

# choosing the right software

Ensuring you have the right software can help you future-proof your business.

**W**hen purchasing computer software or hardware for your business, you should plan for the future. So, it is wise to base any decision about what product to choose on where you would like your business to be in five or 10 years from now, not on what you are doing today.

Following are some tips to help you get the right fit for you.

## Establish a 'must have' and 'nice to have' list

Create a list of features you'd like to have and separate it into two categories – 'must have' and 'nice to have'.

Your 'must have' list should be short and outline the features that are absolutely necessary for your business. The 'nice to have' list can be broader, and features should be listed in order of importance, encompassing all of the capabilities that will make running your business easier.

Some general questions to ask yourself include:

- What are your reasons for buying it? For example, to save time, or to have just one integrated software package.
- Who is going to run and maintain it and what support is provided?
- In what format do you need to access the information produced by the software? For example, can I remotely access data?
- Who needs to access the software and the data produced by the software, and how many people can access the data at once? For data storage devices, ask yourself:
- How much data needs to be stored?
- Will those needs change over 12, 24 and 36 months?
- Where will data be accessed? For example, locally, remotely or both?
- How will you access data if there is a disaster?
- Is there a backup source?

## Clarify your budget

Set a budget and allow for other expenses, such as an upgrade to your additional hardware.

Also consider:

- Will you be able to use the device out of the box, or will it require customisation?
- What are the maintenance expenses?

## Reduce your options

Once you have your 'must have' and 'nice to have' lists and a budget, you can reduce your options. Go through your product list and eliminate those that lack

the features you need, leaving just two or three products that have:

- high quality customer support
- a solid track record
- a broad base of users.

## Evaluate the options

From the remaining options, determine which products deliver the most 'nice to have' features. Are there add-ons that you can purchase at a later date as you need them?

## Choose your finalists

It's time to see your remaining options in action. If possible, book a demonstration.

- Some general questions to ask include:
- Are there any ongoing costs?
  - How simple is the software to setup?
  - Does it come with hard copy manuals?
  - What operating system does it work with?
  - How secure is my data?

## Involve your team

If you have staff who will be using the software, now is a good time to invite their input. This will also help when it comes to implementing the new software – if you have asked for their feedback early on, they will be much more receptive to change.

## Plan the transition

To avoid issues and downtime, take time to plan the transition to the new software. For example:

- avoid implementing new software during your busy times
- allow for system redundancy to ensure that none of your data is lost during the transition
- do not be afraid to ask for support.

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