

Do You Know What Your Business Needs

It is easy to describe what you want, but not so when it comes to need. In reviewing and selecting a new application for your business, the variety of products available in the market and the broad spectrum of capabilities they offer make it even more challenging. It is easy to shift focus to the bells and whistles and subordinate your needs. Therefore, it is important to review the needs and verify the overall fit of a solution.

Ask these questions to validate the suitability of the new application:

1. What are the pains you want to get rid of?

List the problems you aim to solve and prioritize them. Collect data on the impact of these problems on your business. Determine the root cause of these problems so that you understand what you need to tackle. Be clear on identifying the causes for the symptoms.

2. What is the ideal outcome?

Describe the outcome you seek. What results the new application should, at a minimum, effect? What ripple effects would the improvements have on other areas?

3. Could the application deliver the desired results?

Involve and collaborate with people who are familiar with the issues on hand. They have expert knowledge on how things are done and would be able to hone in on solutions which could remove the pain. Walk through key business scenarios that you perform in running the business. Acquire an understanding on how the new application delivers the outcome you desire.

Keep in mind that investing in a new application is not necessary the panacea.

4. Does the application support the business, not the other way around?

To re-iterate the above point, introducing an application to automate bad business practices would get you bad results faster! The application ought to support business process and people.

5. What additional improvements could be achieved?

Request the vendor to demonstrate functionalities that they see would benefit the business. Do this only after you have a good understanding of how your core needs are met. Be flexible and open-minded about existing business rules and practices.

6. How would the application fit your long term technology roadmap?

The new application likely would not be a standalone system. This means ease of integration is an important consideration. This adds complexity as you need to assess technical compatibility and review a broader overall workflow.

7. What is the support model?

Access to expertise and quick turnaround time are important in ensuring that the business is not impacted by problems triggered by the application. If you need to depend on external support, do reference checks and discuss with the vendor the level of service required.

These questions address the main elements in determining the business fit of an application. Once you are satisfied with your choice, proceed with financial and technical evaluations, and assess other decision criteria that are pertinent to your business.