

Small Business IT Outsourcing White Paper: Why Outsource?

*How Small Businesses Can Benefit
From Outsourcing IT Services*



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Executive Summary

IT outsourcing makes sense for businesses of any size. Outsourcing saves money, provides fast access to technical experts, controls headcount, and enhances the business value of a network. However, efficient and affordable IT outsourcing for small businesses requires a service delivery model dramatically different from that of traditional enterprise service firms. Ignored by outsourcing providers who focus on super-sized clients, small businesses often resort to freelance consultants and learn to tolerate inconsistent availability and spotty technical expertise. Other small businesses discover to their dismay that the mass-market IT outsourcing arms of computer manufacturers are geared for by-the-numbers solutions to ordinary problems but have difficulty with the multi-vendor, loosely standardized environments typical of small businesses.

Progent has spent decades refining the art of IT outsourcing for small businesses. Progent's Help Desk model of service delivery provides an ultra-efficient structure for network support services that range from high-level consulting to emergency desktop troubleshooting. Progent's Help Desk model ensures fast response and consistent follow-through, facilitates problem escalation, simplifies status tracking, and produces thorough service documentation. Progent has assembled a large team of engineers certified by Microsoft, Cisco, Apple, and major security associations, allowing Progent to act as a one-stop solution for all key areas of IT support. Progent leverages extensive remote support experience and advanced virtualization technologies to drive down costs and expedite solutions, allowing Progent to offer world-class services that fit small-business budgets.

Outsourcing: A Plan for All Seasons

In the year 2000, the information technology industry reached a significant milestone. For the first time, more than half (54%) of IT services purchased in North America were outsourced. Since then, IT outsourcing has steadily gained momentum through hot and cold economic conditions. As Gartner Group pointed out during the recession of 2001:

During the economic boom, demand for business transformation and scarce IT skills drove outsourcing. The present economic decline has brought cost reduction back to the top of enterprise agendas, and outsourcing can provide this benefit.

Different aspects of IT outsourcing can become more appealing depending on economic conditions, but the basic reasons for businesses to outsource information technology services remain the same. It's always a good time to utilize IT outsourcing, in order to:

- Save money and reduce management hassle
- Ensure timely access to a broad range of IT expertise
- Stabilize the head count of internal IT staff
- Maximize the business value of the network

IT outsourcing is today recognized by virtually all major corporations as the best way to control costs and minimize technical risks for a wide range of IT services such as designing network infrastructure, delivering desktop support, bulking up network security, or building a web-based e-commerce application. Whether businesses are trying to survive hard times or thrive during a recovery, outsourcing allows IT managers to react more quickly to changing circumstances than is possible by building up a large, all-purpose in-house IT staff.

How About Small Businesses?

Small businesses have traditionally been underserved by IT outsourcing providers. Small-businesses don't have the budgets to support the classic IT outsourcing model and feel uncomfortable negotiating complex, long-term contracts for services that may not work out.

For network help, small companies often resort to freelance consultants or small service firms and put up with the attendant availability problems and technical blind spots. Computer manufacturers have begun to address the small business IT outsourcing market, but their by-the-numbers approach to IT support requires a high degree of software and equipment standardization that is rarely found in small businesses networks.

Progent's approach to IT outsourcing has evolved over more than 25 years of experience providing network support and computer consulting services to small businesses. This background has kept Progent attuned to the special needs of small companies and familiar with ways that information technology can be deployed and managed to help clients gain competitive advantage. Progent's success stems from the belief that small businesses can and must have access to enterprise-class IT support, but that the classic service delivery model of IT outsourcing embraced by large companies does not work when applied to smaller ones. Progent has developed a service delivery model adapted to the realities of small businesses and has proven the viability of this model by becoming one of the fastest growing independent IT support organizations in the U.S.

Progent's Outsourcing Model: The Help Desk

IT outsourcing is a special type of business partnership whose benefits increase for both the client and the service provider the longer the relationship lasts. But like most long-term relationships, successful IT outsourcing requires the motives and goals of both parties to stay in close alignment. Progent has developed a model for outsourcing that makes it easy for a client to engage Progent's services, expand or cut back when appropriate, and terminate if necessary. This model provides the basis for a long-term IT outsourcing partnership by giving small businesses the flexibility they need to adapt quickly to changing conditions.

Progent's IT support services are built around a proven Help Desk model refined during the course of more than two decades of providing network consulting and troubleshooting support to small businesses. The Help Desk paradigm provides Progent with an efficient structure for delivering a wide variety of remote and onsite IT services that can range from high-level consulting such as fault-tolerant network design to emergency services such as desktop troubleshooting or disaster recovery.

Key features of Progent's Help Desk service delivery model include:

- Quick access to emergency assistance with optional 24x7x365 availability
- Fast and convenient task initiation via phone, email, or web
- Large, experienced support team with advanced Microsoft, Cisco, and Apple certifications
- Rapid escalation to world-class specialists such as CISSP-certified security engineers
- Prompt and consistent follow-through with automated enforcement
- Immediate status updates for clients via email and a real-time web portal
- Comprehensive service documentation to make sure management stays informed
- Per-minute billing with no retainers, minimums, or off-hour premiums

Progent's Help Desk service delivery model gives small businesses an effective alternative to freelance consultants or small IT service firms by offering dependable, consistently high-quality, and in-depth support with optional round-the-clock availability. Progent's large team of engineers give clients the backup needed to ensure that task-relevant help is available when needed, and Progent's comprehensive service documentation makes it easy for clients to move to other support providers or to backsource service responsibility in-house. This avoids the common scenario of becoming captive to a single service provider.

Progent's breadth of expertise allows clients to avoid the handoff or finger-pointing problems typical of mass-market computer support giants when problems involve multiple vendors. Most small business networks lack the rigid standardization of hardware and software that is required by major computer manufacturers for by-the-numbers service to be effective.

The Help Desk model applies to Progent's Technical Response Center, which is Progent's online Help Desk call center for emergency support, as well as to Progent's consulting engineers, who can provide high-level, project-oriented services such as VoIP system design, security evaluation, application development, or end-user training. In all cases, Progent's support is easy to initiate, track, and terminate, follow-through is consistent, services are thoroughly documented, and costs are controlled.

Practice Areas for Progent's IT Outsourcing Services

Progent maintains a large staff of engineers certified by Microsoft, Cisco, Apple, and other major technology vendors. This depth and breadth of expertise allows Progent to provide small businesses with world-class consulting and support in all key areas of IT outsourcing. Practice areas for which Progent offers professional services include:

- Desktop Support
- Network Security
- Help Desk Services
- Network Operation and Repair
- Disaster Recovery
- Data Center Operation
- Virtualization Solutions
- Server Management
- Hosting Services
- Fault Tolerant System Design
- Application Development and Maintenance
- End-user Training for Desktop Applications

Best-of-Breed Microsoft, Cisco, and Security Expertise

Progent is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner with special competencies that include Advanced Infrastructure Solutions, Networking Infrastructure Solutions, Information Worker Solutions, Mobility Solutions, and Security Solutions. Microsoft Gold Certified Partners are the elite of Microsoft Business Partners and have access to more Microsoft training and support resources than non-certified companies. A Gold Partner's engineering staff is tested and certified by Microsoft to have the technical depth and professional background needed to provide solutions that involve Microsoft's most advanced products.

Progent is among the few IT support firms to offer fast online access to Cisco-certified CCIE network engineers. Fewer than 3% of all Cisco certified professionals reach the CCIE level, which Certification Magazine called the world's most technically advanced IT credential. CCIEs can handle the toughest network problems and are an excellent value because they can find quick solutions to issues that less qualified consultants might wrestle with for hours or even days. Progent retains more than a dozen CCIEs on its phone-support and on-site IT consulting groups, an exceptionally high number for an independent IT support company.

Progent's security engineers have earned the most prestigious certifications offered in the IT security industry. These credentials require rigorous testing and proven field background to guarantee that candidates have mastered a significant body of security knowledge and methodologies and can offer high-level solutions to networks of any complexity. Certifications that have been awarded to Progent's security engineers include CISM, CISSP, ISSAP, CISA, and GIAC. This expertise allows Progent to offer small businesses enterprise-class security services ranging from network security assessment to forensics and recovery.

To be effective, the IT support services offered by major computer manufacturers require their customers to have highly standardized hardware and software products and configurations. Most small business networks have evolved opportunistically and reactively over time and therefore lack the homogeneity needed for this support model to work. Progent's breadth of expertise allows clients to avoid the handoff or finger-pointing problems typical of mass-market computer support giants when problems involve, or are suspected of involving, multiple hardware and software products.

Remote Possibilities

Most IT outsourcing tasks can be performed remotely. For jobs that require an on-premise technician or engineer, Progent offers onsite service in most zip codes in the United States, but in the majority of cases Progent encourages clients to take advantage of remote service delivery to slash costs and minimize downtime.

Progent has delivered remote support to small businesses in every state in the U.S. Long experience providing online solutions and substantial investments in technology and staff training make it possible for Progent to offer the most comprehensive and cost-effective remote IT outsourcing services available to small businesses.

Progent's founder and president Les Kent comments: "We invest heavily in our intellectual assets and information infrastructure. We recruit highly skilled and motivated people, provide them with what's probably the world's most sophisticated virtual office infrastructure, organize advanced and often custom-tailored training from the major vendors, and offer lots of mechanisms that allow our entire staff to share information and experiences."

The benefits of remote vs. onsite service are substantial due to the elimination of travel costs, faster resolution of problems and a corresponding reduction in lost productivity, quicker problem escalation to appropriate remote support experts, and easier coordination of the schedules of both consultants and clients.

Progent offers remote delivery for a broad range of manual and automated outsourced services including:

Emergency Phone Support

Progent's Technical Response Center (TRC) provides expert phone-based assistance to small businesses during regular business hours and offers options for round-the-clock availability. Service initiation is fast for new customers and even faster for existing ones. The TRC can work directly with a client, with an on-premise consultant, or through a conference call to resolve the most common network problems experienced by small businesses. Progent's TRC charges by the minute with no startup fees, minimums, retainers, or expedite charges. Customers pay only for the service they receive, so quick fixes never translate into big invoices.

Remote Diagnostics and Repair

It is often faster for Progent's engineers to diagnose and repair a problem by temporarily taking control of a remote desktop. Progent's engineers are seasoned experts at remote troubleshooting and can quickly set up and remove a secure online connection to a client's network to keep support costs at a minimum.

Security Scanning and Analysis

Progent's security inventory scans, available as specially-priced service packages, give small businesses an affordable, objective assessment of their network security. External scans look for vulnerabilities that are exposed outside the network firewall. For internal scans, Progent's engineers can remotely operate a client's onsite computer to check for gaps in security within the firewall. Together, these remote scans give Progent's security experts the data they need to produce a comprehensive security evaluation report and an actionable remediation plan.

Consulting Services

Most of Progent's high-level consulting services can be performed remotely. Network design, defining security policies, business continuity planning, VoIP solutions, unified messaging architecture, evaluating alternatives for fault-tolerant systems, deploying clustered servers, virtualization techniques, wireless integration, and secure connectivity for telecommuters and mobile workers are all examples of vital areas where Progent can use remote delivery to provide small business with fast access to world-class expertise at affordable prices.

Server Monitoring with Microsoft System Center Operations Manager

Microsoft System Center Operations Manager features automatic server monitoring, trend reporting, and alert generation to help businesses track their IT system's health and resolve potential problems before they disrupt network operation. Progent's Microsoft certified network engineers are skilled at using Microsoft System Center Operations Manager for remotely monitoring key servers, customizing Operations Manager for optimum performance in a client's unique IT environment, and providing online consulting and troubleshooting services to keep a network available, productive, and secure.

Application Development and Maintenance

Progent has broad experience providing remote services to help small businesses customize and maintain Microsoft's popular family of financial and management information packages including Microsoft Dynamics AX, Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Microsoft Dynamics SL, Microsoft Dynamics RMS, and Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Progent's application experts can also help small businesses to revamp their web sites, establish a powerful web presence for a new venture, create internal SharePoint web portals for applications such as human resources or employee training, and build enterprise-class, data-driven e-commerce applications.

Network Management

Progent can remotely set up and manage the latest generation of network management technology in order to minimize the cost and improve the consistency of administering a small business network. Critical areas that once absorbed a substantial percentage of IT budgets but that can now be efficiently automated and affordably outsourced include change and configuration management, security policy enforcement, performance monitoring, data backup, plus clustering and virtual server management.

Disaster Recovery

Progent is experienced in remote restoration of small business networks that have been hacked or suffered catastrophic failure. Progent can perform damage assessment, restore business operations, and retrieve lost information. Progent's security engineers can also perform comprehensive forensic evaluations by examining event logs and using advanced evaluation techniques. Progent's background providing security solutions can help reduce downtime and allow Progent to suggest effective measures to avoid or contain future attacks.

Virtual Classrooms

Progent offers online virtual classrooms for a range of desktop applications including Microsoft Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and Project plus Adobe Acrobat Writer, Adobe Photoshop, and Crystal Reports. Available to individuals or groups of any size, Progent's online training allows the teacher to manage the seminar remotely while students can be dispersed across a campus or throughout the world. Progent's virtual classrooms support electronic white boards and hand-raising as well as application sharing for in-depth training. Virtual classrooms eliminate the expenses of travel and the hassle of accommodating the schedules of multiple workers.

The Power of Virtualization

Progent offers world-class expertise with server virtualization, one of the best opportunities small businesses have for driving down IT expenses. Virtualization allows multiple “virtual” servers to run on a single physical computer. Small businesses often deploy dedicated servers for low-overhead applications such as domain controllers, DNS servers, or web hosting. For these applications, CPU and memory utilization is typically low. These are excellent candidates for converting to multiple virtual servers under a single physical machine.

Virtual servers have the obvious advantage of saving hardware and service costs because a single physical machine can take the place of multiple systems without the expense associated with purchasing and provisioning additional server equipment. But hardware consolidation is only one of the benefits of deploying virtual servers. Using virtual server technology, businesses can enhance the manageability and fault-tolerance of line-of-business servers, vastly reduce recovery time in case of a catastrophic failure, and improve overall network stability by isolating servers used for testing, development, or legacy applications.

The rapid pace of server hardware evolution makes it almost impossible for small businesses to standardize on a specific computer brand and model. Equipment may be purchased from a single manufacturer over a 2-3 year timeframe, but individual models quickly become obsolete and unavailable for purchase. The result is often a hodgepodge of equipment that precludes the use of efficient server replication techniques such as template operating system installations. Consequently, most servers must be configured manually from scratch, which is time-consuming and expensive. Advanced configurations such as clustering or redundant servers are also more difficult to manage when servers lack interchangeable components.

One of the great advantages of virtualization is that virtual host software such as Microsoft Hyper-V and VMware can create standardized environments from a patchwork of computer models and configurations. This dramatically simplifies server provisioning, deployment, and management. New servers can often be deployed in minutes instead of hours. The flexibility of easily moving virtual servers between physical servers supports scalability and expansion of server infrastructure to match application demands. As the need for application computing power increases, additional virtual host servers can be deployed rapidly, and existing virtual servers can be load balanced across the array of physical servers.

Virtual server technology also allows complete remote management and control of all servers. Remote console screen access via a web browser allows any operation that could be performed on a local physical console to be performed remotely. With CD-ROM emulation, even operating systems can be quickly installed or upgraded, and wayward virtual servers can easily be reset or power cycled with just a few clicks.

How Progent Can Help Small Businesses Benefit from Virtualization

Progent offers expertise with popular virtual server platforms such as Windows Server 2008 Hyper-V, Microsoft Virtual Server 2005, and VMware. Progent can show small businesses how to design their networks to take full advantage of virtual server technology, help install and configure virtual servers to maximize performance, dependability, and manageability, propose and test business recovery plans that use virtualization to minimize downtime in case of a catastrophic failure, and provide support, troubleshooting, and consulting for virtual environments. Small businesses can also outsource the operation of a virtualized data center to Progent and save money through simplified management and remote administration.

Virtual Server Hosting and Management Services

Progent's Virtual Data Center Hosting service combines proven virtualization technology, a state-of-the-art data center, and the support expertise of Progent's Microsoft Gold Certified engineering team to provide small businesses with a comprehensive IT outsourcing alternative that enhances network dependability and security, eliminates management hassle, and saves money. With Virtual Server Hosting, a small business can have all of its software platforms and critical applications hosted in a secure and fault tolerant data center on a fast, non-stop virtual host configured and maintained by Progent's network support experts.

By using virtualization technology, Progent can optimize the fault tolerance, security, performance, scalability, recoverability, and portability of the client's environment while keeping hosting expenses at a minimum. Progent's customers retain ownership of the operating system platforms and all application licenses while Progent owns the physical host servers and is responsible for their maintenance. This means that Progent's clients do not have to invest heavily in capital equipment that becomes quickly outdated. Virtualization also means that customers can easily and inexpensively move their entire IT environment to another host if and when they believe such a move makes business sense.

Progent's Virtual Data Center Hosting service allows small businesses to get the benefits of enterprise-class IT infrastructure and world-class support services at a cost that is typically lower than what small businesses would pay for creating and managing in-house data centers and managing internal IT support groups.

Unlike Progent's approach, ASP (Application Service Provider) or SaaS (Software as a Service) hosting models call for customers to own their corporate data but not the operating system platforms or the application licenses for the software that is being maintained by the hosting service. This makes it expensive and time consuming to move from an ASP or SaaS hosting service to another hosting provider or to backsource the entire system in house. Small businesses with limited IT budgets can effectively become captive to their hosting service.

Under Progent's Virtual Data Center Hosting model, the customer owns the data, the OS platforms, and the software applications. Because the environment is virtualized, it can be moved immediately to a different hardware environment without lengthy and risky reinstallation and configuration. With Virtual Data Center Hosting, you are not held captive to a single hosting service.

Another benefit that stems from the virtualized architecture behind Progent's Virtual Data Center Hosting service is that data can be recovered quickly in case of a catastrophic event such as a natural disaster. Since the virtual environment is regularly backed up and archived off site, it can be hosted by any physical server acting as the underlying host to the virtual environment.

Progent will also host environments with a mix of operating system platforms and applications and little standardization. This type of environment is common for small businesses but is not addressed by application hosting services and is difficult to support for any hosting service that does not utilize a virtualized architecture or that does not retain a support staff with the depth and breadth of Progent's seasoned engineers.

Access to Expertise

Access to Expertise

Progent offers small businesses the services of consultants who have earned some of the IT industry's most prestigious certifications, and Progent requires and sponsors all in-house engineers to keep existing certifications current while earning additional ones related to their special expertise. Progent recognizes that credentials by themselves do not guarantee a top-quality consultant, but Progent believes that customers deserve to know that their IT service providers have formal training and testing as well as extensive practical experience in the field so that clients can engage Progent's service with confidence.

Some of the IT industry certifications earned by Progent's consultants include:

Microsoft Certifications

- Microsoft Certified Application Developer (MCAD)
- Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technician (MCDST)
- Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP)
- Microsoft Certified IT Professional: Database Administrator (MCITP:DBA)
- Microsoft Certified IT Professional: Enterprise Administrator (MCITP:EA)
- Microsoft Certified Solution Developer (MCSO)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE 2003)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE 2003+Security)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE 2003+Messaging)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE 2000)
- Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE NT)
- Microsoft Certified Technology Specialist (MCTS)

Cisco Certifications

- Cisco Certified Design Associate (CCDA)
- Cisco Certified Design Professional (CCDP)
- Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert (CCIE Routing & Switching)
- Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert (CCIE Security)
- Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert (CCIE Voice)
- Cisco Certified Internetwork Professional (CCIP)
- Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)
- Cisco Certified Network Professional (CCNP)
- Cisco Certified Security Professional (CCSP)
- Cisco Certified Systems Instructor (CCSI)
- Cisco Certified Voice Professional (CCVP)

Apple Certifications

- Apple Certified Desktop Technician (ACDT)
- Apple Certified OS Technician (ACOST)
- Apple Certified Portable Technician (ACPT)
- Apple Certified System Administrator (ACSA)
- Apple Certified Support Professional (ACSP)
- Apple Certified Technical Coordinator (ACTC)

Security Industry Certifications

- International Council of E-Commerce Consultants Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH)
- Certified Information Security Manager (CISM)
- Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA)
- Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)
- GIAC Certified Incident Handler (GCIH)
- GIAC Certified Intrusion Analyst (GCIH)
- GIAC Reverse Engineering Malware (GREM)
- GIAC Systems and Network Auditor (GSNA)
- GIAC Web Application Security (GWAS)
- Information Systems Security Architecture Professional (ISSAP)
- Information Systems Security Engineering Professional (ISSEP)
- Systems Security Certified Practitioner (SSCP)

Sun Microsystems Certifications

- Sun Certified Network Administrator in Solaris (SCNA)
- Sun Certified System Administrator for Solaris (SCSA)
- Sun SNIA Certified Systems Engineer (SCSE)

Juniper Networks Certifications

- Juniper Networks Certified Internet Associate (JNCIA)
- Juniper Networks Certified Internet Professional (JNCIP)
- Juniper Networks Certified Internet Specialist (JNCIS)

Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) Certifications

CompTIA A+
CompTIA CTT+
CompTIA Network+
CompTIA Security+
CompTIA Server+

Other IT Industry Certifications

- Checkpoint Certified Systems Associate (CCSA)
- Checkpoint Certified Systems Engineer (CCSE)
- Citrix Certified Administrator (CCA)
- Citrix Certified Enterprise Administrator (CCEA)
- Certified Novell Administrator (CNA)
- Certified Novell Engineer (CNE)
- Certified SonicWALL Security Administrator (CSSA)
- IT Infrastructure Library Foundation Certification (ITIL)
- Master Certified Novell Engineer (Master CNE)
- Nortel Networks Certified Support Expert (NNCSE)
- Nortel Networks Certified Support Specialist (NNCSS)
- Red Hat Certified Engineer (RHCE)
- Red Hat Certified Technician (RHCT)

Conclusion

Outsourcing makes sense for everybody, but small companies need an outsourcing model that is flexible, affordable, and aligned with their business goals. Progent's consultants are world-class experts at providing IT services to small businesses and can offer outsourcing solutions that address the special needs of small organizations. Whether customers outsource a few support services or the management of an entire data center, Progent's comprehensive service documentation and knowledge transfer ensures that clients can easily backsource services in house or move to another outside service provider as circumstances change. Progent's experience and advanced technology keep costs low and support quality high, offering clients enterprise-class support on a small business budget.

If you are interested in using Progent's outsourcing, consulting, or technical support services, call 800-993-9400 or send e-mail to information@progent.com