



BUYER'S GUIDE

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

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Buyers Guide

Project management software describes a range of solutions that allows individuals and teams to track the progress of projects, from conception to completion.

Currently, there are hundreds of these solutions on the market, ranging from basic free online task trackers to highly complex project management tools that allow users to manage every aspect of a project, from business case creation to final payment.

We've created a buyers guide to help improve your understanding of software features and buying decisions that need to be considered for project management software.

Here's what we'll cover:

- [What Is Project Management Software?](#)
- [A Comparison of Top Project Management Software](#)
- [Common Features of Project Management Software](#)
- [What Type of Buyer Are You?](#)
- [Key considerations when purchasing project management software](#)

What Is Project Management Software?

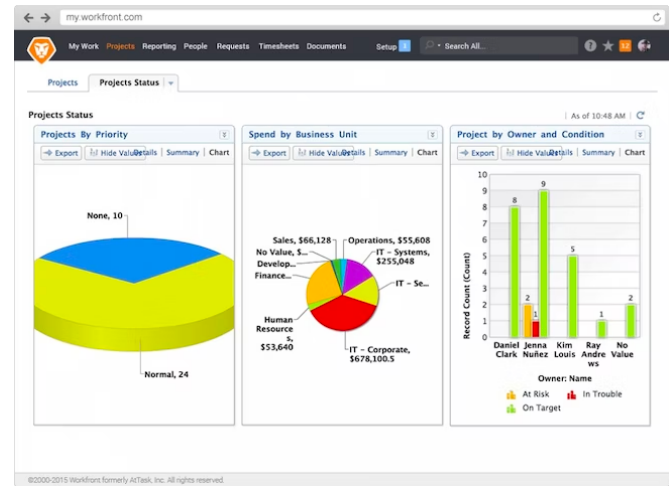
Project management software is a software tool designed to track the lifecycle of projects that take weeks, months, or years to complete, providing project managers and other team members a single platform for real-time updates on the project's status. Most software solutions available on the market include, but are not limited to, the following capabilities:

- Planning
- Budgeting
- Invoicing
- Inventory management
- Gantt charts
- Resource management
- Task management (including to-do lists, task lists, subtasks)
- File sharing
- Collaboration
-

The primary goal is to increase company efficiency by making the entire project lifecycle visible to all team members. Team members are each given a unique login, allowing them to customize their view, report progress, track time, and monitor the progress of others.

Most project teams find themselves to be more efficient in an intuitive and user-friendly project management platform. It allows people to identify problems before or as they arise, view due dates, and eliminate questions about the current status of any outstanding project tasks. It also provides team members with a collaboration tool to share task progress, set up Kanban boards, and manage to-do lists.

Industries that commonly use project management software include construction, large-scale manufacturing (e.g., aerospace), software development, high tech, marketing, research, and consulting or professional services. Help desk, quality control, and time tracking are additional uses for certain types of project management software.



Project status view in Workfront

A Comparison of Top Project Management Software

There are many popular project management software solutions on the market, and it can be hard to know what distinguishes one product from another and which is right for you. To help you better understand how the top project management systems stack up against one another, we created a series of side-by-side product comparison pages that break down the details of what each solution offers in terms of pricing, applications, ease of use, customer support, and more:

Top Asana Comparisons

[Asana vs. JIRA](#)
[Asana vs. Slack](#)
[Asana vs. Smartsheet](#)
[Asana vs. Wrike](#)

Top Basecamp Comparisons

[Basecamp vs. Evernote](#)
[Basecamp vs. Slack](#)
[Basecamp vs. Smartsheet](#)
[Basecamp vs. Wrike](#)

Top Evernote Comparisons

[Evernote vs. Basecamp](#)
[Evernote vs. Slack](#)
[Evernote vs. Trello](#)

Top JIRA Comparisons

[JIRA vs. Asana](#)
[JIRA vs. Pivotal Tracker](#)
[JIRA vs. Wrike](#)

Top Pivotal Tracker Comparisons

[Pivotal Tracker vs. JIRA](#)
[Pivotal Tracker vs. Trello](#)

Top Slack Comparisons

[Slack vs. Asana](#)
[Slack vs. Basecamp](#)
[Slack vs. Evernote](#)
[Slack vs. Trello](#)
[Slack vs. Wrike](#)

Top Smartsheet Comparisons

[Smartsheet vs. Asana](#)
[Smartsheet vs. Basecamp](#)

Top Trello Comparisons

[Trello vs. Evernote](#)
[Trello vs. Pivotal Tracker](#)
[Trello vs. Slack](#)
[Trello vs. Wrike](#)

Common Features of Project Management Software

Project planning and task management

Most systems allow the user to define the scope of the project; establish due dates; and create, track, and close essential tasks and deliverables. More complex project systems include strong project planning capabilities and the other features described below.

Multi-user interface

Since the purpose is to allow multiple users to monitor their own and others' progress, a system will have logins for each user with personalized functionality, different types of permission settings, and ways to share and track relevant information between individuals.

Scheduling

Most project management software systems include basic calendar functionality to allow users to schedule their projects. More advanced industry-specific solutions build on this, providing specialized intelligent support based on the known phases associated with a typical project. The number of project team members and complexity of resource management could determine which is the best project management system for your business.

Document management

Another capability common to almost all solutions, this feature allows users to store documents in a central location, share them with the relevant parties, track changes, and manage different versions of the documents.

Budgeting, expense, and time tracking

For many companies, particularly those tracking large one-off projects (e.g., construction, large manufacturing, professional services), each project must be individually budgeted, with time and/or expenses tracked. These companies will likely require a solution that incorporates such functionality. Doing so allows bids, budgets, expenses, and revenue to be directly connected to the projects they're associated with.

Billing and invoicing

The next level up from budgeting and expense tracking, many products on the market also include full accounting functionality, allowing users the simplicity of using a single system for all functions related to the management and accounting of the project.

Resource management

Resource management allows project managers to account for and assign all resources a project will require. Resources can include both inventory and personnel.

Risk management

Some of the more robust solutions provide the capability of identifying potential risks associated with projects or activities and raising flags to alert the relevant team members.

Customer management

For companies that consider each sale a task to be established, tracked, and closed, customer management can be a valuable addition to the standard capabilities. This moves into the realm of CRM software, in which leads can be tracked and connected to product deliverables. This capability can help track and improve sales cycles.

Product management

Suited for companies looking to track the entire lifecycle (growth, maturity, and decline) of products, including planning, production, marketing, and management. Support for agile projects with kanban boards and project team scrum scheduling is also common.

What Type of Buyer Are You?

Individuals. Since project management for an individual tends to be a far simpler endeavor, there are a number of low-cost solutions that provide basic project management capabilities such as [scheduling](#), task management, Gantt charts, and file sharing.

[Small businesses](#). Companies with more than a couple of employees will want a system that allows for team [collaboration](#), but usually don't want the added expense of advanced budgeting, invoicing, resource management, or advanced portfolio management features.

Development-oriented companies. This includes any business for which a single project, once complete, results in multiple sales (e.g., software) as distinct from single-project-single-sale businesses (e.g., construction). These companies will want strong collaborative capabilities—including robust document sharing, version control, and bug reports—possibly with resource allocation as well. These companies typically will not want invoicing, customer management, or other advanced features.

Large or specialty buyers. Construction is the best example of an industry that uses highly specialized project management systems, incorporating budgeting, inventory management, and many other features to manage the lifecycle of an entire project, from lead generation all the way through to final payment. Similar needs extend to other industries (e.g., custom IT solutions, large-scale manufacturing), each of which will have highly specialized solutions specific to that industry. Companies that manage concurrent, complex projects may want to explore [project portfolio management \(PPM\) suites](#).

Key considerations when purchasing project management software

Project management software can be a useful tool for boosting team collaboration and tracking tasks effectively. However, its usefulness depends on how well it suits your business requirements. Below are some top considerations to keep in mind to avoid purchasing the wrong tool.

- **Collaboration for remote teams:** The need for remote work is on the rise, and to effectively manage a remote workforce, you need a project management solution that supports remote team collaboration. Many project management tools come with built-in collaboration features, such as an interactive Kanban dashboard with task commenting and team chat channels with file sharing. Whether you have a small team managing a few projects remotely or a large team handling multiple projects, you need a project management tool that supports online team collaboration.
- **On-premise vs. cloud-based project management solution:** A cloud-based project management tool typically comes with subscription-based pricing, and the vendor takes care of software maintenance and hosting. An on-premise solution, on the other hand, requires you to make a one-time software purchase. You then install the software on your computer and manage maintenance and updates on your own. If you have a low budget and few IT staff, a cloud-based tool could be your better choice. For an in-depth review of cloud-based systems, review our buyers guide for [online project management software](#).
- **Availability of mobile applications:** Many employees need access to their software in the field as well as the office. With a project management app, you can assign tasks to your team members, view the status of individual tasks, and track the overall project progress, even when you're on the go.

Make sure to take your mobile needs and the availability of a mobile app into consideration when evaluating different systems. For information on products particularly suited to Mac devices, check out our [Mac project management software guide](#).

Note: The application selected in this article is an example to show a feature in context and is not intended as an endorsement or recommendation. It was obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the time of publication.

About Software Advice

Software Advice® helps businesses navigate the software buying journey. Industry-specific advisors guide people through the selection process and provide personalized software recommendations. Founded in 2005, Software Advice has helped nearly 800,000 businesses find the right software for their specific needs through 1-on-1 advice, objective research and actionable insights. Software Advice also features over 1,000,000 verified user reviews to ensure people feel confident in their technology decisions.

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