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Tech made possible

The ultimate guide to getting the most from your bespoke software supplier

Unlock software potential

Unlock your software's full potential by ensuring your supplier is delivering maximum value - whether that means optimising your current partnership or switching software providers

Auditing, improving and even switching software suppliers can seem overwhelming, but it's also an opportunity to boost performance, reduce costs, and align technology with your business goals. It my be tempting to change suppliers when things go wrong, however, a switch isn't always the right answer. Sometimes, auditing your current supplier may reveal opportunities to enhance their service and extract more value from your existing relationship.

This guide is designed to help you assess whether a switch is necessary, or if there are ways to improve your current setup without a full transition.

As global IT-managed services spending continues to rise - projected to grow by 8.1% in 2025 - businesses increasingly rely on technology and AI to support operations and drive innovation. Cloud-managed services, for example, are expected to grow by a further 50% in the next five years. The right software supplier can lighten the load and support business growth, but the wrong one can hold you back. That's why auditing your current supplier is a crucial first step before considering any changes.
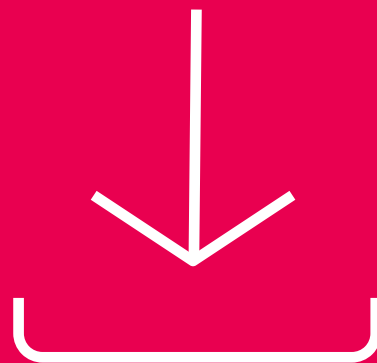
At Propel Tech, we understand the complexities of managing and transitioning software suppliers. As experts in bespoke software development, we know the uncertainty that often surrounds the decision to switch. This guide, developed by our team of experienced developers, technologists, and system testers, will walk you through how to evaluate your current supplier's performance, identify improvement opportunities, and - if necessary - seamlessly transition to a new partner.

With our actionable insights and resources, you'll be empowered to make the right choice, whether that's optimising your existing relationship or executing a flawless supplier migration. Let this guide help you unlock the most value for your business, no matter the path you choose.
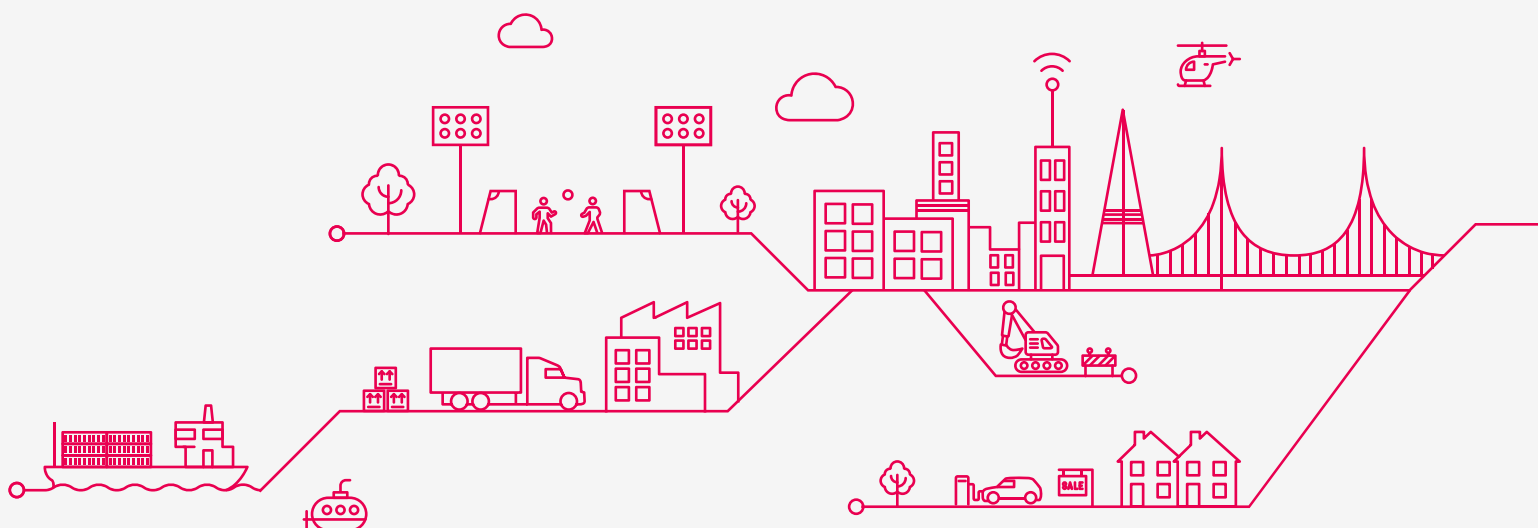
Contents

Downloads and templates

We know it's not always easy to take action. Please look out for the following useful downloads and templates which we will send to your inbox.

- Processes to follow when moving suppliers

- Developing enhancements in your systems plan

- Knowledge transfer, data migration and data governance checklists

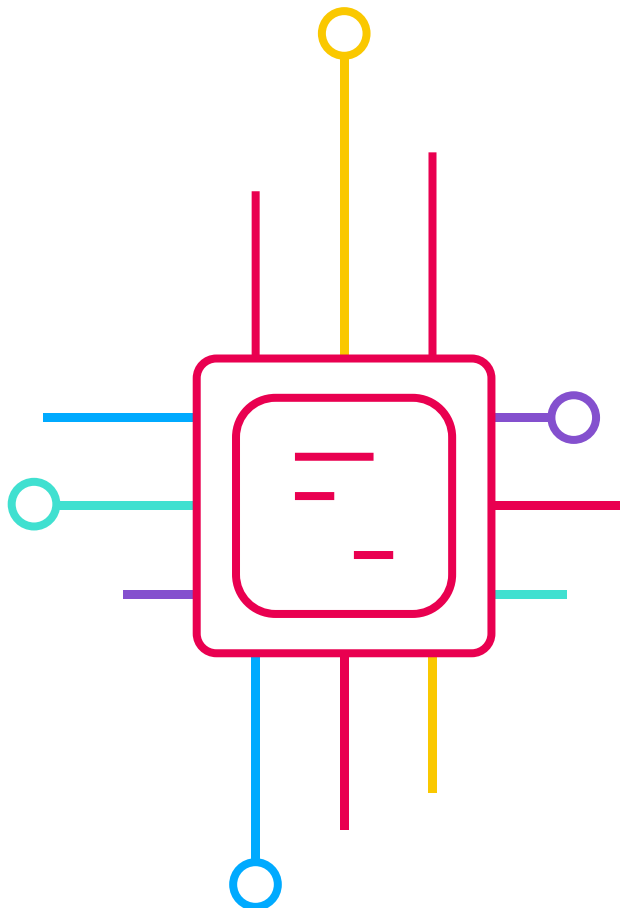**Get in touch with Propel Tech** $\longrightarrow$

How outsourced bespoke software adds value

Outsourcing aspects of your software and technology management can and should deliver significant value to businesses. Whether you are looking to migrate to achieve technology transformation or to keep your technology process optimised and efficient, the right technology partner matters.

When considering a partner you should look for the "right fit". This fit needs to support your business objectives and skills requirements.

There is no set checklist for how a software partner can add value, however, the following six areas provide a good framework to consider:

"I want my outsourced software provider to add value by understanding my business and thinking before I do, fixing the gaps we have with their technical skills and helping us evolve or transform, knowing our business and suggesting the right solution."

Tony McCann - Head of IT - LSL Properties PLC

1. Does your provider add vital specialist expertise?

An outsourced service provider should deliver speedy access to experts in specific technology stacks, and bring project-ready software know-how to ensure you can maximise project deliverables - protecting against costly errors or lack of in-house specialist knowledge. In addition to software and technical know-how, an outsourced team will have experienced many different business scenarios and should also deliver exemplary business understanding to ensure any software or technology changes improve business functionality, and modernises systems and processes, and ultimately support broader business objectives.

2. Do they deliver proactive monitoring and easy issue resolution?

Bespoke software support providers typically offer focused, proactive monitoring of your software. They are well-placed to monitor system performance, identify potential issues or vulnerabilities, and take preventive measures to mitigate risks. Any partner should have a clear scope and skill-set they can use to independently and impartially offer the best advice and monitor software against industry-standard measures.

Your software partner should know what good looks like and what is feasible, and, as such, they should always detect and address problems before they escalate into significant disruptions. A proactive partner adds value by helping to minimise downtime, maximise performance and ensure smooth operations.

3. Can you rely on timely technical support?

Software issues can arise at any time, and having access to focused technical support 24/7 is crucial to expediting the resolution of any software issues when they occur. Outsourced software support providers should add value with responsive support, and offer dedicated support teams available around the clock if required. Proactive prioritisation of issue resolution, clear management of requests and timely assistance are essential services that ensure that businesses can quickly overcome obstacles and minimise the impact on their operations.

4. Do they work with you and support your scalability and flexibility requirements?
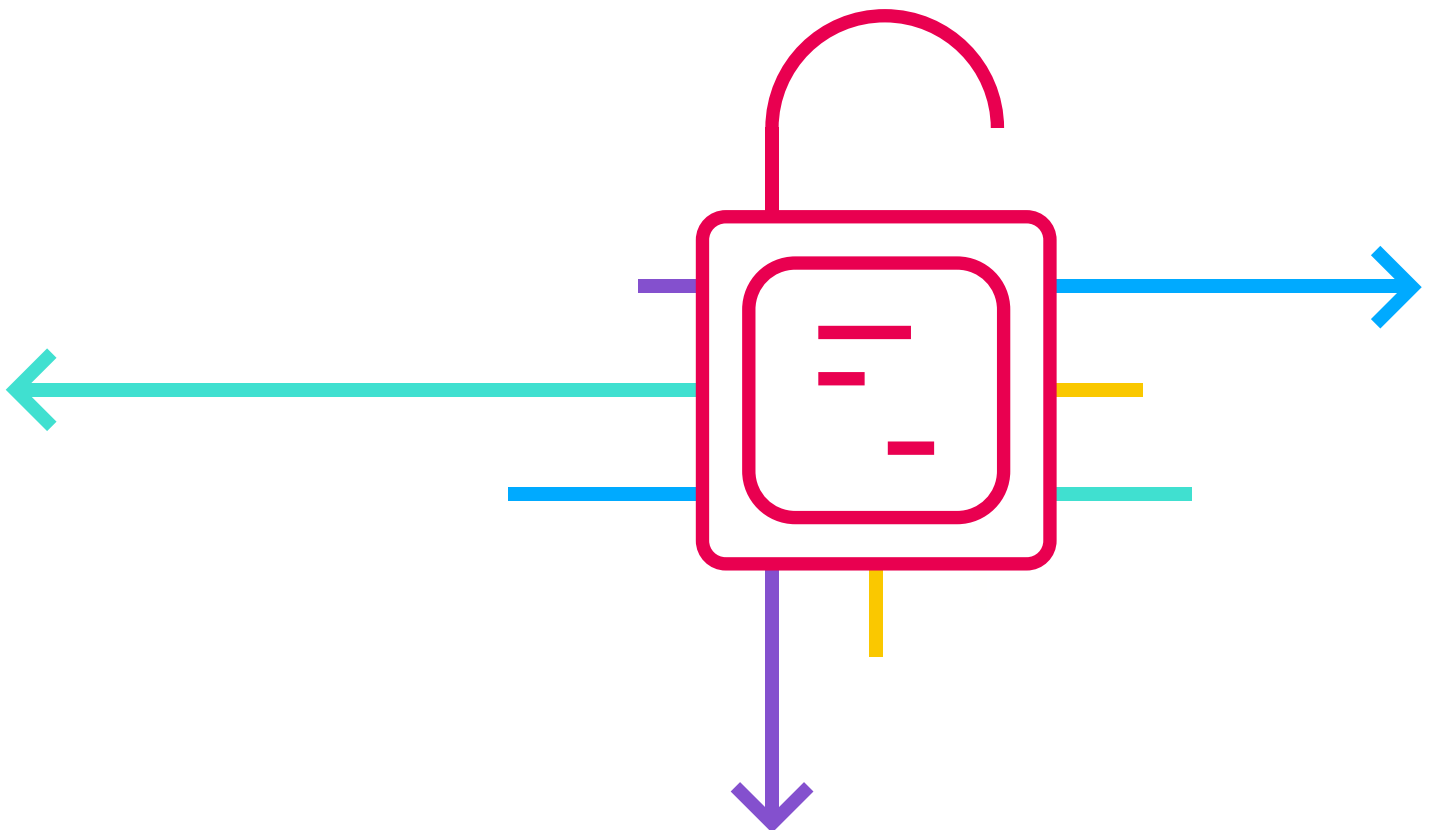
As businesses grow and evolve, their software needs may change. Outsourced bespoke software support providers should adapt and flex their teams to meet your needs at speed. This could mean adding new specialist expert team members to handle increased workloads, or it could mean assigning team members to new scopes and projects to accommodate new features or modules or providing the necessary support during periods of expansion, growth or change.
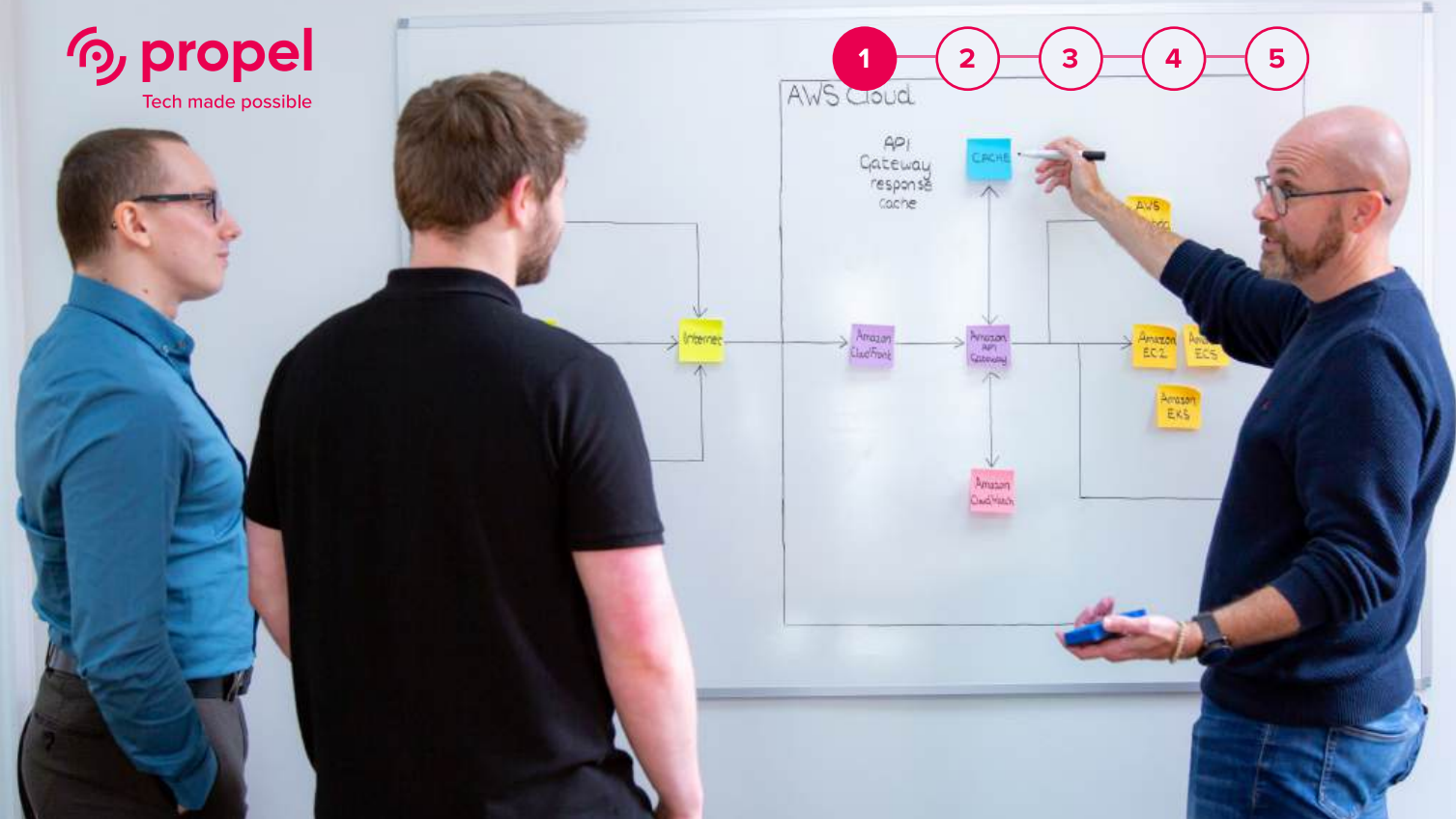
5. Can you expect regular updates and maintenance?

Software requires regular updates, patches, and maintenance to ensure optimal performance, security, and compliance. Outsourced software support providers should act to take care of these tasks, ensuring that new and legacy software remains up-to-date, working optimally and free from vulnerabilities. By delegating these responsibilities to an outsourced support provider, businesses unlock the value of their team to focus on other areas of the business.

6. Are they agile and cost effective?

Investing in outsourced software support can also be very cost-effective for businesses. Instead of hiring, training and maintaining an in-house support team, or relying on one in-house expert to have large amounts of systems knowledge, which could result in systems knowledge leaving the business with that person. Businesses can leverage the expertise of an outsourced service provider at a fraction of the cost and spread the risk and leverage knowledge sharing. Additionally, outsourced bespoke software service providers can offer flexible pricing models, allowing businesses to pay for the support they need based on usage or specific service-level agreements. This cost efficiency frees up resources that can be allocated to other critical areas of the business.
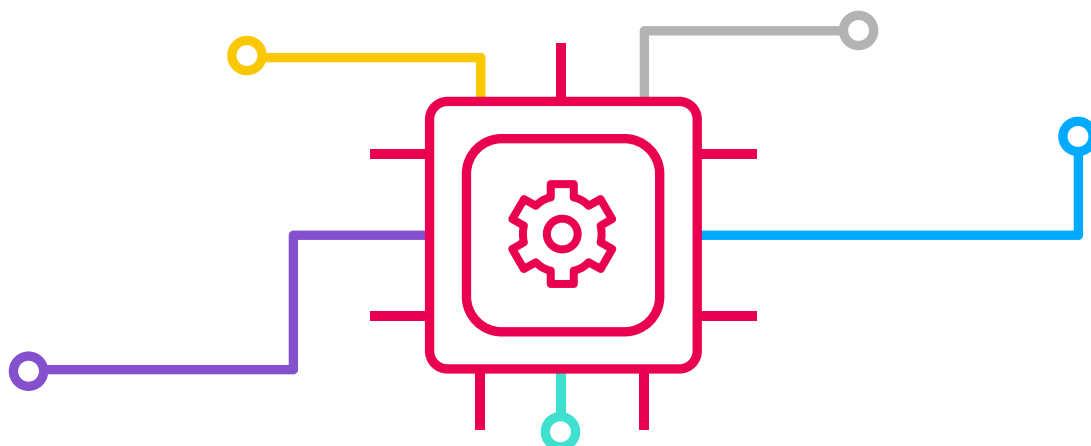
In summary, your software partner should add value by delivering vital expertise.

By leveraging the support services of outsourced bespoke software developers, you should be able to find more value across your business, engage a wide number of technical and non-technical stakeholders, and move forward more effectively by optimising your software performance, minimising downtime, and ensuring smooth operations. If your bespoke software provider is not helping you in the above areas, and your technology is not moving forward at a pace right for your business, then it could be time to consider migrating to a new software partner and even relooking at your business's technology and software value focus.

"I find the best bespoke software suppliers are in tune with our needs, they are astute and take the time to get to know what we need and solve problems as part of the team, staying one step ahead to add value."

Simon Rose - Infrastructure Manger - Group IT - JCB

When and why to consider changing your bespoke software solutions delivery partner

60% of companies outsource some bespoke software management

With software development outsourcing being seen as an antidote to economic uncertainty, there has never been a more pressing time to ensure you have the right partner in place. Propel Tech's years of experience working with clients across multiple sectors have given our team great insight into when and why businesses should consider changing their bespoke software solutions partner.

Here we have compiled some key indicators that suggest it may be time to evaluate and potentially switch your bespoke software partner:

1. Lack of support and responsiveness:
Responsiveness is a basic, and fundamental measure of the health of a supplier relationship. Setting out and maintaining expectations of responsiveness, and embedding SLAs is imperative to success - it sets the playing field and ensures every party know what is expected. If your current software partner consistently fails to provide adequate support or is unresponsive to your development needs, it can hinder your business operations. Delayed response times, unresolved issues, and a lack of proactive engagement indicate a breakdown in the partnership and may warrant exploring other options.

"Any bespoke software supplier needs to be an extension of my team, with us for the journey, adding value by immersing in my business to solve the right problems to deliver."

Mick Roscoe - Software Delivery Manager - Your Move

2. Outdated technology and functionality:
If your current software engineers or consultants are unable to advise on practices, maintain timely updates, can not integrate modern features correctly, or fail to manage integrations with other essential tools, it may be holding your business back. Bespoke outsourced software partners should never let your technology become stagnant or outdated - even a legacy system should be optimised to its full potential and always kept up to date. The biggest costs and issues can arise when technology is left to stagnate.

Sources: Statista global software outsourcing data 2023

3. Scalability limitations:

As your business grows, your software needs to scale accordingly. If your current software solutions provider cannot accommodate the increased workload or lacks the flexibility to adapt to changing business requirements, consider seeking a partner with a more scalable solution. Inadequate scalability can holdback expansion plans and your ability to meet customer demands.

4. Security concerns:

It's essential to prioritise the protection of your sensitive information. Switch to a software partner with a proven track record in security and robust data protection. A good measure is to check if your supplier or prospective supplier has gained any certificates and external stamps of approval for example, ISO 9001 and ISO 27001, which are both internationally recognised standards for Quality Management Systems (QMS) and data management. They set out the criteria for a quality management system and a compliant information security management system that can help protect sensitive data from cybercriminals.
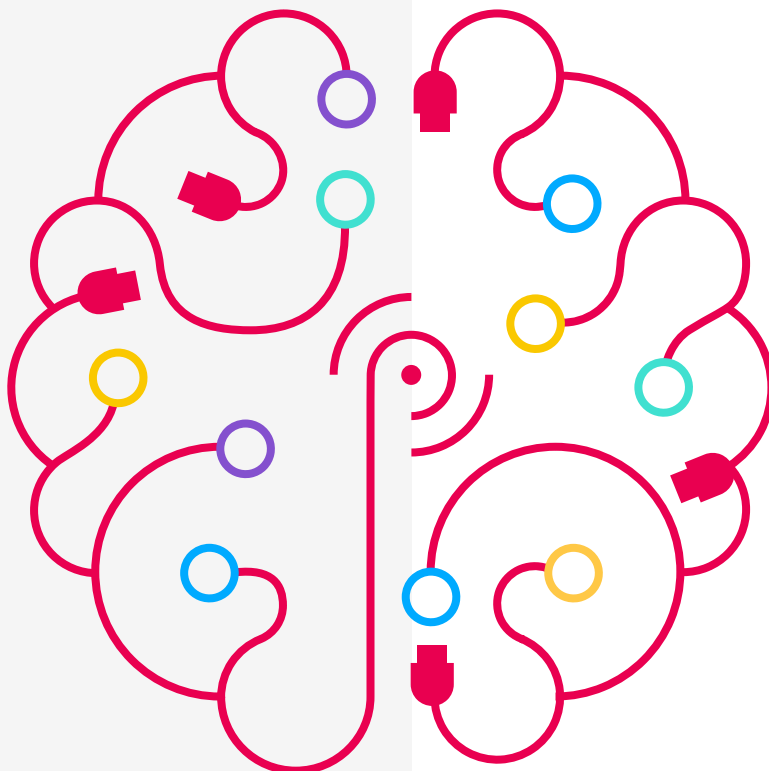
5. Cost inefficiencies:

High maintenance costs, licensing fees, or customisation expenses can significantly impact your bottom line. If you find that your current software partner is not cost-effective or fails to deliver sufficient ROI, review alternative options that offer better value for your investment.

6. Competitive disadvantage:

Consider if your competitors are utilising more advanced software solutions or are leveraging technology to gain a competitive edge. Falling behind technologically can impede your ability to innovate, deliver superior customer experiences, and stay ahead in the market.

7. Organisational growth or restructuring:

Mergers, acquisitions, or significant organisational changes can necessitate a reassessment of your software partnership. Aligning your software solutions with your new organisational structure and goals can improve operational efficiency and streamline processes.

7 key tips to assess and manage a switch in suppliers

We spoke to Wil Jones, our Technical Director, to get his insight into how to change bespoke software suppliers to minimise risk and maximise the impact - the key tips he shared include:

1. Assess your needs and goals:

Before making the switch, take the time to evaluate your current software and identify its limitations or areas for improvement. Clearly define your objectives and prioritise the features and functionality you require from the new software supplier. This will help you find the right fit and streamline the transition process.

2. Research and due diligence:

Thoroughly research potential software suppliers to ensure they have a proven track record and a good reputation in your industry. Look for case studies and testimonials to gain insights into their expertise and reliability. Additionally, consider their compatibility with your existing infrastructure and future scalability.

3. Plan for a phased transition:

Attempting to switch your software supplier quickly can lead to significant downtime and disruptions. Instead, if possible, plan for a phased transition approach. Identify critical functions and prioritise the initial implementation, gradually expanding into other areas. This way, you can minimise downtime and ensure effectiveness in a controlled manner.

4. Ensure data compatibility and migration:

Data migration is a crucial aspect of switching software suppliers. Work closely with both the existing and new suppliers to ensure a smooth transfer of data. Verify that your data formats are compatible and establish clear protocols for the migration process. Conduct extensive testing to ensure data integrity and validate that all vital information has been successfully transferred.

5. Communication and change management:

Effective communication is paramount throughout the transition process. Keep all stakeholders informed about the switch, its benefits, and the anticipated timeline. Create a change management plan that addresses potential resistance and provides support mechanisms for employees. Encourage feedback and address concerns promptly to foster a smooth transition.

6. Test thoroughly before going live:

Perform extensive testing of software, and changes in a controlled environment. Conduct user testing to ensure that all functionality works as expected and meets your business requirements. Identify and rectify any issues before going live to minimise disruptions once the migration has taken place.

7. Monitor and evaluate performance:

After the transition, closely monitor the performance of your bespoke software partner to ensure that they meet your expectations. Regularly assess their impact on productivity, efficiency, and overall business outcomes. Collect feedback from end-users and make necessary adjustments or optimisations to maximise the benefits of outsourcing.

By following these strategies and considerations, you'll be better equipped to navigate the transition successfully and optimise the benefits of your new software supplier.
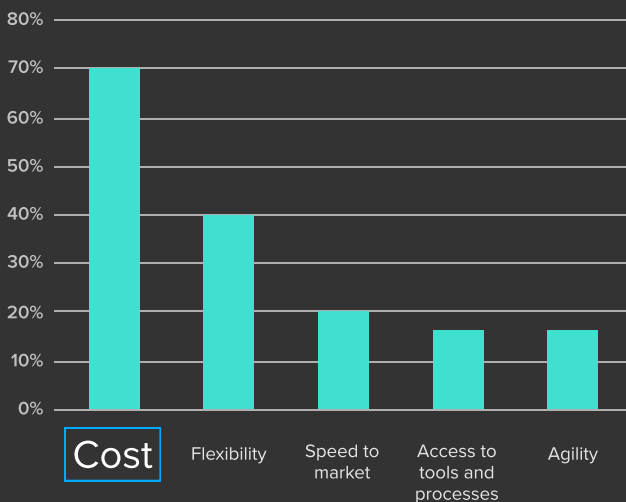
Read our case studies

The pros and cons of migrating bespoke software suppliers

Moving bespoke software suppliers can feel like a big task, it can have both pros and cons, and the decision should be carefully considered based on your specific circumstances and goals.

Cost is the lead driver for outsourcing IT-managed services, but the cost advantage of outsourcing is just one of the pros of finding the right supplier.

Reasons for outsourcing: Cost is top priority among IT leaders

Source: Deloitte Global Outsourcing Survey 2020

"Outsourcing levels are growing as more organisations take advantage of the cost flexibility that service providers offer."
-Computer Economics IT Outsourcing Statistics 2022

"When managing a migration there is a lot of pressure on the team to get to know proprietary code quickly and effectively, sometimes without guidance or handover. Often it is at a point of a critical situation. We always work hard to ensure the rigour and time required to plan and manage the right transition is not undermined and that we improve the status quo removing any crisis risk, and doing so cost-effectively."

Wil Jones - Technical Director - Propel Tech

We spoke to clients across sectors from manufacturing to facilities management and have complied a list of some of the most recognised pros and cons of changing bespoke software suppliers:

PROS:

Improved functionality:
A new supplier should conduct a full audit of functionality. Given the drive to change suppliers of often driven by the lack of the right skills and a system not performing as it should, onboarding a new partner should result in significantly improved functionality linked to the new supplier's expertise and experience. What's more, they should bring fresh ideas and approaches to improve the functionality of your system, leading to enhanced user experiences and productivity.

Better support and maintenance:
If your current supplier is delivering a poor standard of support or maintenance services, a change would lead to improved responsiveness and reliability, ensuring your system runs smoothly. Setting out support expectations and SLAs will help to ensure that support is at a level that you require and your new supplier is delivering to your required standards and hopefully delivering proactively to your needs.

New ideas and up-to-date technology:
A new supplier should bring new ideas and approaches, along with more detailed or specialist expert knowledge, that can support the modernisation of existing systems and ensure that where required they are recommending and utilise more advanced technologies, helping you stay up-to-date with the latest industry trends and best practices.
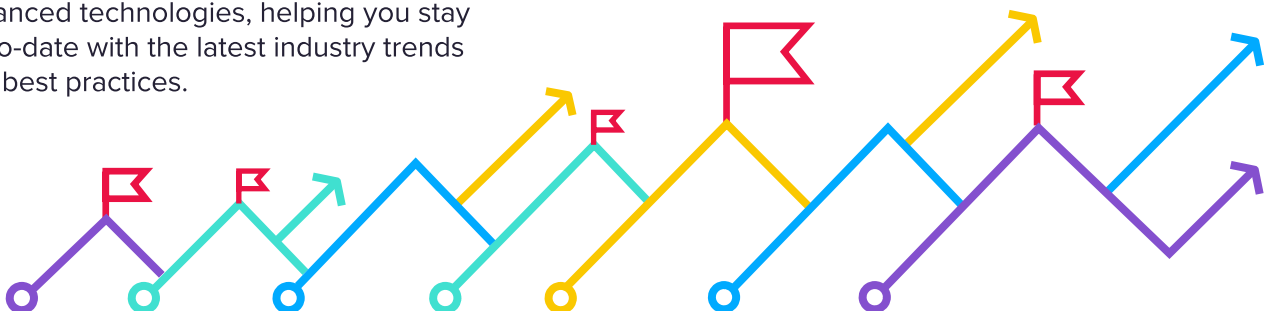
CONS:

Transition costs:
Moving to a new supplier can involve substantial transition costs, such as data migration, training, and customisation, which might temporarily offset the potential benefits. These costs need to be carefully planned and managed to ensure that, in the long term, the migration will deliver wider business returns.

Learning curve:
Change in a business is not always easy to manage. Getting a new supplier onboard is a hearts and minds exercise and it requires a learning focus and an appetite for change. Switching to a new supplier may require time from employees to pass knowledge on, potentially causing a temporary decrease in productivity.

Disruption to business:
During the transition period, there could be support or platform-related disruptions to your business operations, affecting customers, partners, and internal workflows. Planning possible disruptions in advance with scenario planning and getting the right members of the team involved can help mitigate business disruption.

PROS:

Scalability:

If your current supplier struggles to scale the system with your growing needs, a new supplier should be fully briefed as to the scalability requirements. As part of the discovery process, a plan for the scalability of technology to support your business should be made based on your required time frames be this six months or five years. A new supplier should be expected to bring a clear and scalable approach that plots the current and future relationship from that start - this allows both parties to scale and ensure that they can flex to provide a solution for your business technology needs and future expansion.

Cost efficiency:

A common reason for switching to a new bespoke software supplier is often the hope that it will lead to cost efficiencies, however, if your software has been poorly managed or badly neglected for several years, there will be a cost to bring the system up to its optimum efficiencies. An efficient system in the long run will deliver you cost savings in the long term across the whole business - moreover, a more efficient, productive and effective system, saves manual time, improves processes, removes the chance of errors and supports long-term improved technology ROI.

CONS:

Unknown supplier performance:

With a new supplier, you might encounter unforeseen issues with their reliability, responsiveness, or the quality of their software and support. Any concerns about performance can be headed off with clear SLA's from the outset.

Contractual obligations:

Depending on your current contract with the existing supplier, there could be penalties or legal issues related to terminating the agreement prematurely. Getting a clear view of contractual obligations and negotiating at the start ensures everyone is clear about what their obligations are.

To make an informed decision, thoroughly evaluate the potential benefits against the associated costs and risks. Consider conducting a thorough analysis of your system's current performance, setting objectives and getting feedback from all possible stakeholders, the capabilities and reputation of the new suppliers, and the impact on your organisation during and after the transition process. Additionally, involve relevant stakeholders to ensure alignment with your company's goals and long-term strategy.

"When we were looking for a technology partner to support and enhance our business-critical systems we were initially nervous about the cons of migration, however Propel Tech quickly impressed us with their professionalism, efficiency, ideas, knowledge of required technologies, smooth supportive processes, and excellent communications. We are thrilled to be working with Propel on continuous system improvements."

Lukas Fabricius - Business Development Support - SAV Systems

How to evaluate your existing bespoke software supplier and tips for selecting a new partner

Evaluating your existing bespoke software supplier and selecting a new partner is not a decision to be taken overnight, however, it can sometimes be a decision that is time-pressured and made at a point of crisis, when software is becoming obsolete or when your existing provider is unable to deliver to your requirement.

Our Operations Director, Chris Kirkham, defines a seven-step evaluation checklist, along with some essential questions our team and clients recommend asking during the evaluation process:

1 **Define your requirements and objectives:**

Question: What are the specific issues and pain points with the current supplier that you want to address with a new partner?

Question: What does the current supplier do well that needs to be carried over to the new partner?

Question: What are your short-term and long-term business goals for the software system?

2 **Review current performance and support:**

Question: How satisfied are you with the performance and stability of the existing software and the support you receive?

Question: How proactive and effective is the current supplier's support and maintenance?

"We evaluate the impact of our bespoke software partner on an ongoing basis, by reviewing not just their time spent and projects delivered, but by looking for a bespoke software supplier to act as a guide and conduit. We look for a supplier to build trust in the business and help us plan for the future."

Hannah Radford - Data Service Manager - JCB

3 **Research and shortlist potential suppliers:**

Question: What criteria are essential for a new supplier? (e.g., expertise, technology stack, industry experience, scalability, business knowledge, guidance?)

Question: Have you researched and identified potential suppliers that meet your criteria?

4

Assess supplier capabilities:

Question: Can the potential suppliers provide relevant case studies or references from clients who have been through this process with them?

Question: Do they have experience with similar projects and challenges?

5

Evaluate technology and expertise:

Question: What technologies do the potential suppliers use, and how well do they align with your requirements and plans?

Question: How do they stay up-to-date with the latest trends and advancements in software development?

6

Check financial stability and contractual terms:

Question: How financially stable is the potential supplier?

Question: What are the contractual terms, pricing models, and exit clauses?

7

Conduct interviews and demos:

Question: Can the potential supplier demonstrate their software-specific knowledge and their business knowledge?

Question: Have you conducted interviews

with key stakeholders to assess their understanding of your requirements and ability to communicate effectively?

Top hints and tips

We spoke to Touran Weda, Head of IT at Power League, to get some top tips for a smooth transition. Here are some of his key tips for you to consider:

Involve key stakeholders from different departments, including IT, finance, operations, and end-users, in the evaluation process to gather diverse perspectives.

Request and review case studies, testimonials, and references from potential suppliers to understand their track record and client satisfaction.

Get under the skin of their team, how do they operate? Will they integrate with your business? Will they adopt your processes?

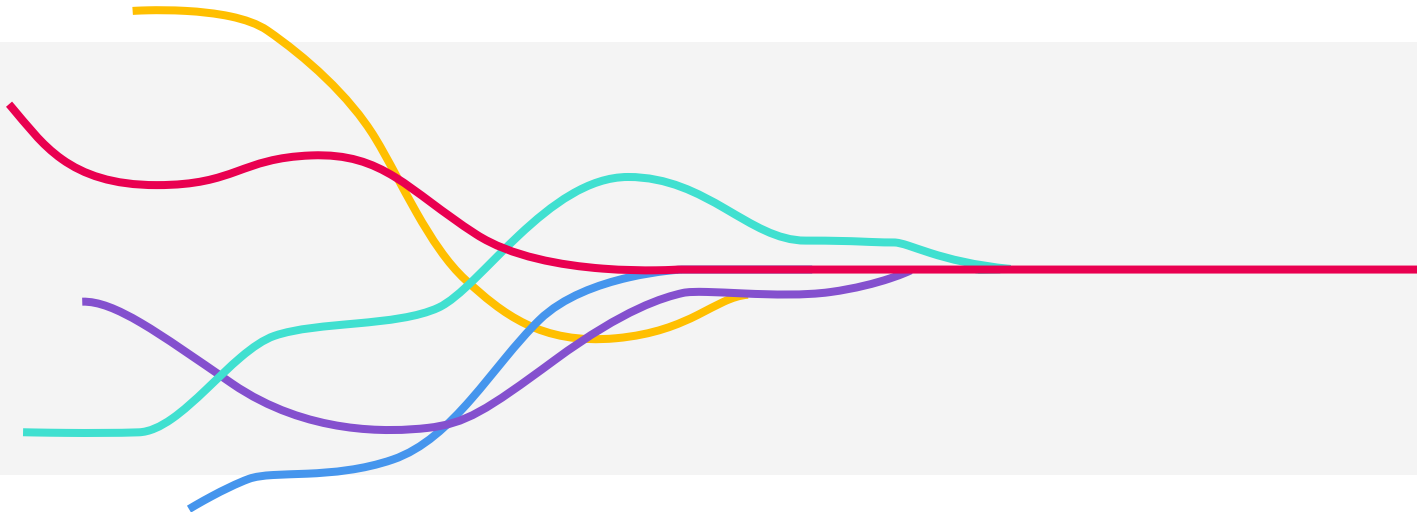Question their business knowledge to see if they understand your business and wider business technology needs.

Ask the potential suppliers about their approach to data security, privacy compliance, and disaster recovery.

Check if the supplier has relevant certifications, such as ISO 27001 for information security management.

Consider the potential for scalability and how the supplier plans to accommodate your system's future growth.

Establish a clear timeline and communication plan for the evaluation and selection process to keep everyone informed and on track.

Request detailed proposals that outline the scope, deliverables, timelines, and costs for the project.

Trust your instincts and choose a supplier that demonstrates a genuine understanding of your needs and a commitment to your project's success.

How to migrate software partners with minimum disruption and maximum impact

It is always best to try and make any existing relationships work before changing suppliers.

However, if it comes to a point of risk, or possible cost to your business, then taking the plunge to find a new bespoke software supplier needs careful planning and execution. We called upon David Ritchie and Andy Brown, owners of Propel Tech, to share their final thoughts in a question and answer session, resulting in expert advice on how you can minimise disruptions and achieve maximum impact when you change your bespoke software supplier.

Q&A summary - step-by-step guide to migrating providers:

1 Clearly define requirements and objectives:

Before making the switch, clearly define your requirements and objectives for the new support and delivery partner. Identify the specific issues with the current partner and outline the improvements you expect from the new one.

2 Research and shortlist potential partners:

Conduct thorough research to identify potential support and delivery partners that align with your requirements. Consider their experience, expertise, client reviews, and industry reputation.

3 Assess compatibility and communication:

Schedule meetings or calls with the shortlisted partners to assess their compatibility with your team and organisation. Ensure effective communication and collaboration are possible.

4 Plan the transition process:

Create a detailed transition plan that outlines the steps, timeline, and responsibilities for both your team and the new partner. Include milestones and key performance indicators to track progress.

5 Plan data and knowledge transfer:

Ensure smooth data and knowledge transfer from the current partner to the new one. Provide comprehensive documentation and organise knowledge-sharing sessions.

6 Conduct training and onboarding:

Train your team on the new processes, tools, and systems introduced by the new partner. This will help your team adapt quickly and utilise the new partnership effectively.

7 Test and validate:

Conduct thorough testing and validation of the new partner's services before going live. Identify and address any potential issues during this stage.

8 Gradual rollout:

Consider a gradual rollout instead of an abrupt switch. Start with a pilot project or a limited scope to assess the new partner's performance and make adjustments if necessary.

9 Monitor performance and feedback:

Regularly monitor the performance of the new support and delivery partner. Seek feedback from your team and stakeholders to ensure the partnership is delivering the expected impact.

10 Address challenges and make improvements:

Address any challenges or issues that arise during the transition process promptly. Be open to making improvements and adjustments to optimise the partnership.

11 Celebrate success, set benchmarks, give feedback and continuously improve:

Recognise and celebrate successes achieved through the new partnership. Continuously assess and improve the collaboration to maximise its impact on your organisation.

Your partner in possibilities

At Propel Tech, we believe that change is the only constant in business. And that it's technology that leads this. As experts across both existing and new technologies, we understand that using technology to help evolve and grow your business can be complicated and difficult to manage. There can be a seemingly endless choice of possibilities which can make finding the right one seem a daunting task.

Our team of highly skilled problem solvers will first work to identify where issues lie and map journeys. They'll then recommend the right solution for your business and, should you require it, provide the support and expertise to make it happen. This can include design and prototyping, software development, testing, deployment, maintenance and updates. We can be by your side for the journey.

Talk to an expert
Want to know more about Propel Tech and how we can help your business? Just chat a member of our team today.

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At the heart of our commitment to achieving the best outcomes are our values which guide our actions at all times. We sum these up as C.A.R.E.

Collaborate
We work together, building partnerships and sharing knowledge to make possibilities happen. We respect each other, we are flexible, open and honest.

Aspire
We have a can-do attitude, focusing on achieving positive outcomes, managing change and tackling challenges with determination and confidence.

Resolve
We never stop learning, improving or looking to the future. We aspire to find the right possibilities for ourselves and our customers.

Enhance
We are trusted advisers, making things better is our measure of success. We use our expertise to improve our customers businesses as well.

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