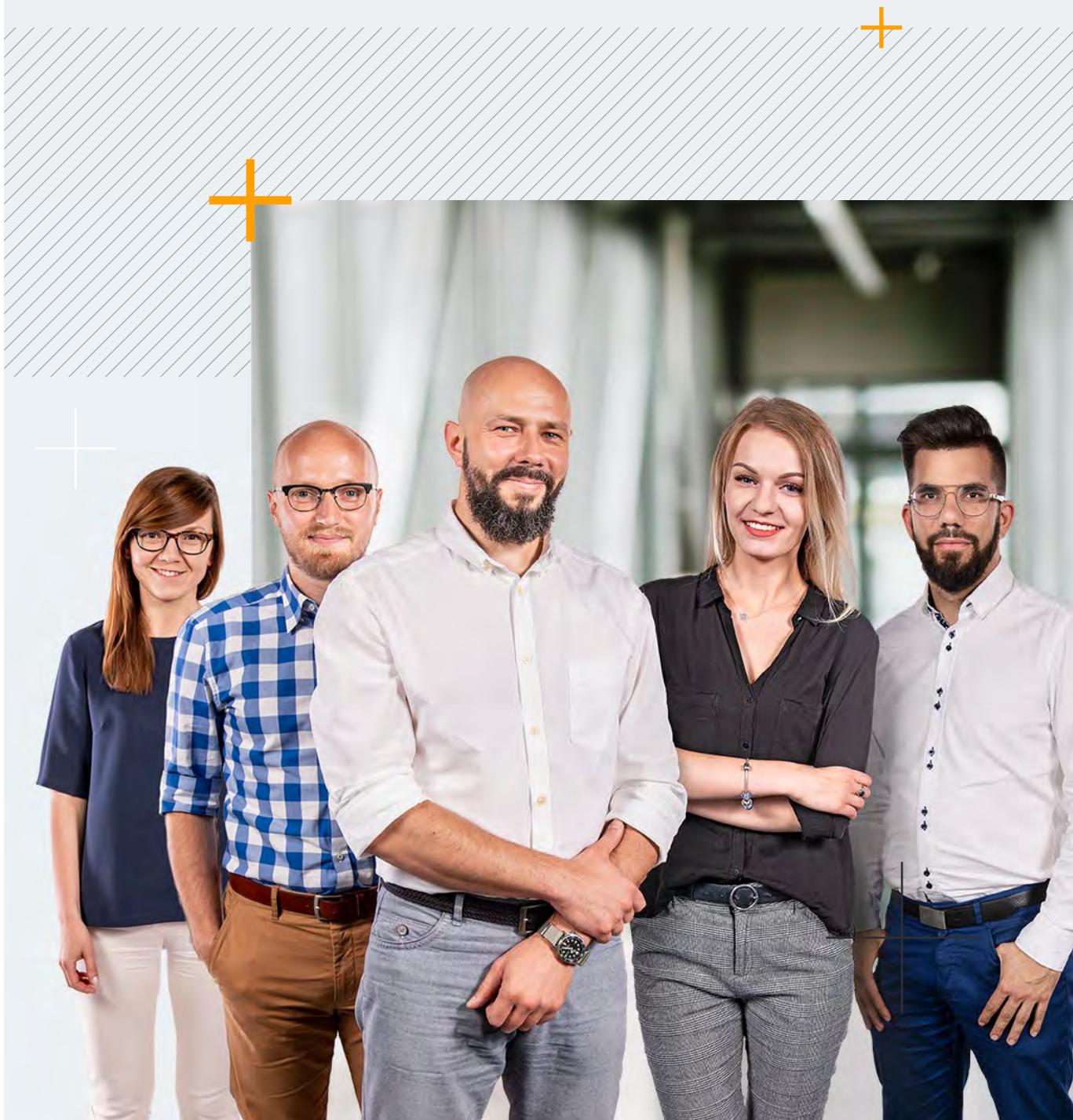




Future Processing

A comprehensive guide to choosing a strategic IT partner

Top 5 qualities to look for





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Introduction

In today's ever-changing world, there's a growing need for the constant and reliable. Like a trusted partner.

Finding the right partner in a competitive business environment is no walk in the park, but it's definitely worth the effort, since a casual partnership can develop into a highly beneficial strategic alliance. Just like a new relationship with a personal acquaintance. **And this paper will help you find a strategic IT partner to last for years, guiding you carefully through the entire process.**

The **structure** of the paper

This guide consists of four main parts:

1. Trends

In the beginning, we briefly outline what the IT outsourcing industry looks like and the direction that it is moving towards.

2. Problems

In this section, we map out the biggest fears, challenges and benefits frequently found in partnerships like this.

3. Solution

On top of all the facts and problems that are related to the outsourcing market, we also provide you with a cut-and-dried list of top qualities to look for when choosing an IT partner, along with simple tips on how to check for them.

4. Benefits

Finally, this is where we highlight the undeniable benefits of a strategic partnership, so as to give you a complete look at the big picture.



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IT outsourcing industry trends in 2019

Outsourcing services are a huge part of the IT industry – one that continues to evolve and shift **away from the traditional, towards the disruptive**. **The market is changing, as are the clients' criteria for outsourcing.**

According to recent statistics, **74% of companies** worldwide use IT outsourcing services. That's nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all existing businesses, which is a pure indicator of how large the capacity gaps are within many organisations, and how strong the need is to overcome these obstacles in the technology chasm. Within this context, it comes as no surprise that the **global market size of outsourced services in 2018 reached 85.6 billion USD**. However, the reasons why companies decide to outsource IT services have changed over time.

1. Why do companies outsource these days?

Only a few years ago, in 2016, the **three main reasons** for organisations to outsource were to cut costs (for 59% of the surveyed companies), to have more time to focus on core business activities (57%) and to solve capacity issues (47%). But these were also the times when outsourcing was mainly used for streamlining back-office operations, and to make minor performance improvements and some cost-reductions.

Now companies are thinking bigger. There's been a significant shift in the use of outsourcing services towards a complete **digital transformation** – driven by **cloud computing** and **robotic process automation (RPA)**. This so-called disruptive outsourcing is powerful enough to help organisations achieve competitive edge (by making them much more efficient), as well as change the reasons for adopting outsourcing solutions in general.

Cost optimisation is no longer the main objective. Moreover, there are up to **five other objectives** that constantly rank higher in importance, which include improving overall performance, shortening time-to-market, streamlining long business processes, and having access to new technology. **Organisations all over the world are now focused on becoming more agile and effective in a holistic sense**, over gaining a temporary boost in productivity in just a few areas.





2. 3 noticeable changes in the market

There have also been three important changes regarding the way clients now select service providers, along with changes in the nature of the cooperation itself.

1. Cost of provider > Service reliability

Service reliability has become more important than the cost of the outsourcing services. As stated inside the online **CIO** magazine, “*Picking a technology partner is a completely different experience than shopping on Amazon. You cannot go to a vendor and simply pick the lowest price for the exact service you need. It can be a nuance-filled and complex process.*” And this specific approach results in the next highly positive shift in the market.

2. A more attentive service provider selection process

A request for proposal (RFP) outlines customer expectations, needs and requirements. **42% of organisations** that have had any experience in selecting technology partners, claim that if they had a chance to do it all over again, they would definitely spend more time on RFP and the entire selection process. This is a clear sign that the **price of outsourcing is much less relevant** than the less measurable details, which definitely require more attention, such as the operational agility of the provider or their level of predictability.

3. IT outsourcing companies as outstaffing agencies or strategic partners

There are two meaningful trends in the IT outsourcing market that pertain to the nature of the client-provider cooperation. Firstly, we've noticed that outsourcing companies very often act like outstaffing agencies, leasing their highly qualified employees and even entire teams to other companies for a single project, usually working within short-term contracts. Secondly, IT outsourcing firms have also become more focused on long-term cooperation and becoming a client's strategic technology partner for years. **Both of these trends are the result of the natural evolution of outsourcing services but, in this paper, we will focus our attention on the second effect.**





Greatest fears and challenges in IT partnerships

The risk of a costly failure is the most general reason for companies to shy away from outsourcing.

The prospect of getting involved in any kind of IT partnership is a source of many justifiable concerns, especially with there being more uncertainties than real data prior to the actual cooperation – no one really knows what the partnership will look like in practice. And the more unknowns that enter the picture, the more fears that arise, clogging up the gateway to innovation by holding companies back from outsourcing services. So, what are these things that worry clients the most?



1. Main fears

▪ Poor communication

Problems with communication are responsible for many project failures. Clients and stakeholders are afraid that they won't be able to cooperate effectively or keep an eye on the project due to lack of contact with the partner, and staying informed is crucial in terms of trust and moving things forward in the right direction. Poor communication is also closely associated with the following concerns.

▪ Lack of understanding

There is always the fear that the client's needs and expectations won't be fully comprehended by the partner, not to mention fulfilled. The client's vision might differ significantly from what the IT partner understands to be the project requirements. As a result, the end product may differ greatly from the client's expectations.



- **Hidden costs**

The fear of having to bear hidden costs can successfully stop any company from starting a partnership, no matter how big their budget is. Clients that have experience with outsourcing place emphasis on transparency, openness and being able to receive precise estimations with a clear road map.

- **Dependency on external service providers**

Companies are also afraid that they will become completely dependent on external service providers in terms of project development, and this may influence the operational efficiency of the entire organisation, significantly slowing down various processes and preventing the company from making advancements in other areas of activity.

- **Loss of control**

Becoming dependent on a third party may also result in loss of control over the project, and the direction in which the business is developing. Companies worry about having their hands tied when it comes to the decision-making process and being left with little to no margins of maneuver.

- **Reputation damage**

Finally, organisations fear that cooperating with an IT partner that seemed so promising at the beginning, may, over the course of time, turn into a partial or total disaster. This could lead to permanent damage to the organisation's reputation, resulting in the loss of both current and potential customers, as well as business partnerships.

Nevertheless, these fears may be **effectively mitigated** in the process of choosing the right IT partner – and even removed (or at least addressed and stifled **prior** to entering into a partnership).

However, there are still problems that often emerge **during** the cooperation, since every partnership carries with it certain challenges to be faced by both sides – for the client, as well as the partner.





2. Biggest challenges

▪ Level of commitment

The level of commitment between partners may differ if the service provider doesn't feel like the returns are equally beneficial for both sides. It is of mutual interest to work out terms of cooperation that are as fair and motivating as possible. Plus, in the case of any noticeable drop in engagement, there should be a mechanism in place, designed to intervene and fix the problem.

▪ Different working and management styles

Working and management styles may – and probably will – be different. It's a challenge, yet necessary, to find common ground that can serve as the basic foundation for any long-term cooperation. And it's usually the responsibility of the more experienced IT partner to suggest the most effective approach to project management and the most adequate method of collaboration.

▪ Allocation of responsibility and trust

It's essential to determine **who is responsible for what** – not only between the client and partner, but also within the teams of experts assigned to the project. The other challenge is to build strong mutual trust between these two entities, and this is a long-term process of understanding and experiencing the ups and downs that can occur in any partnership, and finding the best possible solutions through open, loyal and honest communication.

▪ Cultural differences

There might also be some cultural differences, especially if outsourcing overseas. These problems may pertain to the level of individualism, the importance of seniority, or the style of communication (direct/indirect) when it comes to criticism and saying 'no'. It's important to be aware of these differences in order to work out the best ways to deal with them, especially since they may have a huge impact on the overall mood, mutual comprehension, and general productivity of a healthy working environment.

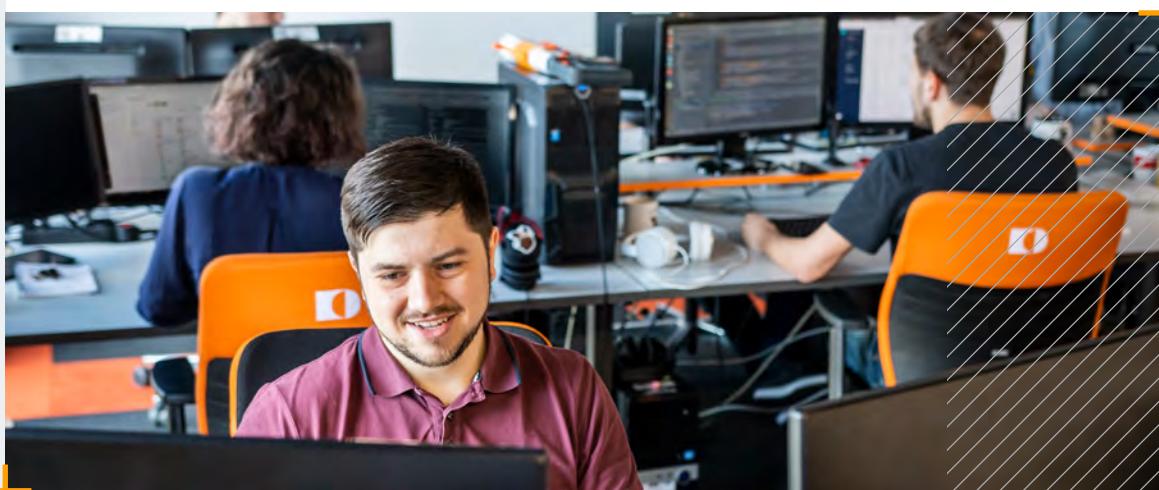
▪ Security

When a third party, such as a partner, is about to gain access to potentially sensitive information (like user data) and internal systems, there's an increased need for adequate security measures to prevent any leaks or violations. According to **The Deloitte Global Outsourcing Survey 2018**, 76% of companies claim that "*regulations around*



data privacy and protection are affecting their disruptive outsourcing decisions", and this number is a good indicator of how serious this challenge is.

In both cases – fighting fears and overcoming challenges – this is where the qualities of your IT partner matter the most. In the next part of this paper, we provide you not only with a comprehensive list of traits to look for in the companies that you are considering for a partnership, but also with words of advice on how to find out if they really have these desired attributes.



5 qualities of a stable IT partner

1. Technical **expertise**

Technical expertise is made up of a few different components. Combined, they create a powerful tool that can be leveraged to design and craft innovative solutions swiftly and efficiently.

Broad experience

First and foremost, having years of experience delivering software solutions for many different business clients means that an IT company has dealt with a number of challenges, problems, and wins and fails – on technical and operational levels. Experience like this is invaluable, both strategically and on a daily basis:

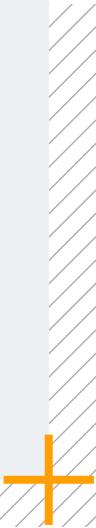
- **Strategically**, because a client may be totally reliant on their partner when it comes to coming up with effective ideas, finding high quality solutions, and steering the project in the right direction – all in alignment with the client's vision.
- **On a daily basis**, because a team with plenty of experience learns to expect the unexpected, is able to quickly adapt to any changes and can collaborate with anyone – regardless of different personality types and individual characteristics.



Broad experience is also reflected in the quantity and quality of successfully delivered software projects, as well as in the amount of positive client opinions and reviews. An experienced partner provides clients with a sense of security and peace of mind. This is strongly associated with having a record of success in the IT field. See below to learn which details will show you whether your future partner has enough experience.

IT company screening — the experience checklist

- Clients and testimonials
- Projects and case studies
- A brief overview of the company – its history and size
- Examples of deliveries in chosen technologies
- Successes and awards



Experienced IT specialists

Having young and fresh specialists on-board, along with their new-age skills and modern approach to software development, is nearly as important as having experienced IT specialists at your disposal. But it's the latter's experience, mentoring abilities and knowledge that keep a project on track. Their presence and talents play a huge role in the trust-building process and lay the foundation for any fully professional cooperation.

Among other highly trained and open-minded employees, a good IT partner should have:

- **senior software developers, data engineers and solution architects** that are used to working within different technologies,
- **senior BA and UI/UX designers** with technical backgrounds, to help collaboration with developers run smoothly,
- **senior software project managers** with multitasking capabilities and analytical skills that are needed to foresee and prevent bigger disruptions and operational issues in a project.

A problem-solving and solution-thinking approach is also highly desired and expected in terms of successful project development. The checklist below will help you see if the staff match your requirements.



IT company screening — the staff checklist

- The number of specialists in the technologies of your interest
- Their level of seniority and years of experience
- Training and conferences that they've attended, led or hosted
- Examples of problems they came across and how they managed to overcome difficulties

Different fields of expertise

A stable IT partner should have a set of experts with profound knowledge from different areas of expertise. This pertains not only to well-known and broadly used technologies, methods, tools and solutions, but also to emerging ones. **In today's world it's essential to stay up-to-date as technological advancements are being introduced almost daily**, so the will to constantly learn and broaden one's horizons is a must. Especially if the partnership is to last for many years.

The eternal desire to always be a few steps ahead of the competition means that **an IT partner should already be leaps ahead**, with eyes wide open. They should have clearly established processes in place (like a technology radar) to quickly detect new trends and surfacing ideas, always ready to test and adapt innovations, never allowing themselves to miss a beat for competitive edge. This approach is beneficial for both sides of the partnership.





Among the hottest trends, concepts and terms that clients are looking for these days are: **artificial intelligence (AI), data mining, machine learning (ML), blockchain, data protection, quality assurance and agile project management.** See what else you should know before entering into a partnership, below.

IT company screening — the expertise checklist

- Skills and technologies that the company focuses on, i.e. Java, .Net, PHP, Angular, or Node.js, along with their specific tool sets
- Innovations that the company has expertise in, i.e. AI & ML, blockchain, Big Data, business intelligence or cloud services
- The number of specialists in the technologies of your interest
- Certifications, e.g. Microsoft Certified Partner
- Experience and capability in critical areas, such as automated deployments, security testing, continuous integration, performance testing or technical documentation
- Processes that enable a company to stay up to date with trends in technology

Clear procedures

Years of experience in various areas of expertise – with senior experts and supervisors at the helm of the development team – suggest that the IT partner in question has a clear set of established procedures for both software development and cooperation with clients. **It's absolutely vital to know what the development cycle looks like**, how they would react in certain situations, who is responsible for which areas and what tasks, as well as who the main contact persons are and how to communicate with them. Both sides simply have to know where and how to tread, and when they need to take the next step.

Having clearly established procedures of collaboration are as important within the internal teams (for both the client and the IT partner), as they are between the two separate entities themselves. This ensures a transparent flow of information so that the developmental process may run smoothly. And now, the questions you need to ask all of the companies on your shortlist will mostly be related to the field of project management.



IT company screening — the procedures checklist

- The preferred methodology of software development and delivery
- The partner's set of best practices in terms of collaboration with clients
- Preferred communication channels
- Procedures regarding the management of requirements, implementing modifications, assigning resources, scoping, estimating, risk management, and tracking progress.

2. Predictable delivery

Predictable delivery is one of the most important factors in terms of risk management. A solid **IT partner should be able to provide you with an essential sense of security, especially when it comes to software development**. This gives you credibility in front of your stakeholders and helps you make sound business decisions. There are three main components that can turn the concept of predictable delivery into a reality.

Analysis & design expertise

The foundation of predictable delivery lies in the first stages of cooperation. It all starts with collecting and analysing the project requirements, and acquiring detailed, research-based information that is vital to tasks. The risk of making mistakes that result from misunderstanding business needs and goals is one of the biggest and most common project risks, but careful analysis and design can help minimise this.

Expertise in analysis and design is no less significant during the rest of the development process, when additional or different needs and objectives are being introduced, and important changes have to be made in alignment with the client's business vision.

Such expertise, along with a data-based approach, allows the IT partner to deliver with predictability, even in very uncertain environments with many factors that are up in the air. **Predictable delivery is equivalent to being ready for changes and having an established scenario of reactions in case certain situations pop up** – reactions that have been approved by the client. Check the points below to make sure that this is an attitude your future IT partner also possesses.

IT company screening — Analysis & Design expertise checklist

- Examples of project analysis
- Examples of architecture design
- Description of how the company deals with the management of project requirements

Precise estimations

Predictable delivery also means that the IT partner is able to make a thorough assessment of the project, based on the information and requirements that they receive from a client. This is an initial touchpoint that allows them to make preliminary estimations and break down all the work into smaller, time-boxed iterations which, for example, in Scrum terminology, are called *sprints*.

These estimations pertain to both:

- **Time** – so that the client knows when an MVP (Minimum Viable Product - a basic working version of the product with just the core functionalities, developed to gather the first round of feedback) or the next feature is going to be implemented, and how much longer it is going to take in case of any modifications that are needed on short notice;
- **Costs** – so that the client knows how much they will have to pay and for what (for example, work or infrastructure), with no costs coming out of the blue.

Precise and openly presented estimations are what make software delivery predictable and the IT partner reliable. They allow both sides to easily track the progress of a





project and mind the budget. Precise estimations are also of the utmost importance for a client in terms of getting new rounds of funding from investors, who are much more likely to place their money in a responsibly led project. This provides them with a sense of security and increased hope for a better ROI (return on investment).

See what you should ask about if you want to make sure that a potential partner is going to provide you with estimations that are as precise as possible.

IT company screening — the estimations checklist

- Description of project scope management
- Description of estimation planning processes
- Daily or hourly rates for all roles (e.g. developers, designers, managers)
- Description of a commercial model partnership

Dependability

Predictable project delivery would be impossible without dependability. You need to be sure that your IT partner will not fail to deliver at any point and on any level.

The dependability of an IT partner is essential in two spheres:

People

The specialists assigned to your project should be fully dependable. This translates into honouring their commitments, being punctual and available during scheduled hours, keeping promises, and being precise, supportive and flexible when needed. This is an essential set of soft skills for all of the people you will need to work with.

Infrastructure

The project should be based on highly dependable infrastructure, meaning that the chosen technology solutions, third-party service providers and tools should be stable and secure, in order to prevent any critical problems. The entire IT environment needs to provide great performance and availability, excellent support, as well as the desired level of flexibility. Dependable infrastructure increases the quality of services, ensures a better user experience, and enhances overall customer satisfaction.





In short, dependability in these two areas may be a decisive factor in the project's success or failure. So, here's a short list of things you need to check for in the screening process:

IT company screening — the dependability checklist

- The above-mentioned soft skills of all the people responsible for your project on the IT partner side (which is hard to gather from just an RFP document, and much easier on a personal level – through meetings, emails, or video conferences prior to entering into a cooperation)
- Description of the IT infrastructure and who bears the costs of it
- A list of their third-party service providers



3. Operational agility

An ideal **IT partner has to be agile on an operational level**: they must exercise flexibility in alignment with changing priorities and requirements, and have the capacity to seize any opportunities. They should also respond well to your needs, the size of the project, your desired level of engagement, your favourite ways of working and preferred pricing model. The ability to adjust to your business challenges is an absolute necessity, and this must be reflected in the below-mentioned areas.

Flexibility and adaptability

Flexibility is the internal ability of a company to flex according to what is needed at the moment. This is one of the fundamental aspects of agile communication in today's environment, where the only constant thing is, ironically, change. Flexibility translates into, for example, being able to quickly rearrange project priorities, changing communication channels if necessary, and basically being able to handle any unexpected situations smoothly. It indicates rather short-term adjustments, in harmony with the client's expectations.

Adaptability, on the other hand, is associated with long-term changes. It's like maintaining flexibility for the long run, and making it the default setting. Adaptability is reflected in one's ability to scale the team and its resources up and down, operating flawlessly in accordance with the client's changing goals, or adjusting quickly to handle the factors that tend to appear in unstable environments. An IT partner should firstly have the will – and then the skill – to adapt, in order to make a long-standing cooperation possible.

Of course, one wouldn't be possible without the other, so it's extremely important to make sure that a future service provider has both flexibility and adaptability.



IT company screening — the adaptability and flexibility checklist

- List of best practices associated with the agile development approach
- Proof of experience with the agile approach
- Examples of behaviours showing flexibility and adaptability towards previous clients

Buffer management

One of the most important aspects of workforce management is having buffers in place – buffers that pertain to people. This adds leeway to a project, and makes it possible to adapt to changes without significant delays, drops in effectiveness, or affecting the overall completion date.

A solid partner should have a number of backup specialists who are trained to work in all of the necessary technologies, so they can reinforce the main team in no time. Plus, they should be able to quickly form a new team – one that is ready to work on a new project at once. Those buffer employees – when they're not working on something for a client – are learning new things, acquiring new skills and getting invaluable experience by delivering projects for internal purposes.

A buffer can also be useful in the absence of a team member. When someone gets sick or quits, there should always be someone who is able to take over their responsibilities.

Managing buffers wisely improves both flexibility and adaptability and helps ensure a seamless workflow. Ask about buffers to check, whether the partner is equally aware of their importance.



Operational effectiveness

Being agile also entails maintaining a high level of effectiveness on a long term basis — throughout the entire process of software development. However, levels can vary in between



sprints. During periods when adjustments and changes must be made and a partner has to adapt to them — effectiveness might be lower, but during times of stability, the team should be able to catch up.

High levels of operational effectiveness are not that easy to achieve and require years of experience in the IT field. **An IT partner has to have a number of safety mechanisms and tested procedures in place to prevent any significant drops in effectiveness**, especially when making modifications to a project. They also need several semi- or fully automated processes to streamline workflow and decision making. Both human and technical resources are crucial to implementing necessary modifications smoothly.

Therefore, in your Request for Proposal, you shouldn't forget to ask questions about the partner's level of effectiveness.

IT company screening — the effectiveness checklist

- Procedures and mechanisms associated with introducing changes
- Levels of automation in terms of processes
- Description of strategies to minimise the rate of attrition and maximise business continuity
- Description of approach to dealing with volatile demand in terms of maintaining both knowledge management and access to skills

4. Trustworthy partnership approach

In any long-term cooperation with a service provider, it's easier to achieve objectives when both the client and the provider see each other as partners. **Mutual trust is key to success**. A client needs to be certain that their partner will do everything they can to minimise risks and maximise opportunities to obtain the most favourable business results. And there are a few particular traits that can help you identify a trustworthy partner.

Open and precise communication

This might sound like a cliché, but for some reason it's often not as obvious as it should be: **there's no operational agility without open communication**. When the need for change makes its first appearance over the horizon, it should be communicated clearly, precisely, and as soon as possible – in accordance with the procedure that both sides have agreed upon.



There's no room for any subtlety, guesswork, or attempts to sweep anything under the carpet, as these bad practices will only complicate the cooperation, undermine mutual trust, and even bring about failure. **An IT partner cannot be afraid of honest communication, especially in situations where mistakes have been made**, which cannot be avoided – they are always included in the price of success. What separates the winners from the losers is how they deal with these mistakes.

Of course, open communication must apply equally to both the IT partner and the business client, so whenever anything pops up that requires communication – it cannot be neglected, and the sooner it's made transparent the better. This is key to being able to react with flexibility and adaptability in any new situation. So, find out what to check for in the sphere of communication, just below.

IT company screening — the communication checklist

- Communication procedures/mechanisms in different cases
- List of people to communicate with and their availability
- Level of foreign language skills, with English as the most important one

Transparency

Transparency doesn't just refer to open communication, which we already mentioned above – it also refers to increased visibility into every single detail of collaboration. A partnership can only be efficient and productive if there's a good flow of information.

Transparency means that:

- no issues can be concealed or kept secret,
- there's always room for an honest discussion,
- business plans, goals and strategies are clear to both sides of the contract in order to better organise and prepare operationally for upcoming changes,
- the progress/status of the project and the team's performance is clearly visible at all times,
- potential risks and problems, if detected, are reported immediately,



- there's a shared understanding of the ongoing processes and the entire project itself,
- there's a high level of accountability between both partners.

Without transparency, it's impossible to make information-based decisions, which is what good decisions are based on. Otherwise, it's more like guesswork rather than a data-driven process. That's why the workflow needs to be fully visible and transparent.

IT company screening — the transparency checklist

- Description of the system for tracking progress
- Knowledge and information-sharing procedures
- Level of visibility into the processes for both the team and the client
- Established set of procedures in case of any red flags or problems
- Transparent governance model and a clear path of access to C-level executives

Quality-oriented cooperation

The outcome of the cooperation should always result in the most optimal solution possible. A quality-oriented approach means that every step is taken to create a product that will work the best for a client, according to their specific needs.

This, of course, requires that all team members have an explicit and shared understanding of what "quality" means. This refers to the designers, developers and managers – they should all move and act based on their shared understanding of this terminology.

Quality assurance is also an important factor to consider. An IT partner has to have certain mechanisms in place in order to ensure quality while developing the software, including tools, processes and documentation.



IT company screening — the quality checklist

- Description of mechanisms used to ensure a quality approach
- Description of the quality assurance methodology
- Experience in both test-driven development (TDD) and behaviour-driven development (BDD) approaches
- Description of infrastructure, utilities and experience in terms of performance and security testing

Reliable consulting and support

A client should feel like their partner is always by their side, and that they can turn to them no matter what. Honest consulting services, scientific data-driven opinions, and expert advice have to be part of the deal.

You may request a consultation at any stage of the cooperation – in order to discuss new opportunities, emerging risks, ongoing processes, and so on. You may require assistance that pertains to the business and/or technical aspects of the project, so **an IT partner should have specialists in different fields of expertise available and at your disposal**. **You should also expect that a partner will proactively provide you with interesting insights or promising ideas**.

Post-production support should also be considered. This is a vital part of any partnership and outsourcing agreement, since a client might come across some problems long after the product has been deployed. Very often, there's also an increased need for support right after the product is ready, as employees on the client side may, for example, need to be guided through the new software and receive training from the IT partner.

IT company screening — the support checklist

- Description of consultation services included in the price – in terms of business and technology
- Conditions of post-production support
- Conditions regarding the team members traveling and spending time on your site, if needed



Client-first approach

All of the above-mentioned features of a trustworthy cooperation should have one common denominator, which is a client-first approach. Even though the basic concept of a partnership generally presupposes equally beneficial results and the equal status of both partners, an **outsourced service provider must bear in mind that everything they do and the final product itself needs to primarily work for the client first.**

Having a client-first approach also means that **the partner has the capacity to challenge a client**, step out beyond the rigid framework, introduce new and innovative ideas, or even change the way they look at their project. All of these actions may be taken in order to provide the best possible solution.

A satisfied client should be perceived as an investment for the IT company – one that may pay dividends in the future in the form of valuable recommendations. Their attitude to software development and customer service, their set of methodologies and infrastructure are precious assets and a strong bargaining chip. That's why the **client-first approach is actually a mutual-success approach**, where the goal is the same (producing high quality working software) but the positive after-effects are different (like increased productivity and profits for the client, with a stronger reputation plus new clients for the IT firm).

But what should you check for, when you want to make sure your future partner has a client-first approach?

IT company screening — the approach to client checklist

- Previous clients and their testimonials
- Personal references, so you can ask about first-hand opinions and feelings
- Description of their model for engaging with clients
- Evidence of projects where the IT firm demonstrated 'innovation', created added-value and challenged the client in order to provide them with the best possible results
- BONUS: You may also visit a potential partner and check to see what kind of impression they make on you





5. Strong work ethic

While technical expertise, predictable delivery, operational agility and trustworthy partnerships are related mostly to the technical aspects of collaboration, a strong work ethic **is all about culture, values and atmosphere**. It's as important among colleagues on the development team, as it is between an outsourcing company and its clients.

So, we will acquaint you with the main concepts related to ethics, which subsequently speak to the traits that you should look for during the screening process.

Can-do attitude

A **can-do attitude is strongly correlated with the ability to achieve success**, and it's absolutely crucial to any business-like project. It entails two powerful features that are highly desired in the field of software development:

- **Solution-driven thinking**

This refers to remaining focused on discovering a solution to a problem rather than on the problem itself, coming up with workable ideas and suggestions, and putting them into practice. This way of thinking is concentrated on positive change and future success, which allows the team to move forward fast, effectively breaking barriers and overcoming hurdles.

- **Problem-solving approach**

This, in turn, refers to the way the partner addresses issues that may pop up suddenly, always finding a way out of a bad situation. Sometimes this involves jumping through hoops flawlessly and in a practiced manner; other times, it requires taking two steps back in order to make five steps forward, and eventually succeed.

A combination of these specific approaches creates a **can-do attitude** – one that influences other team members and **motivates individuals to achieve more, together**.

Honest feedback

It's no secret that constructive feedback – whether it's positive or negative – serves to help everyone do better, in terms of both hard and soft skills. **Honest feedback should be a vital part of every cooperation**, and not only during the process of software development. It prevents confusion and misunderstanding, builds confidence for a job well done, improves mutual collaboration and helps to perfect the product.



Your dream IT partner should have the skills necessary to:

- **Give honest feedback**

This means they should be able to evaluate your ideas and provide you with knowledge and data-based opinions and suggestions. Praise should be vocalised, as should be constructive criticism – in a respectful, open and fair manner.

- **Receive honest feedback**

The ability to receive and make use of honest feedback is equally, if not more, important. Team members should gracefully accept every compliment and criticism, be able to stand up for themselves when necessary, and admit that someone else is right, if that's the case.

Honest feedback should also flow in every direction:

- **Vertical feedback** – from the leader to each team member, and the other way around.
- **Horizontal feedback** – between every member of the team.

And this should all take place in a safe, supportive and encouraging atmosphere, which is a real challenge, since many times employees don't want to criticise their leaders in any way because they are afraid that they will be punished for their frankness. Often, giving feedback to a leader is also wrongly associated with weakening the leader's position, and that's absolutely not the case. It's rather a matter of trust and dependability, both of which need constant building, deepening and nurturing.

Of course, **maintaining the culture of open and honest feedback is something that should be adopted by both sides of the partnership**. This is the only way to keep the flow of information running flawlessly, so that both parties can take fully informed actions.

People-first culture

If you want to feel confident about your project, it's crucial for your IT partner to support the culture of putting people first. Their internal work ethic may favourably influence software development or just the opposite, resulting in negative consequences on the final product, it may adversely affect the entire partnership.





Having a people-first culture is key to keeping employees engaged and satisfied. This manifests itself in:

- **Ensuring team members that their voices are heard**

This is connected with the culture of honest feedback – which was mentioned above. This is about allowing employees to present their own ideas and suggestions, and always taking them into consideration.

- **Maintaining genuine relationships between employees and managers**

Team leaders should build positive relationships with team members by organising activities that promote team building, providing necessary support and showing respect, not only professionally, but also with regard to their private lives and leisure time.

- **Investing in the professional development of employees**

Training, schooling, conferences, access to professional literature – your IT partner should definitely be open to improving the qualifications of its staff and support them in their ongoing efforts to learn more and improve their professional skills.

- **Respecting diversity**

Everyone is unique and should be free to express themselves in their own way – this is something that must be respected, and that shouldn't affect the project, as long as all team members are working to achieve a clear and common goal.

Having a people-first culture is something that attracts top talent on the market, increases loyalty and performance among employees, and allows a business to stay competitive, which translates into higher quality services and better collaboration.

Working together for mutual success

It's already been mentioned a few times, but this feature deserves to have a separate paragraph due to its extreme importance.

The team members from your IT partner have to feel that they are working towards mutual (as well as personal) success. This approach serves to avoid situations where one side of the partnership, or any individual expert within the team, feels like the deal is not that beneficial for them and that a gross injustice has been done.

A 'your success is our success' attitude encourages everyone to work harder, put more effort into their tasks, and remain open-minded so that they can always find the most optimal solution. Plus, people enjoy being able to play a meaningful role in something important – being a part of the project that really makes a difference.



IT company screening — the work ethic checklist

- Description of the company values, mission and vision
- Internal publications regarding work ethic and atmosphere, for example, company culture books or blog posts
- Client testimonials (again, as they may be a source of very significant information in terms of a company's work ethic)
- Available interviews or statements

Benefits of choosing the right partner

Finding an IT partner that you can work with for many years is not a piece of cake. It's a long and tedious process that requires a thorough exploration of a diverse set of data – just to get a clear look at all the available options. However, it's definitely worth the effort, since **there are so many advantages to having a steady partner**. Plus, this is the type of long-term business investment that may – as time goes by – pay off in the form of a lucrative strategic alliance, where one IT partner is enough to take care of all your key technological systems and projects.

▪ Filling in the expertise gaps

Many companies have problems that are related to a lack of experts: those who are trained in established fields, but also experts in fields that have yet to be deemed important. An experienced IT partner should fill both of these gaps in expertise, as their role also involves keeping a close eye on developing trends, and learning and leveraging new skills before others do in order to achieve a competitive edge – both for themselves and for the client.

▪ Improved operational efficiency

An IT partner should have excellent knowledge and understanding of the domain, and be well-informed on the numerous processes and best practices that are optimised towards maximal operational efficiency. Naturally, this efficiency will improve the client's performance, as they can hand over complex and time-consuming projects to a skilled and seasoned partner. Over time, mutual levels of productivity may increase even more, as the cooperation matures and stabilises.



- **Reduced time-to-market**

The best players on the market, with their approach to management, are able to launch a new project in no more than just a couple of weeks. And within a relatively short amount of time, the client can have an MVP. Next, based on gained insights, more features are added in each of the successive iterations, with the product already in full use, or even actively being marketed, which can accelerate ROI.

- **Cost savings**

Finding a long-standing IT partner that can help you develop software solutions is like getting everything in one package: knowledge, skills, infrastructure and support – just to name a few main assets. A company doesn't have to deal with recruitment, onboard new employees, or pay for training costs, accidents or mistakes that are often related to lack of experience.

- **Comprehensive assistance**

With an IT partner, the client is never on their own. They will always have reliable experts close at hand, who can be of great help in any business or technical area regarding software development. And they're available throughout every stage of the cooperation, even after product deployment, as post-production support. Comprehensive assistance and consulting services like this allow the client to steer the project in the right direction.

- **Increased flexibility and scalability**

Having a trusted partner that you can work closely with on important projects is like having an additional department whose job it is to ensure a high level of flexibility and adaptability for the entire company – keeping everything in harmony with the increasing or declining needs of the project. A team should be able to scale up and down with flexibility, whenever it's necessary and at any moment. This keeps the project running smoothly without unnecessary distractions, which significantly reduces business risks and allows the company to seize any emerging opportunities.

- **Higher quality**

An IT partner that is able to stay by your side for years is likely one that pays close attention to detail and focuses on delivering high quality solutions, especially compared with a short-term vendor that is hired just for a short-term project. The better the developed software, the more fruits there are to reap for both sides of partnership.

- **Pleasant cooperation**

Finding a company that possesses all of the five qualities described in the previous parts of this document is also key to finding comfort, confidence, and peace of mind. It guarantees that the collaborative atmosphere will be highly professional, respectful and reliable, which always has a positive effect on the quality of work.





Wrap-up | Key takeaways

- The client's criteria for outsourcing are constantly changing and **cost-savings are no longer the main goal**. Streamlining processes, increasing efficiency and reducing time-to-market are much more significant, according to [research](#).
- Service reliability is crucial for clients who are in the process of choosing an IT supplier. And this process needs to be as selective as possible. Asking the right questions is key to making wise decisions, especially when a company is counting on a long-term partnership. [This detailed RFP template](#) should definitely help you gather all the necessary information required to [effectively evaluate](#) the companies on your shortlist.
- Thanks to **a properly-designed RFP, the fears associated with outsourcing may be effectively reduced even prior to cooperation**. Yet, there are still certain challenges that may emerge *during* the collaboration, so the partner has to have a certain set of traits in order to successfully overcome any difficulties.
- The ideal IT partner should possess **these five main qualities**: technical expertise, predictable delivery, operational agility, be trustworthy and have a strong work ethic:
 - Technical expertise translates into competitive advantage for your business.
 - Predictable delivery provides you with peace of mind and gives you credibility in front of your stakeholders – it also helps you make more accurate business decisions.
 - Operational agility means being able to respond to change and shifting requirements instead of simply following a plan.
 - A trustworthy partnership ensures that the final product you receive is the best one you could have.
 - A strong work ethic carries with it the culture of openness, and a friendly atmosphere of support and mutual respect.
- The benefits of selecting a long-standing technology partner that can **deliver true added value to any project** are invaluable, and it's equivalent to always being a few steps ahead of the competition.

More information

If you have found this guide useful, you may also want to know what steady collaboration with an IT partner can look like in later years, further down the line. More about a long-term outsourcing journey is presented in our whitepaper [IT outsourcing lifecycle](#). Click for more information and increase your knowledge, so you can get a clear view of the full picture.



Looking for software that will work for your business?
Let's start a new project together.

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