



How long does the ERP implementation process take?

How long it takes to implement an ERP is different for every company, but it's vital to get an idea of the timeframe before you begin the project.

In this chapter, we'll discuss all the steps of your ERP implementation and estimate the time it may take to complete them. This will help you clarify your goals and expectations before you begin.

Managing expectations

Setting achievable goals and managing expectations is a company-wide process that requires input from everyone in the organisation. To truly realise the benefits of an ERP implementation, you must look beyond the technology and focus equally on your people and your processes.

Establish weekly status meetings between your leadership team and a newly-formed implementation team, which should include both internal staff and specialists from the ERP vendor.

Everyone involved must agree on expectations and priorities from the start. Underestimating the time and resources a successful rollout takes leads to unrealistic deadlines. When this happens, companies are often forced to either cut corners on quality or face unexpected costs halfway through the project.

You can avoid these setbacks by preparing your team and your business thoroughly in advance. Take the time to speak with industry peers about their own experiences with ERP, focusing particularly on how they managed staff disruption and reshaped their daily processes.

Below is an overview of the core components and a standard implementation timeline for a manufacturing SME.

Defining business needs (weeks 1-2)

The first step in an ERP implementation is understanding exactly what your company needs. Start by mapping your current workflows across engineering, production, shipping, sales, marketing, finance, and administration. Documenting these processes makes it much easier to see which ERP solutions can handle them.

Next, look for where your current processes waste time, duplicate effort, or cause mistakes that affect quality and service. Identify what truly drives your business – whether that is engineering and production, sales and marketing, or another core area.

During the second week, speak with the teams who will use the software every day to find out what they need from dashboards and reports. Work out exactly which figures and data points you need to track performance properly.

Finally, estimate how many users each department will have and assign basic access levels from 1 to 3, with 1 being the highest. Your software supplier will help refine these permissions later.

Presenting a business case to stakeholders (weeks 3-5)

To stay competitive, smaller manufacturers need to work as efficiently as possible, which means adopting modern software.

Build a business case tailored to three distinct groups within the company:

- **Users:** Highlight the daily frustrations they face and explain how the new system will make their jobs easier.
- **Managers:** Show them the reports and dashboards that will help them make quicker, better-informed decisions.
- **Directors:** Demonstrate how the system will improve cash flow, supply chains, stock control, and customer service.

Conclude with a clear summary of how the software will modernise the business and support future growth.

Internal alignment and role assignment (Week 6)

By this point, you have mapped out your required improvements and shown the benefits of a modern ERP system to staff, managers, and directors.

In week 6, bring together representatives from every department. This meeting ensures all teams agree on what the new software needs to achieve, preventing conflicting priorities later on.

Clearly define how the system will help different departments work together and share data. This is the best time to align the leadership team and choose the type of software that fits the whole company.

You must also assign specific project roles and set up a regular meeting schedule. Crucially, appoint a dedicated internal ERP manager. This person will keep everyone on track, act as the main link between your team and the software vendor, answer questions, and organise staff training.

Defining core requirements for ERP solutions (Weeks 7–8)

The ERP manager should now research the market to find which modules and features fit your business. Create a spreadsheet that maps each of your needs against the features of the software you are considering, adding a brief note on how each system fares.

Evaluate how each option:

- Automates and simplifies tasks.
- Standardises your day-to-day operations.
- Offers clear visibility for better decision-making.
- Improves control over production.
- Delivers accurate, live data.
- Fixes operational bottlenecks.

Most ERP software for small and medium-sized businesses is modular, so decide which blocks are essential. Estimate the overall costs, including any add-ons, and contact suppliers for rough pricing if needed.

Essential modules often include:

- **Production scheduling:** prioritising tasks and managing the flow of materials.
- **Quote-to-delivery:** automating pricing, quotes, and contract management.
- **Shop floor control:** live monitoring of machines, capacity, and downtime.
- **Finance and accounting:** linking your general ledger, payroll, and financial reports.
- **Stock management:** tracking inventory levels and materials across multiple sites.
- **Quality control:** automating inspections and tracking compliance.
- **CRM:** managing customer relationships, leads, and sales pipelines.
- **Integrations:** connecting the ERP to existing external software.

Share this spreadsheet with colleagues to get their feedback and make sure nothing has been missed.

Communicating change and overcoming resistance (Week 9)

It is natural for staff to worry about how a new system will affect their daily routines. Take the time to listen to genuine concerns, separating them from a general reluctance to change. Use presentations to show how the software will make their working lives easier, while gently explaining the commercial risks of sticking with outdated processes.

Mapping existing business processes to a new ERP system (Week 10)

Write down the specific problems you expect the ERP to solve, whether that means fixing broken workflows, replacing unreliable legacy systems, or helping departments share data. Ask a representative from each team to look at how the software can improve their daily productivity, outlining the exact changes they want to see.

Choosing between on-premises and cloud-based solutions (Week 11)

For most growing manufacturers, cloud-based software is the best choice. It requires less upfront investment, is quicker to set up, and offers secure remote access. Systems hosted on your own physical servers tend to cost more and put a heavy burden on your internal IT staff.

Defining a data migration strategy (Weeks 12–13)

By now, you should have a shortlist of two to four software vendors. Start detailed talks with them about how they will extract, clean, and transfer your existing data, including removing duplicate records. Ask how they have handled similar transitions in the past and what challenges came up. This will give you a realistic idea of the time and effort needed for a smooth move.

Product demonstrations and the final purchase (Week 14)

Arrange formal software demonstrations with your shortlisted vendors using test systems, webinars, or tailored presentations. Involve as many department heads as possible to ensure the chosen software genuinely fits the needs of the entire business.

Staff training (Weeks 15–17)

Everyone using the new system must be fully trained on the updated workflows. Vendors usually offer live training sessions, user guides, and practical exercises to make sure staff are confident. Investing time here ensures a faster return on your investment and prevents frustration.

Implementation, testing, and go-live (Weeks 15–17)

In this final stage, work closely with your vendor to test the system thoroughly and fix any software bugs before launching. Avoid going live on 1 January or during your busiest seasonal peaks. Choose a quiet operational window so you can handle the transition comfortably.

ERP Project Plan



**Do you have any questions about the issues covered in this guide?
Get in touch with us today.**

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