

BLUELINE Thought Leadership Paper

Topic: Choosing a Security Consultant

F.O.C.U.S Tips on selecting the right Security Consultant

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Everyday, organizations of all sizes are impacted by a number of undesirable events -- storms, workplace violence, tradecraft theft, computer crimes, and loss of intellectual property to name a few. The possible impacts of these undesirable events can be equally diverse. Watching the news on any given day quickly reminds us of what is at stake, which, in the worst case scenario, can mean the loss of life.

If you are a company owner, a leader in an educational institution, a general counsel of a property management company, or hold some other position responsible for minimizing risk in your organization, every time you hear about an act of violence, the natural questions you or someone in your organization may be asking are, "What are we doing to make sure this does not occur?" or "Are we prepared to handle this kind of incident?" For the proactive, the answer means seeking outside help - that of a Security Consultant.

There are a wide variety of security consultants - ranging from large corporate types to solo practitioners. It's a vast field and those who are tasked with obtaining the right Security Consultant should especially be cautioned if the only thought is "how much is this going to cost" question.

When asked what is the best advice I would give to someone hiring a security consultant, my answer lies in the acronym, **F.O.C.U.S!**

F = FIT - Is the consultant a good fit for you and your organization? This question, without a doubt, is more important than price. Do they understand? Can they relate? How are they going to FIT working with your staff? One of the best compliments I received in my consulting career was from the senior leadership at a private college looking for a security consultant. After our tour of the campus, I looked at the Director of Security, General Counsel, and the Business Manager and said, "If I understand everyone here, you want security without seeing security, unless the Director determines he needs to deploy certain elements to successfully stop the possible threat. In summary, you want options." Within three minutes of leaving the meeting I received a call from the General Counsel telling me I was hired because I "got them." I was a good fit for them - pricing was an afterthought.

O = Options – Another priority to consider are the options the security consultant is willing to provide. Are they willing to work within a budget? Are they willing to provide multiple options for leadership to consider? Or, is it their way or the highway? Options are critical not only in the proposal phase but also in the recommendation phase. When the consultant is done, you are left with what? Hopefully, a few options.

C = Credibility – You are inviting a consulting team or individual to come into your organization and learn about what you do, how you do it, and then provide you with security recommendations. Credibility and trustworthiness are critical. You owe it to your organization to check out the credibility of the consultant’s “certifications” and determine if the consultant adds value to your security project.

U = Understanding value – The ideal security consultant will bring a level of value to your project. Often, large consulting companies will bring in the “A” team during the proposal and presentation phase, but once the award is granted, you never see them again. It is important to ask who will be on the team and how they will contribute to the project. I heard of an organization that wanted to use a solo security consultant because he understood the company’s needs but hired another consulting company instead because it was a “not-for-profit” group. How someone files his taxes at the end of the year will not add any value to your project. In fact an ASIS study in 2014 shows “not-for-profits” generally charge 15% more in fees.

S = Sales or Service – True security consultants are not focused on sales; rather they look at the sales process as part of the service they will be providing. This is important because after major newsworthy incidents, some technology providers will hit the marketing trail and offer security consulting for “free.” Beware of FREE! You get what you pay for, and you will pay, if not up front, then on the back end when the company recommends new technology which it just happens to be selling.

If you find yourself in need of a security consultant, **F.O.C.U.S** and you will find a valuable asset that will serve you and your organization as a trusted advisor - one that you will reach out to to brainstorm on your next security project.