OnBoard
Board Management Software

Board Management Software
Buyer's Guide

PASSAGEWAYS

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Introduction

Introduction: Happy To Have You Here

We're here to help you navigate the often-confusing world of board management software. The goal here is for you to walk away informed. Equipped with the knowledge of what board software does, who it's for, why it's important, and how to fairly make the case that your work would be strengthened by having one.

Throughout this guide, we'll take a holistic look at board management software and how it can help you. We aim to help you navigate and make sense of a market populated with providers who don't make it particularly clear what sets them apart.

Here's What to Expect

- We'll start with a big-picture idea of how board management software works and who it's for.

- At the start of every section, you'll find a summary of the most important topics and guidance on how to evaluate board software.

- We'll first turn to the specifics of the technology, the features, security, and accessibility you should demand.

- Taking a turn toward director usability and accessibility, we'll explore why board member adoption is vital and why design matters when getting directors using a product.

- An open secret is that directors remain resistant to technology. We'll guide you through the most common mistakes providers make and what to look for to guarantee your board actually uses a solution.

- We'll examine the business case for the software, equipping you to make the case during budget season by exploring the hidden costs of staying with the status quo

- We'll look at how to choose a vendor, how to understand their differences, and even let you in on an industry secret.

We'll do our best here to be in-depth but pithy. If there's ever a section you'd like more information on – or there's just a question that pops into your head – please don't hesitate to pick up the phone can call us at 765.535.1882 or email us at more@passageways.com. So let's jump right into it.

A Quick Note: this buyer's guide is intended to be accessible to everyone no matter their job title, written in plain English. Much to our irritation, the industry is rich with jargon, starting with just the product category name. If you talk to friends or explore sites like Capterra, you'll see and hear the terms "Board Management Software," "Board Portal," "Board Meeting Software," and "Board Governance Software." Each of these names means the exact same thing. It's one single product category of software that's designed to enrich the board meeting life-cycle.

Chapter 1
Board Management Software, Explained

Board Management Software, Explained

Board management software is a secure environment for administrators and board directors to access meeting materials, communicate with each other, and execute their governance responsibilities. By combining new mobile hardware with rapidly improving cloud technology, board management software replaces the old regime of paper, printing, and emails.

To do this, two distinct sets of tools exist, one for the administrative staff who run the entire process behind the scenes and the other for the board members who make the critical decisions. Board management software simplifies every step of the Board Meeting Life-Cycle.

Before the Meeting

- Before everything gets hectic, administrators can organize information, upload minutes, check director availability, and dynamically update information.

- As the board or committee date inches closer, reports are distributed to the board. The administrator then compiles that information into an agenda, invites directors, and publishes the board book.

- Directors receive the board book and begin their review. They can annotate and share their notes, review past materials, reference documents, and chat with their colleagues.

During the Meeting

- Directors arrive and find there's no last-minute changes or surprises. The meeting starts, and one-tap navigation between sections keeps the meeting on track.

- As decisions are made, directors can vote within the app, sign paperwork, set deadlines, assign tasks, and follow up on outstanding questions.

After the Meeting

- Reminders and notifications provide directors an alert when there are outstanding tasks like a document that needs an eSignature, to cast votes on open approvals, and respond to surveys.

- Every action, every attendance report, and each upload is tracked to ensure governance compliance.

This workflow, coupled with stringent security measures, is the bare minimum for any solution to be considered board management software. With that in mind, there's a lot more board management software can and should do. So let's look specifically at the technology you should expect from any provider.

Chapter 2
Features & Capabilities

Summary

1. Board software must contain the tools to improve the director review processes. That means looking for **shareable annotations**, **always up-to-date and synced materials**, **and calendars**.

2. Your directors must be able to work from **anywhere and on any mobile device**: **ensure iPhone, iPad, and Android compatibility.**

3. Board software needs a complete set of governance capabilities between meetings like **eSignatures**, **Voting**, **and Surveys**.

4. It'd be a tragic mistake if administrators find that board software takes more time than paper. Demand a **drag-and-drop agenda and board book builder, complete file support, and a resource library.**

5. Administrators need to manage a lot and that includes compliance. It's why your board software needs **Granular User Access Controls.**

Features & Capabilities

We're going to move fast here and try our best not to be repetitive. But there's a lot you should expect from board management software. Your investment is obviously about more than features, but demanding functionality that touches on every moment in the board meeting life-cycle is critical to justify your investment. Moreover, the security necessary to shield your materials from bad actors and careless mistakes must be comprehensive in scope.

Directors Features

- **Any Device Access.** Directors should be able to read, review, annotate, and chat, on any device they already know how to use. Technology is often a hurdle for this demographic, so placing the additional barrier of learning an entirely new operating system is one step too far.

- **Notes & Annotations.** To effectively review for the meeting, directors need tools to mark-up their board books with notes, questions, and highlight important information. Those notes should sync to every device so when they leave the office, everything is available right on their smartphone.

- **Always Up-To-Date Meeting Materials.** Directors should never wonder whether they have the latest version of the materials. They should expect that the moment they open the board book, it's the most current information and its ready for their review.

- **Meeting Calendar.** To stay organized, directors must have an easy way to see what meetings are coming up and when. They should also have the ability to access previous meetings to review prior decisions, notes, and materials.
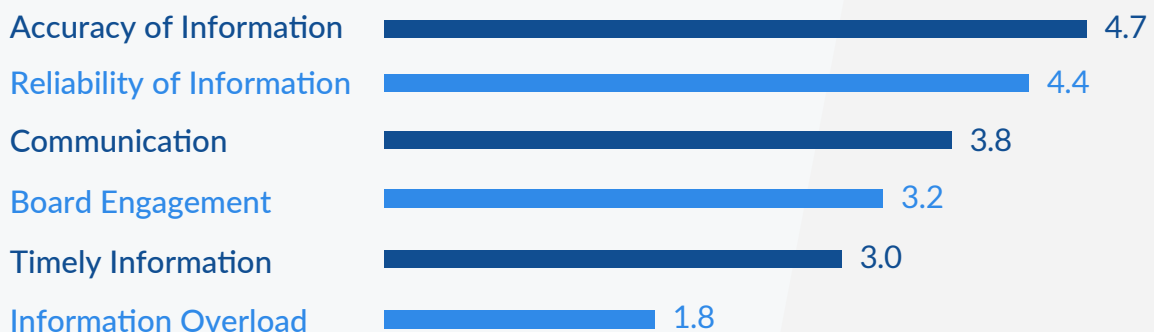
- **Document Archive.** Not only should old board books be available for ongoing review, but vital documents like the bylaws, annual financial reports, and committee assignments should be housed within the board software for quick and easy retrieval.

- **Secure Chat**. Directors should be able to start a conversation about anything right in the same app that houses the board book – so that when finance committee begins their review, the CFO is just a tap away to answer any questions.

- **eSignatures.** Board management software should allow directors to govern outside the boardroom. If a document demands a signature, it should provide them all the context they need to make a decision and tap to sign.

- **Approvals.** Voting from anywhere empowers organizations to safeguard their compliance by keeping digital records of each action the board takes. This provides value when an authorization is on a short deadline and when an action must be taken on a time-sensitive matter.

- **Multi-Board Support.** Directors rarely serve on just a single board, so board management software should allow them to do board work across organizations with a single login.

- **Offline Access.** Whether in the air or a thousand miles from land, directors must be able to continue their work and expect their actions and annotations to sync when they re-establish an internet connection.

- **Biometric Security.** Only the appropriate members and support staff of the board should have access to the meeting materials. Board software should explicitly require a thumbprint or facial recognition to gain access to materials.

- **Two-Factor Authentication.** Board software should enable organizations to require a second PIN texted to the director's phone, before regaining access.

Information Reliability, a Pressing Challenge

In a recent survey we asked board directors to assess most common challenges they face. Information Reliability and Accuracy was the most common problem – one that the right board management software is uniquely suited to help them overcome.

Please rate the following challenges your board has faced in the past year. (7 as the most challenging)

Challenge	Rating
Accuracy of Information	4.7
Reliability of Information	4.4
Communication	3.8
Board Engagement	3.2
Timely Information	3.0
Information Overload	1.8

Administrator Features

- **Agenda Clone.** Most board meeting agendas look strikingly similar. That's why administrators should be able to copy an old agenda, and then begin to fill it with new reports and documents.

- **Intuitive Drag-and-Drop Control.** Creating a board book and agenda should only take a few minutes — a half-hour tops. That means board management software must make it super easy to drag a file from the desktop and place it in the agenda.

- **Board Book Builder.** The heart of board management software involves taking all of the disparate report; PDFs, PowerPoints, and Excel sheets, and quickly compiling them into one final document to be shared with the entire board.

- **Instant Update.** When the CFO sends a revised financial statement the night before the meeting, updating the board book and agenda should be as easy as replacing the file and sending out a brief notification.

- **Resource Center.** Administrators should be able to craft a file structure to organize information for themselves and the board – a place to archive and reference mission-critical documents, old meeting minutes, and process notes.

- **Complete File Compatibility**. Board management software should never make you stop and ask whether this file will work. Everything –Word documents, PDFs, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint decks, Google Docs, YouTube videos, and more should all be able to be dropped right into the agenda and then exported into the master board book.

- **Auto-Save.** The devastation of losing all your progress is such a heart-wrenching experience. No one should never worry about that with board management software. It should save as you go, so there's never a risk.

- **Surveys & Questionnaires.** Whether you need to conduct a board evaluation survey or determine the location for the next board meeting, administrators should expect board management software to let them quickly gather information to fulfill their responsibilities.

- **Granular User Access Controls.** Keeping compliant means administrators need a straightforward way to exclude directors who have a conflict of interest from seeing meeting materials. Board management software should provide a complete tool kit for administrators to provision access.

Chapter 3
Board Software Security

Summary

1. The most secure board management software technology protects your data with **RSA 4096-bit** and **AES-256** encryption.

2. You want board management software built on **Microsoft Azure, the gold-standard in cloud-security**. A serious warning is a vendor who builds and manages their own servers – there's no way to verify the security.

3. Demand proof of external audits and compliance with standards ike SOC-2 and HIPAA.

4. Your vendor needs to ensure your data is backed up in multiple locations, to ensure that if the worst happens, your data is safe.

Security

There may be no more significant an asset than the trust of ones customers. Reputation. That's why it's surprising that people frequently underestimate the value of security – reputation. Because the unauthorized release of confidential board information can instantly impact an organization's financial position and brand.

For example, a survey by Javelin Strategy & Research reported that 25% of consumers would seek to sever business ties if an organization's data was breached. Add in the opportunity cost of lost acquisitions and legal actions, and not only is your reputation in shatters, but so is your business.

The security of board materials is often a blind spot for organizations before looking at board management software. They know security is important but not how or why. Many teams under-appreciated just how risky email and file sharing remain, especially for documents containing sensitive information.

Whether it's an email breach or a hacker tricking a hapless person into giving them their password, there are major information security vulnerabilities across thousands of organizations that aren't taken seriously until it's too late.

That's why when you're evaluating providers, several questions need to be answered about their infrastructure, data integrity, external audits, and their security teams.

Security Features

- **Encryption.** There are two central types of encryption buyer's need to be aware of: how data is stored when no one is accessing it (at-rest encryption), and how data is encrypted when it's sent from the server to a device (in-transit encryption). What you're looking for from a board software provider is data that's encrypted with RSA 4096-bit standard in transit and AES-256 encryption for data at rest.

- **Infrastructure & Cloud Security.** The infrastructure that delivers data over the cloud is vital to keeping your secure. Broadly, board management software is built upon either a major cloud provider or the vendor creates and hosts their own data-centers. Major cloud providers include Microsoft Azure, the gold-standard in cloud-security and Amazon Web Services (AWS). Think of Azure the enterprise-grade provider, the Microsoft team is laser focused on keeping secure and without breach. While AWS is focused on start-ups and consumer needs. Finally, a vendor created cloud should raise warning flags – there's no way to tell who or what has access to your data, no way to verify the security. Worst of all, if the vendor built their own data centers, it will by design be more expensive – there's no scale. Be wary, you don't want to pay more for less security.

- **Data Replicability and Integrity**. A significant problem faced by on-premises installations is the threat of lost data. Whether a flood takes out a server or a power-surge wipes a hard drive, data backups are central to maintaining a permanent record of board activity. That's why buyers should look for providers who regularly replicate data in a secondary region. That could mean having a server in New York and Chicago or L.A. and Berlin. The overarching goal is to keep the data geographically dispersed so that an isolated disaster doesn't become a crisis for your compliance.

- **Penetration Testing.** Vendors hire outside firms to do something called ethical hacking. They ask the firms to see if they can get into their systems and breach dummy data. Any vendor worth their salt will have at least an annual penetration test performed to guarantee their systems are secure.

- **External Audits.** It's critical that any vendor you select has undergone extensive external audits. Those audits are conducted by third-party providers and look at the procedures, controls, and security practices of the board management software firm. They focus on availability, security, privacy, confidentiality, and system integrity. The gold-standard is a SOC 2 certification that assures buyers the product will meet their compliance or IT governance requirements. However, you should ask any vendor about a range of compliance standards including, GLBA, FERPA, HIPAA, FISMA, ISO 27001/27002, SOC 2, SOC 3, SSAE 16/ISAE 3402. All those letters and numbers mean the vendor has opened their processes up for external review and has therefore proven that its system is designed to keep its clients' sensitive data secure over time.

- **People.** The effectiveness of any security system cannot rise above the integrity and ethical values of the people who create, administer, and monitor them. Integrity and ethical values are essential elements of any security environment, affecting the design, administration, and monitoring of other components. It means that management has considered and removed incentives and temptations that might prompt personnel to engage in dishonest, illegal, or unethical acts.

The security of a vendor is a critical part of your evaluation cycle. Research, ask pointed questions about their encryption, their audit history, and how well their employees understand their responsibility to be effective stewards of information security.

Chapter 4
Director Adoption & User Experience

Summary

1. Too many meetings today are essentially lectures. But **when everyone is using board software, when materials are distributed far in advance** and directors are invested in reviewing materials on their own terms, **meetings become strategic and forward looking.**

2. Too often board software is difficult to use – **challenging enough that many return to printing. This is a damning consequence of a poor user experience.**

3. You need a **board management vendor** who has actually spent time with real directors, **who has made their product for an older demographic.**

4. Demand that your board software be **easy for every person,** no matter their age. **Demand In-App Guides and complete device compatibility.**

Director Adoption & User Experience

Board members aren't technology savants, they look at software with intense skepticism. Yet it's only by overcoming this barrier that the full force of board management software can be unleashed. That's why the user experience is so important, because if everyone just goes back to printing, you're left with nothing. And what's even the point of purchasing board management software if it's not going to be used?

So why is adoption essential and how can you identify board management software that's well-designed for every day directors? Here's how.

Why You Need Complete Adoption of Board Software.

Director adoption of board management software can fundamentally improve your meeting outcomes. When board member are together, well prepared, and ready to deliberate the organization's strategy, an entire new kind of meeting takes shape.

The problem is that paper and email has left us all complacent – we accept that most meetings will be tedious affairs. A place where presentations are given, people are talked at, and everyone leaves tired, with a sense that little was accomplished.

Board management software can flip this whole process on its head. But only when everyone is happily leveraging the software. When materials are distributed far in advance and directors are invested in reviewing materials on their own terms, meetings become actual collaborative efforts — a place to make important decisions and think about the long-term health of the organization.

With full adoption, the whole board is prepared to discuss, brainstorm, and problem-solve. Having digested the facts of the meetings in advance, attendees arrive ready to make smarter, more strategic, and timelier decisions.

But too often, board software vendors make their products difficult to use. They aren't made with an older demographic in mind. Everything is too complicated. Nothing is where it should be. It doesn't work on a favorite laptop. And as a result, maybe half the board uses it and the other half continues to demand a printed version be mailed to their homes. And if you find yourself in this precarious position, you'd have to wonder what the point of board software even is?

This is a damning consequence of a poor user experience.

User Experience

It's an open secret that directors remain hesitant about technology. And it's no wonder why, they are an older demographic that didn't spend their careers behind a computer screen. But it can be overcome. An intuitive board management experience demands vendors spend substantial time with real board directors. It means designing a solution that puts essential information like upcoming meetings front and center, creating in-app guides, and making the software work on every device directors already know how to use.

When evaluating a user experience that's most likely to drive adoption and make directors happy, here are the most important considerations.

Clear Layout, Designed For People with Limited Technology Experience. You should look for vendors who have actually spent time with real directors. Yes, that means an older demographic who can find technology challenging to use. Silicon Valley tech investors don't need hand-holding; they intuitively understand software. But for everyone else, the 99.95% of board members who are seasoned professionals – and not programmers – it means creating a product that just works.

Optimism About Technology

During our recent survey of board leaders with Avannis, the results showed hope and eagerness about technologies place in the boardroom.

Looking forward, I think that board meeting technology will become

88% More Important

When they pick it up everything is easily organized and it's simply easy to explain that –
*'here are your meetings, and when you click on the meeting the agenda opens, and then the big
download board book button is right there. Use your finger to make notes or type by pressing the
keyboard button'* That's how humans get software. Good design makes trepidation melt
away.

 What you want is a provider who thought deeply about how an older demographic uses
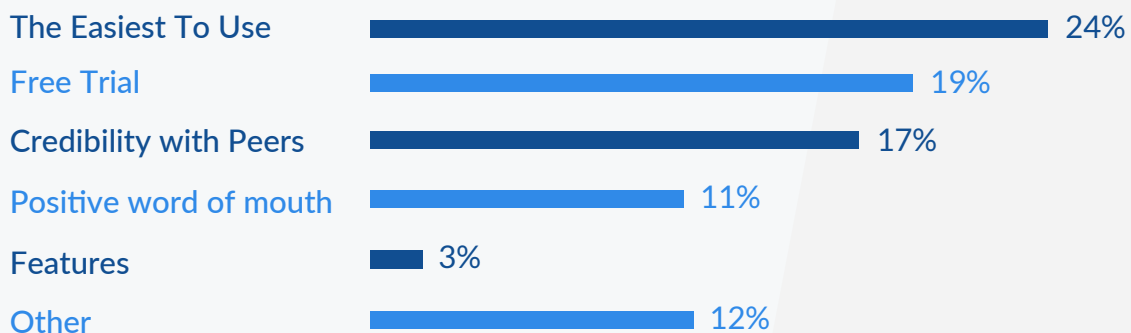software, what's important to them, why, and how to bring that information front-and-
center.

Device Compatibility. This complements design accessibility, you want your directors to be
able to use any device they already own to access their materials securely. You can't ask
them to learn a whole new operating system, it just won't stick, they'll get frustrated, and
they won't use the product. So you should ask any provider: is your board software
available on Windows, Mac, iPhones, iPads, Android phones, Android tablets, and Kindle
Fires? It's difficult to overstate how important it is that board management software just
works on whatever device your directors already use and love.

In-App Guides. When you log in to board management software for the first time, it should
give you a brief tour. A quick little hello that's followed by arrows that point out where
you're at, where you can go, what you can do, and where you can go to learn more. It
provides directors a sense that this is something they can use, that they won't be
overwhelmed, and that if they have questions, they know where to find the answer.

What Directors Look For in Board Software

In a recent survey we asked board directors what they want in board software. The
data also shows that directors want an easy solution, and they are eager to try the
product. They are also talking to their peers and looking for outside validation.

What's Most Important Part of Board Management Software When Selecting a Vendor?

The Easiest To Use	24%
Free Trial	19%
Credibility with Peers	17%
Positive word of mouth	11%
Features	3%
Other	12%

Chapter 5
How to Make The Business Case

Summary

1. Your business case will evaluate the **benefits, limitations, financial stakes, and risks of purchasing board software.**

2. We'll show you how to make that case and why **board software is naturally a compelling solution to your stakeholders.**

3. The benefits are clear, from **better meetings** and more **reliable information**, to **improved compliance** and a **commitment to sustainability.**

4. **It's simple to measure the cost reductions from saved labor and pape**r, making the Financial Analysis a simple yet powerful argument for board software.

5. **Most risks are vendor specific.** With proper due diligence during procurement, you won't lose sleep over your decision to adopt board management software.

Making the Business Case

Before your search begins to identify the right vendor, you need to be confident in making the business case to stakeholders for why board management software is essential right now.

The ideal business case is a straightforward argument: What is this, why is it important, what will it cost, what are the risks, and what are our choices?

It looks like this:

1. **The Executive Summary & Objectives** opens with what you're trying to accomplish and why.

2. **Benefits & Limitations** is a straightforward qualitative analysis of the how and why board software will prove compelling.

3. **The Financial Analysis** examines the quantitative implications – the hard dollars and cents of your investment.

4. **The Risk Assessment** looks at possible pitfalls and shortcomings.

5. **The Option Identification** finally provides your stakeholders with an analysis of the statuesque and alternatives solutions.

This may seem a bit overwhelming, but you're actually in quite a bit of luck. Because Board Management Software has so many benefits and touches on nearly every aspect of an organization, it easily fits into any IT project portfolio.

Board Management Software Procurement

The Executive Summary & Objectives

Luckily, no matter what your main IT objective is, board management software easily fits into every kind of IT procurement strategy, so it's easy to make a compelling business case.

- **It's Transactional,** by providing administrators and directors the flexibility to work from anywhere, it enhances governance, centralizes communications, and bolsters security. A transactional project like board software asks that you improve efficiency and productivity while reducing risk.

- **It's Infrastructural,** meaning it reduces labor costs and cuts waste. Board software increases productivity by minimizing time spent on everyday tasks and eliminates paper waste. Who can argue with productivity gains, saved money, and a lower carbon footprint?

- **It's Informational,** through the timely distribution of information with fewer errors, these projects close information asymmetries. Indeed, as we saw in our board survey, information accuracy and reliability is top of minds for directors. It should be easy to make the case that not only does this project bridge an information gap, but improves the capability of directors to lead the strategic growth of the organization.

- **It's Strategic,** by contributing to your organization's competitive advantage. It's easy to make the case that board software equips your directors to consider your long-term strategy better. As the stewards of your organization's strategy, it helps them remain engaged with your organization, collaborate, and contribute with better information at their fingertips.

Board Management software that meets all four major IT objectives is an obvious investment.

Benefits & Limitations

Benefits
We won't again dwell on the benefits of board management software, but when it comes to making a clear business case, not all benefits are created equal. Here's what should be top of mind when making your case.

- Board software ensures directors are better informed to make smart decisions.

- Streamlined Governance tools that improve information reliability.

- When materials are distributed far in advance and directors are invested in reviewing materials on their own terms, meetings become actual collaborative efforts — a place to make important decisions and think about the long-term health of the organization.

- It proves to stakeholders you take managing environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) responsibilities seriously.

- Because of the information improvements, it means directors can vibrantly debate strategy and make decisions focused on the long-term.

Limitations

- Lack of a development platform to personalize the software.
- Because of security concerns, integrations with other productivity software is often lacking.

Financial Analysis

- It's simple to measure the cost reductions. It's easy to overlook because it's the way it's always been done, but the costs of printing your board materials invariably run higher than most board software. Take into account everything involved: paper, binders, printers, toner, shipping, reprints. People typically find that just the basic materials end up costing more.
- We've found board software typically reduces the time required to create your board books in half. Take into account the time saved in making last-minute changes and addendums and you have clear quantitative labor-savings.

Risk Assessment

Your risk assessment will survey potential pitfalls, their consequences, and strategies for avoiding those threats. Yet, with the right vendor, these risks are significantly curtailed.

- Cyber Security - Consider whether paper and email puts you at risk of unauthorized release of confidential board information that can instantly impact your organization's financial position and brand.
- Board Adoption - Note that there's a risk that the software you select will not be designed for your director's demographic, causing a lack of adoption that will result in a wasted investment.
- Continued Innovation and Support - Board Management Software consolidation poses a risk of selecting a provider who no longer actively supports their product
- Delivered as Promised - Consider the risk of purchasing a product that can't deliver on its promises. Note this can be mitigated through a free tiral in advance.

Option Identification

- When presenting to the stakeholders, you will be asked for a status quo analysis as well as a vendor analysis. Your status quo analysis should include the waste and burden of paper, the security risks of email, and may include a cost analysis of creating your own in-house board software. Once you have a compelling story, it's time to identify appropriate Vendors

Luckily for anyone considering a Board management software project, the case is easy to make. With clear benefits, few limitations, a clear financial upside, and limited risk, your stakeholders will find the case compelling. So compelling, you'll soon be tasked with selecting a vendor. This is actually the hard part.

So what should you look for in a board management vendor?

Chapter 6
Selecting a Board Management Vendor

Summary

1. T**he most important thing to know before selecting a vendor is that most board management software providers are Zombies.** Providers who were acquired yet their websites and brand are still walk the earth.

2. You'll need to safeguard yourself against this scourge. You must demand a **Free Trial,** investigate their **Market Credibility**, and question their **Underlying Technology.**

3. Pay special attention to **market credibility**, its a window into the quality of the product. **Look for a provider that's won awards and recognition**, its proof that their product delights users.

4. With your list narrowed, it's now time to **find a real, enduring, partner**. Look for those who have invested in **Customer Success** and who **Share Your Values.**

Selecting a Board Management Vendor

There's seemingly dozens of board management software providers. Here's how to assess their credibility and capabilities. Here's what every potential customer should look for and ask of their vendors before any paperwork is signed.

Board Management Consolidation: The Industry's Dirty Little Secret

This may be the most important thing to know before selecting a vendor: most board management software providers are Zombies. Really. Many providers were bought up by cash-rich competitors who kept their brand and website alive but killed off service and product development. Between 2012-2019, dozens of providers were folded into larger parent companies. But they didn't stop marketing the products or take them offline. Instead, they've created the illusion of competition while quietly winding-down the software, ceasing updates, and ending support.

Beware, they will still sell you this old software only to return months later and introduce you to their more expensive flagship brand. By this time, you're likely tired, beaten down by bugs and no one to call. So you accept your fate and double – triple! – your spending to ensure security and functionality.

What Happens When Your Board Software is Acquired

There's nothing particularly surprising about one company buying another, happens every day. But unlike many other software acquisitions, the sale isn't for the technology or talent. There's no future synergy, improvements, or integrations. Board management software is acquired to eliminate competition – they are purchasing growth.

The consequence is that the software you've meticulously selected, methodically implemented, and strived to make work for their board of directors ceases to exist.

Here's how you can tell your board software has been acquired.

New Features Stop and Security Concern Rise.
When board software is acquired, it means the end of product updates, and therefore the perilous prospect of widening security vulnerabilities. New features simply cease. Creating new governance capabilities requires a sustained investment in engineering. And groups with a Zombie provider find their left behind. They never gain access to capabilities like automatically syncing notes or in-app messaging – the development resources are simply not there.

Perhaps even worse, because security is ever evolving, the longer they stay with a zombie provider, the higher the chance of a data breach. Releasing updates for device and browser updates demands an experienced team who is on the clock. When organizations find their SaaS software

The Price Goes Up
You'd think that given divestment from both product and service, their new vendor would be in a position to lower their prices. But that doesn't happen exception. Instead, the price goes up, quality down, and service is eliminated. The price increases justify the acquisition and work as a stick, pushing you toward the more expensive flagship product.

There's No One Who Can Help
The board software industry is built on customer success and accurate, timely, customer support. Software as a Service means actually providing service. That's knowing your customers individually, always being on call to help explain a new governance feature, it's answering technical questions, being open and ready to incorporate customer feedback, and ensuring each customer is getting the most out of their investment.

Often these acquisitions occur under with little fanfare or even an announcement. But if your prices are going up, your service quality is going down, and months go by without an update, your board software has likely been acquired.

If you've found yourself in this unfortunate position, it's time to look elsewhere. But your in luck, because you're reading this guide, this time you will be prepared – ready to find a partner for the long-term.

As you begin your search for a partner, you'll first need to weed out all the zombies in your midst. As you evaluate vendors, here's how you discover who the zombies are and avoid moving from one dying product to another.

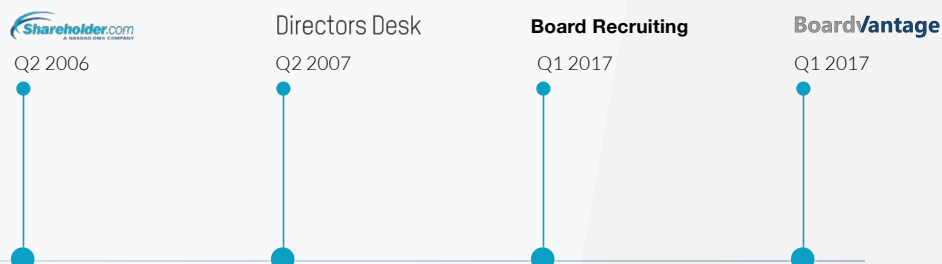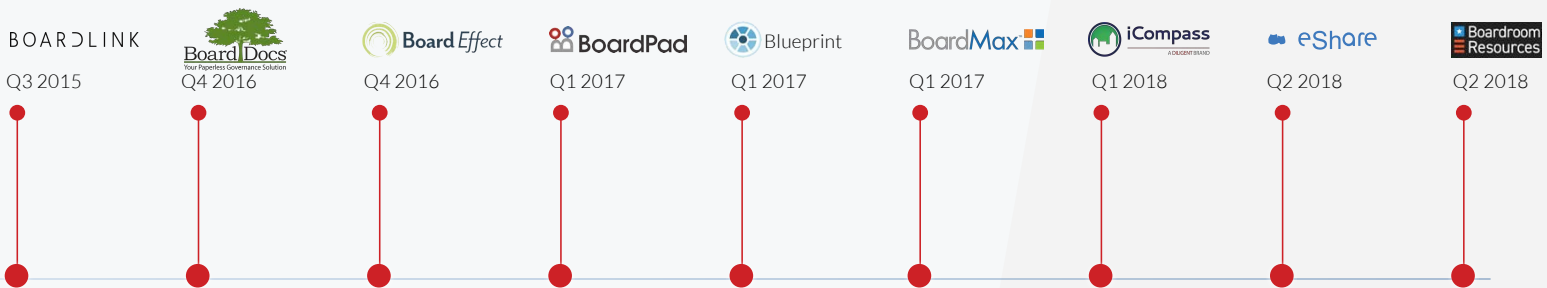## How to Identify Zombie Board Management Providers

Unfortunately, discovering whether you're talking to a Zombie Board Software Provider isn't as easy as identifying a real zombie. Here's a handful of ways to investigate whether a vendor in real and worth your time. We'll end with a dozen or so questions that will equip you to get to the truth.

Demand a Free Trial

The proof is in the pudding. Demand a free trial. If the vendor you're interacting with has nothing to hide, if they are proud of their product and know it will be useful for you, they'll let you try it for free, in advance. In fact, we can't think of any other business software we'd consider making a long-term commitment to that we couldn't actually use before putting pen to paper.

So get into a trial, if you can use it and your directors love it, you're already on your way to making a wise purchasing decision. If the vendor refuses, you have some serious questions to ask about their credibility and technology.

Acquisition Timelines

BOARDLINK	Board Docs	Board Effect	BoardPad	Blueprint	BoardMax	iCompass	eShare	Boardroom Resources
Q3 2015	Q4 2016	Q4 2016	Q1 2017	Q1 2017	Q1 2017	Q1 2018	Q2 2018	Q2 2018

Nasdaq Boardvantage

Shareholder.com	Directors Desk	Board Recruiting	BoardVantage
Q2 2006	Q2 2007	Q1 2017	Q1 2017

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Demand Knowledge of Their Product Release History

Ask whether their board management software is available on all iOS and Android devices; there are dozens of providers who simply missed the boat on mobile. They never invested the resources and will sell you a solution that won't achieve adoption. Ask their representatives to share the release notes of their last 3-5 product updates. Pay close attention to the dates and the time span between updates: If all three updates aren't in the past 6 months, it's a good sign of divestment in innovation.

Market Credibility

Once upon a time, people would turn to companies like Gartner for advice on business software purchases. Today, it's actually more insightful to look at what real people have to say about business software. And board management software is no different. Look at business-software review sites like G2 Crowd and Capterra and see what real people are saying is making them happy.

Credibility today is established by real people leaving real reviews and assessments. Look for a board software provider that's won awards and recognition. When a solution is actually easy to use and delights users, those people will flock to these sites and leave praise.

Question Their Underlying Technology

A central distinction between vendors is their underlying technology – the fruits of their research and development efforts. This is a crucial difference, because the cloud offers significant improvements over legacy technology. It's less costly to run, engineered for all browsers and devices, superior in its redundancy and availability, and more secure. That allows cloud-first providers to pass the cost-savings on to you while maintaining superior service and product improvements.

This is important because the cash-rich competitors that bought up all the little guys – their board software was made in the early 2000s and was designed for on-premise hosting. You install it on your own servers.

They never invested in reengineering their products for the cloud. They couldn't make the business model work. That's why so many refuse free trials. It's not that they don't want too – it's that they can't without cloud technology.

Find a Partner – Selecting a Vendor Committed To Your Values

So now you know how to avoid the zombies. Which means you're already way ahead of the game. Now it's time to get down to brass tacks. It's time to winnow your list of possible vendors. It's time to evaluate which vendor will become a true partner in your success.

How should you look for a partner? Here's some key considerations.

Invests in Customer Success

Investment in Customer Success defines an organization's priorities. It demonstrates a company believes there is value in forging an enduring relationship, a partnership that at its core guarantees the clients experience a return on their investment. It's more than just differentiation against a vast sea of faceless software companies; it's about proving a product can really help people solve challenges and that together you're on a shared mission.

When assessing a vendor, you should ask about whether your account will be assigned a dedicated customer success manager, how that relationship will work, and whether they're always available to assist you when you encounter a challenge. You should ask about the Customer Success team's NPS score and whether they are specialized to know your industry. Without a Customer Success team, the vendor is only responsible for one thing: making sure your invoice clears.

They Share Your Values

If you've ever been to the DMV, you know what it's like to feel like a number and not a person. When selecting a vendor who you can rely on for work done by your board, selecting someone who shares your values is crucial for long-term success.

- If you value being treated like a person, look for a vendor who invests in customer success and has their support located in the United States. Vendors who put a high premium on corporate social responsibility – not just profit and bottom-line.

- If your team cares about community, look for a vendor who has programs in place to give back profit and time to its community.

- If you care about people and the culture of the people you work with, look at companies that people actually want to work at. Where they encourage a work-life balance and employees leave each night happy. A good place to find evidence of this is a website called Glassdoor.

A board management vendor who sees you as a person, puts their community first, and appreciates their employees is a vendor who will care about you. And that ultimately leads to an enduring partnership built on trust.

Board Management Software Vendor Comparison Worksheet

Download our interactive vendor comparison PDF to have on-hand when considering board software vendors.

Download Vendor Comparison PDF

Vendor Evaluation Worksheet

1. Product Features & Capabili	OnBoard	Vendor 2	Vendor 3	Vendor 4	Notes
Available on iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows, Mac	✓				
Notes & Annotaons Always Sync	✓				
Always Up-To-Date Agenda and Board Book	✓				
Calendar of All Upcoming Meengs	✓				
Central Dashboard / Homepage View	✓				
Secure Chat	✓				
eSignatures in App	✓				
Vong and Approvals	✓				
Surveys & Quesonnaires	✓				
Mul-Board Support	✓				
Offline Access	✓				
FaceID & TouchID Support	✓				
Two-Factor Authencaon	✓				
Agenda Clone	✓				
Drag & Drop Agenda and Board Book Builder	✓				
Instant Updates When New Material Is Published	✓				
Resource and Document Center	✓				
Compable with all Files - PDF, Word, Excel, PowerPoint	✓				
Granular User Access Controls	✓				
2. Security	OnBoard	Vendor 2	Vendor 3	Vendor 4	Board

Conclusion

Conclusion

This is an important decision. Make no mistake, board management software is a commitment that directly impacts the most important people at your organization: the bosses' bosses. And there's so many distractions, so much noise, that can leave any person feeling frustrated. Deciding that the time just isn't right, that this decision should be left to someone else – the next person who holds this job.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Utilize this guide to make a wise decision about what board management software to purchase – but don't leave the decision for another day. It's time to take this knowledge, hold vendors feet to the fire, and make a call.

Dig deep into their capabilities, security, director experience, and credibility. Every organization – public or private, big or small – deserves to have a board that's happy, that's well-governed, that makes wise decisions. Take it seriously but know that after the first meeting with board management software the board of directors will be better served. Ready to tackle challenges, ask questions, and deliberate on the future.

Because a well run board of directors promises a bright future for everyone at your organization. More stability, better pay, and less stress.

We hope this guide has shined a light on how this market actually works and what makes board management software important. Take this knowledge and go.

Introducing

OnBoard
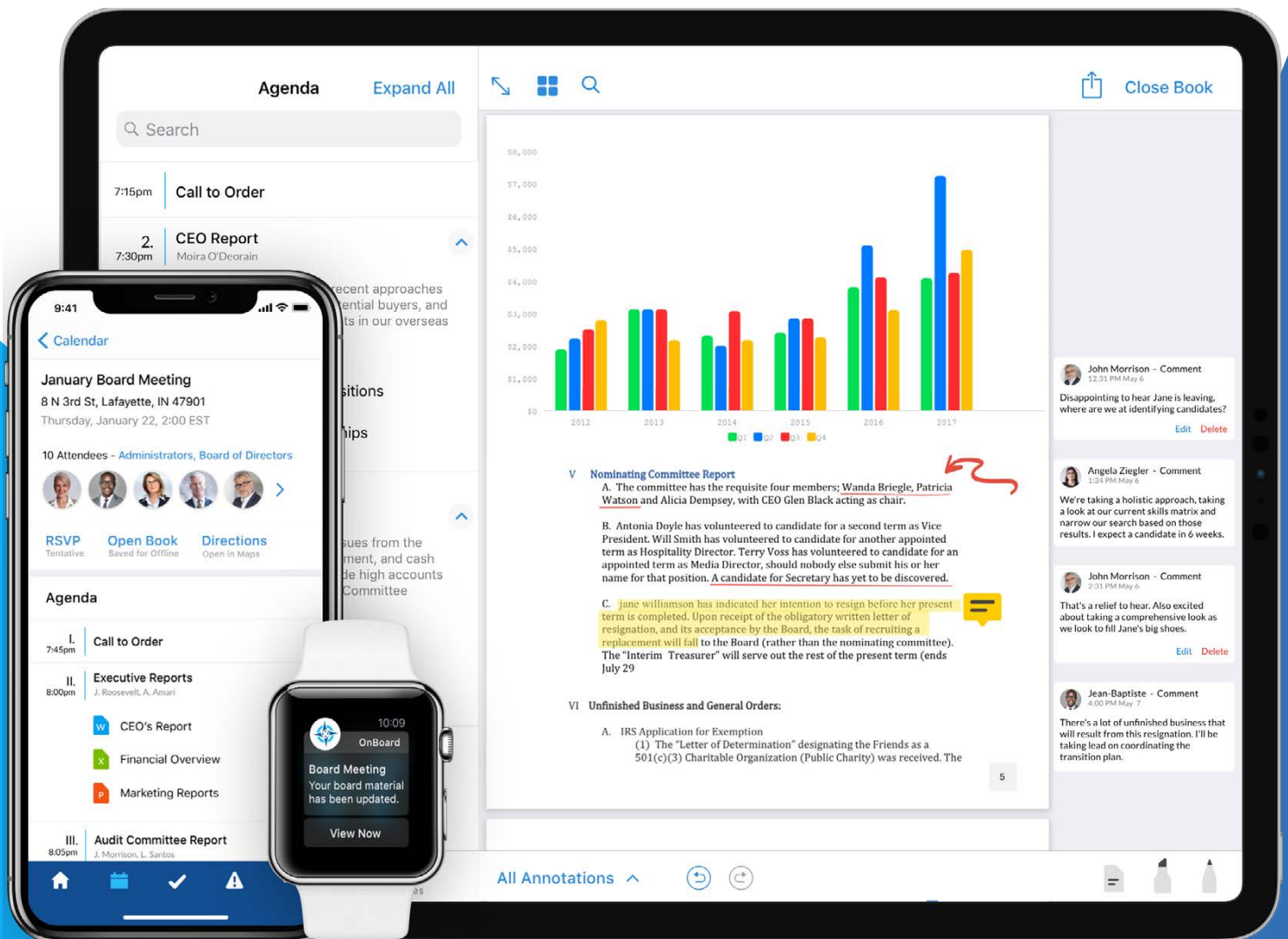
Introducing OnBoard

Passageways' OnBoard isn't going anywhere. We've been around for over 15 years, we have skin in the game, we're not looking for an exit plan, and we continue to innovate around board governance every day.

But best of all, because we took an entirely new approach to creating board management software, OnBoard makes boards happy. We practice what we preach, every day for a decade we've been on the phone, on the ground, and in boardrooms across the world talking to real directors. Listening to their needs and learning how they govern effectively. The result is board management software that directors want to use. It makes their lives easier.

OnBoard is a complete board management solution, with the most accessible user experience ever, with every feature you could ever want, with the complete security you need, that's available on every device. And when real people are given the opportunity to evaluate OnBoard, they enthusiastically rate it above the competition.

The results speak for themselves. OnBoard has won Capterra's award for ease of use, received the American Business Award for governance technology, and is the top-rated board software across dozens of platforms including G2 Crowd, the Apple App Store, and GetApp.

We feel the immense pride that OnBoard has transformed so many lives, that our customers feel compelled to make their voices heard. OnBoard's impact is pronounced, by simplifying meeting preparation and driving more thoughtful and considered board room deliberations, we've helped 1000s of directors, leaders, and administrators do work that matters.

That's why OnBoard is the only leading board management software that offers a no strings attached free trial, so you know precisely what you're getting before you fill out any paperwork. Actually experiencing OnBoard is the best way to evaluate its actual impact. There's no credit card, no commitments. Just an open offer to use OnBoard and make up your own mind.

We hope you accept our invitation to try OnBoard. Whether you're using another solution or still on paper, we'll turn your trust into a happy board of directors. Farewell, and we hope to hear from you very soon!

Start a Free Trial   Join a Group Demo

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