UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

THE IT PROVIDER
SHOPPING GUIDE

What Qualities Should You Prioritize To
Find The Right Fit for Your Business?

THE IT PROVIDER SHOPPING GUIDE

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

Choosing a new IT provider can feel a little like picking someone to take care of your car. You might not know how the engine works, but you know you need it to **run reliably, keep you safe, and not cost more than it should.**

In the same way, an IT provider should **keep your technology running smoothly, protect your business from risks**, and help you plan ahead **without hidden surprises!**

> You don't need to understand all the technical details, **you just need to know what qualities to look for.**

This guide will take you through those qualities step by step so you can make the **most informed decision!**

Communication:
The Foundation of Trust

Let's go back to that initial car example. So, you ask your mechanic what's wrong with your car. If they use a lot of technical words, you might nod politely, but still walk away confused. **This helps nobody!**

A good mechanic would say, **"Your tire is flat. Here's how we'll fix it."** IT providers should do the same thing: deliver information in non-technical, clear explanations that are easily understandable.

> Clear communication builds trust and **makes it easier for you to make decisions** about your business.

If you always understand what's happening and why, **you can feel confident that your IT provider is acting in your best interest.**

How to Evaluate Communication

- Do they explain issues and solutions in **plain language?**
- Do they take time to **listen** to your concerns before responding?
- Do you leave conversations with **more clarity**, not less?
- Can they **connect technology decisions back** to your business goals?

UNIVERSAL DATA
I N C O R P O R A T E D

Look for a Proactive Approach

When you brush your teeth, **you don't wait until you have a cavity to start caring for them.**

You brush every day to **prevent future problems!**

A good IT provider works the same way: **they prevent cavities in your technology before they have a chance to occur.**

Being proactive saves your business money and stress. Instead of scrambling to fix broken systems, your provider is constantly reducing risks, **meaning fewer emergencies and smoother operations overall!**

What Proactive IT Looks Like

01
Continuous monitoring of your systems to **catch problems early**

02
Regular updates and patches so your technology **stays secure**

03
Reports or alerts that **highlight risks** before they cause downtime

04
Preventative maintenance that reduces emergencies and unexpected costs

Security: *Quiet but Essential*

Security in IT should be almost invisible after setup, **working in the background so you don't have to worry.**

If the IT provider you're talking to doesn't make cybersecurity a central part of their conversation, **that's a red flag.** A provider focused only on "fixing computers" or "answering tickets" is not a technology partner: they're just an IT guy. A true partner prioritizes your business's protection, helping you stay secure and compliant **while preparing for future risks.**

Questions to Ask a Potential Provider

- *How do you handle cybersecurity for businesses like mine?"*
- *"What systems or tools do you use to stop threats before they spread?"*
- *"How often do you review security settings to make sure they are current?"*
- *"Do you provide clear security reports so I can see what's being protected?"*

Reliable Support When You Need It Most

Imagine your internet stops working during an important video call. You don't want to wait days for someone to call you back, you need help right away. In this moment, it doesn't matter that your IT provider **CAN** fix the problem, it matters that they **WILL** fix the problem **FAST.**

Reliable support is this simple: it means that someone answers when you need them!

Quick support means **less downtime** and **fewer lost opportunities.** If your IT provider responds quickly and resolves problems efficiently, your business can keep moving without major interruptions.

Signs of Reliable Support

- **Clear response time guarantees** written into their agreements
- **Live support** available during business hours (and after-hours options if needed)
- A simple way to **submit requests** (phone, email, or ticketing system)
- An **escalation process** so urgent problems are resolved quickly

THE IT PROVIDER SHOPPING GUIDE

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

On-Site Support: Still Essential

IT providers love to talk about how almost everything they do can be handled remotely: and in many cases, **that's true!** Remote work saves time and helps both you and your provider resolve issues faster.

> **However,** as long as there are cables in walls, computers on desks, and server closets that need care, **on-site visits will always be necessary.**

It's important to ask your IT provider what happens when an in-person visit is needed. How quickly can someone arrive on-site? Will it be a technician from their own team or a third-party contractor? And will you get a surprise bill for it? The best providers have a clear process for on-site support and set expectations upfront **so you always know what to expect.**

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

Growth in Mind

Think about buying clothes for a child (if you already have kids, sorry for scaring you). You know they'll grow, **so adjustable or bigger sizes save you money and stress**. The same applies to IT: your business will grow, and your provider should grow with you!

The right IT partner makes it easy to expand without disruptions.

Whether you're hiring more employees or moving offices, your provider should be able to adjust **without slowing you down.**

A True Partner, Not Just a Vendor

We can't help it with the random examples! This time, imagine hiring a coach for a sports team. A coach doesn't just show up for the game: **they are there to help their team plan and succeed.**

> The best IT providers act like coaches, not just referees. **They want your business to win.**

This kind of relationship ensures your IT supports your business goals rather than just fixing day-to-day problems. A provider who works as a partner helps you **use technology as a tool for growth.**

Signs of a Partnership Approach

1. **They ask about your business goals**, not just your computer problems
2. **They make suggestions** on how technology can support growth
3. **They check in regularly** instead of only calling when there's a problem
4. **They feel like part of your team**, not just an outsider sending invoices

Understand What's In-House (and What's Not)

When evaluating providers, it's worth asking **what they do in-house versus what they outsource!** For example, you may hear "24/7 support," but that doesn't always mean you'll be talking to the same team you know and trust.

> Some providers outsource things like after-hours help desk, network monitoring, or cabling projects. **This isn't necessarily a dealbreaker, but transparency is key.**

You should know who's actually supporting your business, especially whether it's the local technicians you've met or an offshore team you've never spoken with.

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

Transparent Pricing:
No Surprises

We've exercised your imagination today, but I promise that this is the last example! Imagine buying lunch and then being told at the counter that **the napkin costs extra.** Frustrating, right?

> ## Pricing in IT should never work like that: you should always know what you're paying for **and why.**

The "why" is often missed by the majority of IT Providers! **Transparency in pricing lets you plan for the future.** When you know exactly what's included in your agreement, you can avoid stress and feel confident in your investment.

What to Look For in Pricing

- **A predictable monthly fee** you can budget for
- **No surprise charges** for common support requests
- Clear definitions of **what's included** and **what's considered "extra"**
- **Straightforward contracts** without hidden clauses

THE IT PROVIDER SHOPPING GUIDE

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

👣 Beware of the "Foot in the Door" Technique

Some MSPs will provide a quote before they've truly assessed your systems, then surprise you later with unexpected costs or **"gotchas."** You'll get a low estimate upfront, but the real costs appear once they start the work.

Always request a full IT assessment before accepting a quote. This ensures you're comparing providers fairly and understanding exactly what's included. Otherwise, you're not comparing apples to apples... **and the cheapest option might become the most expensive later**.

🪙 Watch Out for "Nickel and Diming"

> Make sure your IT provider outlines **every opportunity they have to bill you.**

Will you be charged for help desk calls, equipment purchases, cable work, or backup testing? How about strategy meetings or on-site projects? Some providers include everything in one predictable monthly cost, while others charge separately for each of these services.

Neither model is wrong: **your choice depends on your comfort level with variable vs. fixed costs.** The key is understanding what you're paying for, when, and why! That way, you can **avoid unexpected invoices** and **plan your IT budget with confidence.**

Local vs. National Providers

Finally, your business size and structure will help **determine what type of provider is right for you.** If your company has multiple offices across the country, a national provider might make sense (even if it comes with a higher price tag) because they can offer wider coverage.

> If your business is local, **a nearby IT company is almost always the better choice.**

They understand your community, can meet with you in person, and can be on-site quickly when needed. **Building that local relationship creates a stronger, more personal partnership!**

Putting It All Together

The right IT provider for your business is one that:

- Communicates clearly and simply
- Prevents issues before they occur
- Keeps your systems secure without extra stress
- Responds quickly when you need help
- Adjusts as your business grows
- Acts as a partner invested in your success
- Offers pricing you can understand and trust

> When you evaluate IT providers with these qualities in mind, **you can choose with confidence.**

We hope this guide has helped you recontextualize your provider search! **Feel free to reach out to our team at info@udi.com or 504-934-7120.** We pride ourselves on meeting each of these requirements and would love to see if we're the right fit for your business.

UNIVERSAL DATA
INCORPORATED

Contact Us

📞 **(504) 934-7120**

✉️ **info@udi.com**