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## THE BUYER'S CHEAT SHEET: TOP 5 TIPS WHEN PURCHASING AN ELN

**You rarely walk into a car dealership to just look around. Well, maybe you do, if you're like me. I'm the type of person that describes my friend's new car as "a white one" or "it looks like Bumblebee, from Transformers!"**

However, if you're really in the market to purchase a new car, whether it's your first or your tenth, you probably don't walk into a car dealership with the intent to buy without doing your research. The same is true for a house, appliances, a computer or even a television.

You look for things like consumer reports, safety ratings and online reviews. And you generally have an idea of what you want before you walk into a dealership, realtor's office or the local electronics store. So, why should buying software for your business be any different?

So many times at IDBS we've had customers come to us and tell us they don't really know what they want, so they end up looking at everything. They've already sat through countless demonstrations of every piece of remotely related software on the market and, in the end, they're still no clearer to knowing what they want or need.

Only then do they begin to consider what they are actually looking for. By this point, many hours have been lost in examining unsuitable or unnecessary products. Why test-drive a sports convertible for a young family of five?

## That's why we're here to help.

Here is our cheat sheet for top things to think about before buying – or even looking at – an Electronic Lab Notebook (ELN).

### 1. DEFINE YOUR CURRENT NEEDS (AND WANTS)

We get it. You need a big trunk for all of your junk (yes, we went there – sorry!), but wouldn't it be nice if there was a foot button to open the trunk when your hands are full?

You have paper everywhere. You put your coffee down and now the paper is stained. You reprint it. Where did you put your scissors? Did the guy down the hall "borrow" them again? The tape roll is empty.

Wouldn't it be so much easier if you got rid of the paper and went electronic instead of flipping through pages, searching for that coffee stained table of data, hoping you are looking in the right book?

**You should have a list of needs: paper free, easy to use, easy to find, easy to share, easy to repeat.**

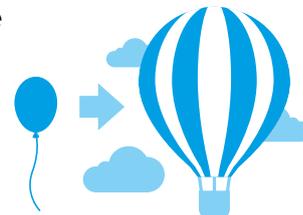


Your needs can be specific depending on the work that you do. Maybe the paper replacement should come with automatic tracking of studies or experiments or samples – or all of the above! Maybe there is a requirement that certain data or documents be present before other work can continue. Maybe there is a need for two disparate groups to use the system, but only certain data can be shared with specific people across these groups.

Define your needs. Make them as specific as possible, and don't be afraid to add in a want or two. Maybe you want to tag that data table with the phrase "coffee stain" so that you can easily find it later?

### 2. THINK ABOUT YOUR FUTURE NEEDS

You buy that convertible because driving down the Pacific coast with the wind in your hair feels so good. Who cares that there is no backseat? I don't need a backseat. This car was cheaper than a bigger vehicle and it turns heads, too.



Two years later, you find yourself with a baby on the way and all of a sudden you have to get rid of this car and replace it with a minivan. Back to the drawing board of researching vehicles, finding the one that will work for you, and implementing this new change.

The future is unknown. But most of the time we have a general feel for when our lab is growing, if we'll be ready to take on more change, or if we'll have more capacity for automation.

Right now I need paper replacement, but in two years I may need structured spreadsheets with automated reports.

Right now I need a system for 50 people, but in two years I may need a system for 300. Approach the research and buying of your ELN with solutions for now and capabilities for later.

A good ELN vendor can help you with this vision, and will have the ability to supply those tools for future growth.

### 3. DO YOUR RESEARCH



You find a good looking car that's half the price of the others and on sale. You know it's too good to be true and, when you read the Carfax, you're right! It's spent more time in the repair shop than on the road and never had the gas mileage or trunk space that you required in the first place.

These days there are many ways to store data electronically. Many of us are guilty of using our email inbox as storage. But then the company retention policy kicks in and 90 days later we can't find that important file we need. Or maybe you accidentally deleted it, it went to junk, or you dropped the external hard drive. Maybe you've found a program you already have in house that will store files – cheap and cheerful.

And even if you did download it and “file” it, two months later you forgot where you put it, and spent half a day trying to locate it. Or perhaps you're out on vacation and forgot to make the file public, so no one else at the office that needs it can get to it. Maybe you don't want to make it public, needing the data to be secure. Or you saved over changes that you made and need to go back to a previous version that doesn't exist.

There are many things to consider, and many questions to ask. Various software features can answer all of them. Create a matrix comparison and ask more questions of the vendor when you don't have the answers. The product you need is out there.

### 4. AND THEN... DO MORE RESEARCH

The five-star dealership has the car you want, but that used lot down the street has the same car for less. Then again, this guy online says he's got it for an even better price...



Most people would prefer to buy a car from a recognized, consumer reported company. Why should software be any different?

You may not know as much about software vendors as you do cars, but this which is all the more reason to research them thoroughly. Learn about the company, learn about the staff and the customers they serve, ask around. Find out who else uses the vendor's products, why and how they use them, and how it has transformed their business.

### 5. MAKE A BUDGET

The car you've long had your eye on is a lot more expensive than hoped. You could put all your money in to it up front, but what about the home expansion and the vacation plans? Maybe a lease, but is that monthly payment with no equity investment. A good idea?

With anything in life, you need to budget for now and budget for later. What can I do now? What will I be able to do in five years? What will this save me or earn me in the long run? What is the return on investment?



There are many ways to do this. How much money is currently spent on paper, on time spent cutting and pasting, on copying and pasting data, on making charts, on reformatting tables, or searching for data to compare? How much will software cost compared with how much time and money it will software save me in the short-term and the long run?

Approached intelligently and deliberately, researching and buying a functional ELN for your organization need not be a laborious or uncomfortable process – it can reduce the chance you'll be stuck with a “lemon”.

When done right, a properly implemented ELN can, and will, save you and your company a great deal of time and money.

To discuss your ELN needs (and wants) get in touch today: [contact@idbs.com](mailto:contact@idbs.com)

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#### UK (HQ)

Tel: +44 1483 595 000  
2 Occam Court,  
Surrey Research Park  
Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7QB

#### USA

Tel: +1 781 272 3355  
285 Summer Street  
Fifth Floor, Boston,  
MA 02210