How We Operate & Ways to Save Money

Personalized Customer Service

We strive to provide a high-level of customer support while remaining immediately accessible to our customers. We also wish to keep our services affordable to your business and continually seek ways to reduce costs. It is with these thoughts in mind, that we offer suggestions to keep your business running smoothly while maximizing your technology investment.

Our focus is to provide services that are **attentive, convenient** and **personalized**. Striving to maintain this goal, we are persistent in advocating our customer's needs. We offer our services on a time & materials basis, allowing us to bill specifically for the products & services needed. We spend time, our most valued asset, offering excellent customer service, providing proactive project management, assisting with break-fix issues, and seeking out more efficient ways to solve ever-changing puzzles.

Our services work best for customers who plan ahead and get their management/staff trained, rather than requiring on-the-fly training & resolutions "after hours". If you value proactive suggestions utilizing the latest technology and appreciate advice that helps bring problems to closure, we certainly would be of value to you.

Urgency

We prioritize calls requiring immediate assistance, and appreciate those with non-urgent requirements. We rely upon your follow through with actions that are in your control and notification of recurring issues before they are beyond repair. We try to steer clients toward the **most sustainable solutions, avoiding high costs**, where possible. While we can't anticipate every issue, we attempt to prepare your business, so as to minimize impact. We reward customers who pay on-time or ahead of time as well as customers who allow us to train them or solve puzzles in an advisory role with them, rather than in place of them. We can significantly minimize costs by getting assistance from your personnel via phone or Internet to troubleshoot issues, because many situations simply don't warrant high cost, on-site service calls. This also saves us time and allows us to continue to provide high quality services to our clients.

Hours of Operation

While we offer 24x7 services to our clients and we are available to speak with you at any time, **our hourly rates are lowest during normal business hours:** Mon-Fri 9am-5pm. We charge more for on-site and after-hours support. So, if you have a non-emergency question, consider emailing (we do provide billable email support) anytime or contact us during normal business hours. Please refer to our website www.sotapop.com (or www.sotapop.org) for a complete list of rates. If our presence is required onsite, be aware that rates are highest for this type of service during the "after hours" and weekend period. Remote support during business hours spent doing "training" is one of the more cost-effective ways to hire us. We can attempt to aware you that our rates are higher for on-site or after hours work, but it is ultimately your responsibility to plan your support needs.

We are still considering an inclusive telephone-only or remote-onsite support offering for clients; however, we have not found a consensus in offering this service while maintaining our attentive service levels. The pre-purchase of a 24x7 "break-fix" style, measured-rate service which aligns with our service levels would run as much as triple the cost of others you may have discovered because of our broad coverage and near-immediate first call resolution response. We have found that the most cost effective way to proceed is with a

partnership relationship with our clients – including accountability and responsibility for proper care/training/programming of the systems we support. An SLA (Service Level Agreement) of 80% of calls answered within 30 seconds and 80% of calls handled upon, what is termed "First Call Resolution" is unfortunately absent in this marketplace (from what we have found). Our hope is to create the inclusive option to the marketplace, where it is the most compelling opportunity available. We are open to feedback/thoughts and beta testers for future projects/planning involving support plans that might prove to be sustainable offerings (without the need for exceptions in an all-inclusive offering - something we feel should be avoided).

Fees

Our standard rates are posted on our website at www.sotapop.com or www.sotapop.org.

We offer retainer-based arrangements for new clients and can begin "evergreen" retainers (aka "rolling"/perpetual deposit), to allow the opportunity to take advantage of our services on a pay-ahead block of time/monthly purchase arrangement. We require a pay-ahead retainer service for all new sites using our POS software. In order to approximate the services & products these sites may use in the future, we require a monthly investment to ensure a "rainy day" fund for new equipment and services. For other clients, the initial retainer is meant to approximate the scope of the primary project that is planned for our engagement.

Weekend & "after hours" emergencies are costly, both in terms of frustration for your staff and guests, as well as costs involved with hiring Sotapop Consulting. As a general rule, we hope that all of our customers are prepared for unexpected events. There are many proactive suggestions that we typically offer, which help our customers have a more comfortable and less surprising experience in working with their technology and our organization.

How to Save Money

In order to minimize emergencies and keep ahead of possible issues, we suggest the following:

1. **Upgrade your equipment** (especially machines with mission critical data) to the latest operating systems. While new equipment may have more upfront cost, older/used equipment often requires more repair/setup/ troubleshooting time and ends up costing more in the long run (in our experience). Many industries allocate a portion of their budgets to Information Technology (I.T.). More than likely, if your I.T. budget has been neglected, emergency cost overruns may force you to overspend a typical planned amount. Our advice is to **plan ahead and upgrade technology**, repair equipment, and replace anything that could get in the way of your system functioning smoothly. From what we've found, keeping ahead of problems often costs less in the long run than reacting to failures.

2**. Spare equipment is always a great idea for your business**. It often affords the opportunity to fix something on your own without requiring a technician onsite, which can prove invaluable. We recommend having extra terminals, printers, and associated equipment aka "hot spares", at your fingertips.

3. **Get advanced training** for your management team to be able to handle common issues. Don't forget to involve yourself in any training as managers don't always stay forever. Then, when no one is available, you will know how to do the work, too.

4. **Consider changing credit card processors**, where there might be an opportunity to save money/reduce your rates. We have credit card/vendor relationships that could benefit you with a competitive rate, if you wish to explore. In any exploration for a new service provider, sometimes cost becomes more important than "service". Ask for referrals and find out how a provider will handle (or mishandle) your request for assistance at 2am and at 5:05pm on overlooked non-shipping holidays, such as the night before Thanksgiving.

5. **Back up data** as often as needed, preferably offsite (in case of an unexpected fire). We offer at least one program to do this. It may cost as little as $100/year. Compared to $1,000.00 or more for data recovery (which we also offer), this can be a tremendous opportunity. Once implemented, understanding how it works and how to obtain data in case of a failure is critical. We can work with you to provide stability, with solutions that send your data offsite daily/weekly/monthly or however often you wish.

6. **Implement a RAID (**redundant array of inexpensive disks) solution. This is an easy and effective insurance policy against hard drive failures (hard drive failure rates can be high). A RAID solution "mirrors" or shares your hard drive data amongst several drives/media, and in case a single hard drive fails, a RAID solution can prevent data loss and provide an available data backup to your organization. With RAID, your business can continue to operate, but without RAID you may effectively be "out of business".

7. **Install power conditioners/battery backups on all critical machines**. In case of power spikes/failures, you will be protecting your equipment. Power Conditioners can minimize the effect of power spikes/sags. Battery backups allow time to shut down prior to data loss, and protect critical operating systems.

8. **Training** is crucial in the care of your technology. For every part of a system that you operate, there may be a training opportunity to save you time and money down the road. We strongly encourage customers to take the time to learn their systems in advance of the emergency/"after hours" situations rather than requiring "training on the fly".

9. We offer **proactive monitoring** and **two-factor remote access**. The "Virtual Technician", a Remote Control and Monitoring Tool that is a requirement for all new Point of Sale clients. It allows our staff & those within your organization to remotely access your site(s). "Virtual Technician" uses two-factor authentication, a Payment Card Industry (PCI) recommended means of preventing an intrusion into the business from outside/unrelated computer users (aka 'hackers'). Additionally, the "Virtual Technician" can aware you of computers running out of disk space, not completing an end-of-day process, or simply can send an e-mail alert if the credit card batch hasn't settled in over 24 hours (which would affect your cash flow). We also offer a secondary means of connecting to your sites, which is geared toward the mobile and Macintosh users. Please inquire if you'd like to purchase this as a cost-effective complement for your business.

10. **Paper & Ribbon** is offered to our customers in the form of a "buyer's club", which simply means that we have negotiated a stable rate, which we pass along to you. Paper & Ribbon fees are listed on our website. We have the best prices on printer ribbons and the length of our paper rolls are the longest available, which simply means they will last longer and are not required to be changed as often.

11. An additional area that is often a challenge for many in the technology world is what we might term, "not in any manual" services. This is a situation where no one has the expertise (sometimes, not even the manufacturer) to the solution to a problem. Our specialty is in solving these 'hard to resolve' issues; however, they often come at a cost - in terms of time & money. Our time is extremely valuable, but we often get involved in projects that are beyond the scope of anyone's knowledgebase. It might be to sit on the phone with Microsoft, AT&T, HP, First Data Merchant Services or Samsung on your behalf. It might include contacting Netgear to get assistance with a new router that the manuals don't accurately provide information about. It is our right to bill at full price for these situations if we are asked to be involved; however, we often share the risk if we feel we are out of our element or if we can't solve the problem in what we might consider a reasonable period of time, even if this "reasonable period" has not been defined by us, by you, or by the manufacturer.

We hope these confidential guidelines provide your organization with a better understanding of how we operate and allow you to utilize our services in more cost-effective ways, should we begin working together.