

## How to Select the Right Consultant

In 1990, US companies spent almost \$23 billion on consulting services and that number has increase 10 fold today. Businesses are growing more dependent on using outside consultants to help them with solving problems, finding new opportunities and other business goals. Consequently, a record number of consulting firms have been established making the process of choosing a consultant a more complicated.

Here are some tips to help the business owner select the best consultant for their firm.

1. **Do Some Research.** Network with professional and industry contacts, review trade journals and identify other companies that have successfully tackled similar challenges.
2. **Evaluate Style and Expertise.** A proven track record in resolving similar issues for other firms is critical to a successful consulting engagement. But so are the interpersonal and communication skills that create an effective working relationship.
3. **Compare the Consultant's Strengths Against Your Needs.** Ask each firm to describe the ideal engagement that will capitalize on the consultant's expertise. Then design the engagement that best addresses your issues. Map the strengths of each firm against your requirements and determine the best fit.
4. **Analyze Each Consultant's Approach.** Is the consultant open-minded to identify new opportunities that arise when analyzing your firm and related issues? Is the consultant flexible enough to shift focus and capitalize on a new business opportunity? Does the expert develop a tailored solution or will it force you into a standard solution?
5. **Recognize That Less is More.** To create a meaningful proposal that addresses your issues, each consultant must spend time with you to understand your goals before they can provide a proposal for the engagement. It is unproductive and costly to evaluate several consultants at once. Therefore, it is best to only select two or three consultants to evaluate and invest your valuable time with.

Regardless of your company size, selecting and working with a consultant can be easy and productive when you prepare. You should clearly define your goals and identify your problem areas. Take the time required to select the best consultant for your company and situation. By doing so, you will be able to get the best return on your investment and achieve your objectives.