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DOWNLOAD TWO
BEST PRACTICE
SYSTEM SELECTION

1. Approaches

The objective of this stage of the process is to select the most appropriate system to meet the needs of your company. The process you use to select this system should be based upon a factual analysis of your needs compared with the proposals of the various suppliers. Normally this is done primarily on the basis of the “Best Fit “ of the packaged software proposed compared with your needs. This principle is used because many of the dangers in computer projects arise from large modifications to software. Modified software normally involves increased risk of faults in the software. It also means that you may be the only company using the modification in which case the software support from the supplier may be lower than normal. It can also mean delivery of the software may be late if the modification took longer to develop than originally expected by the software house, a frequent occurrence, and it can also increase costs if you do not have a fixed price contract. So the attraction of “Best Fit” based upon the comparison of packaged is based upon the principle of picking the “safest” system which, hopefully, will minimise the risks to you when you try and install it. But you may find that there are no packages which are close enough to your needs in which case you have the option of still trying to minimise the risks by applying “Best Fit” whilst recognising its limitations or you may decide that a non package system designed around your unique needs is your best route. This used to be very common in the furniture industry in the 1980’s but can still happen. In this case the software generators proposed and other factors such as financial stability of the supplier can be given a higher priority.

The deciding factors when selecting the most appropriate system can vary from company to company to company. Taking this flexibility into account we will now look at two examples of selecting a system, one simple and the other complex.

In the simple example we will take a search for a new CAD (Computer Aided Design) system. In this case the Design Department have drawn up a simple checklist of their needs and this is shown below.

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REQUIREMENT	SYSTEM A	SYSTEM B	SYSTEM C	IMPORTANCE
Equipment				
Portable Printer (A4)				C
Software				
Designed to include furniture components eg fabrics				A
Original artwork or design loaded from scanner or manual input.				A
Design package with up to 10 million colour combinations.				A
Accurate colour interpretation from artwork. Reproduction onto screen & paper.				A
Drawing tools. .				A
Save images to brushes (more than one brush option).				A
Automatic repeating, masking and copying (variety of repeat options).				A
Accurate rescale enhance merit.				A
Design Facility				
Comprehensive furniture type selection and options.				B
Database of existing constructions.				A
Comprehensive library.				A
Creation of standard and random constructions.				A
3D Modelling				A
Automatic/manual float control option.				A
Custom Made Presentation				B
Pentium Laptop and Monitor for workstation and display purposes.				B
Printouts with custom designed layout and narrative options.				B
3D simulations of room interiors –chairs, sofas etc.				B

Ability to lay fabric on them.				B
Ability to use this facility with a fabric library to provide a sales presentation package.				B
Training Requirements				
Training for 5 people.				A

Note: Importance Grades

A = Essential

B = Must have for existing work

C = Nice to have

From the checklist format above the differences between each system can be identified and the importance grades allow these differences to be measured in terms of significance to the company.

Now we will have a look at a complex selection process, the type one may use for assessing complex and sophisticated corporate systems.

First of all you should identify all the requirements in your Definition of Requirements which are mandatory. This would normally apply to non software areas. For non mandatory areas, including software functions, importance grades or weighting factors should be applied which indicate the importance of each area to your company. It is possible to carry out this process without weighting factors in which case all non mandatory areas will assume equal importance. Then you should assign numerical values to the requirements and weighting factors. The assigning of numerical values is not necessary if you are omitting weighting factors, in which case you can use a default value of 1 per requirement. Now you are ready to compare each proposal and allocate scores based upon the number of requirements met by each proposal. Because this method operates on a Best Fit Principle only those software requirements which are met by packaged software score. Using the scores achieved you can then rank the proposals in order of Best Fit. If you have several proposals to consider, you can then take the top three and grant them Short List status.

In addition to the above you should try and make site visits with key end users to assess each of the proposals you are seriously considering.

2. The Short List

Short Lists are normally only applied if you have many proposals responding to your Definition of Requirements. The purpose of the Short List is to provide the opportunity to go into the top proposals, normally the top three, in greater detail before making a final selection decision.

At this stage you may wish to qualify or confirm various areas of each proposal. In addition you may wish to tie the suppliers down to the costs contained in the proposals, making sure the costs are fixed in any resulting contracts. In addition you may wish to assess these three in greater detail by subjecting them to more site visits with more of your end users.

The objective of this process is to achieve a consensus on the most suitable system for your company. Presentation of the scoring levels for the systems carried out prior to the Short List can be a useful tool in enabling users across several departments to see the strengths and weaknesses of each system being considered. This is normally more effective if done in graphical form, based upon the software scores achieved by each system shown across departments. When this data is initially discussed between departments each departmental head will normally back the system which operates best for him. This is of course entirely natural. The objective of the discussion is to obtain a consensus on the best system for the company and this is best achieved by enabling the users to identify and discuss why they may be asked to support a system which although is best for the company, may not be their preferred choice. In this way the users retain “ownership” of the system.

The next stage is to grant preferred supplier status. This informs the supplier that you prefer his system subject to negotiation of the Terms and Conditions of a contract.

3. Contract Negotiation

So you and your users have decided what system is best for your company and now you want to make sure that the contractual terms are acceptable. First of all be sure you understand what they are and read the small print! If you are happy with the contractual terms then you can proceed and sign. However, you may not be and the most common reason for this is bias in the contract towards the supplier, this will be **his** standard terms after all so that is not unnatural. The most common approach to this is to base the contract on the circumstances you have, namely:

- You have stated what you want from the system in the DOR
- The supplier will be claiming that his system can do the job.
- Conclusion, the contract is based upon the supplier being held to his premise that he can supply a working system which meets your needs. (In English Law the legal principle is called “Fitness For Purpose”. This encompasses all sales and is the principle that any product should be fit for the purposes it is intended to be used for. In this case the purpose is a working system for your company as defined in the DOR. The supplier is claiming that his system is fit for the purpose.) The final contract should contain the DOR and agreed schedules for all aspects of implementation. If you are changing contracts it is advisable to obtain legal assistance before signing a final contract. Always note that prior to signing the final contract you will be negotiating from a position of strength. Once contracts have been signed this automatically changes and strength will normally go to the supplier.