

DEAR CMMS SALES REP, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

How Should I Evaluate the Vendor as a Company?

by Chris Olsen, MPulse Sales Professional

In parts one and two of this series, I answered a customer's question on pointers for selecting maintenance or asset management software. In those articles, I focused on evaluating product attributes and pricing. Equally as important is evaluating the company that provides the software. That's the focus of this article.

Sometimes when I'm presenting to prospective customers, they're so eager to see a demonstration of our software, they don't want to hear much about our company. I'd argue, though, that time spent assessing the company you're buying from is time well spent. It's important to know who you'll get as a partner if you implement their software.



Company Assessment: The Four-Factors Framework

I think about a company in terms of four factors. The first is Viability, or its capacity to survive and stick around. The second is Expertise—the organizational knowledge it brings to bear on the issues pertinent to our industry and product type. The third factor is Responsiveness, the company's ability to meet customers' needs in a timely fashion. Fourth and finally, I consider Policy and Process, the formal procedures an organization has in place to respond to business situations.

Below, I've provide a list of "consideration questions" to spur your thinking about each of these important areas.

Viability

If the company is a "household name" or publicly traded, it's easier to judge their stability. Established, known brands usually have a long track record and offer plenty of publicly available information. If a smaller company provides the best fit for your needs, though, there are good ways to assess its viability too. Consider these questions to better understand its capabilities.

- Does the company's website suggest it's a viable company or does it look unprofessional? Does it seem they built a site five years ago and haven't had the funds to update it since?
- Does the company have professionally prepared literature or other resources for the topics that are important to you? If not, the company either doesn't have the funding to produce relevant content, or it hasn't paid much attention to that topic. If that topic is important to you, that could be a problem.
- If your point of contact is unavailable (e.g., illness, vacation), can you call a main number and get connected to someone who can help?
- Does the sales rep have standard tools of the trade, like a conference call number, webinar tools, and a mobile number to share?
- What do they offer for tech support? You're not purchasing low-end consumer software, so you should expect phone support from a human being. What other training and support resources do they offer? Does the company offer howto videos or regular webinars? Do they have an online knowledge base or support portal? Do they have a tool for tracking tech support cases?
- How often is the software updated? How are these updates performed? How are you notified of updates?
- How many customers and users do they have?
- Can they support their claim with a third-party source of information? Can you get an objective reference from one of their customers? The best reference is the one you find yourself. To find one, leverage any trade associations or alumni networks you or your co-workers belong to. Contact companies in your geography that may use maintenance management software and ask



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their advice. Keep an open mind about references. The business doesn't have to be exactly like yours to provide good insight about the company (and the product). A hospital, government entity, manufacturing company, zoo, and power plant do have things in common when it comes to maintenance. It's a great way to network. It's likely you'll have something of value to share, and you won't get stuck with a reference that a sales rep "cherry picked" to impress you.

Expertise

Ideally, you want a vendor whose main focus is providing the products and services you're buying. The company should also have relevant experience in your industry and understand what you do. Here are a few questions to help you figure out whether they do.

- Does the company focus on CMMS, or is it a side business or loss-leader for something else they sell? For example, do they really want to sell you an ERP system, other software or ancillary services?
- Do the backgrounds of the company's leadership team make sense to you? Remember that you want your vendor to be a viable company. While a leadership team of all maintenance guys may have appeal to you, you want techies, finance folks, and marketing jocks in the mix too.
- What's the company's technical depth? Whether or not you're technical, you can make a judgment about this. For example, ask about certifications. What's the underlying technology? Is it based on familiar technology standards? Tap into your IT staff or geek friends and get their gut feel.
- Does the company have customers who are similar to you in terms of industry, size, and geography?
- Does the company outsource technical support and training? Outsourcing has its place, but tech support and training aren't good areas to outsource. Even if the

outsourced service provider is US-based, it won't have the same level of expertise or dedication as inhouse employees.

Responsiveness

A "great" company is no good to you if it doesn't respond to your requests for help. Consider these questions when evaluating a company's responsiveness.

- Is the company responsive and organized during the sales process? If not, what's the likelihood it will be after the sale?
- If you asked a question that the sales rep couldn't answer, that shouldn't be a red flag (unless it was a really easy question). I'll confess that about 80% of the prospects I've worked with who become customers asked a question I couldn't answer. What you want to scrutinize is whether the sales rep responds in a reasonable time with a reasonable answer. If they don't, either the individual is disorganized or he/she doesn't have technical resources readily available. If that's the case, it could indicate a poorly funded, poorly manned organization, or a poorly trained staff. That's a recipe for miserable tech support

Policy and Process

If a company has poorly defined processes and policies, you'll notice it when they're responding on the fly to ordinary requests or challenges. Strong, professional companies have established, well-defined ways of tackling most issues. Here are some questions to think about.

- Does your sales rep seem to easily answer your questions regarding the implementation process or tech support escalation procedures?
- What's the company's post-sale process? Does it seem like something they've given thought to that will improve your chance for success?

Trust Your Gut

Whether you're considering a large vendor or a small one, there are many ways to assess whether a company will be a good long-term partner. Many of the questions I've posed above you'll be able to answer naturally through your observations during the sales process, or by studying the company's website. Ultimately, though, you should trust your gut and only select a vendor you're certain you'll be happy with over the long haul.

Did you miss Part 1 and Part 2 of this series? Click the links to download them now



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