

Ideal Characteristics for an IT Company

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One of my developers (Mike Klostermeyer) recommended an article on tech MSN titled **7 things to expect from your IT partner** by Microsoft Business Consultant Jeff Wuorio. I found it to be an excellent rundown of some of the things we preach around here at CF Webtools every day.

The article mentions these 7 items as important ones to look for in an IT partner.

1. Technical expertise – and strong communication skills.
2. An awareness of your budget – and resources.
3. An advocate who cuts through product hype.
4. A long-term planner, implementer, and strategist.
5. An industry watcher who maps technology advances and developments to your needs.
6. A keen ability to troubleshoot and solve problems.
7. An interest in handling all of your technology needs.

Although I totally agree with item 3, I found it a bit absurd coming from a "Microsoft" business consultant. It's not that MS is more guilty than Sun or Oracle or any other big software company on that score - it's just ironic that the consultant correctly identifies a major skill that is important in an IT partner - but sorely lacking in any "non-independent" IT partner (i.e. MS Small Business Services). I also found the last point - complete with links to MS Online IT services free trial - to be self serving and not really in step with the other points. It's certainly not real-world thinking to believe that a single vendor can handle all your IT needs.

Still, the other six points read like a primer on what we believe about doing business in the IT sector. I especially like Item 2 - an awareness of budget. It's very important to be sensitive to the economics of your clients. I know many development or media shops who work very hard to sell clients everything they can - even if the client doesn't need it. Does your client really need a site done entirely in Flash with music and animation costing 80,000 dollars? Would your client be better served by spending his money on tools to interact with his customers or on an intranet?

Items 4 and 5 go together and they are also often overlooked. Customers want you "buy into their vision" for their business and help them chart the course. They need someone who is capable of leveraging technology right now, but who is also looking forward and reevaluating. Look for opportunities that benefit your customers. Find ways to help steer them through the morass of products and jargon and find the "sweet spot" that makes them money. Don't sell them "stuff" they don't need just because you can. Remember, your goal is to be around to solve the next problem and tackle the next (usually bigger and better) project.