



VETTING SYSTEM INTEGRATORS

What retailers need to know

When purchasing or upgrading a significant application or system, your organization will likely work with several vendors, namely a technology vendor and a system integrator (SI). While the vendor is the company that sells you a particular technology – a merchandising system, EMV software, etc. – an SI partner can serve in both advisory and delivery roles. Depending on your size, in-house expertise and other needs, an SI can advise you on strategic technology planning, perform custom application development, and deliver system integration and/or support.

The value of an outside perspective is especially pertinent in the current retail environment. With regulations changing, technology constantly evolving, and customer demands driving a fast rate of change, you cannot be (nor should you have to be) an expert on every detail of your IT systems.

When it comes to choosing an SI, understanding the differences between them will help ensure your project meets its goals, timeline and budget.

Services are not a commodity

It's tempting to think of an SI as providing a commodity in a sense; that their services are standardized and delivered in the same, methodical way. *Not so.*

There are stark differences in processes, expertise and the service of your team – and the success or failure of your project hinges on those differences. Every potential SI will tell you why they're different, but to get past the marketing speak you'll need to know what questions to ask in order to discover the differences early in the vetting process.

What's the approach or process?

Let the potential SI walk through how they would approach your work. Do they think strategically about your project and ask a lot of questions? Having a proactive approach will help them catch potential challenges or obstacles early on – maybe before you even realize them – and help solve them faster.

Also, is the SI looking at your business holistically and understanding how the work will impact other areas, even beyond the stated scope? Or does the team have an “order taker” approach, giving you the sense that they have a working template from which they rarely deviate, no matter your unique circumstances?

Key questions to ask

- What is your methodology for a project like ours?
- Have you completed similar projects to ours? What were they?
- What's an example of an approach that differed from your competitor's? What was the outcome?



How broad and varied is the expertise?

Expertise in the technology and application stacks you're using is essential. But expertise is much more than simply doing the same type of project over and over; it's about the team's diversity and creativity. If an SI team has experience with many types of technologies, they're more likely to deliver out-of-the-box thinking and creative problem-solving possibilities. You can get a sense of this by asking how an SI has handled challenges and surprises. How nimble are they? Are they able to point out likely hurdles within your project?

In addition, a diversity of backgrounds is important: Does the SI team have only tech backgrounds? Or do they have a myriad of experience – product development, performance engineering, or even merchandising and store operations? A diverse background will give them a deeper understanding of your entire business, its needs and goals.

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The make-up of your SI team will be further proof of their dedication to your success. Will the SI pitch you with one team and but give you another once the project's begun? Or are you confident that what (and who) you see is what you get? Is the team made up of employees (not primarily contractors) who will be hungry to help you succeed because their livelihood depends on it?

Key questions to ask

- Which technologies do you most often work with?
- What's an example of a creative approach you took with a project?
- What is the background and experience of your teams?
- What will the make-up of my project team look like?

Don't settle for a commodity mindset

You put a huge effort into choosing the right technology for your organization and an equal effort is required to find the right SI to make it a reality.

Not all SI partners are created equal; their approach, expertise and support will have significant impacts on the timing, budget and delivery of your project. By asking the right questions during the vetting process, you'll be able to highlight the differences among your potential SI partners and choose the one that best fits your goals.

About BTM Global

We provide retail system integration and development services for clients ranging from small regional chains to the world's most recognized brands. Through development, implementation, support and strategic technology planning, we offer a holistic perspective of your long-term needs to help you succeed and grow.

We believe you should have a partner with diverse expertise, and that's why our teams are built strategically with depth and breadth of knowledge.

As a result, we bring a more creative approach to your challenges and more well-rounded solutions for your needs.

EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE

