

“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 21 Revealing Questions You Should Ask Any Computer Consultant Before Giving Them Access To Your Company's Network

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

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The “dirty little secret” to the computer repair industry that most people don't know.
- ✓ 21 revealing questions that will help you instantly spot an unethical or grossly incompetent computer repair/support technician.
- ✓ 3 costly misconceptions business owners have about computer maintenance and repair.
- ✓ Viruses, worms, spyware, and hackers: what you need to know to protect yourself.
- ✓ 5 mistakes to avoid when choosing a computer consultant.
- ✓ Why you need to avoid “cheap” or “bargain” computer repair shops.
- ✓ The one surefire sign that you should run – not walk – out of a computer repair shop.

Provided as an educational service by:

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From the desk of:

Tim Gillen
President & CEO
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Dear Colleague,

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 loose morals or gross incompetence. I'm sure if you talk to your own friends and colleagues you will get an ear-full of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.



Why is this? It's because the computer repair and consulting industry, along with a lot of other industries, has its own share of incompetent or unethical businesses who will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine whether or not they know 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, unqualified technicians, and poor management, to 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 they have caused.

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

Here's an embarrassing 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, most 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. That means many of the so-called experts are useless and make the sleazy auto repair shops look like the pinnacle of virtue and competence.**

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 highly 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 unethical or incompetent companies and technicians.

About the Author

Hello, my name is Tim Gillen. I started Terrapin Networks in 1990, and continue to run the company today as the CEO, President, and Virtual IT Director.

I come from a long line of small business folks, back to both sets of grandparents and through our family business – a marina on Glen Lake – that I started working at when I was 13 years old. After that I had a business in the 1980s, and was an "early adopter" to computers, purchasing my first computer that I used in the business in 1985 (which, as you might imagine, was a real screamer!).

At some point, I had some computer problems that I needed some help fixing. Taking my computer to the local computer shop in Traverse City for repairs I experienced a real mess. It was very clear that the techies that worked there neither knew nor cared about the business side of technology. The topper was when I was told – after pleading with them that I was trying to run a business and everything was on that computer in their shop – "Buddy, we all got problems" (yes, those are the exact words, as I have never forgotten them!).

So an idea was launched in my head: If I could take a business mindset to business technology support that could really have some appeal.

Within 18 months that's just what happened: I started Terrapin Computer Company (we've since renamed ourselves Terrapin Networks) in the summer of 1990. In the 20-odd years since we have brought this unique blend of technology know-how and a business understanding to companies and organizations throughout Northern Michigan, and have built a very loyal and dedicated clientele.

Our special sauce of expertise, enthusiasm, and a genuine collaborative spirit are why some of the top businesses and organizations in Northern Michigan keep us as their IT Department year after year.

21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them To Support Your Network

Customer Service:

Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?

Our Answer: We answer our phones live from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it to be the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Are they truly prompt in their response to business tech issues, with the current customer references to prove it? Our Answer: We are, and we guarantee it. Allow us to back this up by having you contact some of our current customers – some who have been with us for 7, 10, 15, and even over 20 years. They'll tell you the truth: We really are dedicated to our customer's business success through business technology enhancement.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms.

Q4: 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?

Our Answer: We conduct regular review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies, and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient, and competitive.

Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices and job detail reports that clearly explain what you are paying for?

Our Answer: We provide detailed invoices and work logs that show what work was done, why, and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you. Let us show you a sample job detail report so you can see for yourself how simple we make what most IT support outfits make confusing and complicated.

Q6: Are they a proper business, with proper insurances, to protect YOU?

Our Answer: There's lots of "trunk slammers" out there these days; anyone who can get a business card printed can be in the "computer repair" business. Not so for Terrapin Networks; we've been at this for 20-odd years now and our reputation for excellence is impeccable.

Q7: 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. This is important because many unethical or incompetent computer guys will only quote "time and materials," which gives them free reign to nickel and dime you as well as take as much time as needed on completing a project.

Maintenance Of Your Network:

Q8: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-356 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions, and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data, and other issues?

Our Answer: Yes; our "Terrapin IT Alert" remote network monitoring system watches over your network and constantly looks for developing problems, security issues, and other problems so that we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q9: Do they provide you with a weekly report that shows all the updates, security patches, and status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?

Our Answer: Every week our clients get a detailed report that shows an overall health score of their network and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches, and other important network checks (like hard drive space, backups, speed, and performance, etc.).

Q10: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, your 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 a quarterly update 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.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q11: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

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 left off.

Q12: When they offer an "all-inclusive" support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are there "gotchas" hidden in the fine print?

Our Answer: Our "all-inclusive" support plan is just that – all-inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by consulting firms today is an "all-inclusive" or "all-you-can-eat" managed services plan. 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 support included, or extra?
- What about adding/removing users?
- Are hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd party software support? (Always includes from us.)
- What if you aren't happy with their services? Do they offer early cancellation, or do they hold your company hostage?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about onsite support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?
- Do they charge extra for emergency support, thereby profiting from your company's misfortune? (Note: We never do!)
- Do they charge extra for after-hours support? (Note: We never do!)

So many IT support firms nickel and dime you to death with things that any IT Department should just include. Additional charges for a quicker response for emergencies? Seriously? That makes about as much sense as the Emergency Room at a hospital charging additional if you have an accident after 5:00pm. Just silly, and not very "partner-like".

Backups And Disaster Recovery:

Q13: Do they INSIST on monitoring an offsite as well as an onsite backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?

Our Answer: We strongly recommend AGAINST tape backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We have our clients have some sort of disk-based tapeless backup devices, specifically our Terrapin Tapeless Backup. Note: This does NOT include external USB hard drive backups for file servers, which is NEVER recommended!

Q14: Do they INSIST on doing periodical test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: We regularly perform a "fire drill" test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to "test" a backup is when you desperately need it.

Q15: Do they insist on doing proper best-practice backups BEFORE performing any type of project or upgrade?

Our Answer: We do; and that's simply as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem. This is how it's done right.

Q16: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or enable you to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: All clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. We encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.

Technical Expertise And Support:

Q17: 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 helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's an important step in keeping your data secure.

Q18: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in on-going training – or are they learning on your dime?

Our Answer: Our technicians are required to keep the most up-to-date network engineer certifications in a variety of disciplines. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent that 99% of the technicians who apply don't make it through (guess who's hiring them?).

Q19: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?

Our Answer: Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally, show up on time and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason) our Help Desk will always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

Q20: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?

Our Answer: We own the problems with all line of business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software – but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you.

Q21: When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT services, do they own the problem or do they say "that's not our problem to fix"?

Our Answer: We feel WE should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

The 3 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 never have 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 after a few weeks of use 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
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Hacker attack monitoring and intrusion protection
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam filtering and email protection
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed
- Security vulnerability checks

Just like car ownership, if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission, and perform other regular maintenance, your car will eventually break down and cost you FAR MORE to repair than the cost of the basic maintenance – and cars are 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 towards preventing you from needing their help on an ongoing basis.

Either one is a good reason 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. 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 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. The only technicians that will work cheap are those that are just starting and they are grossly inexperienced. And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work cheap – 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 mean 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 disconnect 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, e-mail, and other critical data at stake, do you REALLY want the cheapest technician working on your machine?

We take the view that most people want value for 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 to apologize 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 20 years and have dozens customers who've been with us for years and years (some at virtually that entire 20-odd years!).

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 a simple cable being plugged in. If someone brought that to us, we would just plug it back in and not charge them; but without SEEING the machine, we could never have 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 some semblance of control of the experience -- a flat-rate, fixed fee quote, an advanced approval such as our On-Demand support -- so there are no surprises on the costs. And NEVER take a phone quote!

5 More Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing a Computer Consultant

1. **Choosing a computer consultant 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. A competent professional should offer to do an audit 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 consultant that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and 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.
3. **Choosing a computer consultant without speaking to several of the 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. If they hesitate or cannot provide you with references, don't trust them!

- 4. Choosing a computer consultant who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** In this day and age, a computer consultant who doesn't do this is living in the stone ages. 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 onsite; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help PREVENT problems from cropping up in the first place.
- 5. Choosing a computer consultant whose tech staff doesn't carry the proper network-level industry certifications or 4-year degrees.** This is a serious issue: your business technology shouldn't be left to amateurs, as there is simply too much risk. "Fixing computers" is, in reality, a very small part of proper business IT support.

A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide 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 the many incompetent firms 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 maintenance of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business.

Below you will find information on how to request a FREE 40-point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment. This is, of course, provided for free with no obligations and no expectations on our part. 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. So why are we offering something like this for free?

Two reasons:

1. We are simply offering this service as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with. Again, our goal is to allow you to make an informed and confident decision; and offering this is one way we can help you better evaluate us.
2. This will allow us to determine if we even CAN help you. Obviously we can't help everyone, and our services might not be a good fit for you. Conducting this Health Check enables us to do a small project for you to help you evaluate whether or not we're the right company for you without risking your money.

As an additional bonus, you will find our 40-point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment very informational, and the report is yours to keep whether you retain our firm or not. Use it with your current IT services provider if you decide not go with us; the report truly is that valuable a resource.

Looking forward to your call!

Tim Gillen and the entire team at Terrapin Networks

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FREE 40-Point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment for All Prospective Clients Who Want To Put Us To The Test!

As a prospective customer, we would like to offer you a FREE 40-point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment (\$495 value). During this comprehensive audit and assessment we will check 40 different points, under 6 major headings, of the technology system at your organization. We load no software on your network, as our system for the audit is quite sophisticated and thorough. We check out all the parts of the IT system, create some simple reports for you to keep, and offer recommendations based on what we see. Yes, you get the full resources of our Tech Services Team – over 80 years of collective experience – so the insight we provide, and recommendations we make, really have weight.

We will:

- ✓ Check the Primary Network Infrastructure: File, mail, and application servers; security appliances and firewall setup; backup devices and software; virus and spam protection; software licensing; power protection; and more
- ✓ User Computers: Workstations; laptops; tablet computers; Microsoft Office versions; SmartPhones; and more
- ✓ Wide Area network: Internet connection; routers; and more
- ✓ Local Area Network: Internal network security; server physical location; switches and hubs; wireless access point equipment and security; network cabling; and more
- ✓ Backup and disaster recovery/business continuity plans
- ✓ Main Line of Business application(s)
- ✓ Other items of interest that show up and we check your system out

Why Should You Care About This?

At this point you have tens of thousands of dollars invested in technology and the network at your organization. Do you know what it all is? Do you have any way to plan for upgrading, replacements, and improvements? You might as well keep up – you have thousands of dollars at risk each month in payroll that is dependent on that technology. Not even knowing what is there just doesn't make sense.



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I go into offices all the time, some quite large, where no one knows all the parts of the IT system, and there is always – always! – a very high level of frustration. And of course there is – imagine how frustrating payday would be if you had not real idea who was on the payroll!

Think of the risk of just “keeping it going” and hoping nothing bad happens; there is simply no way to justify that when there is so much at stake. Getting a full, clear, and accurate picture of your installed technology products and systems is a perfect starting point. And that’s what you will get with our FREE 40-point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment.

How to Request Your FREE 40-point Terrapin Technology Audit and Assessment

Simply call our office and ask for me, Tim Gillen, or my Tech Services Coordinator, Chad Pyle. Our office number is 231-941-2100, or toll-free at 877-815-2100. Or if you prefer, send me an email directly at AskTim@terrapiIT.com. Either way will work.