GlobalLogic®

A Hitachi Group Company

6 Questions

to Ask When Looking for a Software Engineering Partner

A Guide for Medtech, Life Sciences, and Healthcare Businesses

Introduction

Tectonic shifts are changing how healthcare is delivered in the digital age.
Organizations are racing to create software and digital experiences that will help them deliver better and faster healthcare at lower costs. At the same time, they want to stay relevant and differentiated while unlocking new business value and revenue streams — and improving the patient experience. Tremendous opportunities and challenges abound in both the short and long term.

As a result, more and more Medical Technology (Medtech), Life Sciences, and Healthcare businesses realize they need a software engineering product development partner. Outsourcing may seem an obvious solution, but there's a significant difference between traditional outsourcing vendors and today's software engineering product development partners.

"Outsourcing" typically means throwing a business problem over a wall and then receiving a solution sometime later. It's a model fraught with mis-set expectations, poorly aligned visions, and outright failure. Another common response to such poor experiences is the use of a staff augmentation model, which often yields better results or reduces risk.

To deal with the pace of change and technical sophistication of today's environment, you'll find much more value creation potential, efficiency, and innovation working hand-in-hand with a knowledgeable, scalable, and trusted technology partner. In this e-guide, we'll assume you are, in fact, looking for a software engineering partner. More importantly, we'll provide you with best practices for selecting the right software engineering partner and ensuring that your partnership succeeds.

Question 1

1 Why do you want a partner?

This may sound like a very basic question, but identifying exactly why you want a software engineering product development partner is crucial to selecting the right one. Different partners have different strengths and ways of working with clients, so it's important for a business to truly understand its own vision, capabilities, and maturity.

In our own 20+ years of experience as a software engineering partner for Medtech, Life Sciences, and Healthcare organizations, we have found that most clients partner because they face one or more of the following challenges.

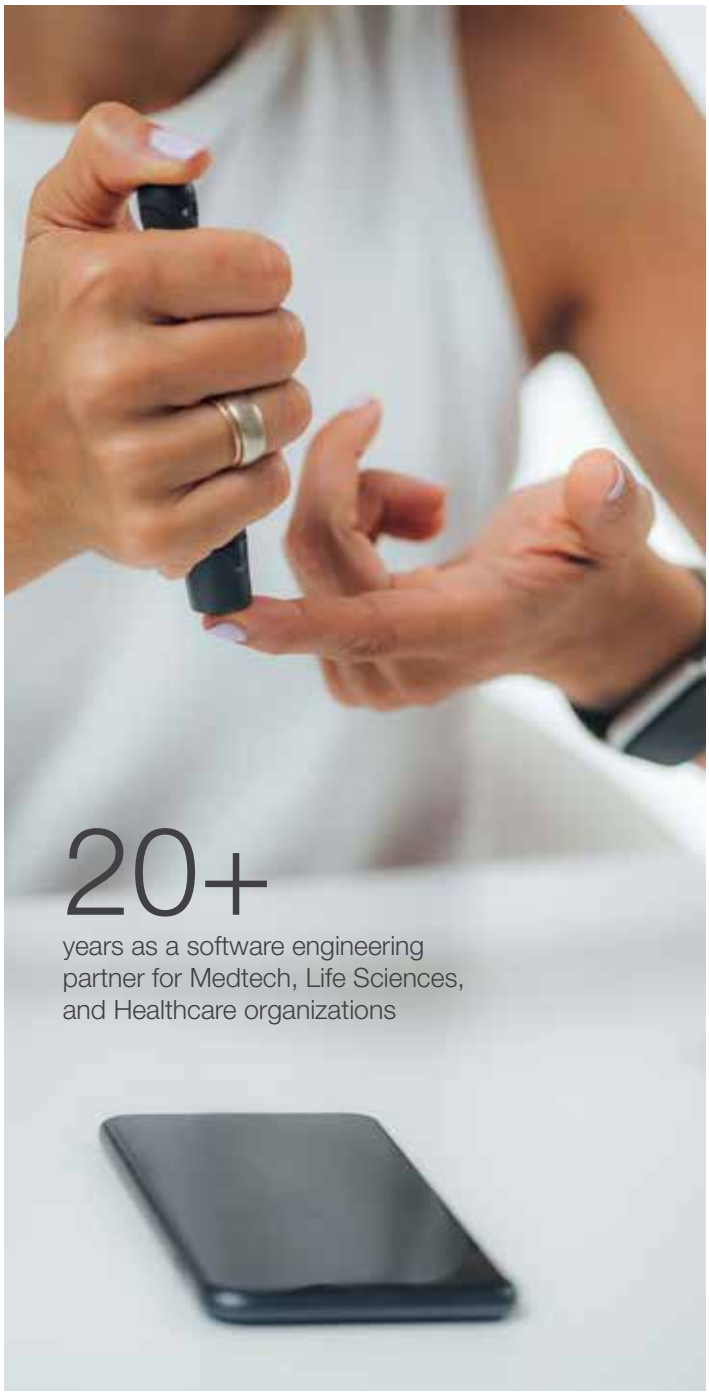
You don't have the right skills.
You want to build a new device, wearable, companion app, IoMT system, analytic, or digital experience, but it requires niche skills, experience developing standards-compliant software products, or deep domain knowledge that you can't access locally. Or, as is often the case these days, you want to leverage the technology of a different industry to innovate in your own — for example, to bring the supply chain visibility common in manufacturing to Medtech or Pharma.

You have the skills, but not the scale or the time.
Even the most tech-savvy Healthcare or Medtech companies will lose market share or miss opportunities if they can't continuously deliver better outcomes, greater focus on therapies and disease, and more efficient use of resources — while empowering patients. You need a partner who can help you quickly scale your engineering operations through established teams, established industry processes, solution accelerators, and world-class infrastructure.

You need to transform your business.
We often work with traditional businesses who are on the cusp of digital transformation but don't yet have the processes, infrastructure, or mindset to drive the changes required to digitally transform. Are you looking for:

- A partner who can help you build digital platforms and ecosystems for connected informed healthcare systems?
- Smart devices to capture new opportunities?
- An innovation partner?

You need to do more with less.
We'd be remiss if we didn't mention cost savings as a reason to partner. Budgets are tight for many companies right now, and partnering with a leading player in regulated software product development and engineering services could help you achieve a bigger return on your investment.



2

Question 2

How mature is your organization?

Does your organization have the culture, executive buy-in, and processes to work with a software engineering partner in the first place? You have to know what your future goals look like in order to sell a partnership to your executive team, and you need your executive team to be 100% behind the partnership for it to succeed. You must not only be able to see where your market is going and how you will (or want to) fit into that evolution, but also be able to identify your own maturity parameters:

Process Maturity

- Do you have a consistent, repeatable development process?
- Are you predictably releasing high-quality medical products?
- How often do you have post-release field issues?
- Are your processes automated?
- How is your customer satisfaction?

Organization Maturity

- Does your leadership have a solid vision and strategy for developing regulated medical products?
- Do you have the support and resources to engage with a partner?
- Do you have the metrics to measure success?

Partnership Maturity and Cost-Effectiveness

Do you have the people, processes, technologies, domain expertise, and infrastructure in place to collaborate with a third-party partner and do it cost-effectively?

Most Healthcare companies we work with can self-assess, but maybe not in all areas. This is especially true for companies that are emerging onto the digital scene. Much like the adage, "You don't know what you don't know," a business may have a general idea of where they want to go but not the knowledge of how to get there. In this scenario, it's crucial to bring in an advisor who can help you clarify your goals and identify the specific steps to achieve them.

For example, we once partnered with a global information analytics business specializing in science and health. Following a period of acquisition and growth, they wanted to take a holistic view of their offering to create a product that added value to research, funders, and stakeholders. We designed a new product experience that manifests their updated value proposition and better supports their research community and processes.

3

Question 3

Is the right person driving the search?

We realize this may be a sensitive topic because — if you're reading this — this section applies to you. We've found that when a company wants to differentiate themselves through software or digital products, they need someone with experience in software or digital products to drive the search for a software engineering partner.

IT, procurement, legal, and other support functions should also be involved in the process of selecting a partner, but they should not be leading the charter because they will not be the ones to ultimately consume that partner's services.

In our experience, the most successful partnerships are driven by the:

- Chief Technology Officer
- Chief Product Officer
- Chief Digital Officer
- Chief R&D Officer
- VP/AVP/Director of Software Product Development and Engineering

These individuals are the ones who are most informed about the business context and technical roadmap and can identify whether or not potential partners can meet their requirements from a skill and process perspective.

For example, we partnered with a medical device company that was looking for an outside team to help further innovate and develop one of their critical high-visibility products. The Head of Clinical Care Software led the search to find the right partner to help them with software development, software verification, and testing — and chose GlobalLogic.

Two years into the process, the two teams work cohesively and are developing new proofs of concept that could someday show up in new products. We currently form about one-third of their Dev team, and the company expects that to become 50/50 as development continues.

4

Question 4

How do you select the right partner?

Different software engineering partners have different strengths. For example, if you want to industrialize your current processes or optimize a platform for third-party systems, you should partner with a provider who specializes in IT services. These types of partners are your more traditional "outsourcers" who will execute on your specific guidelines, manage repetitive tasks, or maintain your current systems.

However, if you need help digitally transforming your business or developing embedded software, SaMD, or a companion app, then you need a very different type of partner. GlobalLogic falls into this second category, wherein we create distributed teams that blend seamlessly with our clients' teams to provide high-level innovation and end-to-end engineering services. We refer to this more as "partnered insourcing" rather than outsourcing.

If you do not have an advisor to guide you through the software engineering and IT service provider landscape, we suggest leveraging analyst reports to find a matrix of who does what. Once you narrow down partners to interview, some good questions to ask include:

- How are you different from your competitors?
- What are your core competencies?
- How much attention can you provide me?
- Have you previously done what I want to do?
- Have you worked with someone like me before?
- Do you have case studies / customer references?
- Do you have experiential learnings that can be applied to my unique situation?

More importantly, though, your potential partner should ask you questions. If a partner blindly agrees to everything you ask for without exploring how the partnership and resulting product will drive business value — that's a red flag. A good partner will ask how your planned investment in the partnership fits with your larger business goals and strategies. They will even challenge you if they don't agree with your approach.

Even if you simply want to partner with an IT outsourcing vendor to collaborate on a short-term project, you should be open to — and value — a partner who demonstrates the ability to say, "No."

5

Question 5

Does team location matter?

You've heard the terms "onshore, nearshore, and offshore." Some companies have strong reasons for wanting their partner team to be in a specific location or time zone, be it for customer support, increased value, location-specific markets, or even a long-term strategy to establish teams in major technology hubs. But most companies simply need access to specific skills. In this scenario, it really doesn't matter where those skills are located — as long as you have the right processes in place for distributed engineering. We call this mindset "rightshoring."

GlobalLogic searches to find the people with the right skills, experience, and competencies to staff all our ISO 13485 certified locations, with a long-term plan to build a training and resource certification program for our individual team members.

We once consulted with a company who wanted a QA center in a specific location because it was a short plane ride from their local headquarters. In our opinion, the targeted location would be unable to support the skill sets and other requirements of the client, but they were insistent that they wanted a "nearshore" team.

We ended up not working with the company, and they moved forward with establishing a two-story QA center in their desired location. A year later, they were facing significant collaboration challenges, even though their teams were distributed across just two floors.

So, regardless of whether your teams are distributed across a building or across the world, what really matters is establishing solid processes and tools for distributed collaboration. For example, GlobalLogic has developed an entire science around building distributed engineering labs, which includes parameters and tools such as:

- KPIs, SLAs, and other metrics to measure the progress of a client's lab
- Communication and documentation tools like Jira, Confluence, Wiki, SharePoint
- SDLC best practices, Agile and Scrum processes, Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe)
- Escalation processes, aligned organization structures, partnership owners

6

Question 6

Do you have a team integration plan?

You've selected a partner — great! You already know that you'll need to set up the right processes, infrastructures, and technologies for distributed engineering before bringing your partner onboard. We won't go into detail about these requirements because your partner will provide you with (or at least advise you on) everything you'll need. Instead, let's talk about team integration.

One of the biggest challenges that many companies don't think about when bringing in a software engineering partner is the people aspect. We often experience pushback from a customer's in-house teams who may feel threatened about working with an "outside" partner. They may be resistant to the change or even actively undermine the partnership.

If you don't have a communications and collaboration process in place before working with your selected partner, you will face significant cultural challenges. Following are three crucial lessons that we've learned over the years to smoothly integrate our teams with our clients' teams.

Start planning at the contract level.
Many contracts are structured in a standard vendor–client format, which creates unequal footing at the very beginning of the partnership. Where you can, format your contracts to read more like a true partnership, with team incentives, MBOs, and other metrics of success that put your internal and partner teams on equal terms. In our own client partnerships, we operate under a "shared burden, shared success" mentality.

Be transparent with your internal team.
Be upfront and direct about bringing in a partner — and create a plan to win over your internal teams. Assure your teams that they are still very much valued; tell them exactly what to expect of the new partnership; and explain specifically how a partner will benefit both the company and them personally. A well-thought-out communications plan is just as important as your technology or process plans.

Integrate your teams immediately.
To further cement a "one team" mentality, create a common organization chart and make sure that your internal and partner HR teams are talking to each other regularly. Identify a partnership champion on both your end and the partner's end, and create "partnership ambassadors" among both teams by sending members to work at each other's engineering centers for a few weeks. Video chat is a great tool for real-time collaboration, but nothing compares to creating relationships in a face-to-face environment.

Conclusion

For companies that specialize in Medtech, Life Sciences, and Healthcare, finding the ideal software engineering partner can be daunting. But with the right strategies and the ability to self-assess, it can lead to enormous benefits. Beyond black and white metrics like ROI, partnering with a software product engineering company that specializes in high-quality regulated software product development can provide you with a unique outside perspective that leads to surprising new innovations — and new and expanded revenue streams!

We hope this e-guide has provided you with a valuable blueprint for selecting a software engineering partner. To learn more or to speak with one of our own experts, please reach out to info@globallogic.com.

About GlobalLogic

With more than 20 years of experience in regulated software product development and engineering services, GlobalLogic helps some of the world's leading Medical Technology, Medical Devices, Pharma, and Life Sciences organizations create world-class digital patient experiences, accelerate new product development, and capture new revenue streams.

20+ years industry experience

2,300+ industry-dedicated engineers

300+ new products

90+ clients

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