Anyone reviewing their IT strategy would do well to consider an approach as radical today as it was at its conception, more than a decade ago.

How many times have you heard the phrase: ‘You simply can’t go wrong’? If you were in front of a salesperson, you might want to think twice before going anywhere near the ‘go’ button. But, what if you heard it from several of your peers in manufacturing businesses? You just might take notice, right?

Certainly, if you were anticipating a major upgrade to your ERP system in the next few months – and reviewing the functionality, platforms and technologies, required to align with the business strategy – such an unequivocal recommendation should make you sit up. But if, on making enquiries, you discovered that, instead of a price tag in the usual hundreds of thousands of pounds, you’d be looking at nothing more than a modest monthly subscription and no binding contract, you’d be forgiven for thinking: ‘This is too good to be true’.

Well, it’s not, and literally hundreds of manufacturers – from start-ups to organisations using more than 200 licences, and spanning industry sectors and production complexities – are quiet testament to an entirely different approach to extended ERP software that should be on your radar.

What does it work? Well, according to Gay Amoroso, pioneering managing director of 123 Insight, which offers this subscription-only ERP software, it’s been achieved by turning the business of ERP software on its head.

‘123 Insight revolutionises ERP/MRP system selection and implementation, because it completely avoids the pitfalls associated with traditional system adoption, both in terms of costs and timeframes’, he states. ‘We have no sales people and implementation is typically just a few weeks, with none of the extended training and consultancy days normally associated with an ERP implementation. In fact, it only normally takes a few days of training and no consultancy at all.’

What’s more, 123 Insight uses the latest Microsoft .Net framework – currently re-architected as a true cloud option on Microsoft Azure – and its adopters universally speak highly of the system.

Double Queen’s Award winning Ovation Systems, which is used for master data management, revision control and advanced BOM control. Again, the mechanism is the SDK, with assistance in this case from 123 Insight partner Solweb.

123 Insight uses the latest Microsoft .Net framework – currently being re-architected as a true cloud option on Microsoft Azure – and its adopters universally speak highly of the system.

Despite extra consulting days, Ovation continued to experience difficulties. ‘The final nail in the coffin came when we did the stock take at the beginning of 2013. It all went wrong, as there was a large amount of stock that was duplicated and put back into the system,’ he states, adding that serial numbers had been compromised, with the system effectively “breaking its own rules”.

Quite apart from that, Ovation operations director Jeremy Rowe states that the user interface was difficult to grasp, particularly for occasional users. The bottom line, he says, was that instead of helping the company, the system was an impediment to doing business. ‘When the time came to do our accounts and stock valuation for the end of 2012, it was very hard to reconcile what we had in stock versus what we knew we had [under 123 Insight]. And these were not small amounts – they were hundreds of thousands of pounds. You can’t tolerate that kind of uncertainty.’

So the brave and difficult decision was taken to abandon that system and revert to 123 Insight and Sage accounts, with data exchange between the two handled automatically by AAI (advanced accounts interface). “Since the reimplementation of 123 Insight we are very clear about our stock position,” says Rowe. And he states that, second time around, useful new features had been added with, for example, 123 Insight’s SDK allowing the firm to share data more easily across other systems, while the cloud-based Service and Repair system has enabled the build up of easily accessible product service histories.

Following go-live, day-to-day operations became much easier and more robust, says Wagerfield. ‘It was just a relief, really. The biggest issue was getting the test procedures in so we could perform online product testing. It was so seamless once we’d moved back to 123 Insight.’

And Rowe adds: ‘All repairs and refurbishments now go through Service and Repair. It’s very good at tracking, giving a permanent history of the lifecycle of a product once it’s been sold...information is automatically imported into Service and Repair with its own life, giving a service history as time goes by.’

Furthermore, the company is now linking 123 Insight to its OmniPDM (product data management) system, which is used for master data management, revision control and advanced BOM control. Again, the mechanism is the SDK, with assistance in this case from 123 Insight partner Solweb.

What did the new ERP system cost? Rowe smiles: £1,512 per month for fourteen 123 Insight licences and a further three Service and Repair licences. ‘This business could not run unless we had a system like 123 Insight.’

123 Insight uses the latest Microsoft .Net framework – currently being re-architected as a true cloud option on Microsoft Azure – and its adopters universally speak highly of the system.

www.123insight.com