

Not all Office 365 providers are created equal

The value of finding the right
Cloud Solution Provider

Since its launch in 2016, Microsoft's **Cloud Solution Provider** program has provided a powerful route for enterprises who want to utilize the power of the cloud, without the hassle. Besides offering straightforward billing and account management, the program was intended to add value to customers too.

In this eBook, we argue that many Cloud Solution Providers (CSP's) are offering little extra to their customers—and so we summarize what you should look for when selecting a CSP.

Not all CSP's are created equal

Don't settle for basic when you deserve the best



When Microsoft launched the Cloud Solution Provider program in 2016, it introduced an innovative new way for organizations to subscribe to and pay for Office 365 and other Microsoft cloud products.

Customers could now work with a partner who managed their cloud licenses, rather than the complexity of dealing directly with Microsoft or using one of their more traditional (and inflexible) partner reselling programs.

The CSP approach provided simplified monthly billing, 24/7 support and a single point of contact for all Microsoft services. This promised to make life a whole lot easier for customers than other ways of provisioning licenses.

When the CSP program was launched Microsoft wanted to help their customers **get the most out of Office 365, Azure, Dynamics 365 and their other cloud platforms.**

They entrusted CSP partners with the responsibility of doing more than just managing licenses and offering support. Instead, the idea was to add value to customers, to ensure they were more productive and used their licenses to the fullest, meaning they got the greatest ROI possible.

The problem is, many CSP's did not fulfill this responsibility – choosing to offer little more than the basics. What's more, many of them did not have a direct link to Microsoft – choosing instead to buy then resell licenses from a distributor.

In the sections that follow, we look at why this is a problem, and provide criterion for you to judge what you should truly be expecting from a CSP.

What is Microsoft's CSP program?

A new, flexible way of using Microsoft's services... in theory



Microsoft launched its Cloud Solution Provider program in 2016 in recognition of the fact that the standard ways of selling Office 365, Azure, EMS and other licenses was not helping customers get the most from the cloud.

Before the launch of the CSP program, the options for buying licenses were to either:

Buy direct from Microsoft

This approach gave customers no value-added services, they had to contact Microsoft directly for any support as well as other requests for changes, and there was little flexibility in license management.

Buy Volume Licenses (VL) from a reseller

Customers could buy licenses through the Partner of Record program, normally for annual licenses. Again, the customer still had to approach Microsoft for support, there was very little flexibility in terms of changing license numbers or contract terms and length.

Recognizing the limits of these two approaches, Microsoft chose to launch the CSP program. This was a new way of providing Microsoft's services in a way that matched the flexibility of business in the cloud. Accredited companies and experts could apply to the CSP program and were allowed to then sell on Microsoft licenses.

To become accredited as a CSP partner, companies had to provide 24/7 support for their customers – they could then build a relationship with them and sell value added services. For the customer, the benefits included:

- ✓ They could flexibly change the number of licenses they paid for on a monthly basis (much more easily than in the alternative methods)
- ✓ They got 24/7 support from a trusted partner
- ✓ They received clear, customized billing (rather than the standard, confusing billing)
- ✓ They could opt in for value added services provided by the CSP partner (either free of charge or at a cost)

On first inspection, this seems like a good deal for customers. However, plenty of CSP's have chosen to maximize profits by offering only the most basic services required by their contract with Microsoft (i.e. to provide 24/7 support) and little more. And this means end customers get very little additional support and miss out on the opportunities that the cloud offers.

Ideally, your CSP should be more than simply a license reseller. Instead, you should expect a partnership, where the CSP helps you get the most out of Office 365 to support your employees and boost your productivity.

In the next section, we explore how you can assess whether a CSP is really a partner for your business.

What should you be looking for in a CSP?

The right partner will put rockets
on your business



We have some news for you. If your existing (or prospective) CSP partner is bragging about their 24/7 support services, they are not to be trusted. Microsoft has set out in clear terms that the absolute minimum requirements of its CSP program is the provision of 24/7 support.

The ethos of the CSP program

A true CSP should aim to build a partnership with your business, giving you a wealth of added value products and services, which make using the cloud highly beneficial for your business. Here are the criteria you should use to judge whether a CSP company is worth your time:

Ongoing and proactive support

As noted above, companies who join the CSP program are contractually obliged to offer 24/7 support. But you should expect more than troubleshooting when you pick up the telephone.

Instead, your CSP partner should:

- Actively engage with you to discover and resolve user adoption challenges
- Provide proactive guidance
- Monitor your systems and alert you to security vulnerabilities
- Have a direct line to Microsoft engineers
- Resolve most support tickets in less than an hour

Have direct link to Microsoft

There are two ways to be a CSP: buy then resell licenses from a distributor, OR, buy and resell licenses direct form Microsoft. The second option is better because:

- It shows the CSP has a strong relationship with Microsoft
- They have Microsoft Premier support
- Your licenses are more secure – CSP's which resell from distributors add one more step between you and Microsoft, meaning a third part had delegated admin rights to your tenant. That's just one more link in the chain that can break.

Extensive training and resources

You should look for a CSP partner who offers a range of resources and training which helps your employees get more out of the cloud. This should include, but not be limited to:

- User adoption sessions and training
- The provision of multiple guides and how-to documentation available easily for all levels of users

Practical guidance on user adoption

User adoption is essential for ensuring you get ROI on your cloud investment. A poor quality CSP partner will leave you to figure out how to use Office 365—and that can lead to end user uncertainty and limited use of the cloud's many apps and tools. You should demand:

- An on-demand Office 365 and Change Management platform
- A library of training resources and quick start guides
- An end user self-service helpdesk
- An adoption and engagement officer who takes full responsibility for boosting Office 365 consumption at your business

Admin and license management tools

One of the greatest benefits of cloud platforms like Office 365 is that they can be enhanced and extended with additional tools which help you make the most of them. You should expect your CSP partner to offer this kind of option:

- Ideally, they should offer business intelligence software that helps you monitor Office 365 usage
- You should also have access to a single place for admin and license management tools which are easy to use and give you more control of your licenses

Extend and enhance Office 365

Your partner should be able to educate you and your colleagues on how to get more out of Office 365:

- Introduce new apps and tools
- Extend and enhance SharePoint with 'intranet-in-a-box' features and tools
- Actively find ways of reducing costs while maximizing ROI
- Introducing tools and procedures to improve security, such as mailbox access monitoring

Access to expertise

While the CSP program requires partners to be accredited by Microsoft, you should expect your partner to provide more:

- A deep understanding of your business
- Recommendations on tools you could use to boost productivity
- True Microsoft knowledge – your partner should have a long, proven track record of developing and launching products that integrate and work with Microsoft’s technology stack
- Preferably, MVP’s in-house

Your CSP should be more than a simple provider of licenses: they should be a business that dedicates itself to your company’s long-term success, and helps you use Microsoft’s tools—plus their own—to support you in achieving your goals.

A value check-list for finding CSP partners

What do you need from the cloud and a CSP partner?	
A help desk?	
Training services?	
Intranet?	
Assess the partner’s expertise and support services:	
Do they offer a direct line to Microsoft?	
Does the CSP partner buy directly from Microsoft or through a distributor?	
How long has the partner been working with Microsoft, and with what kinds of companies?	
Inquire about costs:	
Do any added-value services come at an extra charge, or do they come free at the same rate as your standard Microsoft license?	
Review their additional products and services to see how these extend and enhance the cloud:	
Do they offer a SharePoint company intranet?	
Do they provide Office 365 learning and training?	
Do they offer easy management facilities?	
Ask about their employees and support services:	
Will you get a dedicated success partner?	
What Microsoft certifications do their employees hold?	

Next steps for success

Where to go now you know



Since its 2016 introduction, the CSP program has helped thousands of businesses make more use of the cloud, with flexible billing and 24/7 support. However, as we have seen, many CSP providers have not managed to add more than the most basic value—going against the ethos that Microsoft intended when it launched the program.

MessageOps helps you excel in the cloud

At MessageOps, we strive to go above and beyond when it comes to providing our customers with Office 365 and valued added services including:

- ✓ Comprehensive managed services for every aspect of Office 365
- ✓ Training and adoption support
- ✓ Powerful migration tools
- ✓ Ready-to-use intranet built on the secure foundation of SharePoint
- ✓ Office 365 monitoring tools as part of our Inscope offering

You should expect more from your CSP provider – contact MessageOps today to find out what real support means.

Email: info@messageops.com

About MessageOps

MessageOps, a Division of Sirius Computer Solutions, specializes in Microsoft Cloud services that increase productivity, improve collaboration, mitigate risks, and optimize costs. MessageOps has been working in the Microsoft cloud since the beginning and are therefore, not just a chapter ahead of you in the manual.

MessageOps has real-life experiences that will ensure you have a successful project. Our focus is in helping you gain value at every stage of your cloud journey.

Contact us

Phone: **877-788-1617**

Email: **info@messageops.com**

Website: **www.messageops.com**