



AVOIDING THE IT COWBOYS

Six questions to ask your IT provider if
you are in the construction sector

A common sense guide from Optimus Systems

People talk about 'cowboys' in the construction sector. The same minority exist in the IT services sector - companies that promise more than they ever deliver. **With information technology becoming more critical to the construction sector, from builders to architects to engineers to QS, avoiding the cowboys is important.** We've put together a common sense guide to getting the right provider. It will help you see if your potential IT partner passes the sniff test - and if they don't - we would of course love to have a chat.

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DO YOU KNOW EVEREST FROM COSTX?

Your IT provider needs to know the tools of the trade and how to support specialist software used in the construction industry.

- Are they familiar with specialist industry software?
- Can they access support quickly and resolve urgent problems?

In the building and related sectors, niche software products are common. There are the regular software applications like CRM for selling and marketing, or accounting apps to manage the dollars and cents.

More relevant though is software for key tasks like estimating, project management and health and safety. Applications like the venerable old Everest system, or more modern tools like CostX, CostCon or DataBuild.

You know how to use them, but your IT provider needs to understand how to keep them running, deploy them to users at remote sites, and how to sort out any problems. This doesn't just mean them being able to understand how the software works (and not doing the learning on your dollar), but having contacts with the various product support teams to quickly resolve any problems.

Q.02



DO YOU GET THE IMPORTANCE OF EMAIL?

The importance of email to getting things done in a construction environment can't be understated.

- Email must be available, safe and fit for purpose.

Email seems to be the grease for the wheels of many building projects. It's the easiest way to communicate lots of information across what can be a complex web of suppliers, sub-contractors, consultants and clients.

Often a project can only proceed as rapidly as the decision-making process of its team members – which relies on accessing information.

Your IT vendor needs to ensure your email remains available, that it keeps important documents safe and that it is fit for purpose. The simple example is ensuring your email system can cope with the large files commonly shared for a construction project.



Q.03

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO SUPPORT MULTIPLE SITES?

A construction business exists where its building sites are.

- The technology options for managing multiple sites are excellent, but they need careful setup and management.

Serving the construction sector means delivering the same standard of IT a corporate office would get, but spread out over multiple sites. The options available today are excellent but need to be setup and managed correctly.

A great opportunity is using 'cloud' solutions like Microsoft's Office365 - why fund your own server when you can access the computing power of a large corporate? However your computer network needs to be setup in a way that it works effectively across multiple sites, there is little point providing access to a foreman onsite who has to wait 30 minutes to download a file.

The storage and sharing of files is key for construction companies. Your IT provider needs to be able to provide you with a solution that enables easy access, but also provides good security.



Q.04

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP ME 'SAFE'?

The 'health and safety' of your IT can't be underestimated.

- Underinvesting in business continuity and security can be disastrous.

The cowboys tend to run for the hills when an IT crisis hits. It's about as glamorous as filling out those health and safety incident reports on a job site, but having the right backup strategy in place is critical for any typical construction business.

Be wary if your IT provider isn't too worried about backups or security for your systems. The right back up systems are crucial for the successful continuation of your business, especially in the face of disasters. They also provide peace of mind when retaining records and protected information is important to your business.

Security software, like the right anti-virus solutions is also important. Getting it wrong can result in major downtime. Cowboys might cut corners in these areas, but the ultimate cost of doing so can be great.



Q.05

ARE YOU SELLING TECHNOLOGY GIMMICKS OR TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS?

Hi-tech has to be proven in order to add value.

- Technology is constantly evolving, but not every new innovation adds value to a construction company.

Like many sectors, information technology has brought massive gains to the construction sector. Firms can communicate more, faster and from anywhere. But your investments in new technology, like any business tool, need to be focussed on the return.

Beware the IT vendor always recommending the latest and greatest mobile devices, software or other tools. Electronic whiteboards can be invaluable for sharing project plans across offices in different cities and mobile computing devices like a Windows Surface can enhance the productivity of project managers, but they are only relevant if they add value, are proven and can be implemented without huge disruption.



Q.06

ARE YOU CLEAR ABOUT SERVICE LEVELS AND COSTS?

Value should be easy to see and understand.

A typical construction company is used to managing a huge array of suppliers, requiring large amounts of working capital. The cost and value of the IT services needs to be crystal clear.

Your IT vendor must understand that, fit into your accounts payable cycle and provide clear information about what you are paying for, as well as the service levels involved.

Cowboys will struggle to deliver this.



YOU NEED SOMEONE WHO CAN TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR IT

Optimus Systems has been working with construction companies, from builders to architects to QS, for over a decade. We understand the sector and its very specific challenges.

One of our team would love to come and have a chat about your IT. Onsite of course, and we'll bring our own hi-vis.

**Get in touch for more information
or to arrange a follow up.**

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