Session 11: Buying an application software Product

When does a project decide?
What short cuts can we take?
What specific tasks are needed?

A naive (but common) view
- "We’re going to buy packaged application software, so we don’t need to bother with all that formal project planning or rigorous requirements specification."
- "Let’s just invite some vendors to come in to give us a demonstration and then pick the one we like."
- "Then if we need to, we can charter a project to install the selected product."

A common scenario
- A project is formed to install the selected software product.
- In the course of testing, some users discover that it lacks some feature they absolutely need.
- Vendor is asked to provide customized features (for an additional fee)

Customizing packaged application software
- The vendor may either
  - bid an add-on contract to do the customization
  - or allow the customer access to the source code to do it themselves.

  Should we insist on seeing source code anyway?

- In either case, what happens when the vendor releases a new version of the product?
- How can we avoid that situation?
  - Get the requirements right in the first place
  - Restrict customization to isolatable front- and back-end under our control.
Choosing the product
Things to do (assuming no customization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compile list of candidate products</td>
<td>As soon as system scope known</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select leading candidates</td>
<td>ESD done</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedule vendor presentations</td>
<td>Start of architecture phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoroughly review <em>winner</em></td>
<td>After all presentations</td>
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<td>Prepare discrepancies list</td>
<td>Architecture phase</td>
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<td>Negotiate contract</td>
<td>Architecture phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design complete system</td>
<td>Architecture phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Install product for testing</td>
<td>Programming phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proceed as for in-house development</td>
<td>Programming phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance test per contract</td>
<td>Installation phase</td>
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Should we evaluate the vendor as well as the product?

- How stable is the company? Will they be around if we need help?
- How competent are their programmers?
- Will they maintain a local office?
- What about the internal quality of the programs?

Requirements documentation short cuts

- When we're fairly certain at the beginning that we're going to purchase rather than custom develop software, the ESD can and should:
  - avoid designing input-output layouts. *Why?*
    (but still specify required content)
  - cite sections of a vendor's manual that exactly conform to some desired function or data definition.
  - prefer to use the leading vendor's terminology