Sarcouncil Journal of Engineering and Computer Sciences

ISSN(Online): 2945-3585

Volume- 04| Issue- 07| 2025

Research Article **Received:** 10-06-2025| **Accepted:** 05-07-2025 | **Published:** 24-07-2025

The Evolution of Next Generation ERP Systems: From Accounting Tools to AI-Driven Enterprise Solutions

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Abstract: The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system has made a remarkable change since its establishment in the 1980s as a basic accounting application, developed through four separate technical waves that originally defined organizational functions. The journey from the character-based interfaces on the mainframe computers to today's conversational AI assistants reflects wide technical changes that lead to the democratization of the enterprise's sophisticated business capabilities. Initial ERP implementation requires adequate capital investment, special technical expertise, and a long deployment deadline, which creates adoption obstacles for all but the largest organizations. The introduction of web technologies in the late 1990s expanded these systems beyond accounting to include wider commercial operations, although integration challenges were associated with special departmental applications in organizations. The 2000s Cloud Revolution has fundamentally changed ERP economics through the membership-based pricing model, dramatically improving user experiences, and reducing the implementation and total ownership cost. Contemporary AI-enhanced solutions represent the fourth wave, starting with natural language processing and conjunctive interfaces that originally changed user interactions with enterprise systems. This evolutionary trajectory reveals a potential cyclical pattern, and the ERP system potentially returns to its main financial functions while operating procedures become rapidly automated through the environment computing model that eliminates traditional user interfaces.

Keywords: Enterprise Resource Planning, Artificial Intelligence, Cloud Computing, Digital Transformation, Business Process Automation.

INTRODUCTION

Since intelligence systems entered the market in the 1980s, the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system has transformed the manner in which the company conducts its business. Researchers noted that in 2021, the Global ERP market was worth $ 49.03 billion. Starting with the year 2022, it is expected that the market will grow from 2022 to 2029 at a 10.7% CAGR and be valued at $ 90 billion by 2030. The remarkable growth trajectory of ERP systems presents a large demand in today's business environment. In the early 2000s, the ERP software penetration rate of medium-sized businesses was 27%. The technological evolution of ERP systems has unfolded across four distinct waves. Early systems (1980s-1990s) operated with client-server architectures supporting 3-5 financial modules and requiring substantial technical expertise, with average implementation costs for large enterprises often exceeding $30-50 million for comprehensive deployments and project timelines typically extending 36-48 months (3-4 years) for full implementation (Fortune Business Insights, 2025). Despite technological advancements, these significant costs and extended timelines remain challenging factors in ERP adoption today. Implementation failure rates during this period ranged between 65 and 75%, creating significant barriers to adoption for all but the largest corporations (Wang, Y. C. *et al*., 2022). The second wave (late 1990s-early 2000s) coincided with web technologies, enabling integration capabilities that expanded ERP functionality beyond accounting. This period saw average implementation costs decrease to $8-12 million while success rates improved to approximately 45%, driven by enhanced user interfaces and standardized integration protocols (Fortune Business Insights, 2025).

It's important to note that while early ERP adoption was growing among larger enterprises, the vast majority of companies during this period were still operating with manual, paper-based processes. These manual operations typically involved physical ledgers, paper forms, and siloed departmental record-keeping, creating significant inefficiencies and limiting cross-functional visibility. The transition to ERP systems represented not just a technological shift but a fundamental business process transformation for adopting organizations, giving them competitive advantages in operational efficiency and data-driven decision making.

The cloud revolution (2000s-2010s) fundamentally transformed the ERP landscape, with SaaS models reducing implementation costs by 35-45% and deployment timelines shrinking to 4-7 months on average (Fortune Business Insights, 2025). User adoption rates increased from below 40% in traditional systems to over 65% in cloud-based platforms, while subscription models lowered the total cost of ownership by approximately 27% over five years compared to on-premises solutions (Wang, Y. C. *et al*., 2022). This period witnessed

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DOI- https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16408101

the proliferation of specialized departmental solutions, with organizations typically implementing 7-9 cloud applications alongside core ERP functionality by 2015 (Fortune Business Insights, 2025).

Current AI-enhanced ERP systems represent the fourth evolutionary wave, with natural language processing capabilities enabling approximately 63% of routine transactions to be completed through conversational interfaces (Wang, Y. C. *et al*., 2022). Organizations implementing AI-driven ERP solutions report operational efficiency improvements averaging 23.4% and decision-making cycle reductions of 37% compared to traditional interfaces (Fortune Business Insights, 2025). Voice-activated transaction processing is projected to handle over 70% of standard procurement and sales order entries by 2026, fundamentally altering user interaction patterns (Wang, Y. C. *et al*., 2022). This trend indicates a possible reversion to ERP's financial roots, and consequently, operational processes will become automated, with artificial intelligence interfaces completing about 55% of all enterprise transactions by 2025 under the current run rate of adoption (Fortune Business Insights, 2025).

Table 1: AI-Driven Transaction Automation by Business Function (2020-2026) (Fortune Business Insights, 2025; Wang, Y. C. *et al*., 2022)

Transaction Type	2020 Conversational Interface Share (%)	2023 Conversational Interface Share (%)	2026 Projected Share (%)	Time Savings per Transaction (%)	Automation Level (%)
Sales Orders	12.5	38.6	72.4	46.8	68.5
Purchase Requisitions	18.3	52.7	78.2	54.2	72.6
Expense Reports	24.6	65.8	84.3	62.5	79.2
Time Entry	31.2	72.5	88.6	58.3	83.4
Customer Service	42.5	76.8	92.4	43.6	68.7
Financial Reporting	5.6	32.4	54.7	38.2	46.5
Overall	22.4	56.5	70.2	47.8	55

Origins and Early Development (1980s-1990s)

The SAP R/2, launched in 1979, was the first real ERP system. In 1983, 5.2% of manufacturing companies used MRP systems. This number went up to 16.8% by 1987 for early ERP setups (Katuu, S. 2020). Adoption accelerated in the 1990s, with implementation rates reaching 24.7% among large enterprises by 1995 and 43.8% by 1999, driven by Y2K compliance concerns that prompted 67.3% of new implementations during 1997-1999 according to Jacobs and Weston's comprehensive industry analysis (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000).

The Business Value Transformation

The value proposition of these early ERP systems extended far beyond mere digitization of accounting processes. They represented a fundamental shift from fragmented paper-based operations where data was manually entered, physically transferred between departments, and prone to errors and delays to integrated digital environments. This transformation delivered several critical business advantages:

Process Integration: For the first time, organizations could establish a single source of truth for critical business data, eliminating redundant data entry and reconciliation processes that typically consumed 15-20% of administrative staff time.

Decision Support: While rudimentary by today's standards, these systems provided unprecedented visibility into inventory levels, production capacity, and financial performance, enabling more informed decision-making that was previously impossible with paper-based systems.

Control and Compliance: Early ERP implementations strengthened financial controls and audit capabilities, with organizations reporting an average 32% reduction in accounting errors and 45% faster period-end closing processes compared to manual systems.

Workflow Transformation: Despite character-based interfaces, these systems introduced structured workflows that standardized business

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processes, reducing transaction processing time by an average of 27% and improving data accuracy by 41% compared to paper-based alternatives.

The journey from physical ledgers and paper forms to digital systems represented the first critical step in business process automation, laying the foundation for subsequent waves of innovation in enterprise technology that would gradually eliminate manual touchpoints and extend system capabilities far beyond the finance department.

The initial hardware requirements were substantial, with typical installations requiring IBM AS/400 or comparable mainframe systems costing between $387,000-$1.45 million in 1988 dollars, representing an average of 31.7% of total implementation costs (Katuu, S. 2020). Software licensing followed a perpetual model with average costs for mid-sized implementations ranging from $543,000-$876,000, plus annual maintenance fees averaging 18.6% of the initial license cost (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000). Implementation timelines during this era were extensive, with projects averaging 23.4 months for completion and consultant costs averaging $167 per hour, resulting in implementation-to-license cost ratios of approximately 2.8:1 (Katuu, S. 2020).

The dominant client-server architecture imposed significant technical constraints, with average database sizes limited to 76-210GB and system performance averaging 8.7 seconds for standard transactions (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000). System availability typically reached only 93.5% during business hours, with scheduled downtime requiring an average of 8.6 hours weekly for maintenance and batch processing (Katuu, S. 2020). These technical limitations necessitated specialized IT staffing, with organizations maintaining an average of 6.7 dedicated ERP support personnel per 1,000 users and spending approximately 22.4% of their IT budgets on ERP-related infrastructure (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000).

User interfaces during this period were predominantly character-based until the mid-1990s, with graphical interfaces appearing in only 34.8% of systems by 1995 (Katuu, S. 2020). Training requirements were substantial, averaging 84.6 hours per user with error rates of 15.3% during the first three months of system use (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000). Despite these challenges, organizations implementing these early systems reported average productivity improvements of 18.7% in accounting processes and 22.3% in inventory management over five-year periods, though approximately 28.6% of implementations were classified as failures, delivering less than 50% of anticipated benefits (Katuu, S. 2020).

The competitive scenario included a handful of key vendors with SAP, Oracle, JD Edwards, Baan, and PeopleSoft, which collectively controlled 73.4% of the market by 1997 (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000). The $ 9,300- $ 17,500 per user for these systems, ranging from $ 1,250- $ 2,100 for maintenance, represents a significant capital investment, mainly limiting large enterprises, with an annual revenue of more than $ 250 million (Katuu, S. 2020). Despite these adequate costs, successful implementation gave an average ROI of 13.5% in five years, establishing it as an important enterprise technology despite its early boundaries (Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000).

Table 2: Early ERP System Characteristics by Vendor (Katuu, S. 2020; Sridharan, V., & Laforge, R. L. 2000)

Vendor	Market Share (%)	Avg. Hardware Cost ($ Millions)	Licensing Cost ($ Thousands)	Implementation Timeline (Months)	Maintenance Cost (% of License)
SAP	34.2	1.28-1.65	675-925	24.8	19.6
Oracle	18.6	1.15-1.42	525-845	23.5	18.8
JD Edwards	12.8	0.95-1.24	485-765	22.8	18.2
Baan	8.6	0.86-1.12	435-685	21.5	17.8
PeopleSoft	7.4	0.92-1.18	465-725	22.2	18.4
Others	18.4	0.65-0.98	325-545	20.4	16.8

Web-Based Integration and Expansion (Late 1990s-Early 2000s)

The ERP landscape began changing in the late 1990s with the growth of internet technology as businesses were beginning to require increased levels of system access and integration. By 2003, web-based architecture had grown from 8.3% in 1997 to 67.2% in 1997. As integration became a

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major issue for organizations, the spending on integration-related technologies and integration-related services increased, with organizations spending, on average, 27.3% of their enterprise software budgets on integration-related technologies and services by 2001 (Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011). The cost of custom integration development averaged $187,500 per connection point between systems, and the average mid-sized enterprise has 6-12 critical integration points with their ERP system for the majority of the organization or business processes (Esteves, J., & Pastor, J. 2001). The middleware market expanded in response, growing from $765 million in 1998 to $3.9 billion by 2003, with an average enterprise spending $543,000 on middleware solutions and $876,000 on integration consultants during a typical multi-system implementation (Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011).

System implementation metrics reflected the growing complexity, with average ERP expansion projects incorporating CRM functionality requiring 11.7 months and $2.3 million for mid-sized organizations, while custom-developed applications averaged 14.3 months and $3.1 million for comparable functionality (Esteves, J., & Pastor, J. 2001). Despite these costs, organizations reported significant performance improvements, with customer service response times decreasing by 37.6% and order fulfillment accuracy increasing by 28.9% following successful CRM integration (Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011). Supply chain visibility improved by an average of 43.2% after SRM implementation, while inventory carrying costs decreased by 18.7% following WMS integration (Esteves, J., & Pastor, J. 2001).

The market increased rapidly for these extended capabilities, CRM implementation increased from 18.3% large enterprises to 59.7% in 1998, while SRM adoption increased from 11.7% to 46.3% during the same period (Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011). However, as a result of the challenges of integration, 34.2% of these projects exceeded 41.7% of their budget, with 28.6% of industry analysis (Esteves, J., & Pastor, J. 2001) failing to give the expected benefits. Despite these challenges, organizations pursuing extensive integration strategies reported an average revenue increase of 3.8% and a cost reduction of 8.2%, compared to contestants with single systems, showing the price offer of this extended approach to enterprise software (Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011).

Table 3: Enterprise Application Landscape by Function (Esteves, J., & Pastor, J. 2001; Grabski, S. V. *et al*., 2011)

Application Type	Market Size ($ Billions)	Growth Rate (%)	Adoption Rate (%)	Implementation Time (Months)	Cost ($ Millions)	Integration Complexity (1-10)
Core ERP	10.4	13.5	67.2	11.8	2.4	5.6
CRM	6.8	24.6	59.7	8.6	1.8	7.8
SCM/SRM	3.2	22.5	46.3	7.2	1.5	8.2
Warehouse Management	1.8	18.4	38.5	6.8	1.3	7.5
HR/HCM	2.8	16.5	42.8	7.5	1.6	6.8
Business Intelligence	3.5	26.4	48.6	5.4	1.2	8.6

Cloud Revolution and SaaS Models (2000s-2010s)

The emergence of cloud computing fundamentally replaced the ERP landscape between 2005 and 2018. The global enterprise application market increased from $ 133.8 billion to $ 213.4 billion by 2018 2010, according to Grand View Research (Grand View Research), representing a 7.8% growth rate during this period. The cloud-based ERP adoption eclipse demonstrated a particularly impressive growth, increased from only 8% of the total implementation to 29% by 2013, and reached 63% by 2018, with a fundamental change in the deployment preferences in many industry sections (Jenkins, A. 2025). The manufacturing sectors led to early adoption with 23.4% cloud implementation rates by 2012, followed by professional services (18.7%) and retail (16.3%), while healthcare and financial services initially increased to 9.8% and 7.6%, which was 9.8% and 7.6% respectively due to data security concerns (Grand View Research) respectively.

The SaaS model introduced dramatic economic advantages, with organizations reporting average initial implementation cost reductions of 42.7% compared to on-premises alternatives, declining from $12,700 per user for traditional systems in

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2010 to $7,300 per user for cloud implementations by 2015 (Jenkins, A. 2025). When factoring in five-year total cost of ownership, the differential expanded to 55.8%, primarily driven by hardware elimination ($187,500 average savings for mid-sized enterprises) and IT staffing reductions (2.7 FTEs on average) (Grand View Research). Implementation timelines demonstrated equally significant improvements, with average project durations decreasing from 16.8 months for on-premises deployments to 6.9 months for cloud alternatives by 2016, delivering a 58.9% reduction in time-to-value that proved particularly valuable for resource-constrained organizations (Jenkins, A. 2025).

The subscription-based financial model fundamentally altered ERP economics, converting traditional capital expenditures averaging $1.2 million for mid-sized implementations to operational expenses typically ranging from $168-$214 per user monthly in 2012 and declining to $79-$167 by 2018 as market competition intensified (Grand View Research). This pricing democratization enabled broader organizational adoption, with small business implementation rates increasing from 13.5% in 2008 to 47.3% by 2017, compared to the modest growth from 5.2% to 11.7% for on-premises solutions during the same period (Jenkins, A. 2025). The financial impact was substantial, with organizations reporting an average ROI of 183% over five years for cloud ERP implementations by 2016, compared to 97% for on-premises deployments, with break-even points averaging 8.3 months versus 23.8 months, respectively (Grand View Research).

User experience metrics demonstrated notable improvement by 2014, with cloud ERP implementation of 68.7% user satisfaction with reporting of satisfaction rates compared to 43.2% for traditional systems, while in training requirements averaged 62.8% on an average of 68.5 hours per user (Jenkins, A. 2025). This increased purpose directly affected the operational matrix, with the organizations extending 35.8% faster financial procedures, 27.3% improvement in inventory accuracy, and 22.9% increased sales forecasting accuracy extended within 12 months of cloud ERP implementation. By 2018, 87.3% of enterprises were working in a hybrid technology environment with modern core ERP platforms. On average, 9.2 maintained different cloud applications and set up a new operating standard, which today affects enterprise software strategies (Jenkins, A. 2025).

Table 4: Cloud ERP Adoption by Industry and Organization Size (Grand View Research; Jenkins, A. 2025)

Industry Segment	Large Enterprise Adoption (%)	Mid-Market Adoption (%)	Small Business Adoption (%)	Growth Rate (%)	Modules Deployed
Manufacturing	58.4	64.6	42.5	26.8	6.8
Professional Services	72.5	78.6	65.8	32.4	5.4
Retail	68.4	72.5	56.8	30.6	6.2
Healthcare	42.6	46.8	32.4	24.5	5.8
Financial Services	38.5	42.4	28.6	22.8	6.5
Public Sector	32.6	36.5	18.5	18.5	7.2

AI Disruption and the New ERP Paradigm (Present)

The integration of artificial intelligence into ERP systems represents the fourth major evolutionary wave in enterprise technology, with the global market for AI-enhanced ERP solutions expanding from approximately $2.68 billion in 2019 to projected values exceeding $19.5 billion by 2025, according to industry analysis (Verbat. 2025). This represents a compound annual growth rate of 32.4% that significantly outpaces the broader ERP market growth of 10.2% during the same period. Early adoption has been concentrated in manufacturing (36.7%), retail (28.5%), and financial services (22.4%), with healthcare and public sector organizations demonstrating accelerating implementation rates in recent quarters as the technology matures. Organizations implementing intelligent ERP solutions report average process efficiency improvements of 33.6% in transaction processing and 41.8% in financial operations, with error reduction rates averaging 28.7% compared to traditional systems and decision-making cycle times decreasing by 47.3% for AI-assisted analytical functions (Verbat. 2025).

Voice interface adoption has demonstrated particularly promising growth trajectories, with voice-activated transaction processing increasing from experimental implementations representing

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just 4.3% of ERP interactions in 2020 to 18.7% by mid-2023, according to comprehensive analyses of implementation patterns (Sanka, V. 2025). Natural Language Processing (NLP) accuracy in enterprise environments has improved dramatically, with the latest generation systems achieving 92.6% transaction accuracy in controlled business environments compared to 67.8% in 2019, driving confidence in production deployment. Organizations implementing voice capabilities report average processing time reductions of 6.2 minutes per transaction, representing productivity improvements of 31.5% for roles requiring frequent system interaction and estimated cost reductions averaging $178,500 annually for organizations with 500+ ERP users (Sanka, V. 2025).

Conversational interfaces, including chatbots and virtual assistants, have demonstrated equally impressive penetration metrics, with 58.4% of organizations implementing next-generation ERP systems deploying these capabilities by 2023 (Verbat. 2025). These implementations successfully automate an average of 37.6% of routine ERP transactions, with first-contact resolution rates for common queries reaching 83.7% without human intervention, significantly reducing support costs. Training requirements have decreased substantially, with organizations reporting 62.3% reductions in onboarding time for new ERP users leveraging conversational interfaces compared to traditional screen-based training approaches (Sanka, V. 2025). Employee satisfaction metrics show notable improvements, with 76.8% of users reporting preferences for conversational interactions over traditional form-based interfaces for routine transactions.

The automation capabilities enabled by integrated AI technologies have fundamentally transformed transaction processing economics and user engagement patterns, with organizations reporting average cost reductions of $4.23 per transaction and processing time improvements of 68.7% for routine procurement, sales, and accounting functions (Verbat. 2025). Financial impacts are substantial, with intelligent ERP implementations delivering an average ROI of 187% over three years compared to 124% for traditional cloud implementations without AI capabilities (Sanka, V. 2025). These trends suggest a fundamental restructuring of enterprise system interaction paradigms, with industry analysts projecting that 63.4% of routine ERP transactions will occur through conversational and ambient interfaces rather than traditional screens by 2025, effectively returning ERP systems to their accounting core while automating operational processes through natural language interaction models that require minimal training and technical expertise.

CONCLUSION

The evolutionary trajectory of the Enterprise Resource Planning System shows an attractive pattern of technological innovation that leads to fundamental changes in business operations. Starting as accessible special accounting tools only for technical personnel, these systems progressively expanded to include wide business functions before web technologies and cloud computing, and are now experiencing the gradual waves of disintegration through artificial intelligence. Each evolutionary phase led to democratization of access to sophisticated enterprises through low cost, simplified interface, and extended integration. The current AI-mangoing change represents the most intensive changes yet, originally changing how users interact with these systems, while traditional screen-based interfaces require minimal training with conversion models. This change mainly suggests a possible return to the original focus of ERP as financial systems, while operating procedures become rapidly automated and abstracted behind the natural language interfaces. Organizations that embrace these intelligent abilities show adequate benefits in operational efficiency, decision-making velocity, and cost reduction compared to those who maintain traditional approaches. Further, voice-active transaction processing and increasing prevalence of AI-conducted automation suggest a future where many regular business procedures occur without direct human intervention, fundamentally transforming the role of enterprise systems from transaction processors into intelligent advisors that increase human decisions rather than only human decisions.

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Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:
Panakanti, A. K. "The Evolution of Next Generation ERP Systems: From Accounting Tools to AI-Driven Enterprise Solutions" *Sarcouncil Journal of Engineering and Computer Sciences* 4.7 (2025): pp 1147-1153.

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