InstallerPro

Choosing Security & Fire Management Software

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The best exposition on this topic that I've ever seen

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Whether you're looking for a full Industry Specific Management package or just want some software to help you get better organised, there are some important points to understand before you start. The big question is, how can you make sure you're choosing the right software for your business? Here is our guide for getting it right.

Generic Field Service or Industry Specific Software?

Before we get into the detail of how to choose the right software for you, it's important to know the basic differences. Software packages for Fire & Security tend to fall into two main groups, Generic Field Service, or Industry Specific Software.

Generic Field Service software is designed to work across a range of industries. Providers focus on core functions such as quoting, scheduling, Invoicing, and Field Engineer Access. There are plenty of companies out there who have some very attractive solutions which work well. As a rule, they don't tend to come with full industry specific engineer forms and reports built in, but there are a few that do. You may need to construct your own forms using their online tools or pay to have them created. That can be a big commitment if you have 30 or more forms to produce before you can start.

> If it doesn't produce Service Stats False Alarm & P Figures its Generic

The test to see if a product is generic is to ask if it comes with inbuilt False Alarm Reporting, Call Out Response, Service Compliance, and can produce False Alarm & 'P figures'. If it doesn't - its generic.

Some of the bigger names out there currently used by the industry today are actually generic and not made for the Industry at all—you might be surprised. You might find yourself paying for a string of extras you weren't anticipating.

If you are an SSAIB, NSI, FIA, or BAFE accredited company and you choose a generic product you will have to deal with compliance matters yourself or pay the provider to build them for you. That can be expensive.

Industry Specific Software will in most part come with compliant processes and either have pre-loaded documentation or the ability to easily set these up. Industry software will usually come with a range of features which were developed based on direct industry experience.

If you are not an accredited company but you are planning to gain industry body approval, then you need to consider this choice carefully. If your chosen provider cannot meet the standards, changing to another system will be both expensive and time consuming.

There is another reality to face. Many Industry Specific software packages have, to put it politely, 'lacked investment'. If you compare most to the best generic software, they can feel dated and clunky. The opportunity to do better is bringing new blood into the market and that, in turn, is pushing the established providers to step up, which is no bad thing.

PC Based or Cloud Based?

There are still choices here. However, in technological terms, it's like the decision London cabbies are now making to buy their last diesel or to get the electric taxi now.

Cloud based systems come with a host of benefits. They have long surpassed PC and local server-based systems in terms of reliability, security, mobile and multiuser access options. The simple fact is that nobody is designing a new generation of PC based software - there are no new diesel engine designs. Today PC software development consists of just applying fixes rather than innovation. Some companies have dropped support for their PC based systems entirely.

Security and GDPR compliance are now major issues with legacy PC software systems.

There is another term which is important to know, Software as a Service (SAAS). This is a term used for companies providing a remotely hosted subscription-based software. Almost all modern cloud-based systems, including our product InstallerPro, are all SAAS options.
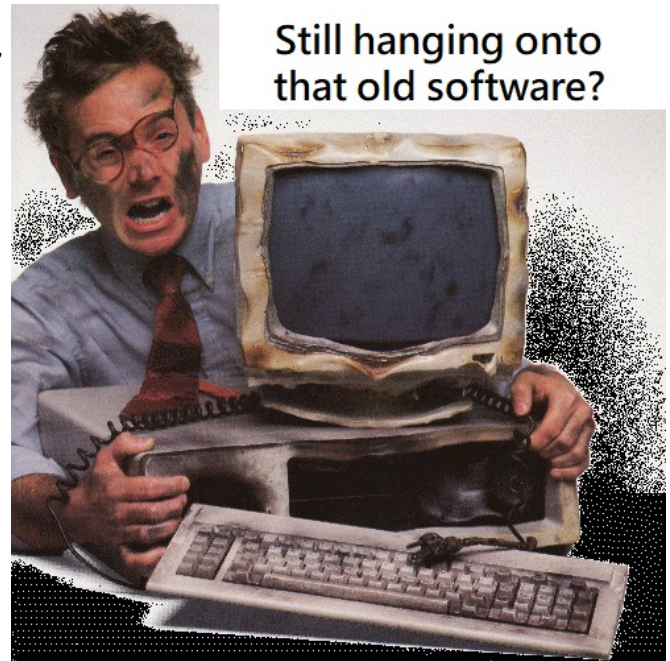
Still hanging onto that old software?

Let us take the pain away...

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The Golden Rules

Whether you are buying your first software package, or changing up, there are some golden rules which always apply. These rules work no matter how big or small your business is.

There is an adage that says, 'You never contemplate change when life is plain sailing'. Most companies only realise that they need to make a change when things are not going the right way. Whilst there may not be a perfect time to change, there can be a right way to deal with the situation.

The worst decision you can make is not to make a decision. Putting off something as important as changing software can be very harmful to your business. If you do it right, then you will reap the benefits.

- Take stock
- Involve your team
- Do your research
- Take advice and soundings
- Choose Providers not just products
- Take demos and trials
- Know the Costs

Turn The Lights on & Take Stock

Take an honest look at your existing software and processes.

Assess your business needs and where your strengths and weaknesses are. Get that done and you are more likely to make the right choice. You need to be honest about where your business is. The right software will help enhance productivity but if you choose a poor fit, it will feel like running a marathon in shoes 3 sizes too small.

Look at what works now and what doesn't. A shiny new feature is unlikely to fix problems in your business so **go for substance and support every time.**

Be aware that as you go through the process of choosing new software, you may also find unexpected weaknesses in your operations. This is no bad thing but be prepared

Secondly, establish the pros and cons of your current software and then use this to make a list of goals. Create a list of 'Must-haves' and 'Nice-to-haves' but try not to approach the market with your own solutions and then get stuck on them. If you are looking for something that works precisely how you do, you might be disappointed. Be open minded and use the opportunity to look at alternative options and ideas. On the other hand, if there are 'Must haves' like compliance, stick to your guns.

Have an idea about what the business can afford to pay but try to focus on value for money.

Involve Your Team

Take care to involve members of your team who will be using the software every day. Gather feedback on what works well with your current software and where your team think new software could drive improvement. Don't forget to involve your engineers in that process.

Managers will have a different view and will need clear oversight of their team's activities. Senior Management should be able to access the data they need to make decisions. They shouldn't have to ask someone in their office what's going on, it should be obvious.

Do Your Research

Take your time to research your options thoroughly and well in advance of any licence subscriptions coming to an end.

Find out what other businesses are using, and what their experiences have been with different software providers. Check reviews on social media and take the time to understand the way the application works before making any sort of investment.

By evaluating the alternatives comprehensively, you will be aware of what is available on the market and be able to make judgements about the best options.

Take Advice

When choosing the right software for your business, take some soundings.

Speak to your approval bodies. They will have an idea about what other companies are using. They often have a list of recognised software providers. They also come with the benefit of being impartial.

Talk to your approval bodies
Look on industry social media forums
Speak to other industry professionals
Go to shows and meet the providers

Go onto the social media platforms and groups and listen to what's being said. These platforms are a broad church, but will give you an idea of what's popular and what's not.

If you have relationships with other businesses in the industry, see what they are using but come to your own decisions. If you have access to consultant advisers, see what they recommend.

If you have a good IT consultant that can be helpful. However, if they don't know the industry well, you might end up getting well intentioned but inaccurate advice.

Take Demos and Trials

Create a rough shortlist of potential providers based on your research and then contact them for a demo or free trial. The demo will give you a much better idea about how the product looks and works. The trial is your chance to check that the functionality that you need is there, and that you are comfortable with the format. Does it feel new and fresh, does it look dated, you'll soon see.

If you are an accredited company, check if it contains compliance reporting, if it has compliant forms or if you must create your own. Can the provider help you transfer any data over from your existing system?

Following the results of these demos or free trials, exclude what's not for you, and choose your top runners. If you are not sure about something, ask to speak to someone senior at the Service Provider and email them your questions.

Choose Providers not Just Products

Remember that when you are choosing software you are also choosing the company that will be supporting it.

Make time to go to shows and meet the providers face to face. Talking directly to the people who run the business will give you a much better feel for their commitment, enthusiasm, and style than any website can ever convey.

You need to make sure their plans align with yours. Do they understand your needs? What are their development plans? How are they addressing changes in the industry?

If you are talking to someone who knows your industry, then they will be able to give you the kind of answers you are looking for.

Read the contract

Before you commit, make sure you read the contract properly. Our advice is don't sign a contract you can't get out of in a reasonable period. A multi-year contract can be a nightmare if you find you've made a mistake.

How long are you signing up for?

What's my notice period?

What's included and what's not?

What is the product cost and are there any increases due?

What are the set-up costs?

What are the training costs?

Is there a maintenance contract and what will it cost me?

How long will it take for me to be fully operational?

If I leave, can I get my data back and will you charge me?

Do I have to pay you to create my compliance reporting?

Do I have to pay you to create forms?

A Final Word

Above all, choose someone you think you can work with - Look for a partner.

A Little About Us

InstallerPro has become one of the largest Cloud Based Industry software's in the UK in the past two years.

We are a UK based company specialising solely in Cloud Fire & Security Industry software.

We have a strong team of programmers, managers, and staff all of whom have extensive experience in the industry. That means when you talk to us we understand your needs.

We are heavily invested in growing our business and capabilities and have a substantial development programme over the coming years. Our goal is simply to be the best at what we do and to offer that at a price that represents value for money.

If you are looking to change your software then get in touch

Visit our website : www.installerpro.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook/installerprosec

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