Content Cover Sheet

Title: Is An IT Service Level Agreement (Or SLA) Important?

SEO Difficulty (per Google extension Keywords Everywhere aim for 55 or less): 51

URL: IT-service-level-agreement

Meta (150 characters, up to 300):

Find out what an IT service level agreement (or SLA) is, what it should include, and why it's important for you and your customers. (110 ch)

Author (provide expertise, authority, trustworthiness): Devin Kelly

Reader/Persona (Who is the intended audience?):

Business/IT leader who is considering outsourcing some/all of their IT, but may not understand the importance of the SLA and how it could affect the price of service.

Objective (How will you change the reader?):

We will provide the information they need to understand what an SLA is, what it should include, how it can affect cost, and why it's important.

Next Step On Your Site (linked to by bottom and/or inline CTA):

Buyer's Journey Stage: consideration

Topic/Type of Article:

List 2-3 queries the reader would search for:

Grammarly Score (aim for 85 or higher): 91

Hemingway Grade Level (between 5-9 is ideal): 8

Total word count/XX minute read: 1590m (5 minute read)

Tags:

News, Disaster recovery, events, foundation, modern data center, business continuity, In the media, IT support, IT lifecycle management, workforce enablement, managed services, cost, working with Kelser, Office 365, wireless, cybersecurity, press release, efficiency, executive consulting, cloud, networking

Campaign:

Global MSP Day, compliance, information security, IT support, enterprise, cloud, MSP SEO, managed services quiz, #Gbury, 10 things cybersecurity e-book, articles and print, BC ebook, BCDR, BCDR calculator, blog subscribe, brackets for good, Cisco, client outreach, cloud, cmmc, compliance, cybersecurity, cybersecurity month, cybersecurity news, cybersecurity quiz & checklist, Defend Forward webinars, Dell, enterprise, events, Giving Tuesday, Global MSP Day, GTLP, Hosted events, HPE, HPI, industry events, INFINIDAT, Information Security, informative social,IT Asset and Lifecycle Management, IT Support, Kelser careers, Kelser Charity Challenge, Kelser Foundation, Learning Center, Managed Services, Managed Services Quiz, media, Microsoft 365, modern data center, MSP SEO, NaaS ebook, networking, news, NIST compliance, open houses, organizations, PR, Primary, reengage, referral, SDWAN, Spring Cleaning, Storage, Success Stories, Travelers Championship, TSL - Cisco Tech Data/Security Study - Star Wars, UCONN, Waas, Win 7 EOS, Wireless, Workforce Productivity & Efficiency, Working with Kelser

Is An IT Service Level Agreement (Or SLA) Important?

As a business leader, you understand the importance of providing **exceptional service** to your customers. But what if I told you that **good customer service isn't always in your hands**?

What if **something outside your control could determine your ability to serve your customers** and, in turn, your reputation for outstanding customer service?

I'm sure you'd want to know how to avoid that, right? That's why I'm writing this article.

The **details of your service level agreement** (SLA) not only **explain what your provider is offering for service response time, but also could directly impact your reputation**.

I've worked in the IT industry for 12 years. As a service deliver manager (SDM) at Kelser Corporation, I walk customers through our contracts and make sure everything makes sense.

In this article, **I'll explain everything you need to know about IT SLAs**. You'll know the **important things to look for, the questions to ask, and how your SLA might impact your business**.

What Is An IT SLA?

In general terms, an SLA is an **agreement between a service provider and a customer that defines the scope and level of service**. For IT providers, an SLA typically outlines **how long it will take the provider to respond and remediate an IT issue**.

The SLA is typically listed in the following format: 24x7x365. The first number represents the number of hours per day, the second is the number of days per week, and the third is days per year. So the SLA cited above means you are covered 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year.

What Should An IT SLA Include?

An IT SLA should include **specific timelines** for both response time and resolution time.

1. Response Time

   Response time is the amount of time it takes for the provider to **let the customer know their request has been received**. This typically ranges from minutes to an hour or so.

2. Resolution Time

   Resolution time is the expected **time between the customer creating a service ticket and service completion**. **Most SLAs for response time are within five hours**.

   The response time may vary depending on the size and skills of the provider, and there will be an occasional outlier when the issue is more complex.

   Although many issues can be resolved in minutes, the SLA is determined based on an average and certain tickets take longer. We'd rather under commit and over deliver than over commit and under deliver.

Ideally, the SLA should also outline the **process for requesting service, notifying the customer that the service request has been received, updating about service activity, and acknowledgement that service is complete**.

Read this article to learn what to include in a service ticket.

Do I Need An SLA In My IT Agreement?

All IT agreements should include detailed SLAs so that both the provider and the customer have the same expectations and there are **no surprises**.

Why Do Some Providers Offer Faster Or Slower Response Times?

Depending on your business, **you may require immediate IT service or you may be able to tolerate a longer wait for service**.

Just as you might pay a premium for an emergency plumber call (versus a routine visit), some **providers with a reputation for speedy resolutions may charge more**. If you aren't in a time-sensitive industry, you might not want to pay the premium cost immediate service demands.

Before committing to anything, understand the terms and be sure that the provider can deliver what you expect. Do your homework and check with existing customers. **The last thing anyone wants is to pay premium prices for subpar performance.**

What Questions Should I Ask When Talking With My IT Provider About SLAs?

Again, depending on the level of urgency for your organization and your budget, you may or may not be able to tolerate different levels of service. To **get the best option for you**, here are some questions that I recommend you ask:

1. ### What Is Your Response Time?

   How quickly will the provider get back to you to **confirm receipt of your service request** and start the resolution process? What does that look like? Is it just an email verifying receipt of your request, or will someone call you for more information?

   At Kelser, for example, we respond to service requests quickly, often within minutes and always within an hour.

Related article: Everything You Need To Know About IT Service Tickets

2. ## What Is Your Maximum Resolution Time? How Often Do You Achieve It?

   The maximum resolution time is the **very outside limit of your provider's resolution time**. Knowing how often they achieve or exceed this goal will provide insight about the service organization's effectiveness.

3. ## What Is Your Average Resolution Time?

   In addition to understanding the maximum response and resolution times, it can be helpful to **ask for an average resolution time for most tickets**, so that you know what to expect.

   Again, don't just take their word for it; ask to **talk with a current customer** and confirm the provider's responsiveness. Or see if the provider's website has any **customer reviews or a customer satisfaction rating**.

4. ## Where Is Your Service Organization Located?

   The answer to this question **may reveal something about the cost of service**. If service representatives are located overseas, the provider may be able to offer less expensive rates.

   Keep in mind that service needs to be **convenient for your organization**. Does it matter if the service organization is in another time zone? How will that affect your support?

5. ## What Is Your Fee Structure For Service? Will I Ever Have To Pay Extra? If So, When? Why?

   Every provider does things a little bit differently. Some include service in their monthly fee, some charge per call, some include a limited number of service calls in their monthly fee and then charge for additional calls.

   Others may charge extra for service on holidays, weekends, or after hours. Or, they may add a premium for service during those times. On-site service may also involve an additional charge.

   Again, it's important to **know what to expect**. You don't want to assume that everything is covered and then find out that isn't the case.

6. What Things Fall Outside My SLA? Will I Be Notified Before Being Charged?

Obviously, **an IT SLA is an average**. There may be a **large-scale or a vendor-related issue** that takes longer or requires **on-site service**. What happens in these instances can help build your trust with your provider or can be an experience that yields mistrust.

Ask for examples of **situations that would fall outside the SLA**. How are they handled? **When would you be notified of the timeline and additional cost?** Finding out this information ahead of time will **alleviate headaches and frustration down the line**.

Learn **how often** the provider experiences these kinds of events. **They should be the exception, not the norm.**

7. What Devices Are Covered Under My SLA?

I'm including this because on occasion a customer will call us with a problem with a device that isn't included in their SLA. For example, our agreements don't cover printers. Others may or may not include phones.

It's important to **understand which devices are serviced by which providers**, so you don't end up wasting time waiting for service from the wrong provider.

8. Is There More Than One SLA?

Some providers include different SLAs for different activities. For example, you may find one SLA for proactive monitoring and remediation and another one for reactive technical support.

Proactive monitoring usually applies to **critical network infrastructure**. There may be a different SLA for an emergency than for planned routine maintenance.

Or, you may see a different SLA for reactive technical support for devices that are not part of the critical network infrastructure.

9. How Do I Let You Know If My Service Request Is Urgent?

In the IT world, we refer to this as "escalation." That mean that a ticket is prioritized above all others.

Every provider has a different definition of urgent tickets. Make sure you **understand what would prioritize a ticket and how to alert the provider if you have an urgent need**.

At Kelser, for example, urgent tickets are any that have **widespread impact** on the organization's ability to deliver for the customer, those that affect **key leadership**, and those that **prevent communication with customers**.

We encourage customers to call us with urgent tickets so that our dispatcher can gather all relevant information and prioritize these requests accordingly.

U**nderstand the escalation process at your provider**, so that you can receive optimal service when an issue arises.

This article outlines how to contact our service desk and what happens next.

Related article: Is My Help Ticket Actually "Critical"? (6 Things to Consider)

Is An IT SLA Important?

After reading this article, you understand the ins and outs of IT SLAs.

You know what an SLA is, what it should include, and why you want one in your IT agreement. You know what to expect in terms of resolution time, and why some providers offer faster or slower resolution times and how that affects the overall cost of service.

We've covered the important **questions to ask** prospective providers about their SLAs.

At this point, you are well informed and likely have a new appreciation for the importance of an IT provider's SLA.

As a managed IT support provider, Kelser focuses on providing outstanding customer service as demonstrated by our most recent customer satisfaction scores. But, the truth is, we know that **managed IT support isn't the right solution** for every organization. And, we're okay with that.

Rather than sell you our services, we publish honest, unbiased articles like this one to provide business leaders like you with **the information you need** to make the best IT decision for your organization.

Knowing that cybersecurity is one of the pressing issues on the minds of many business leaders, we invite you to **download our free cybersecurity ebook** to learn 10 actions you can take to improve your company's cybersecurity.

INSERT CYBERSECURITY EBOOK CTA