**Interviewing and Hiring an IT consultant**

It is important that you do your homework when hiring an IT consultant. You need to fully understand the project that you are requesting assistance with, and should have a basic idea about the equipment and services necessary to complete the project. You may want to go so far as to create a Request for Proposal (RFP) to fully outline the project for prospective consultants in written form—this way everyone receives the same information.

Here is a list of questions to ask or keep in mind when speaking with a consultant:

1. Does the company charge a different price based on the work being performed?

We have seen several consultants charge the same hourly rate regardless of the work being performed. You should never pay the same hourly rate for having a PC set up and configured as you would for the setup and configuration of a firewall. Some one-person shops will charge less and will charge the same for each task. This may be okay if the price is reasonable, but most companies will quote based on task being performed.

Ask for a pricing sheet that outlines the hourly rate for each task being completed.

If you are unsure of what prices for services should be in your area, speak with your district library or other local businesses or organizations.

1. Are they insured or bonded?

You want the consultant to be able to pay for any damages made to your building or equipment.

1. Are there multiple employees or is this a one-person shop?

Multiple employees is preferable to a one-person shop. If there are any problems and one person is not available, you should be able to contact another staff member to resolve the problem. If your firewall goes down and the single person is out of town, who is going to help you resolve the issue?

1. Ask for resumes or a listing of experience for each employee.

Request a resume or list of qualifications for each employee that will be working on your project. You should be able to match up the experience to the tasks involved in the project.

1. What certifications are held by the company’s employees?

Major vendors typically have certified training programs. For instance, if you have Cisco hardware, you may want the company to provide you with a Cisco certified technician.

1. What hours are they available?

The vendor should be available during most of your open hours. This may include evenings and/or weekend hours. Also, are they available for before/after-hours work so that the disruption in service to your customers is minimal?

1. Request contact information for 3 references for a project similar to the one you are undertaking.

You want to hire an experienced consultant who is able to provide you with reasonable references. Require the ability to contact the references, don’t just accept a written reference. You will want these references to be able to speak to how well the consultant completed a project very similar to your own.

1. Are they able to provide you with quotes for hardware?

Most consultants or vendors should be able to provide and order your hardware. They should also be able to get you a better price than you can get on your own. Many vendors have access to buying programs, such as US Communities, or State contract pricing. If they are not able to order for you, they should at least be able to help you place the orders with reputable vendors that provide good pricing. Online vendors that are reputable that you can receive pricing from include, but are not limited to: Dell, HP, NewEgg, Global, CDW, PCConnection, Provantage, and TechSoup.

1. Ask for itemized pricing of all services and hardware

When you receive your quotes, you will want everything to be itemized. With everything itemized and fully described, you will be able to more easily compare quotes.

1. Ask the vendor for a project timeline.

Ask for concrete timelines for the completion of your project and write the contract so you have the ability to hold them to these timelines (within reason).

1. Ask for training

If new hardware or software is going to be installed that you are unfamiliar with, ask them to provide training as part of the project. Even if you will not be maintaining the equipment, you should be aware of how it works and ask for some basic troubleshooting tips that may save you some money down the road.

1. Ask for a network map

If your network is being updated with new hardware, ask the vendor to provide a network map that shows the basic layout of how you connect to your broadband connection. This will help you understand how your equipment is connected, and if you ever need another consultant to come in for troubleshooting or upgrades, this will be a great help to them.

1. You should require that a network access agreement be signed by the consultant that outlines your requirements and expectations for when they access your network and hardware.