

TEN QUESTIONS TO
ASK A PROSPECTIVE
**USABILITY
RESEARCH
PARTNER**



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TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE USABILITY RESEARCH PARTNER



WE SPOKE TO OUR CLIENTS TO LEARN WHAT DRIVES THEIR PARTNER SELECTION PROCESS.

What builds trust? How do they know this partner will be an innovator and not an order taker? What is the general make up of a successful relationship? They revealed the top ten questions your usability research partner must be able to answer before you sign on the dotted line.

1 Does this company clearly understand your customers or target audience?

Every industry has specific regulations, guidelines, and unwritten rules. It's critical that your usability research partner has awareness around those issues in order to skillfully manage a project within those boundaries. Usability best practices that are custom to you and specific to your industry should be top-of-mind throughout study design and execution.

2 Do they have industry experience?

Sometimes it just makes sense to hire someone who has experience in your industry so that you don't need to educate them on the nuances associated with your product. Industry experience can save a lot of time during the onboarding process. A firm that intuitively understands your business can help you get to the core issues faster.

Taken a step farther, partners who pay attention to an entire industry from an unbiased third-party vantage point can quickly identify the most direct opportunities

for improvement. Whether they are writing industry reports, or working with several different key players, a partner with this kind of experience can offer you a wide angle view of the competitive landscape.

Occasionally, it's critical to avoid partners who work with your direct competitors. The inadvertent risk of sharing your findings or innovative ideas could be problematic. It's in your best interest to check references and discuss historical evidence about the partner's integrity in keeping data secure and confidential. An NDA is standard industry protocol.

3 Does this prospective partner have experience beyond your industry?

If you're looking to leapfrog your competitors, be viewed as an innovator, or mirror an experience that users are delighted by, you need a research team that can apply trends that appear outside of your core industry. An eye on what satisfies people, and the creativity to apply features and capabilities in unconventional ways, can result in some big wins for your development efforts.

4 Do they welcome your ideas and communicate progress clearly?

Ideally, project management is part of the scope of work. It's important to have someone on the ground to ensure quality control, risk mitigation, and ensure that everything stays on track and wraps up nicely. A partner who offers project management oversight understands your need to stay informed and updated.

5 Do they evaluate your needs and deliver customized solutions or do they just talk about “off the shelf” approaches?

It's common practice for a partner to offer pre-packaged programs and push your project through a “one-size-fits-all” process. The ideal partner will break that mold. The quintessential usability partner will take the time to listen, understand your needs, and design user research to answer your critical business questions. They have experience in a variety of methodologies and aren't afraid to mix it up to meet your demands.

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6 Do they identify what comes next?

A company with a solid track record of delivering diverse, actionable solutions, not just the test findings, naturally delivers the most ROI. If you ensure that the partner you choose is able to indicate “What?,” “So What?,” and “Now What?” you'll leave the project feeling satisfied with the prioritized list of next steps in hand.

7 Is this partner able to help you at any stage of your product development cycle?

More often than not, a single engagement leads to an increased awareness for UX within an organization. Direct user feedback is a critical component of a successful launch. It can bring a lot of value to the product development process. Ideally, a usability partner can both coach you on proper UX strategy and how to integrate user testing into your product development schedule, as well as execute the usability test plans. Can this usability partner do more than execute? The best usability partner can manage anything from a single study, to lean iterative sprints. They can strategize, recruit, field, analyze, and guide.

8 Does this partner have global reach? Do you need global reach?

It takes experience to run a smooth global research study. Cultural and logistical elements must be considered with care to avoid mishaps. A company with this type of experience, or access to a global network of partners, can keep projects operating smoothly, on time, and on budget.

9 Do the Mission and Vision align with your work style or company culture?

This is one of the most important aspects of choosing a good partner. All things being equal, if your partner doesn't share the same work style or core values, you could be headed for trouble. Is your company committed to speed above all else? Are you looking for a usability partner that places a high value on quality at the expense of speed? You may find yourself managing your partner instead of working together towards a common research goal.

10 Does this company have well-known clients, third-party awards or certifications?

Does this company work with recognizable brand names? Do they have experience working with companies who are similar in size to your organization? Do they have some Fortune 500's on the list? Successful client relationships say a lot about a partner. Be sure to take a peek at who else trusts this partner so that you can, too. Established usability firms work hard to get brand recognition for their research work. If they've listed awards, then a third-party organization has investigated their work with enough rigor to recognize them as an industry leader. They may have even been selected to present at a conference or CEO roundtable.

Taking the time to answer these questions is the first step to properly evaluate and choose a usability partner you can trust with your research needs. On the next page, you'll find a helpful worksheet to use when comparing one firm to another.

We hope that you find Key Lime Interactive a stellar contender in all of these core evaluation areas. Not looking for a usability partner at this time? That's ok. Feel free to reach out with questions, challenges and general good news. We love to talk shop with like-minded professionals.



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The table below is designed to help you execute a quick and easy side-by-side comparison of each usability partner under consideration. It's encouraged to use this table at very early evaluation stages to determine which prospects are best equipped to receive your RFP. It's critical to align with your partner on many of the criteria before you consider more objective elements like price and pace.

Rate each criteria from 1-5, where 1 does not meet and 5 meets this criteria extremely well. Calculate the final score for each usability partner by adding up the values assigned for each question. Keep in mind that you may customize this list and remove any line item that is not relevant or worth consideration for you.

CRITERIA	KEY LIME INTERACTIVE	UX FIRM #2:	UX FIRM #3:
1 Understands your audience			
2 Experience in your industry			
3 Experience beyond your industry			
4 Involves you in the project			
5 Customizes solutions for you			
6 Identifies next steps			
7 Assists you at any stage			
8 Has global reach			
9 Their Mission & Vision align with yours			
10 Has reputable accolades			
PARTNER'S FINAL SCORE:			



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