



THE EXECUTIVE'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING A **SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT PARTNER**

A hand holding a black pen, positioned over a vertical list of four square checkboxes. The second checkbox from the top is marked with a white checkmark. The background is a solid purple color with a faint image of a hand and pen. At the bottom, there are two overlapping semi-circular shapes in shades of purple and blue.

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

THE EXECUTIVE'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING A SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

FLEXIBILITY AND AN AGILE PROCESS THAT YOU CAN TRUST ARE KEYS

When you're planning a new software project to improve customer experience, support your company's digital transformation, or accelerate growth—or when you're ready to uplevel current software or apps—you need the right software development partner to bring your idea to life.

Choosing a custom software development company is always, at some level, a leap of faith. But that doesn't mean you have to do it blindly or without the flexibility you have in mind.

This guide sets out to explain all the key points you should consider when choosing a development firm to fit your needs. If you want to enhance your business possibilities and drive growth through custom apps and software, it's a must-read as you plan your project.



Setting the Stage

Have you've already decided that finding a good software development partner is like looking for the world's tiniest needle in its biggest haystack? Would you change your mindset if you were given the world's biggest magnet to do it with?

When you weigh the key considerations below during the selection process, you'll automatically and significantly increase your odds of finding the right partner:

- Business goals and objectives
- The problem being solved
- Key features
- Competitive differentiation
- Benefits to end-users
- Proof of concept
- Teams needed (developers, project managers, C-suite)
- Budget
- Timelines

AND, YES, YOU CAN FIND A SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT FIRM THAT SEES EYE TO EYE WITH YOU ON ALL THESE FACTORS AND MORE. HERE'S HOW.



HOW TO FIND YOUR PERFECT Software Development Partner

It's simple enough to get the ball rolling on your software development partner search. Google is a logical first step. Professional developer directories, social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn, and referrals from industry partners help narrow the field.

And then there's the Request for Proposal or RFP for software development. An RFP is a technical document you create before you approach a development partner. It contains critical details like specific requirements, expected delivery dates, and so on. Software development companies use RFPs not only to bid jobs but to also further discussions about project elements you might not have considered.

WRITTEN CORRECTLY, AN RFP HELPS YOU MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN A DEVELOPMENT PARTNER AND ENSURES YOUR PROJECT IS OFF TO A GOOD START. IT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- **Project planning**, where you identify things like scope, requirements, business strategy alignment, budget, timeline, and review processes.
- **Drafting the RFP** with sections including a statement of purpose, background information, project scope and schedule, contract terms and conditions, and proposal requirements.
- **Possible roadblocks** like inadequate infrastructure, staff shortages, and budget constraints.

DOES AN RFP UNEQUIVOCALLY GUARANTEE A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP AND PROJECT? WELL, YES AND NO.



Have you seen the movie Office Space? It offers a lot of insight into how software development once worked. Up until a few years, companies would typically hire software developers to ask customers what they want and then spend months writing up a requirements document explaining those desires. There are two big problems with this approach:

1. **It assumes customers know what they need.**
2. **It follows the waterfall approach to software development.**

The biggest disadvantage in using the waterfall method is that about 80% of the time it's used, it fails, with projects typically running about 45% over budget. Why does this happen? Because it follows a straight, pre-determined path that more times than not ends with a customer saying, "Wait a minute, that's not what I meant. I really needed fill-in-the-blank!"

An agile iterative approach, on the other hand, allows developers to continually measure how the software or app is used and refine it until it meets the client's vision. That's important because, in the software development world, it's nearly impossible to predict requirements months in advance. So much of what you think you need starting out can end up being wrong by the time you get feedback from actual users.

“ A practical agile approach is a simpler and more straightforward software development approach that gives you the flexibility to meet customer needs ”

A **practical agile approach** is a simpler and more straightforward software development approach that gives you the flexibility to meet customer needs while producing working software within a much shorter time frame than a traditional waterfall method. It minimizes waste of time and money by solving customer problems through early and continuous delivery, getting the software in front of end-users as early as possible for that all-important feedback. Using techniques like user stories and sprint planning meetings, a practical process prioritizes user needs and builds only on those that provide the highest business value.

It's understandably easy to put the focus on the excitement of launching a custom app. But keep in mind, while the ship's captain supplied the human factor, it was mostly engineering flaws that brought down the Titanic. Our point? Whether it's a luxury ocean liner or a custom software application, a proper design process can prevent most catastrophes.

HOW TO EVALUATE A Software Development Partner

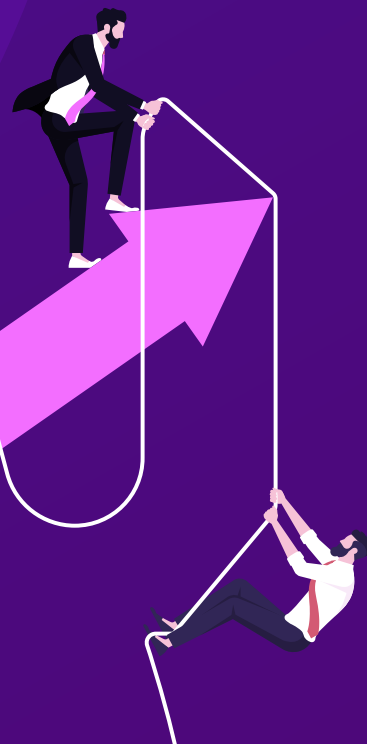
It's a scary world out there. From Nigerian princes to no-effort weight loss, the world is full of deception. Yet despite the universal existence of deceit, trust exists—and it's necessary to survive and thrive. Without it, we remain stuck.

Effective software development relationships are built on trust. But how much should you trust your team? And who should you give your trust to in the first place?

Here's the thing: trust is earned. Every business looking to find the “right” custom software development partner should expect to build trust with that partner using the same metrics they do for other relationships. Still, there are indications to look for that suggest a potential partner will be trustworthy.

- Have they been in business a while? Most untrustworthy developers don't survive long.
- Do they show genuine interest and enthusiasm in your project?
- Are they willing to admit what they don't know about your industry?

In custom software development, trust means being able to predict the behavior of another person or team of people. That trust can be built in many different ways, and they are culturally dependent.



Shared Values

THERE ARE TWO BASIC APPROACHES TO BUILDING TRUST, COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE.

1. Cognitive trust is brain-related and is just a fancy way of describing the confidence you feel from someone's accomplishments, skills, and reliability. You typically get this information from reading a company's case studies and success stories.
2. Affective trust is feelings-based and is built on personal relationships.

In any given situation, trust is about giving of yourself while taking risks. Many companies say they don't know who to trust with their technology, so this is a subject development firms need to take seriously. A client needs to know the partner they choose respects the substantial investment they're making. And that they understand if a project fails, it can result in loss of credibility with customers and investors. If you've encountered other companies that make promises they know they can't keep or that have given you what you want instead of what you need, it's understandable you might be concerned about a similar outcome with your new project.

SO, WHO CAN YOU TRUST WITH SUCH A SIGNIFICANT ENDEAVOR?

You can't go wrong if you partner with a development firm that's willing to put in the effort. Because time and again it's been proven what happens when you do: A powerful, lasting relationship is forged, with clients becoming the development company's advocates, colleagues, and friends.

Look for a company with a proven record of good work building solutions that works for each business's unique goals. If you want a partner who can reliably and consistently deliver on its promise every single time, you'll need to put in considerable time and effort seeking them out. But you'll be rewarded with an experience based on mutual trust, and you'll feel good about having put your faith in the right firm.



You May Not Like This, But ...

Sometimes, doing its best work means a development company must tell clients things they don't want to hear. That should be a given when being hired for technological and business expertise, but it isn't always the case. Clients may come in knowing what they want, but if the developers believe there's a better approach to achieving it, it's their professional duty to tell the client so. Each custom software job needs to be approached with an open mind and commitment to honesty and transparency throughout the process. That kind of communication might be challenging in the short term, but at the end of the day, it's nearly always better.

Managing Expectations

When you build a house, it's easy to see it growing from the ground up. With software development, you must trust it's all coming together. A good custom software development firm reassures its clients their project's framework is solid and the construction sound by letting them know what they can expect and when the job will be done.

They're also upfront about what can happen during the development process, acknowledging from the get-go that delays happen, problems arise, and revised requirements push the project in new directions. A practical approach to software development keeps problems, delays, and revisions to a minimum, but managing expectations in this way can make all the difference in a project's success.

Expecting the Unexpected

How a software development team responds when something goes off course can make or break your project. If your team is composed of flexible problem solvers, you can trust them to adapt and respond to challenges and issues quickly. They know how to avoid speculation, clarify issues, and save time at a much faster pace than less experienced teams do.

Understanding Your Business Challenges

The best custom software developers know there's much more to the job than writing code. You need—and deserve—a true business partner, which can make a big difference when you're developing your business technology roadmap. To understand the business problem you're trying to solve, a development teams needs to dive deep when exploring what challenges and opportunities you face and who your customers are.

Leadership Team Credentials and Experiences

While charisma goes a long way in influencing team motivation, a good team leader also has other valuable skills and attributes acquired through years of experience. Traits like curiosity and self-assurance combined with good time management skills go a long way in delivering the best possible outcome.

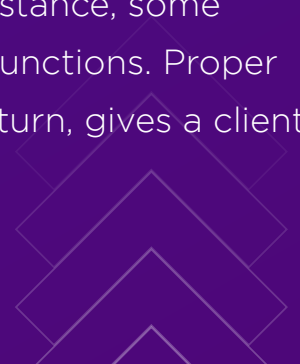
TO GUIDE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT LAUNCH, SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT TEAM LEADERS SHOULD AT A MINIMUM POSSESS THESE SEVEN ABILITIES.

Team building

A development team that works well and happily together is more efficient, as they bring out the best in each other. A good team leader has a keen understanding of what makes people tick and is skilled in identifying team members' particular strengths and weaknesses. They also know how to encourage consistent, proactive feedback to keep a project on track.

Task delegation

When a team leader has a good understanding of each team member, they're able to delegate tasks to the individuals best suited to the work. For instance, some engineers excel in front-end tasks, which others prefer back-end functions. Proper delegation increases team productivity and confidence, which, in turn, gives a client greater trust in the process.



Skilled at problem-solving

Team leaders are responsible for minimizing the number of problems that occur on a development project. That often means being able to recognize what might go wrong before it actually happens. But when that's not possible, a good leader knows how to guide their team through the problem-solving process to quickly achieve positive results.

Personal and professional integrity

Integrity is the concept of consistency of values, actions, expectations, methods, and outcomes. It's an essential attribute of great leaders, demonstrating their commitment to doing the right things for the right reasons, regardless of the circumstances. An integrity-driven leadership approach also inspires team members to follow and emulate their leader in these values and ethical practices.

Promotes autonomy

In a practical agile approach, leaders give their team members clear goals and then let them do what they do best. This trust in their ability to be self-directing keeps developers engaged and committed to performing to expectations.

Inspires motivation

New technologies, needed training, recognition, and opportunities to innovate are just a few of the ways leaders can maintain motivation in their teams.

Assures quality

The blame game is common in software development teams, but good leaders know how to avoid it. In an agile approach, employing what's called a "shift left" strategy can eliminate the finger-pointing that's so prevalent on many software development projects.



REPUTATION: TESTIMONIALS, AWARDS, AND REVIEWS

A good reputation indicates quality work and people, not to mention a certain level of software development expertise. The quickest way to evaluate a software development firm's reputation is to talk to two or more of their references. When discussing a reference's experience with the company, it's essential to not only cover the details of the work performed, but also the overall experience working with the firm.

Of course, a development company will guide you to references who were happy with their projects' outcomes, but there's a lot to be said for a firm that has the ability to produce happy clients! To further evaluate a company's reputation, you can also spend some time researching the firm online. To get a good sense of their standing in the software development world, look for clues like whether they:

- Speak, write, or teach in their areas of expertise. Most well-established companies have a reputation for promoting and sharing insights on their craft.
- Are listed on software development review sites like Clutch. If so, read through a number of reviews to see if there's a consistency in how clients rate them.
- Possess the skills necessary to handle a variety of software products. The company's case studies are an excellent way to determine if a software developer can handle your project.

Work Experience

Along with reviewing a development company's portfolio, look at all the services they provide. Do they offer niche-specific custom software solutions for a variety of industries? Are they skilled in both mobile development and web development?

Development Process

Maturity of process is a good indicator of experience and expertise, as well as talent level. Most firms are “agile” these days, so it’s necessary to dig a little deeper into how a development company handles your project.

“

A practical agile approach differs from other company’s agile processes because it emphasizes high-trust, self-organized teams who understand a client’s specific business needs.

”

A practical agile approach differs from other company’s agile processes because it emphasizes high-trust, self-organized teams who understand a client’s specific business needs. Scrum teams are skilled at dealing with the inevitable interruptions and disruptions that occur during sprints, meaning clients’ projects still meet critical deadlines and avoid the chaos that often accompanies projects that let every minor glitch stop the process in its tracks.

When choosing a software development partner, ask them about their process and where user experience and testing fit into it. Inquire about how often you’ll meet for project management purposes and what those meetings will include, and discuss how they calculate and display budget, actuals, and projections.

Development Approach

The development platform used to build your custom software determines how well your app performs. The software development company you choose to partner with should be skilled in working with numerous development software solutions such as Ruby on Rails, AngularJS, React, and more. They should be proficient in multiple template languages, including HTML, Java, C#, and Python.

You also want highly trained developers who have the skills, training, and flexibility needed to meet your project’s scope. Ask a development company if its teams undergo rigorous training to ensure they’re up to date with the latest trends and technologies. When they do, you stand a better chance of all your software development bases being covered.

Project Management

Open and consistent communication throughout your project's lifecycle ensures your needs are met. Your software development partner should use project management tools to share daily written status updates, provide access to shared files and documents, track individual engineer tasks, and report and resolve bugs. The ideal setup has every team member reporting daily on their activity and project managers keeping communication between technical and non-technical resources uninterrupted.

Testing and Quality Process

Quality assurance is such a critical part of the software development process that it should be evaluated on its own. Sadly, more than a few companies have seen their projects never reach launch day because of the severe lack of quality from their development partner.

In a practical agile approach, quality isn't only QA's job—it belongs to everyone. It includes test-driven, incremental development, continuous feedback, and automation of tedious tasks. Peer code review is used to improve quality and keep software bugs to a minimum. It also allows teams to better prioritize coding standards, facilitates knowledge sharing amongst developers, and significantly reduces review time.

Budget

Software development pricing is based on factors like the value being created, the level of uncertainty a firm is operating at, and the quality of the firm's process and talent. While it's perfectly normal for a development company to ask, "What's your budget?" it's only one part of the equation. For instance, they should also want to know how you define a successful outcome so they can better assess whether the value being created justifies the cost of custom software. An experienced development firm is in the best position to help you determine whether you should consider a more feasible alternative.

When it comes to pricing models, hourly rates are standard, but there are other pricing models you should be aware of. Time and material is a common approach and uses either hourly, weekly, or monthly rates, and advantages include cost transparency throughout the project's lifecycle. Fixed-price contracts can allow for better cost control and reward developers for efficiency, but they also often encourage low-quality work.

Identifying a company that meets all these criteria may seem like a tall order but finding a software development partner who's not only a good fit but an excellent one ensures your project goes well. You'll find it extremely beneficial if you find a company that offers a two-week onboarding process where both sides get to test each other out, as it's often the surest way to deliver universally better outcomes for everyone involved.

Summary

So, let's sum up what makes a development company the right choice for your next software project. You want to look for one that:

1. Shares your values and is an overall good fit with your culture.
2. Has an experienced team leader you can trust.
3. Has an excellent reputation.
4. Can help you manage expectations.
5. Provides you with Agile's inherent flexibility without losing sight of your project's requirements and specifications.
6. Understands your specific business challenges.
7. Employs a development process designed to meet critical deadlines without sacrificing quality.
8. Can meet your budget.

By relying on these criteria, you not only avoid low-quality firms, but you also discover which good ones simply aren't the right fit for your project and company.



About Zibtek



Is it time to expand your business possibilities? **Zibtek** can help you design and build custom software solutions that provide value and stand the test of time.

This eBook contains information we've gathered in our years of experience delivering custom software, and we hope it provides you with the insights you need in your search for the right custom software development partner.

We know you have thousands of software development companies to choose from. We welcome the opportunity to show and tell you how our services deliver results many other companies are not equipped to handle. If you have a custom software or application project you're preparing to invest in, **we'd love to discuss it with you.**



+1 (801) 895 2894



hello@zibtek.com



1111 Draper Pkwy #206,
Draper, UT 84020, USA

