

Connected
Office

Professional Services Company
Experiences a Professional Switchover

GLAD YOU AREN'T HERE.

The Customer

Daston Corp is a professional services company founded in 1992 and headquartered in Northern Virginia. Their staff of approximately 60 employees serves to provide a wide range of information technology and business management solutions to both government and commercial clients. Daston has gained a reputation for superior customer service and high-quality solutions tailored to their clients' specific needs and are experts in the implementation of Cloud-based applications such as Netsuite ERP solutions and Google Apps. Daston specializes in helping organizations transform their business model from on-premise to on-demand solutions – in other words, to move physical software and infrastructure “into the cloud”. With a “keep-it-simple, hands-on approach,” Daston, in their own words, “partners with their clients to craft a clear migration strategy, implement, integrate and boost user adoption”.

The Situation

Given their approach to technology, it should probably come as no surprise that the corporation, as an early adopter & promoter of technology, has been using outsourced IT support for many years. At first, many years ago, they were using an external break/fix provider who would come in on-site at their headquarters approximately 3 times a week. Over time, this individual became less & less responsive and more & more costly until they let him know they planned to go “another way” and he promptly cut his exorbitant monthly fee in half! This price-realignment convinced Daston to stay with him for a little while longer until his reliability eventually gave way to the need for a proactive, predominantly remote, managed services provider (MSP).

Daston engaged this MSP for several years and were generally satisfied with their performance until the past 6 or 7 months when they began to hear things like “that service is not available” or worse still, failed to hear back from them at all on issues. It seemed their only live contact was with a single “account manager” and that “not everything was explained”. Issues that required an on-site presence were also troubling at a \$250 minimum charge per visit (to change a hard-drive, for example).

The Initial Solution

The Utility Company was presented to Daston Corp as a reliable alternative to their current provider. From an offering perspective, Utility's solution was similar from the standpoint of having a remotely monitored and managed infrastructure and access to a dedicated team of network technicians. Daston liked the primary **difference** between The Utility Company and traditional MSPs however - namely that a local franchisee is the relationship owner and responsible for their account. They liked the idea of an invested individual who truly **owns** their business and is responsible for their ongoing customer satisfaction. The idea of saving 25% on a fully managed solution (i.e. fixed-fee per user per month, no additional charges for any necessary on-site visits) wasn't unattractive either. When they let the incumbent provider know they wouldn't be renewing however, that's when their problems **really** began...

The Situation - Part 2

Changing IT providers is never a whimsical decision. Companies will often wrestle with the decision to stay with “the devil they know” versus entering into a new contract with “the devil they don’t”. And rightfully so. Changing IT providers or moving from in-house to out-sourcing is not a flippant decision to make considering that information technology traditionally makes up the second largest expenditure behind employee salaries & benefits. The fear that your current provider essentially owns “the keys to the store” is a justifiable one and was particularly made clear in this case after Daston’s previous IT provider was informed that the corporation was moving to a new solution.

When entering into a contract with an information technology provider, a Service Level Agreement (or SLA) should be a part of the signing. Like any such contract, the SLA should be carefully studied. Generally speaking, the SLA is a customer’s means of protection, underlying the exact specifications of the support their organization is due to receive over the course of the relationship, including the termination or fulfillment of that contract. It defines situations and terms such as “mean-time to respond”, “service escalation levels”, hours of operation, etc. A good SLA should also describe the physical aspects of the managed services taking place. i.e. who owns what, what applications or devices need to be installed to monitor the corporate network(s) etc.

Daston has a variable and mobile workforce that grows or shrinks according to the projects they bring on. As such, they rely heavily on the ability to access & share information across their domain. When Daston gave notice to their provider that they were moving on, the provider began decommissioning their domain controller - their main method of collaboration and communication throughout the company. Unbeknownst to Daston, and never specifically detailed in any SLA, their network had essentially been completely moved to the provider’s “forest” or shared environment. This nasty surprise left Daston & The Utility Company to essentially “start from scratch” according to Daston Corp’s Security Officer Amy Lee. “We had to rebuild accounts for everybody. Our old IT provider didn’t even give us the IP addresses of our devices. They had deleted all user records, all credentials, all passwords off the network”.

The Result | Customer’s Thoughts

“In a relatively short period of time, with a smooth transition period, The Utility Company has come in and made it pretty easy to come onboard (considering the state we were left in). We had very minimal work stoppages for provisioning since they regained control of our domain for us”, said a pleased Lee. “I know too, that if we ever cancel our contract for whatever reason, our network will remain intact. Their SLA makes it very clear that they are not holding us hostage”.

Utility’s View

“Unfortunately, especially for respected IT providers looking to do more business, it is this type of unprofessional (even childish) behaviour that hurts our industry as a whole” stated Mark Scott, President of The Utility Company. “The Utility Company has long lobbied and strived to have technology support service, in the form of Managed Services, be treated as a professional occupation. This is one of the reasons we sought out and then became one of the first organizations to complete the MSPAlliance’s Managed Services Accreditation Program and their advanced Network Operations Center certification. The MSAP is the first program of its kind, specifically designed and created to provide customers of managed services providers (MSP) with the assurance that the services provider they hire meets or exceeds the highest principles of quality in areas such as financial stability, facilities, managed services practices, and customer satisfaction. No customer deserves to be treated like Daston was. Here at The Utility Company, we treat all our customers like partners and will do whatever we can to make on-boarding, and yes even exiting, as painless as possible. We think that’s one of the reasons why our partners don’t want to exit though...”

About The Utility Company

The Utility Company® is a leading provider of virtual IT service and support for small and medium-sized businesses, delivering the required hardware, software and service for a monthly fixed fee per user.

Our Connected Office® service program provides a single point of contact to deliver and manage technology, communications and vertical line of business applications – **95% Remote; 100% Proactive.**

Customers are supported by local Utility Service Providers delivering on-site service and business-technology consulting to reduce spending and increase utilization – our Beyond Managed Services® franchise opportunity is available by prospectus only.

Learn how to make technology work for your business today at theutilitycompany.com