

Words to Live By

Don Farber, Vineyardsoft Corporation

*"I don't know
what I need to know."*

It's a funny little sentence, but it's amazing how often I hear it. Especially with the proliferation of business intelligence (BI) software solutions, today's workers have greater and greater abilities to analyze their data, if only they knew what they were looking for.

Being in the BI business, I am often asked questions such as "what are some of the key things that people want to monitor in their ERP systems?" Having some standard answers such as "invoices that are overdue to payment", "stock that is running low", and "clients who have not purchased in x days" are helpful, but only to a certain degree. What a manager really wants to ask me is "what are the key things within our ERP environment that we should be monitoring?"

Of course since I don't know the detailed workings of their organization and its underlying processes, that's a question that never gets asked of me.

But it should.

Because I can answer it.

Despite the fact that I may never have stepped foot (or virtual foot) in a particular organization, I can help their staff identify what kinds of critical conditions they need to monitor for. And that's because I'm able to identify the key words and phrases that get used by an organization's staffers when they're looking for 'what they need to know.'

There are, in fact, eight 'types' of critically important ERP related business conditions that reveal themselves in the everyday conversations that you hear around your office. These eight types of ERP-related business conditions have very specific words that accompany them, and if you train yourself to listen for these words, you'll have an immediate jump on identifying what it is 'you need to know.'

The Eight Conditions

And The Corresponding Words You Need To Listen For

Date-Sensitive Conditions

You'll hear words such as "due", "overdue", "today", "tomorrow", "next week", "ends", "expiring", and "missed". (e.g., deliveries due this week; invoices overdue)

Approaching Thresholds

Typically expressed using "nearing", "more than", "less than", "above", "below", "close to", and "over". (e.g., more than 6 late deliveries; nearing their credit limit)

Inactivity

Almost always is heard using the phrase "has not" or "is not" and indicates something that should have happened but hasn't. (e.g., a client who has not ordered in the last 30 days)

Exceptions to Normal Business

You'll hear the words "over" or "under" as well as the word "too" as in "too many", "too few", "too much", or "too little". (e.g., gross profit under 20%)

'Bad Data' Conditions

Most commonly identified by the words "missing", "erroneous", "invalid", "duplicate", or "incomplete". (e.g., a vendor missing their email address)

Trend Analysis

Usually this occurs in phrases such as "compared with", "is increasing", "is decreasing", or "has stopped". (e.g., product sales dropped 30% this month compared to last)

Inconsistent Data

Often heard in phrases such as "doesn't make sense" or "doesn't go together", and in the statement "that's not right". (e.g., customer on hold in ERP; not on hold in CRM)

Changes to Sensitive Data

This condition is often identified by the initial words "We need to know when someone changes...". (e.g., a change made to a customer's credit limit)

So before you decide to evaluate any reporting, business intelligence, or data monitoring & response solutions, take a few minutes to think back on your daily business activities and to the conversations that you've had with your colleagues and management. Or, just start listening to those conversations a little more carefully and take note of when the above words and phrases appear.

After all, once you identify what conditions and activities you need to know about, you can better identify the prospective software solutions that will keep you 'in the know'.