All-in-One Vs. Best-of-Breed:

What Software Does a CMO's Team *Really* Need?

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All-in-one or best-of-breed: which is the right marketing tool for your business?

Choosing a marketing platform is increasingly complex, due to the number of systems currently available. Each package has its own strengths and weaknesses, but they all fall into two distinct categories: "all-in-one" and "point" solutions.

Choosing the right type of solution for your organization will help you get a step closer in identifying the ideal product to support your marketing efforts.

What is an all-in-one solution?

As the name would suggest, all-in-one solutions are intended to help you perform every conceivable marketing activity. Typically, these solutions include tools providing:

Social media management

Website optimization and visitor tracking

Marketing campaign creation and automation

Data analysis and reporting

Obviously there is an attraction to having everything you need available in one place. The CFO is often won over by the promise of only having to pay a single invoice for licensing or subscription, leading them to believe that this is a cheaper, more cost-effective solution. For the CMO, however, the situation may not be so clean-cut.

What are the drawbacks of an all-in-one approach?

One of the biggest drawbacks to all-in-one software is that although it "does everything", the performance of each module is often average at best. Although certain functions may be excellent, others almost certainly are not.

All-in-one products often began life as point products, but have been expanded to accommodate increasing demands from customers. As the developer expands beyond their core offering, later modules may not be of the same standard, or support for the original functionality falls behind.

" In most cases they have done especially well with a single product line, and then acquired multiple companies and rebranded the solution as their own. In some cases common management tools can be used for some level of management or monitoring, but in many cases the common management tools are extremely limited, and advanced configurations need to be accomplished using specialized tools for the products. "

Aamir Lakhani, technology consultant and speaker.

There is also a high probability that you will never use their full functionality – effectively wasting money by paying for unnecessary tools.
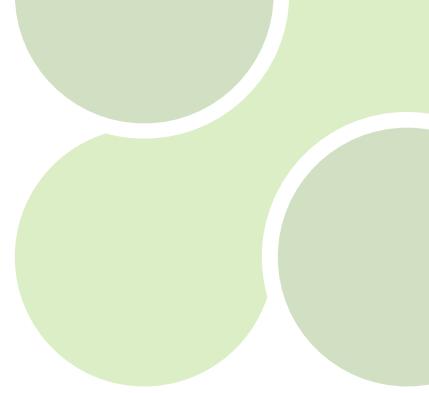
What is a point solution?

Point solutions, also known as "best-of-breed" solutions are the exact opposite of an all-in-one – they are designed to perform a single task well. This may take the form of a dedicated marketing automation platform, a special social media management console, or some form of CRM platform to store customer details.

Point solutions are often developed around the core competencies of the software vendor, built upon their years of experience. This is then channeled to create a product which outperforms the equivalent module in an all-in-one solution. They also tend to create better experiences for your users and customers alike.

What are the drawbacks of a point solution?

Point solutions can be more complicated for the finance department - many people prefer the simplicity of one vendor, one contract and one invoice. Because the point product performs just one or two main functions, your business may need to purchase several packages to perform additional tasks. However, as mentioned above, your TCO may be lower if you're only buying solutions for functions as and when you need them.

Which leads to the other drawback: integration. Point solutions need to integrate with each other in order to provide a full marketing view. This is essential if you want to conduct personal, relevant, targeted marketing.

By assembling a collection of best-of-breed point solutions, your marketing platform will contain a powerful suite of tools which perform each role perfectly. Most importantly, you will never end up paying for unused functionality.

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Which is right for me?

As you would expect, there is no quick or simple answer – the correct choice of marketing platform is dependent on the specific needs of your business. However, bear the following in mind when trying to decide:

If you need a solution that provides plenty of off-the-shelf tools, an all-in-one platform may be all you need. Don't forget, though, that if you subsequently discover the platform is not all that you had hoped, replacing it will mean additional investment.

A best-of-breed solution is perfect when you need to expand your marketing operations in a specific direction. You will benefit from having a tool that is truly excellent at that one task, providing you with a greater chance of meeting your marketing targets. You will also avoid paying for software you don't use.

" Identify a strategic functionality that makes a big difference to your organization, then identify whether or not one of the leading best-of-breed vendors can enable you to do it uniquely and better than anybody else. "

Professor Julie Smith David, W.P. Carey School of Business

Finally, a best-of-breed point solution should support flexible integration with other software platforms to allow for further customization to meet your needs. This may mean connecting other marketing tools, or interfacing with other business software for data sharing and reporting purposes. All-in-one solutions may interface with some of your other business information applications, but it is unlikely you will be able to replace one of the functions provided.

> **There is no general recommendation as to whether to use a best-of breed solution. The final decision will depend on the customer's size, culture and management style. Decentralized organizations, or organizations that often change their structures, will find it difficult to maintain a single vendor over a longer period. In stable, highly centralized organizations, suites are easier to maintain.**
>
> **BARC Research**

When choosing all-in-one or best-of-breed, remember:

- Define what you need from your marketing software then consider the available options.

- All-in-one software may "do everything", but the quality of the application and service may be variable or lacking.

- Point software is extremely powerful for completing one or two core tasks. It can also be linked with other systems to create a custom marketing platform.

- Should an all-in-one solution fail to meet your needs, replacing it could be extremely costly.

- All-in-one software is harder to integrate with other marketing platforms.

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For more essential considerations when choosing marketing software, download our free eGuide:

Ignore customer service in software RFPs at your peril: here's why

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