

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN ERP TECHNOLOGY PARTNER

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Many IT decision makers consider evaluating a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system from as early as every three years to as far out as seven years or longer. This might be an evaluation for an on-premise or cloud-based ERP solution.

Beyond the desire for improved functionality and seamless integrations with new technologies, business and IT leaders often rethink their current solutions with the expectation of finding a provider that offers greater support. Organizations need software experts who are committed partners capable of setting them up for long-term success.

Given today's evolving economic climate, this relationship evolution is no surprise. From planning and training to ongoing software maintenance, an ERP deployment is no small undertaking—both in terms of cost and scope. The bottom line: To navigate today's

market conditions, identifying the right ERP solution provider is one of the most important decisions IT leaders make.

Why Today's ERP Customers Need More Support

Most organizations feel confident navigating the initial phases of their ERP deployment but need additional assistance from providers in the later stages of the process. These include the planning, data migration, training, go-live and maintenance stages.

In part, the need for increased solution support stems from the complexity of modern ERP systems. Today's businesses rely on ERP systems to facilitate applications from financials, sales and order processing, inventory and warehouse management to supply and demand as well as material requirements planning. As these applications are integral to operations, the logistics of implementing and maintaining solutions grow even more crucial.

The successful implementation and maintenance of modern ERP systems require industry-specific knowledge, the ability to integrate multiple sources of data and cross-departmental collaboration. Many organizations don't have the internal teams, time and expertise to see these required initiatives through to completion and on a timely basis.

At the same time, the economic landscape has caused many to tighten belts across industries. With budgets under greater scrutiny, the pressure is on organizations to both stay within spending thresholds and achieve maximum return on technology investments. Inefficient upfront planning of software rollouts can lead to scope creep and cost overruns, which is why it's critical to find a provider that will support and help you get the most out of your ERP solution.

Your ERP Solution Provider Checklist

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With a number of leading ERP solution providers to choose from for your industry, how do you evaluate which solution partner is right for your business? A good ERP solution provider should offer support throughout the process to maximize the value of the investment and help you navigate today's market conditions with confidence. Ask these three questions to identify a solution provider ready to go above and beyond for your business.

1. Will the provider offer personalized, ongoing support?

Ideally, a provider should designate a team of experts for your project for start-to-finish support. Teams should include a project manager to ensure you stay on schedule and avoid scope creep, an account manager to handle communications and technical experts with knowledge specific to your industry and customers. Subject matter expertise is critical to maintaining compliance with industry-specific standards and regulations.

This embedded expertise is also the key to ensuring a provider's capabilities and tools align with your unique needs. The demands of a manufacturing company and an e-commerce retailer look different—and their tech solutions

should, too. Providers rolling out blanket ERP programs aren't the right fit. Instead, look for a customized project plan for your business.

Once the new ERP system is deployed, are you confident the provider's support will continue? Post-deployment is a crucial time for providers to check in with you, offer additional training and determine whether adjustments are required. Additional post-go-live meetings might be required to share feedback that all applications are functioning optimally and expectations of improvement over the previous system are being met.

2. Will the provider offer ongoing training?

Employee training is a critical step in any organization's ERP process. An ERP solution is only as effective as the people behind it and how well they're trained.

End users within your organization must receive the right training, with content and language tailored to their business functions and technical knowledge. For instance, you don't need to train marketing employees on an ERP solution's accounts payable function. If every employee within your organization receives the same

training, people are more likely to forget information pertinent to their specific roles, wasting time, money and effort in the process.

Your provider should offer guidance on which training is the best fit for each group involved, ensuring relevant information and ongoing support are available across the enterprise. The ERP provider should also offer different types of training, such as on-premise, remote and specific to detailed functions.

3. Will the provider assist with data integration and maintenance?

Data migration and integration is one of the most important and challenging aspects of an ERP deployment. Poor scoping and a lack of expertise lead to duplicate or missing data that hinder decision making and create larger problems down the line.

At the same time, access to clean, structured data—and capabilities like predictive analytics and visualization—helps you better navigate changing market conditions and shore up your bottom line. During the project planning phase, providers should determine which data they'll extract from your predecessor systems so you have access to

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accurate, high-quality data in your new system. Providers should also continually check in as your business needs and systems evolve to ensure your data is working for you, not against you.

Today's business leaders hold

their ERP solution providers to increasingly higher standards, and they also have access to more provider options than ever before. However, there are many factors to consider during this high-stakes decision, and partnering with a provider that

isn't a good fit can impact your growth and success. With the help of a provider that puts your needs first, you can get the most out of your ERP investment and maintain operational efficiencies suited for any future business market needs.

