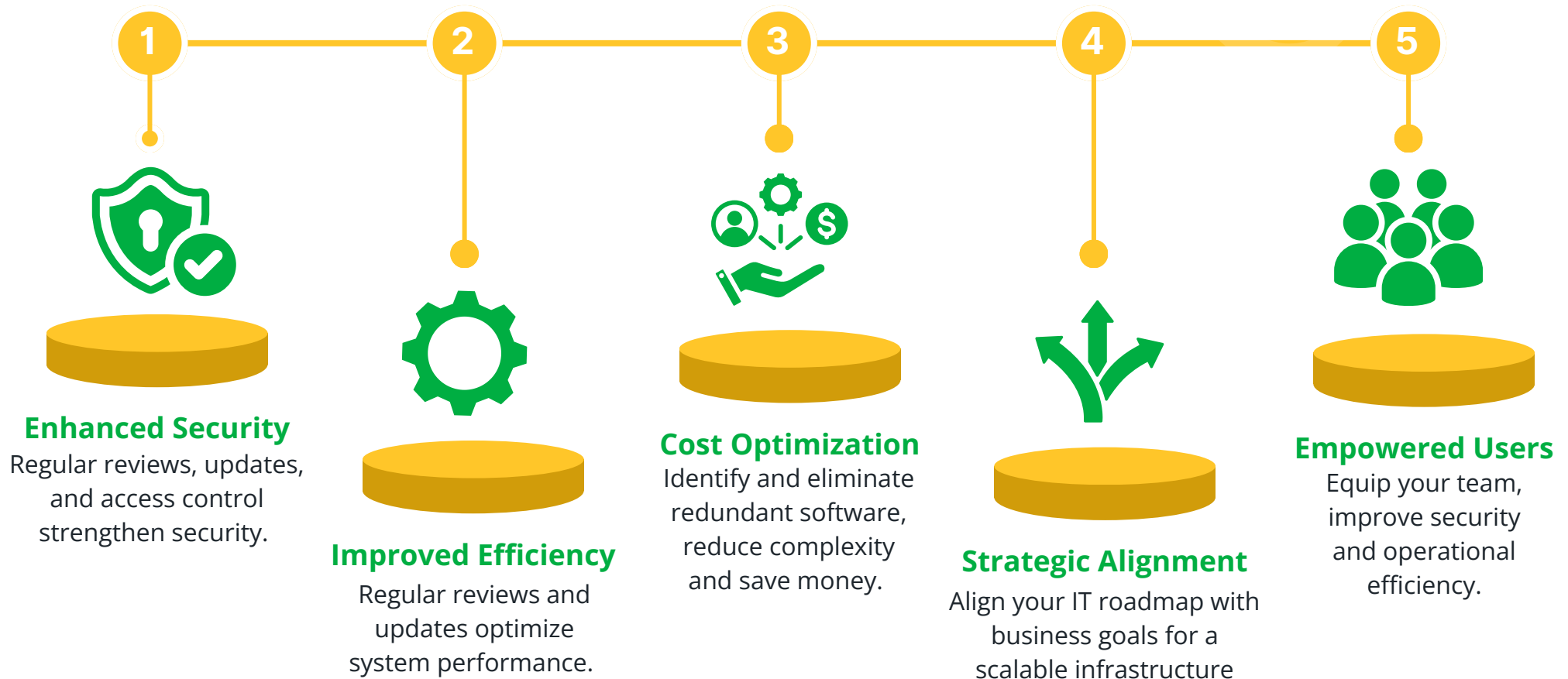
Partnering with an MSP means gaining access to a team of experts who work continuously to ensure your tech not only functions but performs.

They are not just fixers; they are enhancers, strategists, and protectors.



FRIENDLY TIP

Check out the Net Friends MSP Evaluation Tool at the end of this guide!





MSP Performance Review



Responsive Support

Do service tickets get resolved quickly and accurately? Are there regular follow-ups to ensure you are fully satisfied?



Service Tailored to Your Needs

Does your MSP understand your industry's regulations? Are they able to support your Line of Business (LOB) software?



Technology Advancement

Are they consistently on the pulse of emerging technologies? Are they proactive in implementing tech that elevates your IT infrastructure?



Effective Solutions & Performance

Are the root causes of issues addressed? Does your IT partner do regular system updates, health monitoring, and performance reporting?



Open Communication

How are maintenance windows, outages, and breaches communicated? Is there a clear process for escalating critical issues?



Proactive Security

Are your systems and data fortified against cyber threats? Does the cybersecurity framework include an incident response plan, backups, disaster recovery, cybersecurity training?



Value-Driven Cost Management

Do you feel like you are getting your money's worth?



Strategic Support

Do you get help with your IT budget and multi-year technology plan?



Scalability and Growth

As your business evolves, does your MSP have the capacity to grow with you?



Running a Business is Demanding

You juggle a million tasks, wear countless hats, and strive to stay ahead of the curve.

Your business runs on technology. It is how you get things done and grow. But who has time to manage it all?

For business owners managing endless responsibilities, maintaining IT infrastructure can be a daunting task. This is where an MSP stands out from other vendors. While many service providers focus on reactive problem-solving by fixing issues as they arise, an MSP is a strategic partner. By proactively managing your IT infrastructure, an MSP makes sure your systems are working for you. Think of an MSP as your business's secret weapon, keeping things running smoothly so you don't have to.

But amidst the daily grind, there is **one crucial question** you need to ask yourself:

Do you feel confident that your IT partner is truly in your corner?

GUT CHECK

A review of your MSP performance might indicate it is time to discuss your needs with your account manager. This conversation can help ensure you are both on the same page and working towards your desired outcomes.





GETTING YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW

A thoughtful and detailed preparation process allows you to seek out an MSP that fully aligns with the unique needs and priorities of your business. **With all your ducks in a row leading up to selecting an MSP, you can confidently let go of technical burdens and free yourself up for accelerated business growth and maximum productivity.** The time invested upfront to carefully evaluate and address your specific requirements ensures an effective and lasting MSP partnership that fully equips you for the future.



FRIENDLY TIP

Keep in mind that with an MSP you are supported by a team, not just a single IT person. This often allows for faster response times and consistent coverage.

Ready to Explore Managed Service Solutions?

An IT partner can free you to focus on what you do best – running your business. But before you jump into the search for the perfect MSP, there are some key steps you can take to prepare yourself and your team for a successful partnership.

ASSESS YOUR TECHNOLOGY NEEDS

- a. # Employees?
- b. # Workstations?
- c. Typical software?
- d. Unique/Specialized software?
- e. Regulatory/Compliance Needs?
- f. Company data location?

IT BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

It's common to spend 3% of your gross revenue on IT services and support.

SETTING SERVICE LEVEL EXPECTATIONS

- Responsiveness
- Onsite vs. remote
- Cybersecurity
- Regulatory requirements
- Request prioritization

PLANNING FOR A SMOOTH TRANSITION

A typical timeline to receive support from your new MSP is 30 days after signing.

REFLECT ON PAST/CURRENT CHALLENGES

Take some time to recall recent IT problems – how long they took to resolve, the business impact, etc. If you have worked with an IT provider previously, reflect on what worked well and what could have been better.

ANTICIPATE FUTURE NEEDS

Make sure to talk to your new MSP about any expansion plans you have. Also mention any new systems or software applications you are thinking about implementing.

WHO ARE THE KEY DECISION MAKERS?

Identify key stakeholders are on the same page. Determine key performance indicators and expectations.



Reliable IT Support

Businesses need reliable IT support to stay competitive in today's tech-driven world. Choosing the right MSP is key: look for alignment with your goals, extensive support, and security focus. A good MSP can be your secret weapon for success.

3 Things to Look for in a Managed Service Provider

01 An Innovative Partnership

Partner with an MSP that understands your business to unlock long-term efficiency, innovation, and success.

What to Look for:

Strategic Alignment: An ideal MSP partner will leverage technology to ensure continued competitiveness and success.

Commitment to Innovation: A partner that suggests and implements cutting-edge solutions (cloud, automation, AI) to propel your business.

02 Cybersecurity Focus

Businesses need advanced threat detection and proactive strategies to keep their systems hardened and secure. Expect advanced threat detection and a focus on overall security posture.

What to Look for:

Endpoint Hardening: Your MSP should manage updates and patching to keep devices secure.

Comprehensive Security Strategy: Choose an MSP with deep security expertise to manage your entire security infrastructure and set policies.

Reporting: Security reports from your MSP prove your systems are protected and vulnerabilities are addressed.

03 Comprehensive Support

Top MSPs offer remote support to prevent IT headaches and prioritize security with updates, vulnerability checks, and strong measures.

What to Look for:

Support Availability: Your MSP should match your hours.

Range of Services: Look for an MSP with onboarding, proactive maintenance, cloud support, and insightful reporting.

vCIO Services: Seek virtual Chief Information Officer services, ensuring the MSP understands your IT needs and business goals.



Reliable IT is Crucial to Success

Limited IT budgets are a common hurdle for small businesses, but reliable IT is crucial for success. The question is: are you reacting to IT problems as they arise, or taking a proactive approach to prevent them? The key is to choose the right IT solution, not just play whack-a-mole with problems.

Pricing Comparison Chart

How to choose the right IT solution:

Identify your needs:

Do you need backups, cybersecurity, or ongoing maintenance?

Consider your budget:

It is recommended that you spend 6-7% of your revenue on IT, and 50% of that on support.

Cost	BREAK/FIX \$125-\$225/HOUR	INTERNAL IT \$150K/YEAR IT DIRECTOR \$80K/YEAR IT TECH		PARTIAL IT \$650 - \$1000/MONTH VARIES PER SMB	MANAGED IT \$100 - \$300/USER PER MONTH
HELP DESK SERVICES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
NETWORK MANAGEMENT	MAYBE	NO	MAYBE	YES	YES
CYBERSECURITY SERVICES	NO	NO	MAYBE	MAYBE	YES
CLOUD SERVICES	NO	NO	MAYBE	NO	YES
DEVICE & APP DEPLOYMENT	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
DATA BACKUP & RECOVERY	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
USER TRAINING	NO	NO	MAYBE	NO	YES
LEGACY EQUIPMENT REPAIRS	YES	NO	YES	NO	MAYBE
CONSULTING & STRATEGY (vCIO)	NO	YES	NO	NO	MAYBE
ATTENDS INTERNAL MEETINGS	MAYBE	YES	YES	NO	MAYBE

CHAPTER 5: Breaking Down MSP Pricing



Customer #1

of Employees: 15 People

Years in Business: At least 5 years

Location: Likely has physical space, could have limited hybrid operations

Current IT Situation: Operate without a defined long-term plan, relying on reactive break-fix services or technically competent staff. The temptation is to opt for the lowest cost option.


Customer #2

of Employees: 65 People

Years in Business: At least 15 years

Location: Likely has physical space, could have some fully remote or hybrid employees.

Current IT Situation: Have a defined IT strategy but facing execution hurdles. This challenge arises from either deteriorating MSP services or the departure of a critical IT team member.

		 Customer #1	 Customer #2
BREAK/FIX HOURLY	Reactive and leans heavily on internal person	\$950	\$4,000
PARTIAL IT	Infrastructure Only No end-user support and leans heavily on internal person	\$650	\$1,000
INTERNAL IT	Expensive and highly dependent on a few people, if they leave it can be hard to recover.	\$6,700 T1 only (loaded costs, equipment, licenses, benefits)	\$12,500 for IT Director only, and no tech support OR \$19,500 for Director and T1
MSP	Includes IT support and infrastructure management.	\$2,900	\$8,900

WHY AN MSP IS A MORE STRATEGIC CHOICE

MSP vs Internal: Provides access to a wider range of skills and is less expensive.

MSP vs Partial IT: Delivers comprehensive infrastructure support, enabling internal teams to focus on core business objectives.

MSP vs Break/Fix: Prioritizes timely resolution of issues, allowing internal teams to maintain efficient operations.



Online Resources to Help You Evaluate and Choose

There is a wealth of information on Managed Service Providers (MSPs) online. Read their content, staff bios, and reviews to learn about their skills and what matters to them.

4 Things to Look at When Evaluating



1

DECODE COMPANY COMMUNICATION

Focus on Mergers & Acquisitions:

Might signal business expansion but ensure service quality isn't sacrificed.

Look for a focus on innovation:

Frequent product launches and service line enhancements suggest the MSP is constantly improving and adapting.

Look for a forward-thinking approach: Attention to staying on top of tech trends allows the MSP to suggest solutions that keep your business competitive.

Look for industry recognition:

Awards and recognitions signify the MSP is a leader with a large and loyal customer base and is pushing boundaries in its field.



2

EXPERTISE MATTERS

Focus on Substance:

Look for articles with specific challenges, data, and solutions, not just flashy headlines. Credible sources will cite research and reports.

Depth over fluff: :

Avoid generic articles. Look for content with a nuanced understanding of the topic that tackles industry challenges and offers practical solutions.

Beware AI content:

Watch out for overly generic language and a lack of specific industry references. If unsure, consider the blog's overall quality: consistent voice, well-researched content?



4 Things to Look at When Evaluating *(continued)*



3

TEAM EXPERTISE ON LINKEDIN

- Look for relevant certifications and experience matching offered services.
- Positive recommendations and endorsements build credibility.
- Low staff turnover indicates stability and knowledge retention.
- Career progressions show investment in employee growth.
- Leadership with a strong technical background is a plus.



4

ONLINE REVIEWS

Online reviews offer a view into an MSP's performance, going beyond their marketing claims. Examine the negative reviews, especially how the MSP responds to them. Evaluate how the MSP addresses criticism, while considering that negativity with a grain of salt.

Common online review websites are: Google, Glassdoor, Better Business Bureau, Clutch, and Cloutango.

What to Look For:

- Prompt & professional responses to negative reviews.
- Up-to-date online presence (address, phone number, website).
- Recent responses to reviews and engagement in Q&A sections.



FRIENDLY TIP

Finding the perfect MSP is like picking a business partner - it impacts your entire operation. It is not just about picking a vendor – it is about building a long-term relationship.

By carefully evaluating MSPs and getting advice from others, you will find a partner who can keep up with your business as technology continues to evolve.





TRUSTED REVIEW PLATFORMS



Google Reviews

A go-to for local search and real customer experiences. Look for a good volume of reviews.



Glassdoor Reviews

While primarily focused on employee insights, Glassdoor reviews can also reveal how the MSP interacts with and addresses employee concerns.



Better Business Bureau (BBB)

Most MSPs will not have complaints lodged against them with the BBB. If they do, it is something to investigate and ask questions about.



Clutch & Cloudtango

These platforms specialize in MSP reviews. Clutch provides in-depth, verified reviews based on client interviews. Cloudtango acts as a directory where you can find MSP profiles with reviews from past and current clients.



Ditch the Forced Conversations & Sales Pitches!

Choosing an MSP is about finding the perfect IT partner. These initial meetings are your chance to build a strong foundation, establish trust, and map out a successful future together. Consider them a collaborative planning session to discuss your business goals and challenges and see if this MSP can be the ideal fit.

SUPPORT & RESPONSE TIMES

Understanding the MSP's support structure and how issues are resolved.

SCALABILITY

Discussing how the MSP can support your business growth and adapt to changing needs.

BACKGROUND OF THE MSP TEAM

Learn about the background and strengths of the MSP team

COMMUNICATION & REPORTING

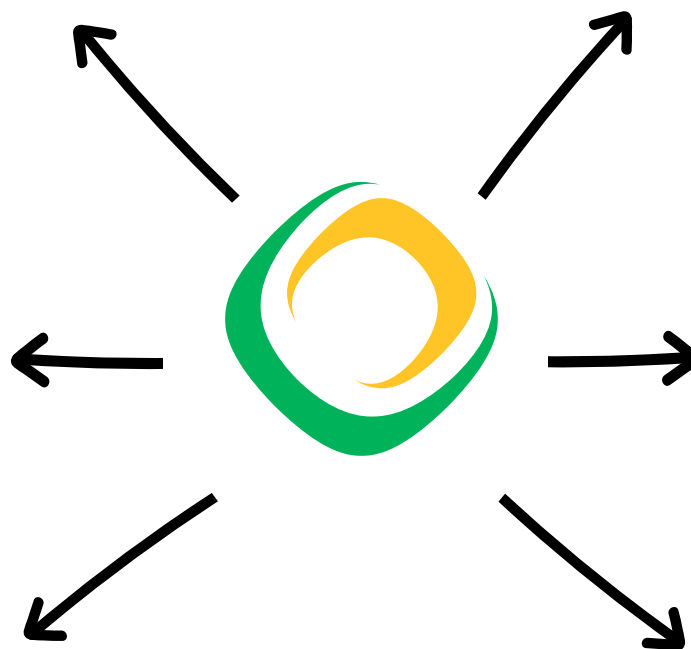
Setting expectations for updates, reports, and feedback loops.

SECURITY & COMPLIANCE

How the MSP ensures data protection and meets regulatory requirements.

CURRENT IT INFRASTRUCTURE & OPERATIONS

Focus on understanding your current IT setup (systems, processes, pain points) to assess overall needs and potential improvements. Technical deep dives come later.





Ditch the Forced Conversations & Sales Pitches!

Before diving into specific service offerings, it is important to know what to expect to ensure this initial meeting goes smoothly and sets the stage for a long-lasting partnership.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you are transitioning from an MSP, be prepared to discuss when the contract ends, to ensure there is enough time for the transition.

Expect to delve into the current state of your IT infrastructure and The overarching goal of this meeting is to determine if this MSP is a good fit for your business.

- ✓ If the pricing model works within your budget constraints.
- ✓ Whether the MSP's services and strategies are aligned with your business objectives.
- ✓ How effectively the MSP can support and grow with your business over time.

INVESTING IN THE RIGHT PARTNERSHIP








Choosing an MSP is about building a strong, reliable partnership. Look for qualities like trust, reliability, and proactive support. By following these steps and approaching MSP meetings strategically, you'll find the perfect IT partner – an extension of your team, not just a vendor.





As you interview prospective MSPs, you will identify both red and green flags. Selecting an MSP is like making a hiring decision of a critical member of your team, we encourage you to seek positive attributes that are likely to make them a great fit for you.

Key Questions to Seek out Green Flags:

-  What is your customer turnover in the past 12 months?
-  What is your technician turnover in the past 12 months?
-  What percentage of the technicians/engineers are certified? Is leadership certified?
-  How many procedures are documented? Ask for their top 5 procedures or workflows.
-  What reports are typically generated for customers? Ask for samples of the top 3 reports.
-  What are the most customer-friendly parts of the Service Level Agreement?
-  What cybersecurity features or tools come with the primary service offering by default? What additional cybersecurity offerings can be purchased or have managed through the MSP?



FRIENDLY TIP

In today's digital age, robust cybersecurity is no longer optional, it is essential.

When selecting an MSP, you need to be confident that your data and systems are in capable hands.





What Are Your Top Three MSP Green Flags?

By prioritizing these green flags, you can make an informed decision when choosing your MSP. With the right partner by your side, you can achieve optimal IT performance and focus on growing your core business.

Green Flags

Neutral

Red Flags



Low Staff or Customer Turnover

Not Mentioned

High Staff or Customer Turnover

Multiple certifications held by a wide range of staff

Handful of notable certifications

No mention of any certifications

100s of documented processes

A few key processes documented

Downplays importance of processes

Informative reports

Only technical reports

Confusing or missing reports

SLA aligns well with you

SLA with some limits

No SLA

Cybersecurity a clear focus

Cybersecurity is only available as an add-on

Cybersecurity is downplayed



Securing a partnership with a Managed Service Provider (MSP) starts with a robust contract that is more than just fine print.

It is your peace of mind. It is about crafting an agreement that not only shields your interests, but also lays the groundwork for a transparent relationship where expectations are crystal clear.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA): Setting the Standard for Success

This defines what you can expect from the MSP, including uptime guarantees, response times, and escalation procedures.

The Statement of Work (SOW): A Roadmap for Implementation

This details the specific services provided by the MSP, including a start date, completion date, and project tasks.

Go Live Date

It needs to be crystal clear when your services begin. The contract should be unambiguous about when you can receive support and management from your MSP.

Contract Terms

An MSP contract should outline service transitions, data security, and liability to safeguard both you and the MSP.

Exit Strategies

Include clear termination clauses with reasonable notice periods and potential costs to ensure a smooth separation if needed.

Confidentiality

Protect sensitive data (IP, customer data, internal processes) by defining what's confidential and requiring strong security practices from the MSP.

Liability

Clearly define each party's responsibility in case of cyberattacks, ensuring a fair allocation of liability.

Billing Transparency

Understand how you will be billed, including one-time fees, recurring charges, and adjustments for user fluctuations.

Making Changes: *Adapting to Your Needs*

Communicate with your MSP about any changes to your service needs. They may be able to adjust services or find alternative solutions within the existing agreement.

A well-crafted MSP contract is the foundation for a successful, long-term partnership. It provides clear expectations for managing your IT, fostering trust and confidence as you navigate the ever-evolving tech world. Ensuring that you understand the details of the contract is an important first step to forging a long-term partnership.

Congratulations!

You have the tools you need to identify and select a Managed Service Provider that aligns with your organization's needs.

About Net Friends

Net Friends has over 25 years of experience partnering with small businesses as they leverage technology to grow their business. Our mission is your mission supported by technology. We look forward to discussing your needs and developing a technology plan that meets your needs.

Let's continue the conversation! You can contact us on our website at:

NetFriends.com/services/managed-it-services

Stay Up to Date!

Engage with us on social and keep up with the most recent news in technology, product announcements and business insights:

LinkedIn.com/company/net-friends-inc



Experience

Net Friends

MSP#2

MSP#3

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Give each MSP points from 1-5 based on how well they meet each criterion. Eliminate any of the pre-populated criteria that are not meaningful to your business.

Communication

Net Friends

MSP#2

MSP#3

Offer vCIO Services			
Customize Services Based on Your Needs			
Strong Project Management Skills & Communication			
Regular Reporting			
Total Points			

Service

Net Friends

MSP#2

MSP#3

Help Desk Hours			
On-Site			
Emergency Support			
Proactive Support			
Root Cause Analysis			
Total Points			



Give each MSP points from 1-5 based on how well they meet each criterion. Eliminate any of the pre-populated criteria that are not meaningful to your business.

Communication

	Net Friends	MSP#2	MSP#3
Offer vCIO Services			
Customize Services Based on Your Needs			
Strong Project Management Skills & Communication			
Regular Reporting			
Total Points			

Cybersecurity

	Net Friends	MSP#2	MSP#3
Stringent Internal Controls			
Offer a Multi-Layered Defense Strategy			
Cybersecurity Expertise			
Cybersecurity Training			
Insurance Guidance			
Total Points			



Give each MSP points from 1-5 based on how well they meet each criterion. Eliminate any of the pre-populated criteria that are not meaningful to your business.

Customer Service

	Net Friends	MSP#2	MSP#3
Focus on What is Important to the Client			
Responsive to Requests & Feedback			
Transparent			
Total Points			

Scalability

	Net Friends	MSP#2	MSP#3
Commitment to Innovation			
Proactive Approach to Long-Term Needs			
Able to Grow with Your Business			
Total Points			



Give each MSP points from 1-5 based on how well they meet each criterion. Eliminate any of the pre-populated criteria that are not meaningful to your business.

Other Requirements

	Net Friends	MSP#2	MSP#3
Total Points			