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COMPUTER CONSULTING

"What Every Business Owner Must Know About Hiring An Honest, Competent, Responsive And Fairly Priced Computer Consultant"

Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data And Operations To Just Anyone! This Business Advisory Guide Will Arm You With 21 Revealing Questions You Should Ask Any Computer Consultant Before Giving Them Access To Your Company's Network

Choosing the wrong computer consultant to support your network can be incredibly frustrating and expensive, and could end up costing you in downtime, data loss and expensive repair bills, not to mention the headaches and frustration!

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The "dirty little secret" of the computer repair industry that most people don't know and will never be told by their IT guy (knowing this ALONE could save you from wasting tons of money and untold aggravation when outsourcing your computer support).
- ✓ 21 revealing questions that will help you instantly spot an unethical or grossly incompetent computer repair/support technician in minutes.
- ✓ 4 costly misconceptions most business owners have about computer maintenance and repair, one of which you will need to know about BEFORE even picking up the phone.
- ✓ Viruses, worms, spyware and hackers: what you need to know to protect yourself.
- ✓ 5 mistakes to avoid when choosing a computer consultant. ✓ Why "cheap" or "lowest price" computer repair shops aren't the bargain they initially appear to be. ✓ The one surefire sign that you should run – not walk – away from a computer support firm.

Provided as an educational service by:
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From The Desk of: Brian A. Goerdt
President, Arena Computer Consulting

Dear Colleague,

Choosing a computer support company isn't easy. There is no shortage of horror stories about incompetent computer repair "gurus" bungling jobs and causing MORE problems as a result of their loose morals or gross incompetence. I'm sure if you talk to your own friends and colleagues you will get an earful of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

Why is this? Because the computer repair and consulting industry, along with a lot of other industries, has its own share of incompetent or unethical businesses that will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine whether or not the technician knows what they are doing. Sometimes this is out of greed for your money, but more often it's simply because they don't have the skills and competency to do the job right, but won't tell you that up front. From misleading information and unqualified technicians, to poor management and terrible customer service, we've seen it all…and we know they exist in abundance because we have had a number of customers come to us to clean up the disasters they have caused.

Buyer Beware: The Computer Repair And Consulting Industry Is NOT Regulated

Here's an embarrassing (and little-known) fact about my industry: it is not regulated like many other professional service industries, which means ANYONE can claim they are a "computer repair expert." **In fact, a lot of the businesses in this industry started because the owner was FIRED or laid off from their job and couldn't find work anywhere else. That means many of the so-called experts are useless and make sleazy auto repair shops look like the pinnacle of virtue and competence.**

Automotive repair shops, electricians, plumbers, lawyers, realtors, dentists, doctors, accountants, etc., are heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, the computer industry is still highly unregulated and there aren't any laws in existence to protect the consumer – **which is why it's so important for you to arm yourself with the information contained in this report.**

Anyone who can hang out a shingle can promote themselves as a computer expert. Even if they are honestly *trying* to do a good job for you, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your network's speed and performance or in lost or corrupt data files. That is why we decided to offer this report. The information in this guide is provided to help raise standards within the computer repair and support industry, and to give YOU useful information to help you guard against the lack of ethics or incompetence of some companies and technicians.

Dedicated to serving you,

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About The Author



I have been involved with computers since the early 80s. In middle school I saw my first PC and it was love at first sight. 30 some years later that passion has evolved into making sure that people who don't have the same affection for technology can use it productively with minimal frustration. More than just fixing the computers, I advise them on trends and software advances and how to future proof hardware purchases.

Fast forward 10 years and here we are today, bigger and better. Still servicing that first big client and many more businesses around the area. Standards for fast response time, professionalism and personable friendly support have set us apart from other companies.

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21 Questions You Should Ask Your Computer Consultant Before Hiring Them To Support Your Network

Customer Service:

Q1: Do they answer their phones live or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?
Our Answer: We answer our phones live from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including on weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your calls?
Our Answer: We guarantee to have a technician working on a problem within 60 minutes or less of your call. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across as arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?
Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the "heart of a teacher" and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms

Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?
Our Answer: We conduct quarterly review meetings with our clients to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients be more profitable, efficient and competitive.

Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?
Our Answer: We provide detailed invoices that show what work was done, why and when, so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.

Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect YOU?
Our Answer: Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider: if one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance AND workers' compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

True story: A few years ago, Geek Squad was slapped with multimillion-dollar lawsuits from customers for bad behavior by their technicians. In some cases, their techs where accessing, copying and distributing personal information they gained access to on customers' PCs and laptops brought in for repairs. In other cases, they lost a client's laptop (and subsequently all the data on it) and tried to cover it up. Bottom line: make sure the company you are hiring has proper insurance to protect YOU.

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Q7: Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and on budget?
Our Answer: All projects are fixed-priced and guaranteed to be completed on time, in writing. This is important because many unethical or incompetent computer guys will only quote "time and materials," which gives them free rein to nickel-and-dime you as well as take as much time as they want on completing a project.

Maintenance Of Your Network:

Q8: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data and other issues?
Our Answer: Yes, our remote network monitoring system watches over your network to constantly look for developing problems, security issues and other problems so we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q9: Do they provide you with a weekly report that shows all the updates, security patches and the status of every machine on your network so you know for SURE your systems have been secured and updated?
Our Answer: Every week our clients get a detailed report that shows an overall health score of their network and the updates to their antivirus, security settings, patches and other important network checks (like hard-drive space, backups, speed and performance, etc.).

Q10: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with written network documentation detailing what software licenses you own, critical passwords, user information, hardware inventory, etc., or are they the only person with the "keys to the kingdom"?
Our Answer: All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. We also perform a quarterly update on this material and make sure certain key people from your organization have this information and know how to use it, giving you complete control over your network. *Side note:* You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q11: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?
Our Answer: Yes; and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client's account, any of our technicians can pick up where another one has left off.

Q12: When they offer an "all-inclusive" support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are their "gotchas" hidden in the fine print?
Our Answer: Our "Arena Care" support plan is just that – all-inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by consulting firms today is an "all-inclusive" or "all-you-can-eat" managed services plan. These are actually a good thing because they'll save you a lot of money in the long run – HOWEVER, make sure you REALLY understand what is and isn't included. Some things to consider are:

- Is phone/e-mail help desk included or extra?

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- What about network upgrades, moves or adding/removing users?
- Is hardware and/or software included?
- What about 3rd-party software support? (We recommend that this IS included.) What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you aren't happy with their services? Do they offer a money-back guarantee? If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are off-site backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra? What about on-site support calls? Or support to remote offices?
- Are home PCs used to access the company's network after hours included or extra?

Backups And Disaster Recovery:

Q13: Do they INSIST on monitoring an off-site as well as an on-site backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated tape backups?
Our Answer: We do not allow our clients to use tape backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We make sure all of our clients have Redundant USB Hard Drives on server backups, as well as a Cloud / Online Backup.

Q14: Do they INSIST on doing periodic test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?
Our Answer: We perform a monthly "fire drill" and perform a test restore from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to "test" a backup is when you desperately need it.

Q15: Do they insist on backing up your network BEFORE performing any type of project or upgrade?
Our Answer: We do; and that's simply as a precaution in case a hardware failure or software glitch causes a major problem.

Q16: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a written plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or one that enables you to work from a remote location? Our Answer: All clients receive a simple disaster recovery plan for their data and network. We encourage them to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their network will be covered should something happen.

Technical Expertise And Support:

Q17: Is their help desk US-based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party? Our Answer: We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it's important for keeping your data secure.

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Q18: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in ongoing training – or are they learning on your dime?
Our Answer: Our technicians are required to keep the most up-to-date vendor certifications in all the software we support. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent, 99% of the technicians who apply don't make it through (guess who's hiring them?).

Q19: Do their technicians arrive on time and dress professionally?
Our Answer: Our technicians are true professionals that you would be proud to have in your office. They dress professionally, show up on time, and if they cannot (for some odd, unforeseen reason), we always notify the client immediately. We believe these are minimum requirements for delivering a professional service.

Q20: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line-of-business applications?
Our Answer: We own the problems with all line-of-business applications for our clients. That doesn't mean we can fix faulty software – but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you.

Q21: When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT services, do they own the problem or do they say, "That's not our problem to fix"?
Our Answer: We feel WE should own the problem for our clients so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.

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The 4 Most Costly Misconceptions About Computer Maintenance and Repair

Misconception #1: My computer network doesn't need regular monitoring and maintenance.

This is probably one of the biggest and most costly misconceptions that business owners have. Usually this is because they've been fortunate enough to have never encountered a major disaster; but that's similar to someone thinking they don't need to wear a seat belt when driving a car because they've never had an accident.

Computer networks are complex and dynamic systems that need regular updates and maintenance to stay up, running fast and problem-free. In fact, it's surprising how fast a brand-new PC will slow down after a few weeks of use without proper updates and maintenance. Here are just a FEW of the critical updates that need to be done on a weekly – if not daily – basis:

- Security patches applied – with NEW viruses and hacker attacks cropping up DAILY, this is a CRITICAL part of maintaining your network
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam-filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed

Your computer network is just like a car: if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission and perform other regular maintenance on your car, it will eventually break down and cost you FAR MORE to repair than the cost of the basic maintenance – and a car is far simpler than a computer network!

If your computer support tech does not insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, then DO NOT HIRE THEM. Lack of system maintenance is the NUMBER ONE reason most people end up losing valuable files and incurring heavy computer repair bills. If your technician isn't offering you these services, you need to find someone else to support your computer or network for two reasons:

1. Either they don't know enough to make this recommendation, which is a sure sign they are horribly inexperienced, *OR*

2. They recognize that they are *profiting* from your computer problems and don't want to recommend steps toward preventing you from needing their help on an ongoing

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basis. After all, they'll get paid MORE to remove a virus than to make sure your system is patched, updated and secured (which can be done quickly and inexpensively with good monitoring).

Either reason is a good one to get as far away from that person as possible!

Misconception #2: My nephew/neighbor's kid/brother-in-law/office manager knows this computer stuff and can take care of our computers.

Most people look for a part-time "guru" for one reason: to save a few bucks. But this often comes back to haunt them. We frequently get calls from business owners who desperately need our help to get them back up and running or to clean up a mess that was caused by an inexperienced neighbor, friend or relative who was just trying to help.

If the person you have working on your machine does not do computer repair and support for a living, there is a good chance they won't have the knowledge or experience to truly help you – they are a hobbyist at best. And do you really want a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and computer network? As with everything in life, you get what you pay for. That's not to say you need to go broke to find a great technician, but you shouldn't be choosing someone based on price alone.

Misconception #3: All computer technicians are created equal. Your best option will be the one who offers the lowest price.

As we stated a moment ago, you get what you pay for. A cheap price usually means a cheap job. Really good technicians do NOT work cheap because they are in high demand just like every other professional service category. The only technicians that will work cheap are those who are just starting, and they are grossly inexperienced.

And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience, OR they allow interns to support your network because they don't have to pay them at all – but what you don't realize is that an inexperienced technician like this can end up costing more because:

1. They improperly diagnose problems, which means you're paying them to fix the WRONG thing and they STILL won't resolve your problem. Case in point: A few years ago a TV reporter went undercover to 8 computer repair shops in LA with a perfectly working PC, but simply disconnected a cable in the back (a fix that the AVERAGE computer tech would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several shops improperly diagnosed the problem and wanted to charge them anywhere from $59 to over $275 to fix it!

2. They could take 3 to 5 times as long to do the same repair an experienced technician could fix quickly. Again, you're paying for those extra hours.

3. They could do MORE damage, costing you more money and downtime.

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With your client data, accounting records, e-mail and other critical data at stake, do you REALLY want the lowest-priced shop working on your machine?

We take the view that most people want value for their money and simply want the job done right. You will find that we are not the cheapest, but we don't apologize for that. As the owner, I decided a long time ago that I would rather explain our higher rates ONE TIME than make excuses for POOR SERVICE forever. That said, we're not the most expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer a good service at a fair price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for over 10 years and have over 30 customers who've been with us that entire time.

Misconception #4: An honest computer support company should be able to give you a quote over the phone.

I wish this were true, but it isn't. Just like a good doctor, an honest and professional technician will need to diagnose your network before they can quote any price over the phone; consider the example above where all that was needed was to plug in a simple cable. If someone brought that to us, we would just plug it back in and not charge them; but without SEEING the machine, we could have never diagnosed that over the phone.

Also, some consultants will quote you a cheap rate over the phone to get in the door, but then jack up the prices once they get in your office by taking 3 times as long, selling you add-ons and up-sells, etc. And finally, reputable firms don't charge by the hour anyway – they give you a fixed fix, flat rate. Here's why…

One of the easiest ways to take advantage of a customer is to get them to agree to a time and materials repair. Unless you know what's wrong and how long it should take, they can soak you on the fees. And what are you going to do when they get 5-6 hours into a repair or project and then spring on you the news that it will take even longer than they anticipated to fix, costing you MORE money?

Always, always, always make sure you get a flat-rate, fixed-fee quote in advance so you don't end up getting burned – and NEVER take a phone quote!

5 More Mistakes To Avoid When Choosing A Computer Consultant

1. **Choosing a computer consultant based on a single phone call.** We recommend you invite them into your office and ask them for a written proposal. Be clear on what your expectations are and what type of problems you want them to resolve. As stated a moment ago, a competent professional should offer to do an audit of your network to diagnose your system BEFORE quoting you anything. After all, would you take a doctor's word that you need surgery if they hadn't done x-rays or other diagnostics? Of course not! Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice.

2. **Choosing a computer consultant that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and for fixing things RIGHT. If you aren't pleased with a job that was done, they should (at a minimum) make it right for free; and if they simply cannot resolve an issue to YOUR satisfaction, you shouldn't get stuck with the bill.

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Plus, the fact that they stand behind their work with a money-back guarantee shows they have confidence in themselves to make you a happy client. And don't fall for the "We don't offer one because people will take advantage of us" routine. In our experience, MOST people just want an honest service at a reasonable price. If you give them that, they are happy to pay. Are there a few unethical folks out there? Of course, but they are the minority, and we would rather bite the bullet on the very few dishonest folks so we can gain the trust and confidence of the majority of clients, who just want their problems fixed fast and fixed right.

3. **Choosing a computer consultant without speaking to several of their current clients.**
   Check their references! Don't just take the sales guy's word that they are good – ask to speak to at least 3 or 4 clients that are similar to you in size and scope. If they hesitate or cannot provide you with references, don't trust them!

   Another good sign is that they should have multiple client testimonials and success stories posted on their web site and throughout their marketing collateral. A lack of this may be a sign that they don't HAVE clients who are happy enough to provide a good reference – again, a warning sign.

4. **Choosing a computer consultant who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.**
   In this day and age, a computer consultant who doesn't do this is living in the Stone Age. You want someone to do this because it will dramatically increase your network's security and will enable them to do faster repairs. That's not to say they shouldn't come onsite; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help AVOID problems cropping up in the first place.

A Final Word…

I hope you have found this guide to be helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by the many incompetent firms offering these services.

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Let us know! And, of course, if you are looking for someone you can trust to take over the care and maintenance of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business.

Below you will find information on how to request a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis. This is, of course, provided for free, with no obligations and no expectations on our part. I want to be clear that this is NOT a bait-and-switch offer or a trick to get you to buy something. My reputation for running an honest and trustworthy business is something I hold very dear. I would never jeopardize that in any way. So why are we offering something like this for free?

Two reasons:

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1. We are simply offering this service as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with. Again, our goal is to allow you to make an informed and confident decision – and offering this is one way we can help you better evaluate us.

2. This will allow us to determine if we even CAN help you. Obviously we can't help everyone, and our services might not be a good fit for you. Conducting this Health Check enables us to do a small project for you to help you evaluate whether or not we're the right company for you without risking your money.

Looking forward to your call!

The Team at Arena Computer Consulting
Phone: 563-823-8888
Web: Arenaqca.com

FREE Network Health Check For All Prospective Clients Who Want To Put Us To The Test!

As a prospective customer, we would like to offer you a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis ($497 value). During this health check we will perform a comprehensive 31 point audit of your entire network to look for potential problems, security loopholes, spyware and other hidden problems that will cause the computers on your network to run slow, act funny, crash and lose data.

We will:

- ✓ Review your system backups to make sure they are working properly and CAN be restored quickly in the event of a disaster.
- ✓ Scan for hidden spyware, malware and viruses that MOST antivirus tools and software can't detect or won't remove.
- ✓ Check for security updates and patches to validate that your network really IS secure.
- ✓ Review your firewall and security settings.
- ✓ Check the integrity of your server and workstations hardware. (*Side note:* Did you know that hardware failure is one of the leading causes of data loss that CAN be detected early and avoided with proper monitoring?)
- ✓ Audit your virus definitions and protection.
- ✓ Conduct a visual scan of your server room and cabling to make sure your network is PHYSICALLY safe and set up properly.
- ✓ Check your overall system performance, space and settings to see if your network is running as fast as it could be.

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Why Should You Care About This?

Because there are literally dozens of ways hackers and viruses can – undetected – gain access to and remotely control your network, corrupt your data and use your network as a conduit for spreading spam, viruses and even illegal software.

There are numerous system checks and updates that should be done on a regular basis to ensure maximum speed, performance and security. Ignore them and your system will get progressively slower, more unstable and susceptible to viruses, spyware and hackers.

Tape backups have a failure rate of 100% – that means all tape drives will fail at some point, often without warning. You don't want to find out that your backup was not working the day after your hard drive fried.

How To Request Your FREE Network Health Check:

Apply online at www.arenaqca.com/activate
Call us at 563-823-8888

Read On To Hear What Our Clients Have To Say:

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David Necker
Necker's Jewelers

"Speed of response is amazing!"

Wow your speed of response is amazing and you don't make us feel like idiots when we ask stupid questions. We love the expertise the team and the owner bring to the table.

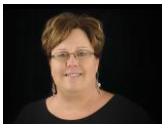
David Necker
Necker's Jewelers

"Couldn't be happier with their service"

Ryan Hornbuckle,P.E., LEED AP
VP Engineering
Hornbuckle Heating & Air Conditioning

We can't afford to have our computer systems fail, operate inefficiently, or slow us down. The team from Arena have been taking care of our systems for several years now and we couldn't be happier with their service. They make sure we're always up to date and running smoothly while being protected from outside threats, viruses, or other malicious software. We highly recommend them to anyone looking for peace of mind with their information and technology needs.

Ryan Hornbuckle
Hornbuckle Heating



I cannot say enough good things about them!–

Nancy Hill
Controller,
Mills Chevrolet

"One call or e-mail and the problems get resolved…"

"Arena Computer Consulting will tell you the truth and give you real solutions that work the way they are supposed to. I cannot say enough good things about them!"

We used to wait till we had a "Big List" to call for help. Now instead of waiting, one call or email and get the problems resolved the same day! What a difference! I appreciate the seamless and quick response to requests. The response time is excellent, as well as the follow through to resolving issues.

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“It’s like having your own IT team on staff”

One thing that sets Arena apart from other IT companies we have dealt with is their sense of urgency to resolve the issue and a Stronger knowledge base.

When we have an issue the Arena team is here right away and the problem is dealt with and solved very quickly.

“It’s like having your own IT team on staff. The Arena team understands how important it is that everyone is up and running, especially during working hours. They are very concerned about making sure they are meeting and exceeding our expectations.”

Bonnie Voelkers



Chief Financial Officer

NAI Ruhl Commercial Company

“Choose Arena!!! … the one on one is something you don’t get with other IT companies.”

The quickness of the service that we receive has been a great benefit to our company.

Arena is great and getting back to us in a timely manner. We have direct contact with the owner of the company which you usually don’t have with other IT companies

If someone was on the fence about switching, I would say “Choose Arena!!! The service is amazing and the one on one that you get is something you don’t get with other IT companies.”

Annie Barclay
Director of Operations/Assistant to President
NAI Ruhl Commercial Company

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