

THE NECESSARY STEPS TO SOFTWARE SELECTION:  
**Avoiding the Common Pitfalls in Selecting and  
Implementing a New Solution**

## Holding on to Legacy Processes

When it comes to software selection there are some common pitfalls companies fall into. For example, when examining current technology, one of the most important questions to ask is if your current systems are creating limitations to how you work today. It is important to examine your internal processes and methods: Are these processes happening in a manner in which you would like to run your business or how you are forced to run it due to the limitations of current software?

There are certain factors that force most companies to change technology: One, if customers are demanding things that their current software won't allow, eventually forcing them to add overhead; two, if they have a system for many years and have grown to the point of where they are carrying out processes in such a convoluted way to get around all of those problems of not having an updated system that they realize technology is holding them back from growing.

### **COMMON PITFALLS**

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- ✓ Holding on to Legacy Processes
- ✓ Requirements Control
- ✓ Being Too Ambitious Right Away
- ✓ Not Committing to the Implementation

Take, for example, a company that realizes it currently has four or five people entering information into Excel, creating reports, making copies, etc., because their current system cannot do these things efficiently. If you price out a system and compare that against what it costs to pay and employ the four or five people being used to carry out these tasks, it can create a revelation.

Many times people are caught up with doing what they are trying to do for business and never look at financial and business applications as a tool for their business. If you were using a bad tool or piece of machinery in the field, you would not hesitate to buy a new one, because you need to keep quality and productivity up. Companies need to look at technology in the same light.

One of the most difficult tasks for companies to accomplish is documenting what they do and how they do it, and then finding a system that matches. This can result in one of two scenarios: You find companies that either put together an RFP with all types of requirements, or they invite vendors to come in and show them what they have.

A vendor should ask you to demonstrate typical scenarios that you use on jobs. Based on this the vendor should be able to show you the application tailored to the way you do business.

When implementing software your organization can either change to meet the requirements of the software or the software can change to meet the needs of your organization. The latter way will definitely provide great flexibility for you in the long run allowing the software to grow with you throughout the years.

## Keep Requirements under Control

Overall, throughout the process it is important to keep one little tip in mind: Always protect against an escalation in requirements. This is where your list of requirements established upfront begins to escalate during the demonstration based on the suggestions pitch might seem overwhelming and some of their suggestions may be relevant, it is important to stick to your guns. The truth of the matter is they do not know the needs of your business and in essence could just be trying to sell you more software than you will ever need. The best way to avoid this escalation is to have a clear and precise list of requirements for your system, as defined by your selection committee.

## Being More Ambitious than the Company Can Withstand

While it is important to see the full picture when it comes to selecting software, it is important to not bite off more than the company can chew, so to speak. It is important to think about, for example, what you need to do for job cost or service, and also keep in mind how this will impact all of your current internal systems.

However, it is very important to get an accurate budget and understand all that is included in the system. From there you will understand what to include during initial implementation as opposed to what things you should expect to phase in over time. This will ultimately impact the way you bid a system as well.

If you identify a need for things such as Web portals or mobile applications, for example, down the line, but not initially, ensure your vendor can explain in great detail how that integration process will work and the impact it will have on your entire infrastructure.

The ultimate outcome is that you get an apples-to-apples comparison, i.e., if the vendor doesn't have certain functionality what will it cost to build it? You need to take this into consideration in order to get the proper vantage point of the solutions.

## Not Fully Appreciating the Organizational Commitment Required For the Implementation

While we are simply at the stage of talking about software selection, when it does come down to making that final decision companies need to have the end goal in mind, i.e., the implementation phase. In some cases companies plan for implementation with three people doing it part time, but in reality what they truly needed was 10 people working on it full time. This is not to say that your implementation will require this amount of manpower, but it's best to prepare. Avoid the old notion of trying to implement software 'part time on Friday afternoons.'

Ensure you have budgeted enough of your own people's time to learn the system and operate it most efficiently after implementation. It's not uncommon for a contractor to get burned by a vendor that says they will come in and demonstrate how the product works, provide them with the proper manuals, and then allow the company to take it from there. Software is rarely plug-and-play. If you don't budget adequately for your own people's time to be trained and become comfortable using the system you will ultimately lose out in the long run.

Companies need to understand the entire impact on internal resources and time: What it will take to get selection and implementation accomplished and then get the system up and moving with little problems. Companies must commit to the technology, training, end-user adoption, refinement over time, etc.

It is true that if you do not have staff with enough time to implement the system the vendor can provide additional resources as an alternative. But you must understand that this will come with a cost. In the end it becomes a matter of using either a soft cost (your people's time) or a hard cost (the vendor's time). Keep in mind that the latter will cause your overall cost of the system to escalate.

## **Do Not Let IT Run the Show**

Typically you want the software selection process to be driven by an operational employee. The thought here is that if you can get operations leading the way, it will give you a leg up on the key aspects required for things like job costing and service,. As emphasized earlier, it is not a wise move to simply leave the process to someone that has extra time, nor should this become an IT project. In many cases IT does not understand the full scope and process of what is needed on a day-to-day basis from an operational and financial perspective for the software.

In conclusion, choosing the best operational software for your company doesn't need to be a daunting task. It can be tackled in manageable pieces that allow you and your organization to evaluate your requirements, evaluate your options and make the best selection, and then go through a well-planned and executed implementation.