

# DWMM™

DOOR & WINDOW MANUFACTURER MAGAZINE

VOLUME 10/ISSUE 3/MARCH 2009

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CARL MAERZ  
ALBAT + WIRSAM NA  
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### ON THE COVER

Photo courtesy of Masonite.

Masonite introduced a variety of new products at the International Builders' Show (IBS). This included new designs such as the Element™ glass series which combines antique black coming and clear handcrafted bevels with granite art glass.

For more products introduced at IBS, see feature article on page 18.

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# Easing Into



## Planning and Expertise Can Simplify the Implementation Process

by Carl Maerz

In these trying economic times, door and window manufacturers that have been fortunate enough to assemble and retain a knowledgeable and talented staff will be the most likely to stake out a favorable market position. However, even the most experienced teams often have difficulty leveraging their shared expertise and market knowledge.

Inevitably, vital information gets misrouted, pushed aside or lost in limbo among departments. Sometimes, software compatibility issues between departments and facilities can contribute to the problem, while outmoded and inadequate storage and communication methods such as paper trails, hard-copy filing systems or overly simplistic software programs like Word, Excel and Outlook often share in the blame.

While these systems and processes may work well for basic filing needs, attempting to access information this way can be a time-consuming, mistake-riddled and a cost-inefficient process. On the other hand, ad-hoc fixes and self-developed software solutions often alleviate the immediate symptoms of information overload without solving the underlying problem—making matters even worse in the long term.

Sometimes, even those door and window manufacturers that have made the leap and have begun to seek an outside solution to their information storage and conveyance problems may find themselves hindered by an allegiance to the status quo. These decision-makers often seek to retain the same basic information storage systems and internal processes that their companies have used for decades, albeit with the scant added benefit of an electronic tool that makes access and distribution of records slightly more efficient. This halfway approach isn't consistent with the full capabilities of today's advanced technologies. In order to reap the full benefits of the systems that are now available, it's important to take a broader view of the implementation process—and to plan accordingly.

### Aim for System-Wide Integration

The true goal of implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system is to streamline, centralize, and rethink the way that information is stored, conveyed and transferred within a company. Ideally, ERP implementation will result in the development of an entirely new system tailored specifically to the organization's current and future needs. It should not focus on making miniscule, piecemeal improvements to an antiquated filing system.

With the help of a qualified ERP expert, manufacturers will be able to see beyond the limitations and shortcomings of their current information storage systems and begin to envision an entirely new approach that combines tools and equipment with an accurate assessment of their information processes and needs. That's why seeking out a trained consultant who can help plan, execute and oversee the ERP implementation process can pay big dividends in the long term.

**"In reality, successful implementation is going to take longer than a few months. An overall timeframe of one to two years is not at all uncommon."**

—Steve Christakis, Gienow Windows

### Seek Out a Partner, Not a Vendor

This is a lesson that Steve Christakis, business analyst and project manager at Gienow Windows and Doors in Calgary, Alberta, understands from personal experience.

"The most common ERP implementation mistakes can be overcome by working with an expert and dedicating more time to pre-implementation project design and planning," he says.

Likening the ERP planning and implementation process to manufacturing, Christakis asks, "Can you design a new window without research, background information and planning?" And yet, based on his own experience in the industry, he estimates that "more than 80 percent of companies give the foundational phase [of the ERP implementation process] very little consideration."

Even among those who dedicate some attention to the planning phase, Christakis says many manufacturers underestimate the time and resources that will be

necessary to ensure a successful implementation. He advises manufacturers to “engage a partner, not a vendor.”

A vendor is interested in securing a hefty commission, while a true partner is deeply vested in your firm’s long-term success.

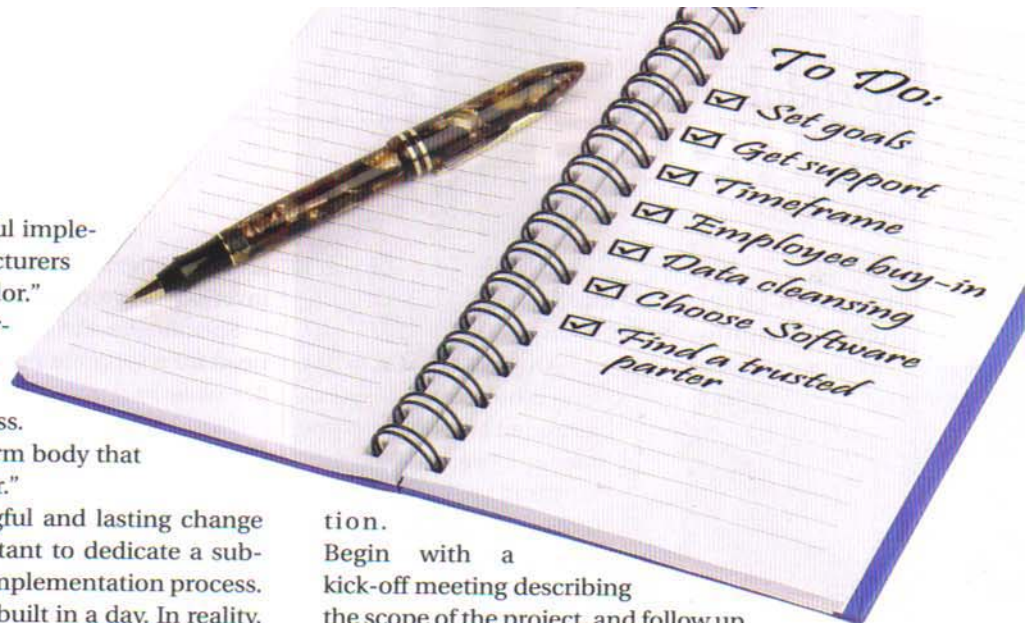
Don’t just settle for the first warm body that shows up knocking at your door.”

In order to achieve meaningful and lasting change with an ERP system, it’s important to dedicate a substantial amount of time to the implementation process. Christakis notes, “Rome wasn’t built in a day. In reality, successful implementation is going to take longer than a few months. An overall timeframe of one to two years is not at all uncommon. The sooner you align your expectations to reality, the less likely you are to be disappointed. Look at the process as an investment, rather than a short-term expenditure—and plan accordingly.”

## Plan Ahead

Are you ready to give serious thought to ERP implementation? Use this checklist to begin designing a system that makes the most sense for your firm.

- **Set specific goals.** Set concrete objectives for your ERP project and define specific and quantifiable benchmarks for measuring success. These metrics will not only help you sell the project to your CFO or corporate board, but will also help you identify and refine the outcomes you’re looking for.
- **Seek support from executive decision-makers.** In order to get the ball rolling on the ERP planning process, it’s vital to gain the backing of key decision-makers at the top of the organization. For boardroom execs with their eyes on the bottom line, the potential gains in efficiency, productivity and profitability can be very persuasive. Aim for a deep and lasting commitment from your executive decision-makers—not just a signature on a requisition form.
- **Set a realistic timeframe for completion.** Be leery of software vendors promising unrealistic implementation timelines. A project timeframe of three to six months may sound viable on paper but, in reality, it can be difficult to attain without compromising on quality, functionality and comprehensive system design. Rather than setting yourself up for inevitable delays, plan ahead for an extended implementation process.
- **Encourage employee buy-in.** Part of a successful ERP implementation is ensuring that end-users (i.e., your employees) are sold on the system and are trained in its proper use. From the outset of the project, do everything you can to maximize employees’ investment in the successful outcome of the implementa-



tion.

Begin with a kick-off meeting describing the scope of the project, and follow up with regular updates and educational sessions. Provide comprehensive training, and allow some leeway for a learning curve when the system becomes operational. An enthusiastic staff can mean the difference between success and failure when it comes to ERP implementation.

- **Maximize data integrity.** Although it can be tempting to transfer all of your current records into a new ERP system, the efficacy of your new system may be diluted by the transfer of redundant, meaningless or out-of-date information. Plan to incorporate a “data cleansing” process into your implementation plan in order to ensure that only relevant records are transferred to the new system.
- **Differentiate between front-end and business logic applications.** It’s important to choose ERP software that is user-friendly, but don’t be fooled by flashy interfaces that may conceal fundamental weaknesses in the system. In order to choose a system with the speed, functionality and reliability your firm requires, look past the surface flash and ensure that the background coding is modern and robust.
- **Partner with a trusted expert.** Seek out the ERP software provider with trusted consultative knowledge and access to a broad range of integrated modules – they possess the expertise to determine how a product can fit your specific needs. Don’t entrust your ERP project to a proprietary vendor with short-sighted or purely self-serving objectives.

The implementation of an ERP system is an improvement that can completely transform the way you do business, eliminating inefficiencies and allowing your firm to make the most of its information and knowledge resources. However, this is a complicated undertaking that should not be initiated without sufficient planning—and plenty of expert advice. |



Carl Maerz serves as consultant, North America, for CANTOR, a division/product of Albat + Wirsam North America.