

The offshore vendor checklist: 28 questions to ask before you sign.

Use it with any offshore development partner, including us. For each question you will see what a good answer sounds like and which red flags to watch for.

Based on 30 years of delivering software for clients across regions. Score each answer as **good**, **unclear** or **red flag**. Two or more red flags in one section is a reason to pause, however attractive the price.

// part 1 of 6

Scope and contract

Most disputes start with a vague scope. Make the vendor write things down.

1 Will you give us a written scope, milestones and assumptions before work starts?

Good answer: Yes, as a document you can review, compare with other quotes and sign off.

Red flag: A single price on a call or a one-line email, with details "to be agreed later".

2 What is not included in the estimate?

Good answer: A clear list: third-party licences, hosting, app-store fees, post-launch support.

Red flag: No exclusions mentioned. Costs then appear as "change requests".

3 How are changes to scope handled and priced?

Good answer: A simple process: describe, estimate, approve, then build.

Red flag: Changes are accepted verbally and billed afterwards.

4 Which contract type fits this project: fixed scope, time and materials, or a pilot first?

Good answer: The vendor explains the trade-offs and suggests one for your situation, including a small pilot.

Red flag: Always the same model, whatever the project.

5 What happens if we want to stop part-way?

Good answer: Notice period and hand-over are stated up front, and you keep the work completed so far.

Red flag: Long lock-ins, or the code is released only after final payment.

// part 2 of 6

People and experience

You are buying the people who do the work, not the brochure.

6 Who exactly will work on our project, and what is their experience?

Good answer: Named people with relevant experience, and honesty about who is senior and who is junior.

Red flag: Only a company profile, or "our team of 200 engineers".

7

Who is our single point of accountability?

Good answer: One named person who answers for delivery and replies to you directly.

Red flag: You are passed between sales, account managers and developers.

8

Have you built something like this before in our domain?

Good answer: Specific, honest examples, even if they have to be described without client names.

Red flag: Vague claims, or case studies you cannot verify.

9

Can we speak to a past or current client?

Good answer: Yes, or a clear reason why not (NDA) plus alternatives such as public reviews.

Red flag: Refusal with no alternative.

10

What is the team turnover, and what happens if a key person leaves?

Good answer: A hand-over process and documentation habits that survive staff changes.

Red flag: "That never happens."

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Communication and time zones

A good vendor makes distance feel small. A weak one hides behind it.

11 Which hours overlap with our working day, and who is available then?

Good answer: Specific overlap hours and named people on call during them.

Red flag: Everyone is "flexible", without any commitment.

12 How will we see progress each week?

Good answer: A demo at the end of each sprint, a shared task board and written status updates.

Red flag: Status reports only on request, or progress shown as percentages.

13 Which tools do you use, and will you work in ours?

Good answer: Willing to work in your repository, ticketing and chat tools.

Red flag: Insists on its own closed tools that you cannot access.

14 How do you raise problems and delays?

Good answer: Early, in writing, with options. Bad news is expected and welcome.

Red flag: Problems come to light only at the deadline.

15 What is the language and communication level of the people we will deal with?

Good answer: You can judge it yourself on a call before signing.

Red flag: You only meet a fluent sales person.

Security and IP

Settle ownership and confidentiality before any code is written.

16 Will we own all the code and IP, and is that in writing?

Good answer: Yes. Assignment terms are signed before work starts.

Red flag: Ownership is vague, or the vendor keeps reusable components.

17 Will you sign our NDA before we share details?

Good answer: Yes, readily.

Red flag: Pushes back, or wants to use only its own template.

18 Where will our code and data be stored, and who can access them?

Good answer: Your repository and your cloud accounts, with named access and the ability to revoke it.

Red flag: Everything lives in the vendor's own repository and servers.

19 How do you protect our data when developing and testing?

Good answer: No production data in test environments, or anonymised data, with a stated policy.

Red flag: Real customer data copied onto developers' laptops.

Quality and AI-assisted code

Everyone now uses AI coding tools. The question is what happens to the output.

20 How is code reviewed before it is merged?

Good answer: A defined review step by a second person, plus automated tests and checks.

Red flag: "Our developers are very good."

21 What automated testing do you write?

Good answer: Tests for the important business logic, and a clear idea of what is not tested.

Red flag: Testing means "we click through it before release".

22 Do you use AI coding tools, and how is that output checked?

Good answer: Open about it, with the same review and testing as human-written code.

Red flag: Denies using AI, or says AI code needs no review.

23 How do you handle accessibility, performance and security checks?

Good answer: Part of the definition of done, not a separate paid extra.

Red flag: Treated as "phase 2".

24 Will you document the system so another team could take over?

Good answer: Yes. Hand-over documentation and a clean repository are part of the job.

Red flag: Documentation is optional or extra.

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Pricing and exit

The cheapest quote is rarely the cheapest project.

25 How was this estimate calculated, and what assumptions does it rely on?

Good answer: You can follow the logic, and the assumptions that would change the price are listed.

Red flag: A round number with no workings.

26 Are there any other costs we should plan for?

Good answer: Hosting, licences, store fees and support are explained honestly.

Red flag: Surprises appear after the contract is signed.

27 What support is there after launch, and what does it cost?

Good answer: A defined warranty or support window, with clear rates after that.

Red flag: Support is "available" but not described.

28

Can we take the project in-house or move to another vendor later?

Good answer: Yes. The code, documentation and knowledge transfer make that possible.

Red flag: The project depends on one vendor-only tool or person.