

Virtualization Consultants: 6 Gotcha's To Look Out For

1. The Signs of Product Pushers

In your conversations with various IT consulting companies, be wary of the product pushers as opposed to solution providers. Take notice if they start conversations talking about products instead of asking about your needs and challenges. Take notice if they ask, "How much are you able or would like to deliver yourself?" because that is the sign of a company that wants to partner with you as a trusted advisor as opposed to sell, sell, sell. Ask to see how they breakdown their consulting services so that you can easily decide what you are capable of delivering on your own, and at what point you want to bring them in. That information should be readily available.

2. Assessments: What is included?

Don't be afraid of the word assessment as long as it includes a detailed roadmap, on-site gap analysis, capacity plans, budget or ROI analysis, and system health checks. Often the most significant value of a consulting firm is their ability to analyze and develop a plan that will quickly optimize the business value and accelerate your return on your investment. Hiring a consulting firm to evaluate your infrastructure and productivity in this much detail will ensure that your investments are the most efficient and cost effective solutions to your problems, before you start any projects. Make sure that you work with a consulting firm that is experienced conducting such assessments, and uses focused teams, not technology generalists. Ask questions that will let you know if they understand the physical as well as the virtual world. Not every problem is solved with virtualization.

3. Partnerships: Quality not Quantity

Should you decide to enlist the assistance of a consulting firm with your virtual project deployment, look for a strong base of high level partnerships with best of breed vendors. Look for words like "gold/platinum level" and "premier partner" to convey elevated affiliations with vendors that compliment their core competencies. In the virtualization space, aside from VMware, Citrix, and Microsoft, look for partnerships with storage, desktop application, reporting and industry compliance tool vendors to name a few. Keep in mind though, more is not always better. A solid partnership with 2-3 reputable storage vendors is better than a consulting firm that spreads itself thin managing numerous vendor associations. Visit the vendor websites as most list partnerships and associated status levels.

4. Training: What can they deliver?

Regardless of the project, it is likely that your tech team will require initial training and help desk access to mitigate the adoption process. Choose a consulting firm that offers training as a part of its delivery services. The most value will come from a consulting firm that is able to come on-site, can customize training specifically to your infrastructure, and is able to provide valuable documentation of the implementation process as an educational tool during the training. If the firm was closely involved during the whole project, they will be able to provide much more value at typically a lower cost per student than public courses. Make sure to ask for references on the company's trainers, and be aware that those trainers should be vendor certified and ideally be the same engineers that worked on your project. A superior consulting firm will be able to offer vendor certification classes to your employees, should you request it, at the end of their private course.

5. Timeframe

If you have made the decision to evaluate consulting firms, you most likely realize that you do not have the internal resources to implement the project in the time you would like. Ask each consulting firm the names and certifications of the persons on the team that will be handling your project. What is their estimated time for completion? What do they see as some potential hang ups, if any, into reaching that goal? A great consulting firm will provide a sequence or plan of events for the sales process and well as the delivery of the project, ensuring excellent communication and documentation of both parties' expectations along the way.

6. Internal Resources

Ask for the virtualization credentials of the company as well as the engineers that will specifically be working on your project. What other resources do they have within the consulting firm in order to leverage a broad knowledge base? What processes does the consulting firm have in place to maintain current certifications and education for its employees? How does the firm document and store details on successful and unsuccessful projects so that other employees can leverage that information? Does the firm have a library of resources and collaboration tools to facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of the project team? A great consulting firm should be able to quickly answer all of these questions to your satisfaction.

If you would like to ask these questions of our team, please contact us at info@newat.com or 1-877-586-8648. We look forward to serving you.