

18 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: We strive to answer our phones live from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and if the phone isn't answered live it's because we are on another call or with a client. We give all business clients an emergency after hours number they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it to be 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: We guarantee to have someone respond to your service request 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 (not geek-speak), or do they come across arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. Just look at what Paul Knupp, Controller, Accu-Bore Directional Drilling, Inc., in Arroyo Grande, CA had to say:

“Lyle has supported our Arroyo Grande based construction company since its inception in 2006. He has guided us strategically, set up our network, fixed things when they stopped working and has been a considerable asset to our company. He speaks in terms we understand, isn't aggressive in his billing and is a heck of a nice guy.”

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?

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Our Answer: We conduct quarterly reviews for our clients with Managed Services agreements to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal is help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive with these meetings. This service is also available for customers without Managed Services agreements and will be a billable on-site service.

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

Our Answer: 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 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 reign to nickel and dime you as well as take as much time as needed on completing a project.

Maintenance Of Your Network:

Q7: 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.

Q8: Do they provide you with a weekly report that shows all the updates, security patches, and status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?

Our Answer: Every week our clients can 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.). This report is sent if the client wants it, most don't.

Q9: 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?”

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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: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q10: 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.

Q11: 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 network upgrades, moves, or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd party software support? (support agreement required)
- 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?
- Is offsite backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about onsite support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?



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Backups And Disaster Recovery:

Q12: Do they INSIST on monitoring an offsite as well as an onsite backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?

Our Answer: We recommend our clients do not use tape backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We make sure all of our clients have the opportunity to have reliable on-site and off-site solutions in place.

Q13: Do they INSIST on doing periodical 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 perform a quarterly “fire drill” and perform a test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.

Q14: 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.

Q15: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or enable 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:

Q16: 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.

Q17: 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 WILL be the liaison between you and your

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vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you. Third party software support contract is required.

Q18: 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.