



## Key Questions to Ask

# Selecting a Member of the Apple Consultants Network

Apple and related third-party companies provide a wide variety of technologies, but you may not know exactly what you need or how to integrate it all into a total solution that's right for you. You also may not know if you're maximizing the potential of your technology. And, if you're like most people, you don't have the time or ability to properly set up and maintain even a small network of computers. If this sounds like you, consider the services of an independent consultant who can develop solutions that keep your company ahead of the competition and ensure that you have the tools and training needed to run your business smoothly and efficiently.

Members of the Apple Consultants Network are independent consultants with technical expertise in the set up, use, and maintenance of Apple and related third-party products and solutions. There are approximately 1,000 members throughout the U.S., Canada and Latin America. They offer a wide variety of services, from setting up an office or network to developing digital video and publishing solutions.

With so many choices available, how do you go about choosing the right consultant? The following questions are designed to guide you through the process.

### **How can I find a consultant in my area with the right qualifications?**

To find a qualified member near you, do a search at <http://consultants.apple.com/consultant/>. Follow the simple instructions for searching the directory, and you will receive a list of qualified professionals, including contact information and a link to their website. If you find a member in your locale, but he or she does not specialize in the specific technical area you need, ask the consultant to refer you to another member with the skills that you're looking for. Consultants are in constant communication with one another and can help you find a proper fit between your needs and a consultant's expertise. All members are certified and have received training in the latest technical information about Apple and related third-party products and services. Members also have access to other resources that help them stay on the cutting edge of technology. Find out if the consultant you're considering participates in any other consulting associations. Consultants' involvement in technical organizations enriches their background and experience, translating into advantages for your business.

### **Should I choose a consultant based on their certification?**

All members are certified in at least one of three required Apple certifications. And to become certified, a consultant must pass an exam that tests their knowledge and expertise on a variety of technical topics. Therefore, you can feel comfortable choosing the consultant that best fits your needs and your business with the knowledge that anyone you choose will be highly qualified for the job.



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### **What is the required certification of an Apple Consultants Network member?**

To help ensure that customers receive the highest quality, all members are required to hold at least one certification in Mac OS X. These certifications include:

#### **Apple Certified Help Desk Specialist (ACHDS)**

A consultant holding this certification has a verified foundation in Mac OS X client software.

#### **Apple Certified Technical Coordinator (ACTC)**

A consultant holding this certification has a verified foundation in Mac OS X and Mac OS X Server.

#### **Apple Certified System Administrator (ACSA)**

A consultant holding this certification is a full-time professional administrator and/or engineer who manages medium-to-large networks of systems, utilizing Mac OS X server in a demanding and relatively complex multiplatform environment.

### **What types of services do consultants provide?**

Apple Consultants Network members offer a wide variety of services, from setting up an office or network, to cross-platform integration and wireless support. Many also provide training as part of their services. Be sure to request specific information about the consultant's unique areas of expertise, and ask for examples of successful customer implementations. See [Services & Solutions](#) for more detail on specific consultant services.

### **What type of training do consultants typically offer?**

Some consultants offer regularly scheduled seminars at training centers. Others are available to provide on-site training at your facility, either one-on-one or in groups. Consultants can train your employees to make optimal use of custom solutions, or they can deliver training in Mac OS X or in specific applications such as Final Cut Pro, AppleScript, and Aperture.

### **How do I find out what types of seminars and training are available?**

Consultants offer a wide variety of training, from introductory classes in Mac OS X to digital media and design. In addition, Apple offers seminars that you may find helpful for your business. Visit [Apple Seminars, Training & Events](#) for more details.

### **What are the consultant's unique technical skills and how do they apply to your environment?**

Companies in areas such as publishing, education and bioscience often have their own unique needs. Most consultants have specialized skill sets and can implement solutions based on a diverse set of products from various companies. If you have a specific need, check to see if the consultant you are considering has experience that maps to your requirements. For example, many consultants have in-depth expertise in creative markets. They can implement solutions such as workflow automation and digital asset management to increase productivity. Others are UNIX experts who can help scientific companies implement open source research tools or spearhead custom software development. Consultants can help you maximize your technology no matter what market you're in. Does the consultant have all of the skills needed to implement your solution? A major advantage of working with members is they are part of a network of approximately 1,000 consultants across the U.S., Canada and Latin America. They can exchange referrals with each other to help you find a proper fit between your needs and a consultant's



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expertise. Or, they can team up on projects. For example, an AppleScript expert might complete the publishing automation portion of your solution then work with another member well versed in ColorSync to implement an integrated color management workflow. Is the consultant willing to set up a complete plan with specific goals and milestones? A consultant's primary task is to understand your needs and translate them into solutions that will work for you. It's important to have specific objectives that clarify what you hope to achieve and milestones that keep a project on track. Make sure that the consultant gives you an estimated completion time and establishes a method to inform you of progress. Regular status reports are a good safeguard. They should keep you up-to-date on the consultant's progress, as well as the costs being incurred. Request that status reports from the consultant start right away, from the beginning of the project.

### **How much will the consultant's services cost?**

Consultants set their own prices and they vary considerably, largely depending on the going hourly rate in their geographic area. Investigate different pricing options with the consultant you've chosen and keep in mind that the services and solutions they provide will typically deliver a long-term return on investment. The best approach is to ask the consultant for references of customers who had the same or similar types of services performed, then ask the references if the consultant delivered a valuable service at a reasonable price.

### **Will the consultant bill on a project or an hourly basis?**

This usually depends on the types of services offered. If a consultant is creating a custom application for you, the best approach might be to establish a fee for the entire project. On the other hand, ongoing services such as IT support are usually covered under service contracts or billed on an hourly or per-call basis. Establish up front the billing structure that your consultant prefers for the type of work you need.

### **Is the consultant available to provide services and training on an ongoing basis?**

Many consultants continue working for the same clients on a long-term basis. Some act as a "virtual" IT staff for smaller companies, because they can assess business needs, recommend solutions, implement and support them at a fraction of the cost of hiring a full-time, in-house staff. Others work with larger enterprises to continually fine-tune and augment their solutions. Many consultants also provide ongoing training to ensure that staff members are making optimal use of solutions. Once you establish a successful relationship with a consultant, he or she can become an invaluable asset to your business. You will want to be sure that the possibility for an ongoing relationship exists.

### **Finally, ask yourself if you feel comfortable with the consultant.**

Consultants' interpersonal skills may be just as important to you as their technical and business abilities. Because a consultant will be providing mission-critical solutions and services that can have a major impact on your company, you need to be able to trust them as well as enjoy working with them.

Members of the Apple Consultants Network can be an invaluable resource for your company. They can help you maximize the value of your investment and turn technology into a competitive advantage for your business. By following a few key guidelines, you can find a consultant that meets your exact needs. Visit <http://consultants.apple.com/consultant/> today to find a consultant in your area and learn more about how members of the Apple Consultants Network can benefit your business.