

Independent Multi-Platform Provider vs Original Equipment Manufacturer (Vendor)

Interactive's Engineering Director Clint Seagrave looks at the advantages of using a single, multi-platform maintenance service provider for your mixed-vendor computer hardware

The days of all your business applications being based on a single mid-range or mainframe system are past. Today, few organisations are 'single-vendor shops', having acquired systems to meet specific purposes from several sources, as well as running key applications and file-serving on Intel-based servers.

Given that you now operate a range of platforms, probably from a range of different vendors – what are your best options for maintaining them? This article looks at the benefits of using an independent multi-platform hardware maintenance service provider versus an Original Equipment Manufacturer for your mixed environment.

Single Point of Contact

When something goes wrong, you need help fast. If you have all your critical systems covered by a single independent hardware maintenance contract there is just one supplier to contact.

An independent hardware maintenance service provider which is focussed on rapid response will provide you with a direct pager number for your dedicated service engineer, so you won't have to waste time talking to an overseas contact centre. Your engineer will call you back in just ten minutes, and can be on your premises, often with the appropriate spare part, within two hours.

Skills and Experience

An engineer dedicated to your account becomes familiar with your IT environment, your locations, your staff and your business imperatives. In other words, they become an extension of your team, working beside you to maximise system uptime and enhance the reliability and performance of your business systems.

With Intel servers responsible for hosting the majority of business-critical systems today, their smooth operation is imperative. An engineer skilled in

diagnosing and resolving issues across multiple vendor platforms has a far superior knowledge to a vendor's engineer who only has experience of the one platform.

And, as independent hardware maintenance providers are able to offer more varied and interesting work and better opportunities for career advancement, your supplier will have attracted the highest calibre of vendor-trained engineers with a can-do attitude and strong focus on customer service delivery.

Streamlined Supplier Management

By combining all your equipment under a single independent hardware maintenance provider you reduce the administrative overheads of managing multiple suppliers and contractual arrangements.

If a fault could be attributable to one of several pieces of equipment – for example your servers, routers or data storage – then having a single maintenance provider can reduce resolution times and avoid finger-pointing between multiple suppliers.

Beware – many vendors offer a 'total maintenance solution' which includes support for platforms other than their own. But they subcontract the other equipment to third parties, which can result in confusion over the 'ownership' of problems and introduces risk.

Economies of Scale

Another benefit of having just one independent hardware maintenance service provider is the cost savings you can achieve by consolidating multiple hardware maintenance contracts across all your equipment at all your locations, regardless of vendor. Multi-platform service providers such as Interactive can provide volume discounts.

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Again, beware of equipment manufacturers offering a multi-platform maintenance arrangement based on sub-contracted services. You may be paying a single bill for all your hardware maintenance but, in reality, your critical equipment is being supported by multiple organisations, all operating their own processes and teams of maintenance engineers – and all needing to make a profit – which reduces the service value you get for your dollar.

Many vendors require annual payment in advance – look for a third-party maintenance provider that bills monthly. Apart from the cash flow benefits, such an arrangement should enable you to add and delete equipment from your maintenance contract on just 30-days' notice – which minimises the administrative overheads involved in reconciling invoices with inventory lists.

Focus

When considering whether to contract with a hardware vendor for maintenance – or going the independent hardware maintenance provider route – ask yourself about the core business and key objectives of each organisation:

- Will they focus on upgrades and selling me more hardware – or will they be dedicated to helping me get the most out of my existing technology investment?
- Are they truly focussed on minimising system downtime and maximising system availability? Do they have the methodologies and processes in place – including optimum ratios of engineers and spare parts to systems under contract – to meet the service levels we need to support our business? (A good measure of these factors is their “first-call fix rate”, as this has a direct bearing on the time taken to resolve your hardware issues.)
- Finally, will my vendor declare an arbitrary End of Service Life (EOSL) after which they will no longer offer maintenance and support, forcing me to upgrade – or can I extend the life of my equipment by using an independent hardware maintenance service provider?

While vendors tend to promote upgrades every three years, according to industry analyst Gartner, companies with hardware replacement cycles based on an asset's true useful life within an enterprise – three to five years – can achieve savings of 10-20% on their overall hardware budget. The next article in this series looks at how an independent hardware maintenance provider can help you extend the service life of equipment, giving you a better return on your hardware investment.

For information on Interactive's hardware maintenance services, visit www.interactive.com.au

