

What to Ask Before Hiring Anyone for This

Five questions that sort the people who can help your organization from the people who learned this eighteen months ago. Use them on us too.

Inside

1. Why the questions matter more than the pitch
2. The five questions, with good and bad answers
3. Four more worth asking
4. A scorecard for the meeting



Why this guide exists

Everyone is selling it. Few can build it.

Every organization in Rhode Island, from the plant floor to the town hall, is getting emails right now about automation, agents, and the new tools. Most of them come from people who are selling the same thing to everyone, and a lot of those people learned it recently. Some are very good. Some will cost you a year and a lot of money before you find out which.

The pitch will not tell you which one you are talking to. The pitch is always good. The questions will, because a person who has done this work for real organizations answers them one way, and a person who has not answers them another. The difference is easy to hear once you know what to listen for.

You are not buying technology. You are buying someone's judgment about your operation. Test the judgment.

Three things to hold onto

You are allowed to not understand it. Nobody owes a vendor an understanding of the technology. If someone makes you feel that you should already know, that is a fact about them, not about you.

The process comes before the tool. Anyone who talks about what they will build before they have asked how your work actually moves is guessing. Confident guessing is still guessing.

The right person will talk you out of things. The single most reliable sign of someone worth hiring is that they tell you not to buy something. It means they are pricing their reputation higher than the sale.

How to use the questions

Ask all five, in the first meeting, before anyone shows you a screen. Write down the answers. The scorecard at the back gives you a place to do that. Then ask them of us, because we would rather earn the work than assume it.



Question 1

Have you ever run a business, or only built software for them?

The technology is the easy part. What is hard is knowing how a business actually runs: what a slow month feels like, why the office manager guards the schedule, what payroll on a Friday does to a decision. Someone who has carried that will build differently from someone who has read about it.

What a good answer sounds like

A specific answer. What they ran, for how long, what went wrong, what they would do differently. Or an honest "no, but here is who on our side has," which is fine as long as that person is in the room when decisions get made.

What a bad answer hides

A pivot to their technical credentials. Years of experience with tools is not years of experience with payroll. If the answer is a list of software, you have your answer.

Question 2

What would you not recommend for us?

Anyone can list what they would build. The question is whether they can see what should not be built, and whether they will say so when it costs them a sale. This is the question that separates advisors from salespeople faster than any other.

What a good answer sounds like

Something concrete and slightly uncomfortable. "I would not touch your scheduling yet, the problem is upstream." "Do not buy the private version, your volume does not justify it." "Half of what you asked for, your current software already does."

What a bad answer hides

"Everything is possible." It may even be true. But a person who cannot name one thing you should not do is either not thinking about your operation or not willing to lose the sale over it.



Question 3

Where does our data go, and who can see it?

Your customer list, your pricing, your employee records and your email are going to pass through whatever gets built. You are entitled to a plain answer about where they sit, who can look, and what the vendor's own tools do with them. Not a reassuring sentence. A location and a name.

What a good answer sounds like

Plain language, specific, and unbothered by the question. Which systems hold what. Whether it is on your hardware, their platform, or inside tools you already use. Who on their team can see it and why. What happens to it if you part ways. If any of it is regulated, they bring that up before you do.

What a bad answer hides

"It is all secure." "Industry standard." "Don't worry about that." Any answer that is a feeling rather than a fact. Also watch for someone who has clearly never been asked, because that means none of their other clients asked either.

Question 4

What happens if we stop working together?

Every relationship ends eventually, on good terms or bad. The question is whether your operation keeps running and whether your information comes with you. A surprising number of arrangements are built so that the answer is no, and nobody mentions it until the day it matters.

What a good answer sounds like

Your data is yours and you take it with you. What you paid to build is documented and either yours outright or available to buy out. They can tell you, today, what the hand-off would look like, because they have thought about it.

What a bad answer hides

Silence, or a laugh, or "why would you want to?" A vendor who has not planned for the end of the relationship has built something you cannot leave. That is not a partnership. It is a lease with no exit.



Question 5

Can you show me something you built that is running right now?

Not a demo. Not a slide. Something a real company is using today, with a real result, described plainly. This is the one question a person who has only read about this cannot answer, and it is fair to ask it early.

What a good answer sounds like

A story with a before and an after. "A shop was quoting one job a week. Now it is about twenty. Same estimator." They describe the problem, what they built, and what changed, in numbers. They may not name the client, and that is right. They can describe the business type and the outcome.

What a bad answer hides

Only mockups. Only "we are working with a client on that now." Only results that belong to the software vendor rather than to them. Or numbers that sound too round to be real, because they are.

Four more worth asking

Who owns what gets built? There is more than one right answer, but there has to be an answer, in writing, before money moves.

What does the monthly fee actually buy? Hosting, support, and improvements as the operation changes is a fair answer. "Access" is not.

How do changes get made after launch? You will want things changed within a month. Find out now whether that is a phone call or a ticket queue.

What is the smallest thing we could start with? A good answer is one process, a couple of weeks, a fixed number. A bad answer starts with a discovery engagement.



The scorecard

Bring this to the meeting.

One line per question. Write what they said, then mark the box if the answer was specific, honest, and about your operation rather than their product.

Who we met with

Question	What they said	Good?
1. Have you run a business, or only built software?		
2. What would you not recommend for us?		
3. Where does our data go, and who can see it?		
4. What happens if we stop working together?		
5. Can you show me something running now?		
Who owns what gets built?		
What does the monthly fee buy?		
How do changes get made after launch?		
What is the smallest thing we could start with?		

How to read it

Seven or more good answers. Talk to them again. Ask for the one-page plan with a number on it.

Four to six. Ask the ones they missed a second time, directly. Some people answer better once they see you are serious.

Three or fewer. Thank them for their time. The pitch was good. The judgment was not there.

One sign worth more than all nine. Did they ask you more questions than you asked them? The people worth hiring spend the first meeting trying to understand your operation.



Ask us the same five questions.

We wrote them, so it is only fair. Thirty minutes, and we will answer every one plainly, including the ones about what we would not build for you. If we are not the right fit, we will tell you who might be.

**Schedule a meeting at rhodeislandintelligence.com/schedule
Or call or text 401-541-2747. You will get a person.**

Rhode Island Intelligence designs, builds and deploys private AI, process automation and robotics for manufacturers, municipalities, practices and firms with complex operations and information that cannot leave the building. Started by an operator who ran his own company for fifteen years. Cranston, Rhode Island.

Building for what's next.