



CUSTOM SOFTWARE PARTNER EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The questions to ask before you hire a software company.



Custom Software Partner Evaluation Checklist

Hiring a company to build software is one of the hardest purchases a business makes. Every shop's website says the same things — “experienced,” “full-stack,” “we listen” — and the real differences don't show up until you're six months and a lot of money into a build that's going sideways. The price ranges are wide, the deliverable is invisible until it exists, and the cost of choosing wrong is measured in quarters, not dollars.

This checklist gives you the questions that separate a partner from a vendor — on scope, ownership, security, communication, support, and how you get out. Ask every prospective shop the same set, write down the answers, and the vague ones will stand out next to the specific ones. Where it's useful, we've added how **QOS Software** answers each — not as a pitch, but so you have a concrete reference point to compare against.

1. Scope & Discovery

A good build starts by defining the problem, not by quoting a price. If a shop is ready to name a number before it understands what you actually need, that number is a guess you'll pay for later in change orders.

Ask:

- Will you start with a discovery phase before quoting a full build?
- How do you define scope — and how are changes to it handled and priced?
- Will you tell me if I should buy an off-the-shelf product instead of building?
- What drives the cost, and where can we cut scope to fit a budget?
- Do you scope openly and up front, or do estimates arrive as surprises mid-build?

How QOS Software answers:

We scope honestly and openly up front, agree it before we build, and don't spring surprise change orders. If a proven product already does the job, we'll tell you to buy it rather than sell you a build you don't need.

2. Team & Communication

The single biggest predictor of a project going well is who is actually doing the work and who you talk to when something changes. Layers of account managers and junior hand-offs are where clarity and accountability go to die.

Ask:

- Who will actually write my software — senior engineers, or junior hand-offs?
- Do I talk to the people building it, or to an account manager who relays messages?
- Are the developers senior, or juniors learning on your budget?
- Will the same people stay on the project from start to finish?
- Can you explain technical decisions in plain English, without the jargon wall?

How QOS Software answers:

We're a founder-led team of senior developers — AI handles the junior-level work, the founder is in the room from day one, and the same people carry the build through to launch. You reach the people building your software directly.

3. Code Ownership & IP

Software you don't own is a subscription you paid to create. Ownership terms are easy to skip in the excitement of starting — and brutal to renegotiate once the code exists and the shop knows you can't leave.

Ask:

- Who owns the source code and the data when we're done — in writing?
- Do I receive the full source code, or only access to a hosted version?
- Can I move to another developer without rebuilding from scratch?
- Are there per-seat or licensing fees that grow as we grow?
- Is the intellectual property assigned to my business outright?

How QOS Software answers:

You own what we build — the source code, the data, and the roadmap. Ownership goes in the contract before the first line of code, not after, so you're never locked into us to keep your own software running.

4. Security & Quality

Security and testing are invisible on a demo and expensive to add after launch. The time to ask how software is built is before it holds your customers' data, not after a breach.

Ask:

- Is security built in from the first commit, or bolted on at the end?
- How do you test — and what does “done” mean before something ships?
- How do you handle sensitive or regulated data?
- Is the code documented and maintainable, or will the next developer have to guess?
- What standards and practices do your engineers follow?

How QOS Software answers:

We build secure, tested, standards-based software from the first commit and document what we deliver, so the code is maintainable long after launch — by us or by anyone who comes after us.

5. Support & Exit

Software is never “done.” It needs maintenance, updates, and someone to call when it breaks — and you need a clean way out if the relationship stops working. Ask about the years after launch, not just the launch.

Ask:

- What happens after launch — who maintains it, and how is that priced?
- How fast do you respond when something is broken in production?
- If we part ways, what do we walk away with, and how does the hand-off work?
- Will you support the software you built, or hand it off to someone who didn't?
- Are maintenance terms clear up front, or open-ended?

How QOS Software answers:

We support what we ship after launch, and because you own the code and the documentation, you're never trapped. A clean exit is a sign of an honest partnership, so we build for one from the start.

6. Track Record & Fit

Anyone can show a polished portfolio. What's harder to fake is software that's still running years later and clients who'll take your call. Fit matters too: the right partner for a 500-seat enterprise may be wrong for a first product, and vice versa.

Ask:

- Can you show me something you built that's still running years later?
- Have you built for businesses like mine — my size, my stage, my industry?
- Will you connect me with a client I can actually talk to?
- How long have you been building software, and under whom?
- Are you the right size for my project — not too big to care, not too small to deliver?

How QOS Software answers:

The QOS family has delivered software since 2007 — nearly two decades of building web, mobile, e-commerce, and business applications. We build for startups and founders, established SMBs, multi-location businesses, and teams replacing off-the-shelf software.

The Red Flags

A shop that never recommends buying off-the-shelf, never puts code ownership in writing, never mentions maintenance, and never lets you talk to a real client is selling you a project — not solving your problem. A partner who answers all six sections of this checklist plainly, and in writing, is telling you how they'll behave when things get hard.

Next Step:

Take this checklist into your next vendor conversation and ask every shop the same questions. When you're ready to compare answers with a founder-led team that owns its work, talk to **QOS Software** — the custom software development company in the QOS family, building since 2007. Call **877.800.7672** or visit **qossoftware.com**.