

Focus Experts' Briefing: ERP in the Age of Mobility



Focus Experts' Briefing: A Guide to Hybrid ERP Solutions

Executive Summary

Managing massive volumes of information requires time and resources—two luxuries that most lean-and-mean businesses simply don't have enough of today. A cost-efficient solution to this challenge is an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that allows you to integrate all your management processes into a single, coherent information system. With an ERP system, all of your internal flows are organized while you monitor exchanges with external partners—including customers, suppliers, and subcontractors. ERP affords unparalleled speed and reactivity throughout your organization, giving you a competitive edge.

And now, companies can take advantage of mobility to boost the ROI of their ERP rollouts. There are big gains to be made by businesses that harness the power of mobility to their ERP systems. As Jimar Garcia, director and product management at Eccentex notes: "The biggest innovations with mobile and the enterprise exist with accelerating business processes by extending back-office systems like ERP beyond the boundaries of the organization, accessing touchpoints like customers, partners, vendors, and so on."

In this white paper, Jimar and industry thought leaders Dana Craig, Sophie Dumas, Jonathan Gross, Nick Parker, Vee Srinivas, and Ferman Thornton share their expert advice on how companies can use mobility to extend the use of their ERP systems.

Checklist:

1. Take the time to develop a purpose-based mobile ERP strategy.
2. Craft a strategy based on users and user needs.
3. Mirror your company's operational reality.
4. Enable mobile devices to function as workstations.
5. Educate end-users on the importance of securing company data.
6. Serve the needs of those outside the organization—the customer.
7. Take advantage of the timeliness and accuracy of mobility.

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1. Take the time to develop a purpose-based mobile ERP strategy.

"There shouldn't be many limitations to the ways businesses can extend the value of their ERP systems through mobility; however, in order to achieve the optimal value, it's necessary to start with a strategy. A lot of organizations are jumping on the bandwagon of mobility and implementing solutions without a clear purpose or strategy in mind. Unless you have got cash and time to burn, try to avoid this 'shoot until we hit something' approach," comments Dana Craig, CEO, Quickstone Software.

2. Craft a strategy based on users and user needs.

"A strategic approach includes researching the mobile needs and benefits of three key enterprise audiences: employees, vendors, and customers. It also includes exploring some fundamental topics like security, scalability, and innovation. Such considerations may show that delivery and warehouse systems, CRM, and business intelligence are all areas that are ripe for mobile solutions. But let the strategy drive the conclusions." (Craig)

"Not all ERP features should be mobile. But thanks to the evolution of technology, we can assume that ERPs will improve mobile transactions. Generally, mobile apps are easier to use when you don't have to enter much data or display an intensive data dashboard, and when they are designed for 'outdoor users' and 'occasional users.' That's why mobile apps are relevant for time and expenses reporting, sales, and order entry, with dedicated information related to the type of user connected," comments Sophie Dumas, Sage ERP X3 product manager, Sage.

3. Mirror your company's operational reality.

"One of the key goals of ERP is to process transactions and issue recommendations that drive meaningful operational value. To successfully achieve this goal, an ERP system has to mirror or prototype the company's operating reality. Mobile technologies empower timely, accurate data capture and analysis by extending the enterprise to places that are not easily supported by workstations, including: warehouses, shop floor, field service, and off-site sales. As organizations become increasingly dispersed, remote, and virtual, I expect businesses to increasingly rely on mobile solutions to ensure that ERP data accurately reflects operating realities," states Jonathan Gross, vice president and corporate counsel, Pemeco Consulting.

4. Enable mobile devices to function as workstations.

"It is important to ensure a point of reference. So you have an ERP system, it has workstations and users who simply process insert, update, or view queries. The key to effective mobility when implementing ERP software is to ensure the user understands the mobile device is just another tool the user must understand as a workstation," states Nick Parker ERP implementation specialist, Ennead Business Implementation Solutions.

"It is not the mobility as the tool, but the mobile device. Once the device is properly configured, it can be used as easily as a desktop computer. This need not necessarily be while on the road. It can be on the shop floor as well, where the updates, corrections, and demands can be entered by the supervisor who is making his rounds on the shop floor," says Vee Srinivas Consultant on Computer Systems & Security.

5. Educate end-users on the importance of securing company data.

“Mobile devices can really speed up processes on the shop floor as well as on the road. Other than making sure all your ducks are in a row with the device and ERP, make sure your staff is aware that the security of the device is most important to ensure that the security and integrity of the company’s database remain intact,” states Ferman Thornton owner and consultant, Thornton Concepts.

6. Serve the needs of those outside the organization—the customers.

“Mobility in the enterprise is not new; it’s the prevalence of high-power mobile devices with a low barrier of deploying applications that is new. This puts ‘(almost) always-connected’ computing devices into the hands of people inside and outside of the organization. One specific pattern that has a lot of legs (in my opinion) is customer self-service. For example, auto-insurance claim initiation by policyholders has the potential to speed up the claims-adjudication process, reducing costs, improving process speed, and (hopefully) improving the total customer experience,” says Jimar Garcia director and product management, Eccentex.

“Mobility is a new way for us to offer value to our customers because it increases worker productivity and enhances collaboration both inside and outside the company.” (Dumas)

7. Take advantage of the timeliness and accuracy of mobility.

“Mobile technologies provide opportunities to ensure that MRP makes recommendations based on both timely and accurate data. From a timeliness perspective, handheld bar-code scanners give companies opportunities to record inventory movements as soon as they happen. From an accuracy perspective, mobile technologies provide opportunities to minimize data recording errors. Many businesses first record material and labor movements on paper, then transfer those records to a system later in the day (perhaps at the end of a shift). This type of double-entry system is not only inefficient and delayed, it creates risks of data entry errors.” (Gross)

Conclusion

Today’s companies are moving too quickly and are too far-flung to make use of complicated, unwieldy ERP solutions. Modern companies need ERP solutions that offer all the advantages of ERP performance while maintaining simplicity, flexibility, and scalability in a fully integrated, cost-effective, end-to-end solution. And, like so many modern staffers, the solution has to be modern and support mobility features to enable employees to work flawlessly anywhere, anytime. Heeding the advice in this report can help your business realize the myriad competitive advantages that adopting a mobile-savvy ERP solution affords.

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