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How to purchase GTM software



Contents

Step 1: Find and evaluate providers

Step 2: Secure buy-in with your stakeholders

Step 3: Approach executive management

Takeaways and closing



Why you're here

You're considering implementing a global trade management (GTM) solution. *Now what?*

Your first step is to understand your reasons for purchasing a GTM solution or, in other words, the business case. The next major step is convincing everyone else. Obtaining internal buy-in can be a real challenge when no one outside the compliance department has a clear understanding of what GTM is, what business problems it solves, or why it's worth the investment.

We understand that. It can be difficult to describe the benefits to key stakeholders or executive team members who don't deal with the regulatory requirements involved in international trade on a daily basis.

That means you need to build support with every department that will be affected by a GTM implementation, even though they may or may not immediately recognize the need. For a successful rollout, you need buy-in from senior management, your supervisor, and a host of other impacted departments such as supply chain, logistics, legal, and finance. **The simple fact is that GTM technology affects almost all departments and divisions of your company.** And it's up to you to demonstrate the benefits and ROI to each area.

We know that not everyone in trade compliance has experience selecting an enterprise software package — which is exactly why we created this ebook. In it, we will walk you through the steps of finding and evaluating providers, securing buy-in with your stakeholders, and finally presenting executive management with the business case for automating your trade compliance operations.



Step 1.

**Find and evaluate
providers**

Consider the business objective

Before convincing the rest of your company, you must first ask yourself two questions — why, and why now?

What made you consider GTM technology in the first place?

Every company is different, but over the years, we have noticed a few common drivers.



You need to do more with less

Many companies pursue technology to gain operational efficiencies. Studies show that for non-GTM users, their top challenge in global trade is the lack of automated systems. Manually performing routine tasks (such as documentation and licensing) is inefficient and error-prone, which increases your risk of noncompliance. On top of that, manual tasks prevent your compliance team from focusing on higher value, more strategic matters.



You're facing a penalty or focused assessment

Sometimes it takes a penalty or focused assessment for management's focus to shift to the compliance department. Unless something goes wrong, the common assumption is that everything is just fine. A penalty, audit, or loss of trading privileges has a way of making companies consider GTM technology in order to lower their risk of noncompliance and demonstrate due diligence.



You want to institute common controls and procedures

We can illustrate this next reason with the same example of restricted party screening. Maybe part of the company is already fulfilling its obligation to screen, but the same can't be said for other divisions and regions. Your team based in the U.S. might screen one way; your European team screens in another; and your Asia-Pacific team may not screen at all. For better control and consistency, GTM software can help create common, compliant procedures across the organization that all users are required to follow. With a GTM platform, all export shipments, for example, are managed and processed in the same manner across the entire organization.



You know that compliance is a moving target

Another reason could be a new regulatory requirement or a change to trade policy. All U.S. companies, for example, are required by law to screen exports for restricted parties. For a small compliance team of two, that task may be extremely time-consuming when performed manually. And what about doing business in an environment where trade policy can change on a daily basis? Can your trade compliance team react fast enough with the current manual processes in place?



You want to enter new markets

Companies often enter new markets as a direct result of an acquisition or the introduction of new product lines. In either case, if you're not proactive in understanding the rules and regulations governing trade in that country, you may run into an unexpected issue (such as a license requirement, a quota, or a control) that prevents or restricts your ability to ship products into that market.

How to find potential providers

Your next step is to create a list of GTM providers.



If you're not sure how to look for providers, here are a few ideas.

Searching the internet

The simplest place to start is a quick internet search of global trade management software providers. Or if you already have defined requirements, you may want to search for a specific solution such as export management software or free trade agreement management software.

Referencing journals and industry analysts

Trade publications like *American Shipper* provide various vendor lists, including GTM providers. They may also provide short profiles on the providers, outlining their general product offerings. Trade analysts like Gartner and Aberdeen Group follow the industry closely and provide information on GTM providers, as well.

Asking your network

Another worthwhile approach is asking your network. Your company may already use a GTM provider for a point solution in a particular division. If you ask around, you may find current GTM providers to consider. Coworkers and acquaintances may also have recommendations from previous jobs where they had hands-on experience working with an automated GTM solution.

How to evaluate providers

Now that you have a list of potential providers, you need to narrow that list down.

After searching the internet, looking at trade journals, or asking your network for references, you might have a list of five providers at this point. Begin a preliminary evaluation to narrow the list to no more than three providers. As global trade becomes more pervasive and unpredictable, it's important to look for a provider that can support your global operations. Here are eight key requirements to consider during your evaluation.

1.

Comprehensive product offering

Do they offer everything you need, both short-term and long-term? Do they have global and regional solutions? Look for a vendor who can offer the scalability, global support, and an integrated suite of products to meet your needs now and in the future.

2.

Global duty deferral opportunities

Can they support your duty deferral strategy both regionally and globally? What is their level of experience implementing duty deferral solutions? In a world of changing tariffs, it's critical for the trade compliance department to leverage duty deferral solutions that contribute to the company's competitive situation and add to the bottom line.

3.

Integrated trade data

Are the vendor's solutions supported with the trade data you need to do business around the world? A complete GTM solution should include integrated trade data such as tariff schedules, import/export controls, FTA rules of origin, licensing requirements, and more. Because of how frequently regulations change, it's better if the vendor has an in-house team of trade content experts rather than relying on third-party providers for the data. This eliminates the need for the trade compliance and IT teams to validate and load data every time updates are sent from the third-party provider. It also ensures that your trade content is always current, complete, and accurate.

4.

Trade data visibility

When your company's data across all trade lanes is brought together on the same platform, you can maintain a "single version of truth" for all your product data, FTA qualifications, and more. To help turn data into actionable information, a GTM solution should offer robust reporting and analytic tools. With visibility into trade data, companies are able to analyze current trends and identify opportunities for cost savings, risk mitigation, and efficiency gains. More importantly, with compliance data captured across all trade lanes, companies can quickly ascertain how a change in trade policy will impact their business and which compliance risks may be present.

5.

Scalability, security, and flexibility

First and foremost, the vendor's application should be highly scalable, able to process billions of trade-related transactions every month. Your business needs a solution that can scale as your business grows. Second, it must keep your data secure. Look for how they take care of your data. Third, you should be able to implement solutions on an as-needed basis. In a cloud-based world, you need a vendor that can respond to changing business conditions and deploy solutions when and where you need them.

6.

Regional and global support

Equally important is the provider's regional and global support capabilities. For example, do they have the infrastructure to support your global operations locally? Do they have regional expertise on the rules and regulations where you do business? Do they cover all time zones with their support hours?

7.

A global network

Today, integration needs to be about sharing data across the entire network. That includes integrating with other cloud solutions via APIs, mission-critical supply chain applications, government agencies around the world, and service providers such as customs brokers and freight forwarders. A cloud solution should create a collaborative environment for all internal and external stakeholders, so that relevant information and processes can be shared and managed effectively across the network.

8.

Automation and business rules

For increased efficiency, look for a GTM solution that can automate the compliance processes involved in a cross-border transaction from end-to-end. For example, can they manage a shipment from origin to final destination without leaving the platform? Does their solution have the ability to incorporate business rules that can improve compliance levels or tailor the application to how you manage trade across the organization? Business rules integrated in a GTM system can support compliance by checking a sales order or invoice if the products being shipped require permits or licenses.



Step 2.

**Secure buy-in with
your stakeholders**

Meet the stakeholders

Your stakeholders are critical to the success of your GTM purchase.

Let's take a look at the most common stakeholders involved in making GTM purchasing decisions.



Compliance and Legal

These two departments often have the same concern: the legal risk of noncompliance. Neither your compliance team nor your legal department wants to be found negligent in their cross-border activities. Exercising reasonable care and proving due diligence are legal requirements and top priorities.



Procurement

Well-versed in the project-approval process, the procurement department is a valuable ally to involve early on. Their concerns are sourcing raw materials at the best price and monitoring supplier performance. Show them how an effective compliance strategy, bolstered by GTM technology, can lead to more informed sourcing decisions that result in lower landed cost.



Finance

Naturally the finance department is responsible for the company's financial well-being. Finance wants to see the ROI of the software in the long run and understand how that ROI will be achieved.



Supply chain

For the supply chain department, it's critical to reduce landed cost, ensure product availability, and enhance communication among supply chain partners. Introduce GTM technology as a way to maximize supply chain performance by reducing cycle times, increasing velocity, and lowering overall duty spend.



IT

As the gatekeeper for all technology-related enterprise projects, the IT department will likely push back against new software solutions because they're the ones responsible for implementing. Before signing on, they need to understand how this new technology fits into the overall IT infrastructure, what savings to expect, and how your project weighs against other initiatives. This last point is critical. Your project won't be the only one under consideration, so your business case must be compelling enough to place your project at the top of the priority list.

Form your team and schedule demos

Your next major steps are to form your team of stakeholders and to schedule demos with your shortlist of providers.

Form your team

Now's the time to pull your stakeholders together and make sure that the team is aligned on the needs of the business and the ROI of the project. Alignment is essential in improving the odds of a successful project. Executive sponsorship is also a major benefit. By involving an executive team member who supports the project, your chances of gaining buy-in are much higher.

If you haven't put together your business case — or at least identified the benefits for the trade compliance department and the company as a whole — then you need to start discussing this with your stakeholders. What is important to each functional area? How will the success of the project be measured? Your success criteria may be fulfilling legal requirements, lowering your risk of noncompliance, or saving money with more duty deferral or FTA opportunities. Regardless, the benefit needs to be quantifiable in order for an ROI to be established.



The goal — which you should communicate to everyone involved — is to make your final decision based on these demos and how well the GTM provider fulfills your list of requirements.

Schedule demos

Now that you have a shortlist, you should contact the providers and request onsite demos if possible. Ideally you would schedule all the demos in the same week, or even on consecutive days. The closer you can schedule the demos, the better you will be able to compare the providers. If you let too much time settle between demos, you may forget important details. A tighter timeline is also more incentivizing.



Creating a demo scorecard

Consider creating a scorecard for your team of stakeholders to use during the demos. You could include specific requirements about product offerings, ERP integrations, user interface, or regional support. Having this scorecard will help everyone take note of the same criteria.

Review with your stakeholders

The less time you wait, the better.

After the demos, immediately schedule a follow-up meeting with your hands-on users and stakeholders. You want to review all the providers while the information is fresh. Let everyone have their turn, and discuss the pros and cons of each provider.

After you and the team have chosen your top provider, you should then request customer references. Feel free to request a customer who is operating in the same region as you or who works in the same industry. Remember that customer references aren't just about if the client is simply happy with the provider. If they're in a similar situation, they can also tell you how they implemented in a certain region, what their timeline was, if the vendor delivered on time and on budget, and more.



Again, be clear that the goal is to make a decision. Once you lose momentum on the project, it can be difficult to regain it.

A modern conference room with a long, dark wood conference table and several black office chairs. The room has a large window on the right side, letting in bright light, and a recessed ceiling with multiple circular lights. A potted plant is visible in the background near the window.

Step 3.

**Approach executive
management**

What your business case should include

You're almost ready to approach executive management. But first, prepare.

You have already identified the need; now you need a complete business case. This is often the most challenging step in the entire process. Before you approach executive management, you should:



Demonstrate the importance of compliance

This may seem obvious, but you do need to reiterate the importance of compliance. When you are noncompliant, you open the company up to penalties, fines, audits, and even loss of trading privileges. Furthermore, if you have inaccurate compliance data, you run the risk of delayed shipments, overpayment or underpayment of duties, and empty store shelves.



Create alignment on the value to the overall business

This is where your stakeholders are crucial. Make sure you include how other departments such as logistics, procurement, finance, and IT benefit from the GTM purchase. If you can show a holistic advantage to the company at large, then you will have a much better chance of succeeding. Remember that the perceived value of the GTM purchase will be weighed against other competing internal projects. Cost, ROI, and NPV are all important factors that affect the final decision beyond just features and functionality.



Identify ROI and how it will be achieved

Depending on your company culture, a GTM solution will be valued one of two ways — its ability to minimize risk and fines or its capacity to contribute to the bottom line. The challenge with risk mitigation is that it represents “soft savings,” which are compelling but difficult to quantify. If your company does not place a high value on risk mitigation, then you need to look at the overall impact GTM solutions can have on total duties paid. If you’re looking into a U.S. foreign-trade zone or a maquiladora in Mexico, make sure you include the estimated savings from those projects and the payback period of the investment. Don’t be surprised if you find enough savings to pay for the entire GTM implementation.



Find examples of other companies

Last but not least, you can include case study examples from other companies. Your provider may be able to help you with this, but also a quick internet search should help you locate a few examples. If someone else has succeeded and benefited from a similar project, then that’s a good investment sign for your executive team to see.

Create your business plan

Now's the time to get organized.

Know the products you need across regions, departments, and business units and then decide how quickly you want to implement. Just a word to the wise — you probably can't do everything at once. You will need to decide what the highest priorities are, what locations or regions should be first to implement, what resources you need to support those regions, and what your ideal timeline is.

Most implementations take a phased approach, rolling out one product or one region at a time. Assuming that your provider is experienced in both regional and global implementations, they should be an excellent resource for you as you create this business plan.

Who funds the project?

Like stakeholders, the final approver varies by company.

We can't say for sure who your final approver will be, as it varies by company. That's often linked to whose budget the GTM purchase will come from. You might be lucky enough that the purchase falls within the limits of your compliance department budget, although that's uncommon.

GTM implementations are typically large enough to require approval from a higher level in the organization. In that case, your purchase may come from the department you report to — which could be supply chain, logistics, procurement, or others. Early in the process, you need to identify who signs off on the project and what the criteria for approval will be. Too many times we see projects where the team is on board with moving forward, but in the end, the recommendation is rejected due to not having a clear ROI.

Approval by committee

More often than not, a GTM purchase will fall into the category of “approval by committee.” According to CEB (now part of Gartner), an average of 5.4 people are involved in today's B2B purchasing decisions. The important lesson here is to consider the priorities of your audience, so that you can deliver a meaningful and relevant business case to them.

Here are 3 potential C-level final approvers, their priority concerns, and some suggestions for when you're presenting.



CEO

CEOs are responsible for the complete vision of the company, both near- and long-term. They don't care about features and functionality the way your day-to-day users will. Focus on the benefit, not the feature. Be sure to clearly articulate how GTM technology can safeguard the company against serious fines and violations, offer proactive duty and tax savings, and increase communication and efficiency across the entire supply chain. If the goal of your GTM purchase is to implement a duty saving program such as a foreign-trade zone or a free trade agreement, come prepared with the number of savings. That's a metric that will resonate with all of your stakeholders.



CFO

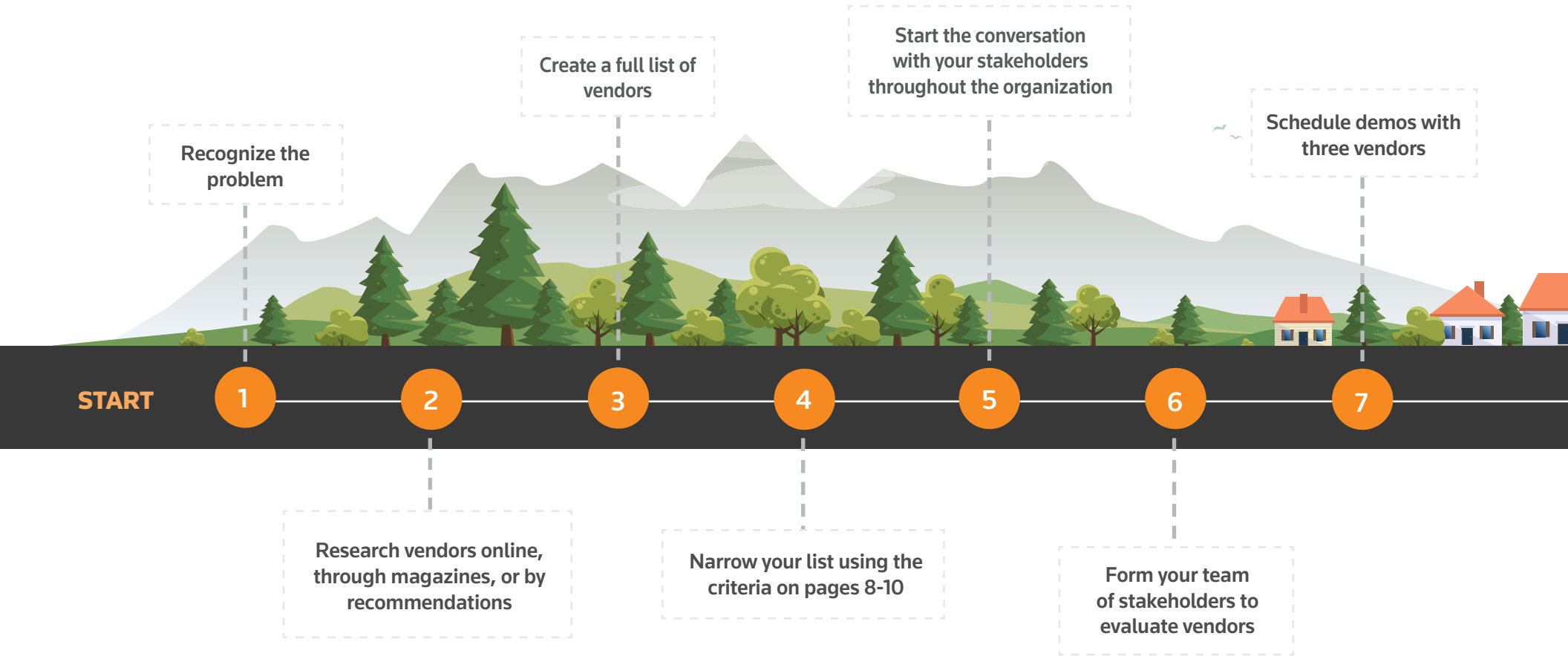
The CFO will want to see all costs associated with the implementation and management of a GTM solution. It's important to be upfront about the cost while explaining the long-term benefits of the investment. One suggestion is to create a table that shows specific line items and costs broken down by month, quarter, and year, making sure to include contract terms, setup fees, etc. Compare that with the benefits such as expected duty savings and productivity gains. You can also highlight the increased visibility brought on by GTM technology. Once you gain control over and visibility into your data, you can use reporting and analytic tools to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of your current trade and supply chain operations.

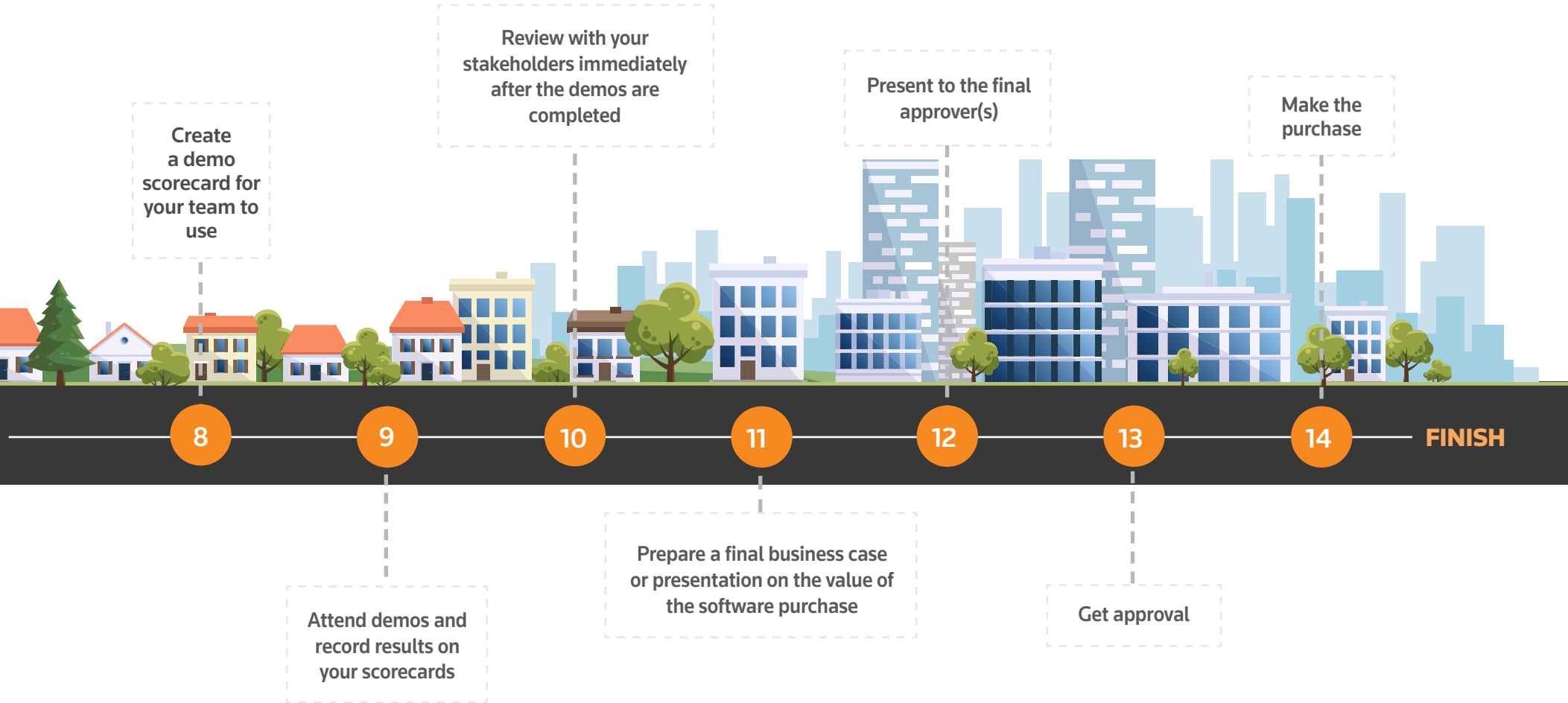


CIO

In this case, come prepared to provide very specific technical details — for example, how it's hosted, what business capabilities it replaces or adds, how data is stored and secured, what type of ongoing support the vendor offers, and what effort and support will be needed from the IT team in the short- and long-term. For the last one, the answer is very little. Cloud-based systems require no hardware and little-to-no IT resources to implement or manage. This leads to significant cost savings and decreases the burden on IT. And don't forget to discuss how GTM solutions integrate with business-critical applications such as ERPs and more. By effectively mapping, exchanging, and synchronizing data between multiple touchpoints, you can reduce errors and duplication.

Reviewing the buying experience





Key takeaways

If you're looking into purchasing GTM technology, the key is proper planning. You will notice that our three key takeaways all have to do with planning ahead. The sooner you start researching providers, involving stakeholders, and creating a business plan — the smoother your GTM purchasing process will be.

Always lead with the business value

It's a simple truth, but you have to sell the big picture impact of compliance. While the everyday concerns of compliance may not reach your CEO — supply chain disruptions do. Companies are often caught unaware when they make new sourcing or procurement decisions. The purchase order is sent, and everything is fine until your shipment is waiting at the dock because you don't have the right documentation or export license. That supply chain delay has a ripple effect downstream. And your CEO will surely notice when your stores aren't stocked and sales are suffering as a result.

Focus on who is essential to the process

Throughout the ebook, we have advocated for including key stakeholders within your company. It's important to do so. But there is a caveat. Be careful not to include too many people, or you might find your team unable to make a decision. Try to form a team of stakeholders as senior-level and executive as you can. Focus on the decision makers and the people directly involved. You don't need everyone to give an opinion — you just need the right people.

Make sure that your provider has everything you need, now and in the future

Right now you might only be interested in one or two solutions to solve a specific pain point. But down the road, will you want your overseas locations to use the software as well? Or if you only have one free trade agreement at the moment, do you think you might add FTAs in other regions? Future implementations are much easier with a known, trusted provider, and that will save you time and money in the long run.



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