

Social Media Encourages the Evolution of ERP Solutions

The business environment is regularly changing to keep up with global demand and supply, and the systems used to support commerce have to evolve to keep up. New trends and technology such as social media are changing the society we live in and these changes have to be reflected even in ERP systems. With more people using social media on a daily basis, the way we interact with software is changing and to meet these challenging demands from customers, ERP systems are evolving.

“More people are regularly participating in social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and this needs to be exploited when developing ERP systems. We leverage these new social media tools in our ERP systems,” says Director Systems Engineer Mats Smedjebacka of Epicor Software Finland Oy.

These social media tools are influencing business systems in more ways than we can imagine. Smedjebacka explains, “In a modern ERP system you can, for example, receive reminders directly to Twitter, Facebook or Outlook, as well as searching for information with a Google-type search interface, making the system easy and flexible to work with.”

Workforce Mobility

Another quite recent change in our daily business life is the increased requirement for mobility. With more people doing their job 'on the move', out on client sites, in warehouses, remotely from home, and not in a traditional office, mobile devices of all sorts are becoming important business tools. These changes have to be reflected in the ERP system to ensure that all staff, regardless of their location, can access vital information in order to carry out their duties effectively.

“As opposed to traditional access through networked PCs, ERP systems can now be accessed on laptops through Microsoft Office applications, via the Internet, as well as through mobile devices such as the iPhone,” says Smedjebacka. “The system is as flexible as the user - when they want to add something it doesn't matter if they're not connected to Internet at the time. They can just submit the data via their mobile phone or a web browser rather than waiting for a slow program, or traditional connection, to open up. Connections and updates can happen in real time, offline or online, and can be synchronized at the users' convenience rather than when they're sitting at a desk in an office.”

User-friendliness

One of the traditional complaints about ERP systems is that they are complicated and difficult to use. End user training used to take a long time, and new users needed extensive education in order to be up and running. Today's modern ERP systems are much more user-friendly, users are fully trained and working live with the system within days, or even hours, enabling companies to save money on training. To make sure a system meets these demands, new products, modules and processes are typically tested four to six months before their launch. Testing takes places throughout the development process to make sure the functionality works without compromising on the user experience.

“Sometimes it looks like the technical progress of a new system is amazing on the outside, but when you 'lift the lid' on the product you discover vital user needs that have been completely forgotten about. For example, perhaps old keyboard commands have been removed - instead all activities are done with a mouse click. For some companies that could result in a slower work pace,” says Smedjebacka.

About Epicor

Epicor is a global leader delivering business software solutions to the manufacturing, distribution, retail, hospitality, and services industries. Founded in 1984, Epicor serves 20,000 customers in more than 150 countries, providing solutions in over 30 languages.

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When considering implementing an ERP system, companies should not be afraid of testing the user friendliness of different systems.

Smedjebacka concludes, "It can be hard to see the big picture when you first start looking for a new system. Because the system has to cover nearly all the activities of a company, detailed testing can take time. But don't move through this phase too quickly. User friendliness should be one of the deciding factors. Unless your staff can use the system it won't bring you the anticipated benefits, and ultimately it won't help grow your business. Who needs a costly system that nobody uses!"

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