

Why Hire a Consultant?

Why do companies update or upgrade their systems and equipment? One reason is to be perceived by their clients as up-to-date and relevant with current technology. Other times the motivation is to increase productivity and profitability; or to cut expense and streamline operations. Whatever the reasons, the temptation often is to decrease project expense by utilizing internal resources or hiring hourly contractors to research the various manufacturers' products.

If you are tech savvy in a company looking for new ways to increase profitability, productivity or customer retention with technology, you may have experienced something like the story below:

The Production Manager of a major regional newspaper runs his fingers through his hair in frustration. Looking at his desktop, he realizes that, once again, he is going to be working through lunch and after hours to do his *regular* job. Yet again, he turns his attention back to the white pages sent by the person hired to research the new IT systems being installed next year. Composing several questions for the sake of clarification, he embarks on an email dialogue knowing that this is only the beginning of a large, quickly overwhelming task. "How did I get drafted to do this?" he mutters as he hits the send button and grabs a cookie for lunch.....

Why would you hire a Consultant instead of utilizing talented, internal resources or hiring an hourly contractor to do the research for you? On the following pages are ten solid reasons for protecting your company's resources by working with a Consultant.

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INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANTS

Top 10 Reasons For Hiring a Consultant



1. Consultants are advisers on business , not just products.
A qualified solution oriented Consultant will do an analysis of your current operations and the goals and direction your company has chosen for the future. Any solution offered will be designed to enhance the goals you have set and reduce or eliminate points of pain that may be keeping you awake at night.
2. A Consultant is always your advocate in research, meetings, discussions, and comparisons of various products that may be explored as part of your solution. They will always take your part when it comes to discussions about cost sensitive items like:
 - a) Is an addition to existing equipment better than an upgrade/replacement?
 - b) Does your system need to be replaced or is an upgrade a better solution?
 - c) What existing resources can be re-utilized during the upgrade/replacement of your system?
 - d) What technology is available to meet your business needs and goals?
3. A Consultant is an expert in technical. In addition to their formal education, they:
 - a) stay current reading and writing white pages,
 - b) chit chat with engineers, learn to the nth degree the how's and why's of what a particular product/technology does and how it does it.
 - c) Understand the advantages/ disadvantages of this technology
 - d) Discover if it is a forklift change out or does this new wonder product play well with others?
4. While it is good to have vender sources that meet your needs in response to prior business deals; personal inclinations and feelings of friendship are not the best basis for making a decision that will affect the profitability of your business for years to come. Professional Consultants are bound by a code of ethics that will protect your company's proprietary information and ensure that competition between manufacturers and venders is fair and balanced.

5. The devil is in the details; overlooking simple tasks can lead to additional expenses, frustrating delays and unnecessary labor. I once knew a voice systems manager who discovered that the existing Main Distribution Frame cabling was unlabeled; as was the PBX, and all wall jacks. This called for hours of labor as each cable drop had to be toned and tested and the eventual phone system upgrade took hours longer than was necessary. While your Consultant should be product, vender, and manufacturer neutral, they are armed by education and experience with:

- a) the right questions to ask
- b) what the industry standards are as to the roles of each vender and manufacturer
- c) how they integrate in a given project,
- d) who is responsible for what
- e) what the expected deliverables are for each phase of the project
- f) what is a reasonable project time-line and
- g) best practices regarding the involved



6. Many times our view of an issue is obscured by being too close to the situation and it is helpful to bring in a fresh pair of experienced eyes to see things from a different point of view. Consultants have a technical point of reference but are not biased toward any one solution or point of view.

7. How many times have you come away from a department head or managers' meeting thinking that you will never be able to meet the needs of every department? Consultants do not work daily with the same set of frustrating situations that can cause us to slap a band-aid on a problem instead of fixing the underlying issue. They will ask questions from a different angle; instead of "What new products do you want?" they will ask, "How would you rather have things work?". If a department head or manager is already fixed on a product or has a special relationship with an existing vender, the Consultant can explore how that product or partnership will meet the needs being expressed by that department as well as the company as a whole. This allows you to make an informed decision that takes into account the benefit of the company as a whole and not just one part.

8. Your best asset is your people, so it is critical that they be able to contribute information regarding their business processes, points of view, and creative ideas in a format where it is safe to do so. The input can be integrated into the solution without your personnel having to research the technology which can slow down your company's productivity. The Consultant is the catalyst that makes this input a useable tool as you develop your solution.
9. Hourly or internally hired contractors often generate much activity to be productive and justify the position they have been hired for. Remember the Production Manager? He's plodding through page after page of technical white papers trying to understand what is being said while in the background of his mind his real job is screaming at him for lack of attention. Consultants will shield you from the information overload that muddies the water and bogs you down; while still attending to the technical details that will result in a solid profitable, reliable solution for your business.
10. A stack of white papers have their place, but they do not belong in:
 - a) the hands of a CEO who just wants to know how this solution is going to increase the company's productivity and profitability, and maintain business continuity while minimizing expense and risk.
 - b) the hands of a CFO when all he wants to see is a reasonable ROI.
 - c) a busy IT manager tasked with keeping your systems running.

They will all want to see white papers eventually but only the ones that pertain to the proper solution for your company; not every white paper that every salesperson involved in the bidding process wants to send over.

The Consultant organizes information, presenting it in reasonable, digestible, pertinent formats to the correct personnel at the right time.

So, why would you hire a Consultant? Why wouldn't you?

