

5 Ways Your Software Must Fit Your Manufacturing Business

How to select the enterprise software that best fits your plans for future growth



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Take Growth to the Next Level

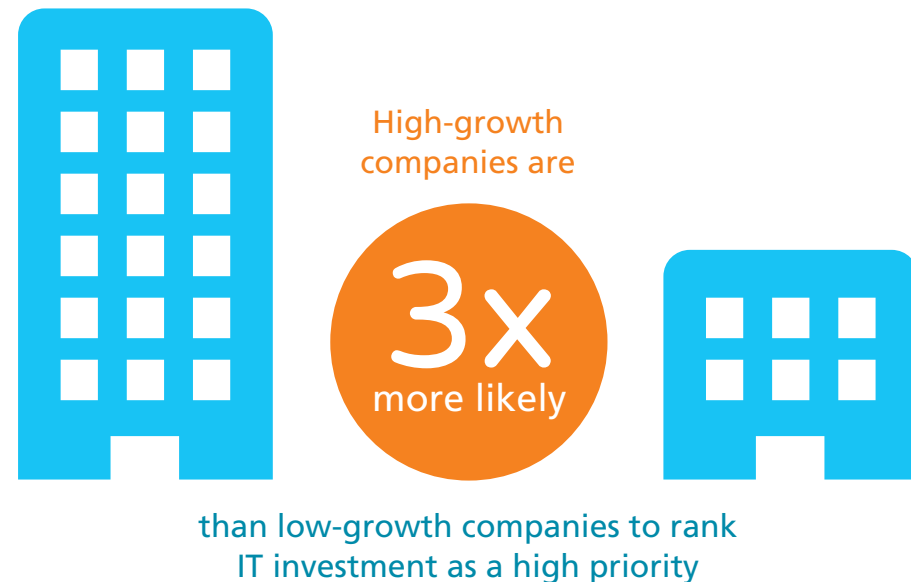
While 70 percent of manufacturers have grown their sales in the past year and 68 percent have increased their profitability, most of these improvements have been only slight—and they have found growth more challenging (45 percent) than rewarding (31 percent).¹

If we focus in on the high-growth companies—the minority—and compare them with their low-growth counterparts, we see that high-growth businesses are not only more than twice as likely to find growth rewarding, they are also almost three times more likely to regard investment in IT as a high priority.¹

The decision to invest in an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system is one that many manufacturers make when they realize that they need greater insight and operational efficiency to pursue growth—expand geographically, add new product or service lines, increase market share, or improve profits.

As you consider your ERP options, how do you ensure that you get the right solution to support growth—one that fits your business and can meet the demands of a sector being rapidly reshaped by digital transformation and Industry 4.0?

This guide will help you find the right ERP fit.



¹ MORAR, Growth Survey, conducted in December 2017 with more than 2,000 respondents from manufacturing companies of all sizes in 14 countries worldwide



1 Fit for Your Industry

Many ERP solutions are strong on generic functions such as financials or HR management, but much weaker when it comes to supporting the processes and workflows specific to manufacturing.

Manufacturing-specific, yet customizable

While generic ERP configurations and workflows may be customizable, you'll save a lot of time and effort if your ERP system—for example—helps you analyze equipment data and track material waste.


Nevertheless, you still want the system to be easily personalized. Even a solution designed with manufacturing in mind likely won't have every feature exactly the way you want it, since each manufacturing industry—such as automotive, electronics, fabricated metals, or packaging—has unique needs.

A specialist provider

An ERP provider specializing in manufacturing—like Epicor—is also more likely to:

- ▶ Prioritize manufacturing-specific improvements in their updates and upgrades
- ▶ Have other manufacturing-specific solutions that can easily integrate with their ERP software—such as a manufacturing execution system (MES) or an aftermarket field service automation solution
- ▶ “Speak your language” and understand your challenges, opportunities, and needs

As a result, your ERP system can be a better business fit and easier to learn and use.



"Epicor offers all the tools required in a make-to-order and make-to-stock manufacturing environment out-of-the-box....We can manage by exception because 80% of the orders are handled by our standard processes within our ERP solution."

—Roberto Morris, ERP Project Consultant
Fife Fabrications

Questions to ask potential providers



- ▶ What is your experience in my specific manufacturing industry?
- ▶ What about your work with other industries in the manufacturing sector—are there things we can learn from any of them?
- ▶ How does your ERP solution reflect what you know about manufacturing?



2 Fit for Integration and Automation

Most manufacturers will agree that successful growth ultimately depends on building smarter factories, and this requires integration across value chains, with systems responding to one another automatically—even “intelligently.”

ERP as your integration hub

There's no doubt that an ERP system—designed to manage multiple business functions in one place—is the ideal business technology for workflow integration. Not all ERP systems, however, are equally able to support the extent of integration you may want across your business—upstream to suppliers and downstream to customers. To support more seamless business processes, you want an ERP system that provides:

- ▶ An integration-friendly architecture—streamlined, standardized, flexible, and preferably cloud-ready
- ▶ Integration-friendly interfaces based on standard open protocols

ERP that eases growth

Besides simplifying integration, a streamlined, standardized, and cloud-ready ERP system can scale more easily, be less susceptible to downtime or performance issues, and be more easily secured. All of these characteristics are critical for growth in the digital age.

Cloud considerations

Keep in mind that cloud-ready architecture doesn't automatically mean that you have to use a cloud-delivered ERP solution. If you're not yet ready for a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model, look for an onsite hosted option that still lets you leverage innovative cloud technologies. That way, you can start to see the benefits of a cloud model in your preferred hosting environment.

"I was a bit reticent using a cloud-based solution at first, but the uptime performance has been fantastic. ...Epicor is integral to everything we do and has the scalability to grow as we do."

—Michael Schmitz, CFO | Aerobiotix

Questions to ask potential providers



- ▶ Do you offer your ERP solution as a cloud service (SaaS)?
- ▶ What control can we expect over updates and upgrades?
- ▶ Do you support hybrid cloud implementations?
- ▶ Will your solution allow a seamless move from an on-premises implementation to the cloud?



3 Fit for Agility and Collaboration

Operational efficiency is often the top reason for investing in ERP, and a large part of the drive for efficiency is that customers today expect more responsive service.

Visibility leads to agility

Responsiveness might mean immediately answering customer questions, giving customers timely reports, anticipating and responding quickly to changes in demand, or shortening production and delivery turnaround times.

To do any of this, you need great business visibility—and the ability to give employees the information they need when and where they need it.² You'll want a solution like Epicor ERP that includes:

- ▶ Integrated analytics
- ▶ Mobile capabilities
- ▶ Social functions

Integrated analytics

Look for ERP analytics that are sophisticated enough to be genuinely valuable without being too complex for non-technical staff. A manufacturing-specific ERP solution should have analytics capabilities that save you time by answering your most common questions.

“With Epicor ERP...the real transformation has come from how we have been able to use the accurate, real-time insights it delivers.”

—Keith Elliot, General Manager | Allspeeds

² For more on the role of visibility in manufacturing, see our eBook, “Three Sure Ways to Get Your Factory Fit for the Future”

Mobile capabilities

Look for a solution that your people can use with any device to respond to a business or customer need wherever they are—at home, on the factory floor, or in a meeting. Think about using mobility to make formerly desk-bound or manual jobs—scheduling, inventory management, or quoting, for example—more agile.

Social functions

Aberdeen Group—an independent, third-party researcher—has found that organizations with social tools built into the ERP platform can achieve almost three times the improvement in profitability than those using ERP without them.³ For better collaboration, you want a solution that offers social networking as integrated, customizable functionality—not as a limited afterthought.

³ “The Next Generation of Business Management: Social ERP,” Nick Castellina, Aberdeen Group, April 2015



Questions to ask potential providers



- ▶ What do you offer in the way of real-time analytics for day-to-day operational insight? What about deep-dive analytics for strategic analysis?
- ▶ How customizable and user-friendly are your analytics?
- ▶ Can we easily embed social communication functions into dashboards and other everyday ERP functionality?
- ▶ Can we extend social functions to customers and suppliers?
- ▶ Does your mobile capability support all roles and tasks?



4 Fit for the Future

Whether your growth strategy is already bearing fruit or you're still taking your early steps, you want the decisions you make now to help your business thrive tomorrow, next year, and beyond.

What does the future hold?

Assess the development roadmap of potential ERP providers to understand where they see your industry going and how they will support change. Does their focus support your vision? Does it align with what research says about the future of manufacturing, such as the centrality of data to digital transformation, the implications of the Internet of Things (IoT), and the practical opportunities from artificial intelligence?⁴

Personalization

The rise of mass personalization is a notable trend in manufacturing—enabled by technologies that support automated product configuration, make-to-order models, and efficiency in short runs. As well as exploring how an ERP solution can help you achieve mass personalization for your own customers, consider whether the provider will be able to respond to your own requirements for personalization in the ERP solution.

⁴ See, for example:

"Industry 4.0: Building the Digital Enterprise," PwC, 2016

"Technology and Innovation for the Future of Production: Accelerating Value Creation," World Economic Forum in Collaboration With A.T. Kearney, March 2017

Delivery models

If a cloud-delivered solution isn't right for you today, ensure that your chosen provider will be able to support you with SaaS delivery in the future. Research shows that interest in cloud-based ERP already exceeds interest in onsite ERP, and manufacturers are managing their operations better through their use of cloud-based applications.⁵

“Epicor has helped us evolve on how we keep up with our customers and put us in a great position to help us grow as we embrace the future of manufacturing.”

—Gary Fruth, President and CEO
Dalsin Industries

⁵ “What Does Digitalization in Manufacturing Mean Now?,” Greg Cline, Aberdeen Group, January 2017

Questions to ask potential providers



- ▶ What developments in your ERP solution can we expect in the short, medium, and long term?
- ▶ Will we be able to customize your software without creating complex or expensive issues for ourselves down the line?
- ▶ What are early adopters in our industry doing that we might learn from?
- ▶ Do you offer a SaaS option? What level of control over updates and upgrades does it give us?



5 Fit for a Fast Start

The last thing you need is to make your ERP choice and then get held back by a disruptive or costly implementation—or by a system that is hard to learn and use.

Start off right

Check that the ERP provider has a clearly defined implementation process with the right combination of expertise, methodology, and tools to limit disruption. Look at their track record, talk to similar customers if possible, and assess any implementation partners that the provider may use.

Ongoing support

If your own resources are limited, find a provider with good consulting or professional-service capabilities to help with your implementation responsibilities. Most modern technology is fairly intuitive to use, but having access to quality training tools can mean the difference between success and failure for software as critical to your business as ERP. Too many businesses fail to achieve their expected return on investment because of poor user adoption or low competency in using the software.

Don't forget that it's not just about training when the solution is first deployed. It's also vital for staff to continue to access resources that help them learn and explore new features and functionality and to quickly onboard new staff long after the initial implementation. A wide availability of different types of training that cater to different styles of learning will indicate a commitment to user support that you can rely on.

“By completing online training in advance of our target launch date, our team transitioned easily to the new interface... which meant little-to-no downtime when we went live.”

—Mike Pavlica, VP Operations and Finance | Omega Plastics

Questions to ask potential providers



- ▶ What implementation capability do you have for our region?
- ▶ What will you do to ensure that implementation doesn't disrupt our business?
- ▶ What types of user training do you support—for example, instructor-led, self-driven, onsite classes, webinars?
- ▶ Do you offer any tools to help us manage and test user training and learning?



Ease of Everything— the Epicor Difference

You've got enough challenges when pursuing business growth. Your ERP system should give your people the time and tools they need to make smart decisions that delight customers and drive profitability.

A great fit for growth

With more than 45 years dedicated to helping manufacturers ease business complexity and grow profitably, Epicor is your ideal source for ERP and other manufacturing-specific business software. Talk to us about how Epicor ERP can fit your needs for a more integrated, agile workplace and how we will support you along the way.

We understand your industry, speak your language, and support you with expertise and tools to simplify work at every stage. Our cloud-friendly platform offers rich functionality focused on visibility and agility for manufacturers. Customers tell us that Epicor ERP is easy to deploy, learn, access, and use. We designed it to evolve with you—whatever the future may hold.

“The Epicor ERP solution has given us real-time process control, data integrity, traceability, security, and agility, which has allowed us to make better decisions, improve our operations, and—ultimately—grow our business.”

—Zakee Siddiqi, Chairman and CEO
SIDDCO Group

Manufacturing industries served by Epicor include:

- ▶ Aerospace and defense
- ▶ Automotive
- ▶ Electronics and high-tech
- ▶ Fabricated metals
- ▶ Furniture and fixtures
- ▶ Industrial machinery
- ▶ Medical devices
- ▶ Rubber and plastics



About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation drives business growth. We provide flexible, industry-specific software designed to fit the precise needs of our manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industry customers. More than 45 years of experience with our customers' unique business processes and operational requirements are built into every solution—in the cloud or on premises. With this deep understanding of your industry, Epicor solutions dramatically improve performance and profitability while easing complexity so you can focus on growth.

For more information, [connect with Epicor](#) or visit www.epicor.com.



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