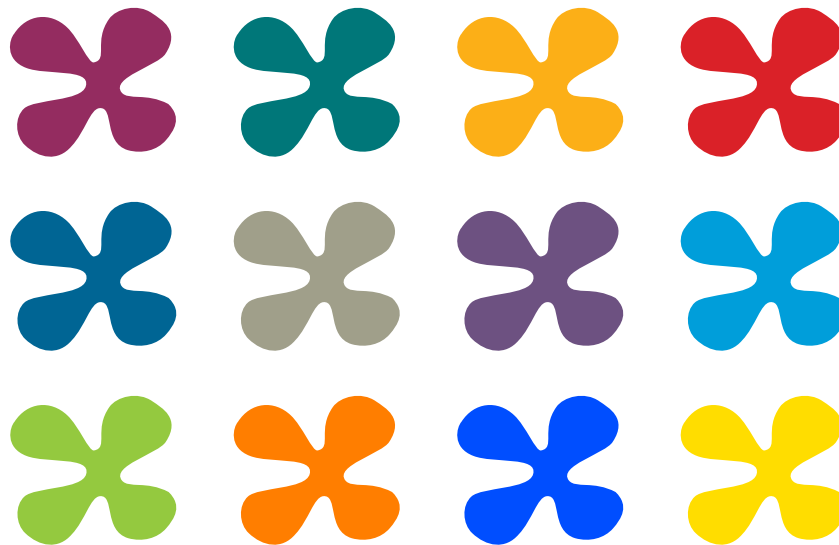


EMAIL ARCHIVING

Planning, policies and product selection

CHAPTER 6 Conducting an email-archiving RFP

- 05 Designing an RFP document
- 07 The RFP process
- 08 Working with vendors during the RFP process
- 10 Making a final email-archiving product selection



Understanding the vendor RFP process is key to getting the email-archiving product and price you want.

CHAPTER 6 | Conducting an email-archiving RFP

by Stephen Foskett and Kathryn Hilton

THE KEY TO buying an email-archiving system is developing a request for proposal, or RFP, that puts together the best deal for your organization. It may be surprising to find at the end of this process that the final choice was not the cheapest product or the frontrunner from the vendor selection process. Instead, the goal is to find an email-archiving product and a vendor that can serve the needs of your users for years to come.

After [narrowing down a list of vendors](#), it's time to proceed to the purchasing phase.

To make sure the best email-archiving system is purchased at the best price, the IT product team should issue an RFP. This process involves sharing your architecture and feature list with vendors, receiving their proposed configurations and pricing in return and then selecting a winner from the proposals. Although it sounds simple enough, an RFP can be quite complicated.

THIS CHAPTER WILL DETAIL EACH STEP IN THE RFP PROCESS:

- 1 Creating the request documents
- 2 Communicating with vendors
- 3 Reviewing proposals
- 4 Selecting an email-archiving system

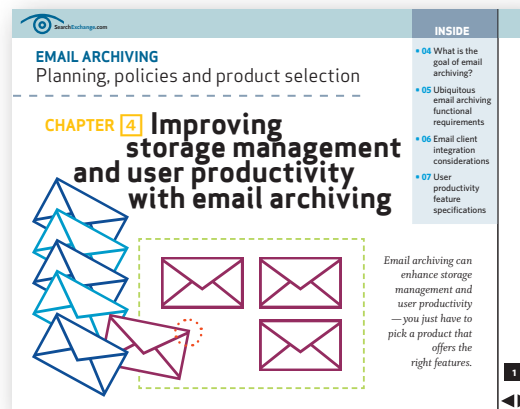
Before creating the RFP document, the project team must define the requirements, architecture and schedule for the email-archiving system it wants. Writing the RFP document before these elements are solidified will make it extremely difficult to rate vendor responses and select the most appropriate product.

As detailed in [Chapter 4](#) and [Chapter 5](#), defining the specifications, requirements and architecture particular to your email-archiving system are critical to help the vendors respond with a list of comparable features.

It's important to nail down a schedule for your RFP process — from creating the request to implementing the system. Make sure to give the vendors four weeks or more to receive and reply to the RFP. Plan for an additional two weeks

for product presentations, question-and-answer sessions and final negotiations. Contracts will likely take a few more weeks to finalize. Keep in mind that pilot implementation of an email-archiving system could take two to four weeks, and full integration and documentation could take several months.

The goal is to find an email-archiving product and vendor that can serve your needs for years to come.

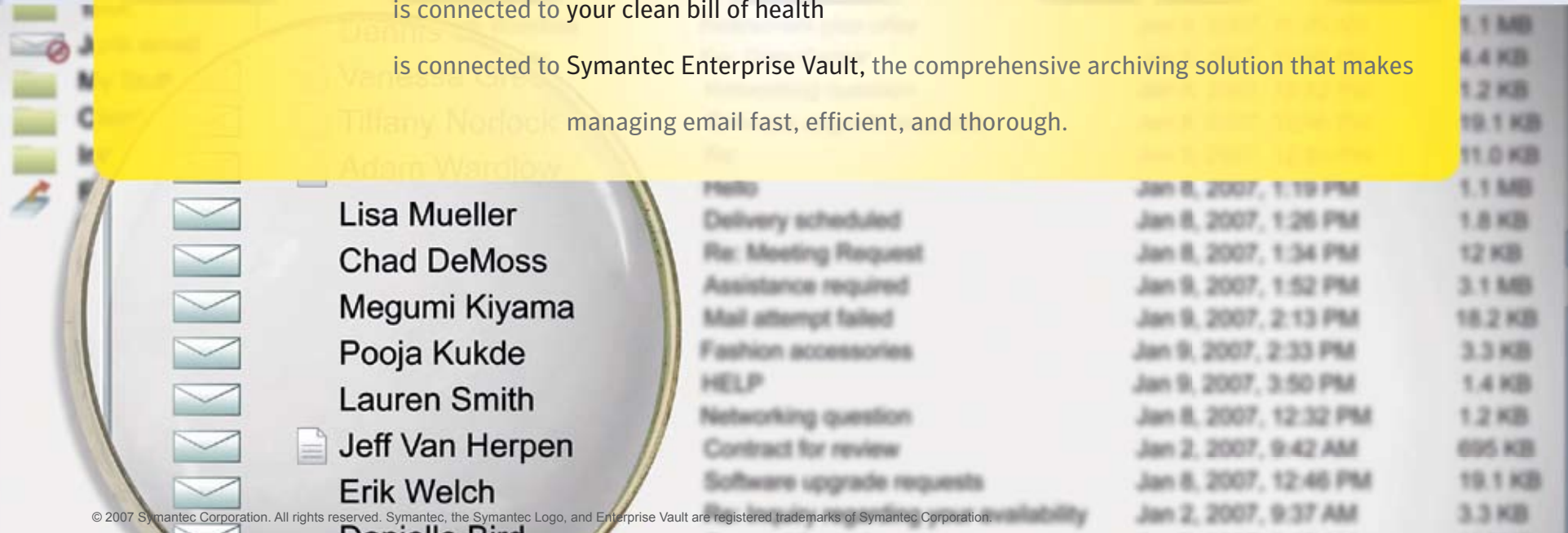


Read Chapter 4 (above) and Chapter 5 (right) to learn how to determine your hardware, software and feature requirements.





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 is connected to your clean bill of health
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Designing an RFP document

Attention to detail helps improve the quality of an RFP document, and that will have a tremendous impact on the final project outcome. This section reviews the key elements typically found in an RFP document. Straying significantly from this format may cause confusion on the part of vendors.



Be as specific as possible about your business requirements, especially if there are service-level objectives to be met.

INTRODUCTION — This part of the document introduces your company and frames your requirements for an email-archiving system in business terms. This section should be a high-level overview consisting of only a few pages. System details should be reserved for the subsequent sections.

Include an overview of your business and IT organization, especially if portions are outsourced, handled via a different division or otherwise managed in an unusual way.

Next, give an overview of the type of system you want. Include the email infrastructure and business requirements for retention. Introduce the reference architecture in this part of the document and specify any unusual elements. Also list any significant

changes that the company expects to make over the next few years.

Finally, outline the process for this particular RFP. Highlight any important dates or deadlines, and spell out the rules of communication that should be followed.

BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS — Detail the business requirements for your email-archiving system. Try to be as specific as possible, especially if there are service-level objectives to be met. Additionally, make sure each requirement is listed separately and not mixed with another. Each objective needs to be articulated well in terms of communicating the needs of the business for email archiving.

In writing this section, keep in mind those features that are absolutely required and those that are negotiable. Although weighting some

In the final analysis, the least expensive or the most technologically advanced options may not be the correct choice.

features over others may not be included in the RFP document itself, it will be important when selecting a final product. At the end of the business requirements section, include a table or checklist of business needs. Give each requirement a line item number to assist responders.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS — This section should be composed of three primary elements:

- ① **An overview of the current email infrastructure, including hardware and software specifics, as well as message volume and storage needs**
- ② **The technical architecture developed in response to the business needs, including any specific functions that are required from your email-archiving system**
- ③ **Any expected changes to the technical environment over the next few years**

Again, be specific and explicit, and do not mix requirements together. Include a table or checklist with numbers assigned to each line item. Consider which items are negotiable.

The RFP process

This section provides the specific information needed to respond to your RFP.

THE RFP SCHEDULE — Include specific dates for these important milestones:

- RFP initiation and transmission
- Intent to respond deadline
- Clarification question deadline
- Clarification response date
- Written response deadline
- Demonstration dates and times
- Expected date of vendor selection

CONTACT INFORMATION — Include the following information:

- Primary contact name
- Telephone number
- Email address
- Mailing address
- Fax number

RFP GROUND RULES — Although they can vary greatly from organization to organization, the rules below can be considered best practice for any RFP:

- **Direct that all communication must go through the primary contact.**
- **Specify how and when clarification questions will receive a response.**
- **Make sure responders know that not all vendors will be invited to demonstrate their products.**
- **Require that final responses are substantially complete and may not change after they are received.**
- **Let vendors know that substantial deviations from the reference architecture will not be considered.**
- **Specify that no component will be explained anywhere in the response if it is not included in the line-item pricing.**

RESPONSE FORMAT — Explain how responses should be structured. The following elements should be included:

- **Vendor and product introductions**
- **Answers to each business or technical requirement line item to show that the solution meets the needs specified**
- **Line-item pricing for features, with optional components noted**
- **At least three customer references**
- **Answers to qualifying questions**
- **Additional information and background documentation**

QUALIFYING QUESTIONS — Create a set of qualification questions that must be answered by every responding vendor. Some topics in an email-archiving RFP can include the following:

- **Company health, including financials, litigation, layoffs or executive turnover**
- **Partnerships and “go-to-market” model**
- **The means by which services and support are provided**
- **List of primary competitors for email-archiving systems**

Working with vendors during the RFP process

In the final RFP package, include a cover letter, the RFP document and any supporting materials. The cover letter should identify the project, outline the schedule and give contact information because many RFPs may already be in progress between your company and the prospective vendors at any given time. Send the RFP package to each of the vendors that have been identified at the same time to ensure a level playing field for all.

THE RFP SCHEDULE should include a date by which vendors must notify the company if they intend to respond. As this date approaches, keep an eye out for vendor intent communications. If any vendors are missing by the response date, contact the vendors to determine whether

their lack of response is an oversight. It is likely a few vendors will drop out after seeing the requirements and schedule. The intent-to-respond communication will also establish a primary contact with each vendor for the duration of the RFP process.

Many of the vendors will request a nondisclosure or proprietary information agreement to be signed. Any agreements should be reviewed by your company's legal staff before they are signed.

Your company may not be legally obligated to keep the contents of vendor responses confidential, but vendors might expect it to do so. Many vendors will require this agreement as part of their response process.

Although the selection committee will be communicating with vendors, no vendor should be given an unfair advantage. Ensure that all communications are logged and saved and that the content of the RFP and each vendor's responses are not discussed.

Any communication that might give one vendor an advantage over another should immediately be shared with the rest of the vendors. To do that, it is important that strict rules be established for communication between participating vendors and the selection group. Notify others within your company that they should not talk about the RFP



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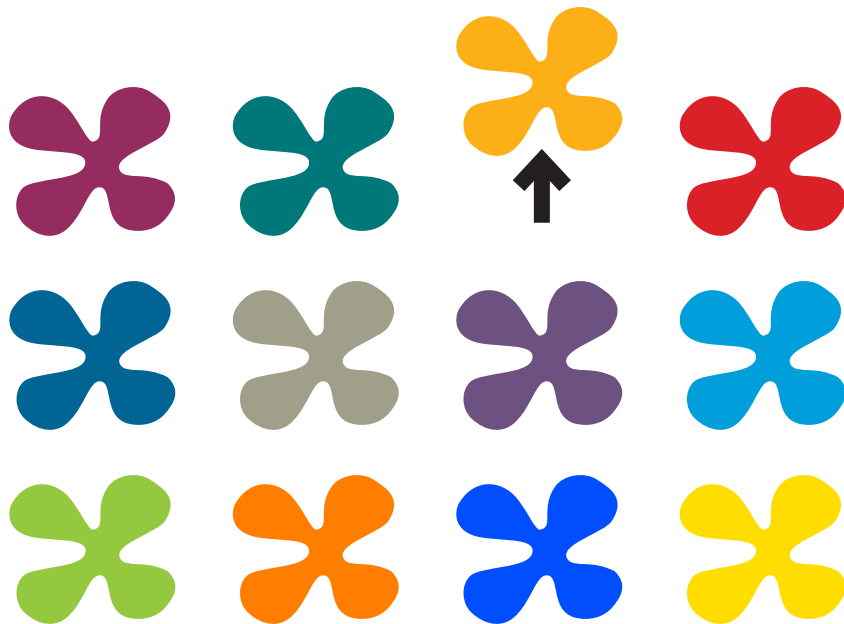
Some vendors may request pre-meetings to discuss the objectives or schedule, but you should avoid these. Instead, suggest a conference call or email broadcast to all vendors to respond to concerns or questions. Make sure that a single email address and telephone number is given to all participants and that no outside communications will be allowed — especially if these might appear to go around the RFP process.

As the final response date approaches, check with vendors to determine if they will be able to respond on time. Some vendors may drop out of the process if they have not been able to provide a satisfactory response. If your list of prospects has dwindled, it may be appropriate to extend the response deadline for all. However, avoid an extension in the last days because this would be unfair to those who were able to meet the deadline.

If the final number of responses is unacceptably low, the entire RFP should be canceled and reissued, perhaps after finding out why there was a minimal response rate.

Making a final email-archiving product selection

Once the responses are in, it's time to select the best product. In the final analysis, the least expensive or the most technologically advanced options may not be the correct choice. A combination of objective metrics and subjective feelings should push one or two products to the top of the list. When that happens, a recommendation to purchase can be made.



WHEN SORTING THROUGH the responses for the first time, a few responses will stand out for their professionalism, low price and completeness. The opposite extreme is also likely, with a few responses totally missing the mark.

Do not necessarily accept or reject one response over another based on initial feelings, however. More investigation may reveal a subtlety or even an error that may change the picture. Create a matrix of response evaluations. Weigh the responses according to the criteria developed earlier and sort the vendors by these objective criteria.

Now is the time to contact the references provided by the vendors. Although a hand-picked reference list may

be universally positive, it is not always the case. Probing questions can sometimes reveal a great deal about the true nature of each product, as well as the vendor's organizational support. Ask objective questions about the number of support calls required for installation and configuration, the number of successful recoveries attempted, and any additional purchases needed.

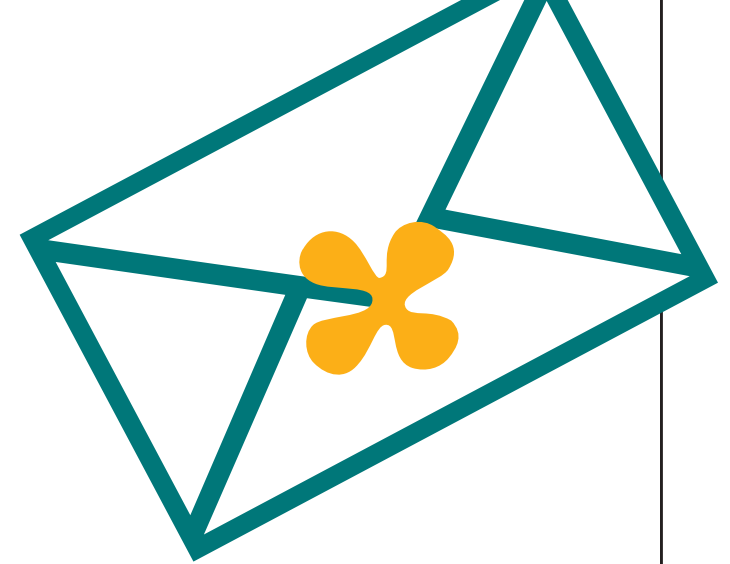
Once all of the vendor responses have been examined, a final recommendation can be made. Contact any vendors that clearly did not make the cut and thank them for participating in the process, but keep the top runner-up in reserve in case negotiations with the winner falter. Talk about any changes to the winning system and request a final price quote. Negotiations will probably continue but do not allow major variances from

the RFP.

Once you have the final quote in hand, the difficult process of integration begins. Pilot tests will be needed to prove that the system works as expected. Final deployment will likely take place in phases, and policies may change as the system gets up and running.

The last step in the RFP process is user education. Make your users aware of all the functions that are possible with the new email-archiving system, and make sure they are trained in its daily use.

Don't forget about auditing your new email-archiving system periodically to ensure that it is meeting your expectations. By following all these steps, you'll have a system that meets your company's needs for years to come.



A combination of objective metrics and subjective feelings will push one or two products to the top of the list.

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