SOFTWARE

Before You Purchase Software for Your Business, Consider These Do's and Don'ts

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David And Carrie McKeegan
Contributor
Co-Founders Of Greenback Expat Tax Services

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As an entrepreneur, you have the lofty responsibility of purchasing the right business software for your company. To the untrained eye, this may seem like an unpleasant task. But for you, the savvy business owner, it's an exciting opportunity to explore the abundance of feature-rich products available to you. Choosing the

right software is critical to your company's operation and overall success, so it's worth every bit of time and energy you devote to it.

Evaluate your needs, do your research and follow these simple do's and don'ts to find the ideal product for *your company.*

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1. Don't design your own software.

Designing your own software may seem like the best choice, as it allows you to customize it exactly as you want. But off-the-shelf products are actually an excellent option for almost all small businesses. It may be tempting to build your own solutions, especially if you find an affordable individual or team to do it. But is it really necessary? You may very well get every feature you need for an existing product that will only cost you $100 to 200 a month.

Also, customized software solutions may not be as secure. Products on the market stand by their security, whereas an in-house program doesn't have to stand up to the same rigorous standards.

2. Do become experts of whatever software you choose.

Don't rely only on outside consultants to fully service and manage your software. If you do, you forfeit the

ability to gain a deep understanding of how the software functions, its limitations and capabilities. Buy tools that are sophisticated enough to allow you to heavily customize but user-friendly enough so you can manage them yourself.

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3. Do be clear about your needs before purchasing.

While the latest-and-greatest software may sound uber-appealing, what's most important is your own workflow and how you'll use it every day. Bells and whistles may be great for some companies, but make sure it works for *your* company. Purchasing a system that is more robust than you need may leave you cross-eyed in front of the computer each day trying to weed through a sea of features you'll never need. It's far more productive to determine all your needs *first*, then find the product that can meet them.

4. Don't neglect the greatest resource: your own team.

Have one person on your team own each software -- even if multiple departments are using it. When you have one go-to person who understands the ins and outs of the product, everyone benefits. Not only can that person provide technical assistance and troubleshooting, but they can recognize opportunities to

use it even more effectively. While a tech department can help with system issues, having a dedicated team member allows you to really explore the product and find new ways to contribute to your company's success.

5. Don't be fooled by integration 'jargon.'

Integrating your systems together so they work seamlessly is critical to your company's operations. Your software needs to share data and information between systems, so you can use the data most effectively.

For example, you may need to see your sales data alongside your email campaign data. If these systems can't "talk" to each other, your ability to gain valuable insight on your company's operations is compromised. Make sure the systems you use have open and accessible APIs -- and really research the functionality. Integrations aren't all the same: some software products pay lip-service to integration while others provide true value.

Choosing the right software for your business can be downright daunting but being cautious and putting in the effort on the front end will pay dividends (and profits) in the long run.

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