Quick guide to researching software

Why?

Successful software shopping starts with research. It's worth investing time in this phase to arm yourself against the hard sales pitches you'll get from vendors. Not all sources of information are objective and unbiased. It's a crowded marketplace and all the vendors are making lots of noise about their 'innovative, unique, turnkey solutions'.

How?

So brace yourself, dive in and take with you these top 10 do's and don'ts from our SMEs…

A word about software comparison sites

Software comparison sites appear to be independent but sometimes aren't. They're created by profit-making enterprises and this inevitably influences the information they provide.

Companies may pay in order for their products to appear higher in listings and the site may receive commission from providers for when users click on the links. Content may even have been written by or on behalf of providers. And often user reviews have been submitted in return for incentives.

By all means use comparison sites but keep your cynical head on. We like the ones that include simple technology explainers and allow you to compare products by cost, support, features and compatibility. Try these three to get you started: *www.g2.com*, *www.getapp.com* and *www.capterra.com*.

Don't be afraid of asking ALL the questions
Your research will throw up a few things you'll need vendors to clarify. The best salespeople will be able to explain things clearly. And if they can't, would you buy from them?

Don't choose the one your friends went with
Lots of firms have told us that they bought something based on a brand name which turned out not to be right for them. Unfortunately, there's no failsafe way to shortcut research.

Don't just go for the brand name you know
Small and mid-sized businesses come in every shape and size, and have drastically different needs. A system which works really well for one company would be inappropriate for another.

Don't forget to leave yourself room to move
Your business is constantly changing and so is the software market. Blink and there's something new to think about. A lot of products are sold on a subscription model, to allow for updates.

Don't do it alone
Who in your business will be relying most on this software? Talk to them and find out about current processes, bottlenecks and pain points to help you narrow down the field.

Do double-check the facts
Be suspicious until you've verified information. We have spoken to a number of SMEs who found that products did not actually have the features that were listed on comparison sites.

Do read online publications with reviews
Check whether the information is coming from a truly independent source or whether it's sponsored advertorial content written on behalf of a provider.

Do use a range of sources for your research
The more the better. Look at supplier websites and third party sources, such as trade magazines, IT publications and professional bodies.

Do get your hands on a demo
A good place to see software in action is to go along to expos and exhibitions. Vendors will give you the hard sell but at least you'll get a feel for what their product is like to use.

Do ask other businesses about what they use
Ask trusted peers, partners and colleagues about their experience of the kind of software you're interested in. Ask what worked well and what didn't. Networking events are good for this too.

You're in Step 3 of the SME Guide to Choosing Software. For more templates and guidance please go to **bethebusiness.tools**

| 1. Setting your objective | 2. Justifying your budget | 3. Creating your shopping list | 4. Buying with confidence | 5. Making it work for the team | 6. Getting your money's worth |