

Things to look for when choosing software

When replacing software, you are replacing not only applications, but a relationship with a vendor. These evaluations should take product, service and continued support into account. This document will walk you through what to look for in the company you will be partnering with.

KNOW THE COMPANY

Let's look at the continued support aspect first. In order to receive continued support, look at the company as a whole. Choose a software vendor with the following qualities in mind. Look for companies that have:

1. A Good Track Record

You want a vendor that has a good track record. This means satisfied customers, high customer retention and a vendor that continues to bring in new customers.

2. Continued Investment in Technology

Look for a company that continues to invest in R&D. This doesn't have to be shiny, new objects. It can be deep, rich functionality that increases the user's experience. Ask the company what their investment in R&D is over and above the M&S fees.

3. Low Employee Turnover

Satisfied employees help ensure satisfied customers. Ask the vendor what their employee turnover rate is. If it is high, attention to the customers may suffer.

4. Industry Experts on Staff

You want the consultant you are working with to understand the demands of your day-to-day job. Having industry experts on staff helps the development of the product as well as the support of the software.

5. Industry Specific Products

Since the Oil & Gas industry has unique requirements, you want a software vendor who is focused on those complex needs.

6. Focuses on Core Competencies

Watch out for companies that think they can be good at everything. Look for companies that focus on their proficiency and partners with complementary products. As Aristotle said "The whole is more than the sum of its parts."

7. Global Focus vs. Regional Focus

A software vendor that focuses on your needs as well as the needs of oil and gas companies globally will be better equipped to handle your changing business requirements.

SUPERIOR SOLUTIONS

Products that solve your business problems will be those products that are developed from the customer's perspective. Best-in-class solutions share a series of common traits including full integration, intuitive ease of use, system scalability, transparent access to information, business compliance, and automated business processes. Here's what to look for:

1. Integration

Shared data within a single platform enables better decision-making and eliminates the wasteful silo effect that cost companies money.

2. Scalability

If the business plan of the company is to grow, look for software that can meet today's needs and tomorrow's demands.

3. Access to information

To make the best possible business decision, you need easily accessible, up-to-speed information at your fingertips. Your solution should enable leading-edge analysis tools that offer high-level dynamic reports with the ability to drill down to detail, allowing you to examine or project business outcomes in different ways.

4. Automation

Routine business process, if automated, saves hundreds or thousands of man-hours each year. Look for solutions that handle your complex business scenarios without external spreadsheets being required.

THREE BASIC STEPS

1. Do your research - learn about the company
2. Look for solutions that are fully integrated, process automated, intuitive, scalable and business compliant
3. Ask questions

5. Ease of use

The functions of software systems for the oil and gas industry are inherently complex, yet must mask the complexity with a simple, intuitive interface that makes it easy to use. User friendliness = efficiency = savings.

6. Compliance

Both public and private companies are concerned about compliance, either Sarbanes-Oxley or regulatory; or you just want to ensure data integrity. Look for systems that have security controls in place and are completely auditable.

VENDOR QUESTIONS

If a vendor has been successful in the oil and gas industry, they must have the features and functions that fulfill the regulatory and operational requirements of their clients. In a software evaluation, these features and functions are typically 'check boxes' during an evaluation.

They are the 'must haves' and are too vast to list here. You probably have a thousand questions to ask your vendor. Here are a few you should be sure to ask:

1. How configurable is the software?

- Can it be configured to the way you do business?
- Or do you have to adapt your business to fit the software?

2. Do you have an 'oops' button?

- Can I undo post items in a trial mode?
- Can I undo an allocation?
- How do I fix something I did wrong?

3. What does your service delivery management look like?

- Tell me about your implementation process.

- Tell me about the conversion process.
- Will I have a dedicated team?
- How much time commitment will be expected of me and my staff?
- What happens when the implementation is over? Who supports me then?

4. Tell me about training.

- It is in house, or at your training center?
- Will we all have hands on with a computer?
- Do you have classes over the internet?
- What is the follow-up after training?

5. How is your online documentation?

- Is there help for each screen?
- Are the processes well documented?
- Do you provide flowcharts of all the processes?

6. Do you have dedicated Customer Support Call Center?

- How are they trained?
- Can they read the code in the program?
- Do they have access to programmers?
- If they find a bug, how soon is it fixed and delivered?
- How are my issues being tracked?
- What's the escalation method? Who do I go to when I'm not being helped?
- Does someone answer the phone?

CONCLUSION

Choosing a software application and its associated vendor is a difficult process. Do your homework - research the company and product thoroughly; interview the vendor's customers; schedule site visits with a customer; attend user forums. Make an informed decision and finally, enjoy a long and fruitful relationship with the vendor.



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