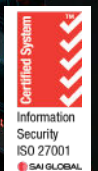


Are you putting IBM Systems at risk?

6 things you must know before
choosing third party maintenance



As every business is looking to optimise processes and reduce ongoing costs, some organisations using IBM servers or storage solutions are looking at third-party maintenance providers for their hardware maintenance. While this might often seem like a convenient option (especially where savings could be involved), before making the decision, you should ensure that you understand all potential risks involved in having machines that are not supported under an IBM Maintenance Agreement.

In this guide, we have put together the key risks and potential consequences for your business if you decide to go with a third-party IBM Systems maintenance provider. They include:



Missing out on system firmware updates



Lack of IBM code fixes



No access to problem diagnosis support & decoding tools via ESA



Inability to escalate problems to IBM



Restricted IBM customer engineer login service procedures



Security vulnerabilities

01

Missing out on system firmware updates

When a system is covered by IBM Warranty or under an IBM Maintenance Agreement, your company (directly or through your IBM partner) can order an Update Access Key (UAK) from IBM. As the name suggests, this key provides access to perform updates of Server Firmware on the server. When entered, it sets a date in the Service Processor that we will call the UAK expiry date.

As Server Firmware levels have a build date associated with them, the UAK expiry date determines which levels of Server Firmware may be applied. This means that:

- ➔ If the build level of the Server Firmware to be installed is **before** the UAK expiry date, then the update **will be allowed**.
- ➔ If the build date of the Server Firmware is **after** the UAK expiry date, then the update **will not be allowed**.

In other words, if you choose to stop your IBM Maintenance Agreement, you will only be able to install Server Firmware with a build date that's before the UAK expiry date for each system.

02

Lack of IBM code fixes

If your machine is **not covered** by an IBM Maintenance Agreement or Warranty, your business **will not be entitled** to download:

- ➔ Server Firmware,
- ➔ Device and adapter microcode,
- ➔ IBM i PTFs, or
- ➔ Any other forms of code from the IBM Fix Central site

This is because IBM Fix Central specifies the Machine Type and Serial Number when you order that code.

03

No access to problem diagnosis support & decoding tools via ESA

The IBM Electronic Service Agent (ESA) problem reporting utility is an extremely important tool for providing timely service to IBM Systems. However, the ESA requires an IBM Hardware Maintenance Agreement to be used.

When a machine calls home to the IBM Cognitive Support Platform (CSP), an entitlement check is performed. If no entitlement is found for the machine - as would be the case if you decide to terminate your IBM Maintenance Agreements covering your machines - then the call home is rejected, and **no service call is opened.**

The use of ESA to upload diagnostic data to IBM when a problem is reported is critical for IBM's ability to diagnose issues quickly, and therefore rectify them in a timely manner. When uploaded for a problem, this information is available to IBM's various levels of support, starting with the Level 1 Remote Technical Support team, who perform initial call screening and case handling, all the way up to the Development teams in the various manufacturing plants worldwide. Without ESA, **this ability is lost.**

In addition, third-party maintenance providers do **not have access** to the decoding tools to analyse diagnostic data uploaded to IBM via the Electronic Service Agent.

04

Inability to escalate problems to IBM

With no coverage under an IBM Maintenance Agreement, it is **not possible to escalate** a problem to any higher levels of the IBM support structure. The only option that a third-party maintenance provider has for machine support is that of parts replacement, whereby they hope that by replacing parts, they can fix an issue. While it is likely the cause of the problem in most instances, the replacement part is quite obvious. For example, failed disk, an expired cache battery, a fibre channel network issue.

05

Restricted IBM customer engineer login service procedures

The fact that machines are managed by Server Firmware means that there will be instances where a problem can only be addressed with a Server Firmware update, as discussed earlier. There are various service procedures that require an IBM Customer Engineer login password to be used to access the Service Processor of the Power Systems server.

These CELOGIN passwords are **IBM Confidential** - meaning that they **cannot be provided** to a third-party maintenance provider. As such, there will be certain service utilities, some of which might be vital in recovering an issue on a server, that the third-party maintenance provider **will be unable to perform**.



Security vulnerabilities

When security vulnerabilities are found in various pieces of code, not necessarily IBM code, but in industry-standard code such as SSH or HTTP, the fixes for those issues are provided in updates to the code in the machine that they affect. For an IBM Power System this has a twofold impact - where the code change to address a security vulnerability might be provided in Server Firmware with **access controlled by the UAK**, or in the Code of the Hardware Management Console (HMC) that manages that Power server.

Summary

There are quite a few disadvantages of not having a machine supported under an IBM Maintenance Agreement or Warranty. Unless your machine is affected by a relatively simple hardware component issue, the net result is that a service call could quite conceivably be extended through the inability to analyse and rectify it in a timely manner. Depending on the type of failure(s) you might encounter, their impact could prove detrimental for your business.

That's why it's critical that before deciding to go with a third-party maintenance provider, you understand all the associated risks and their potential impact on your organisation and consider if you are willing to accept them.

If you have questions about maintenance on your IBM Systems, we can help.

Evolution Systems is Australia's leading provider of IBM i in the cloud and an IBM Gold Partner with Specialist competencies in IBM Power and Storage products. We specialise in providing IBM Power Systems solutions for AIX, IBM i and Linux along with IBM Flash Storage Systems and software products to maximise your investment. We have extensive and proven hands-on knowledge of IBM solutions allows us to provide you with expert support when it comes to unifying, managing and protecting data from threats, accelerating workloads, exploiting multicloud and more, by leveraging industry-leading solutions.

Let's talk about how we can support your IBM Systems maintenance needs



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