

11 questions to ask before partnering with a tech vendor

Documentation and knowledge transfer

Q1

How do you document architectural decisions?

- "We document as we go" or "In the code comments"
- + Maintains an Architecture Decision Record (ADR) explaining why choices were made, not just what was built

Q2

What's included in your handoff package?

- "Code + basic README"
- + Architecture documentation, API documentation, deployment runbooks, test coverage reports, known technical debt log

Q3

Who on your team will be available for questions after handoff?

- "We'll answer emails when we can"
- + Specific person designated for 30–60 days post-handoff with defined response time

Code quality and maintainability

Q4

What's your approach to technical debt?

- "We ship fast, optimization comes later"
- + Tracks tech debt in backlog, includes remediation time in estimates, documents trade-offs made under time pressure

VENDOR EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Q5

How do you ensure code is maintainable by other teams?

- Vague answers like "We follow best practices"
- + Uses linting, enforces code review, writes tests with >70% coverage, uses standard patterns for the stack

Q6

What testing do you include in the base scope?

- "Manual testing" or "That's extra"
- + Unit tests for business logic, integration tests for critical paths, CI/CD pipeline setup

Architecture and long-term thinking

Q7

How do you make architectural decisions for projects you won't maintain?

- "We build what's in the spec"
- + Asks about 2-3 year roadmap, discusses scalability trade-offs, flags decisions that might limit future features

Q8

What happens if we need changes 6 months after handoff?

- "We'd need discovery time to re-familiarize"
- + Provides transition plan, offers maintenance retainer, or commits to knowledge retention practices

Q9

How do you handle integrations and third-party dependencies?

- "We use whatever works fastest"
- + Documents all dependencies, explains upgrade paths, avoids deprecated packages, considers long-term support

Communication and accountability

Q10

When things go wrong after launch, how do you handle it?

- "Our contract ends at delivery"
- +** Offers warranty period (30–90 days), distinguishes bugs from new features, provides fix timeline

Q11

Can you provide references from clients who took over the project after you?

- "Our clients usually stay with us" (deflects) or no references
- +** Provides 2–3 references who can speak to handoff quality

Looking for an accountable tech partner that carries your software from first requirements to long-term maintenance?

Let's discuss how we can work together.

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