Five Pitfalls of Application Package Selection

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Getting started.

You have decided that it is time to purchase a software application to help you run and grow your company. Whether you are a relatively small company replacing a manual process or a larger company that has outgrown the current mission critical software the challenges you face are similar. The first challenge is to select the correct package for your company. In this article we will discuss some pitfalls that should be avoided in order to help you select this application package.

1. Looking at packages, instead of looking for a package.

The common conception of the first step in the selection process is to start looking at what is available in the market. This is certainly an important step, but it is not the first step. This leads you to looking at packages without knowing what you are looking for in a package. Take some time to develop a list of key requirements of the organization. Discuss the needs of other people within your company to help generate a complete list of requirements. Then look at what is available with this list in hand.

2. Canned demos, instead of scripted demos.

When you have narrowed the choices down to your "short" list you want to see these packages in action via a demo. Each vendor and software package has their own set of items that they handle exceptionally well. If you let them run the demo fully you will see all of these. However, you want to judge the packages based on your requirements. It is fine to allow the vendor to have some demo time to show the best of the package, but it is more important to script the demo so that you see how it handles your needs. In this way you will be able to compare the merits of each of the packages.

3. Making this an Information Technology project.

Many companies feel that anything on a computer is the purview of the Information Technology Department. However, people in many other areas of your company will use the package to do their job better. This includes accounting, operations, clerical, and management. These are the people that help run your business. This is a business project and your most trusted business people should participate in the selection process.
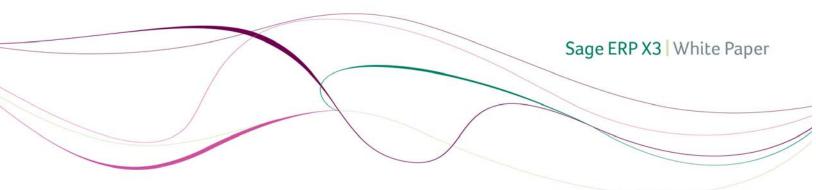
4. Not involving Information Technology at all.

Don't allow the business people to select the package and then leave it to the IT Department to sort out the details of getting it installed and useable. Although the business requirements are paramount it is also important to get a package considering the technology it uses. You want to make sure that it uses well-known de facto standards. Or you may want a package that uses technology your staff is already familiar with. In other words, the technology is part of your requirements.

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5. Not planning for future potential uses.

This pitfall is a little subtler than the others, but it can lead to a quick dead end. Don't look at the requirements of a narrowly focused set of needs that you plan on implementing first, such as your accounting. You may be tempted to only review packages based on those requirements. However, this could lead you to select a package that is good for your accounting, but not good for your operations.

Conclusion – Decide to do something!

Selecting and then implementing an enterprise-wide system is a difficult process, but it's one of the most important projects you will ever be involved with for your company. This is not a reason to decide on doing nothing, but is a good reason to seek advice and guidance from others in your industry. The most common comment we hear from companies of all sizes at the start of a selection project is "we can't afford to be doing this again in 2 or 3 years." If you avoid these pitfalls you will obtain a package that will work for you for many years to come.

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