

The beauty of bundling procurement software up in a unified platform is the opportunity to make every user feel as though it were designed for them. When you stop designing solutions in disparate modules and instead synthesize a platform with the same through-flow as real-life procurement, you have a system that works the same way people do. Software that doesn't multitask like a living, breathing procurement professional is just putting up barriers.

With every function inhabiting a single system, a unified platform personalizes the experience not just for different types of user, but for everyone, whether they're looking for an instant catalogue or steering the organization's entire procurement strategy.

Every function from source to pay can be hosted on the same platform, including spend analytics, savings tracking, category management, contract management and supplier management. There's no need to leave the system for anything, be it creating requisitions, hosting sourcing events, authoring new contracts, checking for supplier compliance, or managing invoices and payments. All the information and functionality needed for spend management throughout the procurement process is clearly visible in one location. The whole workflow can be mirrored for vendors through a supplier portal.

"Beware though of solutions advertising themselves as suites," says Paul Blake, product marketing lead at GEP. "In practice, many of them have a specialist module, with weaker modules tagged on to give the illusion of a comprehensive system. With a truly unified platform there are no delays, glitches or integration costs. SMART by GEP® is offered as PaaS (platform as a service) which also means you need not tussle with multiple network protection types because the solution is built on an incredibly secure platform."

Part of the personal service is the functionality known in SMART as a category workbench. It stores the user's tools (templates, models, guidelines) and raw materials (market and supplier research, pricing and performance data, purchase history and contracts). In a mobile-native system, the workbench is instantly available to the user across all devices – with equal access to secure real-time data and no compromises on functionality.

"Successfully unifying all procurement functions on one platform is not just a question of integration," says Blake. "We believe software design has to make a quantum leap. Previously automation has been about fixing manual processes. If you want users to cheerfully embrace a solution, designers need to focus instead on improving and simplifying, understanding the context, and creating software that is forgiving because the course of real-world procurement doesn't always run smooth. The software might be dealing with highly complex processes, but its design should be airy and minimalist."

SMART meets these requirements, belying the processing beef required to accommodate its Fortune 500 and Global 2000 clients and deal with the world's most complex supply chains across all industries. Crucially, its workflows and tools are all field-tested, a proven fit across all procurement scenarios.

Simple, intuitive systems trigger new possibilities. In future, procurement may no longer be for life – increasingly, companies are looking for dazzling young talent to work their magic in one department then move on to another. This kind of freedom is feasible when software can quickly mould to a user, offering all the information they might need, while directing them to exactly what they want, wherever they want it.