

Whether you're hiring a new employee or switching to a new outsourced vendor, changing your current Information Technology solution can be risky business. Why? Perhaps more than in any other department, knowing what it takes to keep your technology systems running is knowledge seldom shared and rarely documented.

With our years of experience, serving thousands of clients in similar situations, All Covered knows the secrets of how to keep IT services running smoothly. Here are the 10 things you need to know before making an IT change.

- 1. What You Have** Start with an inventory of your hardware and software. Or, better yet, get your current IT person or firm to document it all for you, from your network devices to operating systems and software programs.
- 2. Who's Who?** It would be surprising if you knew all your IT service providers; navigating a change is not when you want to be surprised. That's why you need a contact list of all your providers: telephone, data access, security, web site and email hosts, and any managed services. Be sure that you also have copies of all your current service agreements, as well as a clear understanding of what level of service they provide—for example, how long should it take for a response after you call.
- 3. How You Back-up** Because data back-ups are among the most critical tasks your current IT person or firm handles, you could easily ask 10 questions about this area alone. How is the network backed-up? How often? What software is used, along with what hardware? Who does back-up verification? How often? Where are the back-ups stored? Who can retrieve back-ups? How are laptops included? Is there a plan for data restore? When was the system last tested?
- 4. The Passwords** For many companies, the only person who knows the passwords is the now-former employee who just left. That's why you need to know every password as well, for hardware and software. But more than that, you also need to know who has access to the passwords and where a record of the passwords are kept. Once you change your support solution, change your passwords, too.
- 5. Disks and Docs** All documentation, configuration and installation disks for both software and hardware need to be collected, cataloged and contained in one area. You also need to have the product license keys and purchase information (date and place of purchase, price paid) for every copy of software that's running on your network. These things are needed not only for troubleshooting the network but the kind of trouble your company could face if its IT systems are ever audited by the Business Software Alliance. Without this information, your company might have to pay fines and replacement costs.
- 6. Maintenance Schedules** Like regular oil changes to keep your car running well, IT systems need regular maintenance to keep them from breaking. In that case, you need to know what maintenance tasks are being performed, when and by whom. Daily, weekly and monthly checklists are a good idea no matter what, but are essential during the transition.
- 7. Expert Inspections** When was the last time a "second set of eyes" looked at your network? Having an independent expert, whether it's a firm or a person, scour your computing infrastructure will ensure that your investment is protected and it may spot troubles before they start. For as little as a few hundred dollars, you could save far more in lawsuits, downtime and data recovery.
- 8. Are You Secure?** When people talk about security these days, the buzz is mostly about viruses and spam and hackers. But external threats are really only half of the equation. Your IT systems are much more likely to be breached internally. To ensure your company's protection inside and out, have a written record of the security products and procedures, including rules of use for employees.  
  
And, finally, you need the answers to two big questions:
- 9. Is your system compliant with current industry regulations?**
- 10. Where is your key data (financial, customer, legal, product) stored and who knows how to access it?**

All Covered is the only nationwide information technology services partner focused solely on the unique computing, networking, and application needs of small businesses. Serving thousands of organizations across every major industry, the company helps clients achieve their business objectives by lowering the cost and maximizing the performance of their IT systems. All Covered's broad geographic reach, extensive knowledgebase, automated systems, proven methodology, and preferred vendor relationships meet the IT planning, design, procurement, implementation, maintenance, and management requirements of both single- and multi-location businesses.