

# AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO THE BEST CLOUD-BASED ERP SOFTWARE



As a key decision-maker at your company, you are tasked with maintaining a competitive edge in your industry while championing future growth for your company. You know you need to bring seamless integration and timesaving automation to your daily processes. And so, you've embarked on a search for a new ERP system. This guide is designed to help you identify important traits or attributes every ERP solution should offer as you continue your evaluation phase.

First off, it's important to understand why you are looking for a new ERP system. Perhaps your current system requires too much manual labor to pull information from disparate systems, or isn't sophisticated enough to meet your evolving needs. Maybe no one in your organization ever seems to be on the same page.

Operational challenges such as these are holding back your business in a big way. However, it's also likely that you have some fairly valid anxieties preventing you from migrating to the next level of ERP business software. After all, adopting new ERP business software has a bit of a reputation for big expenses and taking way too much time to deploy.

With so many business software vendors on the market today, it's fairly intimidating to truly know if you're finding the best system. You want business software that provides a number of operational efficiency benefits for your business – both today and into the future – but that also garners the greatest return on your investment.

This insider's guide is your pathfinder to the perfect ERP software solution your small to mid-sized business needs to achieve success.

### First: A Crash-Course In ERP Systems

All ERP (enterprise resource planning) systems offer businesses a way to integrate a range of processes and functions. The point of an ERP system is to provide a holistic view of important information from a single IT architecture.

With one system bridging the gap between all of your individual applications, an ERP system helps to improve functionality across core, company-wide operations. The idea is that – once your process inefficiencies are codified and controlled – you're able to increase employee productivity, gain visibility into your business performance and improve customer service response times.

An ERP software system integrates many business processes pertinent to several vertical market segments, including, but not limited to: distribution, retail, manufacturing, professional services and not-for-profit.

Using an ERP solution to gain control over your core operations is paramount to creating a solid foundation that supports continued growth.

### The Problem With Traditional ERP Systems And Models

Aside from ERP solutions traditionally being costly and time-consuming to set up, a sweeping majority of these systems exist in the form of computer software. Often, these ERP solutions are acquired via a software license model and are loaded onto internal servers and computers.

When you deploy a traditional ERP system for your business – because everything is set up in-house – you must control the entire infrastructure and the platforms. That means you are responsible for maintaining





complex, extensive software and hardware systems, while also absorbing costs associated with maintaining servers and the space they require (not to mention disaster recovery and backups of all of your most important information).

While traditional ERP systems integrate your business processes, they also leave you to struggle with new challenges that become a huge drain on company resources.

Luckily, in the last decade, there's been a shift to cloud computing, and this has had a profoundly positive effect on ERP's affordability and accessibility for small/mid-sized businesses.

### Cloud-Computing As A Modern Trend And Your Next-Generation ERP System

So, there's been a significant shift from in-house ERP software to both hosted ERP solutions and cloud-based ERP, both of which are proving to work really well – *especially* for non-enterprise businesses.

As a hosted solution, cloud-based ERP software is typically accessed via a common browser over an internet connection and offers computer, network and storage capacity that drastically improves value for your business in the following ways:

1. Hardware management is highly abstracted from you, the buyer
2. You only incur costs as a fixed operating expense
3. Infrastructure capacity is completely scalable

The most beneficial cloud-based ERP solution for a small to mid-sized business must comply with these key requirements, but most cloud services only comply with the first and third. When hosted, cloud-ERP systems come together, and this solution offers a number of revolutionary benefits compared to its traditional counterpart.

When all three of these requirements are achieved, you are provided with a business-changing solution at a much lower cost.

### Scalability

#### Why The Cloud Offers What Traditional ERP Never Could

The technology division of any business is typically considered a cost center, and with traditional ERP, that consideration holds true.

Traditional ERP systems have limited flexibility to scale resources. Because traditional ERP was originally created for enterprise businesses, there was no inherent need for scalability. At that stage, a business simply doesn't grow exponentially.

For example, if your business were to rely on a traditional ERP system to manage inventory, you'd have to invest in both the hardware and the software technology – this is a licensing cost that you aren't able to write off during lulls throughout the year when the software isn't really required.

When looking for an ERP solution that's a "good fit" for your business, you also need to consider what you need *beyond* today. This is especially true if you're an emergent business that anticipates significant growth. Your solution should be a good fit today, and scalable enough to grow with your business.

Look to partner with a cloud-based ERP platform featuring a vast customer base, from single-user microbusinesses to multimillion-dollar enterprises. This way, you won't ever have to endure cumbersome and expensive ERP migrations down the road. Your platform should also offer several built-in functional areas to utilize today or in the future.

When you move to a cloud-based ERP solution, your business may increase or decrease the number of access logins with one click. You also don't incur capital costs required in setting up the hardware and software on individual computers, and the savings you would see with this kind of scalability are quite generous.





## Investment Model

### Variable Disparity Versus Fixed-Cost Predictability

There are generally four components to investing in an ERP system:

- Licenses
- Deployment
- Support
- Maintenance/Upgrades

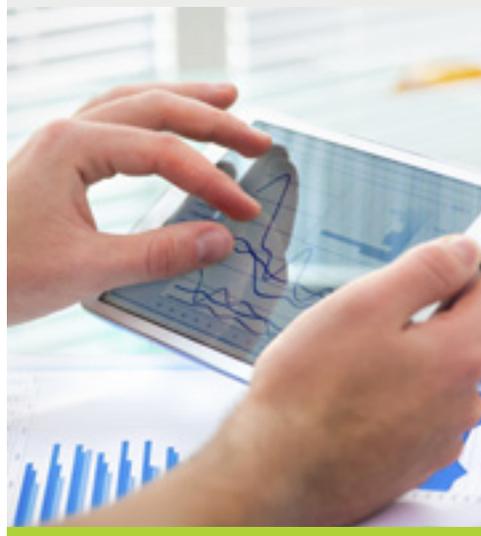
The standard investment model for traditional ERP software is, in a word, disparate: All four of these cost points are variable, as they are all separate from each other. These cost points are also unpredictable, as the costs could change year to year.

With traditional ERP software, you could haggle and bring the purchasing price down, but you simply can't nail down other costs associated with deployment, maintenance, support and upgrades.

*While licensing fees may equal up to 25% of your yearly cost, the components that generate the other 75% **vary** significantly.*

The objective of deploying an ERP system is to improve operational efficiencies to reduce costs, and to that extent, the standard investment model is counterproductive.

So, what does your ideal investment model look like?



### The OneView Subscription

SMB Suite provides customers with a completely transparent investment model for your cloud-based ERP solution. Here's how:

- A single investment point, by way of a monthly subscription, that includes all costs associated with the license purchase, deployment and support – no additional upfront or non-recurring costs
- Unlimited access to our 24/7 Business Success Desk at no additional cost
- Well-defined and tested rapid implementation methodology included in the monthly subscription

Ready to learn more about gaining control over your ERP costs? [Click here](#) for your no-cost OneView quote.

To achieve the ideal investment model, look for a fixed-cost structure, so all four cost points – licensing, deployment, support, maintenance & upgrades – are combined and included in the monthly subscription. This is a fixed expenditure and therefore predictable. In other words, you are able to budget against this subscription, to the penny, for the duration of the term.

There's another added investment benefit of cloud-based ERP software at a fixed cost. Since all of the upgrades and operations of the system are maintained by the service provider, you see continued savings from development, deployment, support and maintenance.

Essentially, you gain high-performing IT services at a low cost point without having to hire for those skills in-house. This means your on-premise resources and staff are focused on other important aspects of your business, such as building, innovating and ultimately growing your business.

### Delivery And Deployment

#### A Successful Methodology Is Found In Striking A Balance

In standard, traditional terms of the delivery and deployment of your ERP business software, vendors try their best to stay within a given price quote, but this still remains a variable element of cost.

The status quo of ERP deployment is notoriously slow, expensive and inefficient, requiring a substantial amount of downtime for your business. You definitely do not want to be in the position where you have to abort the ERP project entirely because deployment takes too long or is too costly.

In an effort to avoid scope creep, providers of ERP software typically inflate their estimate. For a task that might traditionally take 20 hours to complete, the vendor, by good measure and practice (*at least in their minds*), estimates this for 25-30 hours.

This is not good for you, the end-user.



Although you might be pleased that you avoided scope creep, you're *still* paying more than you need to.

With traditional ERP offers, the costs to your business don't stop there. Be cautious about any ERP vendor that tells you, "This is our offering ... take it or leave it."

In this scenario, the vendor is scaling back the deliverables or functional areas/modules of their software in an attempt to provide you with rapid deployment. But, you're essentially being robbed of functionality and software that actually does fit your business needs – maybe not today, but in the future as your business prospers.

Balance is the key for efficiency and effective deployment.

The right cloud-based ERP software provider takes the risk of scope creep right out of the equation through a fixed-cost investment model. The deployment costs are non-existent to your business.

Also, fixed-cost doesn't mean shackling yourself to a fixed set of deliverables that may not work for your company over time. The best ERP provider strikes a balance between flexibility of solutions that work for your business and rapid, thorough and diligent deployment. You should never feel as though you're being forced into a subset of functionality.

### Support

#### How You End Up Paying More For This Service (And How Not To)

The following tiers of support are common amongst most standard ERP providers:

- Pay-as-you-go, which is based on an hourly rate
- Pre-purchasing a "bucket" of support hours for a fiscal period or year
- Unlimited support option – flat fee that you pay on an annual or monthly basis

In all cases, you're paying more than you need to for support services.

### Fast Five Delivery

Does your small or mid-sized business have room for downtime? No, not at all. That's why you need a cloud-based ERP solution that gets you up and running in no time. With SMB Suite Fast Five Delivery, your business:

- Experiences a swift transition process, so you see results quicker
- Achieves a seamless move with minimal interruption to your business
- Receives regular updates to ensure your software grows alongside your business

Ready to discover more about Fast Five Delivery and the proven methodology behind SMB Suite's rapid deployment? [Click here](#) and learn how to go live with Fast Five.



If you choose the pay-as-you-go model of support services, you are most definitely paying an inflated hourly rate. With pre-purchasing, in which a lump sum is paid upfront, if you go over in support hours, you have to purchase more hours at an increased rate – this is a completely unpredictable cost. With unlimited support, although a predictable cost, you are paying for more support than you are probably going to use.

To avoid paying more for support services, you need to partner with a cloud-based ERP provider that offers extensive support at a fixed investment. Ideally, you want solid support rolled into your subscription price.

Ensuring the best support service from your cloud-based ERP software provider is critical to quickly addressing any issues that might hold you back from working seamlessly.

Does the ERP provider have a customer satisfaction index of 95% or higher?

Be sure to research reviews of any ERP company's support desk and team to learn about other businesses' real-life experiences.

The right ERP software support service is all about having a variety of options (that, again, are *all* fixed into the subscription price). Support service should include email and phone options, along with a customer portal featuring training materials or literature as a self-serve point of reference. There should also be a “help” function within the application itself.

As for the team backing up your cloud-based ERP software, find out how experienced they are with this particular platform. Have they done the deployment of software at some point? You should be guaranteed a point of contact that's directly familiar with you, your company and your setup.

Regarding responsiveness, you should be able to reach someone live during normal business hours, and be assured that during off-peak hours, a support team member will get back to you within two hours.

### Maintenance And Upgrades

#### A Necessity That Needn't Result In Total Sticker Shock

When you purchase an ERP system, your worries are not over. Regardless of what ERP solution you adopt, it must be maintained and upgraded. However, the traditional model of ERP maintenance activities is commonly the single largest budget provision.

Standard ERP maintenance costs are bogged down by the price of having an in-house IT infrastructure, hardware upgrades and trained manpower to keep the overall system running. This cost varies according to the complexity of the system, bug fixing, customizations, database administration and performance monitoring. When failures of this nature occur with an on-premise ERP solution, the result is a huge burden for your business.

To avoid the costs and complexities involved in business software maintenance, upgrades and customization, a cloud-based ERP solution with a fixed price is your ideal solution.

When maintenance, upgrades and customizations are included in your subscription price, you actually gain flexibility for how you want to use these services. Look for a cloud-based ERP provider that allows for maintenance and upgrade configurations to be performed based on your discretion. You should make the decision on what you want to upgrade, and *when*.





Ready to learn more about the benefits of a cloud-based ERP solution for your small or mid-sized business? Call 888.525.6398 or click the link below to learn more!

[Contact SMB Suite](#)

## Application

### Ensure A Solution That Includes Microsoft Dynamics ERP

Ideally, you want to find a cloud-based ERP solution that's backed by a stable publisher. With Microsoft Dynamics, this ERP solution works with your existing technology systems to deliver the results you're looking for without complex or costly deployment.

With a cloud-based ERP solution powered by Microsoft Dynamics, you are in the hands of a stable publisher that currently serves over one billion users worldwide. High-level Microsoft certifications lend you:

- Predictable delivery and deployment that's quick, with less cost and risk
- Seamless integration with your current business systems and applications to connect partners, employees and customers
- Multiple deployment options to meet your unique business requirements

Out of the gate, you get user-friendly business management functionality, because your staff is likely already familiar with the Microsoft platform and applications.

In today's cloud-computing environment, there's no reason to let costly software prevent you from deploying an ERP solution into your current business environment.

When you partner with a cloud-based ERP system provider that's scalable and features a fixed cost, you receive a solution that's affordable and lends you all the functionality, support, maintenance and upgrades you need to effectively support the demands of your growing business.

As you reduce pressures on your own internal IT department, you open up your resources to focus on serving core competencies that drive business growth and future success.