

Vendor Research

Step 1 Connect to their network

Send a LinkedIn connection request to your business contact

You can do this before you agree to do business, because they will most likely accept – they are trying to win your business.

This will get you connected to everyone in their network, which is likely all of their coworkers – so you will be able to search for them and view their profiles.

Step 2 Search for the company, and look at the employees.

Once you are connected to someone in the company step1, browse through their employees.

Look at their backgrounds, and here are some things to consider:

- Where did they work previously?
- Where did they go to school?
- How long have they been employed at the current company?
- Look for past employees, do they seem to have high turnover? Where did employees go after working there?
- What is their personal website? If they are designer, look at their portfolio, are you impressed?
- Do you share other connections? Are they the type of people you would do business with?
- Are they on social media sites like Twitter or Quora? What are they sharing? Is it smart and/or relevant?

Step 3 Identify common themes

- Where are they located?
- Were people impressive overall? What is the portion of those that weren't?
- Where did people come from (education, background, etc.)?
- How many employees were listed in the company and showed up in results?

Step 4 Additional people research

- If you have the developers full names search for them on github
- Search for people on Google, or twitter if you didn't have their profiles – what can you find? Do they seem like smart intelligent people you would like working on your projects?

Step 5 Additional company research

- When have they been mentioned in the press recently?
- Where are they based? Are all of their staff local or remote?
- What does their about page say? Who are their other customers?
- What open jobs do they have listed?
- Are they active on social media? What kind of content are they tweeting? What are people tweeting about them?
- Search for their company profile on Elance and Odesk and get a feel for if they do any outsourcing and if so what are the types of projects that they are listing? (Ideally you aren't seeing much – since you would prefer they weren't outsourcing your work)

Step 6 Check references

Any vendor you work with should provide references – reach out to each person and setup a time to talk. Here are some good questions to ask:

- Describe the project you worked on together – what was the nature of the work and the duration of the project.
- What did you like best about working with the vendor? What made you select them in the first place?
- What were the technologies/software you used on the projects? How was it chosen?
- Are you in-house processes defined well? How did the vendor work within them? How flexible was the vendor with regard to process or changes?
- Did they communicate status and risks in a timely manner?
- Were there any hiccups on the project or things to be aware of or manage closely?
- Who were the individuals that worked on your projects? Are there any you wouldn't choose to work with in the future?
- How did you do the handoff of the project? What worked well and what didn't? Was there a need for any updates or bug fixes after the fact? If so, how did it go?
- Did the vendor go above and beyond in any way? Were there any other unforeseen benefits in working with them?
- Were there any hidden or surprise costs either before or after the project? Did the project come in within the proposed budget? If not, why?
- What are the vendor's biggest strengths and weaknesses?
- Would use you them again for a future project? Would you pay a premium to work with them? Why or why not?