

Computer Consultant Questionnaire

Please respond to these questions to assist me in deciding if you will be our next computer consultant.

Thank you,

Mary Jones
Small Biz, Inc.

Response from Rescue Marketing

Q1: How is your company different from all the other tech consultants who call me?

My concern lies with you. Experience has repeatedly proven that my business' success is a direct by-product of treating you with respect, focusing like crazy on improving your profitability and productivity, taking care of your business so well that you can't help but tell your colleagues and friends about what I do, and doing the things I teach and recommend to my clients.

Q2: What's your business background? Ever owned a business other than a consulting firm? Ever made a payroll?

After building a software company to \$1,000,000 in sales in 7 years with no outside funding, spending each of those years making more profit than Amazon, having as many as 9 employees in anywhere from 3 to 7 states, exhibiting at trade shows 5 to 8 times a year all over the country, moving the company 1800+ miles in the middle of that growth period without missing a beat; I can't say that I've experienced everything, but I've experienced a lot of challenges and succeeded at many of them.

I understand what it's like to give everything you have in order to make a business work – and to be ultimately responsible for making payroll.

Q3: What's the goal of getting my company as a client?

I look at every client as a long-term opportunity.

Having you for a client for 20 years and being a part of helping your business explode with success is far more interesting to me than having you as a client one time. While your needs this week might be something that only takes 45 minutes, how I handle that one time need is what will cause you to call back the next time you need help.

My goal is to become your sole solution to business problems outside of your areas of expertise, and for it to become second nature to contact me for help. I intend to be the person you consider as the obvious expert to turn to when you need answers.

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Q4: Have you ever worked in my industry/line of work?

In my view, every industry has something it can offer to other industries. The automation industry has revolutionized the lumber business, for example. How many lumber mills considered adoption of technology critical to their success in the 1990's? How many steel mills considered that in the 1970's?

The answer? You can tell which businesses because they are the ones that are still around today.

Aside from the computer and technical aspects, my background includes government services (software to help states manage Medicaid and third party insurance payments), banking (software to allow ATM transactions to move to/from different ATM networks, software for teller point of sale applications), rubber products (software to manage the manufacturing process for automotive belts), legal (software to manage patents, trademarks and related intellectual property information), point of sale and retail (studio photographers, quick-serve restaurants, small "mom and pop" retail), retail backroom management (software to simplify the task of managing taxation, sales and commission tracking, automated and manual targeted / "funnel" / measured response marketing, successful trade show planning, marketing and execution, measurable ROI marketing and promotion, insurance, e-commerce for imported goods, niche online technical publishing and yes, several others.

Q5: Can you train my people to use <choose a software program>?

I can and will train you and your staff. I don't provide materials or products that I don't expect to receive questions on – no matter how easy they might be to use. I don't think it's a good use of your time and money to pay us to create and/or install a solution, only to have us move on to the next task, leaving you to learn the newly-installed solution all by yourself.

You didn't call me so you could be by yourself and with me, you won't be unless you want to be. While I want repeat business from you, I take pride in enabling my clients to be self-sufficient in those areas where it makes sense. I do that because like you, I've had to make payroll and cut costs during tough times. Having the ability to be independent gives you flexibility and choice, something most of us want and sometimes, need.

Q6: Do you document your work? If so, how?

I document software, configuration steps and just about anything that can be or needs to be redone in the future, when a new computer is purchased, etc. Why?

2 big reasons: First, because none of us have the memory we had 5 years ago, except in our computers. Trial and error from a memory distracted by email, telephone and moment to moment business needs is no way to manage a business or maintain a computer. Second, and more importantly, accurate documentation helps your staff and ours, particularly new staff in your business.

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Q7: Can you show me how to adjust my screen resolution?

Ask me to teach you how to do this without looking at the monitor, or your face (so we can't see your facial expression). I have years of experience handling all sorts of support situations over the phone, where knowing what a screen is expected to look like, knowing how to describe something for someone who is looking at a screen they've never seen so they can find it easily.

However, just because I can do something over the phone without seeing your screen doesn't mean I'm smarter than you, it just means we just have different experience. Having us do these without being condescending, well, that's just being polite.

Q8: How do you select hardware for recommendation to your clients?

With the exception of commodity items (like computer mice) that are always in stock locally, we prefer to evaluate hardware for a particular need (such as a cash drawer or thermal receipt printer), test it with the software our clients use, review the vendor's ability to ship and support it, and stick with that particular item until it is no longer suitable.

The advantage this provides is that neither I, nor our clients, waste time dealing with multiple vendors, multiple support scenarios, multiple system drivers and most importantly, the inability to shift hardware around in a business without concern for what software and drivers are installed on what machine – or what works on one machine and not on another. This simplifies support for me, for you and provides you with flexibility you just won't have if you have to depend on what a big box store has in stock. Ultimately, there are cost savings involved as well.

Q9: Can I call you any time I have a computer problem?

This is a primary reason why I document my work. The last thing a business owner wants to do is pay a consultant repeatedly for the same work.

Likewise, the second to last thing a business owner wants to do with a consultant is to continue to require the consultant's time for every little thing, because it puts the owner in the position of feeling held "hostage" and in some situations it can waste huge amounts of time.

I use several methods to cut down on both of these situations.

First, I document what I've done and include step by step instructions that tell you how to manage the things we've setup for you so that you and your staff can often resolve minor issues on your own.

The benefit of this is that you are put back in control rather than being held "hostage" and even worse, waiting for a return call if we aren't available. No one likes to wait on a return call, but they are a fact of life.

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My goal of the documentation is to reduce the need for the call in the first place. Second, my clients pay a monthly retainer, which for most clients will cover 60-90 minutes of service calls each month. This retainer provides the owner with a number of service advantages, including priority return calls. One of the big benefits of clients on retainer is that it saves you money when you DO have to make those little 5 minute calls. Why? My minimum billing interval is 30 minutes. If your business is not on retainer and you call for a 5 minute quick fix, you'll be billed for 30 minutes. If you are on retainer and under your 60-90 minutes for the month, the call does not increase your bill.

Q10: I'm planning on doing some strategic planning for the next year. Would you be willing to sit down and talk with me about that? How does your process work?

Absolutely, in fact, we encourage it. Technology is an important part of almost every organization's long-term strategic planning and it's what we've done for years. In addition, we specialize in helping businesses improve their efficiency and marketing with measurable results.

As for the process, I use some standard and not-so-standard approaches, including SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis and additional interactive processes to draw out what SWOT might not tell us.

Q11: Can you show me how to make a copy of this Microsoft Office CD? A friend of mine needs a copy for her new computer and she can't afford to buy it right now.

Rather than get "offended" by the request, I will offer alternative suggestions and discuss them with you, or offer to spend a few minutes on the phone with your friend. There are plenty of alternatives. Software doesn't have to be stolen just because you're on a budget. Additionally, there is the issue of licensing in your business. I will help you track it. It might turn out that you have a spare Microsoft Word license to provide to your friend, if not, I can help you find free alternatives.

Q12: My employees always complain when I suggest getting a new or upgraded program to run the business. What do you think I should do about this?

Our services help a business become more efficient and thus, more profitable. In a time when no employee feels their job is "safe forever", our services provide job security. Not the job security one typically expects (same job for 20 years), but the security of a BETTER job at a company that is more profitable, and more likely to continue to need that employee's help.

When my work "eliminates" an employee's repetitive job duty, it improves that employee's job and that person's ability to contribute to the company's bottom line. Why? Because they now have time to work on something that is more important to the

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company than the repetitive work that probably didn't directly contribute to the bottom line.

On occasion, it is possible that a job might be eliminated, but in most cases, the company doesn't want to lose that person's knowledge of the business and will find them more meaningful, profit-generating work. A job that is that easy to eliminate with automation wasn't that secure in the first place.

Q13: I think about getting rid of the old cash register and using a computer instead. What do you think?

A cash register is a perfectly useful piece of equipment. The problem with them is that they lack the ability to quickly tell you much important info other than some daily sales totals and the information necessary to balance your cash drawer.

While both of those items are important, there is a substantial amount of additional business information that are critical to the long-term health, profit and growth of your business than can be provided by a cash register. In many cases, those additional pieces of information can make other jobs far easier and more accurate, such as inventory control.

A computerized point of sale can provide that information and can also allow you to handle additional lines of business that a cash register simply won't support. One last thought is that in some markets, the image that your business portrays can be critical to their impression of your professionalism. This is not a common thing, but in some cases, it can be very important and most often, you know if you are in this kind of business.

Q14: When a consultant comes in to help us, my staff feels intimidated. Most of the time, I think they worry that this person is going to install a new program or computer equipment that is going to replace their job. It makes them mad at me and uncooperative with the consultant. How do you deal with that?

Often, the employee who feels the most threatened is the one we are working with the most, since we are asking questions about their job, the processes related to their job, and similar.

Early in that conversation, we do our best to make it clear that our job is to make their job better, more interesting, and more secure, rather than to "buy a new computer and eliminate them". Once your staff understands these things, they are rarely difficult to work with.

It doesn't take much to get almost any employee to realize that a job done by a computer isn't a very secure job and that they will be more likely to keep their job if they work with the computer and do something it simply can't do.

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Q15: Have you ever had a client whose business burned down? What happened?

Yes, I have had several lose their buildings (or homes) and equipment assets because of fire, theft and/or hurricane-related damage. While they lost lots of hard assets, they didn't lose their business because they followed my (sometimes nagging-like) advice to backup their data, take it offsite, and in several cases, store it online with my systems.

Nothing makes your heart sink like taking a call from a business owner who just lost their building and everything in it. Thankfully, many of those calls are followed up with a thank you for "making" them backup their files and send them offsite. I even provide offsite backup service at no cost to our customers in areas that were about to be hit by a hurricane (or similar), just in case, even if they aren't normally using my backup services.

Q16: My budget is only _____. What we can do to make a difference in my business?

Many of the obstacles we see in a business tend to be resolved by simple procedure changes. Larger "step changes" often occur when I include technology into a solution, but there are many inexpensive steps a company can implement that will make a substantial difference in the bottom line. The best part of these changes is that they often provide you with the extra time and/or cash flow to make more substantial changes, and the whole thing feeds just keeps feeding upon its own success.

Q17: What do I do if I have a serious problem during school hours?

While we sometimes hire a promising high school student for some work (as appropriate), they are never responsible for client support. We know you don't want a 5pm solution to a 9am problem, so you'll never hear "I'll be there after school", or "I just don't have time, I have a soccer game today and a test tomorrow" from me.

If you have any questions about my responses to these questions, please contact me.

Mark Riffey

Rescue Marketing

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