FREE CHECKLIST · FOR BUSINESS OWNERS HIRING AN APP TEAM

7 questions to ask before you hire an app developer

Three quotes for the same app can sound equally friendly and confident on the call. These seven questions show how each team actually works, with what a good answer sounds like and the red flag to listen for.

SOUNDS CONFIDENT ≠ IS SPECIFIC ✓

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The one rule: don't judge the answers by how confident they sound. Judge them by how specific they are. A good team answers with steps, names and dates. A risky team answers with reassurance. Print page 2, ask every agency the same seven questions, and tick what you actually heard.

The one-page hiring checklist

Ask each question on the call. Tick only what you heard, not what you were promised.

1 What happens in the first two weeks? — DISCOVERY

- [ ] They interview you **and your users** before building
- [ ] They map the screens and write down **what's in version one, and what isn't**
- [ ] You get an **updated estimate** after discovery (a short, paid phase is fine)
- [ ] **Red flag: "We'll start coding on Monday."**

2 Fixed price or hourly, and what happens when I change my mind? — CHANGES

- [ ] They explain **both** fixed price and time & materials, and when each fits
- [ ] A change process: you ask → they estimate cost and timeline → **you approve in writing** → then they build
- [ ] **Red flag: "Fixed price, everything included, no surprises."**

3 Who owns the code and the accounts? — OWNERSHIP

- [ ] The contract **assigns the code to you in writing** (have your lawyer read that clause)
- [ ] Code repo, domain, app store, hosting, database and payment accounts are **in your company's name**
- [ ] **Red flag: "We'll host it for you on our account, it's easier."**

4 How will we both know a feature is done? — DONE

- [ ] **Acceptance criteria** agreed up front, in plain English, for each feature
- [ ] Shown working in a **test environment**, and **you sign it off** before they move on
- [ ] Someone **reviews AI-written code** (using AI is normal; nobody checking it is not)
- [ ] **Red flag: "We'll test everything before we hand it over."**

5 Who exactly will work on my project? — THE TEAM

- [ ] **Names and roles:** project manager, lead developer, tester
- [ ] Their working hours overlap with yours by _____ hours a day
- [ ] You can **call a past client** about a project like yours
- [ ] **Red flag: "Our team of fifty developers."**

6 How will I see progress? — PROGRESS

- [ ] A **demo of working software every 1–2 weeks** that you can click through yourself
- [ ] Access to the **task board**: in progress, done and blocked
- [ ] **Red flag: "We'll send you a weekly update."**

7 What happens after launch? — AFTER LAUNCH

- [ ] A **warranty period** where bugs are fixed at no extra cost: _____
- [ ] Then a support plan, **or a handover** with documentation any team can pick up
- [ ] **Red flag: "Once it's live, we're done," or nothing in the contract at all.**

QUESTIONS 1–2

The first two weeks. Changes.

These two questions tell you more than any portfolio: how the team turns your idea into a plan, and what happens when the plan changes. It will change.

1 What happens in the first two weeks?

ASK IT EXACTLY LIKE THIS

“What happens in the first two weeks?”

RED FLAG

“We'll start coding on Monday.” It sounds fast. It means they're about to build from your one-page brief and fill every gap with a guess. You find out which guesses were wrong months later, when changing them is expensive.

GOOD ANSWER

“First we run discovery. We interview you and your users, map the screens, and write down what's in version one and what isn't. Then we give you an updated estimate.”

Paying for discovery is fine. It's usually a short, paid phase, and it's the cheapest place in the whole project to change your mind.

2 Fixed price or hourly, and what happens when I change my mind?

You will change your mind. Everyone does, once they see the app working. So the real question isn't the pricing model. It's what happens to a change.

ASK

“Fixed price or hourly? And when I ask for a change halfway through, what exactly happens?”

RED FLAG

“Fixed price, everything included, no surprises.” If the scope is fuzzy, a fixed price has buffer baked in, or it turns into an argument about what was “in scope” every time you ask for something.

GOOD ANSWER

They explain both. **Fixed price** works when the scope is clear and small. **Time and materials** (paying for the hours actually worked) works when you expect to learn as you go.

- [ ] Either way, they describe a **change process**: you ask → they estimate the impact on cost and timeline → **you approve it in writing** → only then does anyone build it.

QUESTIONS 3–4

Who owns it. What “done” means.

The question most people never ask, and the one that hurts most later. Then the definition that decides whether “done” means anything at all.

3 Who owns the code and the accounts?

In the US, when an outside developer writes code for you, they generally own the copyright, even though you paid for it, unless the contract assigns it to you in writing.

ASK

“Who owns the code? And whose name is on the domain, the app store accounts, the hosting, the database and the payment account?”

RED FLAG

“We'll host it for you on our account, it's easier.” Easier for them. If you ever part ways, your app is sitting in someone else's account.

GOOD ANSWER

“You own everything. The code lives in your GitHub, the servers in your cloud account, and the app store listings are under your company. We just get access.”

- [ ] Code repository: in your name
- [ ] Domain: in your name
- [ ] App store accounts: in your name
- [ ] Hosting / cloud account: in your name
- [ ] Database: in your name
- [ ] Payment account: in your name

Not legal advice. Have your own lawyer read the ownership (IP assignment) clause before you sign.

4 How will we both know a feature is done?

ASK

“How will we both know a feature is done?” and “Do you use AI tools to write code, and who reviews what they write?”

RED FLAG

“We'll test everything before we hand it over.” Test it against what? “Done” often means “it worked once, on the developer's laptop.”

GOOD ANSWER

“For each feature we agree on acceptance criteria up front. We show it working in a test environment, and you sign it off before we move on.”

Acceptance criteria are plain-English checks, like: two customers can't book the same slot. Using AI to write code is normal now. Nobody checking it is the red flag.

QUESTIONS 5–7

Who's on it. Progress. After launch.

The person on the sales call is rarely the person writing your code, a status report is not working software, and launch isn't the finish line.

5 Who exactly will work on my project?

RED FLAG

"Our team of fifty developers." Fifty developers don't build your app. Three or four people do, and you haven't met them.

GOOD ANSWER

Names and roles. Who is your project manager? Who is the lead developer? Who tests? How many hours a day do they overlap with yours? Can you talk to a past client on a call?

6 How will I see progress?

RED FLAG

"We'll send you a weekly update." Then week after week of "85% done". You can't click a percentage.

GOOD ANSWER

"Every one or two weeks we demo working software in a test environment you can click through yourself. You get access to the task board, so you see what's in progress and what's blocked."

If you can't see it working, it isn't progress.

7 What happens after launch?

Launch is the day real users start finding what testing missed.

RED FLAG

"Once it's live, we're done." Or nothing in the contract about it at all.

GOOD ANSWER

"There's a warranty period, usually a few weeks to a few months, where we fix bugs at no extra cost. After that, we offer a support plan, or we hand everything over with documentation so any team can take it on."

- [ ] Warranty length in the contract: _____
- [ ] Handover pack: docs, access, how to deploy

That last part matters. A team that's happy to make itself replaceable is usually a team worth keeping.

SCORECARD

Compare the agencies side by side

You don't need a perfect answer to all seven. You're listening for the pattern. Specific answers, with steps and names, mean the team has done this before. Vague answers mean you'll be the one finding out how it works, with your budget.

QUESTION	AGENCY A	AGENCY B	AGENCY C
Agency name	_____	_____	_____
Their quote	$_____	$_____	$_____
1 · The first two weeks	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
2 · When I change my mind	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
3 · Who owns the code and accounts	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
4 · What "done" means	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
5 · Who's on my project	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
6 · How I'll see progress	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
7 · After launch	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague	☐ Specific ☐ Vague
Specific answers (out of 7)	____ / 7	____ / 7	____ / 7

Go back to the quotes. The cheapest one isn't always the risky one, and the expensive one isn't always safe. The answers to these seven questions will tell you more than the price ever will.

QUOTES IN HAND? GET A SECOND OPINION

I've spent years in senior project management on the agency side, shipping software for US clients. Book a free session: bring the quotes, and we'll go through them together and tell you plainly what's missing.

calendar.app.google/Yy6SMMumbrQHDviP6

Book a free session →