

## The Great Software Search

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Recently our city faced a major problem: Rohnert Park was using an 18 year-old financial information system running on an HP3000 Minicomputer system. Hewlett-Packard announced an "End-of-Support Date" meaning no more Operating System updates, Hardware or Hardware Support. We had to decide if we were going to keep our software and hope that the hardware would keep chugging along, or switch to a whole new system. We decided to look to the future and acquire a new system.

Other cities assured us that implanting a new system would mean dealing with a nightmare of dual systems: we would have to budget for overtime and additional staff, due to the necessity of dual entry for every module, for an extended period of time.

Thanks to the strengths of the new system (we chose Springbrook Software) and our team of highly competent employees, none of these predictions came true; we went 'live' immediately, with the exception of payroll, and never had to keep dual books. Following are some tips that we used when searching for a new software application; our hope is that, when the time comes, every city has such an easy transition!

### **Know What You Can't Live Without**

Our first step was to make a comprehensive list of what we had to have in our new system. Our top 'must-haves' included flexibility, user-friendly and a system equipped with strong internal checks and balances. A few of the systems we tested were confusing and unwieldy: with some of the systems, a user could only be in one module at a time. With our new system, we can open multiple modules or multiple sessions of one module at the same time.

### **Consider the Bottom Line**

First, consider the purchase price of the system; second, consider how it will save your city money in actual dollars or in employee time. Our system gave us the biggest bang for the buck; it has every function we need and was the best value compared to the others we reviewed. It also helps our employee efficiency: we run special reports without needing IT help, and quickly look up information with the 'inquiry' mode.

### **This is a Partnership; Know Your Team Members**

We made sure that we knew how our provider handles service calls, customer inquires, and feedback about functions. For our city, it was very important to have a human relationship with our provider, so when the President of our software provider visited our office, and personally demonstrated his company's product, we were impressed. This level of personal care is carried over into the way we interact today: they are very receptive to our ideas and suggestions. Together, we make a great team.

### **The Extra Mile**

Finally, look at whether a provider will go the extra mile for you. Our provider went out of their way to convert five years of data from our old system; most suppliers usually only convert one year or post the beginning balance forward. This saved us time and money.

With forethought and planning, implementing a new software system can be relatively pain-free. Although the extra effort of identifying your primary needs, testing multiple systems and researching providers is time-intensive, choosing the right system the first time may save you thousands of dollars in the long-run.

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