

5 Key Questions to Ask Industrial Vendors

WHY THESE QUESTIONS MATTER

The wrong supplier choice can cost businesses 10-30% of their expected savings through quality failures, delivery delays, and hidden costs. These five essential questions help you evaluate any industrial supplier's true capabilities and reliability before you sign a contract.

Important Note: While these five questions provide a proven framework for supplier evaluation, every business has unique requirements, risk tolerances, and operational constraints. Use this guide as a starting point and adapt the questions, follow-ups, and evaluation criteria to match your specific industry, company policies, and project requirements.

SUPPLIER EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Before the Meeting

- Research supplier's background and claimed capabilities
- Define your requirements, volumes, and timelines clearly
- Prepare industry-specific follow-up questions
- Set up evaluation criteria for objective comparison

During the Discussion

- Ask for specific examples and supporting data
- Take detailed notes for later comparison
- Request documentation (certificates, case studies, references)
- Listen for consistency in their responses
- Observe their communication style and responsiveness

After the Meeting

- Verify claims by checking references and certifications
- Compare responses objectively using scoring system
- Contact customer references directly
- Trust your instincts if something feels off
- Consider total value, not just initial price

THE 5 ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1 What experience do you have in our industry?

Purpose: Confirm they understand your specific requirements

Look for: Specific project examples, industry knowledge, customer references, case studies

Red flags: Generic answers, no relevant references, unfamiliarity with industry standards

2 What is your production capacity?

Purpose: Ensure they can handle your volume and growth

Look for: 70-85% utilization rates, realistic lead times, backup plans for equipment issues

Red flags: Operating at maximum capacity, unrealistic delivery promises, no contingency plans

3 How do you price your services?

Purpose: Understand total costs and avoid hidden fees

Look for: Complete cost breakdowns, transparent minimum orders, flexible payment terms

Red flags: Hidden setup fees, pricing that seems too low, reluctance to provide detailed costs

4 What certifications do you hold?

Purpose: Verify quality systems and industry compliance

Look for: Current ISO 9001, industry-specific certifications, standards, and specific metrics

Red flags: Missing required certifications, expired documents, vague quality claims

5 How do you track products through production?

Purpose: Ensure traceability for quality control and recalls

Look for: Detailed lot tracking, clear recall procedures, proactive communication systems

Red flags: Minimal tracking beyond orders, vague quality processes, defensive responses

QUESTION 1

WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE IN OUR INDUSTRY?

Every industry has unique requirements, regulations, and challenges. Experienced suppliers understand these nuances, speak your language, and can help you avoid problems that inexperienced suppliers might not recognize until it's too late.

Follow-up questions:

- Can you share examples of similar projects you've completed?
- What industry-specific challenges have you solved for other customers?
- Can you provide references from customers with similar applications?

Evaluation Notes:

QUESTION 2

WHAT IS YOUR PRODUCTION CAPACITY?

A supplier at maximum capacity has zero flexibility for your rush orders or business growth. You need suppliers with healthy utilization (70-85%) who can prioritize your needs when circumstances require it, while maintaining financial stability from consistent demand.

Follow-up questions:

- What's your current capacity utilization?
- How do you handle rush orders or unexpected demand spikes?
- What backup plans do you have if key equipment goes down?

Evaluation Notes:

QUESTION 5

HOW DO YOU TRACK PRODUCTS THROUGH PRODUCTION?

When quality issues arise, you need to know exactly which products are affected, when they were made, and what materials were used. Strong traceability enables quick recalls, effective root cause analysis, and demonstrates organizational discipline that extends to all operations.

Follow-up questions:

- Can you walk me through how you track a part from raw material to delivery?
- How would you identify affected products if there was a quality issue?
- What's your process for handling and communicating quality problems?

Evaluation Notes:

SUPPLIER COMPARISON SCORECARD

Scoring Guide: 1 = Poor, 2 = Below Average, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent

Criteria	Supplier A	Supplier B	Supplier C
Certifications (1-5)			
Capacity & Reliability (1-5)			
Pricing Transparency (1-5)			
Industry Experience (1-5)			
Quality Systems (1-5)			
Communication (1-5)			
References (1-5)			
Total Score			

Next Steps

1. **Use this guide** during every supplier evaluation meeting
2. **Score each supplier** using the comparison scorecard
3. **Check references** thoroughly before making final decisions
4. **Consider total value** including support, reliability, and long-term partnership potential

Need help finding qualified suppliers? Visit IndustrialWebSearch.com to connect with suppliers who have documented their certifications, capabilities, and industry experience.