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Dumping your technology vendor? Let reason prevail

When it's time to move on, be sure you're parting for the right reasons

By Dan Tynan
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5 GOOD REASONS TO FIRE YOUR VENDOR

1. It can't provide the service you need When it takes three phone calls to get a response or three repairs to get something working right, it's time to get out, says the Uptime Group's Patty Laushman. "If you're paying the vendor, they should know what they're doing. You shouldn't have to call three times to fix the same problem."

2. It can't scale If the vendors you started with can't keep up with your company's growth, it's time to move on. "When you're a small company, you want to deal with vendors that understand your needs," says USAS Technologies' Seth Hishmeh. "Once you've grown from, say, 20 to 100 employees, you may need a different kind of company."

3. It can't meet your security requirements Developers don't always build robust security into their apps, says Bruce Eissner, CEO of Polar Cove, a consultancy that specializes in information security. "We sometimes find those applications don't provide the level of assurance our clients need," he says.

4. It can't meet compliance standards If the vendor fails to meet Sarbanes-Oxley, SAS70, HIPAA, or other federally mandated guidelines, you'll still be held responsible, Eissner says. "You can't say, 'I asked them to do this and trusted what they told me.' Ignorance is no defense."

5. It is in financial trouble The last thing you want is the vendor's disgruntled employees with their hands on your IT systems, and this can happen if the vendor skips payrolls, says Technisource's Jon Piot. Ask your service provider for financials, check its Dunn & Bradstreet scores, and listen to what its own employees are saying, Piot advises, as "that will give you a pretty good idea of what's going on."

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5 BAD REASONS TO DIVORCE YOUR VENDOR

1. You're angry "It's the ace No. 1 bad reason to fire somebody," says consultant Rick Brenner. "If you're talking to the vendor on the phone and you look down and see your fists are clenched, hang up and go for a walk. Nothing good is going to happen if you keep talking."

2. Your brother-in-law can do it cheaper "Getting out of an existing contract is difficult enough," says Polar Cove's Eissner. "Saying that you might reassign the work to your nephew is indefensible."

3. You're new and you want new blood Newly hired managers often want to ax vendors hired by their predecessors and bring in familiar partners, says Technisource's Jon Piot. Evaluate vendors honestly. If they are doing a good job, it's a bad idea to fire them.

4. You have unrealistic expectations "In IT, nothing is ever done quickly enough," says USAS Technologies' Seth Hishmeh. "Customers need to ask, 'Are they really providing feedback and information to the vendor to enable them to do a good job?'"

5. You're in financial trouble Struggling firms sometimes make up reasons to get out of costly contracts. But if you can't keep up with the payments, don't be surprised if the vendor decides to fire you.

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Dan Tynan is a technojournalist based in North Carolina and the author of *Computer Privacy Annoyances* (O'Reilly, 2005).

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