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## Doing IT right

Managed services provider intercepts problems

**By Blair Dedrick**  
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A few months ago, the IT department at CB Richard Ellis consisted of one person, who spent most of his time fixing problems when employees at the commercial real estate firm's 12 locations couldn't access their e-mail or the server went down, said controller Penelope Springer.

When the last IT director left after six months, taking all of his knowledge of the network with him, Springer and others at CB Richard Ellis decided it was time for a permanent solution. They turned to masterIT.

"Technology should be a tool," said Gary Wiseman, president and CTO of managed service provider masterIT. "So many companies are slaves to their own tool set. Instead of having a great system, they spend more time focused on technology."

MasterIT, which started in July 2005, makes that possible with a unique business model that allows the company to prevent problems instead of waiting until they occur, something that saves time, and thus money, for their clients.

At CB Richard Ellis, the problems had begun interfering with the business.

"Getting e-mail at the office and on our cell phones, that drives business," Springer said. "There has been nothing but compliments on how things are done with masterIT."

That's how Wiseman and chairman and CEO J. Michael Drake like it.

"The bottom line is this is better for IT users," Drake said of their services. "It makes IT what it should be, so clients can be what they should be, and do what they do."

MasterIT looks different from the outset. The first meeting with a client isn't about making masterIT the service provider but about giving the current IT network a head-to-toe physical.

Engineers do a thorough check of equipment, documenting the state and status of everything, and come up with a report card on the company's IT network that includes everything from keyboards to software to the overall network. Included on the report card are money-saving suggestions, such as better equipment utilization, that Drake said average 20 percent of a client's entire IT budget.

Then, masterIT sits down with the client, the report card and a 3- to 5-year technology road map that shows what the client should do in the coming years to keep their network running smoothly.

At that point, the client has a choice: continue to deal with masterIT or take the reports and walk away.

According to Wiseman, not one client has ever chosen the latter course.

"They have all engaged us in a type of solution," he said.



Lance Murphey  
The Commercial Appeal

Chairman and CEO J. Michael Drake (left) and president and CTO Gary Wiseman run masterIT, a Bartlett-based technology service provider that offers everything from reactive support and monitoring to complete IT services.

MasterIT's brochure looks a bit like a list of options at a spa. A client can choose entire fixed-fee packages, like CB Richard Ellis did, or individual services.

The full masterServe package includes everything from remote network monitoring and management, which helps find problems before they become critical, to spy and virus protection to a staffed service and help desk. It also includes their most unique option, Hardware-as-a-Service, a concept developed by Drake.

HaaS, as it is called, puts masterIT in charge of all of the client's hardware and software. As upgrades are available or necessary, masterIT engineers order and install it with as little disruption to the client's business as possible, Drake said, often working in the evenings.

The company can do all this easily because when masterIT first begins working with a client, it buys the client's IT network.

"If the client perceives that we own the network, why don't we own it?" Drake said.

Often when IT problems occur, clients get sent from service provider to software company to hardware help line, he said. By owning the network, masterIT makes all of the responsibility theirs, giving the client one place to call for solutions to any problem that might occur.

Remote monitoring and top hardware and software mean that masterIT has taken clients' networks from "fire-fighting to fire-prevention," Drake said.

Drake and Wiseman also pride themselves on only working with "Best of Class" companies, such as N-Able Technologies, a six-year-old Canada-based company that enables service providers to become managed service providers.

To ensure high quality, N-Able is picky about who it works with in each market, said vice president of sales, Mike Cullen.

"We're extremely proud of our work with masterIT -- they're the company we want to deal with in Memphis," Cullen said. "We think that's the direction most service providers will go in the future."

N-Able Technologies creates the software masterIT uses to remotely monitor its clients' systems, and Drake and Wiseman worked closely with the company when setting up their business model.

"Delivering managed services is as much business services as technology," Cullen said. "The biggest thing we see (about masterIT) is they're bringing true value to their customers by identifying issues before they take place."

Drake and Wiseman aim to grow their business, although they have 14 clients now and no way to take on more until after the first quarter of 2007.

"We're both convinced that technology services will be delivered the way we're doing today in the future," said Wiseman. "We have a business model that could span the country. We've had a very rapid growth rate, but we're going to go slow so we can do it right."

## **Technology providers**

Name of Company: masterIT

Description of Company: masterIT is a provider of technology services in small to medium environments with a portfolio of services that range from reactive support and monitoring to complete IT management.

Top officer: President and CTO, Gary Wiseman and Chairman and CEO, J. Michael Drake

Address: 8024 Stage Hills Blvd., Bartlett

Employees: 16, plus five engineers on an as-needed basis

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