

Ten questions before you buy software

New software, apps and AI tools can save a great deal of time. They can also cost money, patience and goodwill when they do not fit. These ten questions help owners and managers choose calmly. Most take only a few minutes to answer; together they can save months.

01 What problem, exactly, are we trying to solve?

Describe it in one or two sentences, in business terms: "quotations take five days", not "we need a CRM".

02 How will we know it is solved?

Agree one or two simple measures before you start, such as time per quotation or errors per month.

03 Have we drawn the current process?

Sketch how the work flows today and remove steps that add nothing. Automating a confusing process only makes it confusing faster.

04 Could a simpler change solve most of it?

Sometimes a clear responsibility, a checklist or a shared spreadsheet does 80 per cent of the job at a fraction of the cost.

05 Who will own the tool inside our company?

Every tool needs one named person who looks after it, answers questions and keeps it up to date.

06 Have the daily users been asked?

The people who will use it every day often know best what would help, and what would get in the way.

07 What will it really cost over three years?

Add up licences, set-up, training, connections to other systems and, above all, staff time. The first price is rarely the full price.

08 Where will our data live, and can we take it with us?

Ask who can see it, where it is stored, how it is protected, and how you would export it if you changed supplier. Check this against the data-protection rules that apply to you.

09 Can we start with a small pilot?

Try it with one team or one process for a limited period before committing the whole company.

10 What happens if it does not work?

Know the contract length, notice period and exit costs before you sign, and decide in advance when you would stop.

If most answers are clear, you are ready to choose with confidence. If several are not, that is useful too: it shows where a little preparation will make the difference.