



## **Is Industry Expertise Overrated When Choosing a Provider?**

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It has been said that the six most dangerous words in business are, “We’ve always done it that way.” This is referring to the scenario where companies fall into the trap of doing things the same way over and over again just because that’s the way they’ve done them in the past. “If it ain’t broke, why fix it?” is how the thinking in this situation often goes.

Just because something doesn’t appear to be broken doesn’t mean there aren’t better solutions. Companies that adopt the “We’ve always done it that way” mindset often fail to see that there are more effective and cost-efficient ways of performing tasks and procedures. By sticking with the tried and true instead of being open to new ways of doing things, they often fall behind their competitors — ultimately losing market share and eventually even running the risk of going out of business.

### **Selecting a Professional Services Provider**

This is something to keep in mind when selecting a professional services provider for your business, because the first thing that many owners and CEOs look for when choosing a provider is whether or not he or she has relevant industry experience — and if so, how much?

There are certainly benefits to choosing a professional services provider with experience in your industry. However, this shouldn’t be the key deciding factor in which professional you choose. Why? Because it’s not uncommon for a provider with industry expertise to want to do things the way they’ve always been done.

Instead, industry expertise should be just one of several different factors that go into choosing the right professional services provider for your business. Other factors you should consider include:

- Overall financial and/or accounting experience
- Reputation in the industry and in your community
- References and referrals from other businesses
- Ratings by the Better Business Bureau and industry watchdogs
- The professional’s personality and “fit” with you, your employees and your corporate culture

### **A Few Pros and Cons**

There are pros and cons to choosing a professional services provider with industry expertise. The pros are as follows:

- The professional will have hands-on experience dealing with issues that are unique to your industry.
- The professional will understand and speak the “lingo” of your industry.
- The professional will be able to get up and running quickly with a minimum of training or “hand-holding.”

The biggest drawback to choosing a professional services provider with industry expertise is that he or she may adopt a “We’ve always done it that way” mentality. This can result in:

- An inability for the professional to think outside the box and do things differently.
- The professional won’t bring modern best practices to meet the challenges your company is facing.
- The professional’s expertise may be dated and not adequate to solve your current challenges.

If a professional services provider is skilled in his or her areas of specialty — like accounting or financial consulting, for example — he or she should be able to get up to speed in your particular industry pretty quickly. No professional can be an expert at everything, but a professional services provider with good, fundamental skills can bring plenty of value to your engagement — regardless of whether he or she has expertise and knowledge in your particular industry.

An analogy is the patient facing surgery who must decide between the experienced surgeon who has performed the procedure she’s undergoing 1,000 times or the new surgeon who has only performed it 10 times. Most people would automatically choose the experienced surgeon, but a case can be made that the new surgeon might be a better choice. He definitely won’t have a “We’ve always done it that way” mentality like the experienced surgeon might. Therefore, he could bring fresh new thinking and more modern techniques to the surgical procedure.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

When selecting a professional services provider, the first thing many owners and CEOs look for is whether or not a professional has relevant industry experience. However, this shouldn’t be the key deciding factor in which professional you choose. It’s not uncommon for a provider with industry expertise to want to do things the way they’ve always been done. Instead, industry expertise should be just one of several different factors that go into choosing the right professional services provider for your business.

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