JOVACO

Choosing a Management Information System

AN EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Choosing a Management Information System

Once you have decided to take the plunge and implement a new management information system—whether it is an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution or a customer relationship management (CRM) tool—the first step is to do your homework and see what would be the best fit for your organization. And we're not just talking about the system itself: your longterm goals and choice of partner must also be considered.

We're here to help you make sense of it all. This eBook reviews the top questions to ask when evaluating a new system. Read on to know what you should take into consideration to make sure the system you end up choosing meets your expectations and objectives.

Top 10 Points
You Should Review

1 Impact on and ease of use for your resources

2 Reporting capabilities

3 Adaptability to business growth

4 Ease of integration and specialized products

5 Infrastructure flexibility

6 Cost predictability

7 Experience of implementation partner

8 Customer base breakdown

9 Longstanding results

10 Implementation methodology

1 How will it impact your **operations and resources?**

All implementations involve changes that need to be managed by the organization. Here are some questions you should ask yourself to minimize the impact on your operations and your resources:

+ Does the system work with tools your team is already familiar with?

+ Will you have to drastically adapt your business processes to the system?

+ Will it reduce the number of steps required to perform specific tasks?

+ What operations or departments will be impacted during the transition and for how long?

+ Does the system favor a phased implementation?

To help with the transition, find a solution that integrates to tools that you use on a daily basis such as the Office Suite (Outlook, Word and Excel). This not only helps you get the most out of your solution, but also helps with user adoption since it will interact with tools your resources are familiar with and are currently using.

Will it offer ease of use
for your resources?

A system that is intuitive and easy to use brings concrete benefits to your organization:

Increased productivity and ROI
The faster your staff gets up to speed, the faster they can resume normal operations and make full use of the system to increase productivity in their day-to-day tasks—and increase your company's return on investment by the same token.

Higher user adoption rate
A system that has a look and feel similar to the applications that your resources are already using will increase your user adoption rate. If they embrace the new system and believe in it, they will exploit its full potential and get more out of your organization's initial investment.

Reduced training schedule
It is essential to properly train your users so that they understand the benefits and functionalities offered by your new system and how to take advantage of them. However, an intuitive user experience reduces the number of training hours and associated costs.

2

Does the system offer
real-time reporting?

A business system that collects and maintains accurate historical information about your organization's performance and financial results is helpful for auditing, reporting and compliance purposes. Why stop there? The right business management solution also gives you the ability to further analyze your data. Ask if your potential solution will include embedded business intelligence and analytical tools that can help you dissect your historical information and analyze it in new ways. This enables you to transform data and allows you to have new insights into your organization.

READ THIS
The 5 Most Important Questions to Ask About Business Intelligence for Your ERP System

If your organization already uses Office 365, as many companies do, you can take your data analysis and manipulation to the next level with Power BI. Its advanced features help you visualize, organize, and share data across your organization, in turn promoting collaboration between resources and departments and helping managers react quickly to changes in even the most time-sensitive projects.

What can
BI TOOLS AND REPORTING
help you achieve?

Trim costs now and reduce or avoid cost escalation in the future.
Proactively examine sales by product, store, or promotional offer, for example, and then take corrective action to bring lagging performers with high cost of goods sold up to standard. Identify best practices and implement them across your entire business.
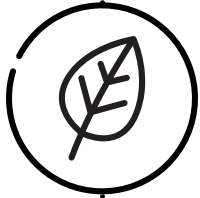
Uncover growth opportunities and pursue those that hold the greatest potential.
Compare key performance indicators (KPIs) by geography, or product line, or manufacturer, or distributor. Use this data to model different scenarios that predict the results you might achieve if you implemented each option. Then invest in the opportunities with the greatest probability of success—highest return on investment (ROI), fastest payback, lowest risk, deepest market penetration—regardless of how you define success.

Solve problems quickly, or prevent them from occurring in the first place.
A large order has come in for a high-priority customer but you are running low on inventory and your primary supplier is out of stock. Quickly identify new vendor options and connect with other suppliers to fulfill the sale and exceed your customer's expectations. Spot new competitive threats, changing market conditions, or underperforming business partners. Then take proactive, preemptive action before your competition can react.

Can the system grow with your business?

Implementations take time and money, and require you to deal with the change management. You don't want to be changing systems every couple of years, and you especially don't want to have a system that holds you back. When looking for a new system, you need one that can accommodate your company's growth by easily adding new business processes and additional lines of business or new company acquisitions.

As such, another important aspect to consider is the system's scalability. You want to be sure that it can meet increased demands without reducing your performance or incurring major investments into your technology infrastructure or your payroll.

Signs you may have outgrown your ERP system

+ **Cash flow issues:** Predict inventory levels more accurately and speed up invoicing.

+ **Inconsistent inventory levels:** Eliminate inventory discrepancies, in turn reducing overstocking or out-of-stocks and days sales outstanding. Cut down on manual data entry and increase inventory turns.

+ **Time spent doing manual transactions that could be automated:** Optimize your current business processes without comparable increases in payroll.

READ THIS
15 Red Flags: Is Your Accounting Software Hurting Your Business? eBook by ERPSoftwareBlog

How to gauge the scale of
your business growth
in the coming years?

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your future company objectives:

Will this system be able to adapt to your changing requirements?
Learn about the effort required or the flexibility that exists if you need to change or adapt current business processes.

Does your growth plan include starting up or acquiring new operations?
This may mean having more than one legal entity. In this case, you need a system that can support more than one company at a time and that can easily consolidate the data.

Are you thinking about international expansion?
If this is the case, it is important to choose an ERP solution that supports multiple languages and currencies out of the box.

How many users does the system need to handle?
Business growth often means more resources, which means an increase in user count. Your system has to be flexible enough to allow additional concurrent users.

How long will users be staying on the system?
Your resources may be using this system for years to come. Make sure that it will grow with your business and enhance your processes to keep them productive and effective throughout their career.

4

What integration possibilities does the system offer?

Integrating your systems gives everyone access to the same data in the format that best suits their needs. Having all your company's data in one place facilitates information sharing between departments.

Today's technology makes it possible to have a tighter integration between your different applications, which in turn allows you to:

+ **centralize** your operations

+ **streamline** business processes and workflows

+ **increase** resource productivity

+ obtain **greater insight** into your business and make more informed decisions.

You should look for a solution with a platform that lends itself well to integrations and has a structure flexible enough to link to other systems.

Don't forget to ask about available tools to help with your integration before ending up with lengthy and heavy development projects.

Why you should integrate your financial and CRM systems

+ Increased data reliability

+ Fewer double entries

+ Time savings

+ Reports when you need them

+ Reduced administrative costs

+ Better understanding of profitability

+ Greater insight into the factors that may affect your organization

+ Optimization of business processes

READ THIS
Why You Should Integrate Your Financial System to Microsoft Dynamics CRM

How can it be adapted to your reality?

If you choose to move ahead with an integrated system, you will find your information more reliable as there will be only one version of the truth across your organization.

You should look for a system tailored to your industry and business processes, or that has the adaptability to incorporate best-of-breed solutions. Certain vendors can also work with you to customize your solution to ensure that it turns out exactly the way you want it to.

A modular solution allows you to pick and choose from a wide array the modules that meet your current needs and enhance your operations and the management of your organization. You can later activate more as your organization evolves.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Some vendors might suggest reducing integration complexity and costs by simplifying the processes you're considering integrating. Be aware that simplification might help initially, but at the end of the day, your business processes need to support your real business, not a simplified version of it. And you could end up incurring those "saved" IT costs later if you end up deciding that you really need the integration after all.

What type of deployment
is most suited to your operations?

Depending on your needs and structure, you can opt between an on-premise or a cloud-based deployment for your solution, or even a hybrid of both.

Ask if it is possible to change deployment, infrastructure or security without having to change your system or applications. This will keep your options open for your longterm technology decisions.

SOME FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Any type of deployment that you choose will have implications and will affect several key aspects of your solution that may not seem obvious at first. It's important that you consider the pros and cons of each type of deployment in order to make an informed decision as to which is best suited to your current operations and budget, while also providing the flexibility that your organization requires in the long term.
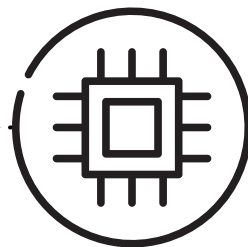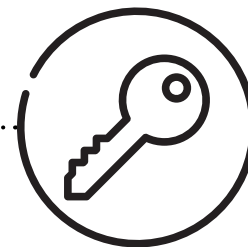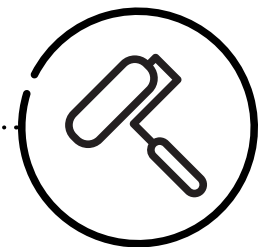
**Pricing**   **Security**   **Hardware**   **Access**   **Customization**

INSTALLATION FLEXIBILITY
With On-Premise or Cloud-Based Options

The flexibility to deploy part or all of a business management solution in the cloud opens additional ease-of-use opportunities: easier deployment, troubleshooting, maintenance, upgrading, and scaling. In cloud-based options, off-loading these workloads frees you and your people to focus on taking your business to new levels. It also means increased mobility for businesses that have resources on the road, as data can be accessed and updated in real time from a smartphone or tablet.

On the other hand, an on-premise deployment means that a server will be dedicated to your system, usually located at your organization. Your organization will be in control of data security and will enjoy even greater flexibility over the implementation process and customization of your solution. Keep in mind that you will have to schedule updates with your partner to keep your on-premise system current. Hardware updates may also be necessary once in a while to keep up with new technology.
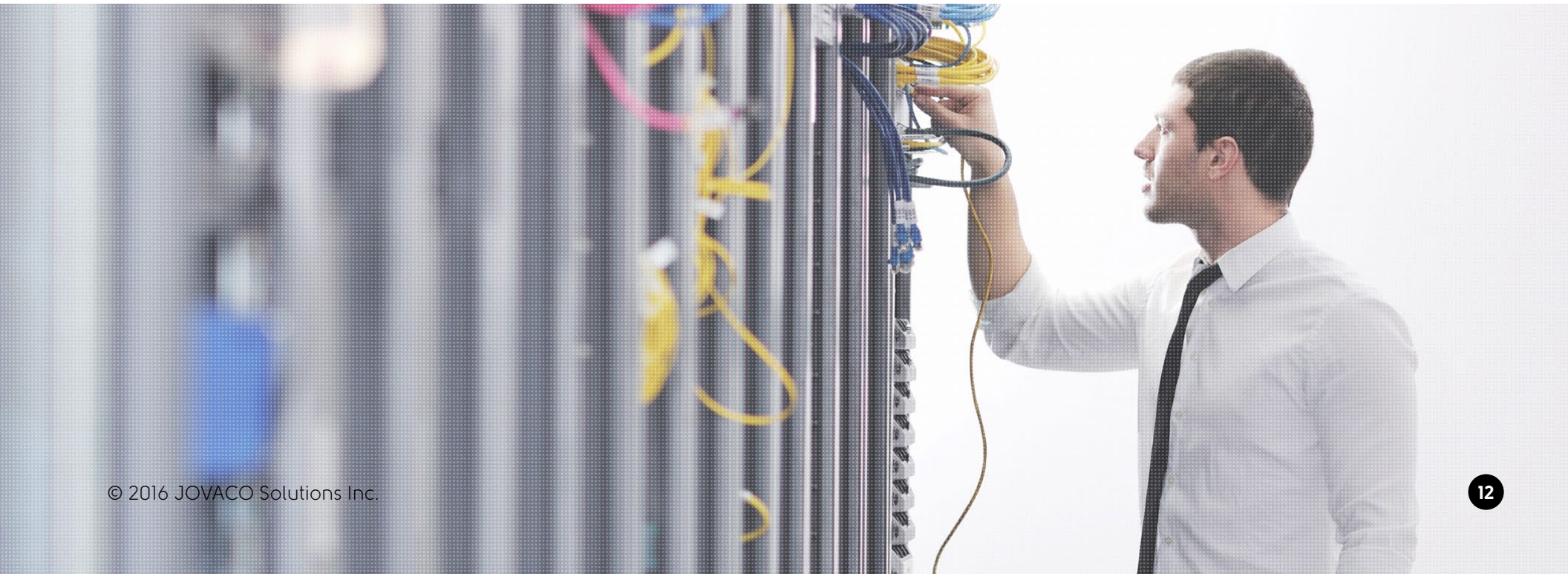
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What are the options for
cost predictability?

Predictable Costs Help You Reduce Business Risk

The right business management solution should be able to offer predictable payment options in order to help you manage or avoid most fixed or irregular IT-related costs for deployment, operations, scaling, maintenance, and upgrading.

ON-PREMISE SOLUTION

An on-premise installation involves a one-time licensing charge, but maintenance fees will recur yearly and hardware updates may be necessary at some point.

Find out if there is a protected system list price that serves as the basis for your future renewals. This means that even if the price of the software increases, your annual maintenance cost should not, barring investments or modifications made to your system.

Ask how long your current version will be supported to better predict costs: keeping your solution up to date will cost you less further down the line, as you will avoid paying premium prices for increasingly scarce support and an obsolete system.

CLOUD-BASED SOLUTION

With a cloud-based solution, you are in essence renting your solution on a monthly basis. However, there are no maintenance fees as the solution is always up to date.

The price is typically broken down by month, resulting in less fluctuation in IT investments throughout the year. And since all hot-fixes and updates are included in this price, fewer future investments are required with this type of system.

You can also look at different possibilities for contract lengths as well. This will help you lock in your current monthly price for a longer period of time.

Other costs to think about

Purchase or licensing costs are only one part of the expenses when implementing your business solution. Ask your provider to also give you an idea of the costs associated to implementation services, maintenance fees, training, and potential upgrades or customizations. You should also have a budget in place for support and technical assistance in case of any post-implementation issues or configurations necessary to ensure that your system is optimized. If you have a clear idea of what you need from the beginning and make a detailed list of your requirements, your partner will be able to give you a more accurate idea of the total costs.

And although it might be tempting to skimp on the analysis phase to save on the overall costs of your project, it really should be the first step of the implementation process. Your partner will identify any gaps between your needs and the system, and figure out the best way to bridge those gaps, be it by customizing the solution or finding third-party applications. This will save you time and money in the long run by setting clear guidelines and goals for the project and reducing the number of modifications and adjustments required later.

Why should cost predictability be important to you?

+ Avoid IT costs that rise even if sales decline.

+ Eliminate surprise charges and increases, especially after the first year.

+ Decrease cost fluctuations and business risk.

+ Reduce fixed costs to improve your bottom line.

7 Is your implementation partner specialized in a given industry?

By looking for an implementation partner specialized in your industry to implement your solution, you increase the probability that they already understand your key business processes and challenges, and most importantly, speak the same language as you.

This way, the learning curve will not be as steep when it comes time to explain how you run your business. It will also give your partner the opportunity to let you know about other industry best practices that are currently trending.

And since many industry-specific third-party applications exist, finding a consultant with a thorough understanding of your industry means that they will be able to suggest which products would best meet your specific needs and help you fulfill your business goals.

What is an implementation partner or VAR?

A Value-Added Reseller (VAR) will configure and recommend processes to optimize your business solution. The added value can also extend to professional services such as consulting, development, technical assistance, and training. A VAR can therefore work with you to develop and customize the solution to meet your goals and provide post-installation support.

8

What is the breakdown of your partner's and product's customer base?

1

Look at the global customer base for the product.
The larger the community, the better the chance that additional support systems such as user groups and third-party products or integrations are available to help you with specific needs.

2

How many installations are there?
This demonstrates your partner's level of experience with the software. If you're looking to go international, it is also important to see how many exist not only in your local market but also worldwide. This will give you an indication as to the support resources available as well as the possibility of meeting international standards.

3

Ask for customer references before you move forward.
It is always a good idea to ask to speak to other companies who have been through the same experience on which you are about to embark. Not just to ask if the potential implementation partner is competent or not, but also to have a better idea of what to expect from a user experience and from an internal change management standpoint.

Customers Stay with Vendors That Take Good Care of Them

After-sales service is a key ingredient in a smooth implementation and to maintain ongoing operations. It's also an important requirement to help you get the most out of your investment. You should ask your vendor the average number of years that their clients have been with them. If they have a large group of longstanding clients, this is usually a good indicator that they try to keep their customers happy so that they don't go looking for new systems or new partners.

This also demonstrates how well a system can grow with your business. If the vendor has clients that have been with them for over 10 years, chances are that these companies have grown and that their systems and partners have had the capacity to continuously meet their needs.

What is your partner's technology vision?

Keep an eye out for ongoing innovation to keep your business management solution up to date

Have an open discussion with potential partners and their longterm technology vision. Does it line up with yours? Ask how often they roll out new versions and releases of their solution—and ask yourself whether you feel confident that both your partner and your organization will stay current with new technology releases.

Things to look for in a partner's technology platform:

> **Does the partner embrace new technologies?**
Cloud computing, for instance, will offer you flexibility and choice.

> **What is their vision of the possibility of an integrated solution?**
Check to see if the partner is looking at continuously improving interoperability between ERP and CRM solutions and other business productivity applications.

> **What is their choice for an underlying technology platform?**
This simplifies application integration so that you can use and upgrade line-of-business software created by other vendors.

10 Does your partner follow an implementation methodology?

No implementation is ever the same. Having a methodology in place is essential to keep the project on track and on budget. It provides a framework, management tools, and industry-tested practices, so that you can track the progress of the implementation and know exactly where you're at. It also makes the roll-out of the solution and migration more efficient and more predictable, in turn making it easier for the project to stay on time and on budget.

You will also get greater visibility into the timeline of the project. That way, you can let the rest of your organization know about upcoming changes well in advance. A project management professional (PMP) might oversee the implementation process and work with you to make sure that you are aware of where everyone is at in the project.

Your partner may ask you to choose one person or team in your organization who will be in charge of overseeing the implementation process, coordinating internal tasks and managing all communications and changes. This ensures that deadlines are met and that everybody is up to date.

What else should you consider
BEFORE THE IMPLEMENTATION
process?

Now that you have decided on a product and are moving forward with an implementation, here are some other key points that you should keep in mind.
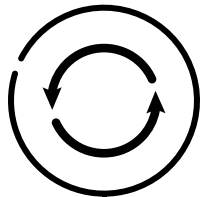
Change management
Involve the members of your organization and take note of their needs and suggestions. Not only will you have better insight into what changes are required, but you will increase your chance that users are on board and open to the process changes.
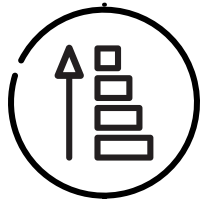
Priorities
Make sure that the project matches your business goals and that it will help, not hinder, your processes. Then organize your priorities. This can guide your partner during the implementation process to ensure that the transition is done with minimal impact on your daily operations.
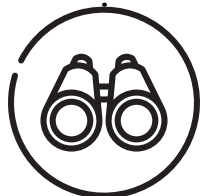
Vision from the top down
Share your project's vision so that everyone across your organization understands the goals of this project. This will ensure that everyone is on the same page and facilitate coordination between the different departments, which in turn means a smoother transition for all.

A Complete Business Solution

Integrate every aspect of your organization

By having a fully integrated system, you can be assured of the integrity of the information that you are viewing. Everyone is analyzing the same data and there is only one version of the truth within your organization.

Microsoft Dynamics GP

This robust financial management solution offers a complete range of modules that can evolve with the growth of your business. From the basic financials to more advanced modules such as HR or Manufacturing functionalities, Microsoft Dynamics GP has all the tools to help you manage your entire business.

Microsoft Dynamics CRM

A customer relationship management solution that allows you to put your customers at the heart of your organization. Track your communications and sales forecasts as well as ensure that service calls have been processed in a timely manner. Have a 360° view of all your customer interactions.

Jovaco PROJECT SUITE

A suite of modules to manage your projects and operations. From the planning phase to tracking profits, this solution offers many built-in tools, such as a timesheet, resource planning and invoicing modules. Have the information you need to ensure that your projects stay on time and on budget.

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What's Next?

With so many different questions to ask yourself prior to the implementation of a new management information system, some more research may be in order. Here are a few other resources to help you better analyze your current operations and find out more about the different options that are available to you.

GP&CRM Integration

eBook
Why You Should Integrate Your Financial System to Microsoft Dynamics CRM

Business Intelligence

Article
5 important questions to ask about Business Intelligence for your ERP

Accounting Software Challenges

White Paper
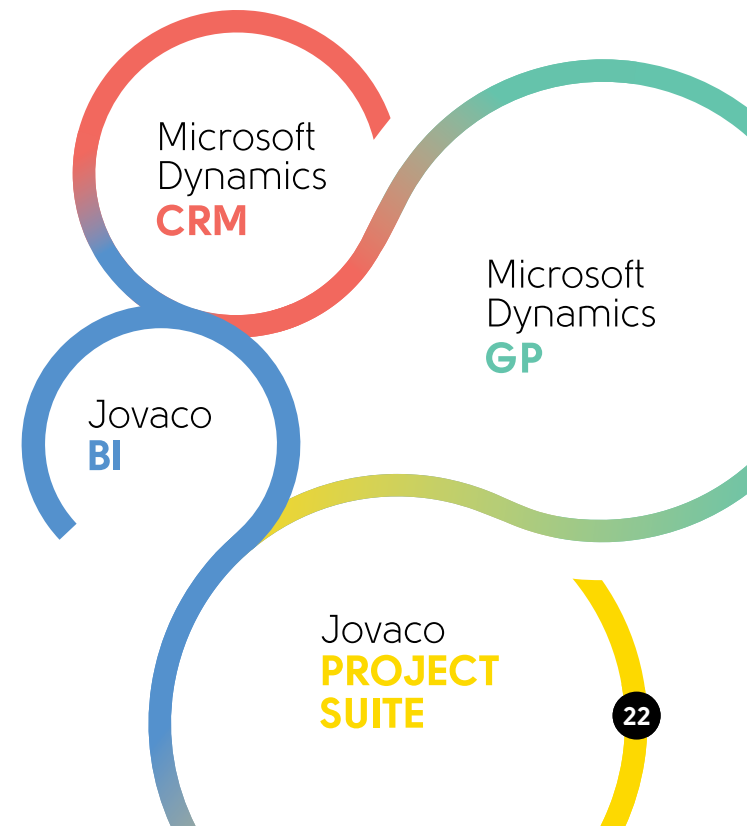15 Red Flags: Is your accounting software hurting your business?

About JOVACO

JOVACO Solutions is a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner in Quebec with more than 30 years of experience in the implementation and optimization of Microsoft Dynamics GP and CRM solutions. We are also an Independent Software Vendor and have developed various fully integrated industry-specific solutions for project management, time and expense, and business intelligence.

We have been guiding and supporting our customers throughout the implementation of their Microsoft Dynamics solutions for over 15 years. We are also equipped with a solid support team to address any post-implementation issues. As a full-service Value Added Reseller, we offer implementation, consulting and training as well as technical services and support to ensure that every customer is getting the most out of their system.

Our multiple professional and accounting designations ensure a thorough understanding of your needs and solutions that are best tailored to your specific requirements. Our staff is equipped with a variety of Microsoft certifications. JOVACO has also been recognized by Microsoft several times over the years for the excellence of its services.

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