

ERP can simplify matters for any business

ERP provides 'full transparency and complete control of the business from a single source'

BY DANIELLE RYAN

The field of IT is littered with so many acronyms that they could cause your eyes to glaze over. Another one of those acronyms, ERP – which stands for enterprise resource planning – seems like one more complicated term you could do without knowing. But at its core, good ERP is a method of integrating the various functions of a business into one system which streamlines processes across the entire company. In other words, ERP is about simplifying the daily functioning of a business. If you think about all the various elements of running a company – human resources, customer relationship management, inventory management, accounting, product planning, marketing etc, it's easy to understand the appeal of modern ERP systems.



The industry standard says that systems need to be changed every seven to nine years

According to Justin Lawless, chief executive of Intact Software, the primary benefit a business gains from investing in a good ERP system is "full transparency and complete control of the business from a single source". Modern ERP systems, like Intact iQ, can automate tasks and send the most important information to the relevant people at the right time. That kind of control "brings greater margin, better inventory management, less waste and a clear understanding of accurate costs, to name but a few", according to Lawless. The challenge that businesses face, however, is finding the right solution to cater for their business. "It's easy to get caught up in hype cycles, marketing collateral and jargon," Lawless said. The solution needs to be tailored to the individual business and should accommodate "the nuances that

exist within organisations". Intact Software's own customers, who are scattered throughout Ireland, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, range in size and complexity from four or five users on a single site, to multi-branch, multi-jurisdiction companies with hundreds of users. With such a diverse spread of users and jurisdictions, software flexibility is of paramount importance. "Ill-fitting software is extremely costly to any business. We see companies coming to us that have only had their last system for five or six years," Lawless said. "Many of our customers are using their Intact solutions for ten to 15 years. Having the most flexible system implemented means that a business can grow or shift focus without costly upgrades and migrations." When Intact was developing the Intact iQ software it wanted to make sure it was the "most open system available on the market". That meant that all in-built features would be accessible and flexible, and likewise, any extensions



Justin Lawless,
chief executive,
Intact Software

to the system would be too. With more and more business leaders wanting total control over each business function and being able to define their own personalised business rules to protect their margin and get a real return on investment, the openness of Intact's software is perhaps its best asset. Another crucial element of modern ERP systems is mobile integration. Business environments have changed dramatically over the last two decades and the change has

largely been driven by the explosion in mobile technology. Intact believes that software providers need to fully embrace that change if they are to provide their customers with increased productivity, speedier decision making and boosted profitability. "We must be both reactive and proactive in everything we do," Lawless said. "Reactive to our customers needs and proactive to market and industry trends – and also the stuff that excites us." We've seen that adaptability

is a crucial component of any ERP software system and that ill-fitting software can waste time and money, but realistically, how often should businesses be changing or upgrading their systems? According to Lawless, the industry standard says that systems need to be changed every seven to nine years. "Our customers seem to buck that trend and reach well into their teens," he said. But the decision shouldn't just be about a generic idea of how long a system "should" last.

"When a business feels that their software is holding them back or significant portions of their operations are handled and measured outside their ERP system, that's when it's time to change," he said. To get the right system in place, Lawless advises businesses to put prospective suppliers through their paces. "Ask them: are they prepared for the future? Can their system handle automated tasks, reporting, authorisation and business analytics? Is all that built into the same system?"

Staying ahead of the ERP curve

BY DANIELLE RYAN

To keep up with an ever-changing business environment, ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems need to be forward-thinking and re-

sponsive to customer needs. Two of the most significant changes in recent years have been the increasing importance of mobile technology and a growing willingness from small and medium-sized businesses to fully embrace cloud technology. Dublin-based IT services provider TRC Solutions has kept on top of the change to stay ahead of the curve.

According to chief executive Gavin Peacock, with so many SMEs using mobile technology and working on the road, systems with real-time instant access to customer and supplier data and inventory are becoming non-negotiable for managers. "It enables staff to be as efficient remotely as they would be in the office," Peacock said. TRC Solutions is partnered with SAP in Ireland and Brit-

ain to deliver the SAP Business One product to SMEs. The company also offers Omni Channel and Digital Solutions to retailers. The Business One mobile application offers real-time dashboards and reports that staff can see on the move. A 'sales catalogue' function on Business One allows staff to use their phone or tablet to showcase products with pictures, videos, technical information and the ability to click and buy.

"It really empowers sales teams to deliver a truly interactive sales pitch when out visiting potential customers," Peacock said. Given the low-cost pricing structures, quick start-up times and the fact that no permanent IT department is needed to run them, Peacock said the migration to the cloud was understandable. An added benefit is that it frees up existing staff to work on improving other IT-related problems across the business. The whole idea, Peacock said, is to capitalise on the internet of things – the concept whereby devices and objects share data over a network without requiring human interaction. With modern ERP systems, devices can feed data back to applications hosted in the cloud. That data, blended together, can produce "deep business insight that can make a real difference to the bottom line", he said.

The Business One software sends alerts and actions to staff, suppliers and contractors automatically. "That level of automation brings efficiency to a new level and businesses can make accurate predictions that form a more intelligent and sound business strategy," he said. According to Peacock, what makes TRC Solutions different is the approach it takes to engaging with new customers. The company's solutions consultants are qualified in delivering Design Thinking workshops – an increasingly popular problem-solving approach which uses a unique strategic framework to spur innovation and creativity. It's about looking at the product "through the customer's eyes", he said. "We start all customer engagements with a design think' workshop. We approach in an order of: people, problem, product. "We've found that businesses prefer to deal with people, not processes and bigger companies, especially in the IT sector, can be rigid

and process driven." As a medium-sized company, Peacock said, TRC has

the in-house ability to meet customer requirements. "We have some long-standing customers with whom we've developed great personal relationships," he said.



Gavin Peacock,
chief executive,
TRC Solutions

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