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The Technology Evaluation Challenge: So Many Options, Too Little Time

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Evaluating and selecting software and other technology has never been more challenging for sewn-products companies as they look to gain an edge, address specific needs, or simply stay competitive. Downsizing has left many companies so lean that they have their hands full simply managing their existing projects and vendors. The time-consuming process of one-on-one meetings and demonstrations with each potential vendor becomes less feasible in today's fast-paced global business environment.

In addition to the lack of bandwidth for evaluation, buyers are often perplexed by the number of software providers that appear to be marketing virtually the same solution. Most often, this comes as a result of the vendors' inability to differentiate their products in a meaningful way. Sometimes adding to the confusion are vendors that claim to 'have it all' regardless of the need, and those that can't quickly and effectively communicate their capabilities and value. With all this, it is no surprise that most companies want to reduce the number of technology suppliers they deal with.

But streamlining the process by evaluating only long established and 'marquee' vendors, or too narrowly defining technical requirements may actually result in missing some of the best and most innovative business solutions available to address your company's needs. Case in point, we recently helped a client discover a new software application that provided a measurably better result for them even though it did not fall within their original database and user interface criteria. Of course, these are important considerations and should be a component of every evaluation. But, even though their IT team initially considered the solution a "technology risk", the company eventually decided that the benefits delivered by the business application outweighed the technology specification issues.

Even with the real need to streamline the evaluation process, smart executives understand the importance of staying open to new ideas. From their fashion business experience, they know that the best ideas can sometimes be found where you least expect them. In the technology arena, this may mean working with niche vendors or start-ups that may bring a fresh approach to the problem. They may also find that rethinking each of their functional and technical requirements may yield options for better solutions to their individual needs.

So how does one balance available resources with the need to stay open to new ideas? Technology-specific guidance and consulting services can help companies find and evaluate products that align to their specific business needs. In addition to saving time in the process, independent consultants can also bring 'fresh eyes' to the business issues and processes that are driving the need for technology. Both IT and business managers are also advised to attend focused industry events such as this month's Technology Solutions show where they can meet with a large number of technology exhibitors and learn from the focused seminar track all in a single, convenient location. AAFA's Issues Seminar series also provides ongoing opportunities to learn from industry experts and leaders on a wide range of business issues.

Productive Solutions, LLC is an Atlanta-based consulting firm providing actionable advice and measurable results through business strategy, enterprise consulting, and technology guidance services. Contact Rick Ludolph at r.ludolph@productivesol.com or visit the website at www.productivesol.com.