



When it comes to technology, it can be difficult to find the best solution for your needs. Especially given the hundreds of options available, it can feel like a very daunting task. But carving out some time to ask important questions can simplify the process. It can help you to filter out all the buzzwords and allow you to zero in on technology that will truly benefit you and your organization.

So what are the questions you should be asking? Here are seven you should consider every time you are looking at a new software or device.

## 1 WHAT IS THE PROBLEM I'M TRYING TO SOLVE?

The video promo looked awesome, the website has glowing reviews, and the software can post directly to Facebook!

But what exactly is the primary problem that you're trying to solve?

We often get sidetracked by how attractive a new technology looks and the promises made by the vendor. However, it's important that we focus on what the pain point is and how the new technology will address that concern.

Are you struggling to manage your projects? Has submitting remittances or issuing notices become a hassle? Is lack of communication causing problems with employees? Whatever it is, make sure you can articulate it clearly so you can identify solutions that meet that criteria.

A good exercise to help you with this process involves tapping into your inner child. For example, how would you explain this issue to an 8-year-old? Can you describe it in one short sentence and avoid using confusing terms and acronyms? If you can't clearly state the problem, you're probably not ready to find the right solution yet.

## 2 WILL MY END USERS BENEFIT FROM THIS TECHNOLOGY?

Think about your end users, employees or whoever will interact with this software. Will it change the way they engage with you? Or will your operations run just as usual?

Too often we think of ourselves first and how new technology will make our daily tasks easier. But what will the effect be on those who don't engage with the technology directly?

I know of too many stories where the organization introduced something new that everyone on the selection team loved and benefited from. However, once they heard back from their users, they realized it was not a good fit.

If the new technology is not going to affect your end users at all, you can skip this step. But, on the other hand, doesn't every change to the way you do business have some impact on those you serve? Take the time to contact your end users in advance and get their input before you get too invested.

## 3 WILL THIS INTEGRATE WITH TOOLS I ALREADY USE?

You already have several different tools and software that are a core part to your operations. How will this new piece of technology relate to what you already have?

We are fortunate that it has become easier and easier to exchange data between different systems. Still, I recommend that

you take a good look at the integrations section of the technology you are considering. Will the new software connect directly to your current system? Will you be able to send out emails or notifications directly from the new software? Is the formatting of data what you are looking for? How does it compare to what you already use?

If the new system will lead you down a path that is very different from what you are currently using, be wary. You don't want to have to fix mistakes that didn't exist in the first place.

## 4 HAVE I COMPARED THIS TECHNOLOGY TO AT LEAST TWO OTHER OPTIONS?

Would you purchase the very first car you test drove or would you look at other, similar vehicles to make the best decision? Buying a new piece of technology can be as simple as clicking a button, so you must make sure you do your research and compare your proposed solution to that of competitors.

One of the best places to do this is at G2.com. This website compiles users' unsolicited reviews and ratings so you can compare the pros and cons of many different technology solutions. Whether you are looking for marketing, analytics or any type of software, G2.com can point you in the right direction.

And don't forget to take advantage of any free trials or trial periods. This is your chance to take the technology out for a test drive and make sure you've picked the right car...I mean software!

## 5 HOW MUCH IS THIS REALLY GOING TO COST?

We have a lot of options when it comes to new technology. But what about the price? How much is this new software going to cost and how could that price change over time?

First, let's get one thing straight. Great technology that brings you real value will most likely have a price tag attached to it. Don't be fooled by free tools or cheap alternatives, or you may end up being very disappointed down the line.

In today's marketplace, almost every software follows a monthly or annual subscription model. This is usually based on total number of users, but be sure you read the small print. Some applications charge based on usage. For example, MailChimp bases its pricing model on the total number of email subscribers you have at any given time. If your email mailing list increases, then your total cost will also increase. This makes sense since they are offering an email marketing solution. However, if you are charged every time you send an organization-wide email, you'll want to do the math before purchasing to ensure this makes sense for your business.

In short, make sure you know how you will be charged and how that might change in the future.

## 6 HOW EASY WILL IT BE TO CONTACT SUPPORT?

No matter what type of technology you are considering, you want to know there will be help when you need it. Whether you're looking at an enterprise resource planning solution or just a simple extension that helps you with your notifications, take a good look at your support options.

We live in a time where many companies provide a knowledge base or community forum for users to solve problems. While these can often be a great start to solving the issues you will face, if you encounter serious problems, you want to make sure that you can contact a human being directly to solve your issue. Take a look at the Help or Support page to see how you can connect with support staff. You may even want to give them a call to see how quickly you can get a hold of someone.

## 7 CAN I COMMIT TO THIS TECHNOLOGY FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?

As mentioned, we can often get infatuated by what the new technology promises to solve. But before you sign on the dotted line (or scroll past those terms of service), ask yourself: Can I commit to using this for the next six months?

If the answer is no, perhaps you haven't found the right solution yet. In this case, this question may be the most valuable one on this entire list because the answer may reveal the biggest stumbling blocks or hidden issues with the proposed solution.

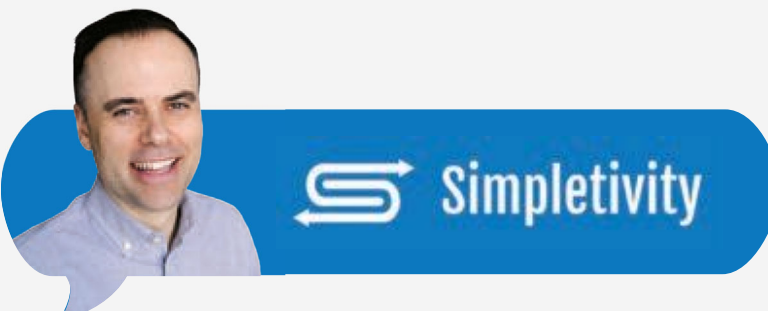
If the answer is yes (and you addressed the other questions here), you should certainly consider moving forward. You'll have the confidence that you've done your due diligence and have made the best choice for your organization.

## REMEMBER THIS...

Technology has the power to transform the way you operate for the better as long as you don't rush the process and get too invested before considering all the facts. Taking the time to review these seven questions will be worth the effort—and may save you a lot of money and headache in the future.

Don't be afraid to ask for outside help if needed. Find a colleague who recently implemented a new software that interests you to get their feedback. Or talk to someone who specializes in that type of software—hiring a technology or productivity consultant can save you a great deal of time and reveal additional questions you may have overlooked.

When your daily operations are running smoothly and you can spend more time on what you want, you'll be glad you made the effort. Just remember, new technology doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, it can be very simple! ■



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