Maintaining Compliance: Choosing the Best Software Solution for Your Hazard Communication Needs

Christina Clements, Jacqueline Wardynski, Lynne Kikuta-Oshima (Arcadis)

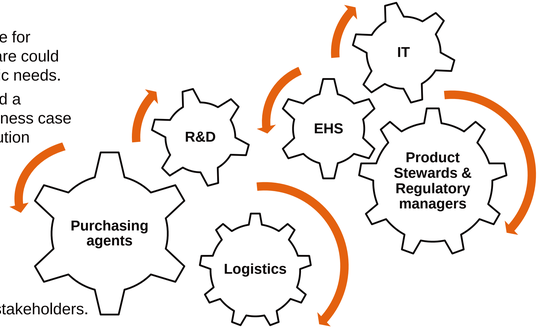
Getting Started

With a few exceptions, no matter what industry you are in, chemicals are likely essential to your operations. Companies and professionals use chemical software to collect and manage data and information about chemical use. It is easy to get caught in the trap of only looking for certain specifications or criteria. One of the best ways to start evaluating needs is to assemble a small team of affected stakeholders, develop a list of the challenges the team currently faces, and describe what would make these challenges “easier” or “more tolerable.” Focus on a few goals (e.g., efficiency, process, cost savings). Solutions should not be brought forth as a singular "software solution" yet.

You may have other departments using software for additional needs in your organization. This software could potentially be leveraged to help solve your specific needs.

If you decide that you do need new software, build a coalition of interested parties to enhance the business case for new software. As you begin your software solution journey, be sure to:

- Benchmark existing software internally.
- Poll your colleagues.
- Identify your stakeholders.



Be clear about project goals and share them with stakeholders.

Successful implementations begin with a plan!

Understanding, Evaluating, and Establishing Requirements

It is optimal to evaluate potential software providers. Conducting internet searches or using SCHC links can provide a path forward. It can also be helpful to rely on a professional network. Contact trusted consultants specializing in product stewardship and EHS software selection and implementation.

- Companies, with expertise in this area, have experience with multiple solutions across industries and can help customers plan, select, deploy, and sustain solutions.

Preliminary software demonstrations can help you further refine your requirements. Conducting informal demonstrations and asking questions can help shape the team’s vision of the future state.

Developing a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit input on a software company’s background, qualifications, size, areas of focus, and their response to your specific requirements is crucial. Select three to four vendors from the respondents for formal software demonstrations.

- Provide vendors with a script to follow that represents how your company plans to use the system.

Build an evaluation scorecard to consolidate results and add objectivity. Combining this assessment with RFP responses and software licensing costs can help further identify the best fit partner company.

Abstract

With the changing landscape of hazard communication, such as OSHA’s impending hazard communication standard update, it is more important than ever to have an effective and reliable information management system; a system or tool that can accommodate functions such as: multi-jurisdiction classifications, regulation tracking (current and emerging), label requirements, and more. It can be overwhelming to consider all the global hazard communications requirements and obligations when implementing or updating your software needs. This poster will offer guidance on critical questions that many practitioners, teams, or companies ask, such as, “What are the steps I need to take to ensure the software I select actually meets my management information objectives?” “Are there ‘out-of-the-box’ solutions that encompass the full range of functions needed - or should I expect to consider customization to suit my needs?” “Is it time to upgrade my software solution?” and “Which solution’s implementation version is the best option and price?” We will also provide guidance on identifying business value, understanding key categories/considerations that contribute to return on investment (ROI), potential pain points and cautions, and the importance of stakeholder/end-user buy in.

Stakeholders

A major roadblock to success is pushback from end users. Lack of commitment or buy-in cannot only delay a project, but it can derail it. Some requirements can be entirely missed because the software is selected only by technical staff or a small group of leaders. To improve the likelihood of buy-in, involve a variety of stakeholders in your business’ software selection process. Road mapping a successful approach that instills stakeholder buy-in can support building a strategy from the beginning that improves your odds of project success.

Using chemical management software should make it easy for your company and team to:

- Find the information you need
- Access or interface with modern chemical databases
- Edit multiple product documents/labels at once (product lines and families)
- Run a variety of reports (e.g.., inventory lists, Tier 2, RTK).

Requirements for the software could include the ability to:

- Review and track new and emerging regulations
- Track chemical approval requests
- Store, search, and retrieve a global library of safety data sheets
- Manage constituents and sub-constituents

Important system considerations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Hosted externally in a highly secure data center
- Have a compatible mobile capability
- Provide readily available tools for importing and exporting data
- Connect with the preferred business intelligence software

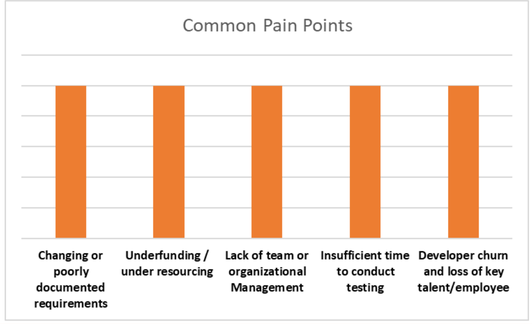
Making the Case

Whether you are looking to improve efficiency or productivity, or replace legacy systems, it is never too early to start building a business case for new software. Most companies require some form of justification for large investments. Your best source of information will be your internal network and others that have walked this path before. As you begin to assemble your business case, here are some areas to document:

- Whether your team is facing impending retirements or organizational changes – this emphasizes the need for knowledge and best practice retention, which new software systems can foster
- Staff engagement/performance with respect to existing systems
- Potential staffing changes due to increased efficiency/effectiveness
- Anticipated improvements in transparency and accountability

Return on investment (ROI) is an important principle to success of a business. A goal for organizations is to lower risk and maximize reward so that they can continue to grow in a manner consistent with organizational objectives. This same thought process should be considered when defining specifications and considering implementation for long-term operation.

ROI = Benefit of investment - Cost of investment



Conclusion

Selecting and implementing a software solution can be exciting and rewarding. It is a project that will challenge you to learn new skills and give you insight into innovative tools. It will also connect you to a new network of professionals who may look to you for future advice or assistance. Most importantly, it can have a lasting impact on the performance of your company and your team. It is important to remember that software projects can carry risk and complexity, and often resource requirements are underestimated. As with most larger projects, success can lie in the amount of investment that is made into the learning, communicating, planning, and preparation in the early stages. Benchmarking directly with peer companies and working through industry associations can prove quite informative.

christina.clements@arcadis.com