A Buyer's Guide to Choosing the Right ERP Software
By Walt Goodfield

The ERP software industry is more competitive today than ever before. Not only have the products and technology evolved, but most customers are purchasing second or third generation ERP solutions - so they are better-informed about the process of evaluation, selection, and implementation.

If you're a customer in the midst of making a buying decision, this guide can help simplify the process into a concept we call the **3 P's** of software selection: **Publisher**, **Product**, and **Partner**.

Publisher

When selecting a publisher (or software vendor), buyers should consider:

- The financial stability of the company representing the ERP product's longevity

- The publishers investment in technology and reinvestment of revenues into development, and continuous improvement, of the product

- The publishers growth which indicates its relevance with recent buyers (is it a legacy system?)

- The publishers commitment to industry-specific capabilities (Distribution, Manufacturing, etc)

- The publishers stability of the executive team and key managers which allows for strategies and initiatives managed to completion

- The publishers ability to nurture and develop future leaders promoting thought leadership, ideas from within, and leader succession going forward

- The publishers website presence and availability of information

"Regardless of software publisher or product, the variable that has the greatest impact on a successful ERP project is selection of the implementation partner. It also represents the greatest area of risk for many buyers."

Product

When selecting a product, buyers should consider:

- Out-of-box features and compatibility with the functional requirements, reducing the potential complexity of managing customizations and third party add-ons

- The user interface and ease-of-use accelerating user adoption and reducing learning curves

- Industry penetration and customer references indicating success in the markets it serves

- Future product roadmaps that include adoption of new technologies, hybrid deployment options, and releases that are focused on features and capabilities versus fixes and patches.

Partner

Regardless of the publisher and product though, the variable that has the greatest impact on a successful project is the selection of an implementation partner. It also represents the greatest area of risk for many buyers. When comparing partners, the customer should consider:

- The profiles and resumes of the partner's support, consultant, and project management teams

- Customer references focusing on successful projects and industry expertise

- The partner's relationship with the software publisher. Is there collaboration with the publisher to fill services delivery gaps? Is the partner fully trained, certified, and in good standing with the publisher? Can you locate the partner's company from the publisher's website? All of these indicate the relationship, importance, and cooperation among the partner and publisher.

- Does the partner understand your business and requirements? Did the partner address the requirements with specific solutions using your terminology, processes and workflows, sample data, and exhibit proof with reports and dashboards?

- Did the partner present detailed implementation methodologies customized for your needs? Is there project management, go-live readiness, milestone and frequent assessment reviews built into the plan?

- Is the Partner actively involved in industry associations, groups, and memberships?

The Bottom Line

Buying new ERP software can be complicated. But simplifying the process into the 3 P's helps buyers structure the selection criteria, identify areas of risk, and create a framework to compare and contrast solutions objectively.

About the Author

Walt Goodfield has spent 20 years in various roles in the ERP market. Currently he is the VP of Sales and Marketing at RKL eSolutions, driving revenue growth through customer acquisition and strategic business partner alliances.

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