

# The 17 Questions Your Computer Consultant Hopes You'll Never Ask

These 17 questions might scare off some consultants. There is a reason for each of the 17. Some are subtle, some are direct. Obviously you can modify or eliminate questions that you don't like.

How to use this form

Download <http://www.rescuemarketing.com/Rescue17QuestionsBlank.docx> (Microsoft Office 2007) or <http://www.rescuemarketing.com/Rescue17QuestionsBlank.doc> (Microsoft Office XP/2003).

At the top of these documents, you'll see the text "Please respond to these questions to assist me in deciding if you will be our next computer consultant" along with a greeting which you will want to customize for your name and business.

After customizing the text and greeting to your liking, print the document out and deliver to the prospective consultant(s) via fax, email, etc. If you prefer to do the interviews by phone, use the evaluation pages that follow this one.

Next, print the following pages out that serve as an evaluation form for each response you receive. You'll want to print a copy for each consultant you interview and use them to assess your choices. I've left room for notes with each question as well as my thoughts on what you should be looking for in the answers you receive.

Now, a few questions to ask yourself...

- Did the consultant make you feel stupid when answering your questions?
- Did your consultant make you "afraid" or hesitant to ask the next question?
- Did your consultant use "computer words" you don't know the meaning of - and fail to explain their meaning - or did they find a way to get the answer across in "plain English"?
- Did the consultant seem confident when answering your questions, or did they come off as arrogant and annoyed (even mildly) with your "stupid" questions?
- Did you get the feeling that the consultant is interested in you and the long-term success of your business, or are they just interested in getting another job?

I hope this helps you choose just the right consultant for your needs, whether it's myself or someone else.



PS: My answers to these questions are at  
<http://www.rescuemarketing.com/Rescue17Questions.pdf>

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Evaluation of the response from \_\_\_\_\_

Q1: How is your company different from all the other tech consultants who call me?

What you're looking for: What the consultant thinks is important about tech consultants. How the consultant speaks of his/her peers, as that may reflect how they will speak of you.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q2: What's your business background? Ever owned a business other than your consulting firm? Ever made a payroll?

What you're looking for: What the consultant thinks is important about business. Have they had to make payroll and hassle with business tax paperwork while trying to turn a profit and supervise employees and market their business? Do they understand what you face as a "real business owner" every day?

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: What's the goal of getting my company as a client?

What you're looking for: The consultant's vision of your business and their role in it. Are they there to fix a problem and leave (which is ok if that's what you want), or do they have something else in mind? The quality of their answer depends on what your needs are.

Comments:

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Q: Have you ever worked in my industry/line of work?

What you're looking for: What the consultant's industry background is and what it can offer your business.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: Can you train my people to use (choose a software program)?

What you're looking for: Does the consultant want to spend time with your staff? Do they feel comfortable doing training? It's ok if they aren't, regardless of the answer, you need to know depending on the type of work you need to have done.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: Do you document your work? If so, how?

What you're looking for: Does the consultant value your time as well as theirs by taking a few minutes to document what they are doing for you? Do they document their solutions so that you and your staff are able to use them without having to make repeated phone calls?

Evaluation/Comments:

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Q: Can you show me how to adjust my screen resolution?

What you're looking for: A demonstration that shows how the consultant handles teaching someone a task that they will often assume "everyone should know" how to do. What you don't want to experience is a roll of the eyes, a condescending tone of voice, and similar responses. What you do want to experience is patience and an ability to explain a concept that is simple to them in terms that anyone can understand – a task that occurs with great frequency in the technology world.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: How do you select hardware for recommendation to your clients?

What you're looking for: What kind of research do they perform? Have they done the legwork to establish relationships with quality vendors who can support them (and you) when needed, or do they purchase whatever Costco or Best Buy happen to have on the shelf that week? If the latter, what happens next week when Costco is out of that item?

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: Can I call you any time I have a computer problem?

What you're looking for: What preparations the consultant has for off-hour support, what their commitment to your company is, and what their business model is. Some consultants are not interested in doing support on "every little thing" because they are afraid to educate their clients about costs and benefits. Some are.

Evaluation/Comments:

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Q: I'm planning on doing some strategic planning for the next year. Would you be willing to sit down and talk with me about that? How does your strategic planning process work?

What you're looking for: What does the consultant's reaction tell you? Do they see their role as a partner to your business, or as an hourly contractor performing a particular job. There's a place for both. One thinks about your well-being in the long term. The other's concern is largely limited to the solution they are working on right now, next month or next year is not necessarily on their radar screen.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: Can you show me how to make a copy of this Microsoft Office CD? A friend of mine needs a copy for her new computer and she can't afford to buy it right now.

What you're looking for: Ethics. With few exceptions, copying software is illegal. While a growing number of programs allow you to legally use them at the office and at home, this does not allow you to give a copy to another person. Even the most incompetent consultant should be aware that the Microsoft Office license does not include free copies for your friends.

*Ask yourself this:* If the consultant will steal from Microsoft (or Apple or whoever) while you ARE looking, what will they do when you AREN'T looking?

Evaluation/Comments:

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Q: My employees always complain when I suggest getting a new or upgraded program to run the business. What do you think I should do about this?

What you're looking for: Most technology consultants aren't expected to be an expert in human relations, but this is a very common reaction by employees. What are they willing to do to help you sell a more efficient, profitable solution to your employees?

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: I think about getting rid of the old cash register and using a computer instead. What do you think?

What you're looking for: Their reason for moving to a computer-based cash register/point of sale. Is it for the sake of technology or to improve your business? Listen carefully to the answer.

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: When a consultant comes in to help us, my staff feels intimidated. Most of the time, I think they worry that this person is going to install a new program or computer equipment that is going to replace their job. It makes them mad at me and uncooperative with the consultant. How do you deal with that?

What you're looking for: How the consultant feels about the value of the employees you have spent time and money training and learning your business. How the consultant handles "people issues" and what might be perceived as a threat to their ability to do business with your company.

Evaluation/Comments:

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Q: Have you ever had a client whose business burned down? What happened?

What you're looking for: What kind of experience the consultant has handling emergencies and catastrophes. What preventive steps do they take to protect their customers' data and systems?

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: My budget is only \_\_\_\_\_. What we can do to make a difference in my business?

What you're looking for: Can the consultant solve problems on a budget? Can they assess your business technology-wise, as well as recommending inexpensive workflow and productivity changes, and help you without spending lots of money on equipment and software?

Evaluation/Comments:

Q: What do I do if I have a serious problem during school hours?

What you're looking for: Is the consultant a high school student? If so, does the firm have procedures in place to deal with customer emergencies when the technician who needs to help you is in high school during an emergency?

Evaluation/Comments: