axolt

WHITEPAPER | 2026 EDITION

Cloud ERP for High-Growth Companies

How a Salesforce-native ERP helps fast-scaling businesses launch faster, stay agile and deliver a customer experience that sets them apart from long-established competitors.

VERSION	PUBLISHED	PRODUCT
4.0	October 2026	Axolt ERP

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ABOUT THIS WHITEPAPER

This whitepaper explains how Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) supports high-growth companies, what cloud delivery adds, and why the platform beneath an ERP application matters as much as the application itself. It closes with how Axolt ERP, built natively on Salesforce, puts these principles into practice, plus a checklist and roadmap for evaluating cloud ERP.

WHO IT IS FOR

Founders, COOs, CFOs and IT leaders at growing manufacturers, distributors and service companies who are choosing, replacing or scaling an ERP system, and who want technology that accelerates growth rather than restricting it.

Executive summary

Technology is either your accelerator or your brake. For a high-growth company, the choice of business applications is a strategic decision. The right applications help you launch products, enter markets and serve customers faster than established competitors. The wrong ones become a constraint that every team has to work around.

This whitepaper explains how Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) supports ambitious companies, how delivering ERP in the cloud changes the speed and economics of adoption, and why the platform beneath the application matters as much as the application itself. It closes with how Axolt ERP, built natively on Salesforce, puts these principles into practice.

19%

increase in complete and on-time delivery for best-in-class ERP implementations

ABERDEEN GROUP, 2010

70%

reduction in time to market when building on the Salesforce Platform

IDC, 2014

Weeks

not months: the timescale in which cloud ERP deployments can be measured

SEE SECTION 03

Key takeaways

- ✓ **ERP is a growth tool, not just a back-office system.** A shared process and data model keeps sales, operations and finance aligned as complexity increases.
- ✓ **Cloud delivery changes the economics.** Faster deployment, subscription pricing and provider-managed security make high-end ERP practical for companies of every size.
- ✓ **The platform matters.** An ERP built natively on a proven platform inherits that platform's security, mobility, reporting and ecosystem.
- ✓ **Customer experience wins markets.** Customers reward suppliers who give them accurate, up-to-date information through every channel.

01 Technology as a growth decision

For any high-growth company, the technology and applications that support core business processes are a critical choice. The right technology enables growth; the wrong choice can just as easily inhibit it. No company with serious growth ambitions can ignore the contribution of business applications, and the decision matters more than ever, because technology is no longer only about supporting the business. It can be the foundation of the business.

Market disruptors such as Uber and Airbnb use technology as the basis of their disruption. It changes how they deliver a service, transforms the entire customer experience and opens customers' eyes to a new form of product or service.

THE DISRUPTION LENS

The term **disruptive technologies** was introduced by Joseph L. Bower and Clayton M. Christensen of Harvard Business School in their 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article, *Disruptive Technologies: Catching the Wave*.[4] They observed that the technological changes that damage established companies are usually not radically new or technically difficult. Instead, they share two characteristics:

1. They initially offer a different package of performance attributes, which existing customers do not yet value.
2. The attributes that customers do value then improve so quickly that the new technology can invade established markets.

The lesson for growing companies is that disruption comes from the experience technology makes possible, not from technology for its own sake. ERP is a well-established technology, yet delivered in the right way it gives a high-growth company the operational foundation to innovate and to compete with much larger, longer-established rivals.

Accelerator or inhibitor: what the technology choice changes

Area	Technology as an accelerator	Technology as an inhibitor
New products and markets	Launches go live quickly on a ready platform	Long deployments delay every launch
Customer experience	Up-to-date information through every channel	Fragmented data and slow answers
Scaling	Systems grow with the business	Outgrown systems force costly migrations
Decision-making	One shared, real-time view of the business	Conflicting departmental versions of the truth

02 Benefits of ERP for a high-growth company

DEFINITION

Gartner defines ERP as the ability to deliver an integrated suite of business applications. ERP tools share a common process and data model, covering broad and deep operational end-to-end processes, such as those found in finance, HR, distribution, manufacturing, service and the supply chain.[1]

Core ERP capabilities

A complete ERP suite brings these functions together on one process and data model.

CUSTOMER AND REVENUE	
Sales order fulfilment	Manages order placement, order scheduling, shipping and invoicing in one connected process.
E-commerce	Supports external-facing sales strategies and links online sales directly to sales order processes.
SUPPLY CHAIN AND OPERATIONS	
Procurement (SRM)	Supports end-to-end procurement and logistics processes to maximise cost savings.
Manufacturing and production	Plans and optimises manufacturing capacity and material resources, driven by material requirements planning (MRP).
Distribution (SCM)	Controls warehouse processes and stock movements, helping teams respond faster to supply chain challenges and change.
Enterprise asset management	Manages the entire asset lifecycle efficiently and sustainably, improving asset usage and cutting costs with analytics.
FINANCE AND PEOPLE	
Accounting	Automates financial operations, supports regulatory compliance and provides real-time insight into overall performance.
Human resources	Maintains a complete employee database and helps the business make the best use of every employee.
INSIGHT AND GOVERNANCE	
Business intelligence	Analyses operational data and turns it into information for decision-making.

Corporate performance and governance	Streamlines corporate services and gives leaders greater control over them.

Proven benefits for growing businesses

ERP applications automate and support a wide range of administrative and operational processes across many industries, covering line-of-business, customer-facing, administrative and asset management activities. Automating these core processes in a single suite of applications delivers proven benefits for a growing business and its customers.

ERP was initially focused on manufacturing, but many service companies have since achieved impressive returns on their ERP investment, thanks to the benefits below.

1. Easier to do business with

Customers expect suppliers to provide up-to-date information about stock, orders, deliveries, returns and invoices at every interaction, through whichever channel they choose. Meeting that expectation requires the tight integration between front-office and back-office processes that ERP provides, together with complete visibility across the supply chain.

Supply chain visibility and a better understanding of the customer also lead to more complete and on-time deliveries, a key driver of customer satisfaction and repeat orders. Aberdeen Group research into how ERP fuels growth and profit in small and mid-sized enterprises found that best-in-class ERP implementations achieved a **19% increase in complete and on-time delivery**.[2]

2. Higher productivity and lower costs

Cost reduction is often cited as the main reason for adopting ERP. The savings come from two main areas: lower inventory costs and lower operating costs.

Inventory costs. Inventory ties up capital while it sits on the shelves, and it carries warehousing costs. In industries with high rates of change and innovation, obsolete stock can also be expensive. ERP helps companies keep stock levels as low as possible by treating the warehouse as one link in the overall supply chain, not simply a storage centre. It also identifies slow-moving goods, so stock can be kept to a minimum and pricing can reflect their higher warehousing cost.

Operating costs. Savings come from several areas:

- ✓ Removing error-prone manual tasks, including re-keying data between separate systems such as CRM, shipping, finance and invoicing
- ✓ Avoiding the cost of integrating and linking separate IT systems
- ✓ Consolidating systems and warehousing locations
- ✓ Introducing customer self-service to reduce servicing costs
- ✓ Linking web sales automatically to sales order processes

3. Better decisions from a single source of truth

Accurate, real-time data provides visibility into every area of the business and enables more efficient use of resources. Everyone works from the same data, rather than from the different views produced by separate departmental systems.

03 ERP in the cloud

ERP began as a complex and potentially cumbersome on-premise application suited to very large enterprises. Cloud computing and multi-tenant architectures have made it accessible to companies of all sizes, and ERP in the cloud offers several additional benefits over on-premise implementations.

1 Faster time to market

Agility and time to market are core ERP benefits, and the cloud strengthens both. On-premise ERP has a reputation for long, complex deployments that require large teams of expensive consultants; early deployments were measured in years rather than months. Cloud ERP deployments can be measured in weeks rather than months, for three reasons:

- ✓ No need for in-house IT infrastructure
- ✓ Greatly improved ease of use, which speeds user adoption
- ✓ Better-architected, more open platforms that dramatically reduce customisation effort and allow a plug-and-play approach to integration

The result is faster time to market and a stronger competitive advantage.

2 Mobility and 24/7 access

Most companies now operate in a global, always-on environment, so on-demand access to critical business data, wherever people are, is fundamental. Whether the task is fixing a production issue, resolving a customer service problem or supporting a client in another time zone, immediate mobile access can make a real competitive difference. Cloud applications are accessed through a web browser, and support for mobile and tablet devices is now considered essential.

The resulting gains in productivity and customer service are major contributors to the growth that many companies achieve with cloud ERP.

3 Technology investment aligned with revenue and growth

Cloud ERP applications typically use a Software as a Service (SaaS) subscription pricing model, in contrast to the up-front licence charges of on-premise software. Combined with the absence of capital investment in in-house infrastructure, including server upgrades as the business grows, this produces a much lower total cost of ownership (TCO) and a cost model that can be aligned with the revenue model. The outcome is lower up-front investment and greater profitability.

4 Technology that scales as the business grows

The SaaS cost model allows technology to scale with the business, and the business to scale with its technology. A smaller business, or a smaller division of a larger business, can afford to start with a high-end ERP solution.

Previously, smaller businesses could rarely afford a high-end ERP suite. They started with applications designed for small businesses and, in time, outgrew them. At that point technology became an inhibitor to growth, and an expensive migration was needed to a system that could support the next stage. The result could be months of stalled innovation and growth, followed by a painful transition during which customers often experienced poorer service.

5 Security

Data security is still cited as a concern by companies considering cloud technology, but the recent track record of major cloud providers such as Salesforce and Amazon is very good. Where vulnerabilities do occur, they are more often linked to poor end-user security practices, such as weak or accidentally disclosed passwords.

Consider, by contrast, the security of a server in the corner of an office. On-premise ERP requires customers to own their server infrastructure. That is a significant capital expense, and it demands IT expertise to protect against malicious attacks and to provide back-up, recovery and disaster recovery services for critical business data. Cloud providers such as Salesforce can afford to employ leading security experts, and comprehensive back-up and recovery come as part of the service.

On-premise and cloud ERP at a glance

Area	On-premise ERP	Cloud ERP
Deployment	Measured in months or years, often with large consulting teams	Can be measured in weeks
Infrastructure	Customer-owned servers, upgraded as the business grows	No in-house IT infrastructure required
Cost model	Up-front licence charges and capital investment	Subscription pricing that can align with revenue
Scalability	Systems are outgrown, forcing costly migrations	Start with high-end ERP and scale with the business
Security and recovery	In-house expertise for protection, back-up and disaster recovery	Provider security specialists, with back-up and recovery included

04 Why the platform matters

One clear benefit of the cloud is that it removes the IT infrastructure burden from the customer. In effect, it provides a layer of abstraction between the business application and the underlying technology, with infrastructure resources available on demand.

Does that mean customers no longer need to consider the technology used to build their ERP application? Not quite.

A category of application development tools known as **Platform as a Service (PaaS)** has emerged to enable the rapid development of cloud applications, whether by IT departments or by independent software vendors (ISVs). One such platform is the Salesforce Platform (formerly the Salesforce1 Platform). It has its origins in the leading CRM solution and has evolved into a PaaS designed for building new applications and for extending Salesforce's own applications.

1 Productivity and quality

IDC research found that time to market was reduced by **70%** when using the Salesforce Platform.[3] With PaaS, developers can focus on innovation instead of infrastructure.

For an ISV developing an ERP application, PaaS means delivering more functionality, faster and at lower cost. For its customers, it means greater innovation to support their business, at lower cost. For example, a new feature such as barcode scanning can be introduced much faster using the PaaS approach.

2 Integration and app availability

Integration with third-party applications is often one of the biggest challenges of an ERP implementation. ERP applications cover core business processes, from supplier management, inventory management, warehousing and scheduling to sales order management, delivery, and warranty and support, as well as support functions such as finance, HR and payroll.

High-growth businesses also need to integrate other applications, such as contact centre software, marketing automation, customer service and business analytics. Customers normally depend on their supplier to build these integrations, or must build them themselves. The Salesforce ecosystem offers thousands of applications and integrations through AppExchange, all built on the same underlying metadata model, database and reporting tools.

3 Analytics and reporting

A fundamental principle of ERP is that everything is built around a common database: a single source of truth shared by every module, front office and back office alike. Agile businesses use this to analyse their data and metrics, improving efficiency and the customer experience.

ERP applications typically include a comprehensive set of business reports, but most users also want to create bespoke reports that show data their way, or to use more advanced analytics. PaaS platforms such as Salesforce include comprehensive reporting tools that let business users build their own real-time reports through a simple interface. For more demanding needs, Salesforce's advanced analytics (originally launched as Wave Analytics, now CRM Analytics) can explore data dynamically to spot trends and visualise complex KPIs, and many third-party business intelligence and analytics options are available on AppExchange.

4 Ease of customisation

A PaaS is designed for the rapid development of new applications, which gives enormous value to an ISV building on a platform such as Salesforce.

Customers benefit too. They can extend the ERP application or develop their own processes, and they can draw on a much larger pool of third-party development resources. This contrasts sharply with ERP vendors whose closed platforms make customisation a more difficult and onerous process. Depending on the application developer, or on highly specialised third parties, for every change is not only expensive but can also hinder innovation.

5 Security and availability

If it makes sense for customers to leave security and application availability to a cloud vendor, it makes equal sense to entrust them to the PaaS vendor, which has the resources to invest in these areas, rather than to an ISV that would need to maintain its own expertise.

05 Axolt ERP: built natively on Salesforce

The previous sections described the benefits of ERP, the additional benefits of ERP in the cloud, and the competitive advantage of an ERP solution developed on a platform such as Salesforce: reduced time to market, greater agility and flexibility, and lower total cost of ownership. Most importantly, these benefits can enable a company to disrupt an established market.

Axolt ERP is an ERP solution developed natively on the Salesforce platform. Building on Salesforce has allowed the Axolt team to exploit the platform's productivity benefits fully and to develop an application that provides complete visibility of the supply chain:

01 Supplier management › **02** Inventory management › **03** Warehousing and scheduling › **04** Sales order management › **05** Delivery › **06** Warranty and support

Because Axolt ERP is built on the leading CRM platform, Axolt customers benefit from Salesforce's robust security, mobility and reporting capabilities, while the Axolt team focuses on its core ERP expertise and on solving the challenges of ambitious, high-growth customers.

Speed to market

Axolt ERP has been deployed in organisations ranging from early-stage start-ups to established businesses launching into new markets or replacing dated systems to improve efficiency and productivity.

A consistent benefit has been speed to market when launching new companies, products or divisions, often shortening time to market by many months and helping these companies exceed their business goals.

Flexibility and agility

Customers consistently highlight the flexibility of the overall platform, which allows Axolt and its customers to tailor the application easily for each deployment.

Axolt continues to innovate with new capabilities and features that deliver further value and help customers maintain their competitive edge.

> *"The robustness of the product has been unbelievable. The Axolt team has many years' experience in warehousing and inventory management, and it feels like there is a round-the-clock service to provide whatever we need. They always seem to be one step ahead of us, anticipating what we are going to want to do next.*
>
> COO, AXOLT ERP CUSTOMER

A differentiated customer experience

As noted at the start of this whitepaper, market disruptors introduce a completely new customer experience when they deliver their product or service. Axolt ERP helps its customers do the same, with mobile and 24/7 access built into the platform. This makes comprehensive client self-service possible and ensures employees have immediate access to the critical information and processes they need to respond to customers.

To read how Axolt customers have used Axolt ERP to disrupt their markets, visit **axolt.com/customer-success**.

06 How to evaluate a cloud ERP

Use these questions to compare cloud ERP options against the principles in this whitepaper. Each question links to the section that explains why it matters.

#	Question to ask	Explained in
1	Is the application built natively on a proven platform, or added to one later?	04 Platform ›
2	How quickly can we go live, and what determines that timeline?	03 Cloud ›
3	Will the system scale with our users, products and business units without a migration?	03 Cloud ›
4	Can we extend and customise it, and who can make those changes?	04 Platform ›
5	How does it integrate with our CRM, e-commerce, shipping and analytics tools?	04 Platform ›
6	Do warehouse, field and remote teams get full mobile and 24/7 access?	03 Cloud ›
7	Who is responsible for security, back-up and disaster recovery?	03 Cloud ›
8	Does the pricing model align with our revenue and growth?	03 Cloud ›

07 Getting started: a practical roadmap

Cloud ERP shortens deployment, but a clear approach still determines how much value you capture. These four stages apply the principles in this whitepaper.

01

Define outcomes and scope

Map core processes and agree the measures that matter most, such as on-time delivery, stock levels and reporting speed.

02

Start where friction is highest

Adopt in phases. Begin with the processes causing most friction, prove value, then extend as the business grows.

03

Connect data and systems

Migrate core data and integrate CRM, e-commerce, shipping and analytics, so data is entered once and never re-keyed.

04

Launch, adopt and improve

Support user adoption, including mobile access for warehouse and field teams, and review results against your measures.

08 Conclusion

High-growth companies succeed when technology removes friction instead of adding it. ERP gives them a single, shared view of orders, inventory, suppliers and finances. The cloud makes that view affordable and fast to deploy, and a native platform adds security, mobility, analytics and a broad ecosystem.

Together, these let a growing business launch faster, serve customers better and scale without the disruptive system changes that held earlier generations back. Axolt ERP is built to give ambitious companies that operational foundation, so they can compete with, and disrupt, much larger rivals.

See Axolt ERP in action

Talk to our team about how a Salesforce-native ERP can support your next stage of growth.

www.axolt.com ›

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About Axolt

Axolt supplies enterprise applications and services that help businesses align and improve their manufacturing, servicing, supply, shipping, inventory, finance and human resource operations, and drive growth across numerous industry sectors. To learn more, visit **www.axolt.com**.

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