

How to Select the Best Agile Lifecycle Management Vendor

This evaluation guide was produced in collaboration with many development organizations to help you choose the best Agile solution vendor to fit your company's needs today and into the future.

Balancing feature richness with simplicity in all the right product areas is critical to your team's acceptance of any development management solution. But unlike traditional software vendors, some of today's on-demand providers have a proven history of delivering new releases every eight weeks. **With such rapid response to customer requests, factors other than a one-time feature comparison will take on significant importance in your selection process.** When choosing the vendor you will rely on, make sure you consider key business factors that will affect your long-term success in creating an Agile organization.

This guide will jumpstart your evaluation process with a complete checklist of the strategic considerations and tactical tool capabilities needed to succeed with Agile practices.

The evaluation guide is divided into three steps:

- 1 Selecting vendors that meet your business criteria
- 2 Identifying key capabilities of an Agile lifecycle management solution
- 3 Scoring and comparing Agile solutions

1 Selecting Vendors that Meet Your Business Criteria

There are three critical areas to evaluate when winnowing down the vendors to consider: 1. Market leadership, 2. In-house Agile expertise and coaching services, and 3. Established customer success programs.

1.1 Pick an Agile Leader

To improve your success in adopting and scaling Agile development, select an established vendor that is a proven leader in the Agile industry and has substantial market share. Choose a company that shows continuous innovation and is widely recognized by its customers, industry analysts and partners as helping define Agile success.

The presence of long-term clients and active partnerships is strong evidence of market leadership. Ask for references and expect customers who are willing to recommend the vendor to their peers.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up
Extensive customer reference list across different industries	<p>As of 2007, Rally supports over 300 corporate customers and 12,000 subscribers in more than 30 countries, including large deployments with Avaya, BEA, BMC, HP, Intuit, JP Morgan, Shopzilla, Sun, Thomson, Yahoo and many more.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally's free Community Edition has over 5,000 active customers.</p>
Recognized "firsts"	<p>Rally pioneered Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) delivered Agile development solutions in 2004.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally was the first Agile vendor to marry Agile project management with defect management and test management, and the first to publish fully-supported web service integrations to popular engineering and customer management systems.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally hosted the first Agile webinar series in 2004 with luminaries like Mike Cohn, Jim Highsmith, Dean Leffingwell, Tom Poppendieck, Jean Tabaka and others.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally pioneered Agile Commons, the largest Web 2.0 social network for organizations adopting Agile. Agile Commons was named runner-up for the Groundswell Award from Forrester Research for innovative and effective use of communities.</p> <hr/> <p>Along with other leaders in the Agile community, Rally launched Agile University, a leading portal for Agile training courses.</p>

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up, continued
Major contributions to the Agile literature	<p>Rally employees have given keynotes, talks and workshops at over 30 industry conferences including Agile Development Practices, CSIA's DemoGala, DreamForce, Dr. Dobb's Architecture & Design World, SD West, SD Best Practices, SIIA On-Demand, SLAM (Software, Licensing, Alliances & Marketing), Software Business, Software Marketing Perspectives, StarEast, Software Best Practices webinar series, and 10 conference sessions at the leading conference on Agile development practices, Agile2007, hosted by the Agile Alliance.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally's Agile Knowledge Portal provides dozens of free articles, white papers, webinars and podcasts to help practitioners adopt and scale Agile practices.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally's Jean Tabaka is the author of the popular <i>Collaboration Explained: Facilitation Skills for Software Project Leaders</i>, part of Addison Wesley's book series on Agile development.</p>
Industry awards and independent recognition	<p>In addition to being honored with three-time Jolt Product Excellence Awards (the industry's Oscars), Rally has received numerous product and company awards for excellence and innovation.</p>
Active partner relationships with industry leaders	<p>Rally has technology partnerships and integrations with HP, IBM, Microsoft and Salesforce.com, among others.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally has an extensive in-house professional services organization and maintains close partnerships with GlobalLogic, SolutionsIQ and Valtech, among others.</p> <hr/> <p>See Rally's full partner list.</p>
Proof of an active user community	<p>Rally's vibrant user community in Agile Commons is a Web 2.0 social networking site where users discuss Agile practices, submit feature requests and vote on their rank, gain full visibility into the release backlog, and collaborate with Rally on feature designs.</p>
Environmental responsibility	<p>Rally's SaaS model reduces e-waste and energy misuse. The packaged software industry feeds a growing demand for servers resulting in millions of pounds of computer-related waste per year and water supplies polluted by mercury and lead. In contrast, SaaS applications are over 50 times more energy-efficient than installed products.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally also offsets its data center's impact with renewable energy credits.</p>

1.2 Make Sure Your Vendor Has Agile Expertise In-House

Even though Agile principles are easy to understand, putting them into practice can be challenging. Many organizations will improve their success with coaching and training from experts who have lived Agile for years. A strong vendor will help you identify and implement pragmatic solutions to the roadblocks teams often face as they scale Agile and Lean practices across teams and departments.

If you foresee scaling Agile beyond a single development team, verify that your vendor has the in-house expertise and resources to help you successfully roll out Agile to your entire organization.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up
Respected source of Agile knowledge and expertise	<p>Rally's Agile Knowledge Portal provides free access to white papers, presentations, webinars and articles about Agile project management, product management, requirements management and test and defect management.</p> <hr/> <p>Agile Commons is a web community with over 2,000 recent members dedicated to increasing the mastery of Agile and Lean practices. Over 150 topic areas have been launched by members to collaborate on Agile software development.</p>
Reputable Agile coaches on staff	<p>Rally's expert coaches are published authors, industry speakers and recognized Agile trainers who have worked on-site with hundreds of teams in adopting and scaling Agile development.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally provides dedicated engagement managers who oversee the success of large enterprise rollouts of Agile.</p>
Comprehensive curriculum of Agile training courses	<p>Rally launched Agile University in 2007 to provide organizations with the training required to create a truly Agile organization. In 2008, AU has over 50 customer-rated faculty and dozens of public courses offered regularly throughout North America.</p>

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up, continued
Proof of expertise in transitioning an entire company to Agile and Lean practices	Rally training and consulting services introduce your teams to the project leadership skills and collaboration tools needed to deliver your first Agile projects within 60 days.
	Rally's proven flow-pull-innovate model helps multi-team development environments successfully adopt Agile practices.
	Rally has proven successes of helping companies transition large-scale projects to Agile from waterfall processes.
	Innovative products like Rally Support Connector, Rally Quality Manager and Rally Product Manager extend agility beyond the development team to enable the Agile enterprise.

1.3 Evaluate The Vendor's Customer Success Programs

All vendors claim their applications are easy to use, but smart buyers know that strong vendors go beyond providing web-based community support and do-it-yourself implementation. Be skeptical when vendors of installed products seek to get most of your money in upfront licensing deals. They rarely have the resources to support success after the sale. Rather than partner with you, these traditional vendors often view customer support as an expense to be minimized.

Look for vendors with pay-as-you-go business models that depend on your long-term success with their products. These vendors will have true-SaaS platforms that enable rapid response to your feature requests. Verify that they provide dedicated pre-sales engineers, knowledgeable customer success staff able to serve your global teams, and interactive training embedded in the tool and in customer portals.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up
Frequent product releases and bug fixes with free training	Since 2004, Rally's release history shows a consistent delivery of five to seven releases a year focused on the customer's highest prioritized feature requests. Release priorities are re-set every eight weeks.
	Bugs found outside of the release cycle can be escalated and fixed on Rally's SaaS offering within one week of submission.
	Customer webinars describe new features and their use in context of a real project with lots of time for Q&A with the Rally staff.
Responsive customer care with 24-hour support options for global teams	Rally's customer care organization provides an extensive knowledgebase and standard online and email support. Most questions are answered within one business day. Premium support options provide global teams with 24-hour customer support access.
Extensive self-help materials and on-demand, "how-to" demos of features and common tasks	The Rally 101 Training Portal provides a library of Flash and PDF modules covering key Agile activities as well as role-based and task-based tool training.
	Numerous tool tips, best practices, videos and context-sensitive help are embedded in the Rally application to move users quickly up the expert curve.
	The search function within Rally provides customers with extensive search capabilities across the support solutions, knowledgebase, online documentation, training videos and the Rally user community.
Dedicated resources for product evaluation, implementation and deployment	Rally staffs dedicated evaluation engineers (these individuals have no quota and no other responsibilities) who understand Agile practices, not just tool features.
	Dedicated technical engagement managers ensure successful Agile and Rally rollouts beyond the pilot teams.
	Rally has resources to be with you every step of your Agile adoption and scaling efforts.
Partner behavior rather than a tool vendor behavior	Pay-as-you-go business model requires Rally to earn your business every day.
	Open customer communication through Agile Commons provides direct access to Rally product staff and visibility into development progress towards customer requests.
Low-risk, incremental approach to adopting Agile and tools	Rally deployment options map an incremental approach to adopting Agile and Rally.
	SaaS deployment model eliminates big up-front IT investments, so you initially focus on success with Agile instead of rolling out new infrastructure.
	No install and no commitment. Use Rally free with Community Edition, or ask for a free trial of Enterprise Edition.
	For highly-regulated companies, seamlessly move to Rally's on-premise option after you've standardized your processes.

2 Identifying Key Capabilities of an Agile Lifecycle Management Solution

Experienced Agile shops have identified three areas that improved their initial experiences with Agile solutions and led to long-term success: 1. Low cost of ownership, 2. Support for incremental adoption of Agile practices, and 3. Rich implementation of the critical features in Agile lifecycle management tools.

2.1 Seek a Low Total Cost of Ownership

Beyond your first team, it is rarely possible to know up-front how fast your organization will adopt Agile and tooling. This means companies are at risk of being saddled with large, unproductive software investments if their vendors lock them in with up-front license fees coupled with large installation and integration costs. Traditional software vendors prefer these pricing and deployment models because they transfer all costs and risks to the customer. The vendors get their money early, while customers own operations burdens and often over-purchase far ahead of their real adoption curve.

To keep your total costs and start-up risks low, avoid big up-front investments for licensing, installation and integration. Look for vendors that offer pay-as-you-go subscription pricing and shoulder the deployment and operations costs with true SaaS architectures and packaged integrations. That way, you can concentrate on delivering better products faster.

NOTE: Don't be fooled by vendors who say they offer an on-demand SaaS solution, but who really use legacy hosted models. These ASP vendors maintain your software as a single instance with inadequate security, poor redundancy, no auto-failover and inability to ensure worldwide performance.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up
No shelf-ware	Rally's pay-as-you-go subscription pricing means you can adjust your seat counts to mirror your actual usage as you roll out Agile and Rally to your teams.
Proven performance and availability	<p>Rally delivers a total uptime of 99.98%. Release updates are performed during a short, scheduled off-hours maintenance window.</p> <hr/> <p>In the event of major server failure, availability is restored within two to three minutes thanks to a clustered server scheme.</p> <hr/> <p>International web caching servers ensure high performance for global customers.</p> <hr/> <p>Rally reliably predicts when hardware upgrades will be needed. Performance is continuously monitored and server response time is charted with a target baseline of under 300 milliseconds.</p>
No upfront hardware and software purchases	Zero costs for Rally's high performance and disaster hardened SaaS infrastructure. Compare Rally's upfront cost savings over other vendor's installed software. Immediate savings range from \$7,500 for a minimum configuration to \$22,500 for a fully redundant, clustered architecture with global performance caching.
No setup charges*	Zero setup charges and no hidden costs. Rally's user license includes everything your company needs to deploy Rally to a global organization.
Zero admin and operating costs	Rally's true-SaaS platform means zero IT costs for this high availability and high performance application.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No costs or labor for application install or upgrades 2. No costs for performance monitoring and hardware upgrades 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rally manages all updates, migrations and interoperability. No need to hire an administrator or wrestle for operations resources. 2. Performance is continuously monitored and server response time is charted. Hardware upgrades at US, European and Asia/Pacific data centers are reliably predicted and managed.
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* Watch out for set up fees associated with legacy ASP solutions.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up, continued
3. No costs or labor for maintaining robust security at physical, network, server, application and data layers	3. Rally provides world-class security and data protection . Strict user authentication based on rules you set prevent unauthorized access to your application. Rally secures all client-to-server requests with SSL encryption. Additionally, Rally protects its physical, network, systems and premises with highly-restricted personnel access, best-of-breed intrusion protection at each network layer and scrupulous patch maintenance. Since threats morph constantly, an independent security firm performs regular vulnerability assessments.
4. Reliable data replication, backup and disaster recovery schemes	4. Your production system is backed up every hour and transferred to the disaster recovery site. Rally keeps a rolling 21 days worth of backups. <hr/> Rally will recover in two to three minutes from a major hardware crash. Disaster recovery is offsite with data synced hourly. Recovery time is eight hours from a major disaster at a primary data center.

2.2 Demand Support for Incremental Agile Adoption

One of the most important tenets of Agile is the continual improvement that results from retrospectives. With Agile, roadblocks and waste associated with legacy processes become highly visible and must be prioritized in an “organizational change” backlog. Maturing and scaling Agile then involves tackling these issues iteratively and incrementally to speed value delivery, improve quality and respond easier to changing requirements.

Sign up with a vendor who understands how Agile practices and tools can be adopted incrementally with pragmatic training and low-risk evaluation and deployment options. Avoid one-dimensional tool vendors who strive to sell you lots of upfront licenses without regard to what you actually need at this stage of your maturity. Instead, choose a vendor who will partner with you as you steadily build on the successes of your first pilots to scale Agile to enterprise adoption.

Demand from Vendors	How Rally Stacks Up
Established process for incrementally adopting Agile and tooling	Rally’s deployment guide maps an incremental approach to adopting Agile lifecycle management tools. <hr/> Proven coaching services help you implement Agile practices with your first teams within 60 days and establish an Agile rollout plan for your organization.
Free, no downloads/no commitment editions that support small Agile projects and your pilots	Free, fully hosted Rally Community provides Agile project management, defect management and test tracking for a team of 10 people. Free migration to Rally Enterprise as your teams grow and mature.
Free evaluation of enterprise class products with no upfront costs for installation and integration	Free 30-day trial of Rally Enterprise adds support for multi-team program management, quality management and integrations with engineering and customer management systems.
Migrate trial data or free edition projects to Enterprise edition without data loss	Start on-demand with free Rally Community or free Rally Enterprise trial and migrate data any time to production systems.
On-demand and on-premise deployment solutions	As a complement to its on-demand product, Rally offers an efficient and innovative on-premise solution for enterprises that want to deploy Rally’s Agile lifecycle management software on site. <hr/> All on-premise products ask the customer to invest costs and resources in setup and maintenance. In contrast, Rally’s on-premise option has significant cost savings over competing solutions, and shares many SaaS benefits such as short deployment times and low operating cost. This allows you to concentrate more on your Agile adoption and development initiatives rather than sinking precious time and resources into software installations.
Ability to turn on functionality as your Agile adoption matures without any operations cost or delay	Instantly add optional modules for quality management, product management and integrations with your engineering and customer management systems as you scale Agile across multiple teams and then across all departments involved in the idea-to-market lifecycle. <hr/> Be wary of other vendors with poorly architected products that force you to accept their big-bang, one-size-fits-all approach to tooling, or just as bad, a re-install and migration when new functions are added.

2.3 Evaluate the Richness of Features and Integrations

Based on interviews and measuring actual usage, here are the key features and characteristics that have been proven most useful to Agile teams as they scale from single-team pilots up to multi-team programs.

NOTE: To download a detailed comparison matrix, refer to Step 3: Scoring and Comparing Agile Solutions.

Feature Area	What to Look For
Ease of Use	Intuitive interfaces and workflows, embedded learning tools and examples, bulk editing, drag-and-drop ordering and the ability to customize fields to fit your processes.
Process Support & Customization	Every team will evolve a “custom Agile” process. Rather than a process skin, look for flexibility to support Agile best practices in planning and tracking iterative development.
Multi-Team Program Management	Support for defining a flexible project hierarchy where high-level features can be decomposed into children stories and tracked automatically across multiple development teams.
Agile Project Management	Intuitive planning and tracking of each story as it moves from backlogs through to acceptance. Ability to view story breakdowns by their related tasks, tests and defects.
Release Planning	Releases should be able to span multiple teams, and charts should track progress and monitor scope creep. Drag-and-drop planning of high-level stories that can be refined as they are scheduled into iterations.
Requirements Management	Story templates and easy attachments make requirements easy to author and review. Change histories and discussions track their evolution. Ability to define parent-child relationships and track predecessor-successor dependencies. Easily navigate to associated tests and defects, plus intuitive views for scheduling stories into releases and iterations and tracking their progress.
Defect Management	Easy entry and attachment support with pre-built connectors to customer support systems and other dedicated defect tracking tools. Ability to associate defects to requirements and tests. You’ll want to schedule defects and groups of defects (defect suites) into your iterations.
Test Management	Define and manage acceptance tests that are first associated to your iteration stories, and then graduate to your regression test suites. Results from automated tests should automatically flow into your project status screens with appropriate rollup reporting and drill-down navigation.
Resource Management	Track availability and capacity of your team members with visual indicators to flag over-burdened members. Be able to rollup individuals to view loading and capacity across projects and programs.
Communication & Collaboration	Personalized home pages where you can monitor relevant activity. Define your own email triggers and RSS notifications to alert team members of new artifacts or changes they care about. Rich text discussions on all artifacts and embedded support for instant messaging.
Reporting	Highly flexible queries and filters to create custom tabular reports plus active defect reports, arrival-kill rates and automatic burn down and cumulative flow charting.
Packaged Connectors to Key Engineering and Customer Management Systems	Demand fully supported integrations. Be careful of vendors that dump their integrations into open source repositories for you to test and repair. Look for engineering connectors and partnerships with the top makers of IDEs, version control, build, test and defect systems. Also active partnerships with leading vendors of project/portfolio management, product management and CRM applications.
Open API that is Versioned	Support for SOAP, REST and JSON interfaces. Versioned web services APIs prevent brittle integrations that break with new releases.
Administration	Robust password management and control over user permissions. Easy setup of new projects and teams. Zero cost to provide installation and maintenance, automatic backup, failover and disaster recovery.
Performance & Scalability	Established metrics for server response times and caching support for global teams.
Security	Documented security protocols for ALL technology layers plus proof of annual audits by certified security auditors.
Deployment & Migration Options	Ask for multitenant true-SaaS deployment (not legacy hosted ASP) with the ability to migrate to on-premise at any time with no data loss.

3 Scoring and Comparing Agile Solutions

Comparing Agile lifecycle management vendors is best done in a spreadsheet. To assist your evaluation, **ask for the Agile Vendor Evaluation Matrix** by sending an email request to info@rallydev.com. This Excel sheet provides an extensive evaluation list that includes vendor criteria and detailed product feature information.

Additional resources to consider during your evaluation:

- [Rally Deployment Guide](#)
- [Rally Services](#) for succeeding with Agile
- Description of [Rally Integrations](#)
- [Rally Architecture and Security](#)
- The advantages of [Agile and SaaS](#)
- Calculating [Total Cost of Ownership](#) of Agile solutions

We will leave you with the five primary reasons customers have selected Rally as their Agile solutions partner:

- Ease of use
- Agile expertise
- Supported integrations
- Program support for multi-team development
- Enterprise scalability

We hope this guide helps you consider the critical aspects of selecting the best Agile vendor.