



GET CONNECTED:
**PURCHASING SOFTWARE FOR
YOUR SCHOOL**



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GET CONNECTED: PURCHASING SOFTWARE FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Are you confident in specifying your software needs? What questions should you ask a software provider? What are the critical factors to bear in mind when successfully implementing new software?



Every school is advised to develop an ICT vision and strategy on how technology is used to support teaching, learning and management. Software applications for the latter are commonly purchased to enhance the systems already employed, to save the school money over the long term or to make life easier. Before you purchase and install software on your server, PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone, there are important issues you must consider.

The first step in the procurement process is **defining a need and preparing a business case**. The following steps will guide you through this stage:

- Identify the core requirements that the software must fulfil.
- Calculate how much you have to spend. People often forget this one and end up wasting time looking at products they can never afford.
- Work out the benefits the software will bring. Will it save time or money?
- Establish whether it is feasible to install the software. You may have to upgrade 100 PCs to allow it to work and that may not be affordable.
- Do not consider software where your systems will only just meet the minimum requirements needed to support it. Your systems must be more than capable of supporting the software as they will probably be running additional tasks simultaneously.
- If there will be time savings achieved by using this software, what will you use the saved time for? Try and demonstrate that saved time will benefit other activity areas.

Once approval is obtained to purchase software, do you then procure specialist software or design the software in-house? Naturally there are advantages and disadvantages to be evaluated with each option:

- Only if the core requirements cannot be met by purchasing software should you consider commissioning bespoke in-house software. The latter option is unlikely to be cost effective for a single school or even a cluster.
- The people who write the software in house may be great at supporting it while they work for you. Once they leave you will either have to train up others, pay the original writers consultancy fees, or end up buying something else to maintain the requirements served by the software. Do take account of the costs of employing people to support software.
- If you buy software off the shelf the vendor will have a support system in place. They will keep the software up to date. They will also have versions that will work with newer editions of the operating system it was written for.
- Appoint Application Owners (AOs) within the school and keep this documented. The AOs can deal with day to day administration of the software but they should have a contact at the vendor for specialist help.



PROCUREMENT OPTIONS

Once you decide to purchase specialist software, there will always be procurement options to evaluate either by competitive tender, negotiation or through a framework agreement. If a framework contract is unavailable then collaborate with other schools, the local authority or other organisations, to create an interesting business proposition for suppliers. The increased volume of business will help you to negotiate better terms and prices.

Consider the following tips when procuring software:

- How is the licence cost calculated? Some suppliers will have a one-off cost others take account of the number of enabled users/computers in the school domain.
- Evaluate the purchase of a maintenance contract, which is often cheaper if taken at the time of initial purchase. There will be different levels of support available, sometimes referred to as bronze to gold or tier 1 to 3. You need to select one that will suit your support needs.
- If you buy software in bulk from the same vendor/author you can often negotiate a good ongoing price or get cheaper support. Microsoft has volume licencing, enterprise agreements and software assurance schemes which are well worth looking into if you have the opportunity of scale purchase by a group, cluster or partnership. Note that a new Microsoft memorandum of understanding was launched on 1 January 2013 by the DoE and operates until 31 December 2015, enabling all UK schools choosing to purchase Microsoft software to access significant pricing discounts and savings, together with enhanced licensing terms.
- Negotiate with the vendor/author to provide an agreed number of days/hours installation help and support. They are the people who know how best to set the software up and should have experience of various designs.
- Ensure that your hardware and operating systems are compatible with and will adequately support any new applications. In isolation, it may appear that your standard desktop or laptop computers have sufficient memory and power to run new applications, but in tandem with applications already in use, new software may require enhanced hardware or an up-dated operating system

Consider asking the following questions when discussing or negotiating your requirements with a software provider:

- What are the system requirements of your chosen software eg operating system, memory required and what graphics capability your PC will require to successfully run their product? Check compatibility with any existing software you use.
- What is the capacity of the support base and is it available on-line?

- Do they offer installation help?
- What are their support costs?
- Do they have engineers in your area?
- Are there volume discounts available?
- If the Author of bespoke software was to leave, what upgrade/maintenance agreements are in place? The source code which constitutes a programme typically falls within one of two licensing standards: open source and proprietary software.
- For how much longer will the software be developed and supported? When will it go end of life?
- Will the software work on your infrastructure? Do they foresee any issues?
- Do they offer a free trial and provide references?
- Examine a copy of standard contract wording.



INSTALLATION

Before installing any software on a Windows PC, make sure your Internet security software is up to date. Run a backup of your important files and folders so that if something goes wrong you do not lose any data or information. Most importantly make sure System Restore is running and you have a recent restore point. In this way you know that you can always roll back your PC to a time before you installed your new software.

Almost all PC software these days can be purchased via download. The advantages of this are that you can purchase from your PC and install immediately and sometimes the product is cheaper. But you will need a decent web connection to download large software files and some people prefer physical media as it means they always have a back-up and a place to store their activation codes.



If you purchase via download, you will typically have to input an activation code once a trial version is installed. Make sure that this code is saved safely, such that if your PC fails or you simply upgrade, you can then re-install your programme.

When you purchase software, in most cases you are buying only the right to use it on a single device. Some products - security software is a good example - are more typically sold in three- or five-PC licences, as you need it to run on every device on your network. In fact, some vendors now sell antivirus for example on licences in which you can install and run their products on every PC you own. Similarly Adobe allows users of its design software to utilise products on two PCs. The idea is that you can use one in the office and another at home, but never both simultaneously.

Software as a Service(SAAS) - which is more widely known as cloud computing, is one of the fastest growing sectors in information technology. Applications are web based and fully supported software is provided by suppliers, including server hosting, security, software upgrades, support and maintenance. There is no software purchase cost; suppliers operate payment regimes which are usually based on the number of users per month. Users benefit from having the software without having to incur the initial capital expenditure associated with developing the software and investing in the resources to run it.

IMPLEMENTATION

What are the critical success factors at the implementation stage? These factors should be listed in the business case.

- Users should be happy! They are the biggest critics and in many cases their actual needs justified the purchase in the first place. Cost savings are an important factor but unhappy users probably will not maximise the anticipated benefits of the software.
- Try and set-up an environment/system to test the install. Often you will find that software that you use on your systems can conflict in some way eg antivirus software.
- Arrange for some of the prospective main users to be involved in the set-up and testing. This will allow them to have a greater understanding of how it works and often pays dividends once the software is in and working as they can possibly help others.
- Try and negotiate with the Vendor/Author to help with the roll out of the software.

- Be prepared as some people do not like change and will complain that “it’s not like the old way”. Make sure the support staff know how it works and involve them in the implementation and testing.
- Document the installation process down to its last mouse click. Those that install it today may be gone in a month and you need to know how it was executed. IT people sometimes do not like documenting instructions but it is a task that must be completed.
- Work out a process for dealing with updates. When updates come out you will need to know how they will be applied and tested. Advance preparation should minimise downtime.
- The systems running the software must have sufficient capacity otherwise the software will probably be slow and that will lead to unhappy users.
- Document the user processes and if necessary provide in-house training on how to use the software.



EVALUATION

Finally when evaluating the benefits to the school after successfully implementing the software, consider the following:

- Assess the installation against the business case.
- Where appropriate re-assess the existing business process you are hoping to replace. Re- assess again after about three-six months once users are used to the new process.
- Ask the users what they think and look for their recommendations for improvements. Get them involved. Happy users are a great indicator of business improvements.
- Where it is a relevant measure, has productivity increased? Test it after 3-6 months and see if it has helped.

Most software requires only occasional updates to patch security holes and maintain compatibility with operating systems. But some products - PC optimisation tools and anti-



malware - require constant updating to be useful. In most such cases and by default, you purchase 12 months of updates when you buy the software. You can almost always extend this at the point of sale for less than it will cost you when your licence runs out, but for this to be worthwhile you need to be convinced that you will still want to use the software 12 months hence.

Implement software licence tracking and management to be sure that you maintain current licensing and that you match the number of licences to the number of users you have at any given time. This is a time and money saving service that may be available from your software vendor at low or no cost.

Keep your system up-to-date to avoid security issues or software malfunctions, which could cost the school much more than the software itself over the long run. To simplify this process, small offices can often use free tools such as Microsoft's Software Update Service (SUS) patch management to automate most routine updates while reducing support costs.

EVERY

Having provided advice, it's only fair we answer the questions we suggest you put to software vendors ourselves.

Installation

There is nothing to install. Customers access Every through an internet connection. It is a hosted (SAAS) solution, which avoids the time, expense and security risks associated with installed software.

Business Case

We have put together businesses cases for 'typical' (is there such a thing?!) primary and secondary schools. We also provide you with a template to help you calculate an accurate business case for Every in your school. You will be sent these documents once you begin your free trial.



License

Our license covers as many users as you wish to add.

Support

We offer support by email, phone and 'live support' through a chat facility accessed via the software. This is available on demand during office hours, and at certain times outside of this. There is no charge for support or limit to the number of calls / requests you can place.

Data

All data is securely stored (our site is SSL-certificated) in the UK. All data remains your property and can be downloaded for your use or access at any time whilst you are a customer, or at the end of your license, should you choose to leave us.

Competitor quotes

There are other asset management systems available and we will be happy to provide you with a written quote to support your procurement processes. There aren't any comparable school management systems, but if you let us know what information you require to satisfy your own procurement rules, we will do our best to help.

Development

We have a permanent, full-time development team who work on two main areas: upgrades and improvements to the existing software, giving you new functionality and improved performance, as well as the development of new modules to support the SBM role (for example, our contract management module and our asset management module were developed in response to customer requests).

Trial

You can only know how much Every can help you achieve if you give it a go. For this reason we offer a full, free trial, during which you can access the full system, add as many other school users as you like, upload as much data or as many documents as you like. If you



decide not to become a customer your trial will simply expire without any need for you to remember to opt-out.