



# How to Choose a Managed Network Services Provider

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6 Best Practices to Ensure a Thorough Evaluation

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## 6 Best Practices to Ensure a Thorough Evaluation

### Could managed network services be right for you?

There comes a point when every organization must make a decision. For small and midsize businesses: Should we really be managing our network ourselves? For larger enterprises: what aspects of managing the network should be outsourced?

If your business has a network that ...

- Connects multiple offices, stores, or other sites
- Is growing beyond the capacity of current access lines
- Must provide secure connectivity to mobile and remote employees
- Could produce cost savings by integrating voice and data traffic
- Needs to be ready for more traffic from video and other high-bandwidth applications
- Is becoming more difficult to manage and assure performance and security, especially given limited staff and budget resources

... then it's time to consider managed network services.

In a managed network services solution, you outsource the day-to-day operation and management of network links and equipment to a service provider. Outsourced network management offers a viable option for most communications services, including:

- Network connections: Broadband Internet access links including T1, bonded T1, business Ethernet, DS3, DSL, cable, satellite and wireless broadband
- Remote access: Virtual private networks (VPNs) based on Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) that provide secure access to an internal business network, using the Internet, for remote sites and users
- Voice: Carrying voice and data traffic on the same circuits
- Network security: Comprehensive management of security elements to mitigate network intrusions, attacks, viruses, spam and other threats.

A managed services provider can consolidate, integrate and manage all of these network services, giving organizations cost-effective ways to connect their business locations to each other, to the Internet and to business partners.

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## Why not manage your network in-house?

Of course, it's possible—but not always easy or cost-effective—for an organization to manage its own network internally. Consider the challenges of in-house network management:

<b>Business Factors</b>
Reducing network overhead costs while increasing network services
Implementing a global network service without internal global resources
Supporting dynamic business growth with restricted budgets and staffing levels
Needing to respond quickly to time-to-market demands
Implementing new technologies to maintain competitiveness
Supporting new business operations and markets or integrating acquisitions
<b>Network Operations</b>
Managing, maintaining and upgrading network infrastructure and management systems
Delivering high-quality, high-availability network services to meet 24-hour demand
Defining and monitoring Quality of Service (QoS) and Class of Service (CoS) parameters to prioritize voice traffic and ensure call quality
Securing data, transactions and communications, keeping up with the latest security threats, and meeting privacy and security regulations
Delivering services to more remote offices and workers
<b>Staffing</b>
Finding, recruiting and retaining certified network professionals
Helping staff stay up-to-date with new technologies and skills
Focusing employees on core competencies and mission-critical processes, rather than network support

Given the difficulty of these challenges, outsourcing network management is rapidly becoming the preferred alternative for many organizations.



## Understanding managed services

Managed network services are typically offered by a managed services provider (MSP) on a subscription basis, with a monthly fee that reflects the network services, bandwidth or user levels, equipment, and service level agreement (SLA) performance levels covered by the customer contract. The MSP can remotely manage network links, equipment and applications that are installed at the customer premises or host all of these elements in its own facilities.

MSP staff monitors the health and availability of network equipment and services to ensure they operate smoothly and securely. A managed services provider also offers a single point of contact for network trouble reports and a full-time help desk for user support.

You can even choose to out-task some network management and monitoring tasks while retaining control of the rest, even if the equipment is physically located at the MSP's facilities.



## Advantages of outsourcing to a MSP

More than ever, businesses are achieving increased operational efficiencies while lowering network costs by using managed data, voice and security services. The benefits of relying on a managed services provider are many.

### Cost Savings

- Predictable monthly fee for network and management services; pay only for the networking services used.
- Cost savings of up to 50 percent by consolidating voice and data services onto a single network.
- Access to leading network technologies and management expertise, without high capital expenditures or ongoing investments in upgrades, IT staffing and maintenance resources.
- A single point-of-contact reduces network costs and simplifies vendor management for IT staff.
- Using outsourced expertise avoids the costs of developing management and reporting capabilities

### Simplified Management

- Proactive management of network services through 24/7 monitoring of links and equipment, automatic fault notification and responsive trouble management.
- IT staff freed to focus on strategic activities instead of network support.
- Well-defined Service Level Agreements (SLAs) guarantee response and resolution times for network problems to minimize impact on users.

# Which is the right managed network services provider for you?

After deciding to explore managed services, the next step is finding the right managed network service provider. With so many different types of providers offering such a range of services and management models, the choices can be confusing. Understanding the different types of service providers is the first step in making the right decision for your organization.

IT managers may think first of the large telecom carriers as potential vendors for managed network services. However, although large carriers sell hosted network services to small and mid-size businesses, their real focus is on the networks of large enterprises. And even for large enterprises with geographically-dispersed locations, service, and network needs, the managed network services offered by large carriers may not be the best-fit or most cost-effective solution for large enterprises.

At the other end of the managed services spectrum are many small “boutique” providers that offer hosted services under a Bring Your Own Bandwidth (BYOB) model, where customers arrange for network links and equipment. This model does not provide the benefits of a provider’s dedicated MPLS network, or support for network-based QoS and managed security services.

For most organizations, the right managed services provider can be found in the middle of the spectrum, in a MSP that maintains its own network and offers an extensive array of managed services. With this type of MSP, you can choose a fully managed network access, voice or security service, or the combination of individual services that match your business needs and internal network management resources, with the expectation that as your needs evolve, the MSP can scale its services to fit those needs.

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## Best practices criteria for choosing a MSP

When searching for a MSP, you’ll likely find several companies to consider. How do you evaluate these providers and their service offerings to make the best choice? The following best practices and the worksheet on page 7 provide helpful decision criteria.

### Service offerings

The MSP should focus on understanding your unique service needs, and meeting them with a business orientation that goes beyond offering all customers a “cookie cutter” solution. The provider should offer network connectivity in a variety of access speeds from DSL to DS3, allowing you to select the right speed for each user or remote location. The broadband access service should offer high-speed, “always on” links in a nationwide connectivity solution that is easy to deploy, manage and support.

For your voice communications, a managed service should combine business-class phone service and high-speed SDSL or T1 Internet access into one low monthly rate. This service can reduce costs substantially while delivering business-class telephony features with no upfront costs and no new equipment to buy. Likewise, the MSP should also offer business-class hosted voice services in a range of equipment and feature packages with low start-up costs and affordable monthly fees. To assure superior quality on voice calls, the MSP should maintain high QoS levels for voice traffic and guaranteed levels of service uptime.

## Network coverage

At a minimum, the chosen provider should offer more than just a high-performance, highly secure, and converged voice and data network. National network coverage with a Tier-1 Internet peering infrastructure is essential to delivering high-performance access to the Internet and the organization's internal network.

## Network, voice and security operations capabilities

The service provider should support and proactively monitor its data, voice and security services on a 24/7 basis from multiple redundant Network Operations Centers (NOCs) and Security Operations Centers (SOCs). A dedicated support infrastructure ensures that the network services perform to their maximum potential and that customers receive timely and responsive technical support.

The provider should also give customers complete visibility into network status and performance via a Web-based customer information portal, so that great service is extended to self-service capabilities.

## Certified professionals and industry partnerships

Delivering high-quality managed network services requires highly knowledgeable and skilled network professionals, as well as partnerships with leading equipment and network capacity vendors. Ask a potential MSP about the professional certifications held by its employees and its participation in vendor partnership programs.

## The importance of service-level agreements

Service-Level Agreements (SLAs) are a valuable tool for assessing how well a managed services provider maintains high levels of network performance and availability. These measurements guarantee overall network uptime as well as response and resolution times for network problems. For greater confidence in the provider's performance, look for a MSP that backs its SLAs with customer credits when targets are missed.



# MSP Selection Criteria Worksheet

Use this worksheet as a reference for evaluating the offerings and capabilities of potential managed services providers for your network.

MSP Selection Worksheet					
Selection Criteria	MegaPath	MSP #2	MSP #3	MSP #4	MSP #5
<b>Service Offerings</b>					
Broadband Services:					
T1 & Bonded T-1	✓				
DS3/OCX	✓				
Business Ethernet	✓				
DSL	✓				
Cable	✓				
Satellite	✓				
Wireless Broadband	✓				
Voice Services	✓				
SSL VPN	✓				
MPLS Site-to-Site VPN	✓				
Managed Network Security	✓				
Worldwide Dial-Up & Broadband Access	✓				
Professional Services:					
Project Management	✓				
Equipment Installation & Support	✓				
<b>Network Coverage &amp; Capability</b>					
National Footprint	✓				
Multiple Points of Presence	✓				
Tier 1 ISP Status	✓				
Integrated Voice & Data	✓				
Supports Class of Service	✓				
MPLS-Enabled, All-Optical IP Network	✓				
<b>Network Operations</b>					
24/7 Network Monitoring	✓				
Automated Problem Alerts	✓				
Trouble Management	✓				
Sophisticated NMS & OSS	✓				
Redundant NOC	✓				
Customer Portal	✓				
<b>Security Operations</b>					
Sophisticated Security Systems	✓				
Intrusion Protection	✓				
Redundant SOC	✓				
<b>Certifications &amp; Partnerships</b>					
Certified network staff	✓				
Vendor & network partners	✓				
<b>Service-Level Agreements</b>					
Offers Specific SLAs	✓				
Customer Credits	✓				



## The Value of Industry Certifications

The strength of a MSP is determined in part by the skill and knowledge of its employees—especially those who design, operate, and manage the network services. Amongst our technical operations and engineering employees, nearly 20% hold at least one vendor or industry certification, and in our broadband, security and voice network design engineering teams, that number jumps to nearly 50 percent. These certifications are an important indicator of expertise because they provide objective validation of an individual's depth of training and experience in solving complex network issues.

As a Cisco Managed Services Channel Partner, MegaPath focuses on attracting and retaining a high number of Cisco-certified employees. Four of MegaPath's network engineers hold the prestigious Cisco CCIE certification, which is recognized as the highest level of technical achievement within the networking industry. MegaPath employees hold other Cisco certifications for network operations, including Cisco Certified Entry Networking Technician (CCENT), Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) and Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP).

MegaPath engineers also hold other well-respected certifications, including:

- Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP) for network security
- System and technology certifications from vendors such as Juniper Networks, Avaya, Nortel, Toshiba, Microsoft and Aventail/SonicWall
- IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) and project management certifications for overall managed services operations

## Why MegaPath?

As a leading provider of secure access and managed network solutions, MegaPath combines the best broadband connectivity, voice, VPN and security technologies with unmatched network design, deployment, monitoring, management, reporting and support capabilities.

You always enjoy crystal-clear call quality with MegaPath voice services. Unlike consumer VoIP services that travel over the Internet, MegaPath carries telephone calls over a private, voice-optimized network with QoS to give priority to voice traffic.

MegaPath managed network services reduce the cost and complexity of securely connecting remote sites and users to your network while providing a single point of contact for network operations and management.

### Why select MegaPath as your MSP?



## The value of a Cisco Master Managed Services Channel Partner

MegaPath is one of only a few Cisco Managed Services Channel Partners to receive the Master designation, granted in recognition of the highest level of network management capability. MegaPath is also a member of the Cisco Powered program, which means we use Cisco equipment to deliver selected network services, we meet Cisco standards for network support, and we achieve Cisco standards for interoperability, service reliability and service quality.

Learn more about how MegaPath can meet your needs for managed network services:  
[www.megapath.com](http://www.megapath.com)



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