
SELECTING A BUSINESS SOFTWARE PACKAGE FOR EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTORS

Next steps to getting off your legacy system

equip-soft

■ INTRODUCTION

Like all businesses, equipment distributors are facing increasing pressure to improve customer service, provide access to information in a more timely manner and increase profits.

But many are unable to respond to that pressure because they're running the bulk of their business processes on legacy systems—systems that are now obsolete and most likely no longer supported by vendors. Although these legacy systems have served equipment dealers well for 10 or 15 years and even longer, they've become inflexible, running on outdated equipment and architecture. So companies running legacy systems spend more time and money on maintenance and they often suffer from a lack of skilled resources.

■ THE DRAWBACKS TO RUNNING LEGACY SYSTEMS

Many companies depend on legacy systems that are the right fit for certain divisions, departments, or functions and because of that they don't need to be replaced. But most likely those systems weren't designed to integrate with other systems—making it difficult for equipment dealers to get one version of their information. Because they can't share data internally, it's also difficult to deliver information to customers in a timely manner.

Companies running legacy software run into other problems as well—the software may have reached end of life, or the company that developed it has been acquired by another company that already had a similar product. That means support is no longer available or, if it is available, it's too expensive. And there are very few employees left who know how to use the software effectively. Not only that, but the legacy software was probably written in a language that fewer and fewer programmers are familiar with, and continuing to customize it to meet the needs of the business is much too costly.

Despite the issues of legacy software, equipment distributors are often unwilling to move to more modern technology because of the huge investments they've made in building the legacy applications and maintaining the critical processes that run their businesses. Their legacy systems have given them a lot of continuity and the way they've looked at their data has been formed around those processes. And a lot of the processes in a rental business haven't changed over time.

So, fundamentally, equipment distributors look at their businesses today and think that they haven't really changed over the years. They think "if it's not broke, why fix it?" They don't look at the technology strategically to determine if it makes sense to move to modern systems. But more and more, equipment distributors, like other companies, are being forced to operate leaner, more effective and more efficient businesses.

The fact is legacy systems are getting old and they're breaking. There's only so much patchwork you can do to keep them in running order and it becomes costly after a period of time. When you fix one thing, another breaks because the technology is just so brittle.

Equipment distributors are starting to realize their legacy systems were developed on proprietary systems by companies that are no longer in business. And while the rest of the technology arena is moving along progressively, these old legacy systems are staying behind. Additionally, customers are putting vendors under new demands. They want access to their information to determine, for example, if it makes sense for them to continue to pay rental fees or purchase equipment outright.

Because of this, legacy systems are giving way to lower cost, flexible open systems that allow equipment distributors to save money while operating more efficiently.

■ **WHY MOVE TO MODERN SYSTEMS?**

To be competitive in the global marketplace depends on how quickly equipment dealers can adapt their business processes to seamlessly integrate information among partners, vendors, customers and employees and respond quickly to market changes. Legacy systems, however, limit this seamless and agile integration.

Managing customer communication and workflow are extremely important in equipment rental firms. Fully integrated solutions that are familiar to employees and easy to use help companies increase sales and become more profitable. The ability to quickly access account history and contact information offline and automatically integrate contact information to smart phones like Blackberry, Windows Mobile, or iPhone is crucial.

In addition, equipment rental firms must be able to use the technology to manage their service operations effectively through work order management, service contract maintenance, field service dispatch, meter/counter reading management, scheduled maintenance, warranty tracking and invoicing, as well as mobile service capabilities. And the right technology solutions can help equipment rental and sales professionals more effectively work with customers and prospects through opportunity management, campaign management and new equipment sales.

Equipment rental firms also have to manage their operations through the complete management of short-term rentals as well as long-term rentals. They have to consolidate fleet management; have rental equipment available instantly; set up contracts easily; and integrate fully with fixed assets and service management.

The bottom line is the business process data decisions and reporting decisions equipment distributors made 15 years ago are no longer valid. Moving to modern systems is an opportunity to revise most of the way the business runs. The market is demanding businesses that are less susceptible to cost, especially businesses that are part of the supply chain like equipment distributors. Equipment dealers have to focus on getting cost out of the supply chain to increase profitability.

■ SELECTING A VENDOR

Now that you've decided to move to a modern the first question you have is: "Where do I start?"

There are a number of things to think about when you're selecting an ERP vendor. For one thing you have to ensure that all your applications can communicate or integrate effectively with one another.

When you evaluate an ERP vendor, consider the company's long-term approach to total cost of ownership for hardware, software, as well as pre-and post-implementation support. And it's extremely important to select an ERP vendor that understands your industry. Find out if the vendor offers industry best practices or if it offers general, already defined processes that are more horizontally focused. Be sure the ERP vendor you select, at a minimum, addresses the mission critical business requirements that are specific to your industry.

In addition, be sure your ERP vendor can support multi-site operations. Ask if the vendor can support all your locations and if it requires overly complex architecture. Ensure that you can contact the vendor when you have a problem. Determine if the ERP vendor has an in-house support team or if it outsources support. Having access to customer support when you're looking for answers to important questions, when you need to solve complex technical issues or software-related problems, and when you just need advice on industry best practices will ensure that you get the most out of your investment.

■ WHY EQUIP-SOFT?

Equip-Soft is a dealer management system focused on the unique needs of equipment dealers. Equip-Soft will provide you with a dealer management system so you can expand your product mix, reach additional geographies through multi-site operations, become more efficient, improve your relationships with your vendors and your customers and increase your profitability. Equip-Soft does this through a fully integrated software product that helps manage business change in the equipment industry.

And Equip-Soft has an edge that other equipment distributor software providers don't have—its product is all Microsoft. Because the software is not proprietary it will be the last software investment you will have to ever make. As technology adapts, Equip-Soft will help you adapt along the way with new technologies. All software upgrades are provided through our maintenance program. Customers receive continual product upgrades and enhancements, and they are guaranteed to be on the most recent version.

Equip-Soft has the highest degree of fit out of the box for your business. This means no customization, no risk, and easy upgrades. Equip-Soft speaks your language. Your company will work with people who understand your challenges because they worked in the equipment industry before working with Equip-Soft.

“When we walk in the front door our first questions are, ‘How are you? Let’s see how we can make this run better,’ not, ‘How are you? What do you do?’” says Grant Skinner, vice president of Equip-Soft. “We speak directly to your business. We take a business system like Microsoft Dynamics NAV and make it specific to your business.”

When you invest with Equip-Soft, you invest in its product roadmap. As a strategic partner with Microsoft Dynamics, Equip-Soft receives early access to all Microsoft products and tests the software before you even hear about the release. Partnering with Microsoft Dynamics means that Equip-Soft has the backing of the largest provider of business software in the world. Microsoft is investing over \$2 billion per year to ensure its ERP solutions are the best on the market and they will be supported for the life of your company.

Equip-Soft has a strong track record of responsiveness to customer needs. Through its Customer Advisory Council, Equip-Soft collects and tracks customer input on enhancements and development priorities in the equipment distributor industry. The company uses that information as it formulates the future directions of its products and services. And its research and development program is supported by an in-house team of dedicated developers and business analysts with vast experience in the equipment industry.

Equip-Soft is known for delivering high quality, personalized technical expertise and support to our clients using its equipment distributor management software. Its support team is specialized in solving issues related to working with equipment dealers, and always goes the extra mile to help its customers resolve issues. Equip-Soft’s e-mail and telephone support provide expert advice and prompt solutions to any technical problem.

Equip-Soft takes the risk out the equation by eliminating the need for risky customization. Equip-Soft has built a scalable implementation process that allows large, mid-size and small companies to implement without taking an eye off the business. After all, what good is business software if it doesn’t help you improve your bottom line?

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Information on Microsoft Dynamics can be found at www.microsoft.com/dynamics

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