What Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) Look for in an IT Provider

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In the digital age, the role of IT in education is pivotal. Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) face unique challenges in ensuring their schools have robust, reliable, and forward-thinking IT solutions. When partnering with an IT provider, MATs consider several critical factors to ensure they receive value, scalability, and exceptional support. Here's what MATs look for when selecting an IT provider:

1. **Scalability and Flexibility**

MATs manage multiple schools, each with varying needs and resources. An ideal IT provider offers scalable solutions that grow alongside the trust. Whether integrating new schools into the trust or expanding IT infrastructure, flexibility is key. Providers must accommodate the specific requirements of primary schools, secondary schools, or special educational needs (SEN) institutions within the trust.

2. **Centralised IT Management**

One of the core advantages of a MAT is its centralised administration, which extends to IT services. MATs seek providers capable of delivering centralised management tools, enabling seamless control over devices, networks, and systems across multiple locations. Centralisation streamlines operations, reduces redundancy, and lowers costs.

3. Robust Security and Compliance

With schools increasingly dependent on digital tools, cybersecurity is a top priority. MATs require IT providers to implement robust security measures, including firewalls, endpoint protection, and regular vulnerability assessments. Additionally, compliance with regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is non-negotiable. Providers must ensure data protection for both staff and students while offering training to enhance cybersecurity awareness across the trust.

4. Cost-Effective Solutions

Education budgets are often tight, and MATs look for providers who deliver cost-effective yet high-quality IT services. This means offering clear pricing models, minimising hidden costs, and maximising value. Providers who demonstrate how their solutions reduce long-term expenses—such as energy-efficient hardware or cloud-based systems—gain a competitive edge.

5. Reliable Support and Maintenance

Downtime can disrupt teaching and learning. MATs value IT providers who offer fast, reliable support with clear service-level agreements (SLAs). Proactive maintenance, 24/7 helpdesk services, and rapid response times are essential to ensure that schools' IT systems run smoothly.

6. Integration with Existing Systems

Most MATs already have IT infrastructures in place. An ideal IT provider offers seamless integration with existing systems, reducing disruptions during onboarding. Providers who understand educational technology tools like management information systems (MIS), virtual learning environments (VLEs), and cloud-based platforms like Microsoft Teams or Google Workspace are especially desirable.

7. Focus on Innovation

MATs are forward-thinking organisations. They look for IT providers that prioritise innovation, offering cutting-edge solutions that enhance teaching, learning, and administrative efficiency. Providers who keep MATs ahead of trends—whether through AI-driven insights, e-learning platforms, or next-

generation hardware—are highly valued.

8. **Strong Track Record in Education**

Experience matters. Providers with a proven history of working with educational institutions and an understanding of the unique challenges faced by schools are more likely to build trust. MATs often seek references, case studies, or testimonials to verify a provider's expertise in education.

9. **Training and Development**

Finally, MATs value providers who empower staff with training and professional development. Whether it's training on cybersecurity, using new software, or implementing digital learning tools, an IT provider that supports continuous skill-building adds significant value.

Conclusion

For MATs, choosing the right IT provider is about more than technology—it's about finding a partner who understands their mission to provide exceptional education. Providers who offer scalable, secure, cost-effective, and innovative solutions, coupled with reliable support, stand out as ideal partners for MATs aiming to future-proof their schools.