

Sample Questions to Ask Online Storage Vendors

The following are suggested questions to ask when investigating the services of online storage providers or online electronic storage “vaults.” Depending on the answers you receive, you may or may not need to ask all the questions in a given category. It is strongly recommended that you have a total “comfort level” on all the topics below before entering into a contract. If you are unable to understand all the technical aspects involved, please associate a trusted person with knowledge of computer data storage, networking, security, the Internet and telecommunications networks (such as T-1 lines) to assist you.

Pricing

- Please describe your pricing structure.
- What are the storage increments? (Do you charge by the gigabyte of storage space?)
- How much does each additional increment cost?
- What is the effective compression ratio so I can purchase the correct storage amount?
- How often do I pay?
- Do you invoice me, or how does it work?
- What happens if I don't pay – can you prevent me from getting my data back?
- Are there discounts for paying by the year instead of the month?
- Do you give a competitive discount if I switch from another online storage provider to your company?
- What is the length of the contract period?
- Are there charges to restore data or for other services?
- What “hidden” charges might apply?
- If it turns out I purchased more or less storage than I will need in the near future, can I:
 - Change my contract mid-term?
 - Receive a credit on my overpayment, if any?
 - Do all this without being charged a fee?

Security

- What kind of security screening do you have for your employees?
- Are your employees bonded?
- Can your employees access/read my data?
- What kind of security do you have at your physical location/office (see [Offices and Servers](#) for more questions)?
- Have you ever had an information breach?
- What kind of Internet security do you use?
- Encryption questions
 - What kind of encryption do you use while data is stored on your servers?
 - What kind of encryption is used during data transmission over private and public networks?
 - Is data ever “de-encrypted” upon receipt for storage?
- What are the redundancy features of your service (dual processors, UPS generator-supplied power, etc.)?

Backups

- How are backups done?
- Are backups unattended (without the intervention of a live body who might have access to the data)?
- Are there special hardware requirements?
- What kind of Internet connection will we need?
- Do you offer customizable data retention schedules?
- What, exactly, will you back up?
 - Do you backup open files?
 - Do you back up core user and network resource settings files?
 - How are incremental backups handled?
 - Do we control the files and directories to be backed up, with the ability to filter?
- Based on my estimated storage requirements, how long will it take to backup my full system?
- How often do the backups occur?
- How can we verify successful backups?
- Do you issue detailed usage reports?
- What compression techniques are utilized to keep my storage costs low?

Tech Support

- What kind of tech support do you offer?
- Is your tech support 24x7x365?
- Do you charge an extra fee for tech support?
- Do you notify my firm automatically of problems encountered?
 - by what means?

Offices and Servers

- Where are your corporate offices?
- Where is the contact person for our office located?
- What fire and theft protection are utilized at the physical locations of the servers?
- Are there security cameras and round-the-clock security guards at the data storage facilities?
- Is there emergency electricity?
- Where are the servers physically located in the U.S. (state, city, building address)?
- How many locations will store my data?
- Are the servers:
 - equipped with intrusion detection?
 - constantly monitored in case of failure?
 - equipped with automatic restart and resume capabilities for handling a variety of network conditions?
- Will you ever utilize servers located “off-shore?”

Retrieval and Restoration

- Do you offer instant file restores 24x7x365 via end user?
- Do you offer the ability to manage the backup and restore from more than one location?
- What kind of tech support will you offer me during the retrieval and restoration process?
 - How much extra will it cost?
- How long would it take to physically restore my data?
- What happens if my Internet connection that day isn't fast enough? Do you have alternate means of getting me my data quickly?
- Will it cost me extra if you have to express ship my data to me on a new hard drive?
- Do you provide a means to allow file sharing from data at your location?
- Do I have the ability to access data files while not in my office?
- Will my firm have the option of receiving our information on tape or disk/DVD on a scheduled basis?

Business Interruptions

- What plans do you have in the event of your bankruptcy?
- What happens to my data in the event of your:
 - Bankruptcy
 - Going out of business
 - Sale of the business to another entity/company
- What happens to my data in the event of:
 - Seizure of your servers by a law enforcement authority, such as Homeland Security, or by creditors
 - Theft of your servers or other equipment
 - Technical problems with your equipment or servers

Miscellaneous

- Who owns your servers?

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