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The ERP Selection Guide

A Vendor-Neutral Framework for
UK Manufacturers

A step-by-step framework to help UK manufacturers evaluate, select, and implement the right
ERP system — without vendor bias.

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Introduction

Selecting an ERP system is one of the most consequential technology decisions a manufacturer will make. The right choice can transform operations, improve visibility, and drive growth. The wrong choice can disrupt production, drain budgets, and set your business back years.

This guide provides a structured, vendor-neutral framework specifically for UK manufacturers. Whether you're replacing a legacy system, consolidating multiple platforms, or implementing ERP for the first time, this framework will help you make an informed decision based on your specific manufacturing requirements.

Who is this guide for? Manufacturing directors, operations managers, IT leaders, and business owners at UK manufacturers with 20–500 employees who are considering an ERP investment.

Step 1. Requirements Gathering Checklist

Before engaging any vendor, answer these 15 critical questions to define your requirements clearly:

1. Business Process Mapping
Have you documented your core manufacturing processes (order-to-cash, procure-to-pay, plan-to-produce) before engaging vendors?

2. Production Planning
Do you need finite capacity scheduling, advanced planning, or simple MRP-based planning?

3. Bill of Materials
How complex are your BOMs? Do you require multi-level, phantom, configurable, or revision-controlled BOMs?

4. Quality Management
Do you need integrated quality management with inspection plans, non-conformance tracking, and CAPA workflows?

5. Shop Floor Control
Do you require real-time shop floor data capture, work-in-progress tracking, and operator terminals?

6. Supply Chain Visibility
Do you need multi-site inventory visibility, intercompany transfers, and supplier portal capabilities?

7. Regulatory Compliance
What industry regulations apply (e.g., ISO 9001, IATF 16949, FDA, REACH, UKCA)? Does the ERP need built-in compliance features?

8. Integration Requirements
What existing systems must the ERP integrate with (CAD/CAM, MES, WMS, CRM, e-commerce, EDI)?

9. Reporting and BI
What management reporting, dashboards, and business intelligence capabilities do you require?

10. Mobile and Remote Access

Do you need mobile access for warehouse, shop floor, or field service operations?

11. Cloud vs On-Premises

Have you evaluated your preference for cloud (SaaS), on-premises, or hybrid deployment?

12. User Count and Licensing

How many concurrent/named users do you need, and what is your preferred licensing model?

13. Data Migration

How much historical data needs migrating, and what is the current data quality?

14. Change Management

Do you have internal change management capability, or will you need external support?

15. Growth and Scalability

What are your 3-5 year growth plans, and can the system scale accordingly (multi-site, multi-currency, multi-language)?

Step 2. Vendor Evaluation Scorecard

Use this weighted scorecard to objectively compare vendors. Adjust weightings to reflect your specific priorities. Score each vendor 1–5 for each criterion.

Evaluation Criterion	Weight	Vendor A Score / Wtd	Vendor B Score / Wtd	Vendor C Score / Wtd
Manufacturing functionality depth	25%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Ease of use / user interface	10%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Integration capabilities	10%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Total cost of ownership (5yr)	15%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Implementation partner quality	10%	__/__	__/__	__/__
UK manufacturing references	10%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Scalability and roadmap	5%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Reporting and BI capabilities	5%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Cloud / deployment flexibility	5%	__/__	__/__	__/__
Vendor financial stability	5%	__/__	__/__	__/__
TOTAL WEIGHTED SCORE	100%	___	___	___

Tip: Weight the criteria that matter most to your manufacturing operations. If shop floor scheduling is critical, increase the manufacturing functionality weighting.

Step 3. ERP Platform Comparison

Below is a vendor-neutral overview of the major ERP platforms commonly used by UK manufacturers. This is a starting point for your research — each platform has strengths in different manufacturing sub-sectors.

Platform	Strengths for Manufacturing	Considerations
SAP S/4HANA	Deep manufacturing functionality; industry best practices; global scalability; strong supply chain	High cost; complex implementation; often over-engineered for mid-market; long implementation cycles
Microsoft Dynamics 365	Familiar Microsoft interface; strong integration with Office 365; flexible deployment; growing manufacturing modules	Manufacturing depth lags specialists; customisation can be costly; licensing complexity
Infor CloudSuite Industrial	Purpose-built for discrete manufacturing; strong shop floor and scheduling; industry-specific editions	Smaller partner ecosystem in UK; can feel dated in places; limited brand awareness
Epicor Kinetic	Strong mid-market manufacturing focus; good MES integration; modern cloud architecture; solid UK presence	Reporting can be limited out of the box; some modules less mature; implementation partner quality varies
Sage X3	Cost-effective for mid-market; good financials; multi-site and multi-legislation support; UK-headquartered	Manufacturing functionality less deep; limited advanced planning; smaller ecosystem than leaders
IFS Cloud	Excellent for mixed-mode and complex manufacturing; strong asset management; project-based manufacturing	Higher cost bracket; implementation complexity; fewer UK partners than Dynamics/SAP
SYSPRO	Purpose-built for manufacturing and distribution; easy to use; affordable for SMEs; good UK channel	Limited scalability for large enterprises; fewer third-party integrations; less modern UI

This comparison is indicative. Platform suitability depends heavily on your specific manufacturing type, size, and requirements. Always conduct thorough due diligence.

Step 4. Red Flags During Vendor Demos

Watch for these warning signs when evaluating ERP vendors. Any of these should prompt further investigation before proceeding:

⚠ The vendor avoids demonstrating with your actual data or scenarios

⚠ The demo relies heavily on customisations not included in the base price

⚠ The vendor cannot provide UK manufacturing references in your sub-sector

⚠ Implementation timelines seem unrealistically short (less than 6 months for full ERP)

⚠ The vendor is evasive about total cost of ownership, including ongoing licensing and support

⚠ Key features are described as 'on the roadmap' rather than available now

⚠ The demo skips over integration points with your existing systems

⚠ The sales team cannot clearly explain the upgrade path and version lifecycle

⚠ No clear methodology for data migration and validation is presented

⚠ The vendor pushes for a quick contract signature before you've completed due diligence

⚠ The vendor is evasive about total cost of ownership, including ongoing licensing and support

Step 5. Implementation Timeline Expectations

A realistic ERP implementation for a mid-market UK manufacturer typically takes 12–18 months from project kick-off to go-live. Below is a typical phased timeline:

Timeframe	Phase	Key Activities
Months 1–2	Requirements Gathering	Document business processes, define scope, form project team, establish budget and governance.
Months 2–4	Vendor Long-List & RFI	Research potential vendors, issue Request for Information, narrow to 3–5 candidates based on fit.
Months 4–6	Vendor Short-List & RFP	Issue formal RFP with specific manufacturing scenarios, conduct structured demonstrations, check references.
Months 6–7	Selection & Negotiation	Score vendors using your evaluation framework, negotiate licensing, support terms, and implementation scope.
Months 7–9	Implementation Planning	Finalise implementation partner, agree project plan, begin data cleansing and preparation.
Months 9–18	Implementation	Configure, customise, integrate, test (UAT), train users, and migrate data in phases.
Month 18+	Go-Live & Optimisation	Cutover to new system, provide hypercare support, and begin continuous improvement cycle.

> Critical Success Factor: Do not compress the requirements gathering and vendor evaluation phases. Rushing these early stages is the single most common cause of ERP project failure in manufacturing. Allow adequate time for your team to define requirements thoroughly before engaging vendors.

Step 6. Budget Planning Guide

ERP budgets should account for the full total cost of ownership, not just the software licence. Use this framework to build a realistic budget:

Cost Category	Typical %	What This Covers
Software Licensing	30–40%	Annual subscription (SaaS) or perpetual licence fees. Cloud subscriptions are typically per-user per-month.
Implementation Services	30–40%	Consultant configuration, customisation, data migration, training, and project management.
Infrastructure	5–10%	Server hardware (on-premises), cloud hosting, network upgrades, and security infrastructure.

Cost Category	Typical %	What This Covers
Internal Resources	10–15%	Your team's time for requirements, testing, training, and change management — often underestimated.
Contingency	10–15%	Budget reserve for scope changes, unexpected issues, and additional training needs.

> Rule of Thumb: For a mid-market UK manufacturer (50–250 users), expect total 5-year ERP costs of £250,000–£1,500,000 depending on complexity, vendor, and deployment model. Cloud/SaaS solutions typically have lower upfront costs but higher ongoing subscription fees. Always request a detailed 5-year TCO breakdown from every vendor.

About Bailey & Associates

Bailey & Associates provides fractional CIO and IT Director services exclusively for UK manufacturers. Founded by David Bailey, who brings over 15 years of hands-on experience in manufacturing IT strategy, we deliver enterprise-grade technology leadership without the cost of a full-time executive hire.

Our ERP expertise includes:

Vendor-neutral ERP requirements gathering and business process analysis

ERP vendor evaluation, selection, and contract negotiation

Implementation oversight and independent quality assurance

Data migration strategy and validation

Change management and user adoption programmes

Post-go-live optimisation and continuous improvement

Book Your Free ERP Readiness Assessment

Considering an ERP investment? We offer a complimentary, no-obligation ERP readiness assessment for UK manufacturers. In a focused 90-minute session, we'll evaluate your current systems, discuss your requirements, and provide an honest assessment of your options — with no vendor bias.

Get started: bailey.associates/contact

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