

How to find out which ERP best fits your needs



Having the right ERP system is critically important for the future health of your company. While it may be true that ERP systems are more alike than different – all contain the same core functionality, more or less – those relatively minor differences are what make the system appropriate, usable and beneficial to your organization.

There are many ERP products available, and many products are offered in variations that are “tailored” to specific industries. Each supplier will tout the superiority of its products, but only you can decide which system best fits your needs. Here’s how:

Functionality

Most companies spend far too much time and energy looking for functional perfection and not enough time on the other factors (listed below). Focus on software that fits your business. That is, it is successfully installed and in use at companies in your industry, preferably companies of about your size.

Also, no packaged solution will be an exact fit for your needs. Look for flexibility. The best solutions will allow you to tailor functions and procedures easily without programming. Perhaps the most important characteristic to look for is the admittedly over-used term, “user friendly.” The look-and-feel of the system must fit in with the way your users operate day-to-day. It is important that the new system makes things easier, not harder. If the new procedures are inconvenient, users will revert to their old spreadsheets and manual procedures and that will sabotage the potential benefits of your new ERP.

Product Maturity

It’s nice to have the “latest and greatest,” but it’s risky to be on the “bleeding edge” of technology. You should look for a system that has been field tested and proven in actual use... in your industry. A reputable ERP supplier will continuously update its products to include the latest technology and functionality. Those flashy new features and functions that look so attractive in the “new” ERP system will make their way into the tried-and-true system after they have been proven in the market. The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese. Talk to current users of the system you are considering. Let them tell you how good it is and how the supplier is about delivering upgrades and improvements.

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The Software Provider

Your ERP provider will be a partner for the long term, not just a supplier of a product. Be as sure as you can be that they will be around for the long haul. Check their financial stability – do they have the resources to support the product in the coming years? Look at their track record for clues about how well they support customers and improve the product over time. You can't guarantee future company viability or predict mergers and acquisitions with any level of certainty but you can play the odds – look for more stable companies with solid resources and a higher likelihood of staying the course.

Community

Look for a community consisting of implementation and consulting partners, satisfied users, as well as user groups, discussion threads and conferences. These resources provide considerable added value beyond what you get from the supplier. Talk to as many of these folks as you can and get their take on the quality of the product, support, and future prospects. And be sure to take advantage of these resources as you implement and use your new system.

Truth in advertising

Beware of a deal that sounds too good to be true – because it probably is. In a competitive market, less reputable suppliers might “lowball” their offering to get the business and then surprise you with less than adequate support, higher implementation costs, insufficient user training or additional costs for necessary software, services or assistance. Beware of the low bid – make sure the vendor's proposals are “apples to apples” when comparing costs. Also ask the vendors about on-going costs so you can get a clear view of total cost of ownership over a reasonable time period – at least 5 to 7 years.

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