

There are lots of examples

of products, businesses and even entire industries that really couldn't get off the ground until all the elements of its tech stack had been implemented. Without the right technology foundation, it is difficult to know what is really happening in your business, to make informed decisions, and to scale when you need to. Technology can not only set you up for success, but can also enable you to gain insights that you couldn't get on your own. A great example of this is the incorporation of Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence in business software today.

Your business is no different.

You have a host of tasks to attend to, almost all of which need to be automated and integrated with affordable software that's easy to use for everyone that it touches. Fortunately for you, we're living in a golden age of software development and expansion. So there's never been a better time to put together an affordable and flexible tech stack that's going to launch and sustain your business. And there are so many good options and so much competition, you'll enjoy a steady stream of improvements and innovation. That's the good news.

The bad news is, you've got a lot of choices in almost any category. And while leaders are emerging, having all those options may complicate your initial decisions. That being said, you're probably not going to make too bad a mistake—you'll know pretty quickly which apps are working for you and which aren't. Don't be afraid to toss something out and pick up something new if it's not working. With so many good options, suffering with an inadequate solution doesn't have to be one of them.

How to Get Started

In his book, *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu maintains that if you know both yourself and your enemy, you'll be successful. Knowing only one or the other, you only stand half a chance. But if you don't know either, you stand no chance. His slim but wise meditation about war has been so popular with business people because of the many parallels that can be drawn to the world of business. In this instance, in order to build a successful tech stack, you must know both your business and your customer. So before we dig into what to buy, we're going to look at why.

Let's start by prioritizing what's important for your business. Not every solution is appropriate--or even necessary--for companies of all sizes and verticals. So what constitutes a good, solid, lean start for your business?

First thing to look at is **your industry**.

- Are there conventions and protocols, whether written or unspoken, you have to meet or exceed?
- Who in your industry is executionally excellent and how are they getting it done?
- In other words, where is the bar being set for performance, product and service?

Large organizations have a need for large scale applications, but for small and medium size businesses, those applications are overkill and more trouble than they're worth. Part of figuring out what your business needs is right-sizing the elements of the tech stack so those applications deliver utility and efficiency without requiring too steep of a learning curve or an undue amount of resources and maintenance.

Second, look at **your company and your position.**

- Are you built to be a disruptor, a fast follower, or the service or cost leader?
- What sort of a reputation are you building?
- What do you want your brand to stand for and how do you intend to communicate that?
- What kind of product are you selling?
- Are you opening a brick and mortar operation with an online component, or can your product be sold exclusively online?
- Does your manufacturing or fulfillment processes include third parties such as distributors, and if so, how will your tech stack interface with them?
- How are you going to handle orders?
- And, crucially, what kind of financial management do you need to put in place?



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Third, think about **your customers** because alignment here is critical.

- Who are they and what's important to them?
- What do they expect from you, and how well is your company delivering on those expectations?
- In what areas does your competition have an edge, if any?
- Are there some attitudes that affect how well you're perceived or thought of?
- Do you understand enough about your customer's behavior?

You need to collect some type of information to get customer insights. If it's Amazon or your own brick and mortar store, you will get this data. The question then becomes how will you use it, how will you communicate with customers, and how often? Do you have procedures in place for customer support as well as advertising, marketing, fulfillment, and shipping, and how well can the applications be integrated?

As you can see, the list of questions that need to be answered is formidable, and this is not a definitive list.

It is worth it to take the time to think about them so that you choose the right tools for your business objectives. Use them as a guide to select the tools that address the requirements for your unique journey as you build and scale your business.

Four general **tech stack commandments** you should obey.

There is a lot of specific information you'll need to glean about the various aspects of your tech stack and how they fit into your strategy. And you should avail yourself of all of it. But there are also some commandments you need to observe because as a set of first principles, keeping them will make all the subsequent steps easier. They are as follows:

1

Orders are your gold mine

And you need to treat them that way. Figure out how they need to be handled, tracked, fulfilled and followed up on in the most efficient way possible. Understand what your website infrastructure is to help gauge which add-ons are necessary. A Point of Sale (POS) or Ecommerce system is a must and so is a payment processor or gateway depending on who you choose. Shopify is a POS system with a built-in ecommerce system; Square requires an ecommerce system like BigCommerce. Once that sale is completed, how are you tracking the order internally and responding to customer inquiries? Is the order being received to your fulfillment and distribution center through API or EDI? What information needs to be passed to be successful? How is the customer and you being notified of an order being processed or shipped? Do you have access to your fulfillment center?

2

Communication is key

It doesn't really matter which communications platform you choose as long as it's conducive to fostering a robust communications ecosystem that can support all the different ways your company needs to talk to internal and external stakeholders. Everyday a new challenge awaits and your response is what propels you to the next level. Customers need to feel trusted and have their questions answered in a timely manner. If it is just yourself or you have hired a team, each person needs to be trained in how to respond to any inquiry. Take time to create scripts, automated but tailored responses, and know your product inside-and-out.

Besides the product standing out, brands are viewed by their customer service. Zendesk, Gorgias, and Kustomer are some of the solutions that can help you track and respond to issues. This truly is what separates a "good" brand from an "outstanding" one.

Besides clear and concise communication with your customers, your team of either internal and external parties need to be following the same practice. How do you organize your communications and hold stakeholders accountable? You should invest in project management tools, communication software for internal and external parties, file sharing applications, and calendar software. Stay organized and focused with your team. Look for collaboration tools with utility and extreme ease of use. Tools like Asana and Slack are good ways to start. There are numerous others. The applications that can be used, will be used, and when it comes to communication, you just can't have enough.

3

Track everything

You're going to want to know how things are going and the only way to do that is to track everything—from the purchase order to the support call. You'll feel better when things are bad, because you'll know how to fix them and keep going. And you'll feel better when things are good, because you've got the right tools in place to scale your business. Either way, the only way to survive is to know what you're doing, for whom, and how much still needs attention. And the only way to do that is to track every business activity.

In an age where investors pour millions of dollars into growth, stock-outs have to be avoided or minimized. Forecasting and tracking inventory are paramount to doing so. Map out the lead times of each mile in your supply chain and model that against the replenishment rate. Your Point of Sale system will give you the daily new customers and subscribers transacting through your website.

However, what is transacted each day doesn't equate to the number that is fulfilled each day. There are order cut-off time implications and one-off orders that include returns/replacements or influencer shipments that can go out. Extract your data from your fulfillment center and model that into your S&OP model along with estimated demand from your marketing team. The model can be sophisticated, maintained in an Excel/Google spreadsheet, or built into a SQL. If you're looking for something other than Excel or a custom solution, check out Qualtrix, Netstock and Anaplan to name a few. Investments into data software tools is also helpful in getting into cohort specifics.

4

Follow the money

Going right along with keeping track, and preparing for the inevitable near-disaster, is the idea of establishing and maintaining financial visibility. If you do, you'll always know where you stand and what you need to do to run the business in a fiscally responsible way. Without this, you're really flying blind and that's no way to run your business. Money is just one of the ways businesses keep score, and it's one of the most important. Make sure you have the visibility to always see the scoreboard.

Track your expenses through AP software. This is good for any independent contracts and for supplier invoices. Having it sync to an accounting software is also important. If there is an internal or external party setting-up your income statement and balance sheet, they need to understand what expense is for what. Popular systems include but are not limited to Quickbooks, Bill.com, and Netsuite.

Cost of Goods tracking is also very important and good to compare with your Customer Acquisition Cost. You need to know when you become profitable for a customer and how long that takes. Excel and BI tools are helpful in understanding that timeframe, using Google Analytics to pull in customer acquisition by channel.

Through all of this it is important to stay flexible and nimble. Your business needs will change and you will have to adapt for each situation. Don't fall into the trap of buying the hot, new tool. It's most likely not needed at your size or scale. Stay lean for as long as you can but don't be shy to admit when you need to spend.

What happens next?

All of these are infrastructure layers that contain a wealth of information that powers your business. Insights for marketing to finance to operations leverage these tools to make informed, daily business decisions. The good news is, you can put a great, functional, efficient tech stack in place and reap the benefits for years. But if your business is growing, your tech stack is going to need to grow with it.

Nothing lasts forever, but if you've picked the best applications in the beginning, you'll be able to use them for a long time because it's likely they'll grow right along with you.

How does your tech stack stack up?

Reach out to us for advice on how to build an integrated supply chain tech stack.

About Anvyl

Anvyl's Production Management Platform streamlines supply chain communication, automates workflows, and delivers real-time production analytics from order to delivery. Companies across the globe use Anvyl to mitigate risk across their supply chains and save millions of dollars in operational costs. Anvyl's digital platform delivers transparency across the supply chain, surfaces key production insights for users, and provides predictive analytics to improve operational efficiency. Visit www.anvyl.com or email sales@anvyl.com to learn more about how Anvyl can help you simplify the production management process.

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