THE 2026 MSP INTERVIEW KIT

20 questions to ask before you sign with an IT provider.

01
Ask
Read each question to the provider word for word.

02
Listen
Compare their answer with the strong and walk-away signals.

03
Rate
Tick strong, partial or weak, then total your score on the last page.

PROVIDER _____ DATE _____

WHO WE SPOKE WITH _____ INTERVIEWED BY _____

866.24.CALIT info@calitgroup.com calitgroup.com/resources/questions-to-ask-an-msp

01 Contract & commitment

Set the terms of the relationship before anything else.

1 “How long is the agreement, and what exactly does it cover?”

The agreement sets the foundation for everything else — scope, commitments and how the relationship works.

STRONG ANSWER

An annual agreement with a clear scope, published pricing and service commitments in writing — plus a written way out: a satisfaction exit early in the term, and the right to leave if commitments are missed and not fixed.

WALK AWAY IF

Multi-year lock-ins, vague scope, or an agreement that doesn’t spell out response commitments and what happens if you leave.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

2 “Who owns our data, documentation and admin credentials?”

If you leave, you need everything — passwords, network diagrams and licensing — handed over.

STRONG ANSWER

You own it all, it’s documented in an IT runbook you can access, and handover is part of the process.

WALK AWAY IF

Vague answers, “proprietary” documentation or fees to release your own information.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

3 “How do you take over from our current provider?”

A messy transition is where outages and security gaps happen.

STRONG ANSWER

A defined onboarding plan: they coordinate directly with your current provider, document everything and deploy their tools alongside before cut-over.

WALK AWAY IF

“We’ll figure it out” — or expecting you to play go-between.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

02 Response & support

How fast real help arrives — during the day, after hours and on-site.

4 “How fast is the phone answered — and by whom?”

Speed means little if the first person can only open a ticket.

STRONG ANSWER
An engineer answers in under a minute during business hours, with measured, published numbers.

WALK AWAY IF
Phone trees, voicemail, call-backs or an offshore dispatcher.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

5 “What’s your response time on emailed or portal tickets?”

Most requests arrive electronically; they deserve a committed response, not just urgent calls.

STRONG ANSWER
A real engineer responds within minutes during business hours, for every issue.

WALK AWAY IF
“Within one business day,” or fast response only on premium tiers.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

6 “What happens after hours and on weekends?”

Outages and attacks don’t keep office hours.

STRONG ANSWER
The same local engineers on call 24×7 for emergencies, plus 24×7 network and security monitoring.

WALK AWAY IF
After-hours support billed hourly, or “monitoring” that only sends an email.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

7 “Are on-site visits included, and how quickly can someone get here?”

Some problems need hands on hardware.

STRONG ANSWER
On-site support for regular issues is included, from a local office nearby.

WALK AWAY IF
Trip charges, hourly on-site rates or a subcontractor you’ve never met.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

03 Security & compliance

Your MSP holds the keys to everything. Make sure they guard them.

8 “Which security tools are included in the base price?”

“Security add-ons” are how low headline prices turn into high invoices.

STRONG ANSWER
A named stack — endpoint detection and response, 24×7 SOC, SIEM, vulnerability management, email security, MFA, DNS filtering and security awareness training — all included.

WALK AWAY IF
Antivirus only, or every security layer priced separately.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

9 “Has your own security been independently audited?”

An MSP holds the keys to your whole environment.

STRONG ANSWER
Yes — a SOC 2 Type II report from an independent CPA firm, available to review.

WALK AWAY IF
“We follow best practices” or “SOC 2 compliant processes” with no report.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

10 “What exactly happens during a security incident?”

The first hour of an incident decides how bad it gets.

STRONG ANSWER
A documented incident response plan, 24×7 containment by a SOC and clear communication to your leadership.

WALK AWAY IF
No written plan, or incident response billed as an emergency project.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

11 “Can you support our compliance and cyber insurance requirements?”

Auditors, customers and insurers increasingly ask detailed security questions.

STRONG ANSWER
vCISO guidance, help with questionnaires and audits, and experience with frameworks such as CMMC, SOC 2, HIPAA and ISO.

WALK AWAY IF
“That’s your responsibility,” or compliance help only as a separate consulting engagement.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

04 Pricing & hidden costs

Find out how the provider really makes money.

12 “How is pricing calculated — and is it published?”

You should be able to predict next year’s bill today.

STRONG ANSWER
A simple per-user price, ideally published, that includes each user’s computer and mailbox.

WALK AWAY IF
Per-device, per-mailbox and per-site fees stacked on top of a per-user price.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

13 “What costs extra beyond the monthly fee?”

The answer tells you how the provider really makes money.

STRONG ANSWER
A short, written list — typically licensing, hardware and clearly defined optional services.

WALK AWAY IF
Onboarding fees, “out of scope” hourly work, or new workstation setups and moves billed as projects.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

14 “How are projects quoted?”

Hourly projects put all the risk of overruns on you.

STRONG ANSWER
A fixed-fee quote, agreed in writing before work starts.

WALK AWAY IF
Open-ended time-and-materials estimates.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

05 People & process

Who does the work, and how quality is measured.

15 “Who will actually support us day to day?”

The sales team rarely does the work.

STRONG ANSWER
A local team of engineers who learn your environment, with leadership directly involved and reachable.

WALK AWAY IF
A rotating call center, offshore tier-one or heavy subcontracting.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

16 “How do you measure and report on service quality?”

What isn’t measured isn’t managed.

STRONG ANSWER
Live response metrics, satisfaction surveys on every closed ticket, and regular strategy meetings (vCIO) to review them.

WALK AWAY IF
No reporting, or a quarterly PDF that no one reviews with you.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

17 “How many engineers support how many users — and what happens when you’re busy?”

A help desk staffed to exactly its average workload falls behind every busy Monday, every outage and every vacation.

STRONG ANSWER
Deliberately staffed above the workload, with a written internal assignment target, published response numbers and a clear escalation path when things get busy.

WALK AWAY IF
Vague answers about headcount, “it depends on the day,” or callback queues and voicemail during peak times.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

06 Proof & track record

Evidence beats promises.

18 “Can we read reviews and case studies from businesses like ours?”

Independent reviews are harder to fake than testimonials on a website.

STRONG ANSWER
Plenty of recent Google and Clutch reviews, plus case studies in your industry.

WALK AWAY IF
Only hand-picked quotes, or reluctance to share examples.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

19 “What happens if our main contact leaves your company?”

Your IT shouldn’t depend on one person’s memory.

STRONG ANSWER
Everything is documented, the whole team knows your environment, and processes are audited.

WALK AWAY IF
Knowledge that lives only in one engineer’s head.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

20 “Have you grown by acquisition, been acquired, or are you planning to be?”

Acquisitions bring new account teams, new tools, price and contract changes, and less access to the people you chose.

STRONG ANSWER
Independent and grown organically, with the same founders and leadership running the company today.

WALK AWAY IF
A recent or pending acquisition, private-equity roll-up plans, or vague answers about who owns the company.

Their answer: ☐ Strong (2) ☐ Partial (1) ☐ Weak (0)

NOTES

SCORECARD

Total the score.

Strong answers score 2, partial 1 and weak 0. Add each chapter, then compare providers side by side — and look hard at any weak answers, whatever the total.

CHAPTER	QUESTIONS	SCORE
01 · Contract & commitment	3	/ 6
02 · Response & support	4	/ 8
03 · Security & compliance	4	/ 8
04 · Pricing & hidden costs	3	/ 6
05 · People & process	3	/ 6
06 · Proof & track record	3	/ 6
Total	**20**	**/ 40**

34–40
Excellent fit

24–33
Good — clarify the weak spots

16–23
Real concerns

Under 16
Keep looking

OUR ANSWERS, IN WRITING

How CAL IT Group answers the kit

Contract
A straightforward annual agreement with a clear scope, published pricing, no onboarding fee and service promises in writing — plus a 90-day satisfaction exit and the right to leave if we miss our promises.

Response
An engineer on our local Huntington Beach team answers calls in under 60 seconds, and every email or portal ticket gets a real engineer within 20 minutes (Mon–Fri, 5 AM–6 PM).

Coverage
Service desk staffed Monday–Friday 5 AM–6 PM — not 8 to 5 — the same local team on call 24×7 for emergencies, with 24×7 NOC & SOC monitoring and on-site support included within 50 miles of our Huntington Beach office.

Security
SentinelOne MxDR, 24×7 SOC, managed SIEM, Qualys vulnerability management, email security, MFA, DNS filtering, DefensX browser security and security awareness training — all included.

Audited
SOC 2 Type II across all five Trust Services Criteria, attested by an independent CPA firm.

Pricing
Published online: one per-user price that includes each user's computer and mailbox. We never bill extra time to support your existing environment, and projects are fixed-fee.

People
Every engineer is technically assessed by our co-founders, Kevin Nichols and Joe Kemp, and background-checked. Our culture.

Proof
Rated 5.0 on Google and Clutch, with case studies across industries.

Ask us these questions on a call · see our pricing at calitgroup.com/pricing

866.24.CALIT