

## The Business Owner's Guide to Selecting an IT Service Provider

*“What Every Business Owner Must Know  
About Hiring An Honest, Competent,  
Responsive, And Fairly Priced Computer  
Consultant”*

Provided by:



16000 Ventura Boulevard, Suite 702  
Encino, CA 91436  
818-501-3390

<http://www.fpainc.com>

*“We focus on your IT,  
so you can focus on your business!”*

## **Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data and Operations to Just Anyone! This Business Advisory Guide Will Arm You with Revealing Questions You Should Ask any Computer Consultant Before Giving Them Access to Your Company's Network**

Choosing the wrong computer consultant to support your network can not only be incredibly frustrating and expensive, but you could end up costing you in downtime, data loss, and expensive repair bills, not to mention the headaches and frustration!

### **Read this guide and you'll discover:**

- ✓ The "dirty little secret" to the computer repair industry that most people don't know and will never be told by their IT guy (knowing this ALONE could save you from wasting tons of money and untold aggravation when outsourcing your computer support).
- ✓ 21 Revealing questions that will help you instantly spot an unethical or grossly incompetent computer repair/support technician in minutes.
- ✓ 4 Costly misconceptions most business owners have about computer maintenance and repair; one you will need to know BEFORE even picking up the phone.
- ✓ Viruses, worms, spyware, and hackers: what you need to know to protect yourself.
- ✓ 5 Mistakes to avoid when choosing a computer consultant.
- ✓ Why "cheap" or "lowest price" computer repair shops aren't the bargain they initially appear to be.
- ✓ The one surefire sign that you should run – not walk – away from a computer support firm.

**From the Desk of:**

Craig Pollack  
*Founder & CEO, FPA Technology Services, Inc.*

Dear Colleague,

**Choosing a computer support company isn't easy.** There are no shortages of horror stories about incompetent computer repair "gurus" bungling jobs and causing MORE problems as a result of their loose morals or gross incompetence. I'm sure if you talk to your own friends and colleagues you will get an ear-full of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

Why is this? Because the computer consulting industry, along with a lot of other industries, has its own share of incompetent or unethical businesses who will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine whether or not they know what they are doing. Sometimes this is out of greed for your money; but more often it's simply because they don't have the skills and competency to do the job right, but won't tell you that up front. From misleading information, unqualified technicians, poor management and terrible customer service, we've seen it all...and we know they exist in abundance because we have had a number of clients come to us to clean up the disasters they have caused.

**Buyer Beware: The Computer Consulting Industry Is NOT Regulated!**

Here's an embarrassing (and little-known) fact about my industry: it is not regulated like many other professional service industries - which means ANYONE can claim they are a "computer repair expert." **In fact, a lot of the businesses in this industry started because the owner was FIRED or laid off from their job and couldn't find work anywhere else. That means many of the so-called experts aren't and worse yet make sleazy auto repair shops look like the pinnacle of virtue and competence.**

Doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, realtors, electricians and even automotive repair shops are regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, since the computer industry is still in its infancy, it's still highly unregulated and there really aren't any laws in existence to protect the consumer – **which is why it's so important for you to arm yourself with the information contained in this report!**

Anyone can hang out a shingle promoting themselves as a computer expert. Even if they are honestly *trying* to do a good job for you, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your network's speed and performance or in lost or corrupt data files. That is why we decided to offer this report. The information in this Guide is provided to help raise standards within the computer support industry and to give YOU useful information to help you guard against the unethical or incompetence of some the companies and technicians out there now.

Since 1991, we've been operating FPA as professional services firm. Our approach and business model has been to hold ourselves up to the same standards as CPA's, Investment Advisors, doctors, lawyers, and engineers. As the author David Maister says, "the opposite of professional isn't unprofessional – it's technician". Our goal is to provide our clients with world class service and support while adhering to the highest level of professionalism.

Dedicated to serving you,



## About The Author

Craig Pollack is the Founder & CEO of FPA Technology Services, Inc. Founded in 1991, FPA was one of the few true "Computer Consultants" in the greater Los Angeles area. Since inception, Craig has provided the strategy and direction for FPA, ensuring its clients, their business owners, and key decision makers leverage technology effectively to achieve their business objectives. Craig focuses on ensuring that the technologies implemented by clients are "business centric" and key components of their businesses' success, and that this approach is shared by every staff member of FPA.

Craig holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science focused on Business Systems Design from California State University, Northridge. Craig began his professional career 25 years ago working with clients creating custom business applications, implementing and supporting their accounting, ERP, CRM, and Portfolio Management systems, as well as implementing and supporting their network infrastructure.

Craig began working with clients in the Investment Advisor arena over twenty years ago. First with Advent's *The Professional Portfolio* through *Axys* and then onto *APX*. Craig has created 100's of custom reports for Advent's Portfolio Management System throughout the years as well as has worked with most of the key Line of Business applications Investment Advisors rely on – Moxy, Qube, Bloomberg, Bridge, Instinet, Morningstar, Centerpiece, First Call Research Direct – just to name a few.

Similarly, Craig began working with CPA's over twenty years ago as well (one of Craig's first office jobs back in the day was working in the "Data Entry" department entering handwritten timesheets for a local CPA firm!). As a Sage and SBT reseller and developer, in the early 90's and 2000's FPA worked closely with CPA's and their clients implementing, customizing, and supporting accounting and ERP systems.

Craig's experience in the industry working with business owners and key decision makers helping them leverage technology is unparalleled. Because of Craig's unique background, he has always brought a business perspective when implementing or supporting technology and ensures that everyone at FPA does the same. Hence the phrase – *Business Before Technology*<sup>TM</sup>. It's what we live by – everyday.

## About FPA

FPA has always prided itself on the quality of the service we provide and the long term relationships we build with our clients. With over 25 staff members, we're big enough to get the job done (and done well) but personable enough to ensure that our clients don't get lost in the shuffle. When you call us, we answer the phone. We don't hide behind voicemail – you can always talk to someone. Our overriding goal is to ensure Client Happiness! That's why our Core Value number one is "Take Care of the Client".

While we have the chops to address the most advanced technical issues, and always with a business first perspective, what we pride ourselves on most is our staff. While we have staff who've recently been hired, we have staff who've been with us 8, 10, 12, and even 18 years! Our staff are led, trained, development, and mentored by our senior management team – again, individuals who are both technical as well as business focused. To say our hiring process is like "running the gauntlet" is an understatement. We only hire the best and the brightest. And then once onboard, we run everyone through our FPAU training program - FPAU – even with its own Final Exam after 3 months! We have two mottos we live by – "No Evil, No Slackers" and "Work Hard, Play Hard". And that's why our Core Value number two is "Take Care of Our Staff".

## 21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before You Hire Them

### Customer Service:

**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 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after hours number they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it to be the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold 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 to have someone working on the issue within 60 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure.

**Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak) or do they come across arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?**

**Our Answer:** Our support staff are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms. One of the mantras from FPAU is "teach a man to fish".

**Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?**

**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 is to proactively help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive with these meetings.

**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, why and when so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We look at every since one of our invoices before they are sent to you.

### **Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers compensation insurance to protect YOU?**

**Our Answer:** Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their staff gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance AND workers compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

True Story: A few years ago Geek Squad was slapped with multi-million dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior of their technicians. In some cases, their techs were accessing, copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line, make sure the company you are hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

### **Q7: Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and on budget?**

**Our Answer:** Projects can be billed on a "Not To Exceed" basis or at a fixed price and are guaranteed to be completed on time, in writing. This is important because many unethical or incompetent computer guys will only quote "time and materials," which gives them free reign to nickel and dime you as well as take as much time as needed on completing a project.

### **Maintenance Of Your Network:**

### **Q8: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-356 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?**

**Our Answer:** Yes; 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 turn into bigger problems. And, our staff - here in our office - are actually the ones doing the work, we don't outsource it to any 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.

### **Q9: Do they consistently provide you with a monthly report that shows all the updates, security patches, and status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?**

**Our Answer:** Every month (like clockwork) our clients get detailed reports showing an overall health score of their network and the updates to their operating system patches, antivirus, security settings, and other important network checks (like hard drive space, backups, speed and performance, etc.). In addition, we provide reports detailing all of the ongoing support issues as well as the status of open issues, maintenance renewals, etc. - all on a monthly basis. AND, all of these reports are available on our proprietary Client WebPortal (along with all of the other documentation we provide to you as a client of FPA).

**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 “keys to the kingdom?”**

**Our Answer:** All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We constantly update this material on an ongoing basis and ensure key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network. Again, all of this information is available to you at any time via our Client WebPortal.

Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you suspect that your current IT person is keeping this under their control (as a means of job security), get rid of them (naturally, we can assist with this to ensure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is unethical and dangerous to your organization!

**Q11: Do they have multiple “techs” who are familiar with your network in case your regular “tech” goes on vacation or gets sick?**

**Our Answer:** First off – we don't have “techs”. We're certainly technical, but we're all professionals. And secondly - Yes; Our systems, processes, methodologies, and organizational structure ensures this. We have detailed network documentation about everything related to your technology (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and have everything we've ever done documented in our proprietary Client Activity System (CAS). Again, all available to our clients via our Client WebPortal.

**Q12: When they offer an “all-inclusive” support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are their “gotchas” hidden in the fine print?**

**Our Answer:** Our “all-inclusive” support plan is just that – all inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by other firms today is an “all-inclusive” or “all-you-can-eat” managed services plan. These are actually a good thing because they'll save you a lot of money in the long run – HOWEVER, make sure you REALLY understand what is and isn't included. Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/email help desk included, or extra?
- What about network upgrades, moves, or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3<sup>rd</sup> party software support? (We recommend that this IS included).
- What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you aren't happy with their services? What sort of guarantee do they offer?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Is offsite backup included? And further, to what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about onsite support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?

The important thing to keep in mind here is not that everything here has to be included, just that it's important to know what exactly is included before entering into the contract AND make sure you're comparing “apples to apples” when you're evaluating two different companies with two different costs.

### Backups And Disaster Recovery:

**Q13: Do they INSIST on monitoring an offsite as well as an onsite backup or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?**

**Our Answer:** While we support some legacy clients still using archaic tape backups, these are archaic for a reason and are going against our recommendations and industry standard best practices because they are incredibly unreliable. We insist that all of our Managed Service clients are utilizing our FPA BDR Solution ensuring a quick and painless way to recover from a server crash.

**Q14: Do they consistent review the backups to ensure they're running correctly and INSIST on doing periodical test restores to make ensure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?**

**Our Answer:** We perform a monthly "fire drill" and perform a test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to "test" a backup is when you desperately need it.

**Q15: Do they insist on backing 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. We believe in the belt and suspenders approach.

**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 enable you to work from a remote location?**

**Our Answer:** All of our 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.

### Technical Expertise And Support:

**Q17: Are their network monitoring and maintenance and end-user helpdesk functions US based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?**

**Our Answer:** We provide these services through our own in-house Network Operations Center (NOC) and help desk and make sure our staff are friendly and helpful. All of our staff are located in our office in Encino and are full-time employees. All have successfully completed our FPAU and are trained and earn certifications on an ongoing basis. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's critical to keeping your data secure.

**Q18: Do their engineers maintain current vendor certifications and participate in on-going training – or are they learning on your dime?**

**Our Answer:** Our staff are required to keep the most up-to-date vendor certifications in all the hardware and software we support. We are certified with Microsoft, VMware, Dell, Cisco, SonicWALL, Symantec, ESET, StorageCraft, and many others. Along with training being a key component of individual performance goals, every one of our employees is given a training budget (both in \$'s and in time) as part of their compensation plan. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent, 99% of the engineers who apply don't make it through (and guess who's hiring them?)

**Q19: Do their engineers arrive on time and dress professionally?**

**Our Answer:** Our staff are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally, show up on time and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason) we always notify the client immediately. We believe in proactive communications and ensure that every team member acts accordingly. 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 or do they say “that's not our problem to fix?”**

**Our Answer:** We feel WE should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's what “world class service and support” is about.

## The 4 Most 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 never have encountered a major disaster; but that's similar to 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:

- Security patches applied – with NEW viruses and hacker attacks cropping up DAILY, this is a CRITICAL part of maintaining your network.
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed

Just like a car, if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission, and perform other regular maintenance on your car, it will eventually break down and cost you FAR MORE to repair than the cost of the basic maintenance – and cars are far simpler than a computer network!

**If your IT Service Provider doesn't insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, then DO NOT HIRE THEM.** Lack of system maintenance is the NUMBER ONE reason most people end up losing valuable files and incurring heavy computer repair bills. If your current IT provider 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, which is a sure sign they are horribly inexperienced, *OR*
2. They recognize that they are *profiting* from your computer problems and don't want to recommend steps towards preventing you from needing their help on an ongoing basis. After all, they'll get paid MORE to remove a virus than to make sure your system is patched, updated and secured (which can be done quickly and inexpensively with good monitoring).

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 a part time “guru” 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 or to clean up a mess that was caused by an inexperienced neighbor, friend, or relative who 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 – they are a hobbyist at best. And do you really want a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and computer network? 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 on price alone.

## **Misconception #3: All computer guys are created equal. Your best option will be the one who offers the lowest price.**

As I stated earlier, you get what you pay for. A cheap price usually means a cheap job. Really good technicians do NOT work cheap because they are in high demand just like every other professional service category. The only technicians that will work cheap are those that are just starting and they are grossly inexperienced.

And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience, OR they allow interns to support your network because they don't have to pay them at all – but what you don't realize is than an inexperienced technician like this can end up costing more because:

1. They improperly diagnose problems, which mean you're paying them to fix the WRONG thing and STILL won't resolve your problem. Case in point: A few years ago a TV reporter went undercover to 8 computer repair shops in LA with a perfectly working PC, but simply disconnect a cable in the back (a fix that the AVERAGE computer tech would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several shops improperly diagnosed the problem and wanted to charge them anywhere from \$59 to over \$275 to fix it!
2. They could take 3 to 5 times as long to do the same repair an experienced engineer could fix quickly. Again, you're paying for those extra hours.
3. They could do MORE damage, costing you more money and downtime.

With your client data, accounting records, e-mail and other critical data at stake, do you REALLY want the lowest-priced shop working on your machine?

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 least expensive, 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 to make excuses for POOR SERVICE forever. That said, weren't not the most expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer great service at a fair price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for over 21 years and still have clients who've been with us that entire time.

**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 IT Service Provider needs to diagnose your network before they can quote any costs over the phone; consider the example above where all that was needed was a simple cable being plugged in. 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.

### A Final Word...

I hope you have found this Guide to be helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the beginning, my purpose of providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by the many incompetent firms out there claiming to offer these services.

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Please let me know! And of course, if you are looking for someone you can trust to take over the care and maintenance of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business. So, please give us a call...

**About FPA Technology Services, Inc.**

FPA Technology Services, Inc. has provided outsourced I.T. services to growing businesses in the Los Angeles area since 1991. With its "business first" approach, FPA prides itself on being a trusted technology advisor helping clients leverage technology to achieve their business objectives. As a single source for all the technology services an organization may need, FPA offers three areas of service: Managed I.T. Services and general Network Implementation and Support, Strategic I.T. Management and Guidance, and Application/Web Design and Development. By providing a "one-stop-shop" of I.T. services to organizations and with a "Business Before Technology" approach, FPA is able to effectively handle all of a company's I.T. needs, allowing client management to focus on achieving their business objectives.

For more information, please contact FPA at (818) 501-3390, by email at [info@fpainc.com](mailto:info@fpainc.com), or visit the FPA websites at [www.fpainc.com](http://www.fpainc.com) and [www.fpamanagedservices.com](http://www.fpamanagedservices.com).

*"We focus on your IT,  
so you can focus on your business!"*



Security Solutions  
Advanced Infrastructure Solutions  
Networking Infrastructure Solutions

