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# Your ERP is Going to Be Your New BFF — Choose Wisely

 MARCH 20, 2014  ANNICK STAHL

When you were a kid, did your report card say something like, "Artemis plays well with others and is always willing to share and try new things,"? Or, was it more along the lines of, "Apollo is very secretive and seems to want to keep all the toys and books to himself,"?

ERPs have personalities just like people do. Some are good at a few things while others can manage all the things you ask it to but rather minimally. It's not easy to simply pick one and go with it.



When the time has come to grab that bull by its unwieldy horns and finally overhaul that ERP, it'd behoove you to do

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your homework and ask yourself a few (maybe more) questions before plunking down a big portion of your budget and going through the experience of it.

## This is the big one

Last week we talked about [taking on smaller projects while a bigger one is underway](#). Today's post is about that big project that's going on while you tackle the smaller one. Now's the time to be able to see the big picture and ensure you have all the puzzle pieces to complete it.

Other than the obvious (determine your scope, your needs, the budget, and timeline), what else should you be thinking about when you decide to take the plunge and finally pull your business together?

### Know what you need...and don't need



No matter if you're a startup that's growing fast or a well-established 10,000+ employees corporation with many ERPs under your belt, every company needs to figure out exactly what it needs. Be prepared to

challenge existing paradigms and business methods in order to work with the change that may come with this new technology.

You can avoid incompatibility by making sure your chosen ERP system is built for the kind of company you are. You don't need it to be bloated with all sorts of features that will only complicate an already complex project. Is it designed for

manufacturing? Distribution? Warehousing projects? Professional Services? Maybe a combination? What about multi-currency/multi-language and multi-location wrenches tossed in there?

Hopefully you've defined and prioritized the processes you need before seeking out ERP vendors. Be prepared to work with the one you've chosen to define and further prioritize your processing needs.

## Pick a company that *\*gets\** you

You know your company; that's why you're here. You know what systems work smoothly, which ones are on their way out, and how some have potential.

- Does it mesh with what your need beyond functional compatibility, e.g. corporate culture, management style? Your H/R team will need it to do certain functions in one way while the customer service team may need quite different things.
- What direction is the wind blowing in your IT department? Should you consider a SaaS solution? A private cloud deployment? Or does a traditional on-premise approach best fit your organization?
- Do you foresee a possible "gap" between the functionality offered by the ERP and what your organization needs/requires?

You need a structural fit, yes, but you also need to know that your people will adopt it, use it, and make the most of it.

## Will it bend when you need it to?

Every snowflake is different. You were born special. And more importantly, you're most likely going to need to add edge products to extend the value of your ERP; that's a given.

An ERP is a long-range investment, and it should be able to grow with your company and its evolving needs. You need to make sure it'll align with existing tools, yes; but what about the future?

Technology progresses, software changes, and your company changes. Flexibility doesn't just mean being able to meet today's needs; it's having the capability meet the needs of the future.



In other words, you need protection from obsolescence.

## Is it going to take forever?

This sort of big project, the overhauling of an ERP, is a daunting one, and so it's rare that anyone says anything nice about it. It's going to cause disruption and you can bet there will be some grumbling from the CEO on down. How long it takes depends on the size of your company and the complexities involved, but the current average time ranges from eight to 18 months.

It's a good idea to check the track records of the companies you're considering. Cases studies, referrals — whatever gets you some information about how the scheduling aspect

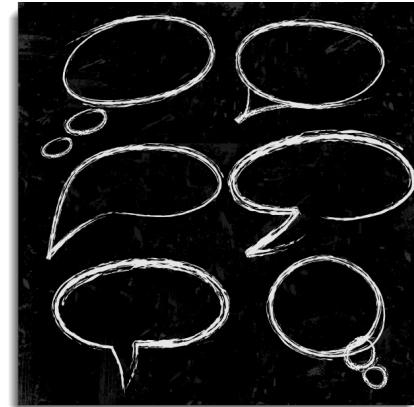
worked with this company in its past. You could probably take a look at any documentation that addresses roll-out times.

One thing to consider, one last time: Project success depends greatly on leadership and commitment. Your ability to make a timely decision is a critical component if you want to meet a reasonable project deadline. Without this, your project is likely to stall.

## Do these guys know what they're doing?

Make sure you know the following things about who you're buying from:

- Are you a company that needs a lot of configuration, and can this company accommodate you?
- Every good salesperson can talk the talk; can this company walk the walk?
- What guarantees do you have that the software developer won't go out of business or get acquired and then drop your support? Validate ahead of time the vendor's track record of installed success. This should always be addressed in the standard contractual agreements.
- Has this company sold its system to companies like yours? Same industry? Same size? Similar needs and structure? Experience counts.



Everyone peddling an ERP system "should come with a pedigree of successful installations in your field," says David Dobrin of B2B Analysts. Good advice, but just one type of benchmark you need to think about while choosing your ERP.



So consider choosing Artemis over her twin, Apollo; she's the more flexible, open-minded, easy to get along with, and flexible one. The Greek heroes are never wrong.

*"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."* — Friedrich Nietzsche

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