

25 Questions to Ask Your Next *Software Developer*

Software development is not one-size-fits-all, much like most of the world these days. So when you are planning out a software project that you will need to outsource, you do not want to sign a contract with just any ol' company.

Software development is not one-size-fits-all, much like most of the world these days. So when you are planning out a software project that you will need to outsource, you do not want to sign a contract with just any ol' company.

What is custom software development?

The short answer is a technical solution that is developed to fit the unique needs of a particular organization, company, or department there within. This web-based application, mobile application, or internal desktop tool would not be found on the mass market and no other company would have anything like it. Typically, a custom software solution is built to address a specific inefficiency or problem.

What should you expect from a software development company?

Understanding. Communication. Commitment. Experience. It may sound simple, but we know not every software development company can offer these four things. You need to choose a firm that takes the time to understand your problem, communicates the solution, commits to building the solution that's right for you - not them, and brings the experience necessary to guide you through the project.

Shop around.

We hope you find all that you are looking for during the first meeting, but the honest truth is - that is rare and probably won't happen. (Unless you talk to us first). You will want to talk to several firms and start narrowing them down during the conversations. We've put together a comprehensive list of questions you'll want to ask the software development firms on your shortlist.

20 questions you should get answered before committing

EXPERIENCE

1 Have you worked with other companies in this industry?

While some software development firms don't take a specialty, most gravitate to a small selection of industries and possibly even specialize in just one. If they have worked on successful projects in your industry, you could have more confidence they will understand your pain points during the project.

2 Have you done similar projects in the past?

An industry is a big indicator, but so is the project type. If you want a mobile app, don't choose a company that primarily delivers top-rated web-based applications. For instance, if you are looking to build a connected marketplace, ask about what apps the firm has built with that model. Review their work that is similar to your project before choosing a firm.

3 What technologies do you use?

The answer to this question will mean more to you if you intend for the application to be maintained by an internal team. If you don't have an internal development team, the programming language may be less important to you.

4 Have you worked with clients from this location?

Remote work is becoming the norm and it's definitely more understanding now than ever before. However, time zones should still be a consideration. This doesn't have to limit your options but should be a factor in understanding schedule constraints and other challenges.

5 Can you provide good references from previous clients?

Every firm you work with should be open to giving your references, ideally in your industry. If not - that's a serious red flag.

COST

6 What is the upfront cost?

Understanding how a company will be billing you for the project will help you budget and communicate to your stakeholders. At Entrision we estimate the total cost of the project, then ask for 10% of that estimation upfront. This is a reasonable start-up cost, while still allowing for tons of wiggle room on the project expectations.

7 What is included in the price?

From staffing to meetings to deliverables, it's our belief that any software development firm should outline exactly what the client is paying for. We often go above and beyond the documented list, but no firm should skip over the things they have promised a client. If scope changes the expectations, it should be documented for all parties to understand and confirm.

8 Do you bill hourly or by a project?

Several firms that work on the same project over and over may have a solid understanding of the project effort, thus charging a project fee. At Entrision, our projects are custom, which means we can only estimate costs based on project planning. We bill hourly after the upfront cost.

9 Do I pay more if you go over the timeline?

If you are working with a company that is excellent at communication - like us, you should know if the project will be more than you budgeted as soon as a delay occurs. We communicate the progress of the project and the budget as we go, this way there is no confusion with our clients and concerns can be raised early on. If clients have tight budgets, we often discuss scope changes to keep time and money actuals tight to the estimations.

10 How are intellectual rights handled?

Who owns the project and all of the components? It should be you. If it's your idea and your brand, there is no need for a development company to own the final product or underlying code. At Entrision, we safeguard our client's intellectual property by telling you upfront - you own everything, we just build it.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT + TIMELINES

11 How much time do you need to scale up the team and capacity?

Sometimes a software development firm will already be working at full capacity, but looking for the next project. We get that - we do it too. Part of your questioning should include when the firm has time to focus on you! Most teams will have a system of scaling down from one project and scaling up on the other. Typically, this can take 2-4 weeks if the team can roll off of one and onto the next. But it could be longer or shorter depending on their current workload.

12 How do you ensure that clients receive the desired outcome?

If the company you're vetting doesn't have a clear answer to this, run, don't walk, run away as fast as you can. You want to find a company that is committed to completing the project that satisfies your goals the first time - or at least clearly communicates what it will take to get there. Sometimes we have clients who are very aspirational and we communicate a versioning release plan that incrementally gets them to their goals. The key

is we meet with the client to understand these goals, lay out our perceptions and get clear sign off before we start development work. Then we have regular check-ins with the stakeholders to ensure we are still on track and nothing has changed on their end. Communication is key.

13 How will my project be managed? (process/reporting)

You will want to find a software development firm that speaks your language. Are you a company that wants a lot of input and communication with the development team? Do you want to hand off the project and expect a project delivered on time and budget without any involvement from you? Understanding how you want to engage with your firm will determine you want this answered - but don't forget to ask.

14 How do you estimate project timelines?

In order to estimate a timeline, the development team needs to understand the product vision and goals. If you haven't communicated that to the team, be skeptical of their timeline. At Entrision, we spend a good amount of time talking to the potential client about the product because this can highlight key features and systems that will impact the scope. The more experience the software development company has, the easier it will be able to estimate a timeline - even for extremely custom projects.

15 Are contractors used for any of the work?

Some software development firms will outsource work to meet deadlines or assist with expertise. Often, the outsourced work will be with a company overseas to save money for the firm. You should specifically ask if this is the firm's practice. Entrision doesn't use anyone outside of our US-based team to complete client work. Whether you are ok with that is entirely up to you and your company, but it's important to know if the firm you work with will intend to do this. You'll want to be clear in your contract about these terms and any non-disclosure agreements you need.

COMMUNICATION

16 Will I get to speak directly with the developers on the project?

While many firms, including Entrision, have project managers to oversee the communication with clients and coordinate with developers, not all will allow developers to communicate directly with the stakeholders. We do. We find that the most efficient and productive collaboration happens through direct communication.

17 How will you ensure that you understand my project's requirements?

At the start of every project, the development team meets with the client's stakeholders to dig deep into the goals and insights around the project. But these conversations don't just happen at the start of the project - they happen during every meeting, every email, and every presentation. If it's not a constant discussion, it's not an agile project.

18 What involvement will be expected from me throughout the project?

In order to estimate a timeline, the development team needs to understand the product vision and goals. If you haven't communicated that to the team, be skeptical of their timeline. At Entrision, we spend a good amount of time talking to the potential client about the product because this can highlight key features and systems that will impact the scope. The more experience the software development company has, the easier it will be able to estimate a timeline - even for extremely custom projects.

19 Do you understand my business model, target, audience, and goals?

Some software development firms will outsource work to meet deadlines or assist with expertise. Often, the outsourced work will be with a company overseas to save money for the firm. You should specifically ask if this is the firm's practice. Entrision doesn't use anyone outside of our US-based team to complete client work. Whether you are ok with that is entirely up to you and your company, but it's important to know if the firm you work with will intend to do this. You'll want to be clear in your contract about these terms and any non-disclosure agreements you need.

20 How often will we communicate?

At Entrision, we try to avoid project delays whenever possible. This means constant communication - even if it's in between scheduled meetings. We urge you to only consider firms that are clear on their communication plan, and also are willing to reach out when such need arises. Why wait 7 days to answer a 30-second question just because there is a scheduled call on the calendar?

LAUNCH + BEYOND

21 Will we own the source code?

After the project is complete, who has ownership of the code should be a major factor in considering a new firm for your software development. Our recommendation: Don't let the firm own the code. It's your baby, your brainchild, the developers are the builders. If they own the code they could potentially pack it up and sell it to one of your competitors.

22 How will my application be tested?

This one is so important to the strength and UX of your new application, no matter the platform. You want to know that the firm has a strong test plan. Each firm will have a way of testing that is right for them; you'll

want to understand why and how they have chosen these methods. For instance, we rely on a mix between automated testing as well as user testing to find the snags in the code and the user experience.

23 How are bugs/issues tracked and fixed?

You don't want a development company that leaves you high and dry. If you have a development team in-house that will be taking on the maintenance of the project, you need a system for them to be able to monitor the bugs. If you are keeping the development firm on retainer for maintenance, they should have a bug tracking system in place and a clearly communicated plan to fix any that may arise. Don't believe any firm that tells you they are "so good, we don't need to monitor bugs."

24 What is the potential for updates after launch?

Depending on whether your company has an internal development team that can maintain the application, you may be interested in not only development but maintenance and updates, especially if you are creating a mobile application. You should map this out with the software firm you choose prior to signing a contract.

25 What will happen to the application after launch?

This is entirely up to you and your company's resources. Where will the software be hosted? How will it be updated? How is data tracked and the application improved? These are important questions to get mapped out prior to signing anything or embarking on a project.

Entrision builds custom mobile and web applications for growing brands with unique needs. They partner with small, medium, and large businesses that need to streamline a process, whether for their employees or their customers.

For more information, visit [entrision.com/work](https://www.entrision.com/work)