



 eBook

Six Months Later:

Secrets of Choosing RMM Tools that Last

Introduction

As an MSP, you want products that stand the test of time—those that help you grow, grow with you, and those that don't require you to switch vendors every six or twelve months. Yet it can often be difficult to evaluate a product's longevity within a short trial period.

Here's why.

Businesses often choose products based on feature sets. However, this mindset covers only what the product does for your team; equally important is how it works. This is the realm of user experience (UX). A product with good UX can not only make your technicians' lives easier now, but have a major impact on your business down the line. How do you know whether a product will still be a joy to work with after your honeymoon period as a customer is over?

It starts with understanding user experience—and how it applies to your business. This guide explains what UX is, why it's quintessential to your MSP's success, and how you can approach your software trial periods with this mindset.

Before we start, it may be helpful to define what we mean when we say user experience. On a micro- level, we refer to all the interactions users have with products. This refers to how easy it is to get set up or how efficient tasks are months down the line. But on a macrolevel, it refers to the full experience someone has with a company—not just the products they use, but the support and education they receive. This guide will cover both perspectives.



Choose Wisely

Great products should extend what you already do. While there's always a little bit of setup, configuration, and learning required, products should eventually become intuitive enough to make your day job much smoother. An example may illustrate this. Technicians often have to ask questions of their colleagues to accomplish a task; a remote access tool that lets people chat behind the scenes and transfer sessions can facilitate this communication without requiring anyone even leave their desk. This feature enhancement can save technicians significant time over months and years.

On the flip side, choosing the wrong tools can have negative impacts on your business later. MSPs need tools that can stand the test of time; selecting the wrong products can weigh your team down like an anchor.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF PICKING THE WRONG TOOLS:

Inefficiency

Efficiency plays a major role in driving MSP profitability. Every moment a technician wastes navigating a clunky UI is time they can't spend on more lucrative, billable projects.

Mistakes

Imagine this scenario—someone logs into their RMM platform, and notices a major check has failed. They've had a long, tiring day, and forget a major step required for fixing an issue. Their mistake disrupts a customer's business operations, and now they must scramble through an obstacle-course UI to fix it. Good UX designers plan for these scenarios, knowing that users are often under pressure. If your RMM product hasn't been designed to prevent critical errors, you could wind up losing a customer.

Longer employee onboarding

In general, a well-designed application should have a gentle learning curve that lets technicians get up to speed quickly. When a new employee comes on board, it takes time to get them contributing fully. A good product takes less time for someone to learn.

Losing employees

Working in an MSP can be stressful. These stresses can propel technicians to look for greener pastures elsewhere. While those who leave often cite reasons like pay or management, quite a few leave because of the small stresses that add up. If your RMM tool, which your team needs to run the business, adds to their daily pressures, it can add up enough to cause them to start looking.

What User Experience Isn't

If you've heard the term UX already, you may have ideas in your head of what the field does; however, there are some misconceptions. Let's dispel a few common myths.

✘ Visuals

Visual design plays a role. But UX isn't about how pretty an application is—it's about how easily someone accomplishes critical tasks. In fact, a "pretty" UI can sometimes mask the underlying usability issues of the product. It may hook you during the trial period, but over time, it can wear on you and your team. Good designers don't focus only on aesthetics; they use design to help communicate and help you with your job. For example, the dashboard within SolarWinds® RMM uses visual elements to quickly draw attention to devices that need attention. This design is functional, not just pleasing. Additionally, our team has chosen an icon scheme that relies on shapes rather than colors to support color-impaired users. In other words, the best paint job won't help you if the car doesn't run smoothly.

✘ Number of Clicks

Often, people try to measure the number of clicks it takes to accomplish a task. This isn't the best metric to measure the usability of a product (or evaluate it yourself). Instead, you want to focus on user satisfaction and how people feel about the tasks they've accomplished. In fact, there may be situations where more clicks are preferable. For example, there may be a good reason to delete a large amount of data at once, but if the system didn't warn users first, someone may accidentally delete critical customer data.

✘ Ease of Use

Ease of use is important, but ease of use is also relative. While a graphic designer may need Adobe® Photoshop®, most people won't need the bells and whistles and could get away with a simple image editing tool. Similarly, ease of use can apply to technicians, with some tasks being easier for senior techs, and others easier for junior techs. This makes it crucial for multiple members of a team to test a product to ensure it's effective for the entire workforce.

✘ Educated Guesses

True UX teams don't just design in a vacuum; they test these designs with real users. These tests can range from seeing people using a feature, user interviews, or panel discussions. Regardless, a good company frequently requests the input of their users to learn what features they need and, more importantly, how best to build them. SolarWinds MSP employs a full user experience team, including full-time UX researchers who test designs with users before rolling them out to the full MSP partner base.

Evaluating a Product for UX and Longevity

When you're evaluating a product, try to evaluate based on how easy it'll make your life in the future, rather than just the features offered. Ultimately, it boils down to a couple questions:

Q. Is it easy to use?

It should make your team's job easier and help you deliver services your customers love and continue paying for.

Q. Is it useful?

It needs to fill a need for your company, whether that's being able to generate revenue from new services or streamlining tasks to free up technicians' time.

Of course, you may want more detail. **Here are some tips.**

1

Make sure techs use the product

This may seem like a no-brainer, but in many businesses, managers choose tools without letting their teams get their hands dirty. The people who will use the product need to evaluate it. Depending on the size of your company, you may want to have techs of different experience levels use the product and compare notes. A junior tech may approach it from a different angle than an experienced tech. But in the end, both need to have the ability to do their jobs. Any good product should design for both.

2

Make sure it's easy to learn

In an ideal world, everyone would immediately grasp how to use an application. But in reality, every application takes time to learn. Instead, look to see if the application offers good instructional materials. Does it offer online help? A support team? What about a support community? Sometimes, there are full forums where you can ask questions, which can be particularly helpful for technical queries. A team can build one of the greatest ships ever, but a company should still offer life preservers for those who get stuck.

3

Multiple paths

We've spoken a bit about how a good application supports multiple types of users. People have preferences. Some may want to walk through a wizard for a task while others may prefer to quickly memorize the steps and skip ahead. If a product offers multiple paths to accomplish a task, this could be a good sign. For example, SolarWinds RMM offers multiple methods of automating tasks. For those unfamiliar with scripting, they can use our drag-and-drop automation editor to set up task flows. If they're fluent in a scripting language, they can write and upload their own.



4 Setting up new customers

This tip is specific to the needs of MSPs, but it's worth mentioning when you're evaluating products. As your business grows, you'll spend significant time setting up new customers. Your RMM tools should make this process easy, ideally automating as much as possible. For example, when onboarding new customers, you should be able to add settings for their account. Once a new device (or several) gets added, they should inherit settings from the customer's account profile. This way, all devices can be pre-loaded with specific policies, features (like antivirus), and the right remote access tools. This lets you spin up a new customer fast, and make manual tweaks to machines as needed. Over the course of your MSP's life, you'll add enough devices and customers that you'll likely end up saving significant hours and money.

5 Look beyond the product

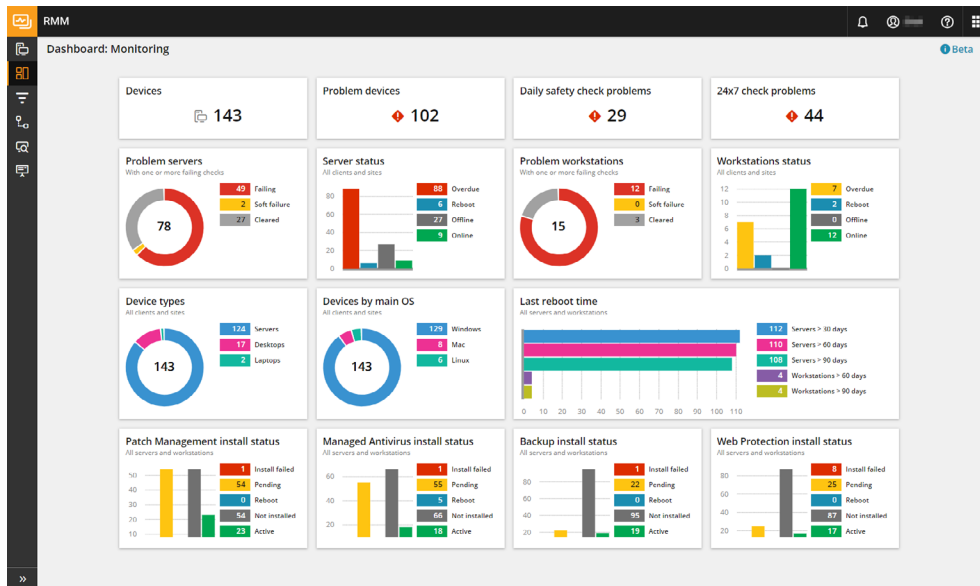
A good company sticks by you. They know that you have a job to do and goals to attain, and while they do provide a product, they have their eyes on the ultimate prize—your bottom line. For example, SolarWinds MSP offers comprehensive training and support outside of the product. Especially if you come from a more technical background, our [MSP Institute](#) and [MSP Advice Project](#) offer advice on business topics, like sales, marketing, management, and even getting into new services, like security.

6 Longevity

Switching vendors is a hassle for any business. The MSP space is filled with acquisitions and changes of management, each of which could affect your business. If you want tools for long-term success, consider the length of time the vendor has been in business. SolarWinds is celebrating its 20th anniversary, so we're not going anywhere. And we continue investing in both product development and user experience. In fact, if you become a customer, you can contribute to the usability improvements in the product by joining our VIP program, where you can give feedback and join tests. If you want to build a long-term legacy or a short-term side business, SolarWinds MSP will be around to help get you there.



About SolarWinds RMM



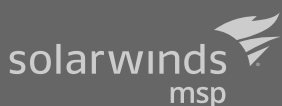
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30 days, full version

As a company, SolarWinds MSP has been leading the charge for MSPs for years. Its flagship product, SolarWinds RMM, was built to make running an MSP easier. By integrating multiple features into one dashboard, SolarWinds RMM helps your team manage the entire customer base from a central location, cutting out a lot of product switching and reducing inefficiencies in your MSP. And with our 20 years of experience, you know we're not going anywhere.

Ready to kick the tires yourself?

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