

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

**Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data And Operations To Just Anyone!
This Business Advisory Guide Will Arm You With 21 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 be not only incredibly frustrating and expensive, but could also cost 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 current 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 business owners have about computer maintenance and repair; one you will need to know BEFORE you talk to anyone on 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 consultants 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.

Provided as an educational service by:

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From The Desk of: **Michael Antola, President**
Highlands Computer Technologies, LLC

Dear Colleague,

Choosing a computer support company isn't easy. There is no shortage 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? It's because the computer repair and 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, and poor management, to terrible customer service, we've seen it all...and we know they exist in abundance because we have had a number of customers come to us to clean up the disasters they have caused.

Buyer Beware: The Computer Repair And Consulting Industry Is NOT Regulated

Here's an embarrassing 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 are useless and make the sleazy auto repair shops look like the pinnacle of virtue and competence.**

Automotive repair shops, electricians, plumbers, lawyers, realtors, dentists, doctors, accountants, etc. are heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, the computer industry is still highly unregulated and there 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 who can hang out a shingle can promote 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 repair and support industry, and to give YOU useful information to help you guard against unethical or incompetent companies and technicians.

Dedicated to serving you,

About The Author: Michael Antola, President



Highlands Computer Technologies, LLC was established in 2004 by its President.

Mike has been involved in the IT industry since 1996, making a career change from the counseling field after 15 years. The evolution was an interesting one, having never touched a computer until the age of 22, the entire interest and motivation came about through a passion for video gaming.

A friend mentioned to me how much better playing games on a PC were in comparison to the game consoles available at the time. Purchasing a “Multimedia” PC and quickly learning that at that time most games would barely work without really understanding how the Operating System would need to be reconfigured, changing drivers, swapping or adding memory, copying hard drives, etc. My brother Tom, a great database guru and software architect must have grown tired of my calls, grabbed the DOS 6.1 manual and threw it at me and said start with reading this... This was when you actually received hard copy manuals for your computer and the operating system.

Since I had a modem in the PC, Tom also said, “Hey, now you can cruise the Information Superhighway” my response at that time was; “Why would I want to do that!” Between the Internet and the game “Doom” an obsession was born. Doom was the first graphical multi player PC game. That meant you had to network (connect) PC’s somehow. I think it was less than 6 months before I had 4 PC’s and a home network. I remember my first PC upgrade was 4MB of RAM and it cost about \$240, followed by a hard drive and 2 modem upgrades the first year. These were the days of being single and having disposable income, pre college funding & children.

My fascination with PC’s grew rapidly and I quickly began to Susan who is now my spouse how beneficial it would be to have a PC for our shared office. We decided it a good an investment and purchased one. I soon learned I could dial in to and work remotely from my house. This was just amazing to me to see what PC’s were capable of. I had a private practice and worked with Susan in Domestic Violence groups running the DV Offenders groups for two counties. My other specialty was substance abuse counseling. These are very challenging populations to work with. So literally in a few months of me ever touching a computer, I soon learned how to repair, build, & network PC’s, mostly to play games against my friends.

It wasn’t long before our Group Room doubled as a kind of a classroom for instruction, and an Internet Café / Gamers’ Arcade for pay to play, web surf etc. At the time real, Internet was just becoming available; you could get PPP/dialup connections and weren’t restricted as were online services such as AOL, Compuserve, or Prodigy. It was a bit of an art to configure these new Internet services. I quickly began to utilize the same network during daylight hours for PC instruction classes. I was realizing I had succumbed to the high burn out rate of my chosen profession of counseling, and also simultaneously had this new passion which I also seemed to have a natural affinity toward.

So a transition had begun. Somewhere in there I closed out with my last counseling client as I had committed to the career change. I would do home PC setups, repairs and instruction as well. I took a job in a retail computer store for a while, & had my own PC related business. The retail home market wasn’t very lucrative, so I went for a job working for a company which has since acquired by Highlands. When I started in the SMB consulting it was a 100% Netware shop. The company is a reseller for a high end accounting software package and also provides customization to that software.



That product required moving to a Windows platform if someone wanted to keep the current supported versions. I saw it was becoming a “Microsoft Centric” world in the business place. Microsoft was still big into Windows NT4 and at the time the release of Windows Server 2000 had recently occurred. I went and achieved passing the Microsoft Certified System Engineer or “MCSE 2000” and shortly thereafter our company became predominantly a Windows based shop. I was given an award from the company for “Blazing New Trails”. What was once run on Netware began migration to Windows, after file servers we changed email from GroupWise to Exchange. Even our phone system was a great PBX based on a Windows Server.

Initially Highlands was founded on a very limited consulting basis. It was a part time endeavor with just several regular small business accounts. Most work was done designing solutions and sub-contracting project work, also IT firms who required someone with experience in higher level network design and support on a contracted basis. Our specialization was developing cost effective solutions for small business networks. Focus was primarily network design installation and implementation, security, anti-virus, switching, and perimeter firewall needs.

It was in 2009 that I decided to focus on growing the company as a full time entity. While developing a client base I continued to work with other IT providers as a sub-contractor. June 2009 we acquired the hardware division of Figtree Consulting, Inc. and added our first fulltime employee, Drew DiGiesi who is our current IT Manager. Shortly thereafter in 2010, we acquired clients from Latent Technologies, LLC.

Along my journey with PC’s and serving clients in the SMB space, I have just always looked at what can be improved either from stability, performance or of course value. Initially Highlands was mostly considered a break / fix company. It is not a good model; it is a reactive way to work, we only make money when you have a problem or have a project. Maintenance often could be overlooked or the client would with good intentions want to attempt to do on their own, it proved inconsistent at best.

As a service provider it is difficult to plan resources, for our clients budgeting is erratic and timing is usually not convenient when problems occur. A client is hoping to not have to call because it costs them for every call / visit. Every few years hardware refreshes are needed it is often a big spend, so often businesses try to put it off and often gamble against recommendations and best practice. Even if they are lucky enough to squeeze the extra year(s) without a major failure they lose so much in production time because the hardware just doesn’t perform as well. This is considered more of a “soft” cost and not typically evaluated by the business owner. However at the end of the day, it is lost productivity acknowledged or not. There are costs and losses but business owners may not know how to account for what those numbers are. Often there are several places “soft costs” can be found and eliminated. They also would lose each time we have to repair or provide support on this older hardware, so it drives up the time it takes to trouble shoot. A reboot alone of a busy server running Microsoft Exchange or Small Business Server can take 20 – 30 minutes just to reboot. If that has to happen for troubleshooting or repair it is easy for a company to lose an hour or more of production just in reboot time. Losing on these hidden soft losses is one thing

Then there are the businesses that play the odds and lose and the server does totally fail the service fees now can cost them up to 80% more in emergency labor costs. They also risk more losses in lost production time, and possible data loss. So much more along the way we have had to deal with things that are annoying to us, as the technical people and ultimately costly to our client base. Virus infections, Malware, Pop-ups, on and on, most infections occur due to an exploit in a program.



So step one is having PC's patched which was an ongoing battle. No strategy seemed effective; the clients Highlands had acquired were having basically only the servers patched monthly. Previously former IT provider had tried many strategies to keep the desktops up to date, but had essentially just kind set a policy and hoped for the best. Our initial policy for Highlands's clients was minimally requiring that we have all PC's patched and checked at least quarterly. It really is a near impossible goal to do manually. Needing to be done "off hours" it was costly and very inefficient.

An infection today can destroy your business, rather than mischief and just annoyances today's malware is big business. There is organized crime and less than reputable businesses looking to get your money or identity. Also it can be just kids looking to be malicious because it is more fun than graffiti, or other adolescent mischief. Infection happen through vulnerabilities often that could have been prevented was a PC to have been current with security patches. Patches never stop until that version of a product is no longer supported. Patches can also cause problems because they have not been tested enough.

I quickly began looking for solutions and quickly moved into using remote management automation and reporting tools. This was our introduction to becoming an (MSP) Managed Service Provider. It was pretty inefficient, so we now only work with clients that use our software and some kind of a maintenance agreement. Work is tracked in ticket systems. We have automated many tedious maintenance tasks, and our clients have benefitted greatly. The company has grown with several full time technical people.

A much neglected area we really see that our clients often didn't even think about was business continuity. There is so much we can do in this area today for small business. There is no need for a company to lose their data or even suffer long outage after losing a server or even their entire office. Technology we implement can resurrect your network much faster depending on the solution and situation we can rebuild in literally as little as minutes. We can have affordable plans to recover so quickly they would only have been available to fortune 500 type companies just several years ago.

One of our primary goals for Highlands is to provide phenomenal solutions and support to our clients for a fair price. Our clients are to me, our business partners. We are linked and if we can provide quality service and guidance, our clients can turn their IT cost center into more of a revenue producing component of their company.

We are always looking for innovations to make improvements for their companies. Since moving to an MSP model, we can work so much more efficiently. The amount of PC infections has decreased exponentially. It is a good time to be in IT, we have so many quality solutions for our clients. For those that are looking for quality service and how to better utilize IT in their businesses we are here to help.

Our ultimate goal is for our client to have a predictable budget; and great service. We have several solutions available. Conceivably depending on the support plan invested in a client could never have to purchase another server again. We offer IT as a Service, Hardware as a Service, Varied Cloud solutions, these vary from hosted desktops, entire network, allowing the client to connect from almost any device that has internet, hosted email, offsite backup at the file level or for disaster recovery and business continuity, there is still limited break / fix agreements which require patch analysis which is primarily automated and billed on a quarterly minimum for a flat rate.



Of course there are unlimited support options on a fixed rate as well. We will offer flexibility for our clients rates vary according to their agreement levels. These are determined on several factors which are determined after evaluating the business, where technology fits in, and the tolerance your business has for down time.

Some of our success stories are having a client up and running within 24 hours after catastrophic server failure. We had recommended a new server, as it happened when we were evaluating backup solutions, and we had a time limited edition for IT which didn't require installing. Knowing there was a concern with server age I discussed with and went to this client and created a backup image (just in case). Six months later the server failed. We were able to bring in loaner hardware and restore the image. We pulled the offsite backup data down and they were running next day.

A trucking company had a legacy application requiring him to stay on Netware 5 or upgrade for \$150,000.00 just for the software. This was a new client, he thought he had backup on tape, the backup hadn't run in years. We were able to recover the data to his old server; during the process I had created an image of the server. I cautioned the client this was a Band-Aid and he was in danger of the same issue if he didn't upgrade the server hardware and get a new battery. Some months later the server failed. He hadn't done follow up on any of the recommended upgrades. However, I had kept a copy of the image of his server and was able to recover to a virtual server. He lost current data but was at least able to run his business. He can continue to run indefinitely if he needs to keep the legacy program going. This was due only to major research and planning on the part of Highlands. We had kept his backup image, and there was no cost. This just illustrates how we do business, it is about attempting to provide the BEST outcome for you the client.

Another client whom we had moved to a managed services agreement has a PC that takes about 7 hours of setup time and is his only PC to process shipping orders. We received early warning that the hard drive was experiencing errors, this was a good indicator that the hard drive required replacement. We were able proactively to get a new PC to him and have it ready before the other drive died. This same scenario had occurred in the past cost him in money and stress, it was 1 or 2 days without the ability to ship. What little he could do needed to be done by hand then manually put in to his system later. Through understanding his needs enables us to make recommendations that will create a safety net for the business. We now have an image of that PC were it to fail we could restore it to a different PC in less than 1-2 hours. The cost for this "insurance" is minimal, all hardware has a 100% failure rate. It is not a question of "if" only when something will break. The same client needed to keep his legacy OS "Windows SBS 2003" or face large costs in upgrading his accounting application cost for upgrades would most likely be \$100,000 - \$150,000 . The new hardware would not run the old Windows OS. We virtualized it and he has been running without issue for 2 + years now.

I am fortunate to have a dedicated team to work with, that share the same vision providing outstanding service to our clients. We are also blessed with some of the best clients who really appreciate our services. I went in to counseling so I could help others; I get similar enjoyment when we are able to really wow a client today. I am thrilled we have the ability to make their life easier, their IT solutions a great value, truly an opportunity for both parties to win.

21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them To Support Your Network

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 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 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 a technician working on a problem within 30 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every unlimited support service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure. If you were to poll our clients you would see that most are dealt with as soon as a request is made. Since all of our clients have our agent installed they can ask for help several ways. Most requests come in via email or a ticket generated from the agent, if your email is broken but you have internet you could submit from our agent and attach a screenshot of the error. We will soon have the ability for you to view your support items online, real time status. Most problems are not only answered but often resolved within 30 minutes.

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 technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms.

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

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 also double-check our invoices for accuracy 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 technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure that 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 the 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: All projects are fixed priced and 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 and constantly looks for developing problems, security issues, and other problems so that we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q9: Do they provide you with reports that show 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: Our clients can get a detailed report that shows an overall health score of their network and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches, and other important network checks (like hard drive space, backups, speed, and performance, etc.). Frequency is typically monthly, we will determine with you, what you may want other than our standard monthly health check summary.

Q10: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing, your critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the "keys to the kingdom?"

Our Answer: All unlimited support clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost if less than 24x7 support there are additional fees. We also perform updates on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network.

Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q11: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

Our Answer: Yes; and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client's account, any of our technicians can pick up where another left off.

Q12: When they offer an "all-inclusive" support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are there "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 consulting 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/e-mail help desk included, or extra?
- What about network upgrades, moves, or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd 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? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are offsite backups included? 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?
- Do they provide support for all your devices at least email support for your phones.

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: We do not allow our clients to use tape backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We make sure all of our clients have local onsite backup preferably a (BDR) Backup Disaster Recovery so any server can be restored fast to totally different hardware if needed. Also we require minimally one of several offsite backup plans we offer. We design solutions within your goals and budget. It can be files only or the ability to restore your server or entire business in a cloud solution until new hardware is ready.

Q14: Do they INSIST on doing periodical test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: We can 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. Minimally there is a quarterly test. With anyone using imaging plans we do a minimum Business Continuity Plan recovery offsite twice per year. After all, the WORST time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it. For those using our recommended service we do full recovery test in our cloud data centers. Depending on the client need, we can design an affordable cloud based recovery of their server(s) and either a terminal (shared remote desktop access) server, or a copy of a desktop with critical programs required, we can then produce copies of this “Golden Image” desktop fast. Employees will have a VPN connection and logon to the temporary desktop until new hardware, office equipment, physical office, etc can be setup. At 6 month intervals minimum the servers themselves are recovered and logged on to verify integrity and timely data is available. The first initial recovery, we test the full process of connecting multiple servers and 2 – 3 desktops. In a multi-server environment total replication of your network is more complex and time consuming so it is completed minimally every 12 months. We document any particular quirks with your environment each time we do a full drill. So should we ever need to do for a real emergency we should have seen any “expected” issues.

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, it would allow a rollback prior to the upgrade.

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 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: Is their help-desk US based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?

Our Answer: We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it’s an important step in keeping your data secure.

Q18: Do their technicians maintain their knowledge base and participate in on-going training – or are they learning on your dime?

Our Answer: Our technicians are required to keep proficient in all the software we support. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent that 99% of the technicians who apply don’t make it through. (Guess who’s hiring them?)

Q19: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?

Our Answer: Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally with a company logo on their shirts, show up on time and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason) we always notify the client immediately. 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 instead of pointing fingers and putting you in the middle.

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 just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

The 3 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, our Antivirus solution checks for threat signature updates hourly this is the database of the fingerprints of specific virus files.
- 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
- Historical information kept by our management software often helps identify new program installation might be the issue.
- Blacklist or Whitelist programs allowed on a company owned PC. Automatically can stop the install for an example: AOL Instant Messenger. If already installed our agent often removes most blacklisted program without us needing to do any manual intervention

Just like car ownership, if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission, and perform other regular maintenance, your car 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 computer support tech does not 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 technician 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 one is a good reason 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, staff member 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. 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. You would not seek an accountant, tax planner, or other valued business partners in such a way. It never ceases to amaze me at how much time and money a business will invest in software and modifications so their business will run better. Even hire business efficiency consultants to make sure things run as efficiently as possible. But will not invest or plan for an IT budget that could save hours a day in lost productivity. Even worse there has never been a thought as to what we will do if there is a fire or flood destroying our equipment or worse yet the entire office.

A true consultant is a "partner" with you and is invested in seeing you do well, and have a great experience so you will recommend us someone else. We get to know you and your business goals to see how we can aid in your success. Technology is constantly evolving; so much is available today for you to improve productivity, and protect one of your most valued assets, your data!

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

As we stated a moment ago, you get what you pay for. A cheap price usually means a cheap job. Really good technicians do NOT work at a discount because they are in high demand just like any other professional. The only technicians that will work for highly discounted rates are those just getting started in the business that often are very inexperienced.

And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience (which means they are learning on YOUR dime), OR they will bring in interns because they don't have to pay them at all. 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 they 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, and some told the undercover reporter that the hard drive would need to be completely replaced!

2. They could take 3 to 5 times as long to do the same repair an experienced technician 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 consultant working on your network and having access to your data?

We take the view that most people want value for money and simply want the job done right. You will find that we are not the cheapest, 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 apologize for POOR SERVICE forever. That said, we're not the most expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer a good service at a fair price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for over 8 years and have watched my competition come and go with bargain pricing.

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 technician will need to diagnose your network before they can quote any price 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 never have 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. And finally, reputable firms don't charge by the hour anyway -- they give you a fixed fee, flat-rate. Here's why...

One of the easiest ways to take advantage of a customer is to get them to agree to a time and materials repair. Unless you know what's wrong and how long it should take, they can soak you on the fees. And what are you going to do when they get 5-6 hours into a repair or project and then spring on you the news that it will take even longer than they anticipated to fix, costing you MORE money?

Always, always, always make sure you get a flat-rate, fixed fee quote in advance so you don't end up getting burned – and NEVER take a phone quote!

5 More Mistakes To Avoid When Choosing A Computer Consultant

1. **Choosing a computer consultant based on a single phone call.** We recommend you invite them into your office and ask them for a written proposal. Be clear on what your expectations are and what type of problems you want them to resolve. A competent professional should offer to do an audit of your network to diagnose your system BEFORE quoting you anything. After all, would you take a doctor's word that you need surgery if they hadn't done x-rays or other diagnostics? Of course not! Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice.
2. **Choosing a computer consultant that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and fixing things RIGHT. If you aren't pleased with a job that was done, they should (at a minimum) make it right for free; and if they simply cannot resolve an issue to YOUR satisfaction, you shouldn't get stuck with the bill.

Plus, the fact that they stand behind their work with a money-back guarantee shows they have confidence in themselves to make you a happy client. And don't fall for the, "We don't offer one because people will take advantage of us," routine. In our experience, MOST people just want an honest service at a reasonable price. If you give them that, they are happy to pay. Are there a few unethical folks out there? Of course, but they are the minority, and we would rather bite the bullet on the very few dishonest folks so we can gain the trust and confidence of the majority of clients who just want their problems fixed fast and fixed right.

3. **Choosing a computer consultant without speaking to several of the current clients.** Check their references! Don't just take the sales guy's word that they are good – ask to speak to at least 2 or 3 clients that are similar to you. If they hesitate or cannot provide you with references, don't trust them!

Another good sign is that they should have multiple client testimonials and success stories posted on their web site and throughout their marketing collateral. A lack of this may be a sign that they don't HAVE clients who are happy enough to provide a good reference – again, a warning sign.

4. **Choosing a computer consultant who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** In this day and age, a computer consultant who doesn't do this is living in the stone ages. You want someone to do this because it will dramatically increase your network's security and will enable them to do faster repairs. That's not to say they shouldn't come onsite; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help PREVENT problems from cropping up in the first place.

5. **Choosing a computer consultant who isn't experienced, trained, and field proven is just not smart.** It is important they have been through varied emergencies, that they are able to align with you to exploit your technology investments. We look ahead for what may help our clients make more money with their technology investments.

A Final Word...

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

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Let us 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.

Below you will find information on how to request a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis. This is, of course, provided for free with no obligations and no expectations on our part. 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. So why are we offering something like this for free?

Two reasons:

1. We are simply offering this service as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with. Again, our goal is to allow you to make an informed and confident decision; and offering this is one way we can help you better evaluate us.
2. This will allow us to determine if we even CAN help you. Obviously we can't help everyone, and our services might not be a good fit for you. Conducting this Health Check enables us to do a small project for you to help you evaluate whether or not we're the right company for you without risking your money.

Looking forward to your call!

The Team at Highlands Computer Technologies, LLC
Phone: 908.813.0200
Web: www.highcomptech.com

**FREE Network Health Check For
All Prospective Clients Who Want To Put Us To The Test!**

As a prospective customer, we would like to offer you a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis (\$400 value). During this health check we will perform a comprehensive 27-point audit of your entire network to look for potential problems, security loopholes, spyware, and other hidden problems that will cause the computers on your network to run slow, act funny, crash, and lose data.

We will:

- ✓ Review your system backups to make sure they are working properly and CAN be restored quickly in the event of a disaster
- ✓ Provide you a report summary on overall health
- ✓ Check for security updates and patches to validate that your network really IS secure.
- ✓ Review your firewall and security settings
- ✓ Check the integrity of your server and workstations hardware (Side Note: Did you know that hardware failure is one of the leading causes of data loss that CAN be detected early and avoided with proper monitoring?)
- ✓ Audit your virus definitions and protection
- ✓ Conduct a visual scan of your server room and cabling to make sure your network is PHYSICALLY safe and set up properly
- ✓ Check your overall system performance, space, and settings to see if your network is running as fast as it could be

Why Should You Care About This?

Because there are literally dozens of ways hackers and viruses can access your network—undetected—to 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, more unstable, and increasingly 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.

How To Request Your FREE Network Health Check:

Call: 908.813.0200 ext # 151, email: info@highcomptech.com please use the subject line "Network Audit", Web: <http://www.highcomptech.com/freestuff>