



# Avoid Data Woes

## ERP solutions streamline business, plug holes

By Zaher Karp

**O**f the many factors that affect a company's workflow, cloudy interdepartmental communication can rank high. The heart of a company, its databases, are where the most interaction can occur. However, separate

databases can slow company processes down, as information can fail to be updated or is simply not immediately available when necessary. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions serve as the answer to these data

woes by working to provide software that will integrate all the functions of different company branches and are able to fulfill each individual department's needs. Prior to an ERP software package being applied, a company may have had to deal with a slow progression of orders from sales to warehouse inventory, neither department sharing their order information, instead relying upon department computer systems where the re-entering of information may cause errors or, at worst, lost orders.

These issues can be prevented by the introduction of an ERP package into a company, which will integrate all departments into one system — unifying manufacturing to strategic management. With this, sales, inventory and any other sections can receive department-specific software that is linked to all other departments. That is, someone in sales

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is now able to see inventory counts and adjust their actions accordingly. Through this change, a company can vastly optimize order fulfillment.

"[ERP solutions] can remove the need to consistently add information after the fact or update it multiple times," says **Jeff Cook** of **Innovative Business Systems**, an ERP solution provider. "As we know, the more human hands touch data, the more prone it is to error. With [such a solution], information is cross-referenced through different [departments], entry time is reduced and you can find the information you need."

Choosing to pursue an ERP solution is an act that requires a company to focus inward and work to optimize internal company processes. This can bring about a more streamlined company or it can lead to internal setbacks. Once a company applies such a solution, they are required to change business practices to accommodate this new software, which can disturb professional roles and responsibilities, or a company can modify software to fit a business through customizations. However, this can lead to software bugs and the more specific a company's software customization is, the more difficult updating it is.

When choosing an ERP, the most important understanding that company administration must have is that choosing an ERP system is less like purchasing software and more like expanding your company with a new software partner.

**Brian Leatherman**, account executive with **Innovative Business Systems**, emphasizes, "We build our relationship with our customer so that it is truly a partnership. We are under the philosophy that when you deal with someone in a vendor standpoint, you need to be assured that your partnership with the vendor is trusted, as you are counting on your business to be controlled by their software."

ERP professionals at **SVA Consulting** echo this sentiment, advising prospective businesses to "focus on partnering with a resource that can provide a comprehensive set of solutions that will address your core [business objectives]... [and make sure to] accurately convey your objectives to a long-term business technology partner."

ERP solutions are completely dependent upon companies' individual needs, and the costs of software training and data conversion should not be underestimated. Though ERP software's greatest strength is in its unity of data, because it covers a great deal of a business, a failure in software can bring a company to a sudden halt. ■

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