



Key Questions to Ask

Selecting a Member of the Apple Consultants Network

Apple and related third-party companies provide a wide variety of technologies that can have a positive impact on your business, but you may not know exactly what you need or how to integrate it all into a total solution that's right for you. You also may not know if you are maximizing the potential of the technology your business relies on. And, if you're like most people, you don't have the time or ability to properly set up and maintain even a small network of computers, and you may not have someone on staff to handle that mission-critical responsibility. If this sounds like you, consider the services of an independent consultant who can develop solutions that keep your company ahead of the competition and ensure that you have the tools and training needed to run your business smoothly and efficiently.

Members of the Apple Consultants Network—independent technical experts in the set up, use, and maintenance of Apple and related third-party products and solutions—are one of your best sources of help. Consultants who are members demonstrate a dedication to professional development, and clients who work with Apple Consultants Network members give them top satisfaction ratings: 4.7 out of 5. There are more than 1,000 members across the U.S. and Canada, all with different strengths and specialties, giving you a broad range of consultants to choose from.

But how do you go about finding and choosing the *right* member of the Apple Consultants Network? The following questions are designed to guide you through the process.

How can I find a consultant in my area with the right qualifications?

To find a qualified member near you, do a search at <http://consultants.apple.com/consultant/>. This search engine is designed to help you find members of the Apple Consultants Network in your area. Follow the simple instructions for searching the directory and you will receive a list of qualified professionals, including their contact information and a link to their website. If you find a member in your area, but he or she does not specialize in the specific technical area you need, ask the consultant about other members of the Apple Consultants Network with the skills you need. Members are in constant communication with one another and can help you find a proper fit between your needs and a consultant's expertise.

Members receive training and the latest technical information about Apple and related third-party products and services and have access to other resources that help them stay on the cutting edge of technology. Being part of a large network of consultants, they can benefit from the knowledge and experience of other members, too. Find out if the consultant you're considering participates in any other consulting associations. Consultants' involvement in technical organizations enriches their background and experience, translating into advantages for your business.



What types of services do consultants provide?

Apple Consultants Network members offer a wide variety of services, from setting up an office, network, or workgroup to cross-platform network integration, digital video, publishing automation and wireless support. Many also provide training as part of their consulting services. Be sure to request specific information about the consultant's unique areas of expertise and ask for examples of successful customer implementations.

What are the consultant's unique technical skills and how do they apply to your environment?

Companies in areas such as publishing, education and bioscience often have their own unique needs. Most consultants have specialized skill sets and can implement solutions based on a diverse set of products from various companies. If you have a specific need, check to see if the consultant you are considering has experience that maps to your requirements. For example, many members of the Apple Consultants Network have in-depth expertise in publishing and other creative markets. They can implement solutions such as workflow automation and digital asset management to increase productivity in creative environments. Other members of the Apple Consultants Network are UNIX experts who can help scientific companies. Most members can help you maximize the potential of Mac OS X no matter what market you're in. Many businesses have more general needs such as networking, business productivity software and Internet connectivity, and Apple Consultants Network members are skilled at meeting these types of requirements as well. Remember to request specific information about the consultant's unique areas of expertise and ask for examples of successful customer solutions.

Does the consultant have all of the skills needed to implement your solution?

A major advantage of working with Apple Consultants Network members is they are part of a network of 1,000 consultants across the U.S. and Canada. They can exchange referrals with each other to help you find a proper fit between your needs and a consultant's expertise. Or, they can team up on projects. For example, an AppleScript expert might complete the publishing automation portion of your solution and work with another member well versed in ColorSync to implement a color management workflow.

Can the consultant provide a solution involving hardware, software, networking and custom programming?

Members of the Apple Consultants Network have the skills to meet a wide variety of business needs. A few examples include custom FileMaker Pro databases, accounting solutions, enterprise content management, digital video editing, and cross-platform network integration. In addition, consultants can recommend and help you make hardware and software purchases. In a survey conducted in 2000, clients of Apple Consultants Network members reported that nearly 100 percent of their purchases were influenced by their consultant and 90 percent did not encounter any problems with their purchase.



Can the consultant provide examples of past projects as well as references?

It's important to check references carefully. It is not necessary that a consultant has done exactly the same work for someone else, but it is important that clients are happy with the consultant's results and continued service. Clients of Apple Consultants Network members report high satisfaction ratings: 4.7 out of 5, and 98 percent of them said they would recommend their consultant to other businesses, according to a 2000 survey conducted by Apple.

Is the consultant skilled at solving a client's business problems?

The best consultants help you look for ways to use technology to solve problems, know how to develop entirely new systems, and can also develop tools that work well with your existing systems. Most Apple Consultants Network members have years of experience in making significant contributions to their clients' success. They can readily assess your current needs before making a recommendation, then propose, implement and maintain solutions.

Is the consultant willing to set up a complete plan with specific goals and milestones?

A consultant's primary task is to understand your needs and translate them into solutions that will work for you. It's important to have specific objectives that clarify what you hope to achieve and milestones that keep a project on track. Make sure that the consultant gives you an estimated completion time and establish a method to inform you of progress. Regular status reports are a good safeguard. They should keep you up-to-date on the consultant's progress, as well as the costs being incurred. Request that status reports from the consultant start right away, from the beginning of the project.

Does the consultant have any training certifications?

The best consultants are always learning. Ask members if they have training certifications from Apple in Mac OS X or certifications for other software or networking products. You will want to be sure that the consultant has the necessary training and expertise, especially if the job requires integrating a number of operating systems or installing a variety of networking hardware components. Certifications also signal a commitment to high standards of professionalism.

How much will the consultant's services cost?

Consultants set their own prices and they vary considerably, depending largely on the going hourly rate in their geographic area for someone with their skills. Investigate different pricing options with the consultant you've chosen and keep in mind that the services and solutions they provide will typically deliver a long-term return on investment. The best approach is to ask the consultant for references of customers who had the same or similar types of services performed, then ask the references if the consultant delivered a valuable service at a reasonable price.

Will the consultant bill on a project or an hourly basis?

This usually depends on the types of services offered. If a consultant is creating a custom application for you, the best approach might be to establish a fee for the entire project. On the other hand, ongoing services such as IT support are usually covered under service contracts or billed on an hourly or per-call basis. Establish up front the billing structure that your consultant prefers for the type of work you need.



Is the consultant available to provide services and training on an ongoing basis?

Many members of the Apple Consultants Network continue working for the same clients on a long-term basis. Some act as a “virtual” IT staff for smaller companies, because consultants can assess business needs, recommend solutions, implement and support them at a fraction of the cost of hiring a full-time, in-house staff. Others work with larger enterprises to continually fine-tune and augment solutions based on Apple and related third-party products. Many members also provide ongoing training to ensure that staff members are making optimal use of solutions. Once you establish a successful relationship with a consultant, he or she can become an invaluable asset to your business. You will want to be sure that the possibility for an ongoing relationship exists.

Can the consultant provide a way of measuring return on investment?

Many customers who have used the services of Apple Consultants Network members report substantial returns on their investment. One advertising agency brought its video production in-house with the help of a consultant and recouped its investment within two days. While returns from other solutions might not be as dramatic, 98 percent of clients of Apple Consultants Network members said they would recommend their consultant to other businesses. Be sure that your consultant understands what kinds of results you expect.

Finally, ask yourself if you feel comfortable with the consultant.

Consultants’ interpersonal skills may be just as important to you as their technical and business abilities. Because a consultant will be providing mission-critical solutions and services that can have a major impact on your company, you need to be able to trust them as well as enjoy working with them.

Members of the Apple Consultants Network can be an invaluable resource for your company. They can help you maximize the value of your investment and turn technology into a competitive advantage for your business. By following a few key guidelines, you can find a consultant that meets your exact needs. Visit <http://www.apple.com/consultants> today to find a consultant in your area and learn more about how members of the Apple Consultants Network can benefit your business.