



INVESTING IN A NEW CUSTOMS CONTROL TOWER? 10 THINGS TO CONSIDER

We have outlined 10 key points to help you evaluate and choose a future solution that contributes to daily efficiency, and develops your overall customs management.

FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



Software as a Service (SaaS)

SaaS solutions are becoming more and more common. Lower investment requirements, shorter deployment times, and increased scalability compared to on-premises solutions are some of the reasons why. When evaluating various SaaS solutions, it may be worth looking a bit deeper into the delivery models provided. To avoid issues with scalability and access to important updates, for example, check if any on-premises installations are required or if the vendor provides a “true” SaaS solution where all users work on the same multi-tenant platform, managed by the vendor.



Security and privacy

Security is a priority when screening software solutions. Review how the interfaces and the exchange of data between you, any current systems and the SaaS provider are managed, and also the solution’s inherent protections, such as code security and end-point protection. Compliance with security guidelines, as well as customs and industry-specific regulations, are other key areas to investigate. Check what standards and certifications the vendor uses, as well as available System and Organisation Controls (SOC) reports. Finally, a high level of security involves both the solution and the client side, so it is also worth finding out whether the security aspects are included in connection with the on-boarding process.



Scalability

Scalability can be divided into three areas: capacity, functional and geographical, each of them important for optimising performance as needs change. Capacity is about the solution’s ability to facilitate growth, and handle fluctuating volumes and workloads. Functional scalability is important to enable the addition of further goods flows, customs processes and customs solutions (including services such as customs clearance), while geographical scalability is about the possibility of using the control tower in several countries.



Performance

Consider what demands you have on performance, and quantify them both in terms of performance and uptime. Include them in your request for proposal or vendor evaluation checklist, and ask for sufficient data to validate both perspectives. Also, make sure that your performance demands are covered in future service level agreements (SLAs).



Collaboration possibilities

Create a clear picture of the integration possibilities that the customs control tower solution offers. The exchange of information must work smoothly in both directions so that correct, relevant information is always available where it is required. Information on imports and exports, for example, must be easy to reuse between different systems, countries and parties involved to promote the supply chain end-to-end. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the solution has an open interface that does not exclude necessary collaborations.



User interface

This may be an obvious point, but the user experience is important to ensure you benefit from all aspects of the solution. Evaluate the user interface, content layout, navigation, and how many and which steps are required for a given work effort based on how the solution is intended to be used and by whom. The supplier should be able to assist as required, to give you as good an understanding as possible.

NON-FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



Support and training

A solid understanding of international trade and customs is, of course, a factor in the system design from the very beginning, and also in its future development. It may also be worth considering when defining what user support requirements you have. The vendor's knowledge of the context the system is developed for can contribute to more comprehensive support, while also assuring accuracy. There is a progression from, "How do I do this in the system?" to "How can the system contribute to X?" Certainly on-boarding procedures, access to training and support, response times, understanding of local conditions and so on are equally important factors to consider.



Service range beyond the current solution

Although the greatest efforts are made to find the best possible solution for the current need, it may be worth building an idea of the supplier's overall service offering. Is the intended system part of a larger software suite that can help improve other aspects of your trade and customs management as your needs evolve? In addition to available digital services, what other services are offered that can help to develop your customs operations and strengthen your supply chain? Examples include various consulting and training services, but also operational services such as customs clearance support as capacity shifts and trade flows change.



References

As part of your evaluation, ask the supplier for cases and references to better understand their ability to deliver a successful solution. Be sure to cover all aspects that are important to you, and make sure they understand your needs – from successful on-boarding to continued ongoing support. Also make sure that the supplier has the necessary competence within the customs domain.



Future roadmap

Investing in a customs control tower is an important matter, and one that has quite an impact on the business. A lot of effort goes into defining what the solution should be capable of and what requirements it leads to, based on both strategic and operational needs. Consequently, it is important to understand not only how well positioned a potential vendor is to meet current requirements, but also what the developments moving forward will be like. How does the vendor manage updates and releases; what is in the mid- and long-term pipeline? How dedicated do they seem to be, and what capabilities do they have to turn ambitious plans into new functionality?



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