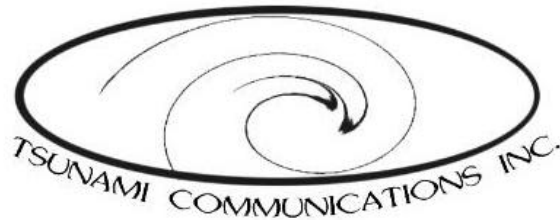


TCI Quick Reference Series

## How to Pick a Computer Networking Consultant

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It has been determined that *something* is wrong with your office computer network, and it is up to you to fix it, or find someone who can. How do you choose the right company to help you out? We'd like to suggest four critical evaluation criteria you don't need a PhD in Computer Science to use. Some are obvious, but when you're dealing with the technical issues, you may accidentally overlook important business criteria.

## References

What can be more reliable the opinion of your peers? Ask the consultants to provide references within the same or similar industry to yours. Then check those references! Take the time to make one or two phone calls and you'll most certainly be glad you did. The consultants may have no experience within your industry and say "hey, computers are computers" but the reality is that you use your computers for tasks specific to your industry.

## Experience

How long have they been in business? Ask to see the resumes or Curriculum Vitae of the consultants who would be engaged for your contract and establish that they have an experience level YOU are comfortable with.

## Business Sense = Common Sense

When you talk to the people, do they have an interest in your business, and what needs to happen with your computer network to make the most business sense to you? Or is it all techno-jargon and "must-do" upgrades that will just cost you money? You want to ensure that the consultants you hire have the best interests of your business ahead of their desire to sell you services, hardware, or software.

## Certifications and Strategic Partnerships

This is one to be careful with, because certifications without reasonable experience are virtually meaningless. Don't let a lot of acronyms behind the company or consultant's names sway your decision. That said, certifications and partnerships with major "tier one" companies like Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Cisco, IBM, etc. will likely mean that the consultant is answerable to the larger organization for the quality of the work they provide. Use your judgment, and weigh this criterion in light of the other three.

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