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. I'm sure if you talk to your own friends and colleagues you will get an earful of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

We founded Merit Technology after seeing our friends and family receive less than the best technical support. Our company values honesty above all else—we tell you how it is, we don't oversell, and when a mistake is made, we admit to it. We are on a mission to use technology to create lifelong relationships that enrich the quality of life in our communities.

I want to make choosing computer support as easy as possible for you. I have talked to a lot of business owners like yourself and have heard countless complaints about their I.T. guys. Included in here is a list of 21 questions based off those complaints and our answers to them. I encourage you to use these questions in your search for I.T. support.

We would love for you to join the Merit Technology family. One of our core values here is client growth, we get excited when our clients succeed and we work diligently to make your technology an asset, not a nightmare. Because when you see success, so do we.

Dedicated to serving you,

Jonathan Yarbrough,
President of Merit Technology Consultants

MERIT
TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANTS
A LIFELINE TO HONEST I.T. SERVICES

21 QUESTIONS
to Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them

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 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get in touch of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your calls?
Our Answer: We guarantee for our Elite Managed Service clients to have a technician working on a problem within 60 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every Elite Managed Service Agreement.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand?
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?
Our Answer: We conduct quarterly 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 that clearly explain what you are paying for?
Our Answer: We provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, what services are covered by agreements, so you never have to guess what you are paying for.

Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect YOU?
Our Answer: Merit Technology and its employees are fully covered by insurance because we value our clients and aim to provide the highest level of professional care. You should feel free to ask for proof of insurance from any vendor you do business with.

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, in writing. We never have hidden fees and you must sign off on any project-changes that would affect price before work begins.

Q8: Do they remotely monitor your network 24/7 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and prevent downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?
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 can impact your network.

Q9: Do they make weekly reports available that show all the updates, security patches and the status of every machine on your network so you know for sure your systems have been secured and updated?
Our Answer: We make detailed reports that show an overall health score of client networks and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches and other important network checks available on demand.

Q10: 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 "full access"?
Our Answer: All Managed Service clients receive network documentation in written and electronic form. We also routinely perform updates to this material and provide key people from your organization with this information.

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: We keep detailed network documentation and up-to-date client's account information. Any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off.

Q12: Does their support plan cover all of your needs?
Our Answer: We offer all-inclusive and customizable plans. Some of the things included in our Elite Managed Services plan are phone and email help desk support, vendor relations, data backup and recovery, executive summary reports, and more.

Q13: Do they monitor offer secure and innovative backup solutions for your data?
Our Answer: Our clients constantly access and rely on their data. We offer cloud services that keep an up-to-date record of your data that you can access from any computer.

Q14: Do they perform periodic 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 perform a monthly test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data can be recovered in the event of an emergency.

Q15: Do they backup up your network 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.

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 one that enables 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.

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 important for keeping your data secure.

Q18: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training?
Our Answer: Our technicians are required to keep the most up-to-date vendor certifications in all the software we support. One of our core values is initiative and we are committed to self-growth and never-ending improvement. This is something we work diligently to instill in all our employees so we can deliver excellence in all we do.

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 we 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 and follow it all the way to its resolution?
Our Answer: Our main business goal is to provide you with a lifeline to honest I.T. Services. We are committed to building trust, admitting mistakes, and focusing our collective energy on positive improvement. Follow-through is a core value of ours and we make an intentional effort to always see a job through until it meets your standards.

4 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 like 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:

- Applying security patches
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure

Any support tech should insist on some time of automated system monitoring. 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, *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.

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 part-time I.T. support 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 after an inexperienced neighbor, friend or relative 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. The world of technology is constantly changing and requires a nose to the grindstone to keep up with it all. 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 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, like most professional services, they are in high demand. At Merit Technology we value honesty and we guarantee fair and up-front costs.

Our technicians are highly trained with extensive experience in this field. One of our core values is initiative and we reward our technicians for earning certifications and working hard to advance within our company. Some shops will hire college students or new technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience. Without supervision, inexperienced technicians can cause more problems:

1. They improperly diagnose problems, which means you're paying them to fix the wrong thing and they still won't resolve your problem.
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.

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.

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. 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, 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 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!

3 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. They 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 for fixing things right, the first time. 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. 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 consultant who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** 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.