

FREE RESOURCE — VENDOR COMPARISON GUIDE

IT Support Vendor Comparison Guide

How to evaluate and compare managed IT support providers. Use this structured framework to assess proposals, compare capabilities, and select the right IT partner for your business — with a vendor scoring matrix you can fill in.

5

EVALUATION
SECTIONS

30+

COMPARISON
CRITERIA

UK

MSP MARKET
BENCHMARKS

/70

VENDOR
SCORING
MATRIX

REQUIREMENTS

CAPABILITIES

SLAS & PRICING

SCORING

PREPARED FOR

Cloudswitched Knowledge
Library

PREPARED BY

Cloudswitched Ltd.

VERSION

2026 Edition

FORMAT

Interactive PDF

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How to use this guide

Use this guide when evaluating IT support providers. Score each vendor across the criteria listed, request evidence for claims, and involve your key stakeholders in the decision. Work through the five sections in order — the comparison matrix at the back gives you a structured way to produce a single number per vendor and compare like-for-like.

Most UK SMEs end up speaking to three or four MSPs before signing. The questions, red flags and pricing benchmarks in this guide are designed to keep that conversation honest — what is actually covered, who actually answers the phone at 19:00, and what the fully-loaded cost looks like once the optional extras are added back in.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

Five evaluation areas — Requirements, Technical Capabilities, Service Delivery & SLAs, Pricing & Contract Terms, and a fillable Vendor Scoring Matrix. Aimed at UK SMEs choosing a managed IT support partner for between 10 and 250 users, with or without a project pipeline.

COMMON MISTAKE

Do not select a provider on price alone. The cheapest provider often delivers the lowest service quality, leading to higher real-world cost through downtime, security incidents and staff frustration. Score on outcomes — response, resolution, reliability — not just the headline per-user rate.

The five sections

- **01 Defining Your Requirements** — users, sites, hours, critical systems, budget range.
- **02 Technical Capabilities** — cloud, security, networking, backup, on-site, procurement, compliance.
- **03 Service Delivery & SLAs** — response/resolution targets, helpdesk model, account management.
- **04 Pricing & Contract Terms** — per-user, on-site rates, projects, hidden costs, term length.
- **05 Vendor Scoring Matrix** — fillable /10 scoring across seven criteria for up to three vendors.

01

Defining your requirements

Before approaching vendors, clearly define what you need from an IT support partner. The brief you write here drives every later comparison — without it, vendors will pitch what they want to sell, not what you need to buy.

Start by documenting your current IT environment: number of users, sites, devices, cloud services, line-of-business applications, and any specialist requirements. Then consider your growth plans for the next three years and any upcoming projects such as office moves, cloud migrations, or security improvements.

Key questions to answer first

How many users and sites need support? Include remote workers and any international offices.

What are your core business hours? Do you need 24/7 cover, or business-hours support with on-call escalation?

What systems are business-critical? Identify which applications and services cannot tolerate downtime.

What is your current pain point? Slow response times, security gaps, lack of strategic advice, or end-user frustration?

What is your budget range? Typical UK MSP pricing is £40–£80 per user per month for comprehensive support.

Do you need project work? Cloud migrations, infrastructure upgrades, new office setups, Cyber Essentials certification?

WRITE IT DOWN BEFORE THE FIRST CALL

A one-page requirements brief — user count, sites, hours, critical apps, pain points, budget band, projects — lets you compare like-for-like proposals and stops vendors quoting different shapes of work. Hand the same brief to every shortlisted MSP.

02

Technical capabilities

Assess the provider's technical depth across the areas most relevant to your business. Ask for evidence — engineer certifications, real customer environments, test-restore reports — not marketing slides.

CAPABILITY	QUESTIONS TO ASK	RED FLAGS
Cloud expertise	Which Microsoft 365 / Azure certifications do your engineers hold? Can you share recent CSP deployments?	No Microsoft Partner status or named engineer certifications
Security	Do you offer EDR, SIEM, vulnerability scanning? Which frameworks — Cyber Essentials, ISO 27001, NIST — do you align to?	Provider does not hold Cyber Essentials itself
Networking	Can you manage Meraki, Fortinet, Cisco or comparable enterprise platforms? Do you offer SD-WAN or ZTNA?	Only consumer-grade networking experience
Backup & DR	Which backup products do you support? How often do you test restores? Can you show the last quarterly test report?	No evidence of test-restore results
On-site support	How quickly can an engineer be on-site? Do you cover our locations — including out-of-hours emergencies?	No guaranteed on-site response time
Procurement	Can you source hardware and software at trade pricing? Will you show the supplier invoice on request?	Significant markup with no transparency
Compliance	Can you help with Cyber Essentials, ISO 27001, GDPR or sector-specific compliance (FCA, NHS DSPT, ICO)?	No experience with UK regulatory requirements

ASK FOR THE ENGINEER, NOT THE BROCHURE

Marketing pages list every certification the partnership umbrella holds. Ask which engineers in *your account team* hold them, and how many of those engineers will be on your tickets day-to-day.

03

Service delivery & SLAs

Evaluate how the provider delivers support and what commitments they make. Request sample SLA documents and ask for real performance data from the last six months — any reputable provider should be transparent about their actual response and resolution times, not just their targets.

What to ask

Response times. What are the guaranteed response times for P1 (critical), P2 (high), P3 (medium) and P4 (low) priority issues?

Resolution times. What percentage of tickets are resolved within SLA targets? Ask for the last three months of MI as proof.

Helpdesk model. Is the helpdesk UK-based? Is it staffed by qualified engineers, or call handlers who then escalate?

Onboarding process. How do they transition you from your current setup? What documentation will they create and own?

Account management. Will you have a dedicated account manager or vCIO for strategic guidance? How often will you meet?

Reporting. What monthly reports do they provide? Can you access a real-time dashboard for tickets, security and assets?

ASK FOR THREE REFERENCES

Request three references from businesses of a similar size and industry to yours. Ask the references specifically about response times, communication quality, and how the provider handled a major incident — not whether the relationship is "good".

RESOLUTION > RESPONSE

Response time tells you how quickly someone replies. Resolution time tells you how quickly the problem actually goes away. The second number is the one that matters — insist on seeing it before you sign.

04

Pricing & contract terms

Understand exactly what is included in the price and what costs extra. The benchmarks below reflect the UK SME MSP market in 2026 — use them as a sanity-check, not a target.

PRICING ELEMENT	WHAT TO CHECK	TYPICAL UK RANGE
Per user / per month	What is included? Is there a minimum user count or floor charge?	£40-£80
On-site support	Is on-site included or charged separately? What are the rates and minimum visit length?	£75-£150/hr
Project work	How is project work quoted — fixed price or T&M? Who absorbs scope creep?	£80-£150/hr
Out-of-hours	Is 24/7 support included, or an add-on? What counts as a P1 out-of-hours?	£10-£20/user
Hardware procurement	Do they charge a margin on hardware? How transparent is it? Will they share the invoice?	5%-15% markup
Contract term	What is the minimum term? Notice period? Exit provisions and data handover terms?	12-36 months
Price increases	Are annual increases capped? Linked to CPI? Can you reject and exit if a rise is excessive?	CPI + 2% typical

HIDDEN COSTS TO WATCH FOR

Some providers advertise low per-user rates but charge extra for essentials like third-party Microsoft 365 backup, EDR, patching or on-site visits. Insist on a **fully-loaded monthly cost** — one number that includes every service you need — so you can compare like-for-like across the shortlist.

05

Vendor scoring matrix

Score each vendor out of 10 across these seven criteria to create an objective comparison. The total out of 70 gives a single headline number for stakeholder review. The fields below are interactive — type your scores directly in any modern PDF viewer.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	VENDOR A	VENDOR B	VENDOR C
Technical capabilities	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
SLA commitments & performance	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Security & compliance	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Pricing & value	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Cultural fit & communication	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
References & reputation	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
Strategic / vCIO capability	_____ / 10	_____ / 10	_____ / 10
TOTAL	_____ / 70	_____ / 70	_____ / 70

Notes

PREPARED BY

DATE

APPROVED BY

Looking for a trusted IT support partner?

Cloudswitched provides managed IT support to businesses across London and the South East. Let us show you how we compare against this matrix — line-by-line, with evidence.

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cloudswitched.com/services/it-support



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