

# A GUIDE TO IT SUPPORT FOR FINANCE PEOPLE






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IT SUPPORT & CYBER SECURITY

## A GUIDE TO IT SUPPORT FOR FINANCE PEOPLE

This guide is intended for people working in a finance or procurement role who have been tasked with the responsibility for, or for their input into, choosing an IT support company. More specifically, this guide will help you to form an IT cost reduction strategy. The reason we wrote this guide is that we're IT experts and even we find it confusing when searching the Internet for a good IT support company. The reason it's so confusing is that IT companies tend to be very similar with not much to differentiate themselves in a very crowded market. Also, they appear to focus on listing product and platform features and types of service which may not make sense to those in a financial or procurement role. So, we wrote this helpful guide to help people like you decide using criteria we know to be important to your role, such as how choosing the right IT support provider can help minimise costs and risk to your business. Or even how the right IT support company can help you to unlock innovation and provide better service to your customers, or to free up valuable resources for more important tasks like driving growth. However, we realise the most pressing questions you probably have right now are "who are you and why are you writing this guide?" or "what's in it for us/you?" so let's address those concerns head on.

## WHO ARE WE?

We're [First Solution Technologies Limited](#) , and since 2005 we've provided a mix of IT consulting and [cloud solutions](#) to help clients realise their desired business outcomes through the effective use of technology. Err, hang on a second - we've just committed the cardinal sin that all IT support companies do. We've immediately lapsed into 'geek speak'. So, here's the deal – whenever we lapse into [geek speak](#) you'll see this icon...



...and whenever you see it please refer to the handy alphabetical glossary at the back of this guide or on our website which will explain the term [cloud solutions](#) further. All throughout this guide we're going to talk to the lowest common denominator and provide further explanations where necessary by pointing you to [our website](#) or [blog articles](#) using this icon...



...for more detail. Our goal is to equip you with the best strategy and tactics to empower you to make the best decisions for your business when choosing an IT support company.



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## WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

We want you to be happy, in fact we really want you to be delighted. We've found that delighted people often promote our business which creates customers and is a virtuous circle. We want you to find the answers you're looking for right here in this guide or on our website. In fact, we're obsessed with creating delighted customers so it's at the heart of everything we do. And by being very easy to deal with, highly professional and pleasant to be around we hope that you'll keep coming back to us. And once you keep coming back to us it's just a matter of time before you get in touch (and we'd love you to do that by the way so don't be shy). Therefore, we've created this guide with you in mind and given it away for free as proof of our desire to educate, support and empower people just like you. Now, that's enough of that touchy-feely stuff so let's get right into why you're here.

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

We can guess that as you're reading this guide that you probably work in a finance or procurement role and are looking for help choosing an IT support company, and in our experience, that probably means that the four following four scenarios are all too common. Below, we'll set out each scenario with a IT cost reduction strategy to address the scenario and tactics to help reduce costs and risk.



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## SCENARIO 1: MAINTENANCE COSTS ARE RISING ANNUALLY BY 10-15%.

It's time to renew your IT support company's contract and it seems that each year costs inextricably rise by 10-15% annually despite doing everything recommended by your IT support company. How can this be? You probably remember some slick sales person showing up and saying something like "once we're stabilised the environment here, things will cease to break and costs will go down", yet they never actually do. So why is this and how do we reduce costs?

### IT COST REDUCTION STRATEGY:






Reduce IT complexity, costs and risks by consuming [cloud based services](#) 🕶️. You no longer care what technology you use – just what it does. Consolidating all your IT support workloads onto a few large server's is called [virtualisation](#) 🕶️. Once many smaller physical servers have been consolidated onto fewer larger virtual servers the need for virtual servers to be highly available becomes even more important. Before virtualisation a business had a separate email server, a separate database server, a separate file server, a separate printer server, etc. all requiring an individual physical server, an individual Operating System (such as Windows Server), memory, disks, network cabling, networking devices, power, cooling, etc. This was very expensive therefore by adopting virtualisation these separate physical devices were consolidated onto a single larger server, (or [server cluster](#) 🕶️) with each 'virtual' server running as an application on the larger server. However, if the larger physical server failed then all consolidated workloads would also fail including email, printing, files, etc. To mitigate this risk, many IT support companies partnered with a data centre whom housed many larger physical servers for virtualisation purposes. This suited the IT support provider very well as they could pass on the responsibility for 'keeping the lights on' and focus on selling more IT support contracts with fewer technical personnel. Recognising this trend, the large mega service providers such as Microsoft, Amazon and Google began building enormous data centres with the associated economies of scale to drive down costs. However, the IT support companies often didn't pass these costs savings on and opted to make improved margins at the expense of their customers (i.e. you). For example, a domestic unit of electricity from a British Gas standard tariff costs £0.12p per hour. [Microsoft Azure](#) 🕶️ offer a single instance of a Windows Server including the physical hardware, an Operating System license, power, cooling and support for £0.04p per hour. This trend has driven the adoption of cloud based technologies from [Cloud Solutions Provider's](#) 🕶️ which require a shift in customers mindsets and for the associated cost savings to be passed on. Initially, many customers were worried about security or data protection legislation and viewed the cloud with suspicion, however the migration to the cloud is now in full swing as the security and protection offered by the mega service providers completely outperform what many smaller data centre providers can offer. Therefore, by adopting a cloud first strategy your business can benefit from the many benefits available from the mega providers and their cloud based solutions with little or no downside.



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## TACTICS:

Provide cost transparency so that departments can be charged on a utilisation basis. For example, by consuming cloud based services such as [Microsoft Office 365](#), each department can be billed each month for each employee that consumes an email service. Therefore, if there are fifty people in the marketing department and all require email, and the cost of email is £3 per month for each employee, then the finance department can accurately budget that the cost of email per month for the marketing department is £150. This is called cost transparency. Another benefit is that the service can be scaled up or down each month therefore if your business is an oil company then you will wish to scale your business up and down as the cost of oil rises and falls, or if your business is a seasonal business the benefits of cost transparency are easy to realise. By turning your IT support into a utility to be consumed upon demand you will enjoy a much tighter control on costs without any of the associated capital expenditure or depreciation costs. Furthermore, with each workload moved to the cloud, the requirement for technical support decreases as the mega provider often provides direct telephone support as and when needed. Therefore, a [Cloud MSP](#)  may be a good choice to consider for an IT support company looking to reduce costs. Furthermore, as the mega providers offer new capabilities such as [Data Analytics](#) , [Artificial Intelligence](#) , the [Internet of Things](#) , [Advanced Machine Learning](#),  etc. then these new capabilities are easily deployed as a utility with the associated lower implantation costs and on demand capabilities. This helps to future proof your business and insulate against rising costs as you're free to start and stop services as required, without a contract, thereby avoiding annual rising maintenance costs.



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## SCENARIO 2: ENTERPRISE MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS BECOME VEHICLES FOR MANUFACTURER 'LOCK-IN'.

When choosing an IT support company, it's easier to think 'better the devil you know'. And although the support provider constantly raises prices each year and upon cold reflection, their service isn't that great, and that they've only had a couple of outages this year.... Err, hold on! Why are you even thinking about renewing with this company? You may feel that it's going to be a lot of hassle changing this provider as they know your network inside out, after all, they built it didn't they! *Didn't they?* But most importantly, it's the perception that by switching provider you'll incur substantial switching costs. But fear not brave reader, here's the skinny on what you need to know to outfox those pesky vendors...

### IT COST REDUCTION STRATEGY:

IT support providers are great at playing the 'what if?' card and use this trick to sow doubt – “what if your new provider isn't that great, remember the company you *used to have* that lost your email data in the middle of that project?” and so on. The fact of the matter is once an IT company becomes the incumbent supplier for a few years then it's hard not to be lazy and keep producing your best work unless your ethos is to constantly provide customer delight. Does your current IT provider make you delighted? Why not? We'll bet it's because your IT company knows that data is the new oil that keeps your business running and even though the service isn't great, your business runs well and you simply don't want to risk change for






change sake. And if it ain't broke... But hang on, this is positively encouraging your IT support provider to underperform. If you simply accept that near enough is good enough then why would they strive to provide customer delight or why would you ask them to help unlock innovation or drive business growth? Now here's the hard part to swallow, because you, **yes you**, the Finance Director or Head of Procurement oversee the IT support function that means one thing. Your business views IT is a cost, a negative, or perhaps even a liability. And that's the problem. Unless your business changes its cultural mindset to a growth mindset IT will simply continue to underperform and overcharge the business, holding the business back like a giant digital anchor. And that apathy is exactly why your IT support company may continue to lock you in to renewal after renewal with fears that the cost of change would outweigh the benefits. Perhaps they even own the equipment you use such as workstations and servers, printers or networking equipment. You may simply believe that you're never going to be rid of this underperforming liability as it is ingrained into your business. So, what's the solution? *A joined-up IT strategy that unlocks innovation and drives growth.*



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## TACTICS:

OK, so you may believe that a cloud first strategy is the way forward and have asked your existing IT supplier for help realising that strategy. How's that working out for you? Hopefully, you'll be making some progress and have now adopted email from a cloud service provider such as Microsoft Office 365 – but please tell me you didn't pay for that project? YOU DID! But hang on, why would your IT support company migrate your business to the cloud for free? Easy, because Microsoft probably did it for them free of charge – and I bet they didn't tell you that. You see consumption is the new currency with the mega providers such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon and they fully realise that once you begin rolling out Google Docs for example that you'll never be an Office 365 customer again (because of the vendor lock-in apathy mindset which they've relied upon for years). Therefore, rather than risk losing your business for ever, Microsoft have set aside millions of pounds to perform a migration of all businesses with over 150 mailboxes to Office 365 for free through a project called the Fast Track Offer. Yup – nada, zilch, nil. And most of the mid-market IT support companies have weighed in and tasked Microsoft with performing this Fast Track migration, project managing it and physically migrating the mailboxes whilst they simply watch from the side-lines telling you how difficult and expensive this paradigm shift to the cloud is. And for smaller companies with over 5 mailboxes Microsoft have contracted with a company called SkyKick to provide this service at seriously discounted rates. Therefore, whatever the size of your business the drive to consume cloud based services from the mega service providers shouldn't be expensive nor prone to risk. And this doesn't just apply to email either, Microsoft have also offered a free or heavily discounted Migration to the cloud for their OneDrive, Skype for Business, Dynamics – in fact all their Office 365 services. And once you've moved your business to the cloud, you can feel free to drop any vendor who doesn't perform and simply designate a new [Partner of Record](#)  within your [Azure or Office 365 portal](#)  thereby invalidating any vendor lock-in for good. The first step towards implementing a joined-up IT strategy is to request a [free IT security health check and IT spending review](#)  to help identify opportunities to lower cost and risk whilst capturing your desired business outcomes. Also, you can now purchase services such as [cloud desktops](#)  and [cloud servers](#)  which negate the need to maintain expensive hardware and networking equipment within your premises, instead let your employees bring their own devices [BYOD](#)  or purchase dumb terminals for around £50 (or better yet [recycle your old desktops as dumb terminals](#) ) that breaks the vendor lock-in for leasing your IT hardware. All these tactics should be highlighted in a comprehensive IT strategy that focusses on delivering your desired business outcomes, such as reducing the IT budget to free up resources to invest in marketing with a [Growth Driven Design](#)  website that actually generates business and transforms IT from a liability into a strategic asset. You see – technology should unlock innovation and fuel growth, thereby creating delighted customers. At First Solution, that's what we do.



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## SCENARIO 3: INTERNAL COSTS ARE RUNNING HIGH FOR CONTRACT MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL.

As traditional businesses grow, people are employed, leave or change roles – including the individual with responsibility for managing IT. Naturally, a newly appointed person with responsibility for the IT function will want to do things their way and over time, change leads to a disparate environment whereby the business IT systems become disjointed. As more technology initiatives are undertaken, complexity, costs and frustration arise. Consequently, responsibility for managing IT support sometimes falls under the remit of the Finance department as IT and when it does this usually means one thing. IT is viewed by the business as a cost, or worse - a liability. To make matters worse, as people pass through the business and a homogenous glue of systems are left behind, the only solution is to hire expensive contractors with the relevant skills to maintain each platform. Silo's often occur and the only option seems to be just to keep things ticking over to maintain business as usual operations. So, what's the solution?

### IT COST REDUCTION STRATEGY:

Building on our approach outlined in scenarios one to three above, we have already developed a solution. By adopting a cloud first strategy and migrating workloads to the cloud, the responsibility for application availability now sits with the cloud service provider, i.e. Microsoft. To elaborate, once your email workload has been migrated to the cloud, the need for an on-premise email server and its associated complexity is no longer an issue. The email server now sits with Microsoft in their data centre and responsibility for keeping it up to date via [patch management](#) 🕶️, keeping the lights on, replacing hardware, etc. are now no longer your concern. Therefore, the associated personnel who support the email solution are no longer required either, which frees up resources to focus on other projects such developing a marketing campaign to drive new leads. And if we also consider that this applies to all workloads that we move to the cloud, such as storage via [OneDrive for Business](#) 🕶️, telephony with [Skype for Business](#) 🕶️, even line of business applications through [Microsoft Dynamics](#) 🕶️, then we have an effective strategy for reducing contract management personnel.





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## TACTICS:

As previously outlined, the cloud mega service providers such as Microsoft, Amazon and Google have initiatives to drive consumption of their products and services. Once we've engaged with them directly and migrated our workloads to the cloud then where's the need for an IT support company at all? And this is a great question that's worrying many traditional IT support providers. The direct answer is that they're going to have to evolve into Cloud Solutions Providers 🕶️ and develop services that customers will want in this evolving market. One such need is for Cloud Networks 🕶️ based upon technologies such as the excellent Cisco Meraki 🌐 portfolio. After all, you'll definitely want to have a solid and fast access to the Internet as any technology before the gateway 🕶️ will not be supported by the cloud mega service provider therefore a Cloud MSP will have a suite of tools and services to monitor your on-premise network and provide reactive IT support 🕶️ when required.





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## SCENARIO 4: THE RISK OF A DATA BREACH CAN HAVE SERIOUS FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS, NOT TO MENTION SIGNIFICANT REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE AND YOU NEED TO REDUCE THAT RISK.

Of all the scenarios previously laid out, this is probably the biggest concern of all people working in a Finance role. The cost of a data breach can cripple many firms from which they never recover – not to mention the effect on a businesses reputation or share price. Because of the risk posed by cyber criminals, and businesses seemingly willing to forego that risk, the European Union has implemented legislation called GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) which comes into force on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Should companies such as Yahoo or Talk Talk suffer data breaches like those that made the headlines in the last year or two, the EU will have the legal right and the obligation to implement fines of either 20 million Euros or 4% of a business's annual turnover – *whatever figure is greater!* And post Brexit, which country do you think the EU's legislators will target first to begin swelling their coffers? So, in Talk Talk's case under GDPR regulation a fine of £71 million could be levied as a consequence of the lack of investment in an effective cyber security policy based upon Talk Talk's 2017 annual revenue should a similar data breach occur.

### IT COST REDUCTION STRATEGY:

The good news is that GDPR compliance strategies can be implemented today utilising a [cloud desktop](#)  service, combined with data management best practices and [Microsoft OneDrive for Business](#) . By containerising data, and creating policies to control data access via mobile devices, data is retained within the data centre rather than stored locally on devices. Management of sensitive data is further enhanced through digital signatures, digital watermarks, contextual access, information rights management and country or region data protection specificities.

Utilise these four GDPR compliance strategies and recommendations:

1. Whenever possible, centralise apps and data in the cloud so sensitive enterprise data is not stored on devices.
2. When sensitive data must be distributed, accessed via mobile devices or utilised offline, ensure it is protected by design utilising the Microsoft OneDrive for Business Administration Centre.
3. Precisely control access to resources with context aware policies based on user, device, location, application and data sensitivity via a [Cloud Desktop](#)  service.
4. Provide visibility and management capabilities that unite your entire IT infrastructure to deliver application and data specific security utilising [Managed Security Services](#) .

In summary, look for a simplified approach that delivers compliance and strengthens security without impeding productivity.

## TACTICS:

Now that we have identified four strategies for GDPR compliance, utilise these seven tactics to ensure GDPR compliance:

1. Get proactive with [Proactive IT Support](#) 🕶️. Data Controllers must assess risks presented by processing activities and develop and implement adequate measures to address these risks. Utilise managed IP offerings developed specifically for GDPR compliance as a catalyst to ensure your business gets and remains compliant.
2. Privacy as the default. Personal data must be protected without action from the individual. GDPR has specific requirements to ensure the data subject does not have to act for their data to be protected. Think about how your business handles and stores data, request a [GDPR preparedness audit](#) 🕶️ to quickly work out if your business is compliant and what steps it must take to become compliant.
3. Privacy embedded into the design. Privacy Controls should be embedded in the architecture of IT systems, operations, and business processes without lessening functionality for the User.
4. Provide full functionality to employees and customers. It's possible to have privacy and security. This principle seeks to accommodate all legitimate interests and objectives in a 'win win' manner, not in a way that encourages trade-offs that customers and employees will work around.
5. End to end Security and lifecycle protection. Embed privacy and data protection into your systems throughout the data lifecycle from collection to destruction using [Data Loss Prevention](#) 🕶️ technologies.
6. Visibility and Transparency. Assure all stakeholders that you are operating according to stated promises and objectives subject to independent verification. Request an [independent audit](#) 🕶️ of your GDPR compliance.
7. Respect for user privacy. The purpose of GDPR is the protection of personal data for the citizens of the European Union. The EU Charter states that Privacy is a fundamental Human right. Don't just pay lip service to this fundamental right or embark on a box ticking exercise as Kodak did for its business continuity planning as detailed above. Take it seriously and act as early as possible to prevent heavy fines.

This means that your entire GDPR strategy, from definition to design to implementation to operation must include clear processes and procedures at the operating level. This includes clear roles and responsibilities, training, and regular review and audit cycles.



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## THANK YOU

We hope this guide helps in your role and if you have any feedback as to what we can do to improve this guide then please send it with 'FEEDBACK: A guide to IT support for Finance People' in the subject line to [info@firstsolution.co.uk](mailto:info@firstsolution.co.uk). Thank you for reading and if there's anything we can do to help support and empower you in your role then we'd be delighted to help.

The First Solution Team.



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## GLOSSARY

[Advanced Machine Learning](#)  
[Artificial Intelligence](#)  
[Azure Portal](#)  
[Before the Gateway](#)  
[Business Continuity Planning](#)  
[BYOD](#)  
[Cloud Based Services](#)  
[Cloud Desktops](#)  
[Cloud MSP](#)  
[Cloud Networks](#)  
[Cloud Servers](#)  
[Cloud Solutions](#)  
[Cloud Solutions Provider](#)  
[Cloud Telephony](#)  
[Cyber Essentials](#)  
[Cyber Security](#)  
[Cyber Security Audits](#)  
[Data Analytics](#)  
[Data Loss Prevention technologies](#)  
[GDPR](#)  
[GDPR Preparedness Audit/Independent Audit](#)  
[Help desk](#)  
[Internet of Things](#)  
[Managed Antivirus](#)  
[Managed Backup and Recovery](#)  
[Managed Remote Access](#)  
[Managed Security Services](#)  
[Managed Services Provider](#)  
[Managed Web Security](#)  
[Microsoft Azure](#)  
[Microsoft Dynamics](#)  
[Microsoft Office 365](#)  
[Mobile Device Management](#)  
[Office 365 Portal](#)  
[OneDrive for Business](#)  
[Partner of Record](#)  
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