

“16 Critical Questions You MUST Ask Before Hiring Any IT Company”

If You Depend On Your Computer Network To Run Your Business, This Is One Guide You DON'T Want To Overlook!

This free guide will explain in simple, non-technical terms what you need to look for when outsourcing your IT support, as well as cost-saving strategies, insider tips and 16 revealing questions you MUST ask any computer consultant before giving him access to your computer network. If your current guy can't answer a confident “Yes” to all 16, it might be time to look for someone else.

You'll discover:

- The single most expensive mistake most small business owners make when hiring an IT consultant.
- The surprising reason that most small businesses fall victim to sub-standard support.
- What some IT consultants are doing to take advantage of business owners, and how to make sure you're not one of them.
- How to avoid expensive computer repair bills and get all the computer support you need for a low, fixed monthly rate.

A Free Guide By:



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A Letter From AGJ:

Why We Created This Guide and Who Should Read It



From the Desk of:

Ryan Giles

Partner, AGJ Systems & Networks Inc.

Dear Fellow Business Owner,

Hi, my name is Ryan Giles, and I'm a partner at AGJ. As a business owner myself, I know how insanely busy you are so I'll get right to the point of this guide.

Although we've never met, I'd be willing to bet that your computer network – and the critical data it holds – is not nearly as secure as you think it is. How do I know? Because over and over again I'm absolutely HORRIFIED by the incompetence and irresponsibility I find when I audit most business networks. In 98% of the computer networks I review, I find faulty or non-existent backups, security loopholes, terrible reporting, and flawed systems that simply cost more to maintain and don't align with the operations of the business.

Plus, hardly a week goes by where we don't get a '911 crisis call' from a business owner with a major technical disaster that COULD have been prevented. Why do so many businesses pay for substandard computer support? Simply because they don't know how to truly verify that their network IS secure and end up having to take someone at their word.

That's why we put together this guide for all the business owners in our area to EDUCATE them about what to look for in an IT consultant. Quite honestly, I'm shocked at the oversights and sloppiness of most self-proclaimed "experts" and want to see the standards raised. On the next page, you'll find a mini acid test you can use to determine whether or not your network really IS being supported properly.

If your IT guy cannot score a "perfect" score on this test, you need to really consider if your critical business infrastructure is in the best hands. If you have any questions regarding any of the information in this guide or would like to discuss any of these points further, please feel free to contact me or one of my team and we will be glad to offer any assistance we can without any obligations or high-pressure sales tactics.

In your service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan Giles". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

P.S. I would like to extend you a special "getting to know you" offer at the end of this guide. Due to resource limitations, I can't extend this offer to everybody, so I need you to act ASAP on this. It is a no-cost, no-obligation offer to give you the confidence that your technology infrastructure really is ready to support your business.

If your technician does not score a “yes” on every point, you could be paying for substandard support AND be wide open to a very expensive, very frustrating computer disaster:

- Do they answer their phones “live” and respond to critical support issues in 1 hour or less?
- Are they remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions, and security patches up to date?
- Do they INSIST on monitoring an offsite as well as an onsite backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?
- Do they INSIST on doing periodic test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?
- Have they provided you with written, network documentation detailing what software licenses you have, critical network passwords, and hardware information, or are they the only person with the “keys to the kingdom?”
- 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?
- Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?
- Do they explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak)?
- Do they complete projects on time and on budget, or does every project end up taking longer and costing more than you expected?
- Do they offer any guarantees on their services?
- Do they arrive on time and dress professionally?
- Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?
- Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training, or do you feel as though they are learning on your dime?
- Do they take calls from other clients while working on your network (and on your dime)?
- Do you have to manage their progress on projects, or do they provide frequent updates, status reports, and follow-up calls and e-mails?
- Do they offer flat-rate or fixed-fee project quotes, or do they give themselves a wide open playing field with “time and materials”

So, did your current IT guy score a 100?

Business Is Becoming (Technically) More Complicated

There is a powerful force driving all businesses to deliver superior products and services faster and on tighter margins—technology.

Every business, from small mom-and-pop stores to large enterprises, is developing a dependence on technology. Whether it's e-mail, e-commerce, websites, cloud computing, database management or accounting software, there are very few businesses that don't have some level of dependence on their computer network and the various applications and data it stores.

The upside of technological advances is tremendous. When applied correctly, technology can provide your business significant competitive advantages in faster production, increased productivity, improved customer service, and up-to-the-minute reporting for strategic planning and decision making.

The Downside of Technology

The downside of this vast dependence on technology is that, when it doesn't work, it can become a tremendous source of frustration, putting a major strain on production, sales and fulfillment. No business is immune from computer problems and failures. Without proper network maintenance, the average business can end up with spyware, viruses and system crashes that can easily turn into major network outages. And that's not including the daily computer "glitches" and problems that frustrate you and your employees.

Then there's the complexity of it all. Installing and supporting even a small network requires specialized knowledge and skills that most small-business owners don't have in-house, and the margin for error is greatly reduced in a small business. If a large corporation makes a \$50,000 technology mistake, it's certainly not a good thing, but it only represents a minor blip in their overall IT budget. If a small business makes a \$20,000, or even a \$10,000, technology mistake, it significantly impacts their profitability and cash flow!

If you're like most business owners, you probably shy away from things technical in nature because you don't understand how they work, why they work, or how to operate them. After all, what you want are business solutions to drive sales and profitability, not whiz-bang gadgets and budget-busting non-solutions that break and make your life more complicated. Yet the technology that runs your business is too important and too expensive to ignore.

- ✓ So how do you make sure that the hardware, software and solutions you are investing in actually support your business goals and work the way they are supposed to?
- ✓ How do you stay on top of technological advances that will give you significant competitive advantages while steering clear of the "latest and greatest" fads?
- ✓ How do you make sure your data is protected from an ever-growing list of threats, including viruses, hackers, spyware, faulty hardware and software, and even employee sabotage?
- ✓ And ultimately, how do you go about finding a reliable consultant who not only has the expertise to make all of this technology work for you, but also the business acumen to recommend and implement real solutions that enhance productivity and profitability?

That's what this guide is about: arming you with the basic information you need to find a trusted advisor who can help your small business tame technology and turn it into a powerful, competitive weapon instead of a huge financial strain and source of problems.

Computer Consultant Horror Stories

Unfortunately, there is no shortage of horror stories about unbelievably bad customer service from technology companies and computer consultants. They range from annoying computer support consultants who take forever to return a phone call to horror stories about fly-by-night computer repair shops or consultants who delete all the data stored on a network as a result of their unethical or incompetent behavior. If you talk with your own friends and colleagues, I'm sure you'll get an earful of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

The biggest reason for this is that the computer services industry is not regulated like many other industries. Almost anyone who can turn on a computer can set up a computer repair shop, regardless of his actual knowledge and expertise. Compare this to automotive repair shops, electricians, plumbers, lawyers, realtors, dentists, doctors and accountants (to name a few) who are heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, because the computer industry is still very new, there aren't many laws in existence to protect the consumer.

The upside is that most computer consultants are ethical and will not try to cheat you or take advantage of you. But unethical computer consultants aren't the biggest problem—incompetent consultants are. Even if they are honestly trying to do a good job, their inexperience can cost you dearly in inflated support bills, network performance, security and data loss.

That is where this guide will come in handy. It gives you basic, need-to-know facts to help you find an honest, competent consultant who can contribute to your business' success. By arming more business owners with this information, I am hoping to raise the standards within the computer repair and support industry, and to give you, the consumer, information to help you guard against the unethical conduct or incompetence of some companies and consultants.

What Are Your Options for Technical Support?

With the constant changes to technology and the daily development of new threats, even a small network requires ongoing maintenance from a highly-trained consultant to ward off viruses, spam, spyware, slowness, user errors and data loss. However, hiring a full-time IT person is not always feasible for small to medium businesses. If your business can't justify hiring an IT manager, you only have three options for computer support:

Option #1: Don't do anything.

This is really foolish, but we see it every day: businesses that don't pay attention to the care and maintenance of their network until it stops working. Then they are forced to call in an expert to repair or replace whatever caused the problem.

This reactive model of network support is similar to ignoring oil and filter changes in your car until smoke starts pouring out from under the hood. Taking a reactive approach to network maintenance is a surefire path to extensive downtime, lost data and excessive spending on IT support, not to mention major disruptions in staff productivity, sales, production

and customer service. Even if your computer network appears to be working fine, there are a number of daily, weekly and monthly maintenance tasks that must be performed to keep your data secure and your system running smoothly. A short list of these tasks includes:

- Virus scans and updates
- Security patches and updates
- System backups and disaster-recovery planning
- Spyware detection and removal
- Server and desktop optimization
- Employee policies and monitoring
- Spam filtering

If you run specialized practice-management, customer-relationship management, or production software, or if you have multiple locations, a wireless network, highly sensitive data (as in financial or medical organizations), or other specialized needs, the list will get longer. Remember, your computer network is just like your car or your house. They all need regular maintenance to avoid problems.

If you learn only one lesson from this guide, I hope it will be to proactively monitor, maintain and secure your network instead of choosing to react to network and computer problems as they arise. Aside from a telephone, your computer network and the data on it are the most important business tools in your office. When they are unavailable, all productive work comes to a grinding halt.

As the old saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; this goes double for your computer network. Unfortunately, most business owners are under the incorrect assumption that regular computer maintenance is not necessary and therefore only call in an experienced consultant when something goes wrong. As we stated earlier, this model of “break-fix” computer support is not a good idea, especially if the operation of your network and the data on it are important to your business.

Option #2: Do it yourself.

Although this option is better than doing nothing, it still puts you at risk for computer network disasters. Instead of hiring a qualified consultant to support your network, you designate the most technically-knowledgeable person on staff to be your makeshift IT manager, and bring in outside help only when you run into a network crisis you can't solve.

Problem is, you are pulling these people away from the real job you hired them to do, and unless they have the time to stay up-to-date on the latest developments in IT support, security, and management, they don't have the skills or time to properly maintain and secure your network (and could actually worsen the situation). This inevitably results in a network that is ill-maintained and unstable, which may cause excessive downtime, overspending on IT support, and expensive recovery costs.

Another variation of this option is to get your neighbor's kid or a friend to provide computer support on a part-time basis. This is a mistake for two reasons: First, they may not be fully qualified to handle the job, so they could make

things worse. They may be able to fix the problem in the short-term, but they might not have the time or expertise to get to the root of the matter. Second, they may not always be available when you need them.

Also, as mentioned previously, they are providing reactive support. As with all things in life and business, it is far less expensive to prevent problems than to clean them up. If your part-time technician is not performing regular maintenance and monitoring of your network, you are susceptible to more problems.

Option #3: Outsource your support to a competent consultant.

Obviously, this is going to be the fastest and surest way to solve your computer problems. However, there are an ever-growing number of companies springing up across the country that offer computer repair services and support, which makes it difficult for a business owner to know which vendor is right for them.

As it stands today, there are five types of external computer support you can use:

1. **Vendor support:** Phone support provided by Dell, HP, Microsoft, or any of the big software and hardware vendors. If you've ever tried to get technical support from a large manufacturer or store, you know how frustrating it can be. First, many vendors don't provide free support. If they do, it is usually very limited and only available by e-mail or Web response forms. If you are lucky enough to reach the support department, you'll end up going through a maze of phone options before you get a live person, and then the person is usually a nontechnical customer service representative who can't provide any real assistance. In most cases, they'll be located in another country, and may even be difficult to understand. You'll also get a different person every time you call, and most will not have any particular knowledge about your business or what you are trying to achieve. Here's another problem with vendor support: They aren't going to help you solve problems that aren't related directly to their hardware or software. For example, let's suppose you're having trouble connecting to the Internet, so you call your local provider. If their service is not causing the problem, you're stuck. Maybe your firewall is not configured right. Maybe the cable is not connected properly. If your problem is even partially related to another software or piece of hardware on your system, they won't help you.
2. **Computer support hotline services:** These services work like prepaid calling cards. For a set fee, you'll get an 800 number to call for 24-7 technical support. Sounds reasonable, but it's not all it's cracked up to be. If you are a home user with simple application problems and questions, this service may work well for you. However, if you are a business with mission-critical data, the last thing you want is a junior technician giving you advice. Also, some problems simply need to be analyzed on-site. Finally, these services are set up to deliver basic computer support, not to troubleshoot server problems, help with data recovery, or provide proactive maintenance.

3. **The part-time technician just getting started:** This is usually someone who left a job in the IT department of a company, got fired, or lost a job due to downsizing. Either way, he decided to start his own business with the dream of making lots of money by providing computer support to small businesses. In many cases, he will try to do a good job for you. He means well, will often work cheap, and is usually eager to please. He might even have been referred to you by a friend or business colleague. Although he has every intention of providing you with a good service, there are some things you need to consider before hiring him to work on your network. Since most of these folks work from home, they don't have a secretary or office staff to handle your requests. When you call, you'll either get:

- An answering machine.
- A spouse, friend or child who will take a message (which might or might not reach the technician).
- No answer and no voice mail; the phone just keeps ringing.
- The technician on his cell phone. Unfortunately, he's usually at another client's site, in his car, or taking care of some personal business (you catch him at the doctor's office or in a noisy restaurant).

The problem with this choice is response time; if you have a major network crisis, you need to know that you can get in touch with your consultant AND get a call back or response immediately. But it doesn't end there ... Another problem you'll encounter is availability; the technician might not always be around when you need him. What happens if he leaves town for a week or has to go to the hospital? Or two or more of his clients experience a major emergency at the same time? Or the going gets tough and he decides to take another job? These are all scenarios that happen frequently with computer technicians who haven't established best practices and systems in their businesses. And if he is only supporting your network part-time, you can bet your emergency is going to take a back seat to his full-time employer. Guaranteeing his work is another problem for the part-timer. Most don't have a professional contract, proposal or invoice to give you, which means you have no written paperwork or contractual agreements to fall back on if things go wrong. Plus, most don't carry insurance, and can't compensate you if they accidentally screw up your network or cause you to lose data. Even if he guarantees his work, how do you know he'll be around to fulfill his promises? Addresses and phone numbers can be changed instantly, and your one-man-wonder can disappear, leaving you no recourse or recovery.

4. **The "major player" tech-support company:** This vendor is the complete opposite of the one-man-band. They may have multiple technicians, multiple locations and a support crew. They might even have locations across the globe. There are many first-rate computer-support companies in this category that can be trusted to do a good job for you. As a matter of fact, many have the staff and resources to do an outstanding job. So what's the problem? Their schedule, price and availability! In many cases, these companies are so busy servicing a number of large, profitable clients that they might not give a small-business owner the service, response time and support you want. They also may charge you exorbitant fees to cover their massive overhead of staff and offices. If you own a big business, with a big IT budget, you'll do just fine with this type of company. However, if you own a small or medium business with a conservative IT budget, this may not be the best option for you. Since you don't represent a large windfall of profits for them, big tech-support companies may delegate their junior technicians, who are just learning the ropes, to support your network, saving the experienced consultants for their more profitable clients. As a business owner yourself, you can hardly blame them for taking this approach

but, as a customer, you don't want to be the small fish who is easily brushed aside. Just like the big vendors, the larger the tech-support companies get, the less personalized the service becomes. You may not always get the same consultant working on your network, and you might not be able to talk directly with a consultant when you call. Being part of a large franchise doesn't guarantee great service either; it just means they were able to write a check to cover the franchise costs. That doesn't automatically buy them good business sense, technical skills and/or customer-focused service.

5. **An independently-owned computer consulting firm:** You might accuse me of being biased here, but please give me a minute to explain my position before you dismiss my advice. First of all, I've been doing business in this industry for many years, so I have considerable experience working with, and talking to, hundreds of other small-business computer consultants. I've seen the horror stories and heard the complaints business owners have with all technology service vendors. Based on that experience, I think the best option for a small business is an independent consulting firm that is locally owned and operated. The business you choose to support your network should be large enough to provide back-up support and fast response times, but small enough to provide personal service. That is the way we've modeled our company, and we've been able to deliver consistent, professional services. We certainly don't feel as though our model is the sole option you can choose, and the size of a company is certainly not the only way to know in advance how professional and competent they will be. There are firms in all the choices outlined above that will do a great job for you.

A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on how your computer consultant should be working with your business. As I stated in the opening of this guide, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by the many incompetent firms offering support services. Before I wrap this guide up however, I want to revisit the survey that we started with.

If your current IT guy failed the test, I want to give you A FREE Business and Technology Assessment to make things “Right”

I know you are so darn busy running your business that you simply forget to think about the security and health of your computer network UNTIL something major happens.

If that's you, consider this a “friendly reminder” to get your network checked out – if nothing else, it's a good way to get a third party review of your network's infrastructure.

And to make it a complete “no-brainer,” for a limited time, I am offering a no-cost, no-obligation Business and Technology Assessment for FREE so you have no excuse for making sure that your computer network is safe not only from spyware and viruses, but also hackers, spam, data loss, hardware failure, software corruption, and a number of other disasters.

For free, I will send one of my professional consultants to come to your office and ...

- Check your network's security settings to make sure you are protected from the latest hacker attacks, worms, and viruses.
- Check the status of your virus and spyware removal software to make sure it's protecting you from threats that could be secretly stealing your company's bandwidth, jeopardizing the speed of your computer system, and embezzling confidential information about you, your employees, and your business.
- Check your network's back-up system to ensure it is working properly and accurately backing up all of the critical files and information you never want to lose.
- Verify that you have the most up-to-date security patches installed properly; miss one critical update and you're a “sitting duck.”
- Check hardware specifications to identify slow, unstable PCs.
- Discuss any other technology-related problems you may be facing.

Why Should You Care About This?

Because there are literally dozens of ways hackers and viruses can access your network—undetected—to access and remotely control your network, corrupt your data, and use your network as a conduit for spreading spam, viruses, and even illegal software.

There are numerous system checks and updates that should be done on a regular basis to ensure maximum speed, performance, and security. Ignore them and your system will get progressively slower, unstable, and susceptible to viruses, spyware, and hackers. Tape backups have a failure rate of 100% --that means all tape drives will fail at some point, often without warning. You don't want to find out that your backup was not working the day after your hard drive died.

Think About This...

What else in your business is more valuable than the data on your network? Just imagine how devastating it would be to lose it! That's why this assessment is so important. We'll conduct a comprehensive review of your network's security settings to make sure your data is safe and secure.

Okay ... So What is the Catch?

I bet you're wondering why I'd be willing to give this away for free, so please allow me to explain. First off, I want to be clear that this is NOT a bait and switch offer or a trick to get you to buy something. My reputation for running an honest and trustworthy business is something I hold very dear. I would never jeopardize that in any way.

We are simply offering this Free Technology Assessment as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with.

After All, Don't You Just Want Your Darn Computers To Work The Way They're Supposed To?

That's why I'm making this offer. I know that we are hands down the best at what we do, but I don't think it's fair for you to risk your money to find out. I don't expect everyone to become a customer, but I know that some will end up becoming loyal, long-term clients.

How to Request Your FREE Business and Technology Assessment:

To request this, simply do one of the following:

1. Call my office at 228-392-7133
2. Send us an e-mail to info@agjsystems.com

As soon as we receive your request, we'll call to schedule a convenient time for us to meet with you and to conduct the assessment. Again, you are under no obligation to do or buy anything. No hidden fees, no bait and switch, and no high pressure sales tactics. I hate high pressure sales tactics and I refuse to use them on others. I believe in simply letting the value of the service sell itself. Even if you choose not to hire us for any additional work, you'll at least get a free, 3rd party evaluation of your company's current technology situation.

What do you have to lose? Don't let another day go by without verifying the health and security of your network! We're making this as easy as possible to say yes – all you have to do is take 60 seconds to fax back the enclosed form or call our offices and we'll do the rest!

YES! Please Reserve a FREE Network Check-Up in My Name to Make Sure My Network IS Actually Secure!

I understand that I am not obligated to do or buy anything by signing up for this offer. For free, one of your consultants will schedule an appointment to conduct a complete health check of my network to:

- Review any computer network problem I am experiencing.
- Check my network's security against hacker attacks and viruses.
- Check the status of my antivirus and antispymware software.
- Check my network back-up system to make sure it is working properly.
- Check hardware specifications to identify slow, unstable PCs.
- Discuss a project or upgrade I am considering, or even give me a second opinion on a quote I've received.

Upon completion, I'll receive a report that will show any problems, threats, or vulnerable areas that need to be addressed. If a problem is discovered, I will receive a recommended action plan and fixed-fee quote to resolve it with no hidden fees. Again, I am under no obligation to hire you to do any work.

**Need To Speak To Someone Right Away?
Call: 228-392-7133**

Your Name: _____

Title: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Number of PCs: _____

Fax This Completed Form To: 228-392-7601

