

ERP BUYER'S GUIDE

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT ERP
SOFTWARE AND SUPPLIER



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ERP Buyer's Guide

How to choose the right ERP software and supplier

Whether you are considering investing in an ERP solution for the first time or you are replacing an existing solution, there are lots of things to consider.

We've been helping people solve their system problems and streamline processes for years – and by writing this guide, hopefully many more.

Within this guide you will find hints and tips on...

- What a good system should offer you
- What to look for when selecting a system
- How to choose the right supplier
- How to ensure your new system is future-proof and can grow with your business
- What to avoid when searching for the right solution

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What exactly is ERP?

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) is a term used to describe software that encompasses all business processes, including customer relationships, sales, marketing, accounting, stock, human resources and much more.

With all processes managed from a single system, data from your day-to-day activities can be analysed to fuel business strategy.

Top Tip

A good ERP solution will help manage your business more efficiently, providing your entire workforce with a real-time view of operations, streamlining processes to improve productivity, resulting in a sound return on investment (ROI).

What will a good ERP system do for me?

We get asked this all the time – the answer? A properly configured, adopted and implemented ERP system can give you greater visibility allowing you to improve margins and drive business growth.

Get it wrong

You may end up with a system that can jeopardise your business processes, affecting employee productivity and ultimately revenue.

Get it right

You'll get one central system to manage all your business operations, enabling staff to focus on business growth rather than business administration tasks.



The benefits of an ERP system

A single view of your business

Each business area can be managed using a central system, providing everyone with real-time access to the information they need.

Enhanced customer service

With everyone within your organisation accessing the "same version of the truth", customer service levels are enhanced dramatically.

Improved productivity

Streamline business processes and automate workflows, enhancing efficiency and productivity without the need to recruit additional staff.

Reduced costs

With improved planning, tracking and forecasting, ERP software can dramatically reduce your inventory costs.

In-depth reporting

Easily report on all business areas to identify opportunities and weaknesses to make better informed decisions.

Data accuracy

With a single system to manage your entire business, data only needs to be entered once, improving data accuracy.



How to choose the right ERP software?

What works for one business may not for another. Therefore, it's important to look for a solution that meets your requirements. Key aspects to consider:

Support

Selecting a system available from multiple partners provides greater support options.

Look for a supplier who can offer a range of support services to meet your business needs.

Reporting

Many software solutions offer standardised reports, however, the option to customise them or build your own will prove invaluable.

Look out for ERP tools that enable you to export reports into Excel, to manipulate and format them to suit your requirements.

CRM capabilities

Customer Relationship Management(CRM) software is designed to improve and strengthen customer relationships.

Be sure to find a system with complete CRM capabilities to help you increase customer retention.

Customisation

No two businesses are the same and it is unlikely an off-the-shelf product will match how you operate exactly.

Look for a solution that can be adapted to reflect your processes, including personalised dashboards, reports and workflows.

Mobility

With flexible and remote working on the rise, mobility is a significant driver for the adoption of business software.

Look for an ERP solution with Cloud or mobile accessibility, enabling anytime, anywhere access.

Business Intelligence (BI)

The ability to interpret your business data is advantageous in a competitive marketplace, to drive business strategy.

Look for a system with BI in order to help you analyse and interpret your data into meaningful acumen.



SaaS, IaaS or On Premise Install?

When it comes to implementing an ERP solution, one of the areas that is often forgotten is the hosting or install requirements. Traditionally ERP solutions have been installed on premise or in the cloud via Infrastructure as a service solution (IaaS). However, many key ERP providers now offer Software as a Service offerings (SaaS), allowing you to implement the solution without having to take on the task of an IT refresh or upgrade at the same time. Things to consider:

On-Premise

- Requires large upfront purchase for software licences and hardware
- High annual maintenance costs for support and functionality upgrades
- You are responsible for the data security
- You are responsible for the maintaining your IT Infrastructure
- You enter into a hardware refresh cycle

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)

- Little to no upfront hardware costs
- Monthly payments cover user license and hardware resources
- Only pay for what you use, easily scale the solution to meet demand
- High level security options
- Minimal in-house IT expertise is required

Software as a Service (SaaS)

- Low up front cost
- May reduce the complexity of your existing IT
- Faster implementation time
- Monthly Fee
- Scalable and Flexible
- Centrally managed

How much will it cost?

Every customer has different requirements that will influence the cost of the project. These can include:

- Business size
- Number of users
- Functionality
- Customisation requirements
- Deployment method
- Support and maintenance needs

When evaluating the cost of ERP implementation, it is worth remembering that the initial outlay for an on-premise solution is usually only one of the costs associated with the purchase of the software. On top of the price of the software licences, there is an additional support and maintenance contract which is charged annually.

Should you decide on a Cloud system, despite a lower upfront investment, Cloud applications can be more costly over the course of the system's life cycle, increasing total cost of ownership (TCO). On the other hand, the benefits include high levels of security and worry-free IT as compatibility and upgrades are taken care of by the Cloud service provider.

Ultimately, it is down to your requirements.

How to avoid paying twice?

When looking for an ERP solution, it is important to think about your future needs as well as your current objectives:

- Can I easily add/remove users if my business grows?
- Are there restrictions on the number of records that can be held?
- Can I easily add more functionality?
- Is the upgrade path straightforward?

Software upgrades can be costly, therefore if you decide not to consider the future, you could end up paying twice...

How do I select the right supplier?

Once you have identified what you are looking for, you must select a provider. Here are some considerations for your supplier selection process:

Should I buy direct from the software vendor or through a reseller?

In most cases, software vendors prefer to sell through business partners who can offer a tailored service and have significant experience in implementation, development, training and support.

Do they understand my needs?

A good supplier will provide a pre-consultancy service to discuss your business processes and requirements. This will allow them to advise you of the best solution available to you.

Do they have the relevant experience?

A supplier must be able to demonstrate relevant experience and provide you with reference sites that illustrate past successful implementations.

Can they tailor a solution to meet my needs?

The right supplier will work with you and your team to ensure that every aspect is properly considered and that the correct configuration is achieved in the timescale promised.

Do they offer training?

Providers should offer numerous training options – classroom sessions, one-to-one tuition and bespoke courses, at your site or on their premises, to help you get a good return on investment.

Are they committed?

Make sure the software is supplied with an annual support contract that is available during office hours. It is also in your interest to check how they are contactable.

Do they demonstrate longevity?

It is important to identify whether your chosen supplier has successfully implemented solutions in the past and can demonstrate long term commitment.

Are they credible?

While researching the credibility of the company, check to see if they have received any awards that reflect their innovation and success.



Technical considerations

To ensure the solution you choose will grow with your business and adapt to your changing needs, you need a system with the following qualities:

Scalability

When researching ERP software it's important to consider what modules/functionality are available, as you may wish to add more later on.

TOP TIP: Look for a solution where you can easily scale up or down and add new users and companies.

Simple upgrade path

To get the most out of your ERP system you will need to upgrade to the newer versions, but upgrading some systems can be time consuming and costly.

TOP TIP: Be sure to check the upgrade path, should the need arise.

Flexibility

With many businesses employing field-based staff or permitting employees to work from home, the demand for accessibility to data is on the rise.

TOP TIP: To achieve high levels of flexibility, look for a system that includes a mobile application for easy access when on the move.

8 steps to a successful ERP implementation

To ensure a successful implementation, be aware of the most common pitfalls:

1. Reputable supplier

When choosing a provider, don't just go with the cheapest or quickest option.

Do your research and check their accreditations, reputation, experience and financial stability and client references. Don't hesitate to ask any questions. Transparency should be paramount.

2. Process mapping

To help your supplier understand how your business operates, it is important to map your existing processes.

This will help identify ways to streamline and automate your processes within your ERP system for productivity gains.

3. Dedicate adequate time and resource

Dedicate the resource and time to your ERP project to ensure that your scope and meets your requirements.

Choose a supplier with a clear methodology to ensure your implementation aligns with your business goals, and one that provides a clear plan, outlining timings, resource and costs, so you can budget accordingly.

4. Security

Your data is your most valuable asset, therefore it is imperative to protect it.

Consider role-based permissions to protect sensitive data and control access on mobile devices, as open networks are vulnerable.

5. Compliance

If software is engineered outside the UK, it may not adhere to legislation which could result in legal action if there are any discrepancies.

Check your software is compliant with the relevant legislation, including data protection laws and HMRC accreditations.

6. Data preparation

Moving to a single system from disparate applications requires careful and time consuming data preparation.

It's important you allocate enough time to carefully review and clean your data, before migrating it to the new system. Talk to your supplier to make sure that you align your data with the new system requirements.

7. User adoption

Introduce your project to employees early on, communicate its benefits and break down adoption into manageable stages.

A software ambassador can help with communication and adoption, along with having a "go-to" for knowledge of the new system.

8. Training

If you are making a significant investment in ERP, training is essential to maximise your use of the system and all the automation benefits that it provides.

Talk to your supplier and make sure that there is a clear program of training from the start and refresher training where needed. This will ensure that everyone is using the system as intended.



Checklist

To help you make your decision, please use our buyer's checklist.

Before embarking on a project, get your homework done first:

- Evaluate processes within each department
- Put together a team to work on your project
- Appoint a project leader
- Form a list of key functions for new ERP system
- Start discussions with supplier(s)

Things to discuss with your supplier:

- The options available to you:
 - Accessibility
 - Functionality
 - Deployment
 - Training
 - Support
- Installation process—what is involved?
- Timescales
- Pricing

Lisburn

Knockmore Hill Industrial Park,
11 Ferguson Drive, Lisburn,
Co.Antrim,
BT28 2EX
Telephone: 028 9267 7533

Peterborough

Churchill House, Isis Way,
Minerva Business Park, Lynch
Wood, Peterborough,
PE2 6QR
Telephone: 01733 362 120

Glasgow

Nasmyth Building, Nasmyth
Avenue,
East Kilbride, Glasgow, South
Lanarkshire, G75 0QU
Telephone: 013 5581 3185

E: enquiries@xperience-group.com

W: www.xperience-group.com