

Consolidating, Upgrading, or Reimplementing Your SAP Systems?

Adding a Baseline Data Assessment Could Save You Millions

Every SAP implementation, upgrade, or system consolidation project is predicated on the idea that you will transform your business for the better. Targets are set. The project hurdles on, and you trust your systems integrator (SI) to manage the data loading process efficiently.

But if your SI doesn't perform a thorough data assessment, you don't have a real-world picture of how your business operates. As a result, the new setup is almost always over-configured, under-configured, or ill-devised, and the data load fails. That's why, at BackOffice Associates, we recommend that, before embarking on any SAP project, you first do a data audit and map your data to the new system.

Answers gleaned from interviews that SIs routinely conduct at the outset of a project — how many terms codes your company uses with suppliers, for example — won't match what you'll find in a data audit. And yet, it's this anecdotal information that often steers the target configuration. This mismatch between the new system design and operational reality causes the data load to fail and, in turn, leads to significant project delays and cost overruns.

The Benefits of an Early Data Assessment

Beyond time and cost savings, a data assessment helps you:

- Better gauge the efficacy of the targets you set for the new system. Will they actually promote the transformation you're looking for or cause unintended consequences?
- Ask better questions. Why pose questions to your controller and other executives that can be answered via an audit? Instead of asking your financial director for a list of all terms codes in use, get this list from your data audit.
- Know, in advance, what parts of your operation (GL account numbers, bin locations, and so on) will be affected by your proposed changes. These things are the reality of how you're doing business; if you ignore them, you will encounter problems.
- Avoid the all-too-frequent unsuccessful data load. Fail to get the terms codes or materials configured correctly, and you'll find that you can't load a good portion of your vendors.

Start with the Facts

The surest, most cost-effective way to effect the transformation you're seeking is to start with the facts rather than a set of anecdotes. Don't just look at where you want to be. You also have to look at your master data and your transactional data. Look at sales orders, for example, to discern the precise number of active customers.

There are upwards of 50,000 tables and five million fields in an SAP system. You and your SI only need to focus on a fraction of them. Do a data audit, and instead of documenting tens of thousands of fields, you can whittle the number of settings you actually have to contend with down to something much more manageable.

Load Your Data Early

There are major advantages of turning the traditional timing of a data load on its head. You can load all of your data into your new SAP system up to eight months prior to go-live. You don't need to wait to load it during the last eight weeks of the project.

By loading data into your system early in your project, you will:

- **Identify issues early.** You can see how your SAP systems actually operate with your data before go-live.
- **Improve your understanding of SAP systems.** You can learn how to use SAP functionality with your data in it.
- **Establish strong user confidence.** You can verify early on whether or not you can price, pick, pack, ship, manufacture, and cost all the standard and custom orders that come in.
- **Better manage change.** You can compare costing data through SAP systems to your old costing data, for example, and find out what the deltas are so that you can resolve them.
- **Lower your overall risk.** You'll have sufficient time to address errors. If you wait too long to load the data, you won't have much time to fix hundreds or perhaps thousands of errors.

The DNA Is in the Data

Most SAP projects are about improving how a customer wants to run its business. But to get there, you have to know how your business actually runs. The DNA of how companies do business is in their data. Knowing that DNA from the beginning can help you achieve the best outcome and potentially save your project millions of dollars. ■

Achieve Global Visibility and One View of the Truth

If you were to ask five companies to define master data management (MDM), you'd probably get five different answers. It's certainly not a simple concept to describe, and there's still a lot of confusion over precisely what it refers to: Is MDM a task given to IT, or is it something the business team uses to make critical business decisions? Is it a specific solution for consolidating data, or does it encompass a larger definition that involves data cleansing, analysis, and governance?

Changing How Businesses Think of MDM

BackOffice Associates believes that the idea of MDM should be turned on its head. We want to change the widespread mindset that a successful MDM project will take months or even years of custom development. Our vision is to provide for fully functional MDM implementations with complete global visibility to data — in 90 days or less. With this global visibility and access, a business can monitor, measure, and produce metrics and global data standards — leading to more accurate and consistent global data, no matter what back-end systems the company has in place.

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Tom Kennedy

CTO and Founder,
BackOffice Associates, LLC

Like many companies, your business most likely pulls data from multiple systems and applications. Therefore, it can be hard to view the data you need quickly and maintain consistent standards across all platforms. Wouldn't it be great to have an approach to MDM that didn't require a heavy investment in software and didn't include retraining end users to enter data in a new way? The CTO and founder of BackOffice Associates, Tom Kennedy, urges businesses to rethink MDM. “Achieving one view of the truth is a short journey requiring virtually no development or retraining of end users,” he says. “The choice is simple: Attempt to build a dream for the ever-changing future — or get global visibility today.”

Global Data Standards and Real-Time Access

By partnering with BackOffice Associates, you can reap the benefits of business process harmonization today. We provide virtual, real-time access to — and visibility of — your

Taking a Business-Focused Approach to Master Data Management: Opportunities and Benefits

With a simplified master data approach, your business can:

- Use your current applications as data collection devices
- Present data — for example, any customer, vendor, employee, or material data — as though it were from one system
- Train a small group of users to define and enforce data standards from a centralized view of all master data
- Reduce data standards violations through built-in, automated workflow notification
- Centrally monitor and measure global master data, regardless of its source system
- Build global cross-references while identifying duplicates and overlaps for remediation and consolidation

A simplified approach provides key benefits:

- Eliminates costly development time
- Leverages existing resources with no required end-user retraining
- Maintains performance of source systems
- Provides a single view of the truth for your global data

master data so you can apply global data standards and build global business processes that improve efficiency and cost effectiveness for your entire ERP landscape. Our approach lets you apply data standards without the complexities of layered technologies and custom development. ■



BackOffice Associates, LLC is a leading provider of data migration and data governance solutions for global SAP customers. Concentrating on data quality for more than a decade, BackOffice Associates' solutions and services are a recognized best practice for companies implementing SAP software. BackOffice Associates is a global corporation that provides data governance solutions to SAP customers that require “Business-Ready Data Every Day.” Headquartered in Massachusetts, the company also has offices in the US, Europe, Australia, India, and Mexico. For more information, go to www.boaweb.com or contact us at Info@boaweb.com.