

Search and research information from articles, to press releases, industry publications, credit history to court proceedings.

# Using Public Information to Assist Vendor Evaluations

When evaluating ERP systems, there is plenty of public information available. We all know how to Google, but the resulting list is mind boggling. Chapter 2 will offer alternative resources to gather the necessary information to make an informed decision.

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### **What kinds of Public data are available and useful?**

There is a wealth of public data available that can be very useful in your ERP selection process. You'll find many sources of ERP information on the web. As in everything, some are better than others.

#### **Google it**

What ever you can imagine, you can do a Google search (or other search engines) and research information from articles, to Press releases, Industry Publications, Credit History to Court Proceedings.



If you want to uncover the dirt on an ERP vendor, Google their name and the word 'lawsuit' or 'problem implementations'. You may find something interesting.

## Credit History

As you will be their customer and paying them, maybe knowledge of credit history isn't as pertinent as other information. But it will still help you with developing your "personality profile" of the vendor.

It is good practice to conduct a D&B (Dunn & Bradstreet) on all the ERP vendors you are evaluating. If they have a history of poor credit, that may imply poor business practices which might provide foresight on your potential business relationship with them.

## Better Business Bureau

More commonly this service is used for individual complaints about customer service, etc. However if the ERP vendor has a poor record established at the BBB, that may indicate potential problems that you probably do not want to get involved with.

## The County Court House

Over the web, it is easy to check for County public records. A majority of any legal actions will be active in the local Court House records. First locate which Counties the various ERP Vendors' Head Quarters are located in. Then Google the County Court House of your choice. Once you have found the local Court House website, inquire into Civil suits, that are Business related and type in the name of the software vendor. Very interesting information is available.

For example, there are many ERP vendors head quartered in Orange County, California.

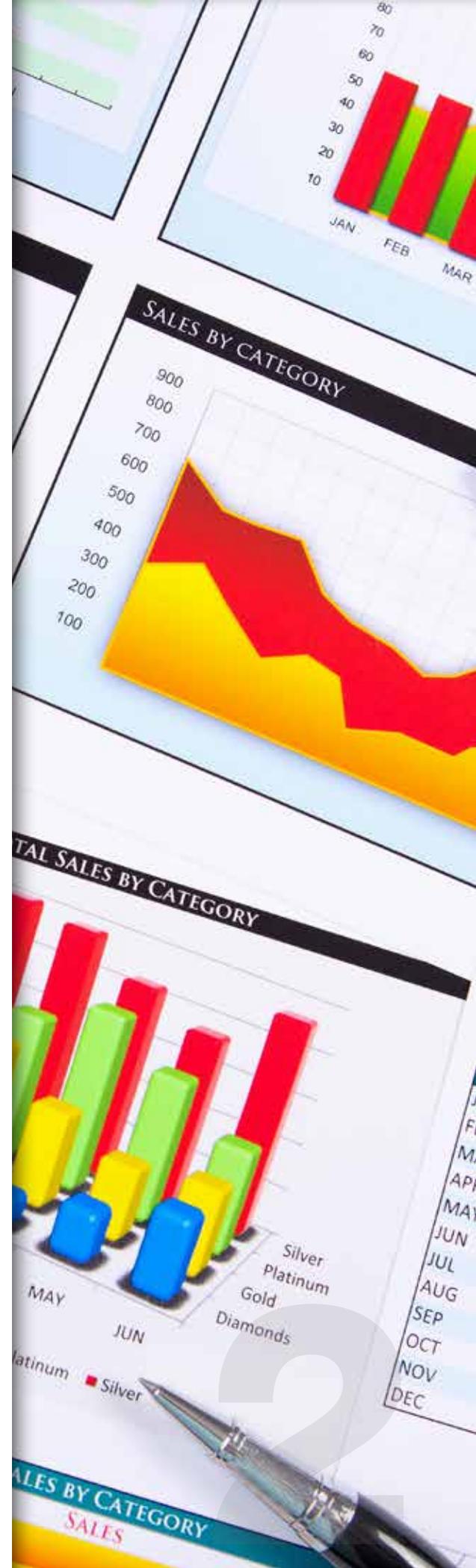
Reviewing the Orange County Court House site can be very enlightening. Their website is [www.occourts.org](http://www.occourts.org)

The 3rd largest ERP vendor in the world is Infor Global Solutions and are located in Alpharetta, Georgia. The website for that County Court House is <http://www.fccljudicialsearch.org/CivilSearch/civfrmd.html>

## Expect that every ERP vendor will have a few disputes.

But if you uncover a disturbingly larger number with some than others, that may be a red flag. Why would you want to risk working with a vendor that is trigger happy with legal actions?

This information can be useful when determining which of the hundreds of ERP vendors you do not want to include on your evaluation short list.





## Publicly Traded ERP Vendors

Public SEC information is easily available over the web. As public firms are mandated to “full disclosure”, interpretation of their Financial Statements can provide volumes of intelligence.

For example, their Financial Statements will list their revenue source breakdown. If a majority of revenue is either maintenance or implementation and only a small % are new software licenses, then either they live off their existing customers or their products are very difficult to implement (higher \$ for implementation for every \$ of software).

## Other Useful Research Tools

### You Tube

Type in any ERP and you may just be surprised. Some videos are rather “salesy” but there are others that could even be used as training tools. Great way to have a look, without a salesperson looking over your shoulder.

# The Inside story

## Press Releases/Industry Publications

Realize, of any public information available, this is likely to be the most biased. Press releases and Industry Publications are usually written by the Vendor’s Marketing Department and is only the information they want you to be aware of.

However reading about similar companies as your own and the experiences they are having with the various systems, can be useful. Especially if you call the company yourself to confirm the validity of the article.

I read an article recently about a manufacturer using a specific ERP system, describing all the wonderful benefits they were enjoying. I called the company in the article only to find out that they were not even using the system advertised. In fact the day that system was installed, they demanded their money back and ended up in litigation.

## Miscellaneous Other websites

### Panorama Consulting

Their material is quite good. They always have interesting webinars. Panorama posts useful, free research about the pitfalls of ERP implementation, and they’re kind enough to tell you what they’ve learned about how to get it right. They look trustworthy in that they don’t

just rubber stamp the big names. Panorama also does ERP software evaluations and consulting—so they really do have people who have been there, done that, and really know the ins and outs of ERP.

**Focus**, an online community of business experts, offers an outstanding selection of topics. In addition to its excellent ERP Experts Guide—it also hosts a variety of topical webinars with intriguing titles such as, “See Real ROI from Your Social Media Strategy.” Is that really possible? Their experts display a deep understanding of market trends in ERP software and today’s most important business issues.

**Gartner** has long been a favorite of C-level finance and IT executives. They’re also more active with social media, which is a positive sign that they’re adapting in a rapidly changing market.

**Aberdeen Group** consistently publishes great information that digs into deeper detail. This information is rock-solid.

## Do Your Homework

**Managing Automation** is a great magazine if you still read magazines. They also have started a service called TechMatch Pro, which looks useful.

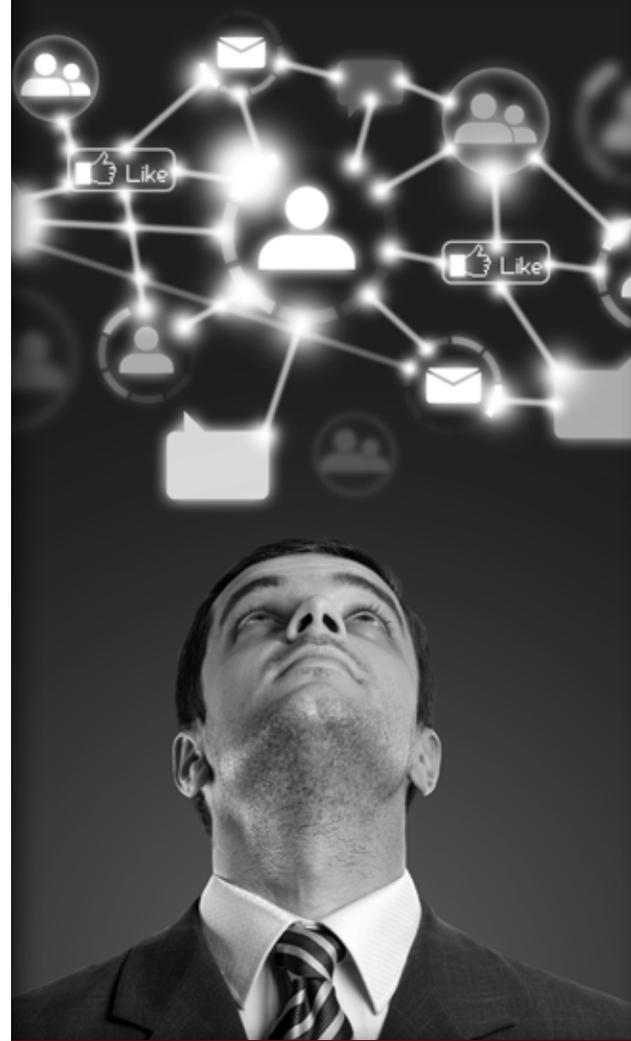
**Social Media:** Today no matter where you turn, you can’t ignore social media. It’s becoming the “go-to” means of communication between companies and their customers. Twitter, which just celebrated its five-year anniversary. The biggest advantage to using Twitter is that it delivers relatively unfiltered news quickly in short, easy-to-digest bursts. You can get straight talk from analysts on Twitter if you know where to look.

**LinkedIn** offers user groups, conversations, collaborations, networking, and company news. When you’re getting ready to implement an ERP system, it’s a great place to look for resources to help you make your software decision.

**ITToolbox.com** and Spiceworks.com are message boards, which are meant for current Customers of various ERPs offering advice regarding their experiences. You can ask questions, comments or offer advice about their systems or just read other posts. You will have to wade through the ERP salesperson comments, but there can be some excellent nuggets found.

**Networking** is probably the best way of learning the latest information about which systems are right for you. Talk to someone who has gone through an ERP project recently. Ask about ease of use, not just functionality. Ask them how long it took to implement and learn the system. Ask them what went right and what went wrong.

Besides, you’ll need all that information and more when you go back to your CFO to make your business case.



You Tube and social media are a great way to research a product, without a salesperson looking over your shoulder.  
**Do your homework.**