



An Extended Guide · No. 2091

Hiring Outside IT Help: What to Ask and What to Keep Control Of

The questions to ask a provider —
and the keys you must always hold

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! Read this first — the two things that stop most attacks

Almost every small-business break-in starts in one of two ordinary ways: a password that got stolen or guessed, or a convincing email that talked someone into clicking or paying. You do not have to become a computer expert to stop most of it. Turn on two-step sign-in (also called multi-factor authentication, or MFA) everywhere you can, keep a backup you have actually tested, and give yourself permission to slow down before you click a link, open an attachment, or send a payment. That is the whole game, most days. When you hand some of that to an outside helper, you're trusting them with the keys — so this guide is about asking the right questions and keeping the master keys in your own pocket.

Getting good IT help — on your terms

At some point most growing businesses need outside IT help, and a good provider is worth their weight in gold. But the relationship works best when you know what to ask up front and which keys you, the owner, must always keep. This guide walks you through both.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. In 30+ years of helping folks and small businesses, I've seen wonderful IT relationships and a few painful ones — and the painful ones almost always trace back to the same thing: the owner didn't hold their own master keys, so they were stuck when the relationship changed.

So we'll cover the questions worth asking any provider, and — just as important — the handful of logins and accounts you should never hand over the only copy of. Get those two things right and you can hire with confidence, knowing you're always in control of your own business.

★ I can help you hire well — without being your IT guy

Here's an honest note: vetting or overseeing an IT provider is squarely my lane, and I can help you do it without being your provider myself. No conflict, no commission — just a second set of eyes on your side. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll hire outside IT help wisely and keep control of your business.

- ❑ Ask about **response time**, the **backups** they'll run and actually test, and whether they require **MFA**.
- ❑ Ask for **documentation**, **security references**, and whether they carry **insurance**.
- ❑ Always keep your **domain registrar** login — the control over your web address and email.
- ❑ Always keep the **primary administrator** (super-admin) credentials for your Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace.
- ❑ Always keep your **billing and payment** accounts and a written **list of critical accounts**.
- ❑ Never let any one vendor hold the **only** keys — and set expectations **in writing**.

! The only-key problem is the one that really hurts

The most painful IT story isn't a bad technician — it's discovering that the only person who can get into your domain, your email admin, or your website is a provider you've parted ways with. Holding your own master keys prevents that entirely, and it costs nothing to insist on.

Why control matters as much as competence

A skilled provider is wonderful, but skill isn't the whole picture. Who holds the keys matters just as much.

A good IT provider will handle things you shouldn't have to — backups, updates, security, the day-to-day care of your systems. That's exactly why you hire one. But convenience can quietly slide into dependence: the provider sets everything up in their own accounts, holds all the logins, and over time becomes the only one who can get into your own business.

That's fine right up until the relationship changes — they retire, they get too busy, you decide to switch, or there's a falling-out. If they hold the only keys at that moment, you can be locked out of your own email, website, and systems, with no easy way back in. I've watched good businesses held hostage not by malice, but by a setup nobody thought to question.

The fix isn't distrust — it's structure. Hire the best help you can, let them do great work, and simply make sure you always hold your own master keys. A good provider won't mind one bit; it's the setup they'd want for their own business.

✓ Great providers expect these questions

Asking who holds the keys and what happens if you part ways isn't insulting — it's the mark of a careful owner. A provider who welcomes those questions is usually one worth hiring.

The questions worth asking any provider

Before you sign on with anyone, these questions tell you most of what you need to know.

You don't need to be technical to ask good questions — you just need to know which ones matter. Here are the ones I'd ask any provider I was considering, in plain English:

- **Response time:** when something breaks, how fast do you respond, and how do I reach you after hours?
- **Backups:** what will you back up, how often, and — crucially — do you test that the backups actually restore?
- **MFA:** do you require a second sign-in step on my accounts and on your own access to my systems?
- **Documentation:** will you give me written records of how my systems are set up and what accounts exist?
- **Security references:** can I talk to a couple of current clients about your security and reliability?
- **Insurance:** do you carry insurance that would cover a mistake or incident on your end?

★ I'll sit in on the conversation if you like

Interviewing a provider goes better with someone on your side who speaks the language. I'm glad to help you ask these questions and read the answers, without any stake in who you pick. Call (330) 200-8042.

Backups and response time: the two that bite

Of all the questions, these two cause the most regret when they're skipped — so press a little harder on them.

Backups that are actually tested

Lots of providers will say 'yes, we back you up.' The question that separates the good from the careless is: do you test that the backups restore? A backup nobody has ever restored is just a hope. Ask how often they test a real restore, and ask to see proof it worked. Our backup guide explains why a tested restore is the only backup that counts.

Response time you can live with

Find out, before you need it, how fast they respond when your systems are down — and whether that's in writing. 'We'll get to it' is not an answer when your business can't take payments. Match their response promise to how much downtime your business can actually survive, and get the commitment in your agreement.

! 'We back you up' is not the same as 'we tested it'

Push past the reassuring answer. The day you need a backup is the worst possible day to discover it was never tested. A provider who tests restores regularly — and can show you — is worth paying a bit more for.

The master keys you must always hold

This is the heart of the guide. These are the logins and accounts you, the owner, should always control — never handing over the only copy.

A provider can and should help you manage all of these. But you must hold your own copy of the credentials, in your own name, so you're never locked out of your own business. Here are the keys that matter most:

- **Your domain registrar login:** the account that controls your web address and where your email is delivered. Lose this and you can lose your whole online identity.
- **Your primary administrator credentials:** the top-level (super-admin or Global Administrator) account for your Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace.
- **Your billing and payment accounts:** the accounts you actually pay for services with, so renewals and control never depend on the vendor.
- **A written list of critical accounts:** what services you have, who the provider is, and where each login lives.

! Hold these in your own name, not the vendor's

Make sure these accounts are registered to you and your business email, not created under the provider's account. It's a small detail at setup that makes all the difference later — an account in your name is yours; one in theirs can walk out the door with them.

Why the domain is the crown jewel

If you keep only one master key, keep this one. Your domain is the foundation everything else sits on.

Your domain is your web address and the backbone of your email — the 'yourbusiness.com' that customers type and that your email is built on. The account that controls it, at your domain registrar, decides where your website points and where your email is delivered. Whoever holds that account holds the foundation of your entire online presence.

This is the one I most often find registered under a web designer's or an old provider's account, with the owner having no idea. When that relationship ends, the business can be stuck — unable to move their website, change their email, or even prove the domain is theirs. Make sure your domain is registered in your business's name, with login details you hold, from day one.

! Check today whose name your domain is under

If you're not certain you control your own domain registrar account, that's worth checking this week — and fixing if it's wrong. It's far easier to sort out while everyone's on good terms than after a parting of ways. I'm glad to help you check.

The super-admin: the master key to your email and files

Your Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace has one top-level account that can do anything. You need to hold it.

The primary administrator — called the Global Administrator in Microsoft 365 or a super-admin in Google Workspace — is the account that can add and remove users, reset anyone's password, and change every setting. It's the master key to your business's email and files. A provider will rightly use administrator access to do their work, but you should hold the primary one, protected with MFA.

The healthy setup is simple: you hold the top-level admin account; the provider gets their own admin login to do their job. That way their access can be removed without touching yours, you're never locked out, and the records show who did what. Our guide on admin accounts goes deeper on keeping these powerful logins separate and safe.

✓ One for you, one for them

Don't share a single admin account with your provider. You keep the primary super-admin; they get their own named admin login. It's safer, it's clearer, and it means parting ways is a matter of removing their account, not changing yours.

Keep a written list of your critical accounts

A simple list is what turns 'only the provider knows' into 'the owner always knows.' It's the cheapest insurance there is.

Keep one living document that lists your critical accounts: your domain registrar, your Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace, your website host, your point-of-sale, your billing accounts — and for each, who the provider is and where the login lives. You don't have to write passwords in plain sight; note where each is safely kept. The point is that you can always see the whole picture of your own business.

This list does double duty. It keeps you from ever being dependent on one person's memory, and it makes switching providers, answering an insurance question, or handling an emergency far calmer. Our guide on listing who can reach your systems pairs closely with this — together they give you a complete map of your own setup.

★ I'll help you build the master list

In one visit we can walk your systems and write down every critical account, who holds it, and where the keys live — so you're never in the dark about your own business. Call (330) 200-8042.

A little outside help, or a full-service provider

Whether you call someone occasionally or hand off everything, the same principle holds: ask good questions and keep your master keys. What changes is how formal the arrangement needs to be.

If you just need occasional help

Maybe you handle most things yourself and call someone now and then for the tricky jobs. Even here, don't let a one-time helper quietly become the only one who can get into something.

- Before a helper sets anything up, make sure accounts are created in your name, not theirs.
- Keep your domain, admin, and billing logins yourself — a casual helper shouldn't hold the only copy.
- Ask them to document what they did, so you're not relying on memory next time.
- Even for small jobs, confirm they use MFA when connecting to your systems.

If you're hiring a full-service provider

You're handing off ongoing care — backups, security, the lot. This deserves a real agreement, clear expectations, and a deliberate plan for who holds what.

- Ask the full set of questions — response time, tested backups, MFA, documentation, references, insurance.
- Put the key commitments in writing, including response times and that you hold your own master keys.
- Give them their own named admin access rather than sharing your top-level account.
- Agree up front on how they'd hand everything back if you ever parted ways.

★ Not sure which arrangement fits you?

Tell me how much you'd rather handle yourself versus hand off, and I'll help you figure out the right kind of help — and make sure you keep control either way. Call (330) 200-8042.

Never let one vendor hold all the keys

Even the best provider shouldn't be a single point of failure for your entire business. Spread the risk sensibly.

It's efficient to let one provider manage everything, and often that's fine — as long as 'manage' doesn't mean 'be the only one who can get in.' If a single vendor holds the only copy of your domain, your admin, your website, and your billing, then your whole business depends on that one relationship staying healthy and that one company staying in business.

You don't have to make it complicated. Just make sure that for each critical key, you hold your own copy, so no single departure or dispute can lock you out. The provider still does the work; you simply retain the ability to carry on without them if you ever had to. That's not pessimism — it's the same reason you keep a spare key to your building.

! One vendor, all the keys, is a business risk

Ask yourself: if this provider vanished tomorrow — retired, went under, stopped answering — could I still get into everything that runs my business? If the honest answer is no, that's the gap to close while things are calm.

Set expectations in writing

A clear written agreement prevents most disputes before they start — and protects both sides.

You don't need a thick contract, but the key expectations should be written down, not left to a handshake. When everyone agrees in advance what 'support' means, misunderstandings get rare and parting ways stays civil. At minimum, put these in writing:

- ❑ What's covered and what costs extra — so there are no billing surprises.
- ❑ Response times, including after-hours, and how to reach them in an emergency.
- ❑ What they back up, how often, and that restores are tested.
- ❑ That you hold your own domain, primary admin, and billing accounts.
- ❑ How they'll document your setup and keep that documentation current.
- ❑ What happens at the end — how they hand everything back if you part ways.

✓ The exit terms matter most of all

The clause people skip — what happens when the relationship ends — is the one that saves you grief. Agree up front that they'll hand over documentation and confirm your access on the way out, and a breakup never becomes a hostage situation.

Red flags when choosing a provider

A few warning signs are worth taking seriously, even when everything else looks good.

- They **resist** letting you hold your own domain, admin, or billing accounts.
- They can't clearly explain their **backup testing** or show that restores work.
- They won't put **response times** or the scope of support in writing.
- They **dodge** questions about MFA, references, or insurance.
- They want to be the **only one** who can get into your systems.
- They're vague about what happens if you ever **part ways**.

! Resistance to you holding keys is the biggest flag

Any provider who pushes back on you controlling your own domain and admin accounts is telling you something important. A trustworthy one expects you to hold your own master keys and is relieved you asked. Take the pushback seriously.

Making the most of references

References are only useful if you ask the right things. A few pointed questions reveal more than a glowing testimonial.

When a provider gives you references, actually call them — and ask about the things that matter under pressure, not just whether they're 'happy.' A reference who's been with a provider through a real problem will tell you far more than one who's never had an incident.

- How fast did they respond the last time something was really down?
- Have you ever needed a backup restored — and did it work?
- Do you hold your own domain and admin accounts, or do they?
- Has anything ever been documented clearly, or is it all in their heads?
- If you imagine leaving them, does that feel easy or scary?

✓ Ask about the bad day, not the good ones

Anyone looks good when nothing's wrong. The revealing question is how a provider handled a real outage, a restore, or a tough request. That's the day you're actually hiring them for.

Insurance and documentation: the quiet safeguards

Two less-glamorous questions that protect you when things go sideways.

Does the provider carry insurance?

Ask whether your provider carries insurance that would cover a mistake or security incident on their end. If their error contributes to a problem, you'll be glad there's coverage behind it rather than a small shop with nothing to stand behind the work. It's a fair, normal question — a professional outfit will have an answer ready.

Will they document your setup?

Good documentation — written records of how your systems are configured, what accounts exist, and how things connect — is what lets any future helper (or you) understand your setup without starting from scratch. Insist that documentation exists, that you get a copy, and that it's kept current. Setup that lives only in one technician's head is a risk dressed up as convenience.

✓ Documentation is portability

Clear documentation is what makes you free to change providers if you ever need to. Without it, you're tied to whoever set things up simply because they're the only one who understands it. Ask for it, and keep your copy.

Being a good client, too

Keeping control doesn't mean being difficult. The best relationships run both ways.

Holding your own keys and asking good questions makes you a careful client, not a hard one. Once you've set the arrangement up right, trust your provider to do their work, pay them fairly and on time, and don't second-guess every decision. A provider who feels respected will go the extra mile when you really need it.

The goal is a partnership where they handle the day-to-day expertly and you stay informed and in control of your own business. Review things together periodically — are backups still tested, is MFA still on, is the documentation current — so nothing drifts. That light touch keeps a good relationship healthy for years.

★ I can be your ongoing second opinion

Some owners like having me as an occasional, independent check on their IT provider — reviewing the setup, confirming backups and access, translating the technical talk. It keeps everyone honest and it's entirely on your side. Call (330) 200-8042.

If you ever need to switch

Relationships end, and switching providers should be an inconvenience, not a catastrophe — if you've kept your keys.

When it's time to move on, holding your own master keys is what makes it manageable. Because you control your domain, your primary admin, and your billing, a new provider can be given their own access and get to work without the old one having to cooperate. You're handing over the day-to-day care, not begging for the keys to your own business.

Do it in an orderly way: line up the new help before cutting off the old, get your documentation and any accounts transferred, remove the departing provider's access on their last day, and confirm you can still reach everything. Our guides on offboarding and on removing account access walk through the same clean handoff, whether it's an employee or a vendor.

✓ Line up the new before releasing the old

Don't cut ties with a provider until the next arrangement is ready and you've confirmed your access to everything. A little overlap makes the handoff smooth and keeps your business running without a gap.

Where I fit — and where I don't

A plain word about my own role, so you know exactly what I can and can't do here.

I'm not pitching to be your full-time IT department — I'm a local tech helper, and this is a spot where that's actually an advantage. Because I'm not angling to run all your systems, I can help you interview providers, review a proposal, check that you hold your own keys, and translate the technical talk, all with no stake in which company you pick.

Think of me as a knowledgeable friend sitting on your side of the table. I can help you hire well, set up your master keys correctly, and check in now and then to make sure your provider is doing right by you. For the heavy ongoing management, a dedicated provider is often the right call — and I'll help you choose a good one.

★ A second set of eyes, on your side

If you're about to hire IT help, or you're not sure the help you have is the right fit, let's talk before you commit. I'll help you ask the right questions and keep control of your business. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from owners about hiring outside IT help, answered plainly.

Q: Isn't it insulting to ask who holds the keys?

Not at all — it's the sign of a careful owner, and good providers expect it. The healthy arrangement is that you hold your own domain and primary admin while they get their own working access. A provider who bristles at that question is telling you something worth hearing.

Q: What's the single most important key to keep?

Your domain registrar login — it controls your web address and where your email is delivered, the foundation everything else sits on. If you keep only one master key, keep that one, registered in your business's name.

Q: How do I know if a backup is any good?

Ask whether they test restores, how often, and to see proof it worked. 'We back you up' is not the same as 'we've confirmed we can get your data back.' A backup nobody has ever restored is just a hope — our backup guide explains why.

Q: Can you be my IT provider?

I'm a local tech helper rather than a full-service provider, and that's the point here — I can help you interview and oversee a provider with no stake in who you pick. For heavy ongoing management, I'll help you choose a good dedicated provider and keep them honest.

★ Still have a question before you hire?

There's no silly question when you're trusting someone with your business's systems. Call or text me and we'll talk it through, in plain English and entirely on your side. (330) 200-8042.

A quick, honest note

So you use this guide with clear expectations.

This is practical, plain-English guidance from a local tech helper on hiring and overseeing IT help — it's general information, not legal advice. If you're signing a substantial contract with a provider, it's wise to have someone qualified look over the terms, especially the parts about liability, data handling, and what happens when the agreement ends.

The technology side — what to ask, which keys to keep, how to set things up so you stay in control — is exactly what I can help with. The legal fine print of a contract is a question for an attorney. Knowing which is which keeps you both well-informed and properly protected.

! A quick, important note

This guide is practical, plain-English guidance from a local tech helper, not legal advice. For a substantial IT contract — especially the terms on liability, data handling, and ending the agreement — have a qualified attorney review it. Confirm legal questions with a professional before you rely on them.

The one thing to take away

If this guide leaves you with a single idea, let it be this.

Hire the best IT help you can, let them do great work — and always keep your own master keys. Your domain, your primary admin account, your billing, and a written list of your critical accounts belong in your hands, in your name, no matter how much you trust your provider. That one habit means you're always in control of your own business, whatever happens to the relationship.

Ask the good questions, put the expectations in writing, and never let one vendor hold the only keys. Do that, and outside IT help becomes exactly what it should be: a trusted partner, not a single point of failure.

★ Let's make sure you're holding your own keys

Whether you're hiring fresh or checking an arrangement you already have, I'm glad to help you confirm you control your own domain, admin, and billing — the keys that keep your business yours. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made hiring and overseeing outside IT help feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a lawyer or your insurance agent — for the legal and insurance pieces I'll help you understand the questions and line up the right professional.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Ask This, Keep That

Two sides of hiring IT help

	What to ask	What to keep
Backups	Tested restores?	Your account list
Access	MFA on everything?	Domain registrar
Records	Will you document?	Primary admin login
Standing	Insurance, refs?	Billing accounts

Hire for skill; keep your own master keys no matter what.

Hiring in Four Steps

A calm way to bring on IT help



Never let one vendor hold the only keys to your business.

The Keys You Must Hold

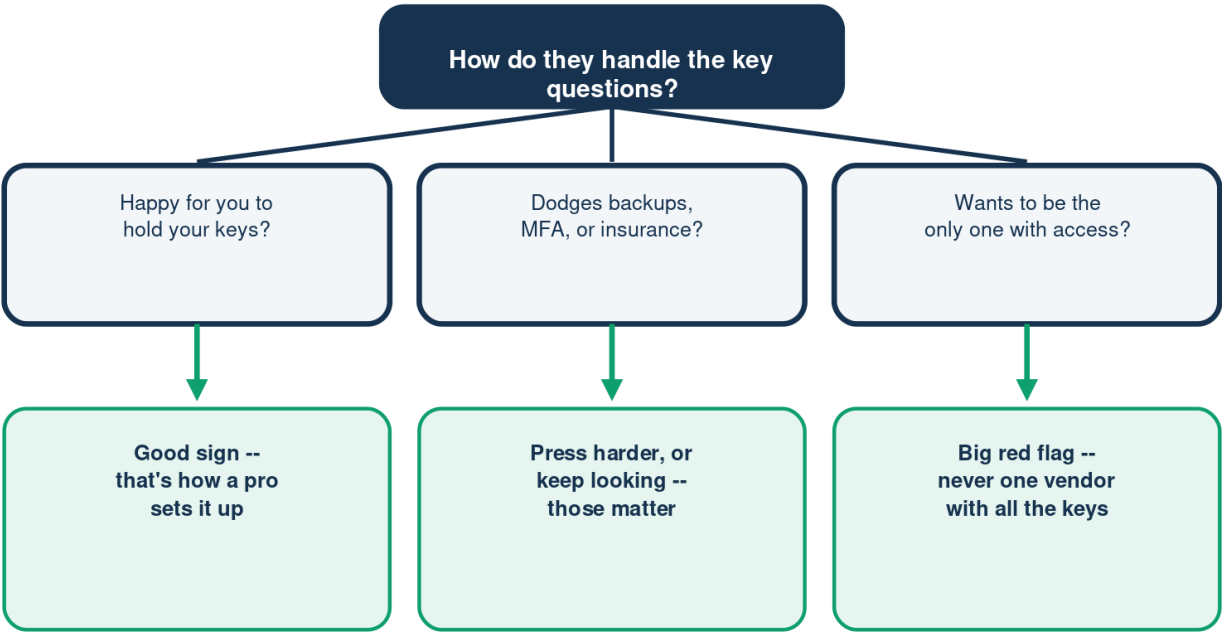
Yours, in your name -- always

	Master key	Why it's yours
Domain registrar	Web address, email	The crown jewel
Primary admin	Email and files	Top-level control
Billing accounts	You pay, you control	No vendor lock-in
Account list	The whole picture	Never in the dark

A provider gets their own access; you keep the primary keys.

Is This Provider a Good Fit?

Let their answers guide you



Resistance to you holding your own keys is the biggest warning sign.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-person tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
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Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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