



Choosing an ERP implementation partner



Selecting the right ERP is only the first step in moving to your new solution. You must also decide who is going to help you put the system into action – your implementation partner. Your successful implementation will depend as much on your finding the right partner as with finding the right software.

ERP affects nearly all of your employees and nearly every aspect of your business. By collecting, managing and distributing information, ERP helps coordinate activities and keeps all areas of the business working toward the common company objectives of satisfying customers while controlling costs and maximizing the use of resources. ERP is such an important part of your company's management structure, the implementation and use of the system has to be done right. You can't afford to "do it yourself" – after all, most people only experience one or two ERP implementations during their career. You need the help of experienced experts to guide you through the process and help you achieve the benefits of your new system.

Experience is the most important characteristic for your implementation partner – preferably experience with companies in your industry. They must understand how your business operates and how the new system will support your objectives. Beyond that, you will want to verify that the partner has the following:

References

The candidate partner should have a track record of successful projects similar to yours and should mention them throughout the sales process. If you do not hear any names, beware. Also listen for (and ask for) background and references for the specific consultants that will be working on your project.

Honesty

Are they realistic about the time frame and costs, or are they "low balling" to get the business? Don't cut corners. Does the partner candidate understand the scope of work and provided a realistic estimate of what it takes in terms of their involvement and additional costs? Have they demonstrated you how much they really know about your industry and its challenges?

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Quality consultants

Unless you are dealing with a small firm (only one or a few consultants), you may meet their “star” consultants who might not be assigned to your project. Be sure to get (in writing) a roster of consultants who will be working on your project and vet their length and diversity of experience. Meet them or conduct phone interviews just as you would with a potential employee. Does the partner firm have a “bench” of consultants that can provide back-up and assistance if needed?

Focus

If the candidate firm is a local company with a small handful of employees, your project will get a lot of attention but the firm may not have sufficient resources to properly serve your company and any others they may be working with. On the other hand, if it is a mega-firm, you will not likely be one of their biggest clients and you are likely to get “second string” resources – your needs will always be secondary to their bigger clients. Choose the firm that best meets the above criteria but understand their position right from the start.

It may not be easy to verify these qualifications, but it's worth the effort to properly vet implementation partner candidates. Your success depends on it.

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