

Don't invest \$70,000 without knowing all the facts. 10 things you should know about your computer consultants

Computers are a part of every day life. From the home to the business, they are used in almost every capacity, and you always want to keep your computers running at top performance. So how do you do that? The obvious answer is a full-time IT technician. The problem with this is IT technicians make, on average, \$70k/year. For small businesses, this amount could very well be a deathblow. The alternative to this is a computer consultant, but this is similar to throwing darts blindfolded. You have to hope you "hit the bulls-eye". So here are some simple questions to ask before signing a contract with any computer consultant.

Consultant Availability

It is always important to ensure that your computer consultant can be there when you need him most. Make sure your consultant is running a full-time consulting service. Ask about after hour support, and response time. Make sure these answers are well documented in the contracts.

Generalist or Specialist?

Most computer consultants say they can do everything; the reality is they are Generalist, who know a little about everything. This is usually what people want, a single person or company to call when a problem exists. However, Generalist usually can't handle problems they encounter with off brand or old equipment, software, and operating systems. Make sure the consultant can handle all of your computer systems. If he can't, ask him who he knows that can help with that specific device.

Reseller, True Consultant or Hybrid

It's important to know the relationship between a computer consultant and his vendors. Don't get stuck with being forced to purchase equipment without shopping around. In some cases, consultants will suggest or recommend a product only based on their profit margin, and not on what is best for you.

Project Length and milestones?

If you are looking for a computer consultant for a long-term project, be sure the consultant fully understands everything about the project. Make sure the contract defines a length of time it should take to complete the project, and make sure it includes milestones, or stepping points, that are clear and concise to help you know things are moving along on schedule. Don't sign a contract without it. It may end up taking twice as long, and cost you twice as much.

R&D and skills development

Ask your computer consultant how he/she keeps updated on skills and new technologies. Make sure he/she knows what is coming down the road and how it might be useful or not to your environment.

Explain and educate you?

Computer Consultants often feel threatened when asked how to fix something, or what went wrong. Make sure your consultant is comfortable explaining these topics to you in terms you understand. A good I.T. Consultant is happy to share tips and tricks that you can do yourself to save you money from having to call him in each time an issue comes up.

Reference Accounts

Always check references. Good computer consultants will be more than happy to provide names for you to call. Ask about long-term contracts, as well as the most recent new contracts. Ask about a client that didn't work out, and why. Most of all check the references you get carefully.

Cost and Billing Practices

Ask about their payment terms, rates, and minimums. Make sure you determine what is considered billable hours vs. non-billable. Ask about travel time, phone support charges, online/email support, and remote access support. Be sure your consultant fully discloses his rate for after hour support, and emergency services. Make sure the consultant you choose is up front, honest, and most of all, discloses all charges to you.

Are you members of the ICCA?

The Independent Computer Consultants Association (ICCA) is a national, not for profit organization of computer consulting firms. Members of the ICCA are held to the highest ethical and professional standards. Therefore, you can be assured that the consultant will be fair and just when dealing with your company.

Beware of a consultant that attempts to “snow you” with technical jargon.

If a prospective consultant tries to explain everything they do in “tech-talk” they are usually trying to avoid the question. On average, if someone sounds like they know what they're talking about, they are believed. If something is unclear or unsure, and you ask for clarification, the consultant should be able to explain it without resorting to technical jargon. If they can't, they're not a solid prospect.

These simple steps are a guideline to make the process of hiring a computer consultant easier. By no means should you hire a consultant based on these facts alone. You should get as much information as possible before committing to any contract. Educate yourself fully on your potential consultants to make sure you are getting the exact services you need.

For more information, contact Nachman Networks at (240) 351-7510, (703) 599-5292 or info@davenetworks.com.