Where do you go to resolve the really tough IT problems at 2 AM?

Google is great when you need to quickly search through massive amounts of content on the Internet. Apple's Siri has emerged as a cool new tool for interpreting your voice commands and getting what you need using an Apple iPhone. If only there was a way for managed service providers (MSPs) to get quick answers to tough IT problems.

The challenge is finding the right service for the task. Google, Ask.com and Apple's Siri are good at processing keywords and short phrases and helping you get quick answers to straightforward questions. But because IT problems are frequently complex, online search tools are often inadequate when you are looking for technical assistance.

The benefits of automation and online advancements are remarkable but can only take you so far. More often than not, you require input and actions from experts who know how to efficiently resolve issues that may have unexpected twists. Your clients know this, which is why they come to your company to maintain and troubleshoot their IT systems. Along the same line, the MSPs' best resource can often be a strong back-office NOC with experienced technicians that routinely help companies avoid and resolve hundreds or even thousands issues every day.

Steve Ricketts, VP of Marketing

MSPs with large clients that have common recurring issues probably already know this and may have built their own NOC. However, building a NOC operation is not cost-effective for many smaller IT solution providers. Fortunately, smaller MSPs can outsource NOC services to a third party vendor that has a ready and able team of qualified technicians.

However finding the right NOC can be a challenge. Third party NOCs all have experts, but not all NOCs are created equal. When evaluating third-party NOC providers, you need to ask the following key questions:

- Is the NOC available 24 x 7?

- Does the NOC have dedicated experts that continuously research and support your client's key business applications?

- Is the expertise codified into business rules that are used to correlate event IDs, registry values and performance metrics to intelligently filter through thousands of alerts?

- Does the NOC provide full problem resolution and also give you the option of getting step-by-step instructions so you can quickly resolve problems yourself?

- Is the NOC operation well established with account managers, proven processes and team leads that help you get the most out of the NOC?

- Is the NOC integrated with your RMM tool so that you have a consistent management interface?

In the same way search tools complement browsers and mobile devices, a NOC is a strong complement to a managed service platform. Making the right choice means much more than accessing online information, it gives you a proven team of certified IT experts focused round-the-clock on making sure your client's systems are always up and running. And because you typically pay a fix price per device, you have predictable operational costs, not to mention a more balanced lifestyle and a higher level of customer service.

Steve Ricketts, VP of Marketing, Continuum, which provides an end-to-end intelligent remote monitoring and management and business continuity platform backed by a 24/7 Network Operations Center (NOC) that enables MSPs to profitably backup, monitor, troubleshoot and maintain IT environments.