Tips for Hiring a Data Center Consultant
By Peter Sacco

Whether your company wants to upgrade its server room or to build a data center from scratch, you don't have to go it alone. A consultant can guide you every step of the way, from the first realization that some scope of change is required, to the final systems commissioning and use training. To help you select a consultant who's the best match for your business, consider the following points:

- **Know what you want.**
Be specific about your goals. It's a step in the wrong direction if you start hunting for a consultant before you're able to draw up a Statement of Work. By ironing out these details in advance, you'll provide a framework for discussions and make it easier for the consultant to generate the most effective solutions for your project.

- **Check references.**
Although references are guaranteed to almost always be positive, they can still tell you a lot about your potential consultant. You're hiring a consultant for the expertise, so make sure he or she is truly an expert. You want to find someone who has maintained relationships with long-term, repeat clients. Ask the references whether the consultant was available when needed and how the consultant dealt with unforeseen problems. Also, examine the scope of the consultant's previous work. You're more likely to find a good match in a consultant who has worked within budgets and timelines similar to your own.

- **Request a written proposal.**
After you've narrowed down your list of consultants, ask the remaining candidates to present a written proposal. This will help you determine how responsive each candidate is to your business needs and may even help you refine your project goals. The aim here is to learn how each consultant might be able to add value to your business. Ask them to back this proposal up with examples from their previous work.

- **Require confidentiality.**
By signing a confidentiality agreement, you and the other employees at your company can feel more comfortable working with your consultant, thus improving project communications and creating a more pleasant, productive working relationship. You may also want to sign a Non-Compete agreement so your consultant will not work with your direct competitors for a fixed length of time.

- **Hire someone you'd like to work with.**
This sounds like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised how many companies simply go for the lowest bidder. The task of hiring a consultant should be treated with the same care as hiring a permanent employee. You need

someone who can not only meet your project needs, but who also communicates well in one-on-one and group situations without smothering you in jargon. Ideally, your consultant should be someone who you'd be happy to work with on an on-going basis rather than as a one-shot deal.

- **Get it all in writing.**
Draw up a contract that stipulates who is responsible for costs, labor, management, and time. You want to be aware of all consulting fees upfront while providing the consultant with a good understanding of the resources available to him or her. Establish guidelines for how the project will be handled. Make sure the consultant is required to provide a written warning if the project may go over budget or miss a deadline.

- **Provide input and support.**
A consultant is not an auto-pilot. You should remain actively involved in the project after a consultant has signed on. Establish a regular meeting schedule and discuss any concerns openly. This review process will help you stay on-track and make it easier to adapt if a change of plans is needed.

With any luck, the consultant that you've selected will not only successfully see your current project through to completion, but will be a valuable asset to your company for years to come, making your job easier and your company more profitable.

About PTS Data Center Solutions
Founded in 1998, PTS Data Center Solutions is a data center design firm and turnkey solutions provider, offering a broad range of project experience, specializing in designing data centers, server rooms and technical spaces that integrate 'best-of-breed', critical infrastructure technologies and result in continuously available, scalable, redundant, fault-tolerant, manageable and maintainable mission critical environments. Visit the company's website at http://www.ptsdcs.com/.

About the Author
Peter Sacco is the founder and President of PTS Data Center Solutions. Pete has a BSEE and has been involved in the data center/computer room industry for over 10 years.