

20 questions to always ask your software development partner

Code quality, data protection, communication, continuity, transparency and integrity

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Quality and security are the two things clients worry about most when choosing a development partner. As an African software company we have worked for the European market since 2017 and we are used to hard questions as well as proving that we deliver the same professional standards as any European software company or other outsourcing partner. A lot can go wrong in a software development project and this is our check list for you.

A. CODE QUALITY & AI GOVERNANCE

1. Is every line of code — including AI-generated code — reviewed by a second human before it reaches your codebase?

***Why it matters:** AI assistance speeds up coding but does not remove the need for a second pair of eyes. A vendor who treats AI output as exempt from review is taking a risk on your behalf, without telling you.*

2. If AI tools are used to write code, is a different, independent tool or process used to review it?

***Why it matters:** A model that wrote a piece of code tends to confirm its own assumptions when asked to check it. Independent review (by a human or by a different tool) catches what self-review misses.*

3. Are automated tests written alongside development, with documented test-script protocols followed throughout?

***Why it matters:** Industry research has found AI-generated code carries meaningfully higher (up to 2x higher) defect rates when it is not properly tested and reviewed. Writing tests in parallel, against documented test scripts, is how that risk gets caught before taking your code to production.*

B. DATA PROTECTION & COMPLIANCE

4. Is there a signed GDPR Article 28 Data Processing Agreement in place, with Standard Contractual Clauses where data leaves the EU/EEA?

***Why it matters:** This is a legal requirement, the moment personal data is processed outside the EU/EEA. A vendor without one is a compliance risk you will inherit.*

5. Can the vendor name the specific standards they design to — GDPR, OWASP, NIS2, the EU AI Act, ISO/IEC 27001 — and show evidence that these are actually followed?

Why it matters: “Aligned with” and “certified to” are different claims. Ask which one applies, and ask to see the documentation and the controls behind it.

6. Where exactly is your data hosted, and can the vendor guarantee EU/EEA-only hosting if your project requires it?

Why it matters: Hosting location affects your GDPR exposure and, for organisations in regulated sectors, your NIS2 supply-chain obligations. Ask for the specific data centre location and hosting provider, and check if this can be changed according to your requirements.

C. CONTINUITY & INCIDENT RESPONSE

7. Does more than one developer fully understand your codebase, so the project survives if one person leaves?

Why it matters: A single point of failure is one of the most common risks in any outsourced or offshore development relationship. One developer means no developer.

8. What is the vendor’s documented process for reporting a security incident or data breach, and how fast will you be told?

Why it matters: GDPR requires breach notification to authorities within 72 hours; NIS2 sets a 24-hour standard for significant incidents in scope. Ask to see the process in writing, not just hear a promise.

D. TRANSPARENCY

9. Will the vendor tell you, unprompted, which AI tools were used on your project and what they contributed?

Why it matters: Undisclosed AI use makes it impossible for you to assess risk, attribution, or compliance properly. A vendor who volunteers this information is one who has nothing to hide.

10. Are secure-by-design practices — OWASP Top 10, vulnerability testing — a normal part of the standard process, not a paid add-on?

Why it matters: Security retrofitted at the end of a project is far more expensive, and far less effective, than security built in from the first sprint.

E. QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION

11. Do you get a named point of contact and daily updates during active sprints, rather than hearing from the team only when something goes wrong?

***Why it matters:** Poor communication, not poor code, is the most common complaint about offshore partnerships. Ask exactly how, and how often, you will hear from the team before the contract starts — then check that it actually happens. Abiding by the SCRUM protocols is the ideal standard for this (see project management)*

12. Do you have short, direct communication lines with the developers themselves so questions get clarified without delay?

***Why it matters:** Communication filtered through a single account manager loses technical nuance and slows down decisions. Direct, short lines to the people actually writing your code is what makes a fast feedback loop possible.*

13. If you are working with an international or offshore team, what is the quality of their spoken and written English, and how reliable is their internet connection?

***Why it matters:** Daily standups, sprint reviews, and real-time messaging only work if both sides genuinely understand each other and stay connected. Ask for a short call with the actual team, not just account management, and check the connection on an ordinary working day, not a scheduled demo.*

14. Have you appointed a dedicated Product Owner on your side, with the time, authority, and business knowledge to make decisions throughout the project?

***Why it matters:** This is the one question on this list about you, not your vendor — and it matters more than almost any of the others. Research consistently identifies weak or absent Product Ownership as the single most common cause of failure in outsourced and offshore Scrum projects. No development team, however skilled, can deliver well against an unclear or unavailable decision-maker.*

F. SCRUM PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR FAST FEEDBACK LOOPS

15. Are sprint reviews held at the end of every sprint, with working software demonstrated?

***Why it matters:** A sprint review is the fastest, most honest feedback loop available: you see real progress every one to two weeks and can redirect immediately, rather than discovering a mismatch months in. Ideally you can start testing features yourself as soon as possible.*

16. Are retrospectives held after every sprint and can the vendor describe a specific way a past retrospective changed how they work?

***Why it matters:** Many teams claim Scrum but quietly skip retrospectives. A vendor who can point to a concrete process change that came out of one treats feedback as a discipline, not a formality.*

G. INTEGRITY

17. Will the vendor tell you when something is going wrong, before you have to ask?

Why it matters: Integrity in a partnership shows up most clearly when things don't go to plan. A vendor who waits to be asked is managing your perception of the project, not the project itself.

18. Will the vendor commit to a commitment that they kept even when it cost them something extra?

Why it matters: Integrity is cheap to claim and expensive to prove. Ask for one specific example, not a general assurance.

19. Is the intellectual property in the source code clearly and explicitly assigned to you, in writing, from the start of the project?

Why it matters: Without an explicit IP assignment clause, ownership of code you have paid for can remain ambiguous, or default to the vendor. This matters the moment you want to switch providers, raise investment, or sell the business and become a total nightmare.

20. Are NDAs and non-competition clauses in place with the vendor's individual staff, not only at company level?

Why it matters: A company-level NDA does not stop an individual developer from reusing your code, your data, or what they learned about your business elsewhere. Protection has to extend to every person who actually touches your project.

Scoring Your Conversation

A confident, evidenced "yes" to each of these is the bar to aim for. Where the answer is partial, look for a credible plan to close the gap. Clear answers, documented with evidence, should be easily available on request

Want to ask us these questions directly?

Book a free discovery call and bring your checklist, and any other questions

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