



SOFTWARE

Why Arxspan?

Selecting an ELN That Will Move Your Business Forward

Innovation with Integrity

Introduction

Over the years electronic systems have replaced paper systems and the research lab has not escaped this digital transformation. Electronic lab notebooks (ELN) have replaced paper notebooks and Excel spreadsheets when writing up lab work and storing vital experimental data.

Whether your lab is evaluating an ELN for the first time or looking to replace an existing system, there are several key factors to consider. This paper will provide guidance on the path to selecting an ELN and for broader success in the digital transformation of the lab. There are numerous other papers which go into the details on the definition and the desired functionality of ELN and we will not repeat that information here. Suffice to say that the two key use cases for an ELN are simple:

- To get data in
- To get data out

Or in terms of functional requirements and benefits:

- Audit trail of who did what, when and why in order to secure IP
- Searching in order to share and re-use the corporate knowledge

Most other functionality is intended to either facilitate or regulate one or other of the above.

ELNs have been around since the early 2000's, first as bespoke projects, then as heavily customized solutions, and finally as 'more-or-less' out-of-the-box products. The problem with custom solutions is that they are difficult to support and maintain. Every custom solution is essentially a cul-de-sac which you pay to get into and then eventually pay even more to get out of. Consequently out-of-the-box or off-the-shelf solutions have become the standard. If you google ELN you will find many, many solutions with varying functionality and varying prices: ELNs are now a commodity.

With the overwhelming selection on available solutions, you may be asking how am I going to select the "best ELN"? The truth is that, in terms of what is the "best" for your organization then there are probably multiple ELNs products that could do what you want satisfactorily.

Now whether they will or not is another matter!

How to choose the “best” ELN for your organization?

The tried and tested way is to go through a more-or-less formal RFP process and solicit responses or input from several vendors. To judge the subsequent ‘beauty contest’ many RFPs use a scorecard:

- ✓ Cloud
- ✓ Enterprise
- ✓ IP Protection
- ✓ Security
- ✓ Microsoft Office integration
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Multidisciplinary
- ✓ ELN-functionality
- ✓ LIMS-like functionality
- ✓ Out-of-the-Box

A key part of any evaluation process will be a vendor product demonstration. Many decisions are made irrationally based on who gave the best demo and then justified rationally based on the above scorecard. You should understand that all demos are meant to show the solutions in the best light, while experience shows that choosing the system based on the demo is not always a recipe for success as many ELN projects do not deliver everything that was promised. So, let’s approach the problem from a different angle.

Why do ELN projects fail?

You choose the ‘best’ solution for your organization, it’s implemented by the vendor and then they leave. And things go horribly wrong. Why?

1. Complexity

The solution is just too complex for the users to manage without a dedicated IT team.

It may not be immediately apparent and usually takes months or years to realize the error. Due to a lack of internal know-how and a lack of vendor support the system gradually grinds to a halt. And the users start to hate the system.

Like many things, the lack of vendor support is usually related to money which is the second reason projects fail:

2. Cost

You choose the “best” ELN for your organization and the license price seem competitive but then you get the itemized services bill:

- ✓ Installation
- ✓ Configuration
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Hosting
- ✓ Management
- ✓ Maintenance
- ✓ Support

Purchasing may haggle over the services bill but generally the less you pay the less you get in return, which leads to one of the main reasons ELN projects fail:

3. Implementation

There are few bad solutions but many bad implementations...

You can ask vendors for references, and they will provide gushing references for successful implementations. But no one ever talks about the skeletons in the closet, the monsters in the cellar, the ones that went wrong.

And things can go wrong for many reasons, but they are usually related to financial considerations, and the amount of time the vendor is prepared to spend on the implementation based on the services spend, and the complexity of the solution and how well the customer understands what they want, or rather what the system can deliver.

This also extends beyond the core project team. How the change is communicated internally and the resulting understanding and acceptance from the broader user community is always extremely important.

While constantly engaging and updating the end user community can be time consuming and therefore costly, a failure to keep them informed about the project and actively involved in the testing can be catastrophic, resulting in missed or incorrect workflows and subsequent resistance to solution adoption and project success.

Working with prospects to make them successful customers

Starting with an evaluation we work with our prospects to understand their workflows and train them how to configure and use the system. Configuration is easier to implement and train than customization, and the experience of our implementation team allows us to advise on suitable configurations and best practice based on the prospect's workflows.

Through a series of weekly meetings, we establish a configure-test-feedback loop. Starting with the main workflows and use cases we configure for the customer to test and provide feedback. If they are not happy, we review the workflow configuration; if they are happy then we move to the next one. In this way we understand the prospects needs and they see how the behavior of the system can be changed to match the way they work.

Only when the prospect is happy with configuration do we prepare a contract and move the customer to the production environment.

This approach has proven itself to be effective and efficient time and again. The customer understands what they are buying and is confident that they can perform the necessary management tasks – usually nothing more than adding or removing users.

And customers are not locked to a single workflow. One of our early biotech customers started out doing small molecule chemistry, then they moved to biologics, and now they are doing gene therapy. Despite these changes, they have used and continue to use the Arxspan ELN solution; their workflows are constantly evolving within the framework of the Arxspan ELN platform to meet their changing needs.

No more “we’re running an old version”, no more expensive upgrade projects

The final obstacle to overcome to keep things running smoothly is to ensure that the implementation stays up to date. To address this all maintenance is included in the Arxspan subscription and new releases are deployed automatically so customers are always on the latest version of the software with the latest features. No more “we’re running an old version”, no more expensive upgrade projects.

And with rapid sprint development methodology new features, updates, fixes etc. are implemented and deployed on an almost monthly basis.

If a customer does have a need for a new functionality, and there is value for other customers, then it can be added into the roadmap and once developed, it can be deployed for all users.

And because Arxspan also owns and manages the hardware, no more problems with old servers or insufficient memory. All users need to ensure that they have the latest version of any modern web browser to keep the business moving forward.

The Arxspan Difference

- The Arxspan platform is a mature and fully featured solution ticking all the boxes on the RFP/vendor selection scorecard.
- Setup is done through configuration not customization.
- Configuration services are included.
- All other implementation services, as listed above, are included, so there are no hidden costs – the license fee is the only fee customers pay.

Support – The Key to Customer Success

While rarely a consideration during the selection process, good support is critical to customer success! This is probably so important that it is worth repeating: good support is critical to customer success and Arxspan prides itself on having a world class support organization with PhD qualified scientists. On average, Arxspan Support receives between 500 and 600 requests per quarter. The average first response time is less than one hour; well below the mandated 2hrs. Additionally, just over one-third of support requests are resolved with the first contact. The overall average resolution time is less than one day. This support is available to you 24/5 from the pilot phase throughout production deployment and beyond.

Summary: the keys to a successful project

- Be aware that several solutions can potentially meet your requirements.
- Don't base the decision on a demo; the best demo is the best demo not the best solution.
- Don't underestimate the importance of the implementation.
- Beware of hidden extras in the price.
- Always evaluate the selected solution...
- ...and during the evaluation test the support.

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