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How To Successfully Select An ERP System in Eight Simple Steps

Introduction

An Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system is a series of software applications or modules that collects data from your sales, purchasing, finance, inventory, supply chain, manufacturing and quality functions into a common database so that your company can share the information, coordinate activities and collaborate.

If you're looking for your first ERP system or looking to upgrade from an existing system, the evaluation, selection and implementation process is a long-term strategic decision for your organization.

The Steps

To help you through this process, here are eight simple steps for a successful ERP system selection.

Step 1: Evaluation

Form an evaluation committee that includes top management, functional experts and end-users from the different departments within your company. Consider hiring external consultants to assist. Throughout the selection process, end each step with a consensus of all members to gain enterprise-wide acceptance of the final ERP system.

Step 2: Make An Assessment

Assess your existing business processes and the scale of your operation, so you can determine what's being done well. Identify the gaps or key challenges that can be solved with the help of an ERP system.

Step 3: Establish Criteria

Develop your selection criteria to evaluate the available solutions. Criteria can include features, price, platform, and anything else your committee can think of. Group the criteria according to importance to your business, i.e. very important, important, and less important. Assign a score to each to make the evaluation easier.

Here are some example criteria:

- *Industry Expertise*. How well does the ERP vendor understand your industry? Does the vendor offer industry best practices or pre-defined processes that are generalized or horizontally focused? ERP solutions should at the very least address your mission critical business requirements specific to your industry.

- *Total Cost of Ownership*. Determine the long-term TCO for hardware, software, and support—pre and post implementation.

- *Multi-Site Operations Support*. If you need to collaborate with multiple operations then ensure your ERP vendor can support multi-site operations. Can your ERP vendor support all your locations with a small centralized IT staff? Do they require complicated architectures?

- *Customer Support*. Does the ERP vendor have its own in-house support or does it outsource? You'll gain the most out of your investment if you have access to a customer care center that can answer your key application and technical

questions, solve your complex technical or software related issues, and advise on best industry practices.

Step 4: Schedule Consultations

Arrange a 10-minute phone consultation with both a sales representative and product expert from as many different ERP vendors as possible. This "discovery call" will provide you with better insight on the vendor and its solution than if you were to rely solely on brochures and sales literature.

Step 5: Create a Shortlist

Shortlist three to five ERP solutions that best meet your business needs. Your discovery calls will have helped you eliminate the solutions which are poor fits.

Step 6: Make Contact

Contact the vendors of your shortlisted ERP systems to arrange presentations and product demonstrations.

Step 7: Prepare Questions That Address Your Concerns

How each vendor responds will help you determine the best fit for your company.

Step 8: Check Vendor References

Visit and consult companies where the ERP system has been implemented. Find out if the system is working as expected, and what the company likes or dislikes. If there were issues, then determine how the vendor resolved them.

Conclusion

Your evaluation committee should now be able to select an ERP solution based on how well it met your selection criteria, how it performed during the demonstration, and how the references checked out.

Finally, with your selected ERP vendor, spend the time to scope the entire project, from start to finish. Work with your ERP vendor to map your critical milestones and chart your course to success.

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