

guide to technology solutions

ASSOCIATIONS

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INSIDE

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You've built the technology and added the tools that your members want. But don't forget to think about what else you can do to minimize headaches and guarantee a seamless experience for both sides. Look inside for tips on how to do just that.



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ADMINISTRATION

Find the right product, and the right partner

By Kerry Gunther

One of the most difficult decisions for an association is choosing the appropriate technology to suit its needs. Many software packages are expensive, and there is a staggering number of vendors, products, modules, and technologies from which to choose. Here's eight tips on how to make sure you're picking the right software—and the right vendor to go along with it.

1. You're buying a company, not just a product. Be certain you can work comfortably with whomever you select.
2. Never underestimate support requirements after implementation. Ask if the vendor provides training and ongoing customer and technological support.
3. Most vendors can "justify" compliance with your list of requested features in one way or another. Engage vendors in a real conversation and test their product. The best vendors are familiar enough with their products to suggest options as to how a particular need might be met—often providing insights you may not have considered.
4. Try to limit the number of vendors involved in your project. Coordinating multiple vendors will generally increase your timeline and costs and complicate matters. You're going to have enough on your hands managing all of your internal stakeholders.
5. Participate in a live demo. Before you buy any software product, it is crucial that you experience the usability, features, and overall look and feel of the system. Ask to see live implementations, too.
6. Identify your problems. The vendor is there to come up with solutions. Approaching technology vendors with solutions in mind may limit their ability to provide valuable ideas and insights that you may not have considered. If you focus on the problems you're trying to solve and overall project goals, the entire transition will be smoother, and you're more likely to get results.
7. Compare apples to apples. "Free" software products still require significant and often costly integration and configuration. Make sure you consider all costs when comparing open-source solutions with commercial products.
8. Be wary of vendors who say they can install any software product. No one company is expert in all technologies. You're better off choosing a qualified expert in a specific product than a jack of all trades who is a master of none.

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