



7 CRITICAL QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK BEFORE HIRING AN IT SERVICES COMPANY

You're probably not reading this guide for fun. There are a multitude of reasons you might need this information, but it's likely that you're frustrated with your current IT situation and have reached your pain threshold. You need to hire a new IT services company or a different solution, but it's a challenge and there are a lot of unknowns.

We've organized a list of critical questions that you can ask a potential new IT services company so you find the best fit for your needs and finally eliminate your IT headaches.

- **How can I tell if this new IT company will be a good fit and is qualified to support my needs?**

- **What if the new IT company isn't any better than my current situation?**

- **What if things get worse?**

- **Can I trust this new company?**



1

Do I get an assigned team with a consistent group of IT professionals, or do I get a different person every time I call for support?

Some IT companies use a bank of resources for their helpline and each request gets queued for the next available support technician. It's a way for them to maximize their resources. The downside is that the support staff don't get to know your company, network, or unique needs very well which can mean extra time is needed to resolve even simple issues or recurring situations.

Our recommendation:

At InhouseCIO we provide each client with an assigned team who get to know your network and build relationships with your employees. Issues are resolved quicker and consistently, and it creates an opportunity to identify other areas to make things better for you.

What you should know

- An assigned team approach lets you have some say in how you work with your IT provider and how they manage requests
- When IT professionals get to know your company and systems, they're better able to identify improvements or technology that can benefit your operations



2

What is your response time to our requests and does a live person answer your phones?

This is the kind of question you'll want to be sure you get in writing. Any IT services company should be able to quickly answer this question and include it in their contract to you – so you're both clear on expectations. Some companies have an answering service or send calls to voicemail, which isn't always reassuring when you have an urgent request.

Our recommendation:

A pivotal role on our InhouseCIO team is our Service Team Coordinator whose first responsibility is to answer the phone. We have 5 different response times for requests ranging from "Critical" which is logged within 5 minutes with a response time within 30 minutes, to "Normal" which is logged within an hour and has a response time within one business day.

What you should know

- Not all requests should be treated the same and should be responded to and queued based on their urgency and other parameters you agree to with your service provider
- Reputable IT service companies will have a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) that they can share with you so you have a clear understanding of their response times.



3

Is everyone on your team, including your Help Desk, an employee or do you have contractors?

It's a common practice in the IT industry to have a series of contractors instead of their own employees. Third party companies often fill the role of Help Desk support for example. It might seem like an IT service company has 20 employees, but in fact they have 2 or 3 and the rest of their team is made up of independent contractors or third parties. While this might not seem like a big issue, it often leads to a big disconnect between your company and the service provider. Be persistent with this question so you know who on their team is on payroll and who isn't.

Our recommendation:

We believe that the best customer service comes from exclusively having our own employees. It allows us to control the quality of the work we do and how we support our client's needs.

What you should know

- Using outsourced contractors or companies can work in rare situations. If you opt to go this route, monitor the level of service and be sure to notify your service provider if quality drops
- Both you and your service provider have better control over the relationship, expectations, standards, and processes when you're working with employees instead of contractors.



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Do you have well documented systems and processes to support our company?

Your IT service company should not fly by the seat of their pants when it comes to supporting your employees and your network. But the truth is, many know a lot about IT but lack well documented systems and processes to deliver. This makes it difficult for them to be effective and efficient, which trickles down to the level of service you receive. It might mean that some days and weeks you get great support, while other times you get substandard support. It might also mean inconsistency and missing out on opportunities to identify better and more cost-effective ways to do things.

Our recommendation:

The InhouseCIO team is a diverse group. We're all passionate about IT but we have a mix of technical people and leaders with experience working with midmarket and enterprise companies where these kinds of systems and processes are standard practice. We're all about documentation, systemization, and processes because we know it lets us deliver better results to our clients.

What you should know

- A good, systematic approach to IT management should include consistent service, a technology playbook, and regular strategic reviews with a goal of continual improvement
- A lack of documented systems and processes can mean employees are unhappy with service or critical things are missed or done incorrectly – which can be disastrous



5

Do you insist on having an onsite and offsite backup solution and how often do you test them?

Using a combination of onsite and offsite backups is a best practice in the IT industry. But you might be surprised to learn that not all providers insist on using both. Using onsite and offsite backups helps minimize the risk. If something should happen to compromise one of the backups, the other is at a different location and available to restore your network.

Another obvious - but not always used - best practice, is regular, full-blown tests of your backup. This doesn't just mean confirming the backup is done, but also testing to confirm you can restore the backup when necessary. This is like the fire drill of data recovery.

What you should know

Testing your backups tells you your process works, how long it will take you to get your system back up and running, and lets you troubleshoot any issues during testing instead of during a disaster.

Both onsite and offsite backups have their advantages. Onsite backups give you immediate access to data at your location, tend to be cheaper, and don't require internet access. Offsite give you access via the internet, preserves your data should something happen on site, and allows data to be more easily shared across multiple locations.

Our recommendation:

Our approach at InhouseCIO is to provide clients with redundancy, backup and disaster recovery. This means onsite and offsite backups. We also look at backup alerts in real time and conduct semi-annual backup testing. We also provide reports to our clients that provide the backup and testing details, so they have peace of mind.



6

Do I have to buy hardware and software from you?

A lot of IT service providers also sell hardware and software, from which they usually make a healthy profit. Depending on the nature of the contract, some providers might require that new software and hardware be purchased through them. The biggest problem with this model is that it often results in frequent recommendations for new hardware or software, which seems like a conflict of interest.

Our recommendation:

At InhouseCIO, we assist you with the procurement process, but we don't make a dime when you buy new hardware or software. We do not sell any hardware or software because we want to avoid this conflict of interest.

What you should know

- The longer you work with an IT provider, the better they will get to know your company and its needs. This should result in them being able to both make recommendations for purchases and tell you what can wait and what is urgent.
- Ask potential IT service providers if they will work with your existing vendor or let you shop around for suppliers. Many won't.



7

Do you provide flat fee pricing, is your all-inclusive support plan truly all-inclusive, how do you charge for special projects, and are their “gotchas” hidden in the fine print?

The bait and switch approach isn't new and isn't exclusive to IT service providers. You don't want to sign up for one of their plans, which you think is all inclusive, and then end up with other additional costs that take you beyond your budget. It's not uncommon to see additional fees for big projects, costs for services they deem outside of the scope of the contract, higher than expected rates for experts etc. A lot of these projects not covered by their plan are billed on an hourly basis. You can ask for a fixed fee for a project but not all are willing to do that. Most service providers bill by the hour for individual projects.

Our recommendation:

Look for transparency between you and your service provider. That's the approach we take. We've clearly defined 3 service plans so you have a choice, know exactly what you're getting and what you're paying each month. We clearly define what we mean by all inclusive. Our platinum plan covers all projects and our other plans provide clients with a fixed fee cost for projects so they have peace of mind.

What you should know

- If you have special circumstances or specific projects, get clarification that they are covered within the contract or ask for a separate quote.
- You're usually better off to insist on a fixed fee price for project. If you opt for an hourly-rate approach clearly define what is included so you don't end up paying for work that you weren't originally aware of.
- Ask potential providers if they have all inclusive plans that include project work. This is the best scenario for most businesses, but most IT service providers don't offer this as an option

A person is shown from the chest up, holding two bright green apples. The background is a blurred grocery store aisle with various items on shelves. The overall image has a light blue overlay.

BONUS EVALUATION CARD

Comparing apples to apples to oranges.

Use the following table to compare the plans and approaches of the different IT service providers you talk to. We recommend you talk to different providers so you get a sense of what's out there and what you do and don't like. We've even put some of our details in there to get you started. When you're ready for the full picture on what we offer, visit our website to [Request a Quote](#), or give us a call at 773-530-1234.

**REQUEST A QUOTE
TODAY**

	InhouseCIO	Company 2	Company 3
Assigned team?	Yes		
Response time?	Critical service tickets are logged within 5 minutes and have a response time of within 30 minutes		
Live person or voicemail?	Live person		
Is your help desk employees, contractors, or 3rd parties?	All employees		
Are your technicians employees, contractors, or 3rd parties?	All employees		
Systems and processes?	Yes, Standard Operating Procedures and IT Runbook used for all clients		

	InhouseCIO	Company 2	Company 3
Onsite or offsite backups?	Both onsite and offsite		
Backup testing?	Yes, semi-annually		
Do I receive reports of my backups?	Yes		
Do I have to purchase their hardware or software?	No, but we'll help you source it		
All inclusive plan options?	Yes, and they're truly all inclusive		
Fixed monthly fees for service plans?	Yes		
Hourly or fixed fee for projects?	Fixed fee		
Any additional fees for services not included in the contract?	No		

A person's hands are shown holding a large green apple. The background is a soft-focus image of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO DEAL WITH IT HEADACHES

IT problems are not fun. Don't be held back.

You can do better. Visit our website to [Request a Quote](#), or give us a call at 773-530-1234.

**REQUEST A QUOTE
TODAY**