



10 Questions to Ask a List Vendor

Finding a reliable, trustworthy, and cost effective, source for the list you need for B2B Sales and Marketing can be a guessing game. We have put together some insider tricks to identifying the list providers to stay away from.

Question #1: Are your Emails Opt-in?

This is the quickest way to weed out potential list vendors. If they say yes, don't trust them. No list company can sell you opt-in lists. They will tell you they are opt-in because they know it's what you want to hear. Opt-in is not transferable; how could the contacts be opted-in to your company when the list company didn't know who you were before today?

Question #2: Can I get a sample?

This question will weed out many companies. Instead of asking what type of data you want a sample of and sending it to you, bad data companies will ask about your budget or just never get back to you. Good riddance. If they do send you a sample, you can usually get a good idea of who you're working with just by a visual inspection. If they only give you 1 or 2 records in the sample or the data is unformatted and messy it's a good sign that they are a bad data company. Do your due diligence and check the quality of several companies' samples, but keep in mind a good sample doesn't guarantee good data. Some list companies will hand pick the records in their sample, then when you get a list from them it will look nothing like the sample.

Questions #3: What type of licensing do you provide?

Historically, lists were sold with strict licensing terms, typically one time use or 60–90-day use. Some list vendors still try to get away with this. Limited licensing is a thing of the past. Don't purchase any list that restricts your use of it. Also look out for expensive online platforms that say you don't own the data you buy and must return all of it if you stop paying for their service. A good list vendor will give you license to do anything with the list, except resell it.

Questions #4: Do you guarantee your data to be accurate?

The guarantee is a must, but it is only as good as the vendor that supplies it. Be leery of anyone who tells you their list is 100% accurate. No list is 100% accurate; 85-90% deliverability is considered very good (for emails). What you want is a 100% guarantee that the vendor will replace or refund for any records that are found to be inaccurate. If they claim their list is 100% accurate, they are either lying or don't know what they are doing.

Questions #5: Do you provide full contact information, including email address, physical address, and phone number at no additional charge? Which fields do you provide with every record?

List vendors/brokers are notorious for pulling bait and switch when it comes to what information you get. They will show you all the fields that are "available", but forget to mention that some, usually email and phone, cost extra. Any list vendor not offering all contact fields at no extra charge is, at best, behind the times and should be avoided.

Question #6: What is your pricing?

If they won't give you information on their costs it's a major red flag that they are going to be very difficult to deal with and instead of working to get you what you need they are working to separate you from your budget.

Question #7: Are you a list broker, or a list source?

This is significant. List brokers or resellers are not always experts with the data you need. If you are not working directly with the source, you may encounter difficulties in turnaround time, getting the exact list you are looking for, exercising your guarantee, etc. List brokers typically feel far less accountable for the quality of the data as they do not maintain the data, they simply sell it and move on. Bottom line, stay away from brokers when possible and go with an original source who compiles and cleans all their own data and can work with you to make sure you get what you really need.

Question #8: Do I get an actual file with contact information?

Getting the list for use in multiple and multitouch campaigns is ideal. Only being able to view records in an online platform or an old school Mailing Fulfillment service is not ideal. You want to make sure you can get an actual spreadsheet with *all* the records you purchase.

Question #9: What forms of payment do you accept?

Unscrupulous vendors know that once you see the data you will do whatever you can to get your money back. For this reason, they often insist on money transfer or cashier's check only. If a vendor does not accept all mainstream forms of payment, be skeptical. Any reputable and established company should be able to process credit cards, accept checks, etc.

Question #10: Do they answer your questions?

When you ask a question do they give you an answer? A surprising number of list companies are not data companies at all but sales companies. They will want to ask you questions to qualify you and see how much money they can get from you before they give you any information you want. Obviously this isn't the relationship you're looking for with a data provider.

If a list vendor you are considering is giving answers to these questions that leave you feeling uneasy, you may want to look elsewhere or dig deeper before gambling with your marketing budget.

For more tips and further details on any of the above items, contact us at info@mountaintopdata.com or call (818) 252-8140 and talk with one of our experts.