



The Beverage ERP Buyer's Guide

Finding the Right Solution for Your Business's Needs



Why You Need an ERP

Between tough competition, changes in consumption patterns and increasing costs for raw materials, utilities and logistics, beverage businesses today face significant challenges. No longer are natural flavors, aromas, sweeteners and water the only vital ingredients for success in the market.

It's also critical to streamline, simplify and automate business procedures, from receiving raw materials to delivering products to customers. After all, efficient operations are a key differentiator for the best-performing players in the beverage industry. This is where a modern enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution comes in.

The right ERP software will make an immediate positive impact, providing specialized tools for the beverage industry, facilitating your processes and promoting visibility of vital information. By choosing and deploying a top-tier system, you can streamline your entire supply chain into one seamless workflow, boosting profitability and customer satisfaction.

Don't fall behind the curve. Invest the necessary time and energy into researching your options so that you can move forward with confidence. Take the next step in your organization's digital transformation.



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Key Signs It's Time for a New ERP Solution

Does your current technology stack empower your beverage business, or is it holding it back? You can't afford to leave the potential rewards of implementing a modern ERP solution on the table.

That said, how do you know when it's time to make a change? Ask yourself these questions:

- » Do you use spreadsheets to compensate for lack of purpose-built software?
- » Do you have the same data or functionality replicated in multiple systems?
- » Do your teams operate in data silos, with little visibility into each others' activities and updates?
- » Does your system need more and more workarounds and tweaking each year?
- » Is your current system up to date with compliance features for the latest regulations?
- » Is your business struggling to scale, acquire new companies or enter new markets?
- » Has your current system been widely adopted by your staff, or are there only a few users?
- » Does your system integrate with other software (like product lifecycle management solutions) and hardware (including barcode scanners)?
- » How frequently does your current technology provider supply updates and support?

Depending on how you've answered, you may feel a sense of urgency to shore up your digital foundation and equip your company with a new ERP as soon as possible. It's crucial to conduct due diligence before purchasing one, though—educating yourself on the options available and how they fit with your business is necessary to ensure you choose wisely.

Luckily, you've already taken the first step by reading this guide. Continue to learn more about the most important factors to consider in your evaluations.

10 Must-Haves for Your Next ERP

When you first begin your search for the right beverage ERP, you'll quickly realize there are plenty of solutions for sale, and you'll have a lot of information to digest. You can simplify the process if you know the key differentiating factors to look for—so we've pulled together this list for you to keep in mind.

1. Beverage Industry-Specific Functionalities

Do you want to start from scratch, build on top of your current system or get started with a solution that is optimized and adapted to your industry? Reinventing the wheel might not be a good idea when selecting your future ERP solution.

Choose Vertically Tailored Software

When looking for a new ERP solution, you basically have three options: Build your own from scratch, customize a standard ERP solution to your needs, or choose an industry-specific ERP solution developed, optimized and adapted to meet the specific needs of beverage companies.

Selecting a solution that was developed for beverage businesses should generally allow you to start reaping a return more quickly. A purpose-built ERP will offer the features and configuration to match your highly specialized processes (like formulation, quality control and excise tax management) while still meeting your needs in terms of finance, sales, production and distribution tools.

Best Practices Included

Another benefit of an industry-specific ERP solution is that it has been developed by a vendor with deep insight into your industry and experience from a multitude of similar projects. This ensures that you get the best guidance and reduces your risk.

ERP solutions from providers that know the beverage sector are built on industry best practices. This means that the software is built to support proven, optimal ways of performing your critical processes, which can lead to significant improvements in effectiveness and competitiveness.



2. Affordable Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

Investing in a new ERP solution is a significant investment. But to determine just how costly it will be, you need to calculate the total cost of ownership (TCO), which includes not just the cost of purchasing (or subscribing to) the ERP, but also the expenses you'll incur over time as you use the software, like those for implementation, licensing, configuration, maintenance, training and more.

Be Wary of Additional Hidden Costs

It's important to keep in mind that beyond the aforementioned, there may be additional "hidden" costs that inflate the TCO of an ERP system and result in other negative consequences.

For example, if you can't afford to maintain a solution, you may be forced to skip upgrades and thus suffer with sub-par performance or antiquated design. Or, if the time needed to train employees on the new system is not included, initial returns may fall short of expectations.

Using TCO as a Tiebreaker

When two solutions provide roughly equivalent benefits over a defined period of time, a TCO comparison can help you decide between them. That said, don't let the number dictate your decision—you should also consider how well each provider's company culture aligns with your own to ensure a harmonious relationship.

3. Long-Term Provider Commitment

There are plenty of beverage software vendors in the market, and they all claim that their solution is the best. But be careful—not all providers are created equal.

Avoid the Risks of Outdated and Unsupported Systems

When you buy an ERP system, you are not purchasing a fixed, static product. You are establishing a continuous relationship with the vendor based on the trust that they'll continue to keep the software updated and supported for many years to come.

Be aware of the fact that, with enterprise technology constantly evolving, older software can drop down on the provider's list of priorities and hence become a liability for the user—you. Vendors sometimes shift strategy or get acquired, and that can lead to a product's roadmap being truncated, leaving you with no more upgrades, enhancements or new functionality going forward.

Seek Out a Long-Term Technology Partner

You should look for a provider with a strategic, long-term focus on continuous research and product development. Go for a solution from a vendor with a strong track record of delivering new and compelling functionality for your platform—especially as it relates to regulatory compliance, as that is bound to evolve over time.

Don't put your business at risk by choosing a platform from a company with high volatility and an uncertain future. Find a technology partner you can trust and rely on to continuously improve their offering.





4. Fast, Efficient Implementation

Replacing your old ERP system can be a daunting task. But it doesn't have to be a long, tedious process—by choosing the right solution backed by an industry-recognized provider, your transition can be smooth and seamless.

It Doesn't Have To Be Lengthy

The risk of a drawn-out and complex implementation project could hold your beverage organization back from getting the ERP it needs in place. While it's true the deployment of a new solution can bring about major change, it does not necessarily require extensive time and effort on your team's part if proper planning is conducted and your vendor has solid experience.

Inquire About the Average Duration of Implementation

ERP deployments that drag on not only delay realization of benefits but also result in greater costs. Ask the providers of each of the solutions that you're considering what their average implementation time is and whether or not they foresee any nuances of your situation that could require additional time.

5. Adaptability and Scalability

Change is inevitable and happens fast, especially in the consumer-driven beverage sector. It's therefore likely that your needs today are different from the ones you'll have in six months, so your solution needs to be flexible in order to accommodate.

Flexibility for Your Workflows

If your software is inflexible and fixed in how it functions, there will soon be a disparity between the way it was originally implemented and the new requirements of your business. You may reach the point where the processes of the system actually constrict the ability of your users to efficiently run your business.

Modern beverage ERPs allow you to tailor your processes based on your organization's unique workflows and can even automate some steps when you need to free your staff from routine tasks. This makes it easier for you to ensure that the system works for your specific circumstances.

Scaling Up When the Time Is Right

When selecting a new ERP solution, you need to consider an expansion scenario—after all, growth is likely among your top business goals. Consider what you need from your ERP in the short-term and what you might need from it down the road, and make sure that the solution you are considering supports both plans.

Depending on the situation, you may need to scale your system from a single-instance implementation to a multi-instance implementation or a hub-and-spoke implementation. You may also need to add users as you hire more staff. Make sure that whatever ERP you choose allows for those changes.



6. Configurability and Modularity

How can you accelerate the realization of the benefits your beverage ERP promises? You need to be able to prioritize the specific functionalities that can address your company's pain points.

Select a System Born Modular

Modularity—also called composability, meaning that functions of the system can be added, swapped and removed in any order, at any time—allows you to deploy and begin using specific features to support individual processes when and how you see fit. That way, you can start small or start big according to your needs, not a predetermined setup.

Cohesion Is Crucial

Individual modules available for a solution might have been written at different times by different programmers, so they could look and feel quite different. The bigger problem is when related modules aren't integrated and thus require duplication of data entry and updates.

When examining the tools that an ERP offers for a specific functional area, make sure that they are intrinsically linked to one another, sharing the same data and remaining synced at all times. That will help eliminate discrepancies and save your staff time on redundant busy work.





7. Optimized Mobile Experience

Today's on-the-go workers need to be able to log on from their phone for remote work and the latest updates. Mobile devices have become an important extension of beverage ERPs thanks to two distinct benefits that support workforce productivity.

Flexible Access

The first benefit of mobile-accessible ERPs is connecting employees, partners and even customers to the system whenever and wherever they need it. Real-time visibility into inventory and orders helps them make sound decisions on the fly, and being able to log in with just a browser and credentials makes collaborating simple.

Ease of Use

The second benefit is mobile devices' enhanced user interface, portability, high-screen resolution and finger-swipe functionality, all of which make completing tasks a breeze. While it is unlikely mobile ERP applications will altogether replace traditional desktop ERP applications in the near future due to some inherent limitations, they help meet the need for agility in today's fast-paced business environment.

8. High-Level Data Visibility

Data represents value in the business world. Through analysis, it can provide insight and a competitive advantage. Empower your decision-making with real-time insights from dashboards, reports and analysis that bring you up to speed at a glance.

Convenient, Legible Formats

Most beverage businesses today have more data than they know what to do with. And getting to that data and then presenting it in a useful manner for a convincing analysis are two tasks that many organizations find difficult.

Modern ERP solutions help you pull data and create reports at the click of a button. They also help you monitor performance with dashboards that update in real time and reflect your company's most important metrics.

Business Intelligence (BI)

To make the most of your data and inform your best decisions, you should go for an ERP platform that integrates smoothly with business intelligence (BI) tools. These solutions, powered by machine learning, can calculate accurate projections based on past data and report on key performance indicators (KPIs) that are critical for your success.



9. Cloud Deployment Options

If you are considering a new ERP solution for your beverage business, one of the most important decisions you will need to make is whether to implement your solution locally or deploy it from the cloud. Let's discuss the differences and why the latter is generally preferable.

On-Premises vs. Cloud

The basic difference between an on-premises ERP and cloud ERP is straightforward. On-premises ERP solutions are installed on your company's hardware at your facility and maintained by your IT staff, while cloud ERPs are provided as a service that you subscribe to (known as the Software as a Service, or SaaS model) and managed by your provider.

The Advantages of Cloud ERPs

The deployment model you choose can have a considerable impact across your business. There are several significant benefits to be unlocked with a cloud implementation, including:

- » Little to no hardware requirements
- » Vendor-side maintenance
- » Streamlined installation
- » Enhanced cybersecurity
- » Broader accessibility

It's best if you can at least select a technology provider that offers cloud deployments, even if you choose to stay on-prem for now. The system can always be migrated later (though it is ideal to implement from the cloud from the start).

10. Positive Customer References

There may be no better indicator of an ERP's quality than the testimony of a happy existing customer. You'll want to request, review and vet several references from any provider you're considering.

Time for the Litmus Test

Once you've narrowed down the options to a short list of beverage ERPs that could fit your particular needs and goals, it is time for the ultimate litmus test: customer references. You want to be sure that the provider of the solution has completed implementation projects that have successfully solved the challenges of other companies similar to yours.

The only way to find this out is by speaking with existing clients. Talk to at least three references and ask them what went right, what went wrong and what they might have done differently. If a vendor cannot provide at least three strong testimonials, they may not have the experience you need.

Industry Recognition Is a Big Bonus

While not quite as crucial as good customer references, industry recognition and awards are also proof points worth considering. Just be sure to research what specifically the vendor was recognized for and how recently it happened—an award for a different product, or one given five years ago, is far less significant than a recognition received recently for the beverage solution you're considering.



Why Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT

Now that you know what you're looking for as you shop around for your next beverage ERP, we'd like to share some reasons why Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT should be among your top options.

A Single, Comprehensive Solution

Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT is a complete and easy-to-use beverage management solution covering your entire value chain. Our solution can simplify your processes, connect all functional areas of your business and support growth. The system powers some of the most well-run beverage companies in the world, ranging from mid-size companies to the world's largest beverage enterprises.

Reliable and Future-Proof

Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT is built on the world's most reliable and advanced ERP platform, Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central. With a user-friendly interface and fully vetted features, you can start generating value with the system's capabilities right away. What's more, the solution is modular, which lets you start by optimizing a single business process, then build out functionality for other aspects of your business as you grow, all while maintaining a single source of truth via a unified data lake.

Tailored to Your Unique Challenges

From ingredient sourcing and quality management to order fulfilment and customer service, Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT addresses all the unique challenges of the beverage industry. With our solution, you'll be able to fine-tune your pricing to enhance your profitability, streamline tax management, account for returnable containers and ensure regulatory compliance with purpose-built features.

Dedicated, Professional Support

As is the case for all Apteian products, Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT comes with robust support from experienced professionals, starting with implementation project planning and going forward throughout your entire digital transformation journey. Enjoy optimum performance and peace of mind knowing that in Apteian, you have a long-term technology partner dedicated to mutual success.




The Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central Difference

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central is the latest generation of Microsoft's platform for business solutions, and it's been nothing short of revolutionary for the ERP market. It builds upon the successful Dynamics NAV but also offers a variety of additional advantages.

- » **Airtight cybersecurity** – Business Central solutions are hosted in the world's most secure cloud, kept resilient to cybercriminals by Microsoft's experts and technology.
- » **Unified data** – ERPs on Business Central benefit from centralized data management, which syncs information across apps and departments, creating a single source of the truth.
- » **Routine process automation** – With built-in capabilities and the new Copilot AI assistant, you can automate routine tasks with Business Central ERPs to save time and reduce the risk of human error.
- » **Integration with other Microsoft apps** – Outlook, Word, Excel and other popular Microsoft programs natively integrate with Business Central ERPs, so you can import and export files seamlessly.
- » **Evergreen development** – ERP systems built on Business Central are under continuous development and improvement, and updates are automatic, so you're always on the latest version.

The next generation of ERPs is on Business Central. Choosing a leading solution like Apteian Beverage ERP Drink-IT can help secure your business's future and ensure that you have the features and functionalities you need to thrive in a dynamic marketplace.





Aptean Beverage ERP Drink-IT is trusted by:



Aptean is one of the world's leading providers of purpose-built, industry-specific software that helps manufacturers and distributors effectively run and grow their businesses. With both cloud and on-premise deployment options, Aptean's products, services and unmatched expertise help businesses of all sizes to be Ready for What's Next, Now®. Aptean is headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia and has offices in North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

To learn more about Aptean and the markets we serve, visit www.aptean.com.