Aptean Food & Beverage ERP

Eight Steps for Implementing an ERP for Your Fresh Produce Business

Are you finding that the various departments and processes across your fresh produce business aren't connected enough? Are there multiple "versions of the truth" depending on who and when you ask?

These are normal issues that arise as companies grow and expand, but it doesn't have to be like this. Enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions can alleviate not only these concerns, but many others as well, and help to future-proof your operations.

Implementing an ERP system is not a simple task—it is normally a matter of months before everything is complete. That being said, it's time well spent, and we're here to help with eight steps to follow for a successful implementation.

1. Make Sure Your Employees Understand the "Why"

As mentioned, getting up to speed with a new ERP platform can take time, as well as money. That begs the question: "Why are we doing this?"

Make clear the advantages of your new system and focus on those benefits that will come once the journey's over. With all eyes on the prize, everyone in the organization will understand the purpose behind their work.

2. Have Clear and Quantifiable Objectives

It might seem obvious, but you need to set a clear end point. ERP implementations that exceed their anticipated time frame are likely seen as "unfinished" simply because no one established the measurable goals by which you can determine your progress.

Envision your perfect end-state, then lay it out in front of your employees and keep track of the milestones you pass along the way. Your people will seize upon the momentum and believe that the destination is worth the work required to get there.

Everyone in the company needs to understand the value of the new system and what it will mean for the consistency and efficiency of all **business processes**.

3. Define Your Critical Processes

This step requires input from the whole team, so bring your management and key users together to explore your processes and identify the ways in which they need to be improved. When they focus on their pain points and how your ERP solution will alleviate them, they'll see the importance of the project and why they need to dedicate their energy to it.

4. Get Buy-In from Top to Bottom

It's not enough that your leaders feel ownership over the process—everyone in the company needs to understand the value of the new system and what it will mean not only for their own day-to-day tasks, but also for the consistency and efficiency of all business processes.

Can you imagine a task as tall as putting a new ERP system in place succeeding when only a select few believe in the value of the results and their work toward them? That's why this step is so vital. Everyone needs to understand the importance and how this new solution will help support their job responsibilities and tasks.

5. Starting the Project

This probably sounds simple and obvious, but beginning the project the right way is crucial. You should have a kick-off of sorts—an in-person or virtual event—in which you do the following:

1. Ensure everyone is aware of why the implementation is occurring and what the advantages of the new system will be

2. Clearly explain the timeframes of the various phases

3. Stress how important success in this endeavor really is

4. Create an internal name for the project that emphasizes the benefits

5. Host weekly progress meetings for the team and key stakeholders

6. Regularly provide updates to the entire company on progress via a newsletter or employee town hall

With good communication and the whole team on the same page, your implementation will get off on the right foot.

6. Find a Partner that Knows Your Industry

It's vital to consider not only what you're working with, but also who will be providing it. One-size-fits-all solutions from businesses with limited experience in the fresh produce industry simply aren't going to be able to guide your implementation as well as providers that have experience in the space.

Your ideal partner would be one with a long track record of serving businesses like yours, as they'll be able to provide greater insight into best practices and advice based on your unique circumstances and needs. Such providers will have gone through the process of putting their ERP in place many times, so they're far more capable of predicting potential pitfalls and helping you avoid them.

7. Involve Your Best People

Implementing an ERP platform isn't an undertaking you're likely to do again in the near future, so you need to make the most of this opportunity. Your best and brightest employees are probably very busy already, but you really want them to focus on this project, even if it takes back-filling or getting temporary help for their regular jobs.

Surround your core team with support and let them concentrate on the critical portions of the process, and you won't regret it.

8. Appoint a Professional ERP Project Manager

There's a chance you have someone in-house with experience in ERP systems, and if that person also happens to be a capable leader, then your selection process for project manager will be simple. If, however, you don't have someone like that in the organization, you'll need to look outside.

Consult with peers from elsewhere in the industry, as well as your solution provider, for recommendations. Keep in mind these qualities when assessing candidates—the right person for the job will have:

> In-depth understanding of fresh produce

> Past ERP implementation experience

> Knowledge of your particular solution

> Excellent communication and people skills

> A gentle, but firm, approach

Finally, don't cut corners on this step—find the best and pay them accordingly.

Moving Forward, Prepared for Growth

Getting an industry-specific ERP platform up and running is no easy feat, but it will pay off in spades. Do your research, follow these steps carefully, and rely on the experts, and you'll see it through to a successful end.
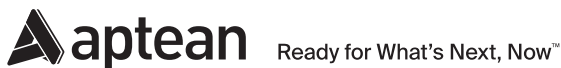
Aptean has years of experience and knowledge helping fresh produce customers implement our industry-tailored solutions. Reach out to us today to hear more about how our decades of industry experience have allowed us to create a best-in-class solution for fresh produce businesses like yours.

Are You Ready to **Learn More?**

Interested to see how Aptean Food & Beverage ERP can help you better manage your fresh produce company?

Contact us at **info@aptean.com** or visit **www.aptean.com**.

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