

16 Questions You Must Ask Before Hiring Any IT Company

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



**Extremely Helpful Strategies And
Tips Every Business Owner Must Know
Before Giving Anyone Access To
Your Computer Network**



“What Every Business Owner Must Know About Hiring an Honest, Competent, Responsive and Fairly Priced Computer Consultant”

**Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data and Operations to Just Anyone!
This Business Advisory Guide Will Arm You With 16 Questions
You Should Ask Before Hiring Any IT Company.**

Choosing the wrong computer consultant to support your network can be incredibly frustrating and expensive, and could end up costing you in downtime, data loss and expensive repair bills, not to mention the headaches and frustration!

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ Little known fact of the computer repair industry that most people don't know.
- ✓ Revealing questions that will help you instantly spot an unethical or inexperienced computer repair/support technician in minutes.
- ✓ Several costly misconceptions most business owners have about computer maintenance and repair, one of which you will need to know about BEFORE even picking up the phone.
- ✓ Viruses, worms, spyware and hackers: what you need to know to protect yourself.
- ✓ Common mistakes to avoid when choosing a computer consultant.
- ✓ Why “cheap” or “lowest price” computer repair shops aren't the bargain they initially appear to be.
- ✓ The one surefire sign that you should walk away from a computer support firm.

Provided as an educational service by:

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From the Desk of: Jim Conley
President, Direct Connect Computer Systems Inc.

Dear Colleague,

If you are a business owner in the Cleveland area that is currently looking to outsource some or all of the IT support for your business, this report contains important information that will be extremely valuable to you as you search for a competent computer consultant you can **trust**.

My name is Jim Conley, President of Direct Connect Computer Systems and co-author of "How To Find The 'Best Fit' IT Management Company For Your Business." We've been providing IT services to Cleveland area businesses for over 27 years. What makes us unique is that we guarantee to make technology work for you consistently – that includes providing custom IT solutions that ensure you never pay for IT services you don't want or need, as well as owning problems and seeking the most accurate solutions to get you back operational with minimal downtime.

Choosing a computer support company isn't easy. There is no shortage of horror stories about incompetent computer repair "gurus" bungling jobs and causing MORE problems as a result of their inexperience or lack of ethics. I'm sure if you talk to your friends and colleagues you will get an earful of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

Why is this? Because the computer repair and consulting industry, along with a lot of other industries, has its own share of incompetent or unethical businesses that will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine whether or not the technician knows what they are doing. Sometimes this is out of greed for your money, but more often it's simply because they don't have the skills and competency to do the job right, but won't tell you that up front. From misleading information and unqualified technicians, to poor management and terrible customer service, we've seen it all...and we know they exist in abundance because we have had a number of customers come to us to clean up the disasters left behind.



Buyer Beware: The Computer Repair And Consulting Industry Is NOT Regulated

Here's an embarrassing (and little-known) fact about my industry: it is not regulated like many other professional service industries, which means ANYONE can claim they are a "computer repair expert." **In fact, a lot of the businesses in this industry started because the owner was fired or laid off from their job and couldn't find work anywhere else.**

Automotive repair shops, electricians, plumbers, lawyers, realtors, dentists, doctors, accountants, etc., are heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, the computer industry is still unregulated and there aren't any laws in existence to protect the consumer – **which is why it's so important for you to arm yourself with the information contained in this report.**

Anyone who can hang out a shingle can promote themselves as a computer expert. Even if they are honestly *trying* to do a good job for you, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your network's speed and performance or in lost or corrupt data files. That is why we decided to offer this report. The information in this guide is provided to help raise standards within the computer repair and support industry, and to give YOU useful information to help you guard against the lack of ethics or incompetence of some companies and technicians.

Dedicated to serving you,

Jim Conley



About the Author



Direct Connect is a complete technology solution provider in the Cleveland area. Through our team of talented IT experts and customized managed IT services, we help you get the most from your technology. We are proud to be a trusted IT business advisor for over 27 years to Cleveland area businesses.

Here's why businesses depend on Direct Connect Computer Systems for complete IT services and support:

1. **Peace of Mind** - We watch over your entire network, taking the management and hassle of maintaining it off your hands. This frees you to focus on your clients and on running your business, not on your IT systems, security and backups.
2. **Quick Response** – A live person will always answer your call during normal business hours, extended business hours, and even weekends! We can log in to your PC or server remotely and resolve many issues immediately without the wait for a technician to travel to your location.
3. **Reputable** – Direct Connect Computer Systems has been around since 1992 as a respected leader in the community and the industry. Our proudest accomplishment is the large number of long-term clients who year after year put their trust in us.
4. **HIPAA Compliant** – As an IT provider, Direct Connect requires access to systems containing protected health information (PHI) and, as such, are required to comply with HIPAA Rules and Regulations. To ensure all the Rules and Regulations are met, Direct Connect completed a 6-Stage HIPAA Risk Analysis and Remediation Process and was awarded a HIPAA Seal of Compliance by the Compliancy Group.
5. **100% Satisfaction Guarantee** - Quite simply, if you are not happy with our work, we'll do whatever it takes to make it right to YOUR standards without charging you for it. And if we can't make it right, the service is free.

We get to know your business inside and out, providing custom IT solutions that help you get the most from your technology!



16 Questions You Should Ask a Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them to Support Your Network

Customer Service:

1. Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice message?

Our Answer: We answer our phones live 7 days a week.

2. Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your calls?

Our Answer: We guarantee a response within 30 minutes of your call.

3. Do they provide detailed information that clearly explains what you are paying for?

Our Answer: We provide detailed information to show what work was done, why and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for.

4. Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and on budget?

Our Answer: All projects are fixed-priced and guaranteed to be completed on time.

Maintenance of Your Network:

5. Do they proactively monitor your network 24/7 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date?

Our Answer: Our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them before they turn into bigger problems.

6. Do they provide you with a report that shows all the updates, security patches and the status of every machine on your network so you know for sure your systems have been updated and secured?

Our Answer: Every day our automated system is checking all computers and sending us notifications of the overall health of the network and notifying us of the updates for antivirus, backup, Windows updates, and other important network security services.



7. Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the “keys to the kingdom”?

Our Answer: All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform frequent updates on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

8. Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician is unavailable?

Our Answer: Yes; and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client’s account, any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off.

9. When they offer an “all-inclusive” support plan, is it truly all-inclusive?

Our Answer: Our “all-inclusive” support plan is just that – all-inclusive. These are actually a good thing because they’ll save you a lot of money in the long run – however, make sure you really understand what is and isn’t included. Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/e-mail help desk included or extra?
- What about network upgrades or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd-party software support?
- What if you aren’t happy with their service? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- Are off-site backups included?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- If your network gets hit with a virus, is recovering your network included?

Backups and Disaster Recovery:

10. Do they provide a backup process for both off-site and on-site?

Our Answer: We include both off-site and on-site backup processes as a standard service.



11. Are you made aware of your successful or unsuccessful backups?

Our Answer: A daily email is sent to us and the customer that their backups have been either successful or unsuccessful.

12. If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a plan for how your data could be restored fast and, if necessary, enable you to work from a remote location? Our Answer: With our solution, we can perform a complete restore within hours of a failure, plus our clients can enjoy the convenience of knowing that we are a full-service Value Added Reseller (VAR) and can supply the necessary hardware and accessories to get them back on their feet.

Technical Expertise and Support:

13. Is their help desk US-based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?

Our Answer: We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and qualified.

14. Are they familiar with your unique line-of-business applications?

Our Answer: *We work directly with our clients' industry specific vendors for support.*

15. When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other technologies, do they address the problem or do they suggest you call the other vendor?

Our Answer: *We feel we should be the first line of defense for your technology.*

16. Do they have experience working with owners of small businesses that allows them the ability to recommend appropriate solutions for a unique operation such as yours?

Our Answer: WE DO! Simply put, we've been doing this since 1992. Because at Direct Connect, *Your Technology is Our Business!*



The 4 Most Costly Misconceptions About Computer Maintenance and Repair

Misconception #1: My computer network doesn't need regular monitoring and maintenance.

This is probably one of the biggest and most costly misconceptions that business owners have. Usually this is because they've been fortunate enough to have never encountered a major disaster; but that's similar to someone thinking they don't need to wear a seat belt when driving a car because they've never had an accident.

Computer networks are complex and dynamic systems that need regular updates and maintenance to stay up, running fast and problem-free. In fact, it's surprising how fast a brand-new PC will slow down without proper updates and maintenance. Here are just a FEW of the critical updates that need to be done on a weekly – if not daily – basis:

- Security patches applied – with NEW viruses and hacker attacks cropping up DAILY, this is a CRITICAL part of maintaining your network operating systems
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on all computers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum performance

Your computer network is just like a car: if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission and perform other regular maintenance on your car, it will eventually break down and cost you FAR MORE to repair than the cost of the basic maintenance – and a car is far simpler than a computer network!



If your computer support tech does not insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, then DO NOT HIRE THEM. Lack of system maintenance is the NUMBER ONE reason most people end up losing valuable files and incurring heavy computer repair bills. If your technician isn't offering you these services, you need to find someone else to support your computer or network for two reasons:

1. Either they don't know enough to make this recommendation, which is a sure sign they are horribly inexperienced, *OR*
2. They recognize that they are profiting from your computer problems and don't want to recommend steps toward preventing you from needing their help on an ongoing basis. After all, they'll get paid MORE to remove a virus than to make sure your system is patched, updated and secured (which can be done quickly and inexpensively with good monitoring).

Either reason is a good one to get as far away from that person as possible!

Misconception #2: My nephew/neighbor's kid/brother-in-law/office manager knows this computer stuff and can take care of our computers.

Most people look for a part-time "guru" for one reason: to save a few bucks. But this often comes back to haunt them. We frequently get calls from business owners who desperately need our help to get them back up and running or to clean up a mess that was caused by an inexperienced neighbor, friend or relative who was just trying to help.

If the person you have working on your machine does not do computer repair and support for a living, there is a good chance they won't have the knowledge or experience to truly help you – they are a hobbyist at best. And do you really want a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and computer network? As with everything in life, you get what you pay for. That's not to say you need to go broke to find a great technician, but you shouldn't be choosing someone based on price alone.



Misconception #3: All computer technicians are created equal. Your best option will be the one who offers the lowest price.

As we stated a moment ago, you get what you pay for. A cheap price usually means a cheap job. Really good technicians do NOT work cheap because they are in high demand just like every other professional service category. The only technicians that will work cheap are those who are just starting, and they are grossly inexperienced.

And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience, OR they allow interns to support your network because

they don't have to pay them at all – but what you don't realize is that an inexperienced technician like this can end up costing more because:

1. They improperly diagnose problems, which means you're paying them to fix the **WRONG** thing and they **STILL** won't resolve your problem. Case in point: A few years ago a TV reporter went undercover to 8 computer repair shops in LA with a perfectly working PC, but simply disconnected a cable in the back (a fix that the **AVERAGE** computer tech would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several shops improperly diagnosed the problem and wanted to charge them anywhere from \$59 to over \$275 to fix it!
2. They could take 3 to 5 times as long to do the same repair an experienced technician could fix quickly. Again, you're paying for those extra hours.
3. They could do **MORE** damage, costing you more money and downtime.

With your client data, accounting records, email and other critical data at stake, do you **REALLY** want the lowest-priced shop working on your machine?

We take the view that most people want value for their money and simply want the job done right. You will find that we are not the cheapest, but we don't apologize for that. As the owner, I decided a long time ago that I would rather explain our higher rates **ONE TIME** than make excuses for **POOR SERVICE** forever. That said, we're not the most



expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer a good service at a fair price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for over 25 years and have customers who've been with us that entire time.

Misconception #4: An honest computer support company should be able to give you a quote over the phone.

I wish this were true, but it isn't. Just like a good doctor, an honest and professional technician will need to diagnose your network before they can quote any price over the phone; consider the example above where all that was needed was to plug in a simple cable. If someone brought that to us, we would just plug it back in and not charge them; but without SEEING the machine, we could have never diagnosed that over the phone.

Also, some consultants will quote you a cheap rate over the phone to get in the door, but then jack up the prices once they get in your office by taking 3 times as long, selling you add-ons and up-sells, etc. And finally, reputable firms don't charge by the hour anyway – they give you a fixed fee, flat rate. Here's why...

One of the easiest ways to take advantage of a customer is to get them to agree to a time and materials repair. Unless you know what's wrong and how long it should take, they can soak you on the fees. And what are you going to do when they get 5-6 hours into a repair or project and then spring on you the news that it will take even longer than they anticipated to fix, costing you MORE money?

Always, always, always make sure you get a flat-rate, fixed-fee quote in advance so you don't end up getting burned – and NEVER take a phone quote!

4 More Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing A Computer Company

1. **Choosing a computer company based on a single phone call.** We recommend you invite them into your office and ask them for a written proposal. Be clear on what your expectations are and what type of problems you want them to resolve. As stated a moment ago, a competent professional should offer to do an assessment of your network to diagnose your system BEFORE quoting you



anything. After all, would you take a doctor's word that you need surgery if they hadn't done x-rays or other diagnostics? Of course not! Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice.

2. **Choosing a computer company that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and for fixing things RIGHT. If you aren't pleased with a job that was done, they should (at a minimum) make it right for free; and if they simply cannot resolve an issue to YOUR satisfaction, you shouldn't get stuck with the bill.

Plus, the fact that they stand behind their work with a money-back guarantee shows they have confidence in themselves to make you a happy client. And don't fall for the "We don't offer one because people will take advantage of us" routine. In our experience, MOST people just want an honest service at a reasonable price. If you give them that, they are happy to pay. Are there a few unethical folks out there? Of course, but they are the minority, and we would rather bite the bullet on the very few dishonest folks so we can gain the trust and confidence of the majority of clients, who just want their problems fixed fast and fixed right.

3. **Choosing a computer company without speaking to several of their current clients.** Check their references! Don't just take the sales guy's word that they are good – ask to speak to at least 3 or 4 clients that are similar to you in size and scope. If they hesitate or cannot provide you with references, don't trust them!

Another good sign is that they should have multiple client testimonials and success stories posted on their web site and throughout their marketing collateral. A lack of this may be a sign that they don't HAVE clients who are happy enough to provide a good reference – again, a warning sign.

4. **Choosing a computer company who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** In this day and age, a computer company who doesn't do this is living in the Stone Age. You want someone to do this because it will dramatically increase your network's security and will enable them to do faster repairs. That's not to say they shouldn't come on-site; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help AVOID problems cropping up in the first place.



A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide to be helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by any incompetent firm offering these services.

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Let us know! And, of course, if you are looking for someone you can trust to take over the care and management of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business.

As a prospective client, we would like to offer you 2 FREE hours of network support (a \$300 value) to prove that we can do a better job at solving your technology headaches than your current computer-support guy.

Just give us a call the next time you find yourself dealing with an IT-related problem. At no charge, we'll send one of our senior technicians to your office to diagnose and treat the problem.

Why Are We Giving Away Free Support?

Some people think we are crazy for offering free services. They say, "Aren't you afraid people will just take advantage of you?" The truth is, some people might, though no one has – but we know that most business owners are just honest people trying to find someone they can trust to fix and maintain their computer network.

And since there's a good chance you've been disappointed, let down and even burned by a less-than-competent IT provider, I want to give you a risk-free way to "kick the tires" before you commit to anything.



After All, Don't You Just Want The Darn Thing to Work the Way It's Supposed To?

That's why I'm making this offer. I don't expect everyone to become a client, but I know that some will end up becoming loyal, long-term clients, just like these Cleveland area businesses:

"It brings me piece of mind knowing that Direct Connect is managing all of our technology and I can call them anytime for support."



"Before we started working with Direct Connect, our technology was not effectively supporting our office. They brought us into the 21st century and have continued to keep our business running efficiently and securely. *It brings me piece of mind knowing that they are managing all of our technology and I can call them anytime for support. It's like having a trusted in-house IT department.*"

Kathy Joseph

Kathryn T. Joseph & Associates, Inc.

"Direct Connect makes our technology work and it's one less thing for me to think about."

"It was critically important to find a trusted IT partner who would protect the confidential data that our law practice values. Direct Connect put my concerns to rest. With their Managed Services Plan, Direct Connect manages our technology and provides unlimited support. I know that Jim and his team are protecting our data, backing up our systems, updating.... they are taking care of everything, and everything just works. *They make our technology work and its one less thing for me to think about.*"



Joseph Rosalina

Russo, Rosalina & Co., LPA



"We liked the idea of being able to budget for our IT expenses with no surprises."



"We needed a professional IT firm to manage our rapidly growing business. Relying on internal staff (non-IT) to manage our technology was making for a chaotic work environment. Direct Connect offered us a Managed Services Plan that would take care of all of our technology needs, with unlimited support, for a fixed monthly price. *We liked the idea of being able to budget for our IT expenses with no surprises.* Now our technology is supporting our business."

Lisa Ristagno

Pete & Pete Container Service Inc.

"I can locate any email, for any purpose, by using any keyword, with Direct Connect's Email Archiving and Hosted Exchange service."



I used to search emails only by subject lines. When the emails became too voluminous, the search mechanism could no longer search through them. Now, with Direct Connect's Email Archiving and Outlook Hosted Exchange services, *I can locate any email for any purpose using any keyword!*"

Neil Siegel

Attorney At Law

"Direct Connect is responsive, courteous, and professional – traits seemingly lost in an IT industry dominated by know-it-all techs with bad attitudes."



"Since hiring Direct Connect, I have peace of mind knowing that everything consistently works. Having been through several IT firms in my career, none were able to provide the comprehensive approach to our particular IT needs, nor the prompt and respectful support like Direct Connect! *Direct Connect is responsive to our questions and concerns, and treats us with courtesy and professionalism – traits seemingly lost in an IT industry dominated by know-it-all techs with bad attitudes.*"

Brian Halliday

Ritter Halliday LPA



"I let Direct Connect worry about technology for us, so we can focus on our business."



"Before Direct Connect started working with us we were in the dark with technology. I was referred to Direct Connect and right away found that they were easy to work with and trustworthy. Now Direct Connect manages all of our technology from top to bottom and keeps us up-to-date. They are attentive with any issues that arise and are proactive with recommending solutions for the future. *I let Direct Connect worry about technology for us, so we can focus on business.*"

David Gross
Gross & Co CPA Inc

How Can You Use Your 2 Free Hours?

Maybe you don't have an urgent problem that needs to be fixed right now. Maybe you think you have your computer network "handled." Maybe you don't have a regular IT support guy and think you don't need our services.

After all, if it ain't broke, why fix it?

I completely understand that point of view, so let me suggest how you can still benefit from this offer.

Even if you don't have an immediate problem, you can use your 2 free hours of network support to have us conduct our **proprietary IT Network & Performance Assessment**.

During this IT Assessment, we'll look for hidden problems developing under the surface that could turn into bigger, more disastrous events that could cost you thousands in lost productivity, downtime and computer repair bills.

For FREE, we will come to your office and answer key questions such as:

- Are your IT systems **truly secured** from hackers, cybercriminals, viruses, worms and even sabotage from rogue employees? *If you're not getting weekly security patch updates from your current IT person, your IT systems may not be as secured as you thought.*



- Are your **backups configured properly** to ensure that you could be back up and running again fast in case of a disaster? *In many computer networks we've reviewed over the years, the owners were shocked to learn this wasn't happening.*
- Could you utilize **cheaper and more efficient cloud-computing technologies** to lower IT costs and make it easier to work remotely? *Cloud is not for everyone, but may be for you.*
- Are your systems **optimized for maximum speed** and performance? *Lags can be found at the workstation level or with your network and internet hardware.*

Once we have a clear picture of the state, health and performance of your current IT systems, we'll then deliver a **customized IT optimization plan** that will show you how to eliminate nagging problems, allowing you to work more efficiently and possibly even lower IT costs with smarter cloud solutions.

And we'll create this plan for you absolutely FREE. Here's how to get started...

Activate your Free Assessment by simply going online and complete a brief form giving us a few key data points about your company and your systems. This will help us keep track of your request and prepare for your call.

Activate Your Voucher Here: www.ClevelandComputers.com/activate

If you need immediate help, call us at (216) 382-4900 and we'll get someone out to see you ASAP. If you don't need immediate assistance, just activate your Free Assessment at the web site above and we'll keep your 2 free hours on retainer until you need them.

NO OBLIGATION GUARANTEE: I want to be clear that when you take us up on this offer, you are not expected to buy anything. So, go ahead and activate your Free Assessment now; you'll be glad you did!

Good Networking,

Jim Conley