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## QuickBooks® for Contractors Newsletter

### *Hiring Computer/IT Consultants*

With computer technology becoming more complex and sophisticated, many business owners are hiring independent computer/IT consultants to update their existing outdated computer systems and ensure that their business has the tools and training needed to run smoothly and efficiently.

The question is, as a business owner who is confused about more complex and sophisticated computer hardware and software – HOW do you find a GOOD computer/IT consultant?

We deal with “computer/IT consultants” every day – and believe me when I say – it seems like most of them know absolutely nothing...because they call us for free “support” (which is really training) while they are charging you (our customers) for their time. It’s incredibly frustrating to say the least!

#### **Tips for finding a good consultant:**

1. Be wary, VERY WARY, of the consultant who attempts to impress you with a bunch of technical jargon. A GOOD consultant should be able to explain things in terms that you understand. You should feel that they have your best interests at heart.
2. Be wary, VERY WARY of a consultant who wants to lock down your PC’s security so that only he/she has control over who can or cannot do things.
3. A GOOD consultant should listen to your needs, concerns and objectives BEFORE offering up solutions. They should understand your needs and translate that into technology solutions that will work for you.
4. Ask what their background is and how long they have been doing computer/IT consulting.
5. Ask for and check their references. It’s not necessary that they have done the exact same type of work for someone else, what is important is that their current customers are happy with them.
6. Ask them if they are familiar with the various software programs that you use – QuickBooks, QuickBooks integrated applications, other programs that you may use that others may not.
7. Ask them if they have someone who covers for them in case you cannot reach them and experience computer problems. Make sure you have that person’s or company’s contact information and perhaps even arrange for a meeting.
8. Don’t be afraid of a high hourly rate. An experienced computer/IT consultant can usually justify that rate because they can accomplish more in less time.
9. Ask around. Ask other business owners who they use for their computer/IT needs and are they happy with them.
10. Get it in writing. Ask for a price quote that details EVERYTHING: new computers, new printers, software updates, labor, timeframe, etc.

### **Some questions to ask the prospective computer/IT consultant:**

1. **How will you get all of our existing software on the new computer(s)?** If they tell you that they are going to “copy” your programs from the old machine to the new – be VERY WARY – computer software **MUST** be **installed** from either downloaded files or original installation CD’s, unless they have a special software program or intend to take your original hard drive and put it in the new computer. While you can copy Word documents from one computer to another without a problem, you cannot copy the Word program from one computer to another.
2. **You’ve heard that Windows Vista has a User Account Control, can this be turned off, and if so does it cause any problems?** If they tell you that the Vista User Account Control can be turned off and not cause any problems at all, be VERY WARY, because this is absolutely not true in the case of using QuickBooks integrated applications with your QuickBooks software.
3. **Do you have a “day” job?** Meaning are you moonlighting and what hours will you be available? Will you be comfortable with someone who is only available “after hours” when computer problems often happen during “business hours”?
4. **Are there other people who work at your company?** This question determines if they are a solo practitioner or part of a larger company. If they are part of a larger company, find out if others will be involved with your account, and what their background is.
5. **What “size” is your typical client?** This helps determine what size business the consultant is used to dealing with. If you hire a consultant who is used to working with large companies, it could mean that they are used to working with many PC’s and employees, but it can also mean that they are used to dealing with a much bigger technology budget than your company can afford.
6. **Does your company specialize in any specific product or services? and Do you act as a reseller for any specific computer hardware company?** These questions help you to understand what software products they specialize in, what kinds of computers they fix, install, and maintain. And, if for instance, they tell you that they are a Hewlett-Packard Reseller, it could mean that you are limited to only purchasing HP equipment.
7. **What kind of user and technical training can you provide?** With new computer technology comes a learning curve, asking this question will determine if the consultant you are about to hire will provide you with training through the learning curve, or if you are “on your own”.

### **Questions they should be asking you:**

1. **Do you have all of your software installation CD’s?** You will want to provide them with a complete list of software including versions – for example: QuickBooks Pro 2008, Microsoft Office 2003.
2. **Did you download any software directly from the internet without buying the program on CD? And, if so, do you have that original program download or can you get it again and from where.** Again, you’ll want to provide them with a complete list and whether or not you saved the program installation package to an existing computer, what the folder name is, and what the program name is; if you’ve not saved the program to your computer, provide them with the name and phone number of the company that you purchased the downloaded software from.
3. **Do you regularly back up your data file? Such as your QuickBooks company file, and how is the back up done?**
4. **Do you currently have Anti-Virus software?**
5. **Do you have old computer equipment, such as a printer that you absolutely need to keep?** This is a critical question because many old printers do not have updated drivers that will work with Windows Vista.

### Some General Stuff:

These are just some general tips for everyone in your company who uses a computer and are the biggest challenges that we face on a daily basis:

- Every user should KNOW where their data is – by data I mean, the location of the QuickBooks file and any other data that is stored by other programs; such as a QuickBooks integrated application.
- Every user should know how and if backups are done AND how to restore a back-up if the need arises.
- Make sure that every user has the proper training to keep your computer system and its data in tip-top shape.
- If you are a user of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party application, can your staff find the instructions on how to update the software or where to download a new program, in order to minimize wasted time for your IT person.
- Prepare and train your employees in BASIC computer use:
  - How to attach a file to an email.
  - How to save a file, where to save it and where to find it (NOT their desktop)
  - How to copy a file in one folder and paste it to another.
  - How to copy and paste text.
  - How to take a screen shot.
  - Remember to turn off their computer each and EVERY evening

### The Bottom Line:

Don't fall into a trap of hiring a computer consultant or consulting firm that isn't a good fit for your business!

Use these questions and tips to help you make informed business decisions. And if you have any doubts...don't be afraid to seek out a second opinion. After all you don't want someone who doesn't know what they are doing to be in charge of your computer system.



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