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Find the Right ERP

Industry knowledge, expertise and scalability point the way to a successful software solution.

■ Organizations evaluating an enterprise resource planning (ERP) software solution want to ensure they make the right choice, see the solution successfully implemented and quickly experience a return on investment (ROI). They can increase their odds of success — and speed up their ROI — by coming into the process with a clear understanding of their company's needs and exercising due diligence as they research ERP vendors. Selecting the right ERP solution and vendor is essential; the wrong decision can be costly, in terms of time as well as money.

ERP software specific to the apparel industry integrates a business's primary operations, from sales order entry, through production and inventory control, to accounting and financials. With functionality developed to meet the critical needs and complex processes of apparel decorators, industry-specific ERP is designed to streamline and manage these intricate business operations in a centralized database.

Nonetheless, navigating the vast

software choices can seem overwhelming. To ease the search and decision-making process, look for industry knowledge and expertise, scalability, and functionality tailored to apparel decorating businesses.

Vet the Vendor

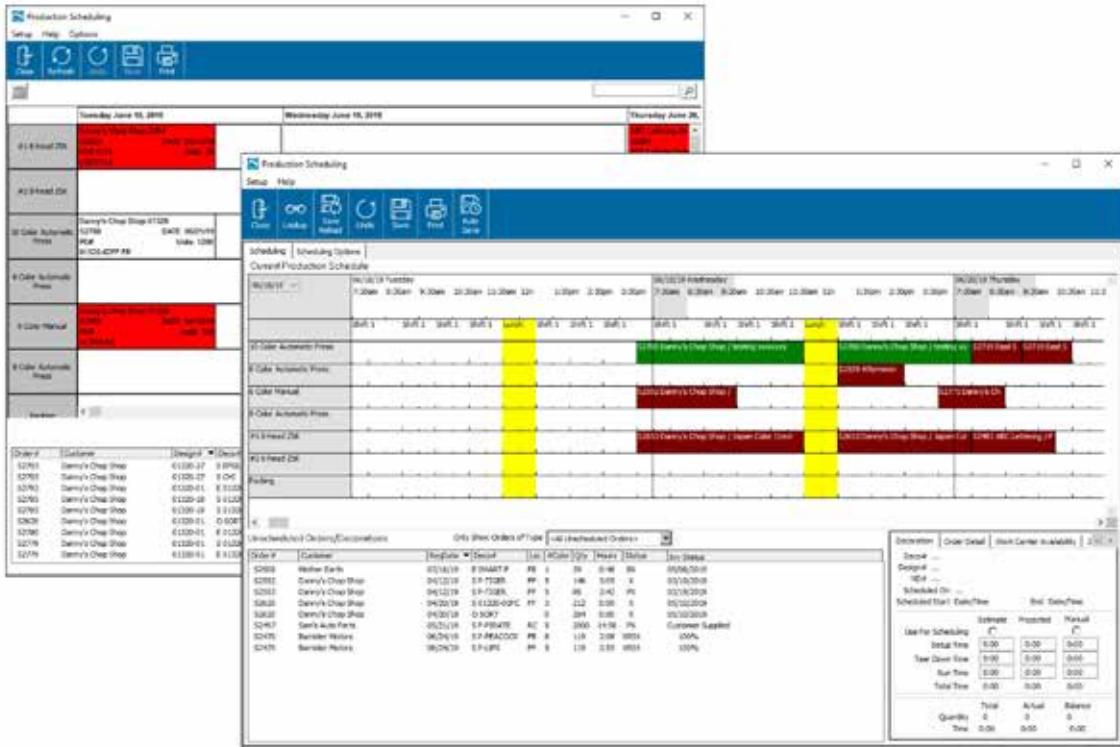
The apparel industry has unique needs and specific processes, and generic business management software solutions may not be up to the task. Therefore, thoroughly vetting an ERP vendor for their industry knowledge and expertise is critical — and the results should be a primary selection criterion. Finding an ERP solution that is developed by experts who have an extensive understanding of apparel industry best practices, terminology and business processes, results in solutions with features and functionality that meet the dynamic requirements of decorators. The result is a comprehensive software package that fulfills the end user's needs and serves the uniqueness of the apparel industry.

Years of expertise in the apparel industry provides many advantages to the client.

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By Adam Brister, Director, Impress





Manage a shop floor quickly and easily using Production Scheduling. Courtesy of Impress.

Select a vendor who actively participates in industry associations, establishes good relationships with suppliers and fosters integrations with marketplace leaders. A vendor who's actively involved in the industry and knows terminology, business methods, market climate and industry requirements is able to develop the ERP software that employs best practices when implementing standard operating procedures.

Understanding the dynamics of the industry produces a host of other benefits as well, including the decreased need for software customization, shorter implementation times, and reduced implementation and maintenance costs — all of which speed the time to ROI. The knowledgeable ERP vendor will also be able to recommend ways to utilize additional functionalities within the software to improve processes even further.

An ERP vendor should have a proven methodology for implementing the system in an effective and timely manner. This plan should include a detailed implementation guide with a dedicated project team to get the new software up and running as quickly as possible. Experienced implementation specialists will be able to walk companies through proven processes to ensure a smooth transition. Training opportunities should be available after

go-live, with the software vendor offering personalized training, webinars specific to end users and user conferences. Select a vendor that stands behind its development strategy. When advances in the industry require continuous improvement and new software functionalities, opportunities should be in place for receipt of the latest major release.

Choose Apparel-Specific Functionality

Apparel decorators will also have to choose between a generic ERP and an industry-specific ERP solution with distinct apparel decorating functionality. This is a critical selection criterion. Any ERP system selected should have front-end to back-end functionality from beginning sales order entry through shipping of the final product; it should provide a complete business management system.

A solution that has been developed with apparel decorators in mind from the ground up offers specialized features and functionality such as artwork management, purchasing, full production scheduling, inventory management, royalty tracking, EDI, business analytics and reporting, customer portals and shipping integrations. With a comprehensive ERP solution, these applications are part of an integrated system with real-time updates and are

scalable to meet the needs of companies of any size. By incorporating the unique requirements and processes of the apparel industry, software vendors are able to demonstrate a better understanding of end users' needs to provide more customer-centric solutions.

Apparel decorators need ERP vendors to provide the following industry-specific functionalities:

Artwork Management

Manage and track the customer-specific or catalog artwork/decoration process and track approval of garment design.

Production Center & Scheduling

This application provides visibility into production by tracking job processes and each employee's timeline for completing them. Alerts that include information on jobs that are late or require attention allow problems to be resolved before they come to a head. The solution tracks setup, run time and employee productivity.

Warehouse Management System (WMS)

Using barcodes and handheld mobile scanners, companies can easily manage inventory in multiple warehouse operations. Inventory accuracy is increased and order fulfillment is streamlined with



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detailed inventory tracking and real-time visibility.

Customer Portal

Providing both customers and internal sales teams with 24-hour access via a web portal, this feature delivers a method for approving pending artwork, checking the status of open orders, tracking shipments, viewing invoices and other customer-related information.

Partners

Apparel decorators should ensure that the chosen ERP vendor has strong relationships with industry-best solutions that complement the ERP software and the end user's organization. An ERP solution that offers integrations with key suppliers, popular industry-specific e-commerce platforms, payment processors and other strategic partners, enhances the performance of the software as a whole and is a good indicator of a best-of-breed vendor.

Go for Scalability

Scalability is the capacity to handle growth and change, specifically the exponential increase in volume, workload and the amount of data, all while keeping pace with the trajectory of the business. Investing in a technology platform that

is scalable is an important ERP selection criterion. Companies must implement software solutions that can grow with their businesses. Scalability includes the ability to add new features, functionality, applications and cross-platform capabilities that can scale along with the growth of the apparel business. Companies should have the ability to add optional modules, increase the number of users, expand to additional facilities (including globally), or increase the amount of data and information at any time or as business needs evolve.

It is essential to evaluate software vendors in terms of their scalability and their focus on development for the future. As a prospective client, an apparel decorator should ask whether the ERP vendor is continually focusing on industry changes and staying abreast of where the industry is going. Being responsive to market changes shows their commitment to remain at the forefront of technology.

When further evaluating a vendor, find out if they utilize a client advisory group — the answer can provide insight into their dedication to developing a client-centric solution. Soliciting customer feedback to incorporate into a company's development roadmap indicates that a vendor is responsive to the needs of the apparel industry — ensuring their focus

remains on ongoing development and continuous improvement.

In the search for an apparel ERP solution, it is essential that companies utilize several selection criterion to avoid making a decision that could be costly to their apparel decorating business. By examining a vendor's industry knowledge and expertise, the ERP software's industry-specific functionality and the scalability of the technology platform, companies will have the tools they need to make an informed choice — creating a foundation for growth and greater profitability.

Adam Brister has been with Impress' parent company, Open Systems Adaptable Solutions (OSAS), for over 11 years, providing an extensive business management software background. As the Director of Impress, Adam oversees the division, focusing on ensuring that the technology solutions meet current and future market demands. Leveraging his comprehensive understanding of apparel decorating, the unique business trends of this marketplace and information gathered from market analysis and customer feedback, he guides the Impress product offerings, sales and support services. Adam always enjoys opportunities to gain further insight into the industry and making connections within the marketplace. Impress has been part of OSAS since August 2017.