Teaching an old ERP New Tricks:

Turning legacy systems into modern enterprise collaboration applications
New demands on an old system

In its latest report on the future of ERP systems, analyst firm Gartner predicts that on-premise, traditional systems are not going anywhere as they are still serving their core functions quite well. However, from senior executives to IT administrators, everybody is demanding more agility, better integration with vendor and customer systems and remote access!

Companies also increasingly face issues around their user interfaces. The days of command prompts and green screens are long gone and it is a reasonable request from users that their ERP systems be presented with simple, point and click interfaces, just as most other modern applications do.

Today, managing information and collaborating with supply chain partners is critical to business success, organisations are also looking to easily share information with their customers and suppliers and seek a system that would just ‘talk’ to the systems of their stakeholders. A traditional ERP lacks such flexibility and teams often rely on manually extracting such information (usually in the form of spreadsheets) to share with vendors and customers.

Over a traditional ERP system, the benefits of a system that is easy and simple to use, can be accessed from anywhere over a secure internet connection and through multiple devices, would be too many to count.

The barriers to such a new, modern system being rolled out in the organisation are often even more.

Due to the immense amount of investment that has already been made, completely changing the system or making major customisations and re-implementing it changes the return on investment equation.

Though, for the organisation, it is a hard situation to be in, there is a solution that helps it take back control and make the ERP work for the business again. Just as it did when it was young.

Different systems across different organisations needed to communicate with each other for any progress to happen. Claims management systems, construction management tools, web interfaces for claimants to view progress of their claims, shared properties between insurers and more such complex bits of information needed to be connected, while also maintaining access controls and honouring privacy guidelines.

Many organisations who were ahead of the curve in adopting ERP systems a few years ago are now starting to feel like they’ve been backed into a corner with their system unable to serve changing business needs of better collaboration, internet enabled anywhere access and mobility.

For organisations that grow organically or through acquisitions, enterprise systems struggle to cope with a situation like this, due to scalability challenges or lack of interoperability between multiple systems. An extremely complex legacy application environment can equally frustrate senior leadership and business growth.

The curse of the early adopter

When ERP systems first arrived on the horizon, they promised better integration of processes and functions within the organisation that were otherwise being serviced by individual programs that rarely interacted with each other. A better integrated set of applications and processes set the backdrop for increased efficiencies and real business value for the organisations.

Since then, most organisations have built on that base of solid ERP systems and added their own customisations to make it align better with their business processes. However with the advent of ‘cloud-enabled’ or ‘internet-enabled’ suites, there are a number of new functions that are available to organisations going in for new ERP implementations, such as mobility and anywhere access as well as close integration with suppliers’ and customers’ systems.

The early adopters of ERP systems are starting to feel locked in with the ERP systems that still perform well based on the performance criteria set years ago, but do not look or function anything like a modern, cloud based system with accompanying mobile applications.

Over the years, companies have invested a huge amount of money and resources into their systems and it is never going to be a case of simply switching one ERP off and turning a new one on. There are costs related to changing ERP systems, but sticking with a system that doesn’t change with changing business needs might be even more expensive.

There is, however, a smart and inexpensive way out of this conundrum that keeps senior management and the IT team happy.
The better (and cost-effective) alternative to a complete overhaul

A software layer that sits on top of a traditional ERP, has a simple and modern, web-based interface and connects an organisation’s systems with those of its supply chain partners, may sound too good to be true, but it’s not.

A traditional ERP can easily be web enabled, in turn increasing the accessibility and availability of business applications. When all staff members access (and update) the same database, no matter where in the world they are, the organisation has one source of truth for all business critical information. A web-enabled system can then also be accessed over a multitude of devices, including smart phones and tablets.

Apart from looking better, a web enabled system also allows the organisation to share information with its supply chain partners in a secure fashion and reduces the IT spend required. Since it is based on the trusted ERP that the business already uses, there is minimal additional investment required to achieve these results.

With this additional software layer, businesses can improve business process administration, lower costs and discover better flexibility, accessibility and synchronisation with partners’ systems.

Finding a partner to re-train your ERP

It may be hard, but it is not impossible to find a partner who understands your specific requirements, has the know-how to deliver and has a strong list of past successes.

Here is a simple check list that will help in choosing the right partner that can make your existing systems perform like modern cloud-based systems:

1. Industry knowledge and pedigree
   Look for a partner who has a strong understanding of business and supply chain issues. It is less about the software and more about people who understand the complexities that are specific to your business.

2. References
   The golden rule - ask for references. There are a number of organisations who would’ve been in the same position as you are and chose a partner to up-skill their ERP. Who did they choose and why?

3. Cost and time assurance
   ERP projects are notorious for consuming precious time and resources before anything is actually delivered. Look for a solution provider who will provide a solution that is configured to your specifications and is up and running within an assured time-frame.

Further customisation and reimplementation of their ERP or moving to a new system altogether is often untimely and either too expensive, too hard, or both.

A dependable solution – iViis

iViis has developed the technology and knowledge to web-enable legacy systems and traditional ERP systems. The iViis team of experts bring with them in-depth knowledge of supply chain and other enterprise systems and experience of working with clients, large and small.

viisConnect is an advanced cloud based business solution from iViis. viisConnect links existing systems in an organisation’s supply chain – ERP systems, financial planning, spreadsheets – across different stakeholders allowing them to update data and access up-to-date information about orders, dispatches, materials and other key information.

It streamlines workflows and centralises information, allowing users to focus on important decisions. Here’s a solution that is flexible enough to allow end users to configure their business rules into the system, yet is robust, simple and easy to use. It’s the single source of truth for all stakeholders.

iViis is helping a number of companies web-enable their ERP systems, without changing their business processes. We’ve helped them streamline workflows, collaborate better with stakeholders and got them up and running in a time span unheard of with traditional ERP systems delivery.

Talk to us for a solution that is tailored to the unique needs of your organisation and we will help teach your ERP new tricks.

For more information visit: www.iviis.com