



console

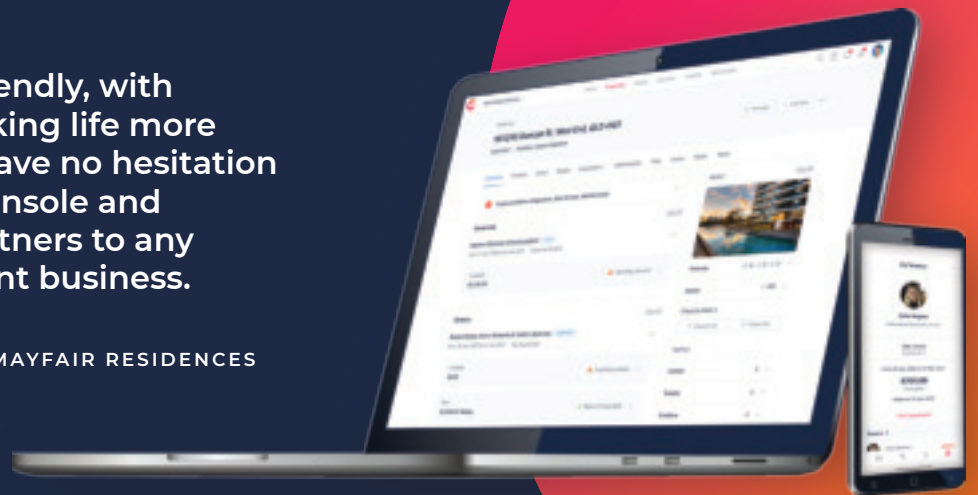
EBOOK

Buyer's guide to property management software



Cloud is very user-friendly, with features that are making life more efficient for us. We have no hesitation in recommending Console and Console Cloud as partners to any property management business.

TED VAN FLEET, MANAGER, MAYFAIR RESIDENCES



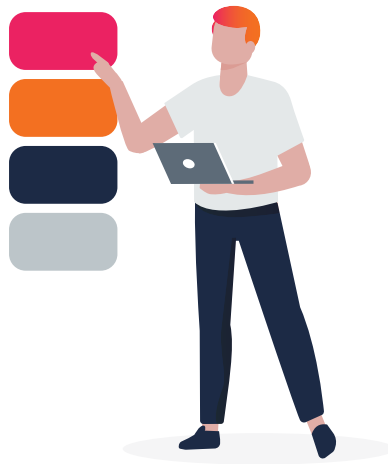
CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the buyer's guide

Choosing the right property management software for your portfolio: a buyer's guide

The first piece of advice when choosing the right property management software for your business is this: do your own research. Do not rely on the opinions of others as 'research'. Basing a critical business decision on what other property managers are doing might make you feel confident in the short term, but it also promises disaster in the long term.

Why? Because not all agencies operate alike, not all property managers operate alike, not all states and territories have the same laws and regulations governing property management, and not all software is created alike. Here's what you should be looking for when deciding to change property management software.



Things to consider when buying property management software

Here's a summary of what you should be focusing on when comparing property management software alternatives.

It should be cloud-based

We will primarily discuss purchasing decisions based only on cloud-based property management software options. Besides the obvious benefit of being able to access cloud-based applications wherever you are, there are a number of other important reasons for this.

For a start, cloud-based software runs on the processing power of your software provider's network. As technology experts, these software companies provide much faster software processing speeds than most in-house agencies' own servers are capable of running. They are expected to be far more responsible with data back-ups and security—meaning your business's data is much safer.

Furthermore, cloud-based property management software updates live and in the background, meaning you'll never have to install updates on your computer. You'll also never have to hit save or worry about losing work, because cloud-based applications update and save your data constantly.

The problem with server-based property management software

Server-based software is being phased out across the real estate industry, which means that moving your data to another server-based system will be a short-term move. When that software is phased out, you'll have to go through the whole migration process again.

Moreover, the gap between the technology offered by server-based software and its cloud-based competitors is growing daily. Server-based software takes longer to load, is used by increasingly fewer people, and is only going to become more expensive for technology companies to service with updates and support. That means that server-based property management software will become more expensive for you to purchase. That's more money for less value.

If that doesn't hammer the final nail in server-based property management software's coffin, then there is also the fact that it is expensive to run in terms of server and other hardware costs. It also leaves you at risk of data loss (in the event your physical server becomes damaged such as during floods). And finally, a lack of integration with other modern software means it will create extra work and inconvenience for your employees.

cloud-based property management software updates live and in the background, meaning you'll never have to install updates on your computer

It should not have hidden costs

Some cloud-based software still asks users to pay extra for access to some features such as document storage and other basic property management software features. While Console Cloud includes all basic features such as file storage, FlashScan, workflows, business insights and integrations at no extra cost, they are common costs that other software providers charge extra for.

Homework

Find out what it is costing you currently to run your platform, including one-off costs and other small ad-hoc expenses. This should include any technology or infrastructure you need to support it.

What should you do

Make sure you research the full cost of any potential subscription when looking for the right property management software for your agency. Ask sales reps to break down exactly what costs you can expect, and ask them for details on pricing for other agencies with similar portfolios to yours.

Compare these costs to your current costs.

Here are some of the standard costs you can expect to pay for cloud-based property management software:

Implementations

Usually depends on portfolio size, but ranges from ~\$200 for smaller portfolios to \$1250 for very large portfolios.

Some companies (like Console) will waive implementation fees for existing customers.

For an idea of what you should be looking for (besides cost) in implementations and onboarding, see below 'Migration and onboarding experience'.

Training

Generally recommended. Pricing depends on inclusions and hours, but budget at least \$400-500 for a better onboarding experience.

SMS

Varies considerably, depending on PAYG usage or prepaid plans. Cost of SMS is usually 20-30 cents per message PAYG.

Extra offices or trust accounts

One-off fee. Should be no more than \$150 per extra office or trust account.

Price per property per month

Between \$0.75-\$3 per property for a basic tier.

Note: pro tiers of software are usually more expensive, and extra costs will need to be weighed against the extra benefit they bring to the business.

Integrations and add-ons

Varies. Some are free, some pay you to use them (e.g. Movinghub) and some charge a fee for service.

It should make a substantial difference to how well you work—that is, it's not another electronic version of your existing workload.

Homework

The easiest way to compare this is to write down the main property management processes you undertake in your office—inspections, maintenance, tenant onboarding, vacates, etc. Estimate how much time it takes one person to do one of these processes on average, and list what work is involved.

What you should do

Take those notes with you when talking to sales agents and get them to identify whether those processes will remain as intensive to manage, make them worse, or make them better. Those who cannot realistically make a significant improvement on the balance of your property management tasks should fall to the bottom of your list.

Why?

Even though it may be cheaper, platforms that don't let you scale your business through efficiencies in these everyday processes put the brakes on. The lack of time-savings, in other words, becomes a lack of scalability. It therefore puts a very hard limit on the number of properties that can be managed in your portfolio.

An example of this type of time-savings work in action: Workflows.

Workflows revolutionise day-to-day property management

Workflows are a type of feature first launched into Console Cloud in 2018. A workflow simplifies a complex, non-linear or clustered process (such as a lease renewal) and automates, groups, sets up triggers and notifications and so on, and organises them into an actionable, easily understandable timeline.

Because not all processes are linear in property management, these workflows are sophisticated enough to work in a number of directions simultaneously. Console Cloud has revolutionised how many day-to-day tasks are managed with workflows. That's why we mainly discuss how property management software works with regards to workflows.

Want more information about workflows? We explain everything in this article.

Look for compliance and risk

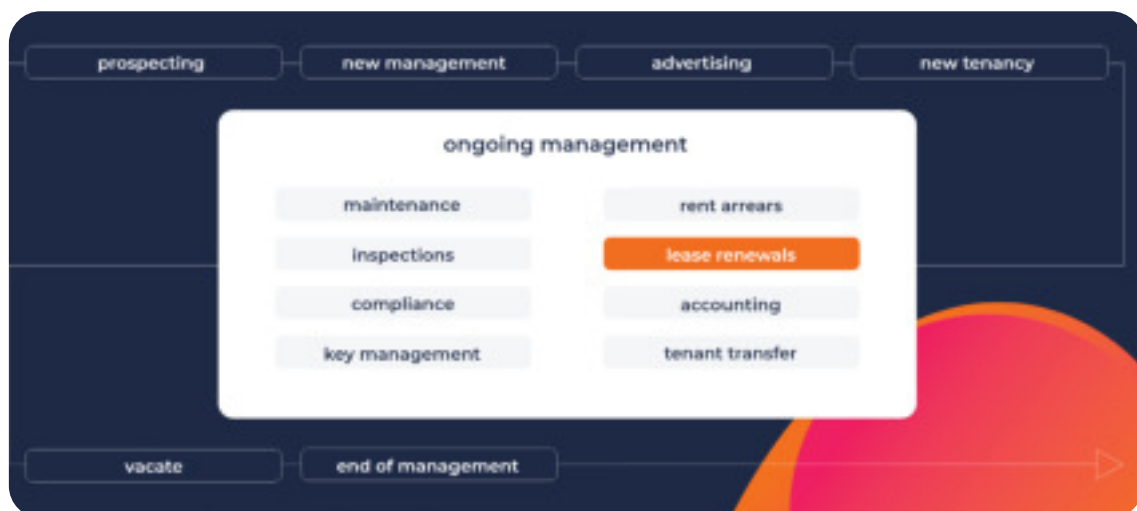
Currently, there is no certification available to property management software companies in Australia and New Zealand to confirm compliance with trust accounting and other compliance laws. That means it's up to you to do your homework when picking a platform to go with.

Trust accounting laws vary between states and territories. That's why it's important to make sure your property management software's trust accounting systems are compliant with the laws and regulations of your region.

A product might be fit for day-to-day property management such as property maintenance and invoice processing, but unless that software company can prove they have had their product audited by governing bodies and authorised trust account auditors in your State or Territory, you are leaving yourself open to risk.

Homework

You should know what laws and regulations you are required to comply with, but do you have a list of all of them somewhere? Compile that list, and start grilling sales reps about compliance and risk exposure.



Do

Ask your software provider ‘Does this software comply with the trust accounting laws of my State or Territory?’ If the answer is ‘I’m not sure’, that probably means it isn’t. If they swear hand-on-heart that they do, get them to prove where they’ve had their software audited, by whom, and how often. Make them show you where they have updated their software to reflect changes to legislation.

Compliance is a huge selling point for property management platforms, because it de-risks your business. It also costs a fortune to audit and measure, so unless you’re dealing with a particularly dysfunctional sales team (which itself is a bad sign), if they aren’t raving about their compliance, chances are it isn’t that compliant.

Be careful with this one. If the evidence is unsatisfactory, it’s probably not worth your investment.

Example: Console Cloud’s compliance measures

Console Cloud releases new features and enhancements on a daily basis, but we continually review these features in compliance with trust and tenancy laws. When laws change (as they did in New South Wales in March 2020), Console’s product managers reviewed the changes against the existing product and made changes to ensure that Console Cloud remained compliant. Where it no longer measured up, we prioritised changes so that it did.

Audit reports and statements

Besides trust accounting, your property management software will need to be able to produce the audit reports and statements in the format auditors need. If in doubt, ask your auditor about the program you intend to use for their views.

Example: Console Cloud

Console Cloud currently has a reporting function that is built to take care of spot-audits—producing the documents you need, in the right format, on the spot. To back this up, it also features an audit log or change log, which is a detailed catalogue that records every change, payment or update made in your account with a time-stamped log, including who took the action.

Court preparation

While strictly speaking, this isn’t a compliance question, having the right reports in the right format makes it easier to explain your narrative in tribunals and other official proceedings.

Homework

What current reports do you need to take to your local court or tribunal in the event of legal proceedings? Does your current system provide adequate reporting in the correct format?

Do

Include these reports in your assessment! They might not be a major factor in your purchasing decision, but they do contribute to your total efficiency, and therefore the number of properties you can manage in a portfolio.

Look for a premium migration and service experience

Here are some inclusions you’d expect to see in a gold-standard migration and onboarding experience:

Important	Optional service
Migration preparation plan and regular consultations with your team	Assistance with data entry
Trial migration with data reporting	Certification and train the trainer courses
Access to online learning resources and webinars	Dedicated onboarding specialist
In-person or remote product training	Legacy data management services
Priority escalation service for support issues	Assistance with new software notification comms to owners
Customisable training packages (e.g. flexible hours, face to face or remote)	Goal setting and change management assistance
Launch day support and final disbursements / EOM	Adoption and efficiency tracking + support

Look for business intelligence that will help you make better decisions.

Business intelligence usually refers to a type of software or software feature that visualises important metrics about your business in an easily digestible format. Most property management platforms will include some sort of business intelligence, but the quality and scope of that intelligence varies significantly between products.

Some businesses like Ailo exclusively build business intelligence products, and some software includes next to no reporting functionality. This is why it's important to get clear on the priorities of different software platforms. If helping you grow your business isn't really in their scope, their software will do little to further the economic interests and profitability of your business.

The bottom line is this: if you care about making more money, investigate how your software can help. Business intelligence is a principal's most powerful tool for finetuning their business for profit.

Homework

What metrics do you use to measure business performance? Gained and lost managements, net promoter scoring, revenue per property, arrears, staff performance—identify those metrics and how you currently measure them. Then create a shopping list of the metrics you don't have, and bring these lists with you when shopping for software.

Do

Figure out how much time it takes you to find this information, and how easy it is to interpret. Spreadsheets, unless stunningly simple, are not easy to interpret. Figure out what you struggle to easily measure now, and what decisions you would be better placed to make if you had the right business intelligence tools at your fingertips.

if you care about making more money, investigate how your software can help

Example: Console Cloud

Console Cloud's business intelligence was designed with the aim of improving the quality of investment decisions and overall profitability of property management businesses. It does this by allowing you to easily visualise important metrics such as which properties are costing you the most or least to manage, how your landlords feel about you, and property manager performance.

An example of this is landlord satisfaction scoring or NPS (net promoter scoring), which measures the likelihood of your landlords to recommend your service to their friends. In Console Cloud, this feature is called Yardstick.

Yardstick gives agencies an insight into which landlords are happy with their service or not by sending a one-question survey to them. The question asks, 'On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend this agency?' who is a fan and therefore a good candidate for referrals, and who is a detractor—perhaps preparing to leave your agency. Knowing how landlords feel about your business gives you the opportunity to save landlords before they leave, and invest more heavily in your promoters.



What other questions should I ask vendors when evaluating property management products?

Here's a list of questions we think should help you find the right property management software for your business—besides the ones we've suggested you ask earlier.

- Is this software compliant with the laws of my state or territory such that a trust account auditor would recommend it to me? If yes, prove this is the case.
- Is your software cloud-based? If so, who is responsible for your web hosting, and how reliable and secure is your hosting?
- Does it require me to change my technology stack (i.e. the other tools, apps and software that you use currently to manage properties).
- How will this software benefit my business? Will there be time savings and if so, where, and how can you prove those time savings are real?
- Will there be cost savings? If so, where will I find these savings? Will it replace apps that I already use and pay for?
- Do you have workflows, and if so, are these more than one-step triggers? Some software companies claim to have workflows, but they tend not to be as sophisticated or complex as the ones first built in Console Cloud in 2018.
- What about if there are any features that I need and you don't have. What is the process for submitting feedback to get these features built?
- What is your roadmap for the future, and what features do you think are a priority to build next?
- What is your average service resolution time by phone, live chat and email times? For reference, Console answers 80% of service and support requests within 2 minutes.

- Are there any opportunities to earn extra revenue and commissions using your software?
- What are the one-off and recurring costs for the software? Are there any features that are not included in my subscription?
- What training and onboarding options are available and how do you typically onboard agencies of my size? How long does it take?
- What data do you migrate, and what will not come across?
- What business intelligence will this software provide me, and how can I use it to grow my profitability or rent roll?

Not all software provides a service centre capable of providing answers how you need them

What are some drawbacks I should watch out for?

We've covered most of these in this chapter already. However, there are a couple of nasty things to watch out for specifically.

Scope creep: costs that aren't included in your quote, and lack of transparency around pricing

If you asked your accountant, they would tell you that their biggest pet peeve is discovering costs that were either hidden or that vary from month to month.

Make sure you truly understand how much your software and technology costs will be once you begin using a different system, and whether those costs are fixed or variable. Also be aware that some software providers charge you extra for the use of features that come included at no extra cost in other software providers.

Lack of service

Not all software provides a service centre capable of providing answers how you need them, when you need them. While this may not seem that important during the buying cycle, service and support is your ongoing relationship with your software provider.

You will have to use their service model as long as you remain on that platform, so choose a provider with a comprehensive support service and guaranteed timeframes for support.



Lack of time savings and product vision

If a product is more or less a cloud-based version of software your property managers are already familiar with, you get the immediate benefit of easy-onboarding. But that is where it ends.

The question here is really: why change software if you are not improving how properties are managed? Look for material, verifiable time and money savings in your new software. Look for business insights and intelligence tools, customisable features and advanced workflows, and look for a product vision and roadmap that shows where the software is heading. If they can't provide these to you, keep looking.

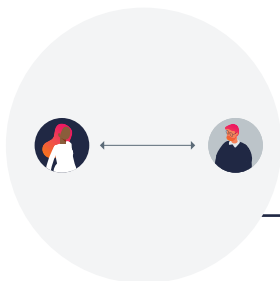
Lack of integration

Inevitably, your property management platform will not integrate with every single piece of software you use. But check to see there is enough integration and cross-over such that you aren't losing more time double-handling data and cross-keying information than you gain from using your new property management software.

why change software if you are not improving how properties are managed?



What property management looks like without Console Cloud.



What it looks like with Console Cloud.

CHAPTER 3

Completing your own technology stack audit

Apart from the main software platform you are using, what other types of software or systems do you use to run your property management business? We've included a number of resources to help you get a better look at how efficiently your technology stack is working together.

<https://www.research.net/r/consoletechnologyassessment>

What apps, software and other tech do you use to do the following tasks?

Maintenances	
Inspections (entry, exit, routine)	
Email providers (e.g. Gmail)	
Document scanning & storage (e.g. DropBox)	
Bulk invoice scanning & payment creation (e.g. ScanAssist)	
Electronic document signing (e.g. DocuSign)	
Form integrations (e.g. ADL, Realworks/REI, Forms Live)	
Marketing tools (e.g. Mailchimp)	
Sales CRM/process management (e.g. MyDesktop, Ailo)	
Portal listings (e.g. Realestate.com, Domain)	
Holiday bookings (e.g. yesbookit.com)	
Tenancy Database check (e.g. NTD)	
Utilities connections (e.g. Movinghub)	
Any others you can think of?	

What other types of software or systems do you use to run your property management business?

If you are still using server-based technology, what systems and software do you use to run these servers?

What are the current rental payment options you offer to tenants?

Direct credit	1	
Direct debit	2	
BPay	3	
Centrepay	4	
Eftpos (in person)	5	
Cheque (in person or via post)	6	
Cash (in person)	7	
Rent collection card	8	
Other	9	

Who is your current direct debit payment provider(s)?

DEFT (Macquarie)	1	
Rental Rewards	2	
Rent Pay	3	
REConnect oneCard	4	
Advantage Card	5	
iPayRent	6	
SimpleRent	7	
PayAdvantage	8	
Debit Success	9	
Rent Mate	10	
NAB Easy Rent	11	
Westpac PayWay	12	
Ezidebit	13	
Console Pay	14	
Other		

CHAPTER 4

Apples with apples: how to compare property management software

The key to getting comparison right is being able to line up features side by side and measuring competitors against each other on the same terms. Here's a little freebie we've built to help with that: **a criteria sheet.**

Features + Capabilities

Residential Trust Accounting	Console Cloud	Other A	Other B
RECEIPTING			
Receipt funds from owners and tenants	✓		
Miscellaneous receipting (e.g. receipting from creditors)	✓		
Automated receipting (via multiple bank file upload or Console Pay)	✓		
Macquarie DEFT Integration (auto-generate DRNs and automated receipting)	✓		
PAYMENTS			
EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) and Cheque payments	✓		
Disbursements (owner, creditor, fees, bond, ABA files etc.)	✓		
Centrepay payments	✓		
BPAY Payments in bulk	✓		
FLASHSCAN			
Automated processing of council rates and utility bills using intelligent data scanning and advanced matching	✓		
Automated water invoice charges to tenants for usage and consumption	✓		
AGENCY FEES			
Standard fees (rent commission, letting, sundry)	✓		
Custom fees (recurring, on events and on-demand)	✓		
Task-based fees (maintenance, with inspection fees coming soon)	✓		

Features + Capabilities

Residential Trust Accounting (Contd.)

	Console Cloud	Other A	Other B
REPORTING			
Compliant trust account reporting (including close of month, disbursement and reconciliation)	✓		
Combine statements for multiple owners	✓		
Statements on disbursement	✓		
Financial year statements	✓		
Business revenue reports & insights	✓		
KPI Reports (Lease Renewal, Arrears, Vacancies, Gain and Loss Managements, Rent Review, Maintenance, Inspections)	✓		
INVOICING			
Tenant invoice to reimburse owner or creditor	✓		
Automatically email invoice and attachments to tenants	✓		

Commercial Property Management

GST on rent for Commercial Tenants	✓		
Recurring invoices for rent	✓		

Console Pay

Integrated direct debit for rent collection	✓		
Automated transaction entry and receipting in bulk	✓		
Simple online tenant sign-up	✓		
Tenant sign-up invitations sent in bulk that can be automated to re-send monthly	✓		
Tenant sign up via the Tenant App	soon		

Sales Trust Accounting

Enter sales agreements between seller and agency	✓		
Enter contract details between buyer and seller	✓		
Receipt buyer deposits + seller expenses	✓		
Make payments to buyer / seller via EFT or cheque	✓		
Commission payment via EFT	✓		
Settle or terminate a sale contract	✓		
Reporting (incl. tax invoice / statements)	✓		

Features + Capabilities

Property Management Workflows

	Console Cloud	Other A	Other B
COMPLIANCE MANAGEMENT			
Capture and track property compliance per property	✓		
Automated workflow (communications and notifications to the owner, tenant, creditor or body corporate)	✓		
Compliance activity tracking on timeline	✓		
QLD 2022 smoke alarm compliance tracking	✓		
LEASE RENEWALS			
Track upcoming lease renewals	✓		
Request and capture owner and tenant intention on lease renewal within the workflow	✓		
Create new lease agreements within workflow (via Realworks / REI Forms / Forms Live)	✓		
Lease renewal activity tracking on timeline	✓		
RENTAL ARREARS			
Automated arrears reminders by SMS	✓		
Create breach notices within workflow (via Realworks & REI Forms only)	✓		
Arrears activity tracking on timeline	✓		
TENANT VACATE			
Capture tenant summary	✓		
Rental references	✓		
Email / SMS messaging within workflow	✓		
INSPECTION MANAGEMENT			
Schedule entry / routine / exit inspections	✓		
Routine / entry / exit inspections with Console App	✓		
Edit inspection reports on desktop	✓		
Raise maintenance requests with photos while at the property, with Console App	✓		
MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT			
Create maintenance request with photos	✓		
Create and send work orders with photos	✓		
Create and send quote requests	✓		
Manage maintenance by status, search by address or subject	✓		
Close off work order when paying the bill	✓		
View and action maintenance requests lodged by tenants who use the Console Tenant App	✓		

Features + Capabilities

Communications

	Console Cloud	Other A	Other B
Fully automated SMS notifications for arrears	✓		
Tenants can self-serve, by viewing their current lease details, recent payments, rental reference and downloading rental receipts with the Console Tenant App	✓		
Bulk communications - email / SMS (owners, tenants + creditors) including contextual merge fields	✓		
Template management (add, edit+ delete templates)	✓		
Email and SMS at any time within workflows	✓		

Apps & Portals

Console Tenant App	✓		
Console PM App	✓		
Console Owner Portal	✓		

Other

Tenant application & onboarding workflow	✓		
Key management	✓		
Gained and lost management	✓		
Insurance management (creditors and properties)	✓		
Auto email tenant receipts	✓		
Change Log / Audit History	✓		
User roles and permissions	✓		
Document storage	✓		

Integrations

Forms: Realworks (QLD), Forms Live (VIC), REI Forms (all other states)	✓		
Maintenance Manager	beta		
Inspection Manager	beta		
MovingHub	✓		
Bricks + Agent	✓		
i4tradies	beta		

How to build a business case for property management software

Found the right software for you? Brilliant. If you're not the one making the purchasing decision, here's how to make a convincing case for your software of choice.

The formula for a strong business case

1. Introduction

Identify your objective/s, and the reasons you believe your business needs an upgrade.

Your introduction page should be a summary of how your business is already operating, with its pros and cons and risks. Identify the options you considered for change, and the candidate you believe has the best potential to improve your business.

You should also summarise what you believe is the right outcome, and identify what you are asking for in this business case. Set expectations of what you are asking for on the first page, and let the rest of your business case talk to that.

1.1 Current technology stack

Assuming you've completed your tech stack audit, insert the results here.

1.2 Software comparison criteria and feature requirements.

Show what features / processes / functionality your business runs on currently, and what it would require under a migration to a new platform.

Then show your working out: what is your criteria sheet for software?

1.3 Software comparison

Insert a table here comparing your current software to the software you believe would be most beneficial to the company. You can also include another option here that is least suited to your needs for comparison.

Note: Don't forget to also show where other property management platforms failed. Part of your working out will be how you came to the conclusion that other property management software failed to meet your expectations.

2. Software for profit, and for the future

Besides demonstrating why you think this software is the best for the business today, explain why you think it is the best software for your agency's profitability, and for its future growth. How does it help scale your business? How does it help you collect fees, learn more about your customers, harness opportunities for growth and help you analyse staff performance?

Point to evidence to back up your claims. If you're struggling to find it, get in touch with the platforms you're considering using and ask them for the evidence.

3. Negatives and possible pain points associated with this change

Change nearly always requires some sort of sacrifice. It might be non-productive time while the changeover happens, or it might be the short-term loss of certain features or reports. Identify these negatives in your business case, and where possible, handle objections and solve pain points. Is there another solution that we could use in the interim? Do we really need this feature? Make peace with these in your business case.

4. Proposed plan of action

Hypothetically, if your business case was accepted, what does migration, onboarding and implementation look like? What additional resources would you need? How long would it take? This section of your business case is the action required to make this change, and the costs and time.

Tip: Start your plan with the next steps that need to be taken by the person deciding on your business case to encourage immediate action.

5. Conclusion

There should be no new information in this paragraph. Sum up the key points, and suggest next steps for the reader so they know what to do with your document.

Alternately, you can use the template on this page to get started.

Business case template

Proposal name:

Agency name:

Created by:

Date:



**Console Cloud is currently
available in Australia +
New Zealand.**

Talk to one of our friendly Console Crew, who will assess your business needs. For more information or to request a demo;

Call **1300 131 311**

Email **sales@console.com.au**

or visit **console.com.au**