



“What Every Business Owner Must Know About Hiring an Honest, Competent, Responsive and Fairly Priced Computer Consulting Firm”

**Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data And
Operations To Just Anyone! This Business Advisory
Guide Will Arm You With 21 Revealing Questions You
Should Ask Any Computer Consultant Before Giving
Them Access To Your Company's Network**

Choosing the wrong computer consultant to support your network can be incredibly frustrating, expensive, and could end up costing you even more in downtime, data loss and expensive repair bills, not to mention the headaches, stress and frustration!



21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them To Support Your Network

Customer Service:

Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?

Our Answer: Skyward answers our phones live from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your calls?

Our Answer: Skyward guarantees to have a technician working on a problem within 60 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand?

Our Answer: Our technicians here at Skyward are not only specifically trained to resolve problems, but also to communicate the resolution in a manner in which can easily be understood. They will take the additional time answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms.

Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?

Our Answer: Skyward conducts quarterly review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive.

Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?

Our Answer: At Skyward, we provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.

Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect YOU?

Our Answer: Here's something to consider: if they cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we



live in, make sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance and workers' compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

Q7: Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and on budget?

Our Answer: All projects are fixed-priced and guaranteed to be completed on time, in writing. This is important because many unethical or incompetent computer guys will only quote "time and materials," which gives them free rein to nickel-and-dime you as well as take as much time as they want on completing a project.

Maintenance Of Your Network:

Q8: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?

Our Answer: Yes, our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q9: Do they provide you with a monthly report that shows all the updates, security patches and the status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?

Our Answer: Our clients get a detailed report that shows an overall health score of their network and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches and other important network checks (like hard-drive space, backups, speed and performance, etc.).

Q10: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the "keys to the kingdom"?

Our Answer: All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.
Side note: Never allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company.

Q11: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

Our Answer: Yes; and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client's account, any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off.

Q12: When they offer an "all-inclusive" support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are their "gotchas" hidden in the fine print?

Our Answer: Our "all-inclusive" support plan is just that – all-inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by consulting firms today is an "all-inclusive" or "all-you-can-eat" managed



services plan. These are actually a good thing because they'll save you a lot of money in the long run – however, make sure you really understand what is and isn't included.

Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/e-mail help desk included or extra?
- What about 3rd-party software support?
- What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you aren't happy with their services? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are off-site backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?

Backups And Disaster Recovery:

Q13: Do they insist on monitoring an off-site as well as an on-site backup, or are they letting you rely on tape backups?

Our Answer: Skyward encourages our clients to use multiple methods of protecting their data. Recommendations include an onsite backup as well as an offsite. We prefer for our clients to have an image based BDR backup system that allows for nearly instant restores in the event of a failure or outage.

Q14: Do they insist on doing periodic test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: We monitor our customers backups 24/7, 365. Unfortunately, that is not enough. We also perform a monthly “fire drill” and perform a monthly test to restore files from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency.

Q15: Do they insist on backing up your network before performing any type of project or upgrade?

Our Answer: We do; and that's simply as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.

Q16: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or one that enables you to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: All clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. We encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.



Technical Expertise And Support:

Q17: Is their help desk US-based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?

Our Answer: We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's important for keeping your data secure.

Q18: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training – or are they learning on your dime?

Our Answer: Our technicians are required to obtain and maintain certifications in for the software we support. Our hiring process is pretty stringent, over 75% of the technicians who apply don't make it through (guess who's hiring them?).

Q19: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?

Our Answer: Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally, show up on time, and if they cannot (For some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

Q20: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line-of-business applications?

Our Answer: We own the problems with all line-of-business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software – but we act as the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you.

Q21: When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT services, do they own the problem or do they say, “That’s not our problem to fix”?

Our Answer: We feel we should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.



5 More Mistakes To Avoid When Choosing A Computer Consulting Firm

1. **Choosing a firm based on a single phone call.** We recommend you invite them into your office and ask them for a written proposal. Be clear on what your expectations are and what type of problems you want them to resolve. As stated a moment ago, a competent professional should offer to do an audit of your network to diagnose your system before quoting you anything.
2. **Choosing a firm that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and for fixing things correctly. If you aren't pleased with a job that was done, they should (at a minimum) make it right; if they cannot resolve an issue to your satisfaction, you shouldn't get stuck with the bill.
3. **Choosing a firm without speaking to several of their current clients.** Check their references! Don't just take the sales guy's word that they are good – ask to speak to at least 3 or 4 clients that are similar to you in size and scope.
4. **Choosing a firm who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** In this day and age, a computer consultant who doesn't do this is living in the Stone Age. You want someone to do this because it will dramatically increase your network's security and will enable them to do faster repairs. That's not to say they shouldn't come on-site; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help AVOID problems cropping up in the first place.
5. **Choosing a firm that isn't local.**
While it's true that most things can be handled remotely, there are occasions when an onsite presence is needed. If your support firm is an hour away, it's going to take at least that long to get them onsite.

A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide to be helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision.

If you have any additional comments, questions or concerns, please let us know, we welcome them!