Why the IT tender process is so important for hospices

Most hospices review their IT and technology needs periodically. It's not uncommon for a hospice to start by referring to a previous IT Tender document, or search for a generic template. Whilst this often provides a good starting point, one major challenge can be the lack of specific detail outside of key technical requirements.

Today, your IT partner needs to delve deeper and to understand goals, vision and the specific needs of departments to ensure the tender response aligns to the organisations'

goals. This helps you ensure you are able to prioritise your IT needs now and for the next 2-3 years, with a high degree of confidence that you can also plan your budget over that time.

We have been supporting hospices and charities for many years and whilst there are always sector specific needs, in our experience, the most cost-effective approach is one where the two parties work more as partners.

Important considerations

1. Look for a partner, not a provider

- How can any technology partner begin to make recommendations when they don't understand your organisation at a strategic level?

- Any experienced IT provider should want to understand your hospice's strategy and principles of sustainability. They also need to understand your values, vision, risks, objectives, short – long term goals, financial objectives and governance.
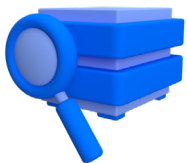
2. Allow the IT provider to conduct an audit /analysis of your systems. Remove the risk of unforeseen costs

- Allow a provider to do their own system analysis. This reduces the potential of nasty surprises and unforeseen costs once onboarded. Tenderers can analyse your systems upfront and give an indication as to what they will be looking to do to address any issues along with any project costs.

3. Hospices are not the NHS

- **The traditional health/public sector style of tendering simply doesn't lend itself to the hospice model.** It is too prescriptive and cumbersome and can lead to key IT support needs being left out, leading to higher unpredicted costs.

- Allow the IT provider to do their own discovery work and provide recommendations and budgetary costs so there are no nasty surprises once you have chosen a partner and the dust has settled. We see it far to often, **whereby a hospice has already outlined what they think they need, only to have missed things the chosen IT partner has found.**

- Include the **most recent strategy document or yearly report** you've published so the IT provider gets an initial understanding of where the hospice is from a strategic perspective.

4. Don't be overly prescriptive

- Every IT company will have a different way of doing things. **Don't make the tender too specific,** in terms of what you want. It's more about what you want to achieve. Leave it quite open to see how the IT provider approaches the tender with their own ideas. After all, **ideas are what you want an IT provider to give**; then use your decision process to decide if their approach and offering meets your needs.

5. Define the core requirements

- Set the minimum requirements / expectations as "must haves". This will allow you to quickly identify providers who cannot deliver what you want. Remove any none-starters as soon as possible.

- Always give a foundation of information relating to your current IT setup, this will help the IT provider decide whether they'd like to submit a proposal. Not all IT providers will be able to support what you have in place, so you don't want to waste time talking to providers who don't have the right skillset to take you on in your current state.

- List the IT services provided by the current partner. This is an easy way to ensure you have continuity in IT if you do decide to change provider. You want to limit the gaps left when/if the new provider takes over. This is also an extra way to quickly filter out any bidders who cannot meet those needs.

- What are you currently putting plasters on at the minute? Give an indication as to the current IT challenges you're facing to get an understanding of how an IT partner would approach these issues.

6. Where does technology fit?

- Clearly state where you believe you can utilise technology and implement digital ways of working to help improve the service you deliver to your patients and service users? Get an idea as to where the IT provider can help with this or what projects they've worked on to demonstrate this.
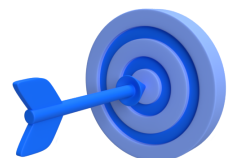
7. Understand all points of view

- Speak to your key stakeholders to establish a more rounded picture. **Hospices have many moving parts, including clinical, retail, fundraising, marketing, finance etc.** It's important to get the view of what's going on across the hospice. Asking simple questions like **"what works well?"**, **"what frustrations do you have?"**, **"what would make your life easier?"**, **"are there any tools you've used in previous roles which may help your job?"**. There's no point in just getting the view of the IT stakeholder, there may be things being swept under the carpet which could be quickly addressed and improve staff morale for example.

"What frustrations do you have?"

"What would make your life easier?"

"Are there any tools from your previous roles?"

8. Consider compliance and credentials

- For trustees and senior management teams, **credentials and accreditations are key to providing the right level of data security and IT support to a hospice,** to protect the brand of the organisation and the security of your service user's data. Saving money on the IT service doesn't always mean the right level of security. **ISO 27001 and Information Governance Toolkit credentials are the bare minimum** an IT partner should have when working with a hospice.

- Experience is key. **Always ask for recommendations from other hospices.** References and case studies can also help but always try and have a conversation with some of the provider's customers.

bsi. ISO/IEC 27001 Information Security Management CERTIFIED

NHS Information Governance Toolkit

DH Department of Health

8. Carefully consider the transition process

- Switching providers can be a little daunting as it's a major decision to take if you're going to change. Request a demonstration of the IT provider's onboarding process. You want to make sure that the transition process is as bullet proof as possible. Gaining references from other organisations as to how the transition process worked is always a good option too.

Interested in our award winning IT services?

Speak to a member of the team today.

There's no doubt that utilising technology can improve efficiencies, reduce operational costs and improve clinical services, which is why choosing the right technology partner is more important than ever in the hospice sector.

T | 01246 266 130

E | info@ct.uk

ct.uk