

Essential IT Guide for Small Business



Every small business will need IT support to run their business. How a SMB organises its support is critical to the ongoing success of the business.

What are the options?

- **In-house**
- **Outsource**
- **Co-source**

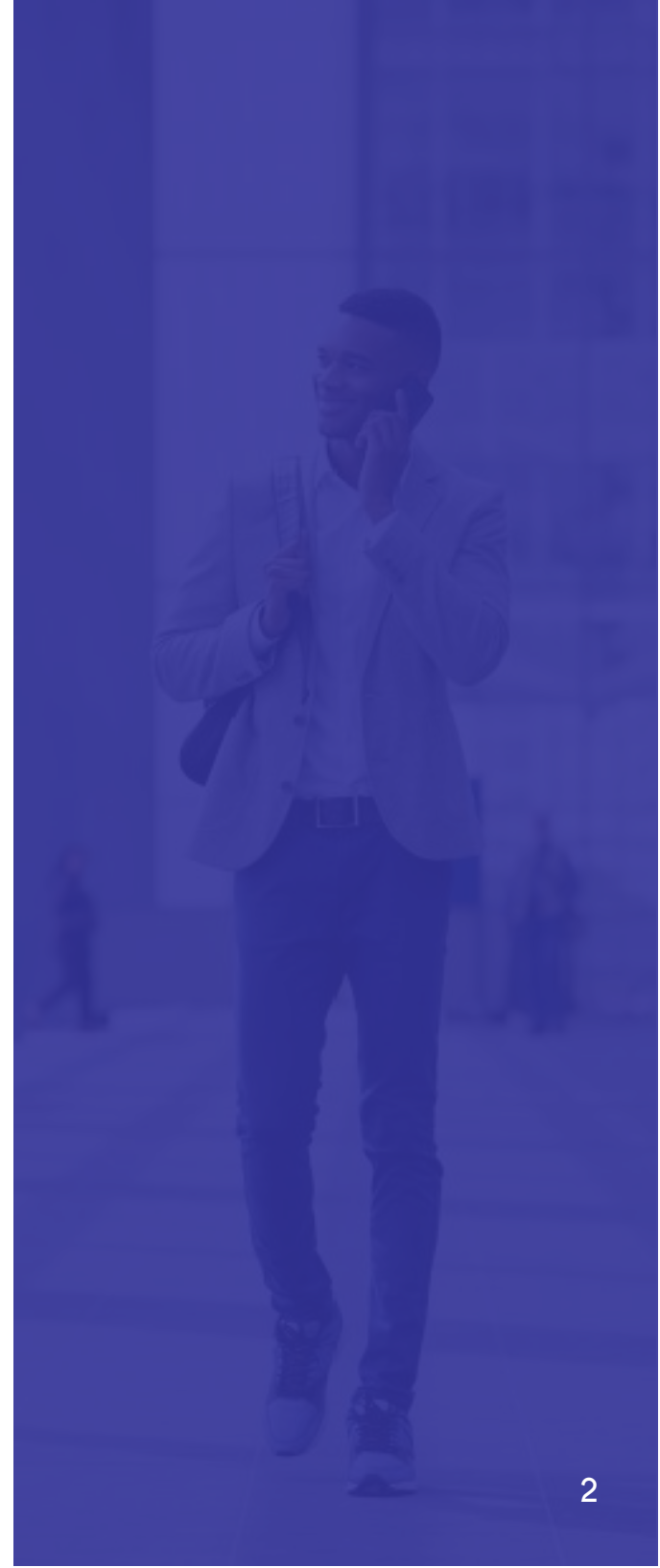
In-house: most SMBs would not be able to afford to hire a fulltime IT person. Not only is the cost prohibitive, but there are several other disadvantages not often considered upfront, such as

- (i) 365 days: Who provides support during holidays and time off?
- (ii) Experience: will a single individual have enough experience and skills?
- (iii) Knowledge transfer: where is the IP of the company stored?

Outsource: sometimes management want to completely outsource the IT operations to another company. This, in theory, may sound like a good idea. But in practice, it is difficult for a SMB to achieve on a limited budget given the scope of services they would require from Level 1 to Level 4, in addition to the knowledge that would be required to support their core business applications. Large organisations, such as banks, employ outsourcing arrangements to support thousands of users and it works due to economies of scale.

Co-source: finding an external provider that can provide support for the high value tasks, while a site contact provides level 1 tasks, will reduce costs significantly and allow the provider to deliver excellent value with strategy and Level 3 and 4 support. The site contact will perform tasks such as coordinating tickets, dealing with simple application issues, and ordering new computers. The provider will give ongoing knowledge transfer and training to the site contact, enabling them to provide efficient coordination of IT issues onsite while making their life easier.

Following is a list of essential components of a support arrangement that an IT provider should include in their scope of services.



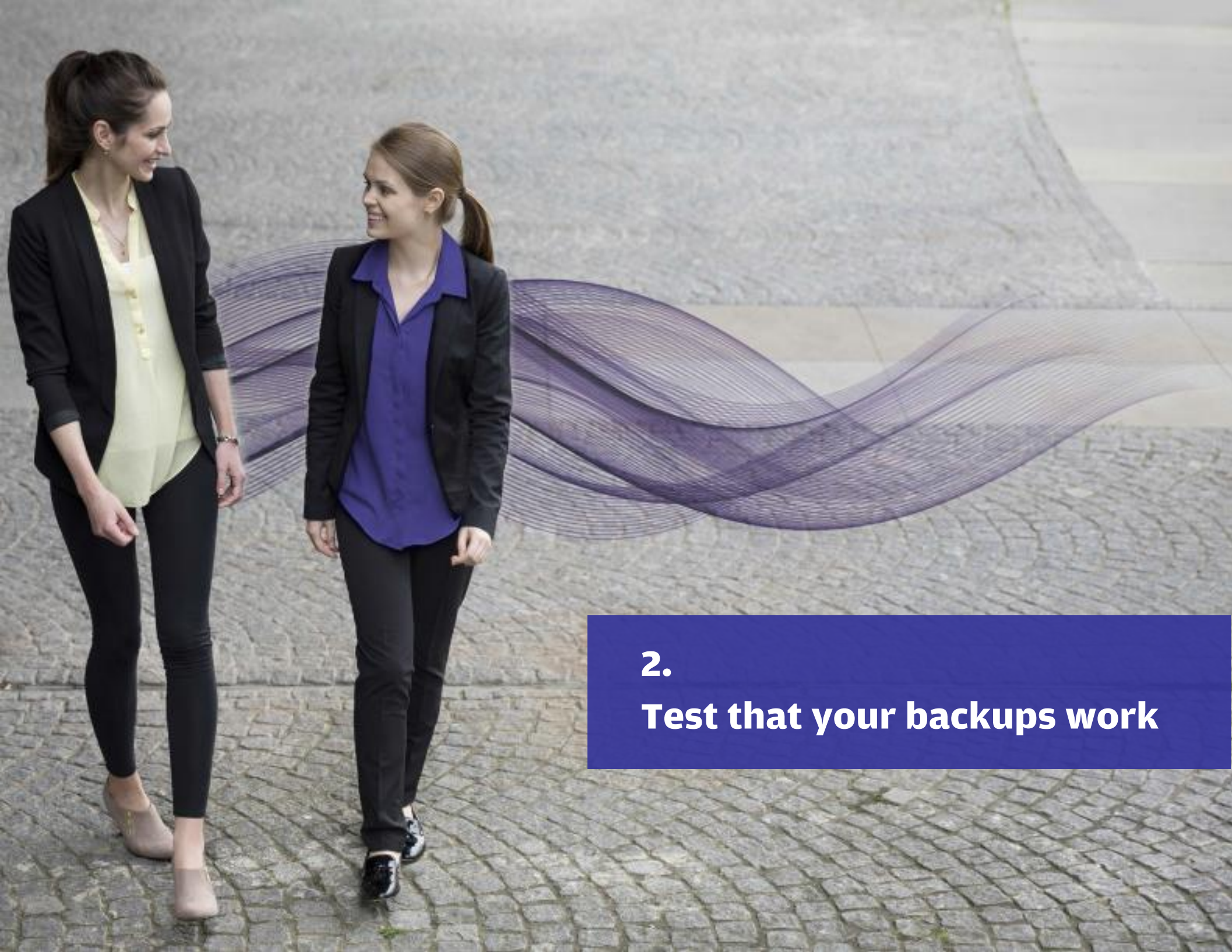
A man in a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue tie is walking from left to right. He is smiling and talking on a mobile phone held to his ear. His left hand is in his pocket. The background is a modern glass building with a curved facade. The ground is a light-colored paved area. A dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

1. Regular maintenance

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- a. IT is no different to other equipment or systems. Just like cars and air conditioners, IT systems work best with a proactive maintenance schedule in place. Over time, your outages will be lower, costs will decrease, users will be happier and you will get better service from your provider.
- b. The old-school strategy of a break/fix reactive model is sub-standard. Every few months there will be a major outage followed by a flurry of activity while the IT guy rides in a fixes everything. You wouldn't accept this with your car, so don't accept it with your IT systems.
- c. Proactive maintenance means that your ongoing subscriptions are checked and kept up to date. You will know that renewals are due in advance so you can budget and/or look for other options.
- d. Your technician will have regular contact with you and your IT systems so will be better placed to provide support when required because he knows your environment.
- e. Less outages means happier and more productive users. Users want their systems to be stable and reliable. Being on the front foot with maintenance for your IT systems will guarantee a better outcome for everyone.
- f. In the long run your overall support costs will be lower. Doing a small amount of maintenance per month means that your support budget is spread evenly throughout the year. You won't have large unexpected spikes in support spending brought about by unplanned outages.





2.

Test that your backups work

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- a. Every 6 months your provider should perform a simulated recovery of your offsite backups.
- b. This is the only way you will know that your backups can be recovered, with integrity, and within a reasonable time period.
- c. Otherwise, when you desperately need to recover your servers, you won't be wondering if it is going to work.
- d. Check if the provider can host your backups.
- e. Check if the provider can provide an option to host your servers in the event of a disaster and you have lost all IT systems.



A man in a purple blazer and dark trousers is walking from left to right, talking on a mobile phone. He is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame. Behind him, a wall features large, flowing, purple wavy patterns that extend across the middle of the image. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

3.

Keep an As Built document

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- a. As Built document: the document that describes the installed and running IT systems
- b. Critical information about your IT systems needs to be stored in a single document that belongs to you.
- c. It is an evolving document so it needs to be updated at least every 3 months.
- d. It should contain information such as contact details, server roles, applications, network diagrams, networking equipment and site photos.



4.

**Implement an acceptable
use policy**



4. Implement an acceptable use policy

- a. Your organisation should have a document to end users so that it is clear what is acceptable use and what is unacceptable use of the organisation's IT systems.
- b. What one person considers acceptable use may differ from another person
- c. A single document that defines and publishes acceptable use is of great benefit for users as well as protecting the organisation from claims that they may not have taken action to protect their users.



5.

**Engage a provider that
supports your needs**



5. Engage a provider that supports your needs

- a. Enter into a support arrangement with a local provider that can support your organisation.
- b. Consider the size of each other's businesses. They should be roughly similar.
- c. Remote support by itself is rarely good enough. At some stage you will need onsite support.
- d. Ask for response times and service levels
- e. Check reference sites. Current customers will tell you the good or bad news in advance.
- f. Ensure you will see the same technician most of the time. There is nothing worse than seeing a different face every visit and having to go through the re-education process.
- g. Don't sign a contract unless you specifically want one.

