The 2026 MSP Buyer's Guide

What to Ask Before You Sign an IT Contract (Even If You Don't Choose Us)

The questions that separate great IT providers from the rest no matter who you hire.

Why This Guide Exists

Choosing an IT provider shouldn't feel like deciphering hieroglyphics. But let's be honest the MSP world can be confusing, inconsistent, and filled with promises that don't always match reality.

So here's the deal:

Even if you don't hire Cyber Command, we want you to hire someone great.

Someone who protects your business like it's their own. Someone who answers the phone. Someone who isn't Googling "how to fix this" while your systems are down.

This guide gives you the exact questions, expectations, and red flags you need to confidently evaluate any MSP.

Use it. Share it. Bring it to every meeting. Your business deserves real support, not just a ticket number.
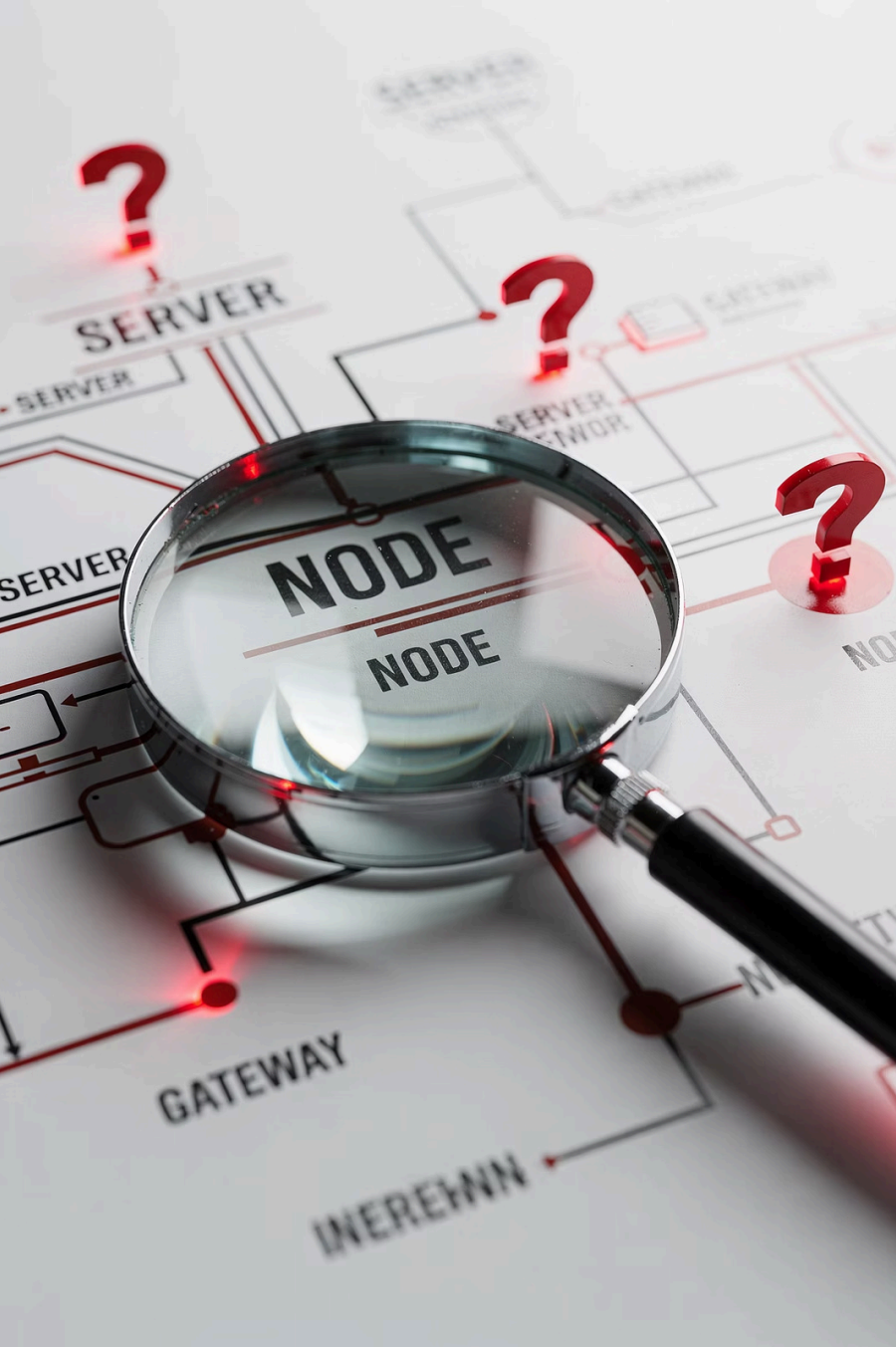
The 12 Questions Every Business Must Ask Before Hiring an MSP

These questions work like X-ray vision. They reveal things most MSPs hope you never think to ask.

1. Who will actually be supporting us day-to-day?

You're not buying a brand name, you're buying the people behind it.

Look for:

- A real team (not a one-person shop drowning in tickets)
- Clear roles: help desk, engineers, cybersecurity analysts
- Backup coverage for sick days, vacations, and after-hours

Red flag: "It'll usually be Mike."

2. Do you have a real 24/7 Security Operations Center, or do you outsource alerts to a third party?

This is a big one. Most MSPs don't have their own SOC.

Look for:

- In-house SOC with trained analysts
- Real-time monitoring
- Experience with AI-driven threat detection

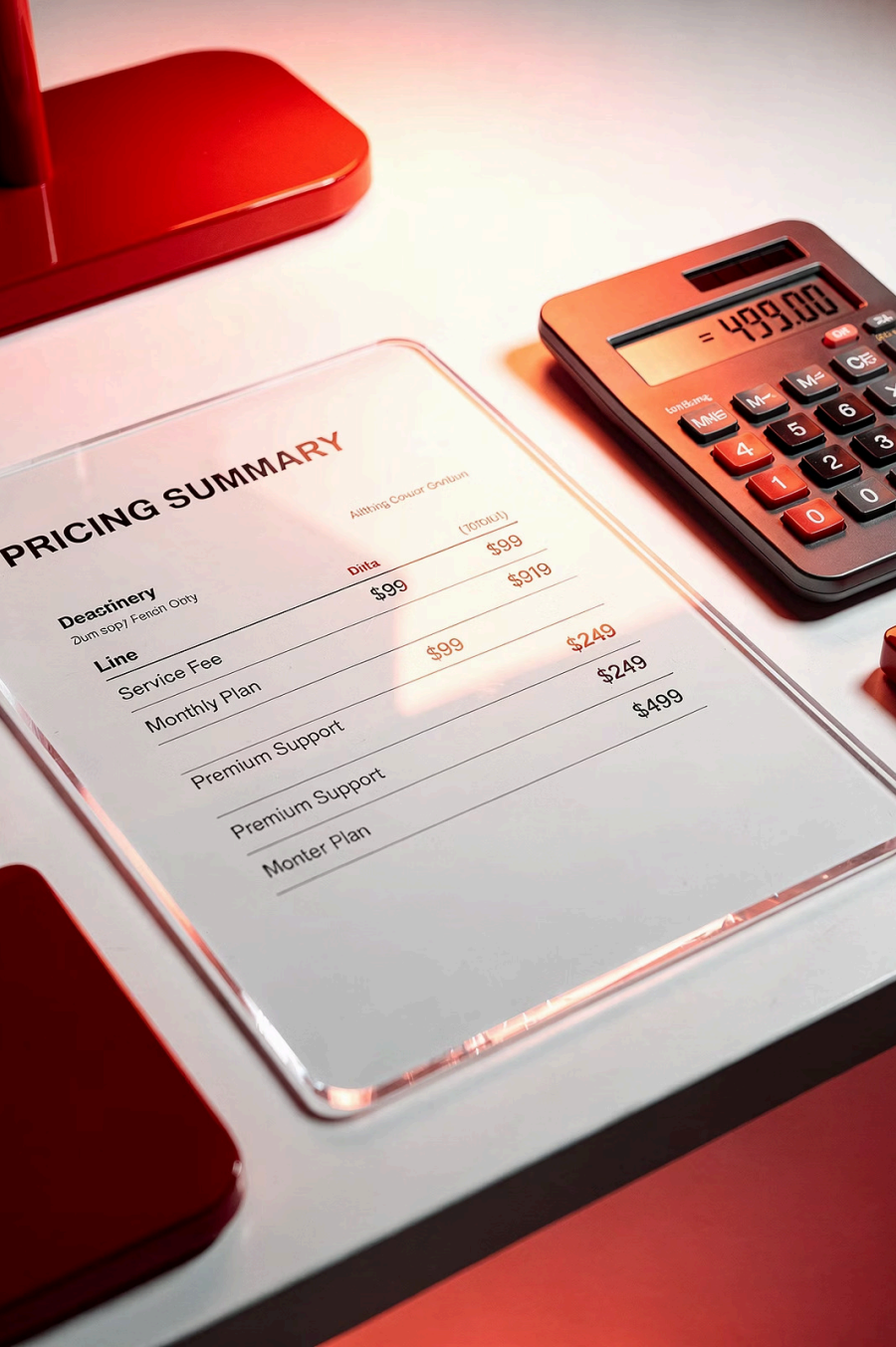🗋 **Red flag:** "We monitor alerts during business hours."

3. How fast is your average response time and can you prove it?

Every MSP claims "fast support."

Look for:

- Documented response SLAs
- Monthly performance reporting
- 24/7 emergency escalation

Red flag: "We aim to get back to you the same day."

4. What exactly is included, and not included in your monthly fee?

Many MSP complaints start with surprise invoices.

Look for:

- Clear lists of what's included
- Transparent project pricing
- No hidden onboarding or deactivation fees

📝 **Red flag:** Vague language like "additional charges may apply."

5. How do you handle after-hours emergencies?

Cyberattacks don't punch out at 5 PM.

Look for:

- 24/7 engineers
- Clear escalation paths
- Guaranteed response

Red flag: Voicemail after 5:01 PM.

6. Do we get a dedicated account manager?

A strategic partner, not just a help desk.

Look for:

- Quarterly strategic reviews
- Technology roadmap
- Budget planning / lifecycle forecasting

Red flag: "You can email support for that."

![Cyber Command logo]

7. How do you proactively prevent issues instead of just reacting to tickets?

Modern MSPs focus on prevention.

Look for:

- Automated patching
- Vulnerability scanning
- Proactive monitoring
- Quarterly security reviews

🗒 **Red flag:** "We'll fix issues as they come up."

8. What cybersecurity standards do you follow?

This exposes whether they're modern or outdated.

Look for:

- NIST CSF
- CIS Controls
- MFA everywhere
- Zero Trust principles

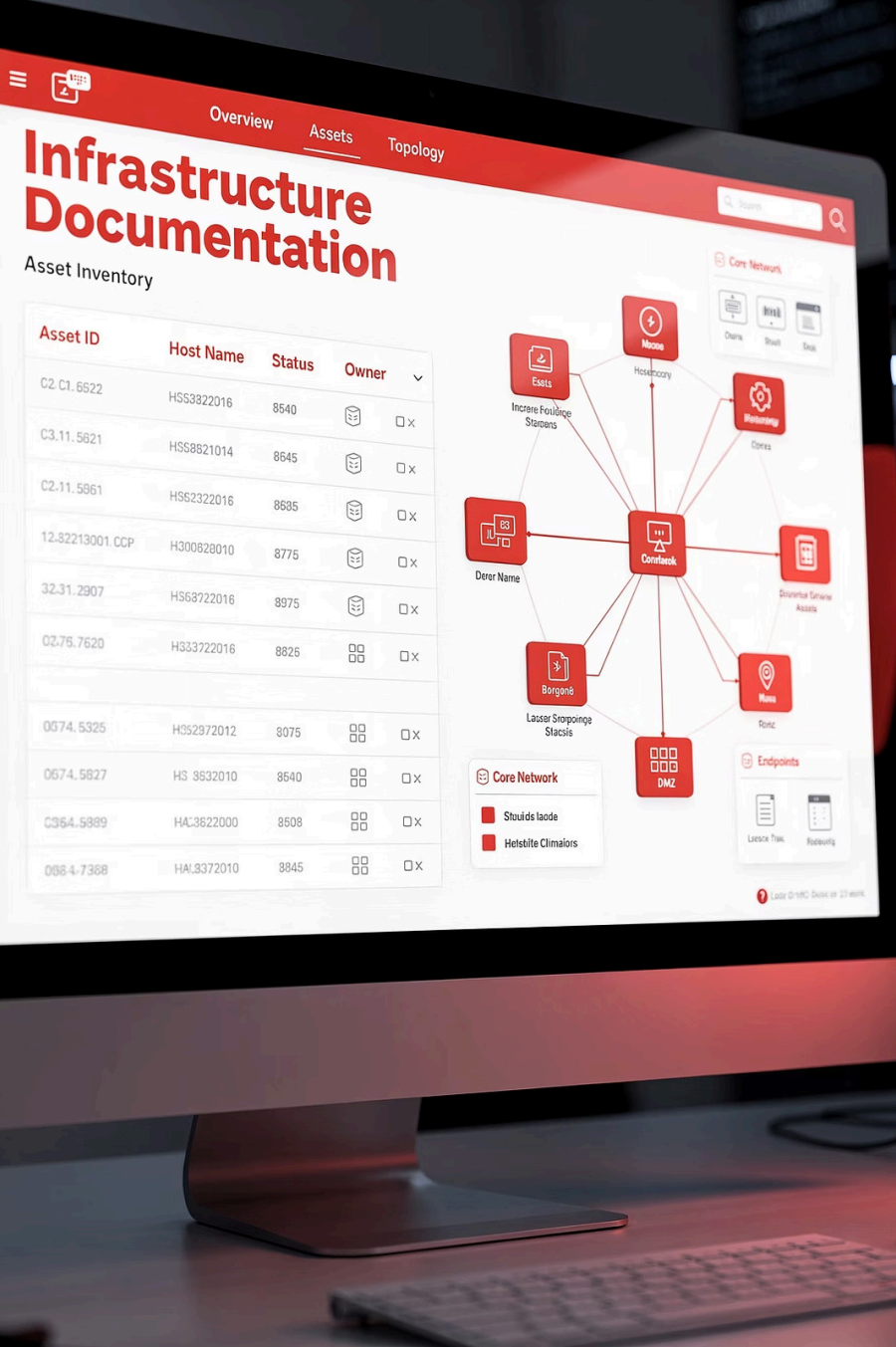**Red flag:** "We install antivirus and keep Windows updated."

9. What is your disaster recovery plan, for us and for you?

MSPs can also get hacked.

Look for:

- Backup redundancy
- Incident response plans
- Business continuity documentation

> 🗒 **Red flag:** "...for us?"

10. How do you document our systems?

If one person leaves the MSP, your business shouldn't fall apart.

Look for:

- Centralized documentation systems
- Password vaults
- Network diagrams
- Asset inventory

> 🗒 **Red flag:** "We keep notes internally."

11. What does onboarding look like?

Good onboarding predicts your future experience.

Look for:

- 30–60 day onboarding plan
- Discovery and documentation
- Immediate security hardening
- User training

Red flag: No defined process.

12. What does your ideal client look like?

Both sides need clarity.

Look for:

- Honesty about who they serve best

- Transparency if you're not a fit

Red flag: "Everyone is a great fit!"

The MSP Red Flag List
(If You Hear These, Run.)

"We don't really need MFA."

"We have alerts, but we don't always check them overnight."

"We charge extra for everything that's not a password reset."

"I'm the only tech, but it's fine, I don't take many vacations."

"Backups? Yeah, we set something up a while ago."

"We'll migrate your entire company next week for $300."

"We don't do contracts, unless you want unlimited support, then it costs more."

What Good MSP Service Actually Looks Like in 2026

Here's what a modern MSP should deliver as table stakes:

24/7 monitoring and response

Threats don't sleep, neither should your protection.

A real engineering team, not one overworked technician

Coverage matters more than charisma.

Strategic IT leadership

You need guidance, not just fire extinguishing.

Transparent pricing

No surprise invoices. Ever.

Documented processes and repeatable systems

Because "tribal knowledge" isn't a strategy.

Cyber-first mindset

IT without cybersecurity is just expensive troubleshooting.

Measurable results

Reports. Metrics. Accountability.

If an MSP isn't doing these, they're not modern, they're reactive.

MSP Comparison Checklist (Printable)

Use this in your MSP selection meetings, seriously. Score each MSP from 1–5 on each line.

Requirement	MSP #1	MSP #2	MSP #3
Dedicated engineering team			
Real SOC, not outsourced			
Documented response times			
Clear contract, no hidden fees			
Cybersecurity-first approach			
Quarterly strategy/vCIO meetings			
24/7 emergency support			
Strong onboarding program			
Industry compliance expertise (HIPAA, PCI, etc.)			
Transparency + cultural fit			

The Honest Truth (Most MSPs Will Never Say This)

> **You should never feel pressured to choose an MSP.**
>
> **You should feel understood. Supported. Confident.**

A good MSP partnership feels like having a full IT department that actually cares about your business, not like outsourcing to someone who always feels "too busy."

If you walk away from a meeting feeling confused, rushed, or talked down to... That's your decision right there.

If You Want to Talk to Cyber Command (Zero Pressure)

If you'd like a second opinion, contract review, or just want to sanity-check what another MSP is telling you, we're happy to help.

No sales pitch. No commitment. Just honest guidance.

Because every business deserves good IT, even if it doesn't come from us.