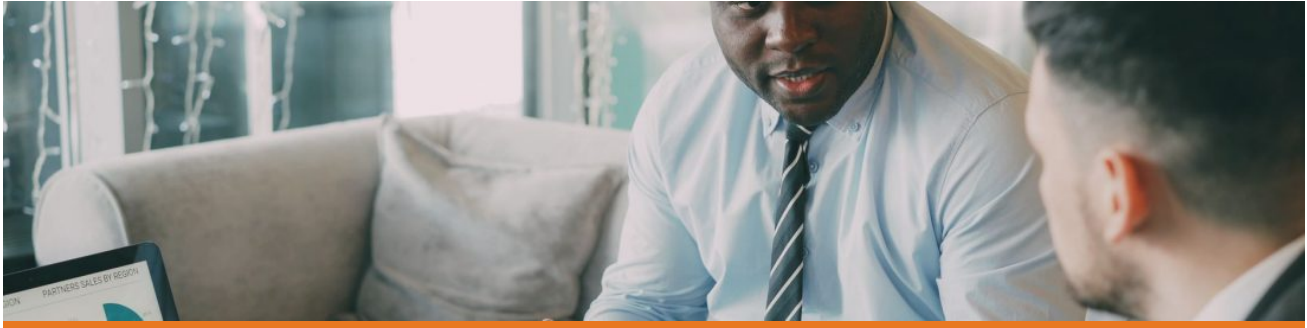




CHECKLIST

Twelve Questions to Ask Before You Sign an IT Contract

Every managed services quote looks alike. These twelve questions are the ones that do not, and the answers are where providers stop resembling each other.

Most IT proposals are hard to compare on purpose. They price a bundle, describe it in terms only the seller uses, and leave the parts that will actually matter to you unmentioned. That is not usually dishonesty. It is that the things which decide whether a relationship works in year three are awkward to put on a quote.

These are the questions worth asking in the room. Take the list with you, ask them out loud, and write down what you hear. A provider worth hiring will answer all twelve without hedging, and will tell you plainly where they are weak. Being told a limitation up front is the single best sign you are talking to somebody who intends to still be your provider in five years.

— Who actually does the work

Who will I be speaking to when something breaks, and will it be the same person next month? Ask for names and for the size of the team. High turnover is the most common reason a good relationship goes bad, and it shows up as having to re-explain your business every few months.

Is any of this subcontracted or offshored, and to whom? There is nothing wrong with either, but you should know before you sign, not when you hear an unfamiliar accent on a Sunday.

How many other clients does the engineer assigned to us carry? A number, not an adjective. This is what decides how long you wait when you are not on fire.

— What happens when something goes wrong

What are your service levels, and what happens when you miss one? Every provider has targets. Ask what the consequence is. A target with nothing behind it is a hope.

Walk me through the last time a client of yours lost a server. What did the first four hours look like? You are listening for a specific story, not a process diagram. Somebody who has actually done this will remember it in detail.

When did you last restore a client from backup, and was it a test or a real failure? Backups that have never been restored are a filing system, not a recovery plan. The answer should be recent and unremarkable.

— What you are actually buying

What is not included, and what does it cost when we need it? Ask for the out of scope list. Every agreement has one. A provider who says everything is included has either not read their own contract or is about to surprise you.

Who owns the licenses, the domain, and the documentation? All three should be in your name. If they are in the provider's, you are renting your own business.

If we leave in two years, what do we get, and how long does it take? A good answer is a short list and a number of days. Vagueness here is the most expensive kind.

— Whether they will still fit you later

What does the technology roadmap look like, and who writes it? You want equipment replaced on a plan and a budget rather than on the morning it dies. Somebody has to own that, and it should not be you.

What compliance work have you actually delivered, and for whom? If you have any obligation now or expect one, ask for specifics. Familiarity is not experience.

Can I speak to a client who looks like us, doing work like ours? Not the flagship reference. One with your headcount and your problems. Hesitation here tells you more than the call would have.

— One more thing worth doing

Ask every provider you are considering the same twelve questions, in the same order, and write the answers side by side. The differences will be obvious and they will not be the differences on the quotes. That comparison is usually worth more than another round of pricing.



Talk to us

440.210.1362 | contact@TechDynamix.com | TechDynamix.com

Lake County Office

1924 Mentor Avenue
Painesville, OH 44077

Summit County Office

156 N Main St, Suite #1
Hudson, OH 44236