



### What Makes a Great E/CTRM? Part 3 - Selecting C/ETRM Software

As we learned from Bob's recent expeditions into [DIY](#) (Do it yourself) scratch-build projects and [Best of Breed](#) solutions, neither option presented Bob with a risk-free alternative to simply finding and acquiring a C/ETRM solution that "has it all" already. In fact, neither of these two options were even remotely close to Bob's tolerance for project risk for an enterprise-wide system affecting every important part of his company's business. So, Bob now turned his thoughts to C/ETRM vendors who claim to provide every feature and every function Bob's company requires, shrink-wrapped and out of the box.

Bob picked up some brochures he collected recently at a trade show. He considered each a mark of heroism. His peers wouldn't even enter the exhibition hall at the trade show. Afraid of being trapped by vendor representatives and forced to watch system demonstrations. But Bob had swept through

the exhibition hall like a whirlwind. In and out fast. And, now Bob had at least a place to begin.

"They all look pretty good," Bob thought. The brochures all say exactly what I'm looking for. Graphics, nice and professional looking. But there were at least 10 of them in all. Brochures, that is. Should Bob call each vendor one-by-one? What questions should he ask each vendor to whittle down the list a bit? 10 was too many to put in front of his user community. He wouldn't be doing his job if he subjected his entire company's staff to help him whittle down this list. Bob would appear to not know anything about his company's business, then. But, alternatively, if Bob did whittle it down, how would he know he wasn't eliminating one of the better alternatives?

A real head-scratcher. Bob was between the proverbial rock and hard spot. Not a comfortable place to be. Then, Bob

remembered he met someone at the recent trade show. Got his card. Where was it? Ah, here it is. Ace Systems Integrators. Specializing in software selections and implementations. That's exactly what Bob needed at this moment. Some expert power. Someone who knew the lay of the land. Someone who could help Bob ferret out which vendors to consider seriously and which vendors to cautiously avoid. And, Bob could always shield himself politically by hiring the "experts". Brilliant idea. No more rock-n-hard spot.

Bob picked up the phone and called Ace. Pete picked up the call and assured Bob that Ace could steer Bob clear of any rocky shoals. In fact, Pete had in his possession a list of great questions to ask vendors about their software. Perfect. But first, Pete and Bob would need to discuss Bob's company's needs, prepare an RFI and RFP, and schedule product demonstrations. Cost would be minimal. Afterwards, after a vendor was selected, Ace would staff Bob's implementation project with its large staff of highly experienced implementation experts.

Hmm. A generous offer certainly. Bob made a note to ask Pete for resumes of Ace personnel assigned to his project. Bob was nobody's fool. Bob wanted to see value in exchange for his precious budget allocation. Bob wondered where Ace's highly experienced team of experts received their experience and expertise. Certainly not from all 10 potential vendors. From any of them? Bob wondered how their experience and expertise would bias their selection recommendations. Which vendors would be included? Which would be excluded? Would the "included" vendors correlate with the work history of Ace's experts? Something to be considered. Bob made another note to get more detail on this matter later.

Pete and Bob had many more conversations during the next month or two, preparing for software selection. First, Ace developed an RFI

(request for information) packet and short-listed four of the ten vendors on Bob's list. Bob asked Pete why the other six were eliminated. Pete told him, not to worry. They were newer vendors without a long client list. Fewer employees. Not fully matured. Pete didn't want Bob to take a risk on those companies. What would Bob's management say if Bob selected one of those vendors without a proven track record? Pete's advice made a lot of sense to Bob. While Bob wanted to pick "the very best one", Bob had politics to worry about. At least, Bob could say he picked a highly qualified vendor with the help of a highly qualified expert. Who could find fault with that approach? Bob certainly couldn't. However, being a cautious sort of person, Bob did decide to follow up on an earlier note: How were potential vendors eliminated by Ace? Just for grins. An academic pursuit.

Bob wondered how he would select a vendor without Ace's assistance. How would Bob know if a vendor was highly qualified? Balance sheet? Annual reports? List of clients? Track record? Ah, Track record. That might be just the thing, thought Bob. Ultimately, what is the best measure of quality? Shouldn't it be track record? And what does track record mean exactly? On-time? Within budget? Happy customers?

Bob pondered that thought for a moment. Yes. Happy customers. Customers who can say good things about their experience. That seemed to summarize track record rather well. Bob wanted his company to be happy with his/their decision, too. If a vendor showed a track record of happy clients, shouldn't this be an important qualifying factor? After all, a happy customer should be one that is satisfied, even delighted, with its purchasing decision, right? Bob made a note to suggest Ace include an RFI requirement for a list of references from each potential vendor, which Bob could interview.

After the selected vendors returned RFIs, Ace's team poured over vendor responses. Another

vendor was eliminated: Not enough clients like Bob's company. Bob considered Ace's reasoning. It sounded perfectly logical. Why would Bob's company acquire licenses to software from a vendor not having deep experience with Bob's company's business? Wouldn't that indicate that their software isn't a good fit for Bob's company?

But, on the other hand, every company starts somewhere. Even the older companies were young once. And, did a lack of a lengthy client list stop their business development? Does it necessarily mean software from a vendor without a lengthy, relevant client list has no meaningful features or functions for Bob's company? Certainly, one can assume more years, more experience, does indicate a better chance of having more relevant features and functions. But what if a vendor now has a long client list, but its product hadn't changed significantly in years? Does that mean a product is perfect in its present form? Or, does it mean that a vendor stopped investing in product development after implementing all those customers?

An argument could be made, Bob thought, that younger-vendor software may not have all the bells and whistles one might expect from a more establish vendor. But, what about the essentials? Why should a more mature vendor get a pass, and not a less mature vendor, in the absence of information? And, Bob thought, younger vendors probably have a more current technology stack, too. And, perhaps, they are hungrier for business. Certainly, more product development to catch up to competitors. Maybe less costly, too. Might make a deal. Don't know. And, may never find out if they are never reviewed. But that would take too much time. Isn't that why I hired the experts, Bob thought?

So, Bob returned full circle to where he started. And, looking at other vendors now would be moving in a backwards direction. Perhaps, Bob conceded, if none of the selected vendors work out, I can fall back to exploring these

other eliminated vendors and their software. But Bob knew that would not likely happen. He was kidding himself. After all, hadn't he been spending budget to select a software system? And, he couldn't just tell his management that it was a waste now, could he? It would look really bad. And, Bob didn't like looking foolish.

But how much had the selection project really cost? Was it all that much? Weren't sunk costs sunk, as they say in MBA school? What would be the cost of mistakenly selecting the finalist, just because all the other choices were eliminated for one reason or another? Was the finalist the only choice? Bob felt a bit like he was being railroaded. Couldn't turn left. No right turn. Only one thing to do: Keep moving forward.

It didn't occur to Bob until much too late that he probably should have explored independent reviews of software. He vaguely remembered seeing something somewhere about these companies that conduct independent software reviews, sometimes with comparison-contrast. Bob should probably have done a little more research before hiring Ace directly. But, at the time, Bob was in a hurry. He had panicked, hadn't he? Well, he thought resignedly, let's hope for the best. There probably isn't much difference made by picking one software over another, right? Aren't they all supposed to do the same thing? As long as this selection process picks a software that ticks all the boxes from a qualified vendor, Bob's company should be fine.

But what constitutes a quality vendor? Happy clients, Bob remembered. But what makes clients happy? What would make me happy, Bob considered? "Makes me look good to my management" was Bob's first thought. He shook this thought from his head. Bob didn't consider himself politically savvy. But he did want to keep his job and get a promotion or a raise from time to time. And what would do that? What kind of vendor would make his company happy? Well, for starters, an on-time

and within-budget software implementation sounded nice. Knowledgeable, experienced, easy-to-work-with vendor professionals. A responsive helpdesk. Fast turnaround for product defects. Useful, helpful documentation and training. Lots of post-implementation product support. On-going product development, too. Yes, this sort of vendor would make Bob very happy.

Bob's reflections returned to the RFIs. Bob hoped one of these vendors was of the sort Bob sought. Now that the number of vendors had been reduced to three, each remaining vendor would be invited to submit an RFP (request for proposal). From this list, three would be reduced to two. And, these two finalists would be invited to demonstrate their software to Bob's company. From ten to two. Bob hadn't seen software from the other eight. Now, all Bob would really see is software from only two. Strange how this process works, Bob thought. We eliminated eight potential vendor candidates, practically sight unseen. Now, we are left with either one or the other.

Seemed like a false binary to Bob. Must be one or the other. But it didn't have to be this way, one or the other, when there existed many other possibilities. At least, eight other possibilities, to be exact. Still, that's the way it turned out, isn't it? And, Bob couldn't really see how it could have happened any differently. Vendors had to be eliminated on some basis. Decisions had to be made. Wouldn't indecision be a worse predicament? And, Bob had provided his company with a choice. The final decision wouldn't be his. The burden of the blame wouldn't be his either if the decision didn't work out. Bob was glad of that point. But was the choice between better and best? Or, was the choice between worse and worst? Bob really couldn't ever know for certain. Not the way this process worked.

But now that Bob and his company would finally see some software, Bob was eager to figure out how one of the two finalists would be chosen and the other eliminated. In our next installment in Bob journey, we will look at some important product features Bob should review with his company.