

The complete EPM platform evaluation guide



Pigment

There are a few reasons you may have discovered this guide.

It might be that you're currently using Excel or Google Sheets and finding that they just can't cope with the complexity and scale of your models, or it could be that you're using a legacy platform that's clearly past its sell-by date. Whatever your situation, in this guide we will examine the questions you should ask yourself and the criteria you'll need to bear in mind when assessing vendors for a new **enterprise performance management** (EPM) solution.

Choosing an EPM platform is a big decision. The implementation process for a new platform could last months, your entire team will need to adjust to using the new tool, and its capabilities will have a significant impact on the way you make business decisions - it's a huge commitment.

But the payoff can make that all worth it. That's why making the right choice for you is of the utmost importance.

Before you begin your assessment

“Do we even need business planning software?”

That’s a question worth asking. A [survey](#) of finance professionals revealed that small businesses with fewer than 50 employees were unlikely to have an FP&A function, and of mid-sized companies with up to 500 employees, only 28 percent had an in-house FP&A team. Those tasked with financial planning, forecasting, and budgeting processes in these organizations are probably able to do their jobs adequately using Excel or Google Sheets. But at 500+ employees, a full FP&A team becomes a necessity, to deal with the complexity of the business planning required to steer a company of that size. Likewise, it’s at this point where a proper planning platform is required to run your business effectively.

Is Your Business Ready for Implementing a FP&A Solution?

An indicator that you’re ready for implementation is the presence of well organized and integrated ERP, CRM, HR and other systems.

Their presence suggests that the underlying data that FP&A solutions require is available and that there are technically-sophisticated, non-finance staff that can be leveraged, along with finance professionals, to ensure a successful implementation.

An upcoming upgrade to your tech stack need not delay EPM implementation though - the data integration capabilities of a well-designed solution allow for a quick and easy process for changing sources of incoming data.

What are the problems that you want to solve?

There are a number of different reasons you’d want to implement a new EPM solution, but these are the biggest problems we see:

- **Data is disparate and siloed**
With multiple SaaS tools and data sources scattered across an enterprise, no single source of data truth can be found. Businesses need a credible, real-time view of all information sources to plan effectively.
- **Disparate teams make collaboration difficult**
What businesses need is a way for teams to work together, at the time of their choosing, via an easy-to-use platform to drive the business forward.
- **It’s hard to change direction**
Rigid, legacy tools lack the features and integration necessary to quickly execute and pivot to new strategies. Businesses require a full-view of their operations and the means to achieve this unified perspective, so they can quickly adapt their plans when their business needs change.

While you’re assessing a potential solution, keep your biggest problem in mind - it’ll inform how much weighting you give the evaluation criteria we’ll list in the next part of the guide.

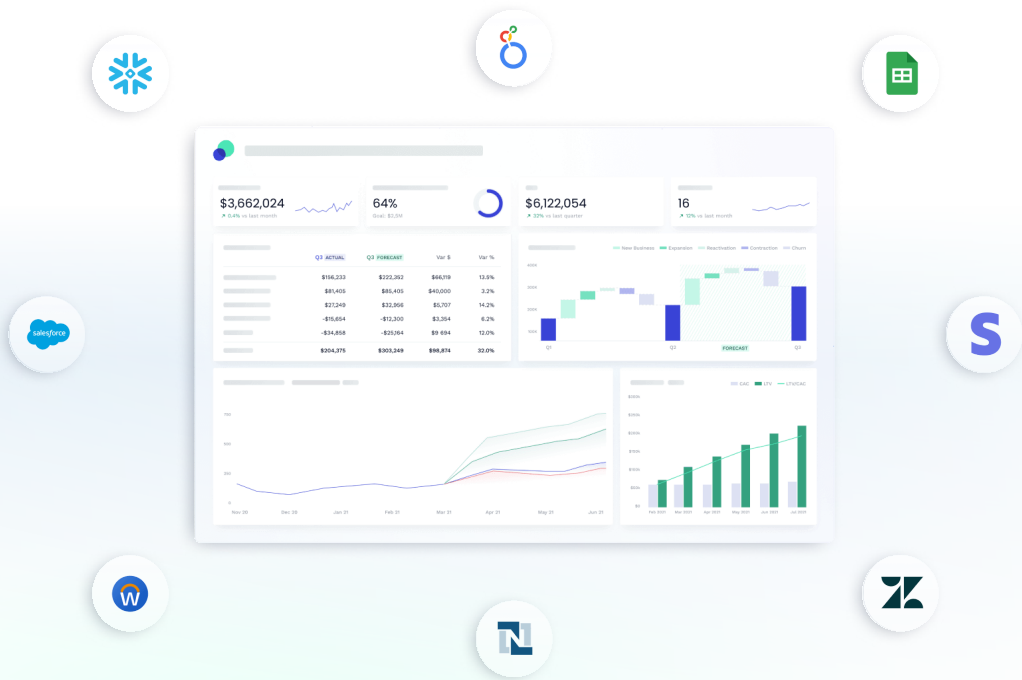
With so many business/financial planning solutions available, evaluating the choices is simplified by understanding the critical success factors (CSFs) that enable a business to achieve its goals. Some of these CSFs are:

Ease of Integration

Companies have invested a lot of time and money in their technology stacks, building them with a multitude of functional systems (e.g., ERP, CRM, HRIS) and the business applications that comprise the systems (e.g., Workday, Personio, MS Azure, Sage Intacct, Excel, NetSuite, SAP).

But collecting accurate data in real-time from these systems is difficult. Look for EPM platforms that easily integrate with your existing tech stack to free your team from time-consuming data consolidation work while avoiding data transfer errors. In addition to offering native integrations, a prospective vendor should be able to offer generic APIs to enable in-house building of custom integrations using standard extract, transform, and load (ETL) processes.

Accurate, large-data imports that occur readily, while reducing dependency on the enterprise’s IT infrastructure, should be a priority.





Process Automation

Process automation is all about the need for speed. Does the solution shorten the time required to build dynamic, multidimensional models? Can it provide interactive reports based on real-time data for everyone to use, from analysts up to the C-suite? Can you run what-if-scenarios on the fly, to plan for contingencies and estimate the impact of events and decisions, within minutes?

Ask for demonstrations, evidence-backed specifications and other proof points regarding process automation.



Ease of Use

User experience should be an extremely important factor to consider. What does the UI look like? How can I visualize the data I'm working on? Are product features intuitive for users? These are all questions to consider, because any business application is only as effective as its level of adoption allows.

An easy-to-use interface, with superior visualization qualities, makes interrogating business data easier. Ensure your vendor's offering provides an elegant, clear interface to users.

Additionally, offering separate BI tools for reporting needs on planning data should be a red flag. They add unnecessary complexity and costs to an EPM solution, which should already have the needed reporting abilities built-in.

Finally, a more forward-looking point on ease of use to consider. Wouldn't it be nice if anyone within your company could get quick answers to the financial questions that matter to them in an intuitive way? Ask your potential vendor about how AI fits into their product roadmap - with [Pigment AI](#), soon anyone in your company will be able to interact with the software using natural language in a familiar chat-like interface.



Collaboration Tools

Your organization’s ultimate success lies with its people – and their ability to work together. Business planning platforms should promote cross-functional collaboration as well as improve business outcomes.

The cost of not doing so? Misaligned teams working from different sets of numbers, plans lagging behind the business and decisions based on unreliable data, and a delay in the execution of strategy.

End-to-end workflows, task assignment, the ability to add comments at the cell level, tagging – these are hallmarks of an advanced business planning solution, helping teams share both critical data and build a common understanding. Look for a solution that allows the right people from sales, finance, HR, and more to be brought into discussions at the right time.

A strong platform will make collaboration second nature, and its feature set will keep users within the tool rather than resorting to alternatives.

Headcount requests

	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q4 2023
Sales	12	18	24	8
Finance	35	43	56	64
Marketing	4	2	0	1
HR	9	7	2	5

Sophia Russell

just now

@Ben Hartman Hi, can you please update the headcount by tomorrow morning?

Set a reminder

Reply

Olivia Foster

Samuel Parker

Liam Mitchell



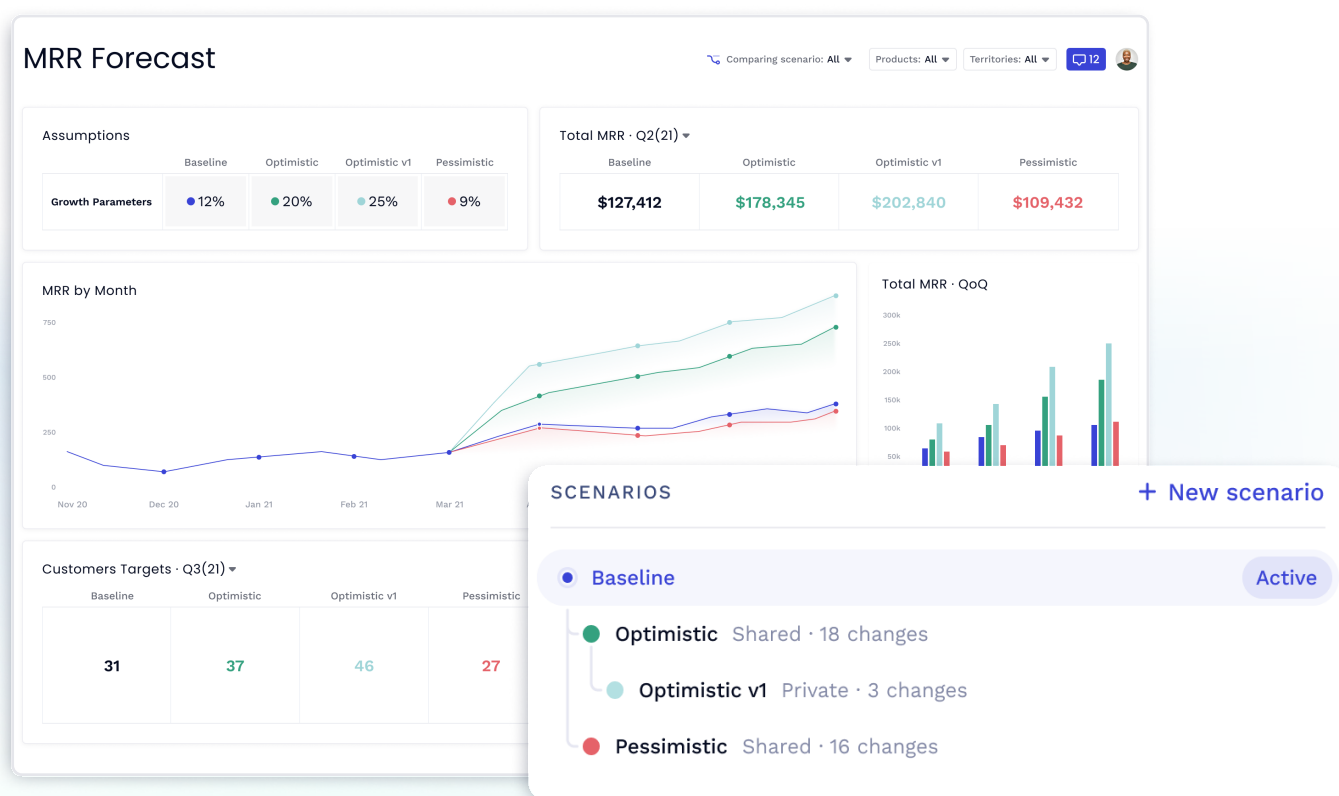
Modeling Flexibility

Financial modeling is critical to scenario planning and as such, a state-of-the-art business planning platform must be flexible: it should accommodate your specific use cases and easily adapt to changes.

This is especially important in times of uncertainty, with enterprises realizing that the ability to quickly understand the state of their business requires tools that can bring insights from across the organization and make faster decisions with calculated risks. In scenario planning, flexible modeling becomes the key to seizing the opportunity that volatility creates.

This presupposes understanding the incumbent models in the first place. With legacy solutions, the builder – who may have long since left the company – is the only one with that insight.

That situation doesn't lend itself to growth. Your platform should be extensible so as to grow with you, adding more departments and users easily. Models should not be limited by arbitrary data-size limitations that may require you to artificially split models.





Access Controls

Permission-setting is key to FP&A processes and results. Chances are that you don't want just anyone to build or rebuild models on a whim.

The solution is fine-grained access controls, so that managers can configure what individual staff or a group of users can do, see, or modify. That control should apply across any board or metric, dimension or cell. Data traceability and audit logging should also be a consideration.

ROLES						
+1	Admin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	access to all applications
+2	HR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	access to Workforce Planning , Incentive Comp...
+4	FP&A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	access to Budget , Workforce Planning , Revenu...
	RevOps	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	access to Territory Planning , Sales Forecasting...
+2	Execs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	access to Execs Boards , Budget , Rolling Forec...
+2	Investors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	access to Investors Board
+ Create a new custom Role						



Implementation and Onboarding

Implementing any SaaS application can be challenging. Let your earlier experiences – and the lessons learned from deploying, for example, ERP and CRM solutions – guide you in asking the right questions. Here, the experience of current customers of the business planning solutions being investigated will prove to be invaluable. The initial setup process for some vendors and their customers can be complicated and time-consuming, especially if your business units have limited technical expertise.

A training department and various resources, including on-demand instructional videos, should be front-and-center, to ensure a smooth and speedy implementation journey. Once deployment is complete and the system goes live, how responsive and knowledgeable is the customer support help desk? Response metrics should be easily obtained and clear escalation procedures in place.



Product Development and Support

You may take it for granted that any solution will have an army of technical geniuses behind it, both developing the product and supporting it. This is not always the case. The product development team should have real-life acumen when it comes to financial practices and technology acumen. A worthy vendor should also have a detailed product roadmap and be willing to share it with you: ensure it aligns with the forward-vision of your finance function and is in sync with your company's own IT abilities and roadmap.

Updates are something else to consider: ask if the vendor plans weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual releases? It may seem counter intuitive but small but meaningful improvements are preferable to risk-laden, voluminous product updates, where more can go wrong.

As for support for your staff, both in deployment and ongoing, look beyond the contractual service level agreements (SLAs). Does the vendor have an extensive and tight-knit user community which they actively engage with? Is this community easily accessible to your staff once the platform is deployed, by way of forums, chat lines and other means of communications?

Taking it a step farther, a vendor should believe in the power of peer-supported learning and tie in their community with a formal resource – often called an 'academy' or 'university' – that offers 24x7 access to self-paced content focusing on fundamentals and more advanced topics as well.

For example, an academy should be open to, and structured for, both pure business users and for technical users. The latter might benefit from a fully-structured learning pathway to prepare for a modeling fundamentals certification, learning advanced data modeling and analysis concepts. This may include how to craft formulas, connect to and explore your data, and [reporting and forecasting](#).

Business users may benefit from an 'essentials' track, which includes a rundown of how the solution works, and a specific focus on building [beautiful dashboards and presentations](#) to uncover deeper insights.

Finally, are your key vendor contacts responsive, and willing and able to find answers – sometimes involving pass-offs to internal, subject-matter experts – as well?



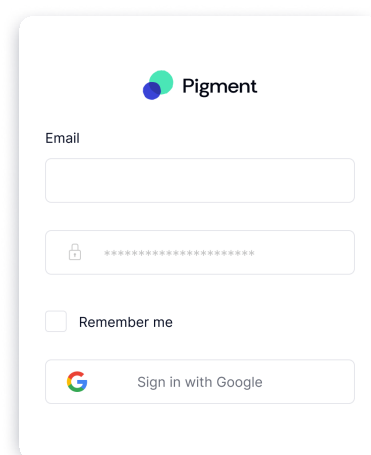
Security and Compliance, Uptime and Recovery

All vendors take security seriously. But your choice for a business planning platform partner should take it more seriously than others. A case in point is passing all SOC audits, encompassing the vendor's internal control over financial reporting and an assessment of the vendor's cybersecurity controls. SOC 1, Type 1; SOC 2, Type 2; [SOC 3 final report](#); all should be checked off, to give you that comfort level of enterprise-level protection and a secure service that aligns with AICPA SOC2 standards.

Is your data encrypted at rest, both for live data and its multiple, geographically-distributed backup copies? Robust encryption protocols and HSTS preloading will ensure that data is always concealed, in transit to and from the vendor's platform.

Additionally, your vendor should be partnered with one of the cloud juggernauts; e.g., AWS, Google Cloud Platform, MS Azure, IBM Cloud, etc. Decide which one offers the best guarantee possible for physical and infrastructure security. Bonus points if your vendor's infrastructure is located primarily in Europe, as that region offers the highest standard of privacy compliance: the GDPR (E.U.).

Related to data housing is availability. A good measure of availability is having the platform available 99-plus percent of the time and a recovery point objective of 6 hours in the rare event of downtime. Consider vendors who ensure business continuity and disaster recovery through advanced concepts, such as "availability zones," as well as the inherent advantages of a geographically-distributed cloud infrastructure.



Security case study: How Pigment helped Webhelp safely democratize access to data

[Webhelp](#), a global provider of customer experience and business solutions, operates in 55 countries with over 100,000 employees. Pigment helped Webhelp democratize access to critical data throughout different teams. This helped Webhelp ensure that relevant stakeholders and teams could securely access and analyze data and insights, meaning they're able to make better decisions, faster.

[Learn more](#)

Next Steps

What should your next steps be, then? Well, it's over to you now. To properly understand whether Pigment is the right EPM platform for you, a good next step would be to explore the website, or to book yourself into our next live tour.

They're 30 minute sessions with solution experts who can answer all the questions this guide will have prepared you to ask. [Sign up here!](#)

