

# **The IT Director's Guide to Third- Party Maintenance**

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## What this is

You have a renewal quote from Dell, HPE, Cisco, IBM or NetApp on your desk. It is higher than last year. The hardware is older than last year. Somebody has told you a third-party maintenance provider will do it for half.

This guide tells you what third-party maintenance is, when it works, when it does not, what it costs, and how to check a provider before you sign. It is six pages. Read it before the renewal call.

We sell third-party maintenance. Read this knowing that. Everything in here is the same advice we give a buyer who ends up staying with the OEM.

## What third-party maintenance is

The OEM builds the hardware and sells a support contract on it. That contract covers break-fix, parts, and access to firmware. When the hardware reaches a certain age, the OEM stops selling the contract. That date is the end of service life, or EOSL.

A third-party maintainer, or TPM, sells the same break-fix contract without building the hardware. It holds the parts, employs the engineers, and answers the phone. It supports hardware from many vendors under one contract, and it keeps supporting it after the OEM date.

That is the whole model. There is no trick. The OEM prices support to push you toward a refresh. A TPM prices support to keep the hardware running.

## When it works

Third-party maintenance fits when most of these are true.

The hardware is out of warranty. Under warranty, the OEM contract is usually the better deal because the parts are free anyway.

The hardware is stable. Servers, storage arrays and switches that are three or more years old have known failure modes. Parts are on the secondary market. Fixes are routine.

You run more than one vendor. Four OEM contracts with four renewal dates and four support desks is the normal state of an enterprise data center. One contract with one date and one desk is the point.

You do not need new firmware. After EOSL the OEM stops writing firmware for the platform. If the hardware does its job today, that does not matter. If you are waiting on a firmware fix, it does.

The refresh is not funded. Or it is funded for next year, or the year after. The gap between now and then is where a TPM contract pays for itself.

## **When it does not**

Stay with the OEM when any of these is true.

The hardware is under 18 months old. The OEM warranty is doing the job. Wait.

The platform is firmware-gated. Some storage arrays lock features behind support entitlement checks. Some blade chassis will not accept a replacement blade without an OEM-signed part. Ask the TPM directly whether your model is one of them. A good one will tell you.

The OEM has an active roadmap you rely on. If you are a heavy user of a vendor's management software and it ships new features quarterly, losing entitlement costs you those features.

Your procurement rules require it. Some public-sector and regulated buyers have OEM-only clauses. Check before you spend time.

## What it costs

The number most buyers see is 40 to 70 percent below the OEM renewal for maintenance, and 40 to 80 percent below OEM list for parts. Those are our numbers. Other providers will quote in the same range. Park Place Technologies, the largest TPM, publishes 30 to 40 percent on its site.

Why the gap exists: the OEM prices support as part of a refresh cycle. A TPM prices it as a service. Neither is dishonest. They are selling different things.

What is not in the TPM price: new firmware, OEM-signed parts for locked platforms, and the OEM's name on the contract. If any of those has a dollar value to you, add it back before you compare.

## What to check before you sign

Ask every provider the following. Write down the answers. A provider that cannot answer in one email is telling you something.

**Who fixes it.** Ask whether the engineer on the ticket is an employee or a subcontractor, and what level. "Level 3" means they can diagnose and repair without escalating. "Level 1" means they read a script and open a ticket for someone else. Ask how many are on staff and where.

**Where the parts are.** Ask which stocking location serves your site and what is in it for your models. Ask what happens if the part is not there. A four-hour on-site SLA is meaningless if the nearest spare is two time zones away.

**What the SLA actually says.** Response time and on-site time are different numbers. Ask for both. Ask what "response" means in the contract. Ask what the remedy is when they miss it.

**How you leave.** Ask for the term, the notice period, and whether it auto-renews. Month-to-month exists. Multi-year with auto-renew also exists. Know which one you are signing.

**What they will not support.** Ask for the list of platforms they decline. A provider with no such list has not thought about it.

**Who owns them.** The three largest TPMs in North America are now one company. Park Place Technologies acquired Curvature in 2019 and Service Express later. If you want a second opinion on your OEM renewal, know whether the second opinion comes from the same company as the first.

**Proof.** Ask for a reference customer running the same models you run. Ask for a case study with a real number in it. A brochure that says “trusted by industry leaders” is not proof.

## How to switch without a gap

The mechanics matter more than the price. Here is the sequence that works.

- 1. Export the asset list.** Brand, model, serial, site, current contract end date. Your CMDB or the OEM support portal has it. This takes an afternoon.
- 2. Get the TPM quote.** Send the list. A serious provider prices it line by line against the OEM renewal within a day or two. Ours comes back within one business hour. Anything that takes a week of discovery calls before you see a number is a sales process, not a quote.
- 3. Decide per platform, not per vendor.** You can keep the OEM on the array that is firmware-locked and move the 60 servers around it. Most first-year switches look like this.
- 4. Co-term.** Ask the TPM to align every asset to one renewal date. This is the single biggest operational win, and it is free.
- 5. Give notice.** OEM contracts usually need 30 to 90 days’ written notice to not renew. Miss the window and you pay another year. Put the date in your calendar the day you receive the renewal quote.
- 6. Overlap for 30 days.** Start the TPM contract a month before the OEM contract ends. Costs you a month of double coverage. Saves you a gap if anything in the handover slips.
- 7. Pre-position spares.** Ask the TPM to confirm, in writing, which parts for your models are in the stocking location that serves you before day one.

## The negotiation you can run either way

A line-by-line TPM quote is the strongest document you can bring to an OEM renewal call. Some buyers get the quote, take it to the OEM, and get a better OEM price. That is a fine outcome. We say so on our quote page: use it to switch, or use it to negotiate.

Either way, get the number before the renewal lands. The quote is free and takes an hour.

## Questions to expect from your own team

**”Is this risky?”** The hardware is the same hardware. The risk is in the provider’s parts depth and engineer quality, which is why you check those before signing.

**”What about security patches?”** Firmware security patches stop at EOSL whether you use a TPM or not. The OEM is not writing them either. Compensating controls are the same in both cases.

**”Will the OEM void anything?”** Nothing to void after warranty. During warranty, third-party repair does not void the warranty in the United States under the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act, but the practical answer is to leave in-warranty gear on the OEM.

**”What if the TPM goes out of business?”** Ask for their financials or their ownership. Ask for month-to-month terms so the exposure is 30 days.

## What to do now

Pull the asset list. Find the OEM contract that expires next. Send that list to one or two TPMs and to the OEM, and compare the three numbers on the same sheet.

If you want ours, the quote form is at [datacenterservices.ai/get-quote](https://datacenterservices.ai/get-quote). No account, no credit card, no sales call unless you ask for one. Or call 888-838-8796. A person answers.

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