



ENTERPRISE SOLUTION(S) - A JOURNEY

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Various Perspectives

Can an organization scale up *smoothly* without systems in place ?

An Enterprise Solution is required not only for large organizations but for any organization who wants to:

- ❖ Have a collaborative environment so as to integrate various business processes, thereby optimizing the current operations
- ❖ Leverage the systems to take strategic decisions
- ❖ Adapt fast to the growing needs and changes in business / market & regulatory changes
- ❖ Set a base so that they can scale up ... scale up smoothly
- ❖ Track process compliance at a granular level

Some steps that organizations should take while embarking upon their enterprise software journey are enlisted below.

BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE

- ❖ Identify key areas in the business with high potential return of investment (ROI) from using enterprise software.
- ❖ Understand the benefits and potential switching costs of moving from no software or multiple specific software(s) to enterprise software.
- ❖ Ensure the solution is flexible enough to smoothly incorporate enhancements and changes as per changing business needs; without incurring a high cost and requiring a lot of time (which might happen due to inflexible software architecture)
- ❖ While calculating the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), identify the key TCO components specific to your business / current scenario.

IMPLEMENTATION PERSPECTIVE

- ❖ Ensure active support for enterprise software from the top and middle management; and perpetuate it to IT staff and end users.
- ❖ Formulate a change management plan for implementation of enterprise software.
- ❖ Identify a core team for change, comprising of few champions across various business functions (Note: Its preferable that the champions are higher up in organization hierarchy)

TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE

- ❖ Evaluate the architecture of the enterprise software for platform independence
- ❖ Evaluate the flexibility of the solution to make changes / enhancements
- ❖ Design security in from the start. It is important that the architecture supports various levels of security, so that any sensitive data doesn't reach wrong hands, in any case.

Enterprise solutions are being adopted at a faster pace in local and global markets. Its adoption varies widely from one company to another, one sector to another; or one country to another.

Enterprise software is about understanding the value it brings to the business, through a higher degree of collaboration, among various business processes and stakeholders.

Wise and mature companies will leverage the benefits of enterprise software, not ignore it.

Few evaluating factors

Enlisted below are some key factors to consider; and few questions to ponder over; while finalizing the enterprise solution:

- ❖ **Customizable**: Is enterprise solution customizable to your unique needs based on your business processes/ workflow? Are process workflows, screens, reports customizable?
 - Enterprise software shouldn't put restrictions on the company as to how to run their business.
 - You are the master of your business and business processes. An enterprise solution might suggest best practices, but should not compel the organization to change its mode of operation due to some restrictions in its architecture.
 - Many enterprise solutions enforce you to adapt to their systems' implementation of business processes / workflows, claiming them to be best practices followed by big conglomerates.
 - Note: Sometimes companies realize this at a later stage, and owing to additional cost of implementing another enterprise solution, have no choice but to change their processes.

- ❖ **Enhanced Flexibility / Extensibility**: Is the architecture of the enterprise solution flexible enough so that, with proper access rights, a design decision taken earlier can be smoothly changed (even when the system is live, in production)?
 - Does implementing such a change require a lot of time (due to inflexible architecture) and high escalation in price / TCO?
 - Note: This is a major cause of concern, as the systems are not flexible
 - Is the architecture flexible enough to incorporate enhancements later? As the business evolves over time, can the enterprise solution evolve to smoothly incorporate changes & enhancements required; without high price escalations?
 - Note: This becomes a major cost, as life span of an enterprise solution is many years, during which business/ requirements evolve, and technology also changes.
 - Note: Usually, the proprietary enterprise software(s) don't adopt open standards that facilitate interoperability of systems, and standardization.

- ❖ **Scalability**: Is system highly scalable to meet company's organic and inorganic growth?
 - Does the response of the system slow down with increase in the number of users?

- ❖ **Dependency on vendor**: Would there be a lot of dependency on the vendor either due to support or enhancements?
 - In due course of time, can you become independent of the vendor?
 - Can the vendor share the source code?
 - Are you shielded, to the extent possible, by Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A)
 - Note: Many such cases of M&A have happened in recent years, involving large vendors, raising genuine concerns by the customer base and end users

- ❖ **In Depth Support**: Does vendor provide in depth support, through enhancements and even specific code-level-customizations (if need be), periodic upgrades, quick resolution of specific problems?
 - Note: Resellers, distributing proprietary solutions developed by other vendors (where source is rarely available), may not be able to provide in depth support.
 - This increases manifold, the dependency on proprietary software vendor; and longer wait cycle for future upgrades/ releases, without any surety of the problems getting resolved. One pays high price for longer wait-period.

- ❖ **Security**: Security of data is crucial for any organization. Does the architecture support various levels of security, so that data doesn't reach wrong hands, in any case?
 - Is the security implemented at a granular level?
 - Is it possible to set access rights to a particular business process / workflow; or which reports can be seen / generated?
 - Is there customizable access security at the level of screen(s); or, if required, even at the level of a field(s) within the screen(s)?
 - Are audit trails maintained at a granular level?
- ❖ **Integration**: Can the enterprise solution easily integrate with other solutions that the company has currently, or might opt for in future
 - Is the system flexible enough to support a possible change, in future, to a new enterprise solution?
- ❖ **Phased approach**: Is it possible to adapt a phased approach towards implementation / deployment of various components within the enterprise software; or would that mean increased complexity and a high escalation in price?
- ❖ **Internet interface/ Remote access**: Is the system accessible by various stakeholders remotely, over the internet; and is most of the functionality offered in such a case?
 - Can various stakeholders (vendors / customers, shippers, sales professionals, etc.) transact, and track status online?
- ❖ **Web-store**: Is an internet interface readily available (without any extra work required) for the company to sell their products and services over the internet?
- ❖ **Ease of use**: Is system easy to use or is it required for end user to be tech savvy?
 - Is the user interface intuitive and does it hide unwanted details, as per the transaction context?
 - Does the user interface offer support granular validations, auto filling of relevant fields, drill down and drill across features?
 - Does the reporting feature allow you to slice and dice the data, drill down for a detailed report; or drill across to see where certain data was used.
 - Is it easy to move about in the system, say from one screen to another?

The journey to shortlist and implement an enterprise solution involves a lot of consideration, as it would be the backbone of the organization. Due diligence is essential so as to make the journey a pleasant one.

TCO – Total Cost of Ownership

While evaluating TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) for deploying enterprise software, one needs to consider various aspects. Few key ones include:

❖ Software Costs

- Purchase Price of operating systems, and other basic software(s) required (like document editor, spreadsheet, mailing software, etc.)
- Purchase Price of Enterprise wide software(s) and any third party software(s) required for the same
- Software Support and Maintenance

❖ Hardware Cost

- Purchase Price of hardware; like Servers, Client machines, printers, firewall routers, network and communication (including any high-speed internet connections required).
- Hardware Maintenance

❖ Implementation Costs: Planning and Deployment

- Project Management.
 - This includes time spent by company's professionals, at various stages of implementation, who would champion the deployment of the enterprise software, so as to have an optimum fit of the best practices and the existent processes / practices followed by the organization.
- Professional Services Cost for
 - Configuring the software as per workflows followed by the organization
 - Any customization / new development required, specific to the company's business processes
 - Any enhancements / changes required in the future, as the business evolves

❖ Staffing Costs

- Project Management
- Up-gradation of basic / required skills
- Training for the enterprise software
- Change Management. Some of its facets include:
 - Adoption of the software across the enterprise
 - Minimizing of any disruptions while transitioning to enterprise software

Simext's BizInt

Simext offers a system **highly customizable as per the unique needs** of a business. **Specific processes / modules can be implemented in phases.**

Specific "Enterprise Software Solutions" are offered for Manufacturing, Point of Sale (POS)/ Retail and Warehousing.

Functionality span: It **integrates business processes** including:

Inventory Management / Warehouse	Invoice / Billing / Payments
Tracking Orders / Inventory	Sales / Marketing
Purchases / Suppliers	Tracking Invoices / Shipments / Payments
Manufacturing / Production	Distribution / Supply Chain / Shipping
Point of Sale (POS) / Sales Outlet	Web Interface for self and Business Partners
Services / T&M (Time and Material)	Projects / Phase-wise / Ongoing orders
Customer Relationship	Business Analysis / Performance
Financial Management / Accounting	

Simext's BizInt suite of solutions caters to the need of organizations to build and strengthen their Business Infrastructure and Compliance. It provides a single integrated solution encompassing enterprise-wide processes / workflows. It can be deployed in phases. This ensures that the organization's current and expanding needs are met with ease through a single integrated solution.

An enterprise-wide customized solution is drawn out based on your unique needs, your business processes and workflow. While supporting the integration of various business processes, it helps track process compliance at a granular level, across various business functions.

BizInt provides a multi-dimensional view of various processes / activities' status and stakeholders (vendors / customers, shippers, sales professionals, etc.)

"Integrated Business Processes":
A key characteristic facilitating
"Business Visibility"
 &
"Enterprise-Wide-Compliance"

Complete Solution: Enterprise-level requirements that BizInt suite caters to, include an optimal mix of features of ERP, SCM, CRM, BI; and specific needs of Inventory Management, Billing, Retail POS software, e-Procurement & Sourcing, etc. Hence, a company need not spend time in evaluating separate enterprise software(s) catering to just the need of just one / two of these.

- ERP : Enterprise Resource Planning
- SCM : Supply Chain Management
- CRM : Customer Relationship Management
- BI : Business Intelligence

Phased solutions adaptable to growing needs: Tomorrow, with growth in business, one would surely want to integrate other business processes; and be able to quickly respond to any changes: like changes in business environment, market, regulations, etc.

Phased solutions should converge into larger system, with ease: Keeping business growth in mind, systems that you have today should be able to converge into a larger system, with ease, and without incurring a high cost.

The enterprise-wide customized solution should be flexible to changes and enhancements and be able to incorporate the other businesses the company might venture into or want to automate / computerize in future.

BizInt - Some advantages and distinguishing characteristics

1. **Open Architecture:** This ensures that *flexibility and stability* is sustained over long periods of time. Most of the information is stored as meta-data (and not hard-coded in software-programs). Underlying technology is J2EE; deployment tools used are JBoss Application Server, Oracle DB.
2. **Smoothly changing a live system in production:** Flexibility ensures ease of change of a live deployed system, and a smooth transition. Hence, unlike other enterprise solutions, there is no need to worry about irreversible design-decision or implementation. As per changing business environment, you can adapt your system.
3. **Easy integration with other software / Systems:** Support for various Import / Export formats & Open Architecture ensure easy integration with 3rd party systems/applications.
4. **Enhancement Flexibility/ Extensibility:** Open Architecture & underlying technology ensure that new features can be added / upgraded with ease, and as standards evolve.
5. **“Multi” Dimensions for a global business:** Multiple languages, currencies, accounting principles, tax-regulations, costing methods, organizations. This enables companies with international locations to use the system throughout their entire organization. The solutions are suitable for multiple geographies across EMEA, US, or APAC.
6. **Process / Workflow based system:** The system is based on extensible business rules; including its user interface, processes and procedures. This ensures that the system is extendible and that customizations can be made as per the requirements of a client.
7. **OLAP Analysis:** The integrated OLAP Analysis functionality allows you to view your information in a slice and dice fashion. Based on a data warehousing architecture, integrated-flexible-reporting allows slice and dice across dimensions
8. **Fail-safe architecture:** The system is fail-safe and allows application to fail safely, while maintaining its integrity. Failed transactions can be resubmitted, or in the case of a process error (e.g. wrong rule) transactions can be reprocessed, correcting the previously unnoticed error.
 - ❑ Unlike many applications that assume everything works perfectly; this system was designed with the assumption that humans can make mistakes.
9. **Base System success and large deployments worldwide:** BizInt is powered by Compiere, an open-source ERP + CRM solution, having a large number of worldwide deployments, including some well-known international conglomerates; enough proof of success worldwide.
10. **Context-Sensitive Smart User Interface (UI):** *“You only see what you need!” Context sensitive personalization is used to achieve this.* User interface is dynamically created, with focus on the information required in current transaction context; unwarranted details are hidden.
 - ❑ For example, if you don't use foreign currencies while dealing with a local vendor, you don't see it - but it is there in situations where you need to transact in a foreign currency. Similarly processes / fields required for different payment options as shown as per need.
11. **Simple and Intuitive User Interface (UI) – A key to success of enterprise wide adoption**
 - ❑ End-users (Non-IT professionals) can easily operate the system
 - ❑ Two parallel user interfaces:
 - DHTML web-based interface: Access system anywhere, through Internet
 - High performance Windows Application (Java based rich UI): High-speed data entry
 - ❑ Option for data entry in multi-row layout or single row layout
 - ❑ Immediate validation of data, Cross field validation, Data-entry tips; thus reducing human errors due to data re-entry
 - ❑ Field dependency support (e.g. address depends on selected customer)

- Set field preferences – This facilitates fast data entry
- Can easily zoom to look up the details of any referenced field
- Drill across to records referencing the current record
- Option to attach document(s) to any record in the system
- Option to archive (and search) documents & reports, manually or automatically
- Online help
- Customizable user interface
- Print screen and Report functionality
- Attention given towards aspects like: Security, Data Consistency, Integrity, etc.

12. Flexible Reporting

- Based on a data warehousing architecture, integrated-flexible-reporting allows slice and dice across dimensions
- Numerous Customizable Reports: Financial, Statement of Accounts, open-orders, inventory status, Tabular/ Form Reports, etc.
- Customizable layout, sorting, sub-totals. Can include graphics, images
- Filtering, Drill-Down / Drill-Across Reporting (data dictionary based)
- Can open the data-entry windows from the report
- Send reports as e-mail attachment

13. In built E-Commerce Web Store Solution

- Online Product Catalog, Pricing and Availability.
- This ensures that the internet medium for sale of products is ready for the company to explore, as and when it decides to.
- Easily customizable (css, jsp) web-store (look & feel of your web site)
- Product search & payment processor interface
- Enter / view requests, subscribe to interest areas (mailing lists)
- Customers view their sales orders, shipments, invoices, payments
- Vendors view their POs, receipts, remittances; and answer RFQs
- Sales Reps view / maintain requests, advertisements/ click counts; and view their customer's orders / shipments / invoices
- No synchronization or extra integration work is required

14. Multi-level and Granular Security

- Complete security built-in at various levels
- Support for Firewall and Proxy
- Granular and customizable security (Role based)
- Scheduling Alerts / Notifications / Security issue captures
 - E.g.: List of customers with certain % over credit limit, long outstanding open items, new customer, not moving inventory, etc
- Isolating internal Resources from user
- Process / Workflow access
- Screens that should be accessible/ seen
- Which reports can be seen / generated / printed / exported
- User Authentication and Password Control (Expiry, Dictionary, etc.)
- Security Logging and Audit Trail (including at transaction-level)

15. Technical Features

- Platform Independent (Windows, Linux)
- Database support for Oracle [plan: DB/2, Microsoft SQL Server]
- J2EE Architecture based on JBoss [plan: WebSphere, Oracle AS]
- Multiple User Interfaces: Rich Java and DHTML
- User interface can be customized to suit user requirements
- Attach any number of documents to any record in the system
- Automatically or manually archive documents and reports
- Various import and export options available, facilitating easy integration with other software(s) / systems.
- Import your previous data: Products, accounts, orders, invoices, payments, business partners, journals, bank statements, movements, confirmations, inventory, etc. from flat file, xml, or via sql
- Export any data (subset) to csv, html, xml

16. Multi-Currency Transactions and Bank Accounts:

(P.S.: This feature is written in some detail so that one can appreciate in depth analysis done in designing the base system, and how the system can evolve due to its flexibility)

With globalization, multi-currency becomes essential. But it is essential to evaluate whether the system supports only multi-currency transactions, or even bank accounts of foreign currency.

Is there provision to have the price lists in multiple currencies, or set a preferred currency for a customer / vendor? Does this involve duplicating the transactions? Whether a transaction has one or many accounting currencies, can the parallel accounts be prepared in different currencies? Can transactions be revalued based on exchange rate changes?

P.S.: For a list of benefits & features, please refer/ send a request for BizInt overview documents

Disclaimer

This information is not designed to provide any professional advice. It's compiled based on experiences of various professionals/ companies. It merely intends to facilitate the reader appreciate various aspects involved when an organization embarks upon the journey to implement enterprise solution(s).

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