

MAKING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY CHOICES FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

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Throwing money away is definitely at the bottom of every company's to-do list. However, business IT is an area where this can happen on a potentially huge scale if a proper plan to test, analyze and seek out information is not in place.

These days, organizations are spoiled for choice with technology. But in some ways, this is a double-edged sword. Alongside the greater choice and availability of solutions comes the increased difficulty of accurately identifying the ones most likely to have the right impact and deliver on their promise within your organization.

Coming from the CEO of a software company, this may be regarded as a surprising statement, but as much as vendors want to be the architects of your choices so far as their websites and marketing are concerned, to ensure you're sourcing the solution your organization needs, there's no substitute for getting your hands on a trial version and running a well-thought-out, structured test in your environment.

Essentially, good software speaks for itself — and the only way you will find out what is the best fit for your business is to put in a dedicated period of research and testing upfront. That effort makes the future vendor-customer relationship more productive and rewarding. This is because vendors and customers can then work together to help get the most out of a solution (and, crucially, what vendors learn from their customers also informs the solution's future development) rather than enter a long battle of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

Minimizing the risk

Should you buy technology simply based on the website description and supporting brochure? No! But some customers do. Oftentimes, these are the ones who have used a solution before in a different workplace and are now implementing it in a new one. However, there are still those who "wing it" and find out what they need to after purchase and rollout!

When you're thinking about new technology, careful consideration of all the angles can help you progress from

being cautious and possibly pessimistic about "yet another" solution on your shortlist to being reassured and optimistic regarding the benefits it can bring to your business.

Here are some actions you can take as part of your research:

1. Try before you buy

This is the key to finding out whether the technology will do what you need, when and how you need it to and deliver all the other impacts you have on your wish list. But to do this properly, treat your trial period with the software with the respect that you would any other project by:

- Recruiting a carefully selected team of staff to trial it.
- Agreeing on what features and functions you want or need to test before you begin.
- Reviewing the trial regularly as a group.
- Getting feedback from other stakeholders in the company who will be affected by/involved in any potential final rollout (their insights could be revealing).
- Gathering quantitative and qualitative data (if you can) to inform and reinforce your final decision-making process.

What many people omit to do during the trial stage is proactively talk to a technology vendor. Get in touch with them, ask them the questions you need answers to and tap into their expertise. Remember, they have customers in all sorts of sectors and verticals, so they have vast experience of their solutions' applications. It really is worth the effort, and experienced vendors understand that providing good support at the trial stage (i.e., not pressurizing people to buy at every point of contact) is what is needed for people to make informed choices.

2. Social proof

Reading case studies about other organizations' experiences can be a huge help, especially if their business functions and aims are comparable to yours. For a brand-new solution, case studies may be tough to source, but for more established ones, reading about the challenges a product has helped another business

overcome not only demonstrates its possibilities but can also inspire you as to how your organization could do things differently — or potentially be more effective and efficient.

Another avenue to explore is software review sites. Of course, as with all review sites, you'll need to back up the recommendations you read with your own research, but they can provide some valuable insights into what solutions are currently available and what has or (just as importantly) has not worked for other organizations.

3. External validation

In terms of an independent evaluation of technology, the education sector is setting a great example right now. In a cash-strapped environment, EdTech must provide evidence of the positive impact any new teaching can have on pedagogy and student outcomes. That's quite a tall order. So, to help schools make the right choices, independent evaluations are now available from providers such as Education Alliance Finland, which evaluates and certifies education solutions based on common standards. Feedback from such organizations not only helps schools in their technology selection processes but also helps vendors shape and improve their products in the right ways to ensure they are meeting the right needs.

Weighing the different types of evidence

Independent certification may be less common outside of EdTech or perhaps security circles, so that means for companies to ensure their dollars are well spent, autonomous research is a must. And there are many kinds of evidence to consider. Anecdotal evidence such as blog posts, testimonials and recommendations are commonplace on most vendors' websites and are a great starting point to get a feel for how products are being used and received. But seeking out white papers or independent research papers can provide you with a much deeper dive into things, which is essential if you're planning a large-scale deployment. Bear in mind, though, that context is key and everyone's context is slightly different — even more reason to commit a serious amount of time and effort to ensure you get it right for yours.

