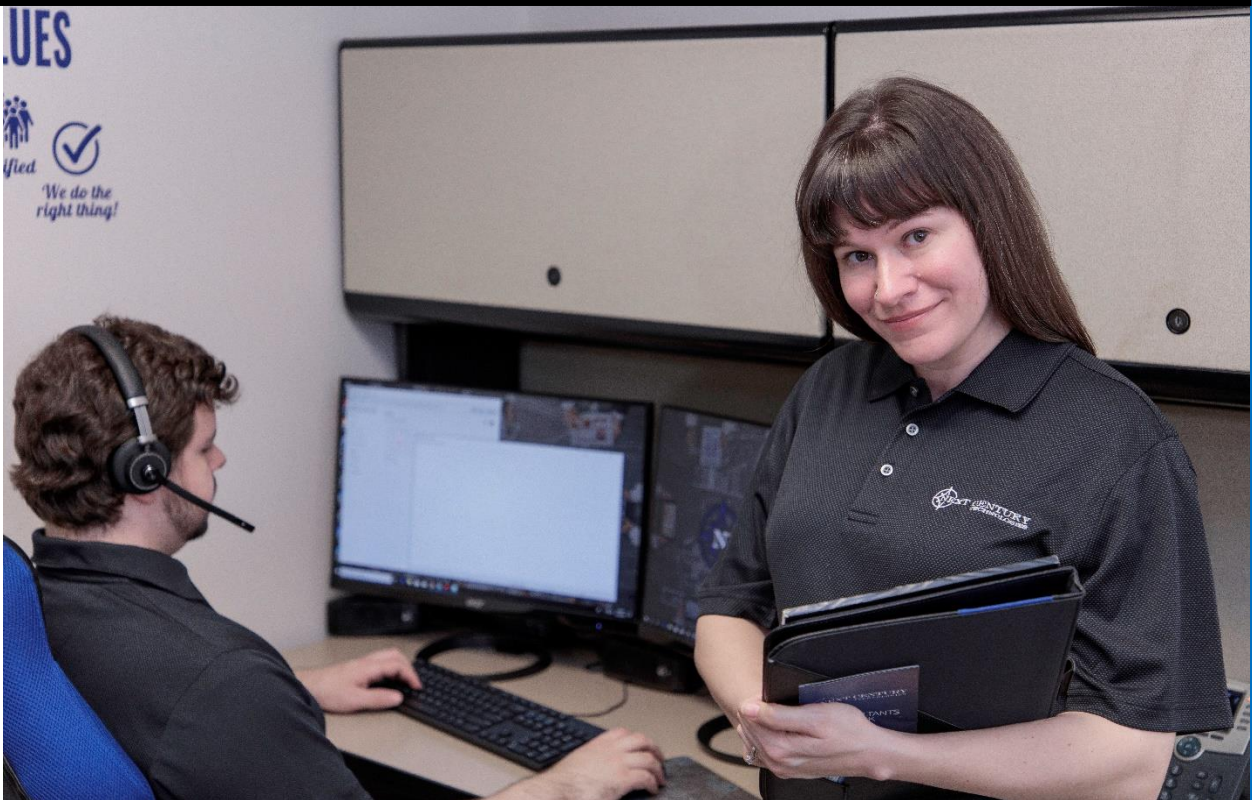


21 Critical Questions You MUST Ask Your IT Vendor



Your IT infrastructure is one of your biggest investments – is your IT vendor treating it that way?

Next Century Technologies

October 2024

Forward

If you depend on your computer network to run your business, this is one e-book you **DON'T** want to miss!

Today businesses rely on computers. Unfortunately, downtime and cyber attacks can cripple our IT and literally shut down a business. An unqualified IT vendor places your critical IT investment at risk for downtime, ransomware and lost productivity. Use this list of questions to spark a conversation with your vendor to make sure they are qualified to do their job.

This e-book will explain in simple, non-technical terms what you need to look for when outsourcing your IT support. Ask your IT vendor these questions to see if they really do have your best interests in mind! If they don't, it might be time to look for someone else.

You'll discover:

- Why your downtime may be good news for your IT vendor.
- Why your IT vendor must be a legit business with the proper insurance to cover not only themselves but you if there is a mistake or breach.
- The importance of verifying your backups are actually working.
- Why documentation is critical.
- The single most important tool at your disposal for recovering from ransomware.

A Free Education E-Book By:
Next Century Technologies, LLC
www.NextCenturyTech.com
Phone: 859-245-0582

21 Critical Questions You MUST Ask Your IT Vendor

SECTION I: Business Practices

1. How does your IT vendor make their money? Do they make their money when your computers are down or do they make their money when your computers are up?

A “break/fix” IT vendor makes bank when you are down. Your bad situation works to their benefit. When you are down, you are losing money due to staff that can’t work plus you will be writing a big check to your IT vendor. On the other hand, a “managed services” IT vendor makes money when your computers are up. They now become your strategic partner whose goals for technology align with yours – uptime and productivity. Not only will you make more money from your technology and staff due to better productivity, but your IT vendor will be hyper-focused on protecting your network from risks such as ransomware, e-mail phishing schemes and hardware failure. A “managed services” vendor will proactively monitor your network around the clock, make certain those backups are working flawlessly and keep a close eye on cyber security threats from the internet. They will be super-responsive to fixing any technology issues that may arise. They are motivated to keep your computers working and working well.

2. Do they have a guaranteed response time in writing?

It’s important that you have a written agreement for how long it will take, on average, to resolve your issues. Having an SLA (Service Level Agreement), or guaranteed response time, keeps your vendor accountable to meeting the needs of your business. This is another method of reducing your downtime and giving you peace of mind that you know your issues will be resolved in a timely fashion.

3. Is satisfaction completely guaranteed?

It is important that a company stands behind everything they do and sell. If an IT vendor does not fully back the hardware or service they are selling, you could be left unsatisfied with the time and money invested in your technology. A “value added reseller” may be an old phrase from the 90’s, but what it stands for is still important today – a hardware reseller should stand behind what they sell, and if you aren’t happy with it, they should work diligently to make it right, even if it means replacing the hardware. Same goes for the services an IT vendor provides. People make mistakes. Does your vendor hold themselves accountable for mistakes and resolves them quickly and without charging? If your IT vendor is not confident enough to guarantee their products and services, why should you be confident in your vendor?

4. Is your current IT vendor properly insured?

You have car insurance and health insurance to cover yourself from the unexpected, whether you're at fault or not. Your IT vendor should be taking the same precautions with liability coverage as well as error and omissions coverage. Make sure your current vendor is protected so that you are also protected. Request a certificate of coverage from your IT vendor. It's free and not an uncommon request.

5. Is your IT vendor acting as a company registered with the secretary of state?

Being a properly registered business (LLC, corporation, etc.) is a sign of commitment to both you and the law. It is a great step to ensuring they are complying with state laws, paying state taxes and workman's comp. Are they fully committed to providing quality service? Are they doing the right thing by law? A company that is not properly registered with the state is likely not carrying the proper liability coverage as well. This puts you and your company at risk if there is an accident.

A "Certificate of Existence" from the Secretary of State may be relied on as conclusive evidence that a domestic corporation or domestic limited liability company is in existence. Ask your IT vendor for a copy of theirs or search for one yourself online. Kentucky's link is: <http://app.sos.ky.gov/ftsearch>

6. How long have they been in business?

With longevity comes stability. There are certainly great new companies out there, but it's difficult to understand their track record if they have been in business for only a short time. Weed out the fly-by-night folks by looking for vendors that have an established, positive track record. Companies that have been around a long time should have a list of references and testimonials.



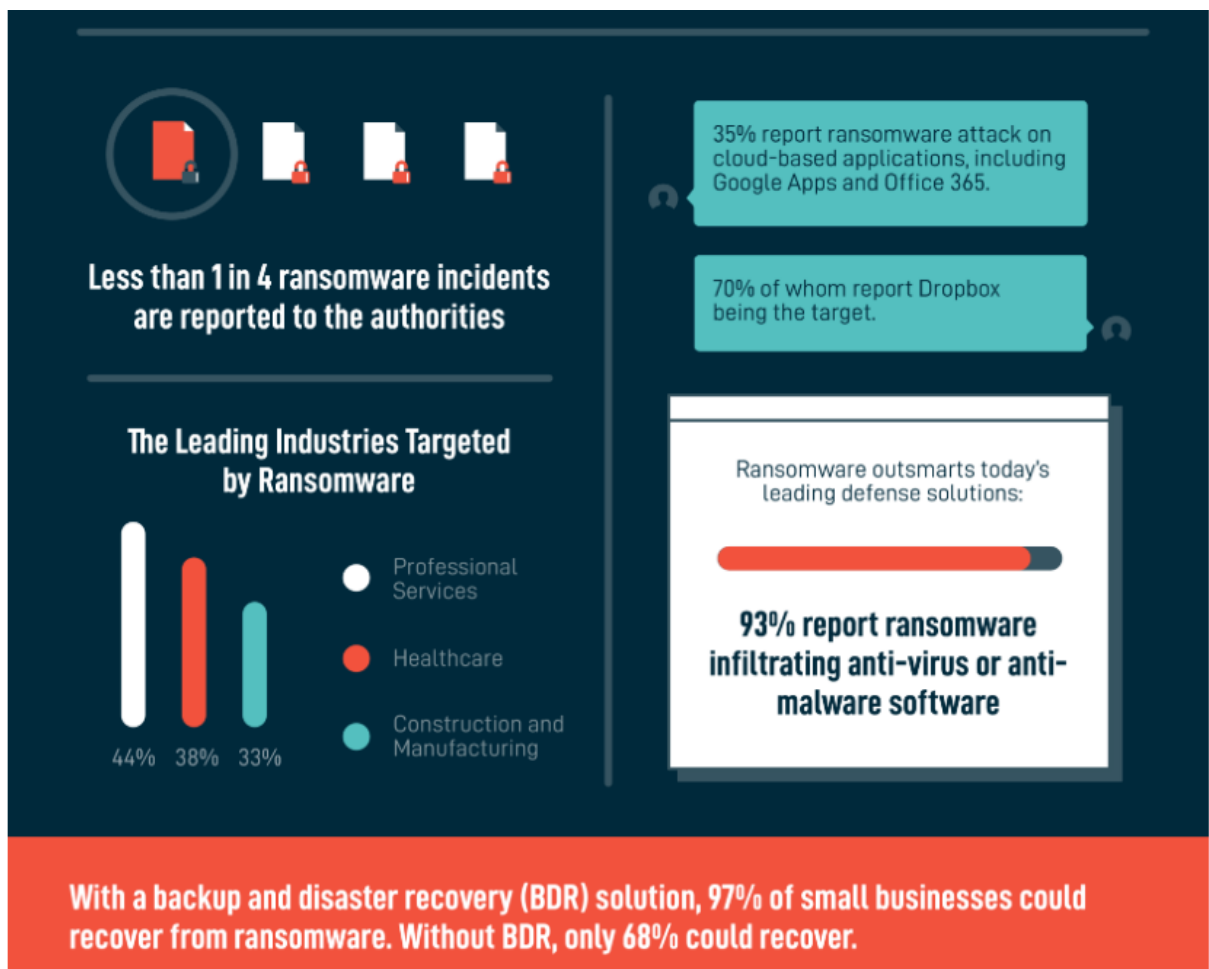
"You can observe a lot by just watching."
-- Yogi Berra



SECTION II: Business Continuity

7. Does your IT vendor test your backups regularly and guarantee successful restores?

Frequent and successful backups are absolutely critical in a world of ransomware, hardware failure and natural disaster. There has been a 70% increase in ransomware attacks in the past two years. CBS' 60 Minutes ran a segment on ransomware on May 5, 2019 that every business owner should watch (<https://bit.ly/60ransom>). In it they explain how Ransomware-for-Rent websites allow anyone, regardless of experience, to run a ransomware campaign. Now tens of thousands of ransomware e-mails and phishing attacks flood US-based businesses of all sizes every day. 60 Minutes asked a security expert, "What is the best way to prevent this from happening?" The answer: "Great cyber hygiene..Certainly your backups need to be secured offline." Your backups are the single more important remedy to an attack that will, not may, occur. Those backups must be reliable. So did you get a successful backup report last night? Do they run at least 7 days a week, including holidays? When was the last time your IT vendor did a test restore? Ask!



8. Did they help you design a business continuity plan in case of disaster?

If data or hardware is lost or destroyed, are you covered? Can your business ride out any risk, be it a hardware failure, tornado, fire, busted water pipe or ransomware attack? Do you have an alternate location if your building is damaged or destroyed? Can you function without internet? Do your employees know your business continuity plan? How do you contact your clients during a disaster? Are there specific regulatory requirements for your industry, such as banking, that set mandatory recovery times?

If your business relies on technology, then your IT vendor plays a critical role in your business continuity plan. Employ an IT vendor that is not only well-rounded with technology but is skilled with helping you craft and maintain your business continuity plan.

“He who fails to plan is planning to fail.”
-- Winston Churchill

SECTION III: Who is supporting you?

9. Does your IT vendor hire local?

Knowing who you will be working with when support is needed is important. Ease of communication is an essential part of receiving quality service. The overseas call-center can be a source of great frustration when staffed by people who know as much about the technology as you do, possibly less. Time is money, and the money saved by hiring a vendor that outsources support may cost you big in the long run. Remember, supporting our local economy benefits your business as well!



10. Does your vendor have adequate resources to solve problems in a timely manner?

Your technology is too complicated and too specialized for one person to know everything. It takes a team to provide the skills, maintenance and protection business technology requires. Not only will a team provide a better response time, they will have a diversified skillset for solving problems and building solutions. If your business relies heavily on technology, make sure you have an IT vendor that provides a team to manage it every day of the year, regardless of sickness or vacations.

11. Is their staff certified and/or educated?

Certifications represent commitment and knowledge about the products and skills required to work with brand-specific technology. Some common ones available are from corporations such as Microsoft, VMWare, CompTIA, Cisco and many more. This results in faster response times, first time resolutions, and better recommendations of products or methods. Make sure your IT vendor's certifications are current and relevant to your technology.

Bachelor's degrees are important as well, with many local colleges and universities offering more technology-focused programs than ever before. The four-year Bachelor's degree is still a standard for commitment and excellence, and helps develop skills such as critical and logical thinking, writing, communication and mathematics.

12. Do you know who's going to be helping you when you do have an issue?

Does it seem like someone new works on your computers every month? It can be frustrating explaining your environment to every new technician that answers the phone or shows up at your door. Having an assigned technician or a dedicated account champion gives you a single go-to person that knows your business and your technology. It's a personal touch that goes a long way to providing better communication and support.

13. Does your IT vendor maintain a business culture around employee training and retention?

If your IT vendor invests in staff education and well-being the result will be a better service experience for you. They will keep pace with your technology needs and be a better, happier steward of your technology. IT is the fastest changing industry in the world. Employee retention is a sign of stability and good business culture in your IT vendor. Look for it in a strategic IT partner!



14. Does your IT vendor help even when another vendor is involved or at fault?

The e-mails keep bouncing back – it's your computer's fault they say. The internet is slow, must be your router, go replace it. The copier scan error is caused by your cabling. We've all heard these lines before and you just don't have the time or energy to play this game. Your IT vendor should be taking the lead on all these IT issues, even if it involves an outside vendor. The goal is IT that just works, so make sure your vendor is making that happen, no matter who else is involved.

“Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”

-- Mark Twain

15. Does your IT vendor work well with other connected technologies such as phones, security cameras and Chromebooks? Nowadays phones, security cameras and Chromebooks are becoming more an important part of your IT infrastructure. Is your IT vendor covering them? Peace of mind comes with knowing that all of your IT is managed and protected. If your vendor does not work with these technologies, do they have a strategic partner or partners that are trusted and vetted to assist? Is your IT vendor willing to put their reputation on the line with using these other vendors?



SECTION IV: You

16. Do they have experience in YOUR regulated industry?

Medical industries and industries that handle patient data will fall under HIPAA requirements. Does your IT vendor know that they fall under HIPAA if you do? Banks fall under a variety of financial regulations. Does your IT vendor have experience with your financial regulations? Processes, procedures and a critical eye for cyber security and accountability are a must for regulated industries. Your IT vendor should also carry an error and omissions insurance policy as well and will be able to provide a certificate of insurance upon request.

17. Do they help you plan for growth?

Technology is an important part of your company's growth. Does your IT vendor help plan for events such as opening satellite offices, adding employees, building new locations, offering ideas on new applications to manage the growth, etc.? Your IT vendor should plan, at minimum, a bi-annual technology assessment. They will help you design a technology roadmap for your existing and future growth, and a budget to go with it.



18. Does your IT vendor look for ways to help you increase productivity?

Growth-minded business owners leverage technology to increase efficiency and make more money. Does your IT vendor identify needs and make recommendations on hardware and software to help increase your productivity? Your IT vendor should be on the leading edge of technology and employ a staff that is eager and willing to learn and advance new skills. Are they passing this knowledge on to you, or at very least, discussing these advancements with you to ensure your business needs are met with the best options available?

Documentation is a love letter that you write to your future self. — Damian Conway

19. Does your IT vendor maintain documentation on your network?

Does your vendor have a list of all your critical logins and passwords? A diagram of your network that tells you what is connected and where? An inventory of all hardware sorted by age? A reputable IT vendor will document your network environment and keep it updated. A well-documented network can be managed easily by your IT vendor's team because important details are easy to find. An IT vendor with good documentation is a sign of stability and good stewardship of their clients' networks. Good documentation means that if an employee of your IT vendor leaves, someone else can easily take over!

20. Do you have real-time access to your documentation?

Documentation is important if you ever decide to change IT vendors. Less scrupulous vendors will hold back documentation and passwords to make it more difficult for clients to leave. Ask for documentation. Better yet, ask for real-time access to it which is easily provided by most cloud-based IT documentation solutions that your IT vendor can utilize. Good documentation is a critical part of your business continuity plan, you can't do the plan without it. Get access to it if you don't already.

**21. Most importantly, are you happy with your IT vendor?**

Do you trust and value your IT vendor? Are they friendly, knowledgeable, accountable and doing the right thing? Would you recommend them to a friend? If not, why? Your technology represents a significant investment of time and money on your part, in fact, its likely your company is built on it. If the success of your business relies on technology, invest in a partnership with a quality IT vendor!

If your current IT vendor failed to answer these questions to your satisfaction, I want to give you a FREE network check-up to make things “right”.

If that's you, consider this a “friendly reminder” to get your network checked out – if nothing else, it's a good way to get a third-party review of your network's security.

And to make it a complete “no-brainer,” I'm offering a Network Check-Up for FREE so you have no excuse for making sure that your computer network is safe not only from spyware and viruses, but also hackers, spam, data loss, hardware failure, software corruption, and a number of other disasters.

For free, we will come to your office and...

For FREE, We Will Come To Your Office And...

- Check your firewall's security settings to make sure you are protected from the latest hacker attacks, worms, and viruses.
- Check your internet to make sure you are getting the bandwidth you are paying for.
- Check your network's back-up system to ensure it is working properly and accurately backing up all of the critical files and information you never want to lose.
- Verify that you have the most up-to-date security patches installed properly; miss one critical update and you're a "sitting duck."
- Diagnose slow, unstable PCs.

Why Should You Care About This?

Because there are literally dozens of ways hackers and viruses can access your network—undetected—to access and remotely control your network, corrupt your data, and use your network as a conduit for spreading spam, viruses, and even illegal software.

There are numerous system checks and updates that should be done on a regular basis to ensure maximum speed, performance, and security. Ignore them and your system will get progressively slower, unstable, and susceptible to viruses, spyware, and hackers. Tape backups have a failure rate of 100% --that means all tape drives will fail at some point, often without warning. You don't want to find out that your backup was not working the day after your hard drive fried.

Think About This...

What else in your business is more valuable than the data on your network? Just imagine how devastating it would be to lose it! That's why this Check-Up is so important. We'll conduct a comprehensive review of your network's security settings to make sure your data is safe and secure.

Okay...So What's The Catch?

I bet you're wondering why I'd be willing to give this away for free, so please allow me to explain. First off, 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.

We are simply offering this Free Network Check-Up as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with.

After All, Don't You Just Want Your Darn Computer To Work The Way It's Supposed To?

That's why I'm making this offer. I know that we are hands down the best at what we do, but I don't think it's fair for you to risk your money to find out. I don't expect everyone to become a customer, but I know that some will end up becoming loyal, long-term clients, just like these:



**Lana McGinnis
Sturgill, Turner,
Barker & Maloney**

Local Company With Experience We Count On

When you have an issue, which could be a breach or other type of cyber incident, you need help immediately. Next Century Technologies has always been there for us when we've had issues, been on site here in our offices and worked with us until the issues were resolved. They are a local company with experienced personnel who continue to assist us with upgrades and updates along with cyber incidents.



**Matt Finney
Everburn Mfg**

Workflows Improved Company-Wide Thanks to System Upgrades

Next Century Technologies has a wonderful team and is very fast to respond to issues and get them taken care of in a timely manner. **This has been a huge help to me as someone with several different responsibilities.** Also, the upgrades implemented by Next Century Technologies to our systems has helped us improve workflow company-wide at all three locations. They have the ability to remote manage our computers and resolve issues without having to travel, which has saved us a lot of time.



**Jennifer Durbin
American Health
Mgt**

They Do The Heavy Lifting, Provide Great Customer Service And Communicate Well

Our employees and administrators are busy. They don't have time to agonize over the right IT equipment, software, or just basic issues that arise with technology. Next Century Technologies allows us to have a trusted partner who can do the heavy lifting for those types of decisions and assist with any issues that arise once those decisions are made.

The team at Next Century Technologies provides great customer service. **When our employees, who may not be tech savvy, have questions and reach out, the Next Century technician is able to communicate effectively in what is often a stressful situation and resolve the issues as quickly as possible.** Next Century goes above and beyond in this way. Also, timely responses are key, and someone is always available either immediately or with a very quick return call.

About the Author



Tracy Hardin has over 30 years' experience managing servers and networks and, most importantly, helping people. She worked as a student consultant while studying Computer Science at the University of Kentucky. After graduation, she worked another 10 years in the corporate world managing computer networks before starting her own IT consulting firm, Next Century Technologies, in 2001.

In addition to her bachelor's degree, Tracy has earned certifications from Novell, Cisco and CompTIA. In 2019 she completed the Goldman-Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program at Babson College in Boston. She is also an active member of Commerce Lexington and the National Society of IT Service Providers (NSITSP.org).

Tracy is the author of *How to Cyber Secure Your Business: A Guide to Demystifying IT Security for Small and Medium Businesses* and *How to Manage IT in Your Business: A Guide to Demystifying IT Operations for Small and Medium Businesses*. Both books are available on Amazon.

Located in beautiful Lexington, Kentucky, Next Century Technologies manages and protects IT for clients who want to focus on what they do best—running their business!

Slow computers, lousy internet, unreliable networks, viruses and ransomware cost you productivity and money. We only work with clients where we have a positive impact on their bottom line. Let's talk and see if my team can improve your productivity with our technical expertise. Call us at (859) 245-0582 or drop me an e-mail at Tracy@NextCenturyTech.com

