

Avoid the **Costly** Mistake of Migrating Error-Ridden Data

Expert Advice to Make Sure Your Data Is Business-Ready

When most companies plan a strategy and set goals for an SAP implementation, they focus on business process reengineering and configuration. Both are important, of course, but too many companies fail to ask: "Is our data business-ready for the new system?"

Part of the problem is that these companies are rarely given a meaningful explanation of what "data readiness" really is or what the potential ramifications of migrating data that is not business-ready truly are. Incomplete, inaccurate, and irrelevant data populated in your ERP system can mean costly errors and delays in any project. Additionally, ignoring the impact of bad data in your IT system will lead to a poorly performing system that requires constant and expensive remediation.

Assessing Your Readiness

At this point, you might be wondering, what exactly constitutes data readiness? BackOffice Associates has recognized four levels of data readiness, each with associated levels of risk that emphasize the importance and consequences of data migration.

Good Enough

The first level of data readiness, which is often referred to as "good enough to go live," basically denotes the point when a company simply accepts that its data will have a certain error rate because the project has already extended beyond the estimated deadline. These companies simply decide to migrate their data and then deal with the business consequences of this "acceptable" level of error after go-live when problems arise. Unfortunately, this process is common practice and most companies are never presented with alternatives other than accepting the apparent status quo of data chaos.

Error-Free

Other companies realize that there really is no acceptable error rate and that data should be error-free before go-live. Companies embracing this level of data readiness make sure that all data is loaded without error messages. However, these companies still often neglect to put in place an effective data migration strategy, meaning that not all data needed to run the business is loaded. Without all the data being loaded into the new SAP system, the company will see costly delays in daily business operations.

Business-Ready

A company that ensures that data is error-free and that critical data is not omitted from the migration is one that makes certain



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its data is business-ready. All data required to accurately power the system will be in place at go-live.

Validated

For highly regulated, compliance-intensive industries, adding a final step of data validation is a legal and practical necessity. For example, many life sciences firms not only need to validate and trace data changes, but also need to authenticate and audit these changes to demonstrate their compliance to certain federal regulations.

Why a Traditional Data Migration Approach Is Not Good Enough

A traditional data migration method is one that considers the new SAP system as the central integration point for all peripheral systems' data. In this approach, each database is tactically loaded into the new SAP system as an isolated task without respect to the activities simultaneously carried out for the other systems. This tactical approach may seem a logical way to ensure focus and accuracy, but it often results in an inaccurate and inefficient view of the aggregate data set and resulting data dependencies. This approach promotes redundancies and allows for the proliferation of data that is inconsistent and incomplete.

The trouble is that this methodology is based on attacking individual parts of the problem in isolated groups, hoping that the accumulated effort will solve the task. But the approach fails to account for the complexity of a fully integrated system and the necessary interaction of the data, including data interdependencies. Each individual database may therefore be properly sorted for loading, however, the target system may be full of duplicate or inaccurate data when all the systems are joined. As a result, there is a good chance that transactions will be executed redundantly, which is an expensive mistake.

Furthermore, this traditional approach offers no qualified review of the actual data, resulting in a transfer of outdated or irrelevant data. When handling systems in an isolated manner, it is not possible to forecast the data connections, interactions, or duplicates across the entire set of systems. Data transferred in such a manner cannot be business-ready. Companies following this traditional data migration method often end up settling for "good enough" data, assuming that the error rate is at an acceptable level.

Taking a New Approach to Data Migration

BackOffice Associates believes that there is no such thing as an acceptable error rate — ramifications of data errors can only lead to problems. It could be that 3% of your customer addresses are missing and you will not be able to serve that part of your client base. Or perhaps a component used across all product lines is not loaded into your new SAP system, resulting in the inability to process any production orders. An initial error rate is no measure



of the impact it could have on your business — it most likely shows only the tip of an iceberg that could become extremely costly to your enterprise.

That's why BackOffice Associates created a data migration approach, which we call the "Boring Go Live." The Boring Go Live methodology takes a strategic, global approach to data migration. In this approach, we accept only a 100% representation of data and use no sample sets during migration. This is because, under the traditional methodology, time spent interpreting samples is often wasted and simply acts as a delay, severely shortening the time that could be used to find and eradicate errors.

We also load all data simultaneously, meaning that all data interdependencies are also transferred so the data is business-ready. We do this by first extracting all the current databases into a central repository and then continually reporting the entire data pool against what's in the SAP system. We are then able to flag the data that will not be accepted by the system and correct the problems right away — instead of post go-live.

Besides making data error-free, this strategy enables us to search for any omitted data since all databases can interact. When the date for the actual go-live arrives, the procedure has already been tested several times and any data or business process errors have already been corrected along the way.

Don't Ignore the Data

Because implementation planning has traditionally focused on configuration and other challenges, many managers regularly overlook the need for error-free data and an effective data migration methodology. By ignoring the data, these managers pay the price in costly delays and business interruptions.

BackOffice Associates delivers a proven data migration approach to ensure successful SAP implementations worldwide. Through our solutions, methodology, and experts, we help make certain that the SAP investment delivers the value you expect and require at go-live. ■