

Project Management Software Buyer's Guide for Architects & Engineers

Your guide to evaluating software, complete with a vendor scorecard to find the best fit for your firm.

READ TIME

15 min.

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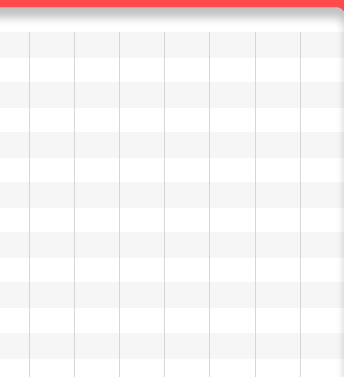
Finding the Right Software Starts Here

Successful projects rely on successful systems.

The right project management software helps projects run smoothly, keeps teams aligned, and gives you more time to focus on the business.

The wrong one adds extra admin, costs, and frustration. With so many options on the market, it's easy to get lost comparing features, pricing models, and promises.

Think of this guide as your map to a clearer buying process. We'll explore what architects and engineers need to think about before buying, from clarifying the real cost to defining essential features, plus the questions to ask vendors along the way.



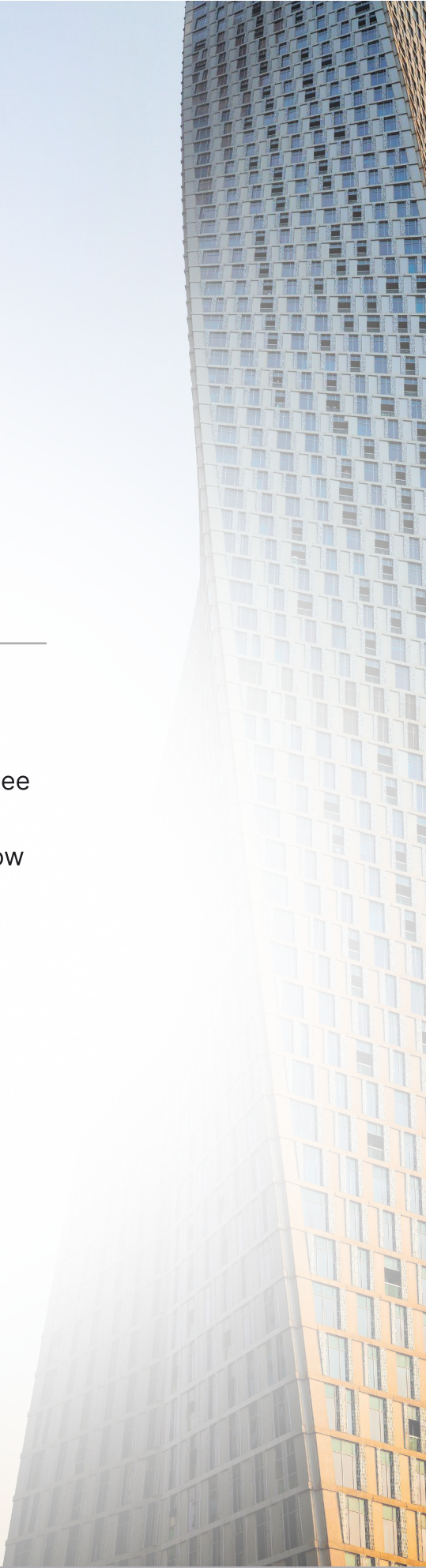
Download our free vendor evaluation scorecard to compare options side by side. Use it to track notes, grade vendors on your requirements, and find the best fit for your firm.

Download Scorecard



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CHAPTER 1:

The Real Cost Breakdown

Cost is always a major factor when choosing project management software.

The challenge is that it isn't as simple as the number you see on a subscription plan. You also need to weigh the time it takes to implement, the features you'll actually use, and how easily your team will adopt it. The wrong tool can end up costing far more in lost time, stalled projects, and missed opportunities to grow your firm.

Let's break down the real cost.

Looking Beyond the Subscription Fee

Make sure you're comparing software fairly. A complete system that manages your whole practice will usually cost more than a single app for timesheets or invoicing, but it also delivers much more. If you piece together several smaller apps, the subscription fees might look cheaper at first, but you also need to account for the extra time your team spends moving data between them or trying to make them work together.

It's not just about finding the software with the most features for the lowest price. Paying for tools you'll never use is wasted money, but having features your firm can grow into can be valuable. The right platform should support you today and give you the flexibility to adapt as your practice scales.

Another important factor is opportunity cost. Money spent on software is money you can't spend elsewhere, such as hiring, training, marketing, or upgrading design tools. The question isn't only "how much does this software cost?" but also "what are we giving up if we put that money here instead?" Over time, the value you gain or lose from that decision will matter far more than the first invoice.

In short, knowing the cost means looking beyond the subscription fee. Review how complete the solution is, how much of it you'll actually use, and what the investment could mean for your firm both now and in the future.

Weighing Cost Against Time Saved

Once you've looked at functionality and price, it's important to think about the cost of time.

Implementation usually involves three parts:

1. The expense of someone to install or set up the system.
2. The hours of downtime while data is migrated or the system is configured.
3. The time each employee spends learning how to use it.

Add those hours to the subscription or purchase cost to get the true investment. Then compare that total to the time you expect the software to save once it's in place.

If it cuts down on admin, speeds up reporting, or simplifies workflows, those savings often outweigh the upfront effort.

Questions to Ask Vendors About Cost

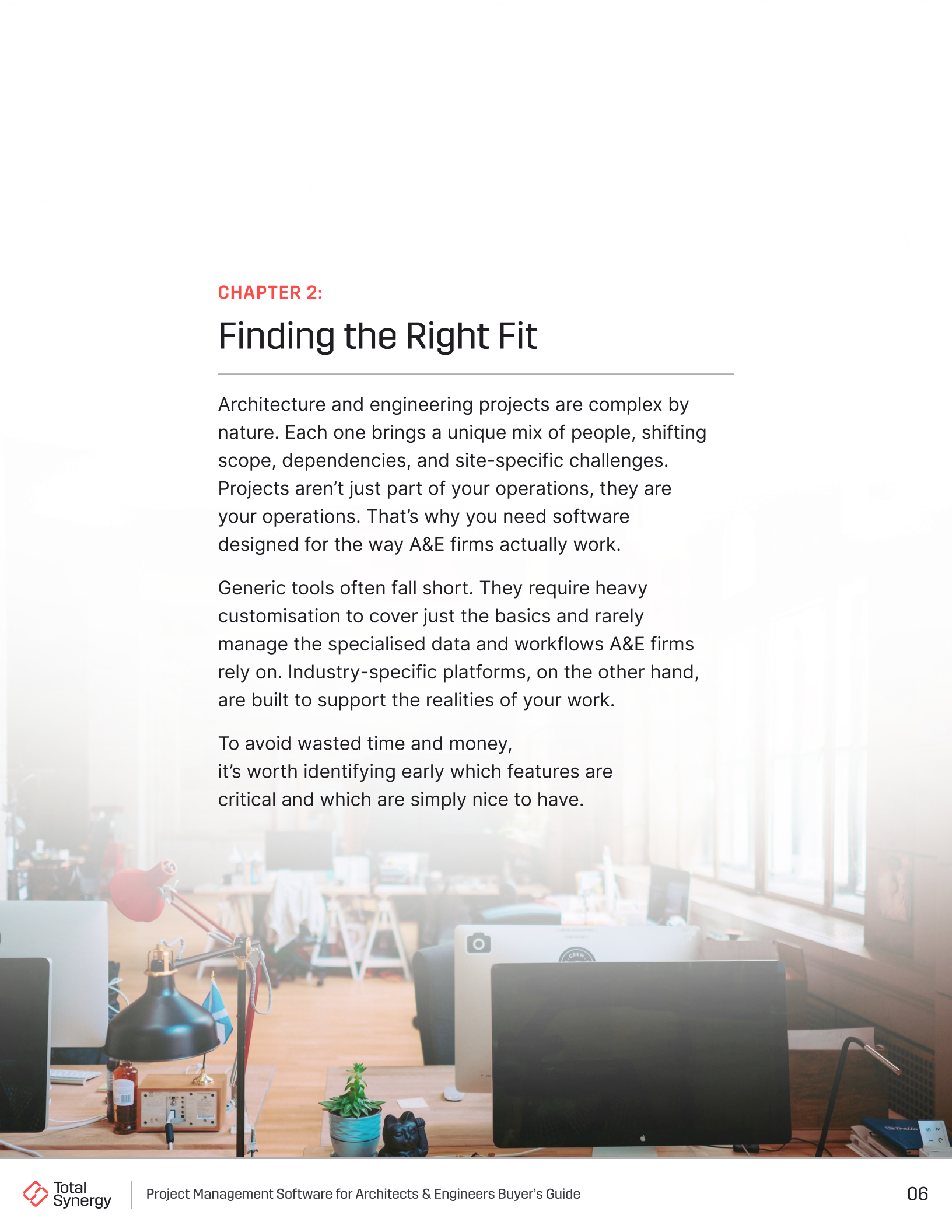
What's included in the subscription price and what isn't?

Are there extra fees for setup or training?

How do other customers measure ROI after implementation?

How often do you release updates, and are they included in the subscription cost?

What support is included in the subscription, and is there a cost for premium support?



CHAPTER 2:

Finding the Right Fit

Architecture and engineering projects are complex by nature. Each one brings a unique mix of people, shifting scope, dependencies, and site-specific challenges. Projects aren't just part of your operations, they are your operations. That's why you need software designed for the way A&E firms actually work.

Generic tools often fall short. They require heavy customisation to cover just the basics and rarely manage the specialised data and workflows A&E firms rely on. Industry-specific platforms, on the other hand, are built to support the realities of your work.

To avoid wasted time and money, it's worth identifying early which features are critical and which are simply nice to have.

Identifying the Features You Really Need

What problems are you looking to solve?

For architects and engineers, things like tracking project progress in real time, forecasting resources, keeping budgets under control, and making sure everyone has the right information at the right time are essentials.



Must-have features for A&E firms

Project scheduling

Resource planning and forecasting

Timesheets and time tracking

Budgeting, invoicing, and financial reporting

Document and version management

Dashboards that show project status at a glance with advances analytics

When you're clear on what's critical for your practice and what would just be convenient, you'll avoid paying for tools that look impressive but don't actually add value.

Questions to Ask Vendors About Features and Fit

Who is your software built for?

Which features are core to your system and which are add-ons?

How do you handle project scheduling, resource planning, and reporting?

Can the software track project progress in real time?

Which features do most of your A&E customers actually use?

What features are available now versus on your roadmap?

Flexibility & Integrations That Continue to Support You

No single platform can do everything, and that's expected. What matters is that your project management software handles your core workflows and connects easily with the other tools you rely on. Strong integrations save your team from wasted hours moving data between systems or patching together workarounds.

Flexibility also means access. Your team should be able to log in from anywhere and work together in real time. Cloud-based systems make this possible, giving architects and engineers the freedom to keep projects moving whether they're in the office, on site, or working remotely.

And then there's growth. As your firm takes on larger projects or new types of work, your software should scale with you. A rigid system that only fits your practice today will quickly become a barrier tomorrow. The right platform adapts to the way you work, not the other way around.

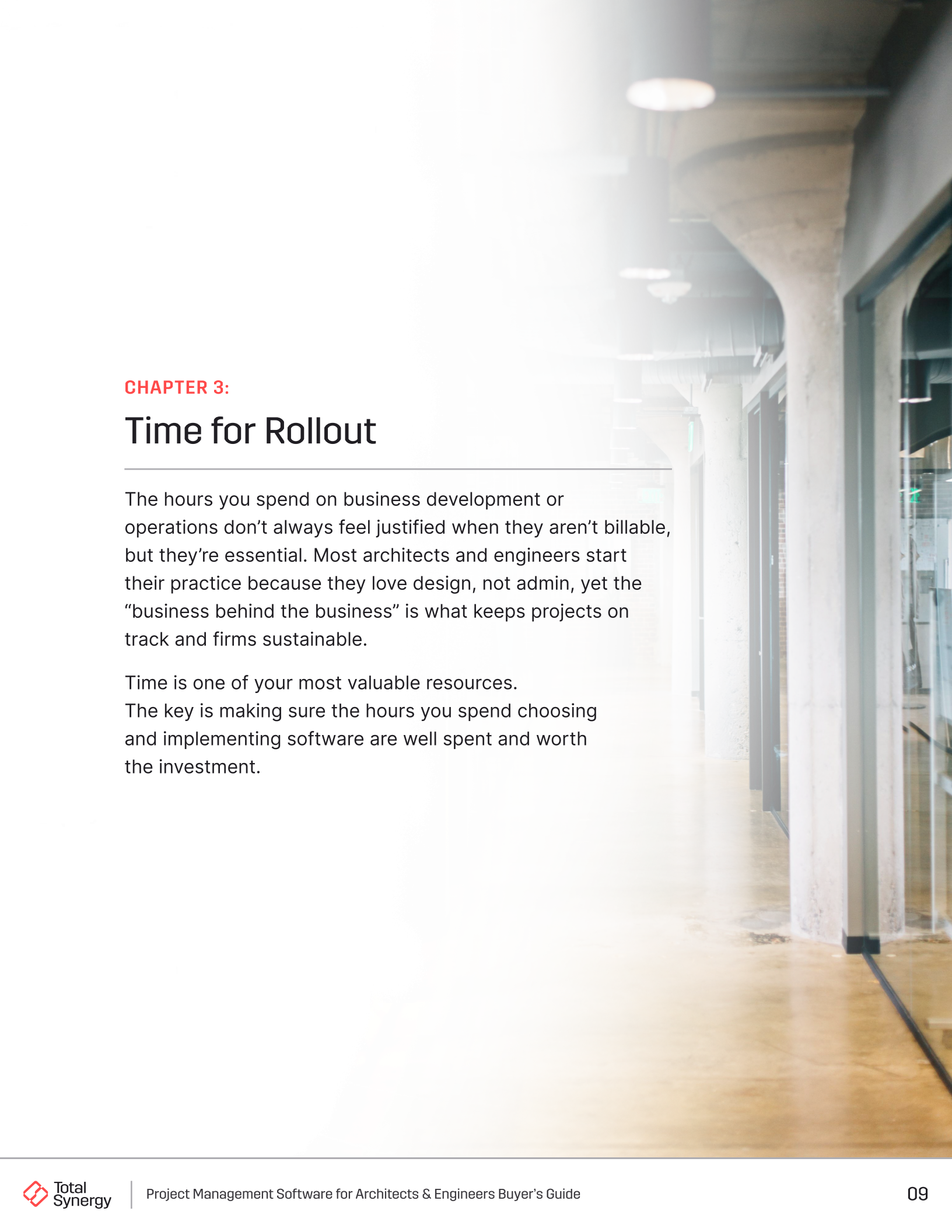
Questions to Ask Vendors About Flexibility & Integrations

Which tools does your software integrate with?

Is the system fully cloud-based, and can our team access it anywhere?

How does your software support collaboration across different locations?

Can the platform scale with us as we add more people, projects, or services?



CHAPTER 3:

Time for Rollout

The hours you spend on business development or operations don't always feel justified when they aren't billable, but they're essential. Most architects and engineers start their practice because they love design, not admin, yet the "business behind the business" is what keeps projects on track and firms sustainable.

Time is one of your most valuable resources.

The key is making sure the hours you spend choosing and implementing software are well spent and worth the investment.

Training & Support

When you're assessing software, don't overlook training and support. It can be tempting to figure things out yourself, but that usually costs more time than it saves and makes adoption harder for your team. Look for a vendor that offers support with setup, data migration, and onboarding, and make use of those services.

If the software is feature-rich enough to truly help your firm, you'll need guidance to get it running smoothly. That guidance should come from people who understand how architects and engineers work, not just how the software works. The right training gets your team using the system faster and ensures you make the most of its features.

It's also worth checking the resources a vendor provides like online help, documentation, videos, webinars, or community forums. The quality and clarity of these materials can give you a good sense of how easy it'll be to get answers when you need them.

Good training and support save senior staff from getting stuck in admin and free up more time for billable work or client relationships, time that matters most for your firm's growth.

Questions to Ask Vendors About Training & Support

What does implementation look like? How long does it take?

What services are included for setup, data migration, and onboarding?

Do you provide training tailored to architecture and engineering firms?

What types of resources are available (videos, documentation, webinars, community forums)?

How often are training materials updated, and are they easy to access?

What kind of ongoing support is included in the subscription?

Contracts & Commitments

Contracts are about more than cost, they are about time. If you are locked into the wrong system, you will waste both. Having to start the software search all over again a year or two down the road can be a major setback for your firm.

Most project management tools are sold in one of two ways:

1. Traditional Model

You pay a larger upfront fee, then add ongoing maintenance costs such as upgrades, servers, and IT support. This model can feel like a one-and-done purchase, but the long-term costs and lack of flexibility often make it harder to change course if the software does not fit.

2. Subscription Model

You pay incrementally, usually monthly or annually, with the option to scale your licenses up or down as your team grows or shrinks. If the software is not working for you, you can switch vendors without losing a huge upfront investment. Subscriptions are typically lower risk and easier to adapt as your needs evolve.

Taking the time to evaluate your options and train your team properly will save you headaches later and give you confidence the software can grow with your practice.

Questions to Ask Vendors About Contracts

What contract lengths do you offer?

What happens if we need to scale our licenses up or down?

Are there hidden costs, like implementation, maintenance, upgrades, or IT requirements, that we should plan for?

Next Steps

The right project management software should fit the way you work now and give you room to grow in the future. Cost and time matter, but the real value is in how well the system helps you deliver projects, keep your team aligned, and clients coming back.

The good news is that you don't have to make this decision alone. At Total Synergy, we work with architects and engineers every day and deeply understand the way they work. We'd love to talk with you about your software search and walk through the questions outlined in this guide.

Every firm's needs are different. Let's talk through yours together.

[Let's Chat](#)



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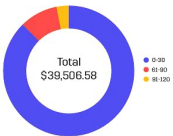
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Unlock the Full Potential of Your Projects with Total Synergy

Most engineers and architects didn't choose this career because they love timesheets and invoices. But tracking finances and managing projects is the difference between a thriving business and one that's constantly chasing its tail. Total Synergy gives you visibility, control, and confidence to run your architecture and engineering business and projects, without the admin headaches.

[Watch our 10-Minute Demo](#)



Project Management

Keep projects moving with clear milestones, task assignments, and timelines.

Track progress in real time and stay ahead of delays.

Collaborate with your team in one central workspace. No more disconnected tools.

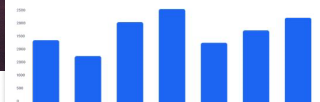
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Project Finance

Monitor budgets, forecasts, and cash flow in one place.

Speed up invoicing and improve accuracy with connected financial data.

Stay on top of profitability with clear, project-level cost insights.



Project Analytics

See how your projects, teams, and budgets are performing at a glance.

Identify trends, spot bottlenecks, and make data-backed decisions.

Customise dashboards to track what matters most to your firm.