Do IT Like a Small Business

IT is the foundation for practically all business activity. Productivity, communication, collaboration, security, decision-making — they all hinge on effective and efficient IT. But how do small businesses actually do IT?

Let's compare the three most common options to find the right fit for your business.

	DIY Reliance on owner/non-IT workers	**IT Staff** Hiring one or more IT employees	**MSPs** Using outside IT service provider
Cost	Cheapest up front (no salaries, contracts), but expensive in hidden costs like downtime, lost focus/productivity, security breaches.	Highest fixed cost (salary, benefits), but the staff's specialization and additional control may be worth cost if/when budget allows.	Mid-level option at a fixed, monthly rate. Different tiers carry different costs, but usually much less expensive than staff.
Expertise	Limited to what the owner/non-technical employees bring to the business or can learn on the fly about technical IT matters.	Depends on quantity/quality of hires and the staff's capabilities across multiple IT functions. Deep expertise with right hires.	Team of experts across wide range of IT functions, who stay current on latest IT trends, threats. MSPs vary in quality.
Focus/Speed	Owners/workers handle IT tasks as time allows and may lose focus managing and fixing tech instead of running business.	Staff can focus entirely on tech and respond relatively fast to IT issues. May need outside help for heavy workloads, technical tasks.	IT handled off-site; business can focus on business. Depending on service tier, 24/7 monitoring/support means fast responses.
Control	Absolute control. Owner/employees handle all planning, installation, troubleshooting, maintenance of IT systems.	Direct control over IT staff. Coverage often limited to business hours and staff's capabilities across IT functions.	Business retains strategic control while outsourcing day-to-day IT control to MSP, so the business can focus elsewhere.
Technology	Tech limited to the budget, knowledge, and work capacity of business owner and other non-technical employees.	Like DIY, limited by business budget. IT staff usually have more knowledge of cutting-edge technology/software than an owner.	Depending on provider, MSPs use the most advanced, secure technology available — and regularly update this stack.
Security	Often weak in practice, because security is limited to internal tech/capacity. Updates, backups, firewalls, etc. may be neglected.	Better. Dedicated IT staff may stay informed on most advanced threats. Limited by internal resources and staff development.	Usually more rigorous and up to date, since an entire team of experts employs the latest security measures to combat cyberattacks.
Scalability	Doesn't scale. Business's internal capacity (time, know-how) can max out quickly as the business grows more robustly.	Scaling often means hiring and training additional personnel — which is generally slow and expensive for small business.	Varying service tiers, from affordable entry-level packages to value-add "enterprise" packages, let businesses easily scale IT.