

Its All about the kids right?

Finding the right IT partner can help you rediscover that

In today's demanding childcare centre environment, there is a constant pressure to 'do more with less'. The majority of privately funded early education centres have limited IT resources, staff and time. This all adds up to less time with the kids, and more time getting tense shoulders from spending too much time leaning over your computer.

Centre Directors and Owners are required to complete so much documentation, meet so many OHS requirements, and then make sure staff levels are correct. All these tasks can sometimes seem quite over whelming.

The most common statements from centre Owners and Directors are:

- I'm sick of all the paperwork, is there an answer?
- Printing receipts and invoices on the spot for parents is impossible. Is there anything that can do this in one mouse click?
- How do I get my centre online? I don't even have an email address!
- And the list goes on...

Any of this sound familiar? Well, maybe it's time to take a different approach. Maybe there is a way to meet all these demands and still have time for the fun aspects of running a child care centre - the kids!

The best way to help ensure ultimate business success to start with is by having a great relationship with an IT partner. The trick is selecting the right one. Perhaps a partner that understands 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'. So don't cut corners in selecting the right one to support your business.

Any IT solution provider can supply new hardware or software that they claim will help your business. But in reality, do they? When looking for an IT partner what do *you* look for?

- Do they know how your business works?
- A demonstrated understanding of the childcare industry?
- Do they know the pressures of small business, employing staff and the all important cash flow?

Do you look for those? No?! Well maybe you should.

If your IT Partner suggests a new piece of hardware or software without knowing your business plans, your visions for the future and understanding the long and short term goals of your childcare centre, then maybe you should do something about it. Simply spending money on IT is not at all a long-term objective of the new breed of business savvy centre owners and directors. Many Techies try to offer a solution before anyone knows the real cause of the problem.

Your IT Partner should, in fact, provide advice on, and recommend reliable, high-end tools to help enhance your business image, refine your internal business processes to maximise efficiency and provide after sales service second-to-none. Specifically, all good IT solutions providers should also be able to indicate to you the return on

investment (ROI) of your IT expenditure – what's the use of spending money on IT if they don't even know what efficiencies it will produce for your business?

Equipped with the right questions, you can evaluate the 'fit' between your business and the IT provider:

- You almost never get a lot for a little and almost always get what you pay for – ask each IT Partner their rates;
- Ask about their maintenance and support plans – the person who sold you the equipment and installed it, should be the person who maintains it through its life in your centre;
- Does the IT Providers business knowledge match your needs? Do they understand small business? Have they worked on similar organisations?
- How well does the recommended solution fit with your immediate and future needs? Is it upgradeable? Expandable? Or flexible enough to cater for differing needs?
- Are they trying to push one particular product? Have they other options?
- Do they explain solutions or technical specifications in a way in which you and your staff can understand?
- Do they provide training on the solution they recommend?

Finding the right IT provider can be crucial to the success of your business. Just knowing that you have that peace of mind, can not only allow you to free up some time to spend with the kids, but it can mean the difference between making informed business decisions in an instant, or being weighed down by IT expenses, paperwork and lengthy business processes that could ultimately see your business drown.

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