

15 Tips to Consider When Choosing the Right Software Company

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Are you ready to make the best choice for your business?

Software development is often seen as an extremely complex process and daunting task to companies seeking a solution that best caters to their needs. Custom solutions, or what we refer to as bespoke development, is becoming an increasingly viable option for many companies who have the intention of streamlining their businesses.

At Evolution Software, we take pride in our ability to understand your business quickly and deliver a bespoke software solution in line with your needs. This is done with the goal of eradicating or reducing inefficiencies, which will improve the way your business runs and allow you to gain an advantage over your competitors.

Should you be considering a bespoke solution for your company? Is it time to shelve pre-packaged software for a more favourable, economical and critical solution that is at the forefront of technology developed at the highest-standard of quality?

We offer the following 15 tips to help you when considering this crucial business decision.

Tip 1: Choose unique solutions to meet your unique business needs

Pre-packaged software is, by definition, created in an attempt to satisfy as many customers as possible. Unique or unusual businesses — whether due to offering a new product or an existing product in a new way — are naturally predisposed to falling outside the originally planned audience of off-the-shelf packages. We see businesses that pride themselves on their unique character or approach. They often only use parts of their existing software and find it does not fulfil all of their needs or processes. Bespoke software, in contrast, is tailored to your business rather than everyone's business. This means you don't waste time or money on unnecessary functionality and can prioritise the applications you need.

Tip 2: Consider the business experience of the team

The simple truth is that your bespoke software must work in a business setting, not an academic, theoretical or abstract context. It must work in the real world, in a real business situation. This covers function as well as form, and it is essential that the development company has solid business acumen. Furthermore, learn whether the development team has had enough expertise within your industry. Some industry standards are special, and you want to make sure that these are not neglected.

Tip 3: Emphasis on good communication practices

Would you as the customer be fully involved in the development process or just involved at the initial stages when the project requirements are agreed upon? Make sure your chosen software developers not only have technical skills to build your application but also great communication skills. This provides transparency and a sense of working together towards a common goal.

Tip 4: Your software must be capable of growing with your business

Pre-packaged software is generally inflexible and rigid. What may have worked well for your business at the time of purchase may now be severely lacking as your business continues to grow. Bespoke software has the significant benefit of being able to grow alongside your business as an organic expansion to accommodate your increased productivity. If you no longer require certain functions, you can remove them. If you discover you require new elements or functionality in the package, you can create them.

Tip 5: Pay close attention to the user experience of your software

Choose a software development company that has the expertise and resources to provide exceptional user experience. Technological advancement has resulted in increasingly complex and 'busy' interfaces as pre-packaged software aims to fulfil the needs of many different types of business. Bespoke software is, by nature, streamlined and clear. It does what you want it to do, how you want to do it, and no more. As an added bonus, being involved in the testing and development process gives you and your team time to identify any confusing aspects and change them — meaning the end product really is suited to your business.

Tip 6: Calculate the 'total cost of ownership' for your software

Pre-packaged software is perceived as a lower 'total cost of ownership,' but in reality this is not true. Consider all the associated costs such as the initial product purchase, user licence and annual licence fees. In addition, there may be upgrade fees as new functionality becomes available. As your business grows, so will the number of software users, therefore increasing user licence fees. One of the largest costs, however, is the further 'customisations' of your pre-packaged solution to meet all of your business requirements, which happens more frequently than one would think. This comes at a huge cost, has red-tape to get approved and also time delays since the developers are more focused on their pre-packaged solution than your business needs.

Bespoke software is a larger upfront investment in your company. However, it is a statement of commitment in the mid to long-term success of your business, which will pay for itself many times over in the future. There are no user licence or annual licensing fees...no matter how big your business grows. In addition, there is no red-tape when needing to make changes or add on functionality as your environment requires. You own the software built for *your* business by a team focused on *your* business!

Tip 7: Focus on the delivery timeframes

Choose a software development company that has a proven track record of on-time delivery. Not only will this give you and your team enough time to test the software and report bugs (if any), but your staff can train and orient themselves to make better use of the new software. Decide the deadline of the project in the initial negotiation phase and set the timeframe taking into account the time to be taken for debugging and training.

Tip 8: Effective training increases the usage of new software

Software is only as good as the people that use it. How your team is trained on the new software will determine the usage and effectiveness to your business. Ensure the software company offers comprehensive training to your team. Training on bespoke software is often based on existing operational processes, which is easier for any staff to grasp and it takes less time, meaning less impact on productivity.

Tip 9: Speed of software deployment impacts the project success

Off-the-shelf software may take a long time to learn properly. You may even have to make adjustments to the software or alter the way that you work in order to fit in with the way that the software was designed. These changes result in extended deployment timeframes and a frustrated staff while you make operational changes to fit the software.

Bespoke software is already specifically designed for your business processes and staff requirements, resulting in rapid deployment timeframes. In addition, your staff was involved in the project activities, therefore, increasing their awareness and knowledge of the changes to their operational areas.

Tip 10: Differentiate yourself from your competitors

With pre-packaged software, it is possible, even likely, that your competitors are on your level. The same software can be bought by your competitors; therefore, it is very difficult to gain any competitive advantage solely from its use. Building your own solution will help your company to do business and offer solutions that differentiate you from your competitors. It fuels innovation and gives your business the advantage it needs to succeed.

Tip 11: Ensure your project has suitable post-implementation support

Effective support after your software implementation is as crucial as the development phase. It is essential that you discuss support services with the software development company upfront. All unforeseen issues can be resolved timeously by making sure that they are able to provide software configuration, user training, software maintenance and backup services.

Tip 12: Own your software and have it in writing

Bespoke software is owned by the company who pays for it. However, there have been exclusive cases of ownership conflict between custom software development companies and business owners. To avoid any such conflicts in your project, ensure that the contract clearly states the ownership.

Ownership also provides a further unique opportunity. If your software is innovative and of use to similar businesses, then you could start selling the software yourself, creating an alternative revenue stream. This is a fast way of paying off development costs.

Tip 13: Development using correct standards and proven technology

Get assurance that your software is being developed using the correct industry standards and proven technology. The quality of software coding will directly influence the quality of the software application built. It is essential that your solution be robust and maintainable, using the right mix of technologies that are best suited to your needs.

Tip 14: Don't forget about your data security

Your business is totally reliant on your data, so ensuring this data is secure at all times during and after the project is crucial. Discuss and agree how your software developers will manage sensitive data, classified information and proprietary business information. Only software development companies that follow high standards of security practices should be considered for your project.

Tip 15: Review their previous work

Go through a few of the past projects to get an idea of the type of applications the software developers have worked on previously. Experienced bespoke software development companies that have worked on many projects have a tried-and-tested methodology for successful completion of the projects. On the contrary, new software development companies (because of less experience) are still in the stage of developing methodologies. As a result, they are not familiar with the challenges that can surface during a software development lifecycle.