

## Six Ways Consumer Apps Are Changing ERP

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There's a reason that bring-your-own-device (BYOD) has spread across businesses of all sizes: Consumer apps just work better. If you're seeking outcomes, not just clocking time at the office, at some point you realize that the applications that you use at home are just more efficient and easier to use than the stuff provided by the IT department. So you go BYOD, whether authorized by your employer or done clandestinely.



This doesn't work so well with ERP, however, the nerve center for most large businesses and not something that lends itself well to BYOD. So instead of consumer apps replacing ERP systems, ERP slowly is assuming some of the characteristics and functionality that employees have come to expect from their consumer applications.

"Individuals in all industries are beginning to realize that the increased productivity and convenience that connected devices and intuitive apps provide doesn't have to end with their personal lives," says Eva Schoenleitner, vice president of product marketing for ERP provider, Sage. "Enterprise customers are consumers, and [they] have come to expect, even demand, this connected, intuitive experience with the vendors and services they use in the workplace."

So ERP is learning from consumer apps. Here are six ways that ERP systems are evolving.

### 1. Subscription Model

One way that consumer apps are changing ERP and all other software solutions is through the move to the cloud-based, subscription model. Although small business and best-of-breed solutions are leading this trend, even larger integrated ERP systems are moving to the subscription model championed by consumer apps.

"This is very significant among small businesses, where it's easier to switch to another accounting solution," notes Schoenleitner. "At Sage, we are also seeing this strong trend in the ERP market. This means ERP solutions need to offer more flexible billing options."

### 2. Consistent User Experience

ERP on desktop is so last decade. Mobile rules the consumer space, and enterprise customers also now expect their ERP system to travel with them on any device they choose.

“Today, backend systems need to be integrated with simple mobile and web user interfaces so customers can consume their services not only through traditional channels, but also through new channels like on their smartphone and smart wearables,” notes Schoenleitner.

This includes not only access on any device, but also a consistent user experience. ERP applications need to look the same way no matter what device or platform the user is interacting with, and this trend is driven by the expectation of a consistent user experience regardless of technology, something fostered by the consumer space.

### **3. Ubiquitous Access**

Because computing now is unquestionably mobile in the consumer space, ERP systems also are transforming into tools that employees access and use in the field and on the shop floor. ERP systems aren’t consulted or updated later from a desktop, they’re becoming instrumental at the point where the work is performed.

“Ease of access to the ERP system via mobile on the manufacturing floor is a game changer,” notes Jenny Peng, chief technology officer at enterprise software provider, Aptean.. It “puts actionable information the palm of your hands, any time and anywhere.”

### **4. Easy Usability**

Along with a consistent user experience, the consumerization of ERP systems has brought added emphasis to usability. Clunky business systems no longer will suffice for many employees.

“The ultimate usability perception of an ERP system has been defined by personal experiences with completing an online purchase, booking a flight, or similar tasks in daily life,” says Peng. “ERP solutions will be forced to become more intuitive as users demand an interface that includes best-practice usability comparable to current market leading consumer websites and apps, thus eliminating the need for lengthy and repetitive training to learn how to use the system.”

This consumer trend gains added momentum as Millennials rise in the ranks at most businesses, since this cohort is much more likely to judge software on usability and generally has less patience for archaic technology that is inefficient.

### **5. Better Integration**

Consumer apps now are typically deeply integrated with various cloud services and other systems. ERP has always been integrated, of course, but these integrations typically have been cumbersome for the most part. But with the rise of consumer apps that easily integrate, ERP vendors are having to reexamine how and to what extent their offerings integrate with other systems.

This is good news for business, because consumer integration is pushing ERP systems to move out of clunky connectivity and walled garden behavior.

“Today’s ERPs require easy integration with a wide variety of new solutions,” says Schoenleitner at Sage. “This includes not only the ability to interact with new devices and wearables, but also with modern apps developed by independent software vendors.”

## **6. AI for Data Access**

Siri, how can I improve my supply chain? While we might not be there quite yet, AI that is making data access easier for consumers also is spreading to ERP systems. Because ERP is going mobile and being used more actively on the shop floor, there’s a push toward using AI to help deliver data more intelligently.

“Artificial intelligence has entered the market and is creating new solutions to improve the customer experience, such as speech to text or chatbots,” says Schoenleitner. “This kind of technology will move the needle with regards to productivity and business management within ERP solutions.”

Business applications have a long history of rigidity and inelegance. ERP’s reputation is even worse. In this light, the consumerization of business applications is not such a bad thing. Especially when it comes to ERP.

## **About the Author**



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