OMS Evaluation Guide

A guide to help publishers navigate the Order Management System decision process: survey the landscape, dominate the RFP process and migrate smoothly.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Congratulations. You've been charged to decide which Order Management System (OMS) will serve as the backbone of your advertising business. Yes, it will be a lot of work. Yes, you still have to do your day job. And yes, it's usually a thankless task.

But it's also an incredible opportunity. As part of the team that will be owning the OMS decision, you will be setting the foundation of your advertising business for years to come.

We created this guide because we're often asked, "I gotta figure out which OMS our business is going to use and I don't know where to start. Please help!".

After a dozen of these convos, we decided it was time to share what we've learned. After reading this guide, you'll understand how to navigate the RFP process, selection considerations, and our most important recommendations.

Let's do this.

-Dan Calamai
Managing Partner, Sangora

-Melissa S Chapman
Collaborator, Beeler.Tech
Founder, Part Two Consulting

Survey the Landscape

Before assuming that an OMS is your best and only option, let's pause to consider all available choices for managing your advertising business. We'll break down all three options, review the pros and cons, and provide recommendations for each.

Option 1: Don't Use an OMS

This option is how most publishers start out. The publisher is small, scrappy, and just trying to close deals. They rely on a combination of Excel, email, Slack, homegrown solutions, and duct tape. The truth is, if this is your current reality, you likely can continue operating in this fashion. There's no rulebook dictating that you *must* have an OMS. But if you choose this option, it's important to understand the long-term implications.

Pros:
- Business-as-usual
- No need to migrate data to another system

Cons:
- This isn't a system, it's the lack of a system
- Crippled potential to grow the business
- No integrations with other systems
- Weak or no reporting
- Duplicate entry for all downstream systems

Recommendation:
- There are **very few** companies where it makes sense to stay in this world. The landscape is too complex. Your business will not grow. You will need more staff to make it work. The exception is smaller pubs (less than 25 employees) with minimal growth goals. If you're not in that bucket, keep reading.

(You're probably thinking "no kidding, this option is a joke. We're reading this guide because we want to identify the best OMS option!". Touché. But without proper planning and execution on one of the other options below, this is what you'll end up with.)

Option 2: Build a Custom OMS

The classic "Build vs. Buy" decision. If you build, you can either build completely from scratch or build OMS-ish features on top of an existing business platform (e.g. Salesforce). Speaking from (painful) experience, realistically designing, building, and rolling out a new OMS will take *at least* one year plus ongoing support commitments.

Pros:
- Fully customizable
- Can build system to match your exact specs

Cons:
- Reliant on your product and engineering team to build new solutions (or, partnering with an external development shop)
- Expensive
- High opportunity cost (your team will be focused on building and maintaining an OMS vs. growing the business)
- Designing OMS is not your core competency
- Requires continuous development & support

Recommendation:

At first glance, the custom build is appetizing to many leaders. Build everything you want and nothing that you don't. It lets you solve your "unique" problem that the out-of-the-box solutions simply don't address. With that said, the focus, effort, and cost required to successfully roll out a custom build solution is **always vastly underestimated**. This option is only recommended in very specific scenarios, and only after extreme vetting so the true impact and commitment level is understood. If you've never gone through a custom build scenario, drop us a line and we'd be happy to talk through the harsh realities.

Option 3: Partner with an OMS software company

There are several companies in the ad tech ecosystem that focus on building configurable OMS software. They worry about building and maintaining the technology and you configure the software to meet your needs (so you can focus on more important things).

Pros:
- Partner company focused solely on building order management systems for media companies
- Take advantage of new features and functionality as they are released
- Platform support typically included in with product
- Work alongside professional services team to help ensure smooth migration

Cons:
- Less customizable - must work to fit your business processes into the existing software
- Roadmap vision might not align with your company vision

Recommendation:
Partnering with a software company that focuses on building Order Management Systems is typically the best approach for mid to large-sized publishers (>25 employees). With that said, it's important to spend time determining your true needs, wants, and nice-to-haves. Not just your individual team, but the needs of your entire end-to-end workflow must be considered. (Believe it or not, your Finance team has needs too.) With that knowledge, you can decide if the partnership approach makes the most sense and with whom to partner.

If you've never had an OMS and need help justifying the cost internally, drop us a line and we can help you steer that delicate discussion.

Preparation

From this point forward, we'll assume that you've decided an OMS is the best path for your organization. But before we jump into the weeds, it's important to acknowledge the preparation and commitment needed for a successful selection and implementation. Selection of an OMS is a marathon, not a sprint. We've seen many publishers jump headfirst into the RFP and selection process without first establishing the proper foundation.

Here is the foundational work that will help set you up for success:

- **Assemble a Team -** you may be leading the charge, but long-term success is 100% dependent on a strong internal team. We recommend pulling in the eventual core implementation team into the RFP and selection process. These are the teams that do or will use an OMS. Having all the involved parties will help ensure you're not missing anything during the decision process and will also get the team more vested in its

long-term success. Put yourself in their shoes — wouldn't you prefer to be involved in the decision of which system to use instead of just being told "implement this system I decided we're going to use"? Identify a representative or two from each key user group.

- **Clarify the Budget** - do your best to understand the budget available for this effort. Order Management Systems don't come cheap and there is typically a 2-3 year commitment. With a known (or at least roughly known) budget, you can focus on the partners that meet your monetary needs.
- **Consider the Scope -** is this OMS for all media products or digital only? Identifying the scope will make a big difference in the selection process. Scope could change as you work through vendor evaluations, but you should have a working scope as you start the process.
- **Clarify Expectations** - talk to the leaders whose teams are involved in this effort and understand their expectations. What are the important factors they are looking for in an OMS partnership? Are there any companies they definitely *do not* want to work with? For any large project, we always recommend asking the question, "how can we hit this project out of the park?" Then, do those things.
- **Set Realistic Timelines** - either during the expectations conversation or at another time, it's important to set realistic timelines within your company. Whether you're implementing a brand new OMS or migrating from another system, these projects take time. At a minimum, the RFP and Selection process will take 2 months. On the implementation side, expect at least 3 months, but typically closer to 4-5 months to work out all the kinks. Being honest with yourself, and others, about these unavoidable timelines will make the entire process less stressful.
- **Corporate and Stakeholder Support and Approval -** ensure you have organizational support for this project. Selecting and onboarding an OMS will not be a quick or inexpensive effort, and it is important to have both corporate and individual stakeholder support to keep the project moving and funded. No one wants to invest four months in an evaluation just to have it die on the vine. Also, who will give final approval and what does the process before that approval look like?

Requirements and the RFP Process

Start by listing the things you want in a spreadsheet. The salesperson at the software vendor then responds in the spreadsheet, saying their product can do everything you need and then some. You decide to move forward with that partner. Three months later, in the midst of the implementation, you find out that 25% of your "must haves" actually aren't supported.

Sound familiar?

Unfortunately, you aren't alone. This disappointment seems to be common for major software purchasing decisions.

The goal of the RFP (Request for Proposal) process is to let potential software partners evaluate your requirements. We wish we could give you a simple Excel template and call it a day. But the reality is that the RFP document format does not matter. It's the content that matters.

The goal of this section is to help you uncover the true requirements to include in your RFP.

We recommend looking closely at four key areas:

- How your business is taking advantage of the current OMS
- How your business *wants* to take advantage of an OMS
- Where you see the business going in the future
- Expense savings and revenue generation

How your business is taking advantage of the current OMS

If you are currently using an OMS, it's important to spend some time analyzing your historical usage. No matter what *you think* you'll need, how you *actually use it* will uncover what the business truly values.

Some items to look at:

- How many OMS users do you have, broken out by team. Of that, how many have logged in within the last month.
    - Why: this tells you which teams truly rely on the OMS and how many licenses you'll need.
    - How: Admin > Users
- How many unclosed proposals are currently being worked on? How many closed deals do you average each month? Of those deals, what are the dollars tied to them?
    - Why: this gives you an idea of deal flow and how much revenue is tied to those deals. It's important to compare this to your total business revenue to see what is actually flowing through the existing OMS.
    - How: Reporting
- What features are configured to meet your business needs? Of these, which ones are actually being used?
    - Why: this gives you insight into the key features that are being used to meet today's business needs. Not every configured feature is making an impact, so identifying the features you use today helps figure out which will be most important in the new system.
    - How: Dig through key OMS features to see usage, such as:
        - Products
        - Packages

- Rate Cards
- International Features
- Workflow
- Finance
- Export Templates
- Reporting & Revenue Forecasting

This exercise will help you figure out your current OMS usage and minimum requirements to include in the RFP.

How your business *wants* to take advantage of an OMS

While the above questions focused on the current state of your business, this question addresses how you'd *like to* be taking advantage of an OMS.

To answer this question, you'll first identify the different teams that are involved in the end-to-end lifecycle of a deal. Typically they include: Marketing, Sales, Planning, Account Management, Operations, Finance, and Business Intelligence. Or, you can look at the teams that are actually using your current OMS, as noted in the section above.

Once these teams are identified, you should talk to at least two team members from each team. One person will give you high-level insights, but two will bring a fuller picture. Ideally one is a hands-on user as they will provide specifics around what works well and what doesn't. The other should be in a leadership role, with a strategic view of how the tool should work for them. Some areas to discuss:

- Current team workflow
  - How does the team currently use the OMS? Or, if you're not currently on an OMS, how is the team currently involved in the deal lifecycle?
  - What work is done outside of the OMS?
  - What other systems are involved?
  - How can the process be improved? What has prevented it from improving?
- How does the OMS help make your job easier?
- What are the pain points?
- What's being done today that doesn't make any sense?

As you go through these questions, you will start to identify the requirements needed for an OMS to improve your current operations.

Where you see the business going in the future

Since a new platform implementation is a long road, it's important to also spend time thinking about your long-term vision.

"In the digital advertising world...no one knows what life will be like next week, let alone in the next couple years!"

Point taken. But it's still important to review your company vision (as it stands today) and identify ways an OMS will align (or misalign) with that vision. How does the potential OMS partner's vision complement yours? Is there reasonable overlap? Note: if they have no tangible vision, run for the hills.

These questions will help you figure out what you need and (more importantly) why you need it.

Expense savings and revenue generation

An OMS is often seen as an expense line item; a necessary expense to save even larger expenses by having resources manage work manually. But look for opportunities for an OMS to be a revenue generation tool. Are there new integrations or partnerships available that could increase revenue? Are you able to create new products or opportunities that could add to the bottom line? Consider it, ask questions of the vendor, and be on the lookout for these opportunities.

Selection

Decision time. When choosing the best fit, there are several important factors to keep in mind:

- **No Perfect Fit** - unfortunately, there's no such thing as a perfect fit. This lack of perfection is how publishers convince themselves they should build instead of buy. They're looking for the solution that meets 100% of their needs — and it simply does not exist. As long as the solution meets your "must-haves", consider everything else gravy.
- **See it in action** - for your "must-have" functionality, trust, and verify. You'll likely be told, "Sure, we can definitely do that." Trust the answer, but kindly ask to see it in action. A demo of your specific use case will ensure your needs are actually met and in the way that you're expecting. A word of caution: demos always follow a happy path to minimize the risk of error messages. Go a level deeper and get a demo using a few of your real-world scenarios. Also, keep in mind that a solution that solves a particular use case may not look the way you envisioned it - so stay flexible.

- **Demo, if possible** - some OMS companies will set up a demo environment for you to test on your own. Whenever possible, take this opportunity. It accomplishes two important things: first, it shows that the company trusts their product enough to put it in your hands before a done deal. Second, it will give your core project team a chance to poke around and test key use cases on their own.
- **Don't underestimate workflow** - features can be easier to compare across systems, but pay close attention to workflow. The number of clicks it takes for each process and the average time it will take to create a proposal or finalize an IO could have an even larger impact on your business than features alone.
- **It's not just about the features** - if you're choosing between two companies that check the same amount of boxes, we recommend prioritizing relationships over price. Most Pubs use the same OMS for at least 5 years, so this relationship will be long-term. It's important that there's more than just a handful of features and a cheaper price tag holding it together.
- **Talk to references -** choosing an OMS is an important decision that will shape your advertising business for years to come. Spend a couple hours talking to references before signing on the dotted line. Most companies are happy to cherry-pick one or two references that they know will give glowing reviews. Try asking for the list of all their clients and choosing two references from that list. Or, join the [Beeler.Tech Publisher Community](#) for some honest feedback.

Migration Considerations

If you're migrating from an existing OMS onto a new one, it's important to think about your desired migration approach. There's no single right way to do it since it's highly dependent on your specific needs. Let's look at the different methodologies and the pros and cons of each.

- **Pure Migration Approach**
  - "We like what we're doing in our current OMS, and we want it to stay the same in the new system."
  - Pros:
    - Least amount of work for your internal team
    - All historical OMS data typically migrated over to the new system
    - Training should be less intensive since workflow is similar
  - Cons:
    - Missed opportunity to evaluate how to improve business processes
    - Missed opportunity to take advantage of new functionality that didn't exist in the prior system
    - Not every existing concept will translate exactly to your new system. Some decisions will always have to be made

- **Start From Scratch Approach**
  - "Take nothing at face value, every configuration decision should be a new one"
  - Pros:
    - Business processes are updated to reflect current world
    - New features of new system are utilized
    - Broken or unused processes are thrown out the door
  - Cons:
    - Highest time impact on your team, as all processes and decisions made will be new
    - Training will need to address new processes as well as new system
    - Keep an eye on the overall process effort/time, to ensure new processes are giving you the same or better as the old

- **Hybrid Approach**
  - "We like the way we did some things, but many areas definitely need to change"
  - Pros:
    - Identify the highest impact areas and thoroughly review processes
    - Non-critical areas can be migrated cleanly from your existing system
    - Balances migration risk based on need
  - Cons:
    - Not all business areas will have the opportunity to be analyzed
    - Requires strong discipline to avoid scope creep

Recommendation:
These three options should be reviewed thoroughly by your team to decide what best meets your needs. We typically see the split of 25/25/50 - with 25% who want a pure migration, 25% who want to start from scratch, and 50% who prefer a hybrid approach.

The activities involved in an OMS migration are usually piled on top of most people's day jobs (sound familiar?). Do you have the internal resources to pull a project team together to focus on this project?

Internal resources know your business and require minimal ramp time. But they're usually busy, they have a hard time seeing new ways of doing things, and may not know the OMS landscape. You don't have to go it alone. Working with an independent party during selection can be very helpful because they bring industry best practices, knowledge of the OMS landscape and functionality, and experience in OMS vendor selection.

There is no right or wrong decision for both migration and resources approaches, but the former impacts the latter and it's important to go into the decisions considering all factors.

Closing Thoughts

An OMS system is an important tool for most media organizations, they are often complicated by the fact that so many teams use and leverage them. No system will be perfect, but with due diligence during evaluation, selection, and implementation, you will have a system that improves your process flow and grows and changes with your business.

If you would like to learn more about the OMS selection process, please contact us. We are here to help you find the right partners to make your business successful.

About Sangora

Sangora is a consultancy that helps media & ad tech companies improve their operations by implementing technology and building strong teams. We operate by the Japanese word, Majime, meaning reliable, responsible, and most importantly: getting things done without the drama.

www.sangora.co

Drop us an email: contact@sangora.co

About Beeler.Tech

Beeler.Tech was founded to rethink how consulting, training, content, and events can better serve individuals and companies in the digital media space. Beeler.Tech is the platform to facilitate those connections and develop content and events based on topics not properly served through traditional channels.

Beeler.Tech

Drop us an email: support@beeler.tech