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Tech
Questions
you need to ask

10 Tech Questions Every Roofing Company Needs to Ask

The world is changing by the minute and those in the roofing industry are seeing unprecedented change in how they run their businesses. Technology is taking the front seat and with it comes many questions. Roofing companies need to be able to understand how to incorporate technology into their business, in the office and in the field. For many, it is a daunting task. As with anything it often comes down to understanding the right questions to ask up front.

As roofing contractors begin their search for software or any technology solution, they need to start the search by asking several questions. Some vendors will portray that they can do everything the company may need but that is seldom true. Some solutions try to be everything to everyone, but that usually means they are just ok at a lot of things, but not that great in any one area.

This e-book will review the Top 10 Tech Questions that every roofing company should be asking as they look to add or upgrade their software systems. By understanding the questions, it will make it easier to look for answers that will provide the connectivity and sustainability that any roofing company will need to maintain a strong business in trying times.

#1 - Does this software fit the roofing company's specific need?

It may seem like a simple question, but it is similar to what every person has experienced with scope creep. The company starts with a very specific need and the next thing that happens is a revved-up system that does everything except what really needed to be accomplished.

At the beginning of the buying experience, take the time to very clearly outline what problem needs to be solved. It could be a problem with turn around times for estimates. That is a clear problem, estimates are not getting out to customers in a timely manner due to slow processes and possibly antiquated methods. As the team looks for solutions, that initial need must stay top of mind, turnaround time is crucial.

Along the way you will find other benefits that will accompany the ability to create estimates faster but don't lose sight that it was the first need and must be solved.

#2 - Does it have an open, scalable platform?

This question relates to what is being referred to as a "Software Stack". This question looks at how well the companies software will play together or not. Many companies have experienced software that does not talk to each other resulting in duplicate entries and data errors.

Software stacks are simply all the company's software and how they work together. Asking how software works together is important. A good question is to ask if the software has an open or private API.

You may be asking now, what is an API? It is an Application Programming Interface (API) and it offers the ability for software to connect at different levels and share information. For example, when the company's estimator is working in their estimating software does it have the ability to download the estimates, materials and numbers into the accounting software. If it is an open platform then yes.

The benefit of an open platform is that it allows different software to interact with each other and share data. It is often an implementation of REST which stands for Representational State Transfer and is an architecture style for designing networked applications that allows specific services or software functionality to work with other software while protecting the overall application.

In contrast, a private system only opens parts of the backend data and application functionality and is usually designed by the organization and authorized partners. The problem with this type of programming is that it does not usually connect well to other types of software, leading to the need for entry redundancy.

Having software share data two ways is a huge time saver and helps eliminate entry mistakes. How often have numbers been entered in wrong and caused mass problems at the end of the job. Having an open system that plays well with others is key to saving time and money.

#3 - Is the software scalable and does it allow employees to access and work virtually?

Following up on the previous question, it is important to also ask if it is scalable and web based. As the construction industry has experienced in the last decade, the mobility of the industry demands easy access with the ability to rapidly grow users. The days of systems that only function in a closed arena on the desktop will not work for strong office and field communications that are critical in today's environment.

Working in the cloud, has taken prominence for successful company communications. In these unprecedented times, we need to be able to work virtually and from anywhere. Being able to communicate through the internet and on mobile apps, allows field and sales employees to consistently communicate with office personnel and customers. The speed of digital communications is not just a want but is one of the most important needs in roofing today.

#4 - Does it fit the roofing company's employees, processes or workflow?

Fitting software to the culture of a company can be tricky. In fact, many contracting firms have had to look at the need to change culture and processes in order to adopt technology. As part of this process, it is important to include key employees in the process of deciding on the right software applications and all affected employees during onboarding.

One of the ways to do that is to have those key employees develop a list of "must haves" vs. "nice to have" features. They can look at their day-to-day work processes and provide input on what they must have to obtain higher productivity and communications and what features would just be nice to have. That helps decision makers as they are reviewing features and benefits of different software.

It is good to remember with an older workforce, that they may not know what will help productivity or communications based on years of doing things the same way without technology. Bringing in a multi-generational team to develop a needs list can start the process of improved communications and understanding on how technology can help increase productivity, communications and profitability.

After the internal team reviews a needs list, they also need to look at the software under consideration and determine will it work without disrupting current workflows. That is a tricky question in that sometimes change is needed, and workflows need to be disrupted. In those cases, it is best to wait for slower times of the year and be sure there is a high level of training and education so that any disruption can be minimized.

#5 - Does the software company have experience in commercial roofing?

Many companies see an opportunity to develop software that they think will solve a problem for roofing contractors, but do they really understand the problem. Roofing has its own unique processes and terminology. Many may think it is all the same in construction or in the subtrades but roofing like other trades have specific needs that need to be understood by product managers and software developers.

By asking if the software company has experience in commercial roofing, the contractor will be able to determine the level of education the software company may need to build solutions for roofing specific processes. It is important that the roofing company can talk to product managers that understand terminologies, systems and needs of roofing specific workflows. It is just as critical that the software company also talks the same language when it comes to software technical support.

By working with a company that is committed to roofing it ensures that their product development team also understands the needs and pain. Many companies develop programs where "one size fits all" but that usually does not work. The product managers need to be able to get into the field and work with roofing companies to understand pain points, sometimes finding solutions that employees did not even realize they needed.

This type of contractor driven development is best found when companies are a part of the industry they work with. Not only with product experts and developers but sales and tech reps that are a part of the roofing industry.

Participation in tradeshows, industry associations and vendor collaborations show their commitment to the industry and contracting companies.

#6 - Does the software company offer knowledgeable support teams, training and service?

Following the commitment of the company to the construction industry, is also the commitment to hire knowledgeable sales and technical representatives, product managers and software engineers knowledgeable in what roofing employees need to understand in order to find success with the software. That means software representatives that have experience in the roofing industry and relate to the pain or success of the software implementation.

One of the most important questions is does the software company offer a proven onboarding and training process. Many companies have seen epic failures due to poor onboarding and training. As discussed earlier, it is not just learning the software, but it may also include a substantial change in culture, workflow and processes for employees and the contracting company as a whole.

Trainers must have experience with roofing contractors and the people who work in the industry. Without good experience, it can be like oil and vinegar, it is too easy to feel separated from the trainer due to not understanding terms, phrases and technical jargon. Employees become alienated and confused and the onboarding begins to disintegrate. By asking ahead of time about the onboarding and the history of the trainers, the discussion can take place ahead of time instead of when it is a real problem.

#7 - What does the industry say about the software?

Most construction industries including roofing are somewhat small and well connected. Contractors need to take advantage of those networks and ask for reviews on the software and how it is working to solve pain points. It should go beyond online reviews. Too often they can be manufactured to make the companies look better than they are. Pick up the phone or drop an email to roofing industry friends and ask about the software's effectiveness and the company's commitment to the industry.

In fact, go beyond your friendly network and look at your competitors to see what they are successfully using. Is their ability to use software including the software you are currently reviewing, helping them to close more business, win more bids and be overall more profitable. It is important to understand what is making competitors successful and often it is turning out to be the use of technology.

#8 – Does the software company have a history in the industry?

Contractors do not want to work with a company that is here today, gone tomorrow. Looking at the history of the company can shine light on their future in the industry and how they will continue to support roofing companies. Contractors should be asking how the company was started? Was it by contractors, software companies or individual developers? All of those scenarios can result in a good software solution provider if they have shown long-term commitment to their customers and industry.

For new companies, look to their senior management's experience and commitment. Do they have a tech background? Do they have a construction background? There are several great technology companies that have provided industry changing solutions as a start-up business but there are also a large number of well-established software companies that have endured through start-up, tech changes and are still providing strong solutions that fit today's needs in roofing. By looking at the history of the software company and its management, contractors can learn a lot about the company they may be working with.

#9 - Will the software fit our budget?

It is not inexpensive to subscribe to new software and implement it into a roofing company. In fact, it can first appear to be expensive, but many contractors do not take the time to look at the return on investment (ROI) of adopting technology. By determining the importance of the business process that the software will improve, companies can discover a true ROI.

For example, by focusing in on redundant entries that lead to ongoing clerical mistakes, contractors can see substantial savings just by correcting these two problems. Communications can also bring a high ROI for implementing software through expedited messaging and improved communications with customers and employees. In fact, often increased closing rates and more efficient production can cover the cost of new software.

#10 - Is it Best of Breed?

Best of Breed means finding technology solutions that fit the specific need of the company and then committing to getting the best software for the need. Software companies that focus on Best of Breed, focus on fixing problems and providing very specific solutions for success.

Best in breed software goes deep into the vertical or need and does not put resources in other areas that will ultimately be just ok. An example is estimating. By being the best estimating software available and putting all resources to continual improvements for that one important function, the software company provides a focus that fits the estimators needs.   Some software will try to include other functions or add on modules. They are taking their focus off of the needs of the estimator.

With open ended programming, your estimating and ERP can talk to each other providing two best of breed solutions that now reduce redundant entries and keying errors. So, look for the top best in breed technologies in turn creating a software stack that will position the roofing company for overall success.

In conclusion, these *10 Tech Questions that Every Roofing Company Needs to Ask*, can help roofing companies focus on the technologies and automation that each department or division of the company may need. By taking the time to focus in on the best of breed concept, the company will become stronger and employees will be happier with software solutions that fit their needs. Asking employees to simply adapt to software that they have to maneuver around or create "cheats" for is a fast road to discontentment. By creating software stacks that integrate with each other, employees can be a part of driving top performance in their job, team and division with the right tools.