

10 Questions to Ask a Consultant BEFORE You Hire Them

Finding a consulting firm is not difficult nowadays, since even small towns have numerous ones. However, finding one that is right for you and your company can be a difficult task.

One reason the task can be so difficult is the diversity of Consultant's backgrounds and their methods. Listed below are some of the areas in which Consultant's differ greatly:

- a. Educational background
- b. Number of years experience
- c. Types of industries served
- d. Their approach to your needs and your staff
- e. Supervision of their consulting staff
- f. Information provided to you and its timing
- g. Costs for consulting fees and travel expenses
- h. Personality

While all the above are important, special emphasis should be made on the last item. No matter how qualified a consultant is or how glorious their resume appears, if you cannot work closely with them, and feel comfortable relying upon their advice, then you will not receive the maximum benefits for your consulting dollar.

What is the key to finding the right firm for you? The website is a good place to start. Often times the website's appearance is a direct reflection of the firm's personality, professionalism and approach to a client's needs. If it is easy to use, simple to follow, and "feels" good, you may want to pursue that firm. If the site seems too flashy or too difficult to follow, then you may want to concentrate on other firms who make you feel more comfortable.

Once you have a "pool" of consultants, the next step is asking the right questions. The goal is to get responses that make you feel comfortable. Before you decide to hire a consultant, prepare your list of questions. Known as an RFP (request for proposal) in larger companies, the approach is to ask each firm to respond either in writing or verbally to a preset list of questions. This allows you to compare potential firms on a more objective basis. Your list of questions will vary depending upon your needs and your industry. Using the following 10 questions as a guide, form your own RFP and ask each consultant you are considering the same questions. Your questions should be direct, without offending. Again, the following are only a guide, but can be used until you have time to form your own questions.

Remember you are the client and the one who needs to feel comfortable.

1. Does your website cover your background and methods? (Ask for website address and check it out!)
2. What makes your firm ideally suited for this project?
3. What differs in your approach from your competition?
4. How will you keep me informed and keep yourselves on target?
5. If selected, when could you begin? When will you complete it?
6. How much will it cost in fees? Travel expenses?
7. What results can I expect?
8. What kind of support do you provide after the project is completed? How long?
9. Do you offer a guarantee or warranty of your services?
10. Specifically, who will be involved in this project? May I see their resumes? Who will supervise them?

In addition, there are questions you should be asking yourself.

- Does this firm's values match those of my company?
- Do I feel comfortable accepting advice from this person?
- Does this consultant really listen?

- How will my staff react to this person?
- Were the verbal answers I received in line with their website presentation?