



E-BOOK

From spreadsheets to strategy: Your guide to choosing a GRC system.

Navigate the move from the manual chaos of spreadsheets and email, to connected, intelligent risk and compliance, with practical advice, real-world examples, and tips to future-proof your program for the AI era.

Executive summary

If you're still managing risks, controls, incidents, and compliance in spreadsheets and email, you're not alone – but you're not scalable. Manual processes may work for now, but they're slow, siloed, error-prone, and hard to audit. As regulatory expectations grow and AI reshapes data management, the gaps in spreadsheets are impossible to ignore. **That's where governance, risk and compliance (GRC) software comes in.**

Why it's time to move on

Spreadsheets are flexible but in risk and compliance, they're a liability. No audit trail, no version control, no easy way to link risks to controls or incidents. Reporting is inconsistent, workflows vanish in email, and critical data is delayed, duplicated, or lost. With regulators demanding real-time assurance, the status quo is no longer safe.

Getting ready for change

Buying GRC software isn't just a tech upgrade, it's a shift in accountability, collaboration, and decision-making. Success depends on engaging risk, compliance, IT and business stakeholders, understanding pain points, aligning on goals, and building a clear case for change.

What to look for

You don't need every feature on day one. Look for a platform that replaces spreadsheets with structured, connected, auditable data and grows with you. Prioritise ease of use, no-code configuration, strong reporting, and vendor support with real GRC expertise. Consider AI-enhanced tools you can adopt over time, like live chat queries, automated testing, and regulatory intelligence. Avoid flashy gimmicks with little value.

Choosing a vendor

Start with your use cases. Focus on problems like manual reporting or fragmented control tracking. Run demos, ask practical questions, and involve stakeholders. The right vendor will show how they solve your exact challenges.

What success looks like

In year one, success means centralising risk data, improving reporting, taming workflows, and reducing manual effort. That could mean your first enterprise-wide risk register, automated attestations, or dashboards replacing five spreadsheets. Over time, you'll expand maturity with integrated testing and real-time AI insights.



Don't let spreadsheets hold back your risk management. See how Protecht streamlines risks, controls, incidents and compliance into one connected platform.

Book a demo

Contents

Executive summary	02
01. Why it's time to move on from spreadsheets	04
02. Getting your organisation ready for change	06
03. What to look for in a GRC platform	09
04. Choosing your vendor	15
05. What success looks like	17
About Protecht	20

1 Why it's time to move on from spreadsheets.

Research by Ray Panko at the University of Hawaii found that nearly 90% of spreadsheets contain errors¹. When those spreadsheets are used to manage financial data, compliance tracking, or risk registers, those errors become liabilities.

Lack of governance

Manual spreadsheet systems lack governance. There's no audit trail, no version control, no real way to monitor who changed what or why. This lack of traceability is a major concern under standards like SOX, ISO 27001, and Basel III, which require clear documentation and defensible records.

Knowledge concentration

Another silent threat is knowledge concentration. In many teams, there's one person who 'owns' the spreadsheet or understands the macros and formulas that hold the whole system together. If that person leaves, entire processes can grind to a halt.

Inconsistency

Manual systems make visibility a constant challenge and reporting becomes an exercise in reconciliation. For executives and board members, this results in inconsistent and often out-of-date reports – and worse, it leaves the organisation exposed to compliance failures.

Common pain points across risk, compliance, and IT

Spreadsheet pain points aren't just an operational nuisance: they impact how well risk, compliance, and IT teams can do their jobs. Everyone feels the pain differently:

- **Risk managers** often struggle to consolidate key risk indicators, incident records, and actions in one view. They spend more time reconciling data than analysing it.

- **Compliance managers** lack a single obligations register. They manually chase attestations and struggle to link controls back to regulatory or policy frameworks.
- **IT and cybersecurity teams** waste time duplicating assessments and manually aligning controls to frameworks like ISO 27001, NIST CSF, or PCI DSS.
- **Executives and boards** receive delayed reports that are hard to digest and disconnected from performance or strategy.

This fragmentation leads to inefficiency, frustration, and most worryingly, missed signals of risk exposure.

"Before Protecht, each business unit managed risk in its own spreadsheet. Central risk teams had no real-time visibility. We were chasing email updates or waiting on monthly reports. Now, we're able to provide our committees with up-to-date information, visual insights and graphs. It's literally been life-changing for the organisation.

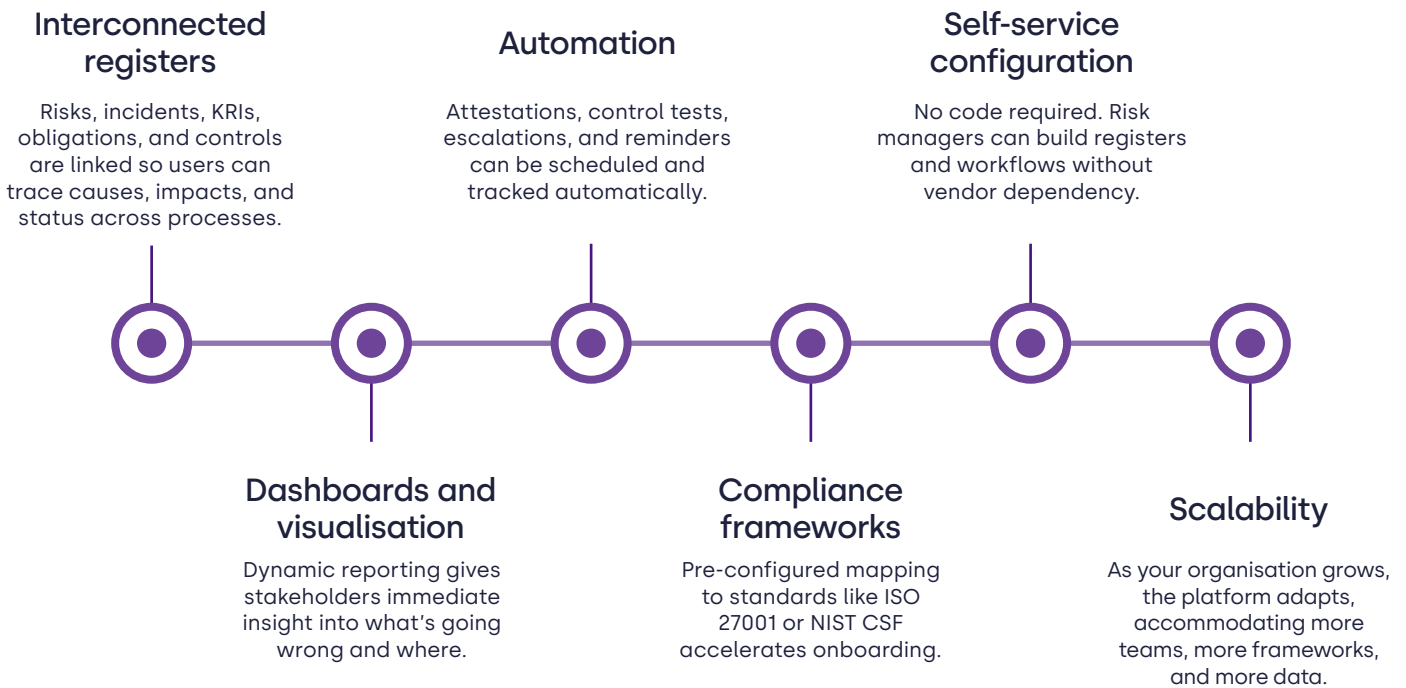


— **Rishad Paul Smartt**, Senior Risk and Compliance Manager, NZAA

¹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228662532_What_We_Know_About_Spreadsheet_Errors

What modern GRC looks like – and why it's better

GRC platforms aren't just digital versions of spreadsheets. They're designed to manage interconnected elements of risk, control, compliance, and assurance across the business.



How Protecht helps



Protecht links risks, incidents, KRIs, obligations, and controls into auditable registers, automates attestations and testing, and delivers dashboards your board can trust. With pre-mapped compliance frameworks, no-code configuration, and scalability as you grow, Protecht gives you the governance and insight that spreadsheets can't.

2 Getting your organisation ready for change.

Every business unit approaches governance, risk, and compliance with different needs and pain points. Understanding these is the first step in building your mandate for change.

Common needs by function:

- Risk teams seek unified registers, interlinked risks and controls, clear issue tracking, and improved visibility over KRIs
- Compliance teams need better obligation management, streamlined attestations, and a system to manage regulatory change
- IT and security leaders look for frameworks like NIST and ISO 27001 to be mapped against their controls environment for assurance and audit readiness
- Executives and boards want timely, trustworthy dashboards to support informed decision-making and demonstrate assurance

Symptoms of deeper issues:

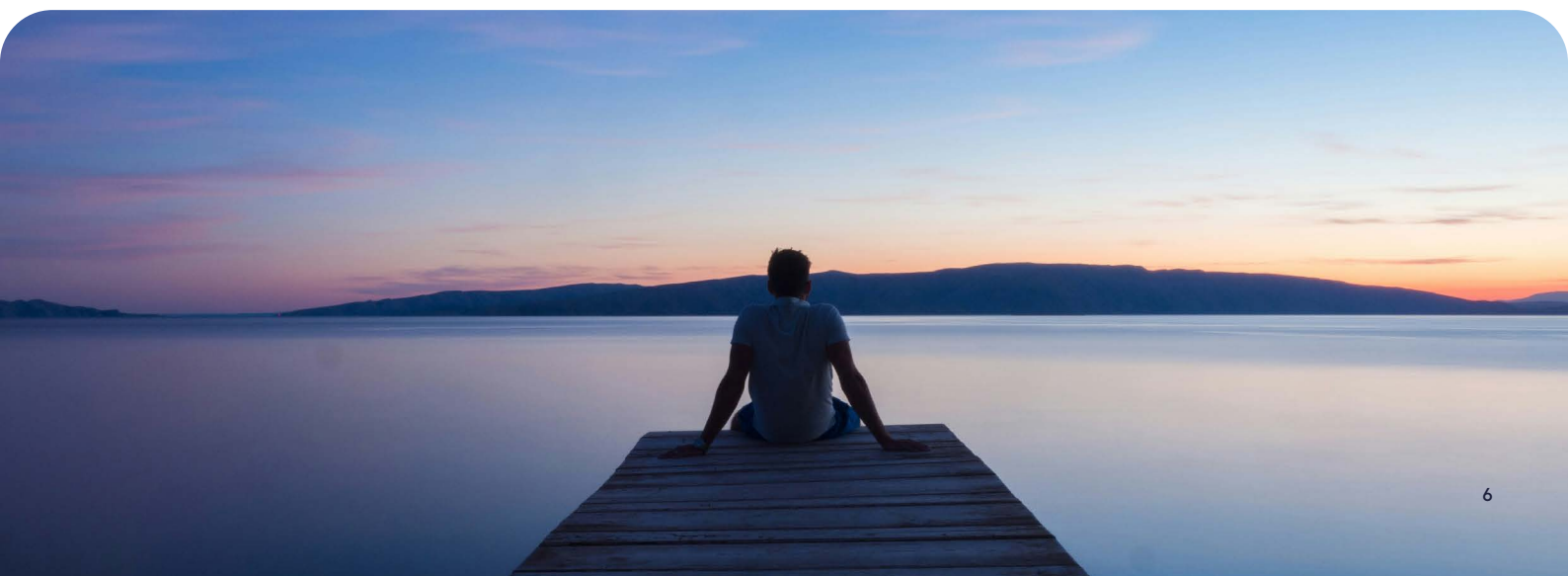
- Duplication of effort and inconsistent data across departments
- Lack of standardised taxonomy for risks, causes, and controls
- Audit actions not closed or lost in emails
- Risk reviews treated as one-off exercises rather than continuous processes

Practical diagnostics to uncover issues:

- Map all current spreadsheet-based processes in order to determine where inefficiencies, inaccuracies and duplications are taking place
- Interview frontline users to estimate hours lost to manual reporting
- Review recent audit findings or compliance breaches for root causes that are down to poorly integrated, slow or inaccurate tracking and reporting
- Use a maturity model or heatmap to visualise weak spots

"Risk was seen as a separate, box-ticking exercise. With spreadsheets and basic databases, we couldn't connect risk to business performance or decisions."

— CFO, UK Motor Insurer



Engaging stakeholders at all levels

Moving from spreadsheets to a dedicated GRC platform is not just a technology upgrade, it's a change in how people work. Getting buy-in from everyone is essential.

How to engage with stakeholders:

Stakeholder group	Key concern	Strategic engagement insight
Risk & compliance	Better reporting and risk visibility	Show value of insight, not just tracking
IT & cybersecurity	Integration, data quality, performance	Position GRC as scalable data infrastructure
Legal & regulatory	Audit trail, obligation management	Emphasises defensibility and linkage to evidence
Internal audit	Assurance, findings and action traceability	Show how GRC closes the loop across records
Frontline managers	Ease of use, reduced admin	Make accountability visible and painless

Engagement best practices:

- Speak their language: e.g. "reduced risk of incidents and downtime" for IT, "regulatory defensibility" for Legal
- Show specific value: e.g. "how better risk visibility will allow you to take better and more effective business decisions"
- Identify champions: early users who can validate and advocate the solution
- Avoid one-size-fits-all: tailor FAQs and benefits statements by role

We have prepared a detailed list of questions that you are likely to receive from stakeholders during the engagement process and guideline responses. Download it now:

[Download stakeholder Q&A](#)

Building a shared vision of success

The most successful GRC implementations don't just address pain, they align with broader strategic goals.

Strategies to align on outcomes		Recommended outputs
Co-create goals	Ask stakeholders, "What would success look like in 6 months?"	Shared KPI framework (e.g. fewer manual tasks, faster report delivery)
Visualise the future	Use mock dashboards and before/after scenarios.	A "Why now?" explainer, ideally one page, written in plain business terms
Align with enterprise goals	Position GRC transformation as a driver for strategic agility, regulatory resilience, cost efficiency in compliance	Executive briefing or board deck linking GRC transformation to enterprise strategy, with metrics showing ROI, resilience improvements, and compliance efficiency

Preparing a simple business case

A well-framed business case bridges technical needs and strategic outcomes. It turns GRC from a "nice to have" into a "must-do."

Structure your case around:

Problem definition	Tangible ROI	Intangible ROI	Cost considerations	Get vendor input early
Quantify: number of spreadsheets, hours spent on reporting, number of open audit findings Qualify: missed deadlines, team frustration, poor visibility	Admin time saved (compliance, risk, IT) Fewer audit findings or duplicated control tests Reduced risk of non-compliance or fines	Improved stakeholder confidence Enhanced risk culture Faster, more strategic decisions	Include more than licensing: Reduced external audit scope Time saved on training, remediation, and evidence gathering Internal support load reductions	Protecht offers ROI calculators and business case templates. Bring these into internal conversations to build credibility.

How Protecht helps

Protecht makes change easier by giving every stakeholder what they need: unified registers for risk teams, obligation management for compliance, mapped frameworks for IT, and real-time dashboards for executives. Our Cognita AI assistant helps you identify critical gaps, guides users in real time, and automates admin tasks.

Want to know more about calculating ROI and preparing a business case?
You can access Protecht's ROI calculator and business case template here:

[ROI calculator](#)

[Business case template](#)

3 What to look for in a GRC platform.

Not all GRC platforms are created equal, and for first-time buyers, the goal isn't to chase every feature, but to find the right foundation. You need something that delivers immediate value, adapts as your needs evolve, and is simple enough to drive adoption across the business. Focus on a solution that covers the essentials well, helps you grow at your own pace, and avoids unnecessary complexity.

No-code configurability

Configurable registers for core GRC activities (risks, controls, incidents, obligations, actions) without requiring coding skills or third-party configuration

Templates & libraries

Built-in templates eliminate "blank page" syndrome and provide a preconfigured library of best practices to hit the ground running

Linkages between records

Linking risks to controls, controls to obligations, and incidents to actions allows you to trace root causes, test effectiveness, and ensure you're not missing gaps

Simple implementation

Quick to roll out with guided onboarding, prebuilt registers, and minimal IT dependency, so you can show value early and build momentum

And here's what to avoid:

- Overly complex platforms that require heavy configuration just to get started.
- Point solutions that solve one need (e.g., risk registers) but don't integrate or scale across the wider GRC landscape.

Usability: Getting the whole organisation engaged

Usability is the biggest driver of success for GRC buyers. Without it, systems sit unused, and spreadsheet chaos creeps back in. Your platform should be easy enough for everyone to use, not just your risk and compliance leads.

Clean, intuitive interface	If your new system doesn't meet modern usability standards (or modern aesthetics), adoption will suffer.
Role-based views	Different users need different views. Your risk manager might need access to analytics dashboards and register libraries. A department head just needs to see their assigned actions and due dates.
No-code configurability	Risk and compliance teams should be able to build new forms, update workflows, or change register fields without waiting in an IT queue.
Mobile-ready	Especially in sectors like education, utilities or field operations, people aren't always at a desk. Mobile-friendly functionality means users can log incidents or complete compliance tasks from anywhere.
Built-in user support	Look for embedded help content, tooltips, and contextual guidance that reduce training time and make it easy for occasional users to stay on track without needing to call support or ask the risk team.
Purpose-built GRC AI	Modern GRC platforms should offer AI capabilities that simplify tasks and deliver insights, from risk assistance through to simplified incident logging and investigation. Ask vendors how their AI roadmap will support your future needs (see more at the end of this section).

Implementation and support: What good looks like

For first-time buyers, the onboarding experience can make or break success. You're not just switching tools, you're changing how risk and compliance get done.

Pre-configured modules	Your vendor should help you focus on your highest-priority use cases, often incident management or enterprise risk. There's no need to build everything at once.
Change management support	Look for partners who provide email templates, training guides, and stakeholder communications to help socialise the system internally.
Advisory services	GRC software is only as good as the people supporting it. A good vendor brings experience in regulatory frameworks, risk strategies, and internal controls, not just system setup.

Key implementation questions to ask vendors include:

- Can you help us convert our existing spreadsheets into registers?
- What onboarding support is available for teams with no dedicated GRC administrator?
- How much of the platform is pre-templated and how much do we need to build ourselves?
- What training and education support do you have available, what is the cost model for it, and how is it delivered?

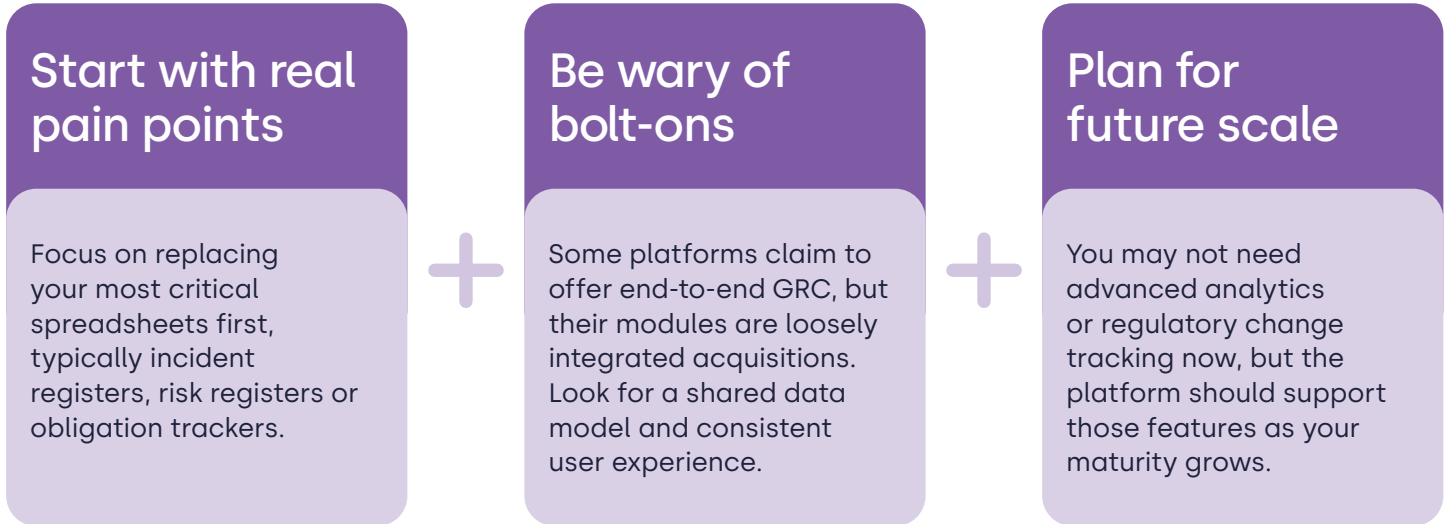
“With Protecht, we’ve transformed risk management in six months. Now, we’re looking at how far we can take this.”

— Lone Le Roux, Director, Risk & Compliance, Pay.UK




How to avoid overbuying or underbuying

When choosing your first GRC solution, it's easy to go too big or too small.



Real-life customer experiences



Melbourne Polytechnic started with just a few registers to centralise operational risk data. As the team matured, they added more registers with ease, using the same consistent framework.



Protecht's interface helped Pay.UK engage front-line and support teams in incident logging and control attestations, turning risk into a shared responsibility.



First Central Group went from using Protecht to replace spreadsheets to automating attestations, linking actions to risks, and building dashboards for execs — all without waiting on consultants.



When WorldRemit implemented Protecht, they used library content to establish risk and control taxonomies across a decentralised international business, without starting from scratch.



First Tech Federal Credit Union adopted Protecht for its ease of configuration, empowering their team to update risk forms themselves when regulatory needs changed.

What you should know about AI

AI is fast becoming a powerful enabler in modern GRC systems. But its role isn't to replace your core platform, it's to make that platform more effective once the basics are in place.

For first-time buyers, the top priority is moving from spreadsheets to structured, connected, auditable data. That foundation gives you reliable registers, workflows, and taxonomies. Once that's in place, AI can enhance your system by:

- Streamlining incident logging and resolution with natural language guidance
- Automating repetitive workflows such as control testing and review
- Surfacing patterns and trends across incidents, risks, and controls
- Enhancing dashboards with prioritised insights you don't have to slice manually
- Keeping regulatory registers up to date through intelligent content mapping

Look for a platform that gets the basics right but includes AI features you can grow into like smart dashboards, AI-powered workflows, or embedded regulatory intelligence.

Feature	Why it matters
Support tools that combine platform help and risk knowledge	Reduces learning curve for users new to risk/compliance
Enhanced incident logging	Saves user time, allows more accurate incident reports, faster review and actioning
Enhanced dashboards	Helps prioritise and visualise risk trends without manual slicing

Vendor roadmap clarity is also important as AI plans continue to evolve. First-time buyers should ask vendors how AI will evolve in the next 12-24 months.

What AI can and can't do for first-time buyers

AI can help right away by reducing admin, improving accuracy, and highlighting risks faster. But it's an aid, not a substitute:

- It can't replace clean data. AI can structure individual reports, but it won't instantly build an enterprise-wide database from legacy spreadsheets.
- It's not fully "plug and play." AI features often require some training, tuning, and change management.
- It's often subtle, not flashy. Much of AI's value shows up as smoother routing, better recommendations, and faster guidance rather than dramatic outputs.



Find out more about Protecht's safe, smart Cognita AI solution

[Learn more](#)

The risks of waiting too long

There's a real cost to delay. Organisations that wait to modernise risk being caught off-guard by changing expectations. The longer you wait, the more fragile your systems become and the more risk you absorb without visibility.

Regulatory risk

Frameworks like NIST CSF, SOC 2 or COBIT in IT or regulatory specific ones like the EU's DORA require documented controls, audit trails and insights, which spreadsheets can't deliver.

Scalability failure

As the organisation grows or enters new markets, manual systems buckle. Risks are missed. Obligations fall through the cracks.

Momentum loss

Delaying modernisation can lead to internal fatigue and missed windows of opportunity, especially if there's initial buy-in that later fades.

Talent challenges

Today's professionals expect modern, intuitive systems. Relying on legacy spreadsheets makes roles less appealing and harder to retain.

Reactive culture

When your data is fragmented and out of date, you're forced to firefight. GRC software enables proactive, preventive action.

How Protecht helps



Protecht gives you the right foundation: simple onboarding, prebuilt registers, and no-code configuration to replace spreadsheets fast. With linked records, built-in templates, intuitive dashboards, and an AI roadmap you can grow into, it balances ease of use with scalability, so adoption sticks and value is clear from day one.

4 Choosing your vendor.

With dozens of vendors offering overlapping capabilities, how do you narrow it down to the right shortlist? The goal here isn't to find a theoretical "best" solution, it's to find the platform that supports your most urgent needs, engages your users, and gives you room to grow.

Step 1

Don't start with a feature checklist

Many first-time buyers begin their search by compiling long lists of technical features. While that may seem logical, it can quickly lead you into two traps:

- Overbuying a platform that offers everything but solves nothing urgently
- Underbuying a tool that ticks compliance boxes but can't scale with your needs

Instead, anchor your shortlist in the real problems you're trying to solve, such as eliminating spreadsheet duplication, reducing compliance reporting time, or gaining cross-functional visibility over risks and controls.

Step 2

Start from your use cases

Look back at the business needs and pain points you identified in Section 2. Each one should map to a scenario you can test during demos. For example:

- "Can I set up a single risk register that links to incidents, controls and obligations?"
- "How can business unit managers complete attestations without training?"
- "If I want to create a new dashboard for executive reporting, how long does that take?"

You need to know what's possible, what's configurable, and what will require vendor involvement.

Step 3

Watch out for red flags

As you build your list, it's worth watching out for a few common warning signs:

- **One-size-fits-all demos:** If the vendor can't show examples relevant to your size or sector, they may not be the right partner
- **Opaque implementation timelines:** Vague promises around "quick setup" without details can lead to long, expensive projects
- **Rigid pricing or packaging:** Some vendors only offer all-or-nothing packages, which can leave smaller teams paying for features they don't need

Step 4

Get your internal decision-makers back in the loop

Before moving into vendor demos, it's a good time to re-engage key stakeholders, especially the people who will approve the investment. Revisit the shared objectives and change narrative from earlier in the process. Ask:

- Has anything changed in terms of strategic priorities?
- Are there new pain points we should raise during demos?
- Who needs to be involved in the evaluation process from here?

Some organisations run internal "demo scorecards" for each stakeholder group to capture their feedback in a structured way. Others start with a single use case, such as compliance attestations, and evaluate vendors based on that.

Key questions to ask vendors

With your shortlist in hand, the next step is a structured vendor evaluation. This is where early assumptions get tested: what looks good on a website or slide deck may not hold up in a demo or proof of concept.

The best vendor conversations are more than just feature reviews. They're an opportunity to explore how each platform aligns with your workflows, data structures, team experience, and future goals. Don't be afraid to ask practical questions that reflect how your teams actually work today.

You should leave each demo with a clear understanding of:

- What you can do yourself vs. what requires vendor support
- How each platform handles your specific use cases
- What onboarding and adoption will require across your teams
- Whether the platform is likely to still be the right fit in three years

We have created a longlist of key questions you can ask vendors as part of the evaluation process.

Download it now:

Download vendor question checklist

How to run a structured evaluation

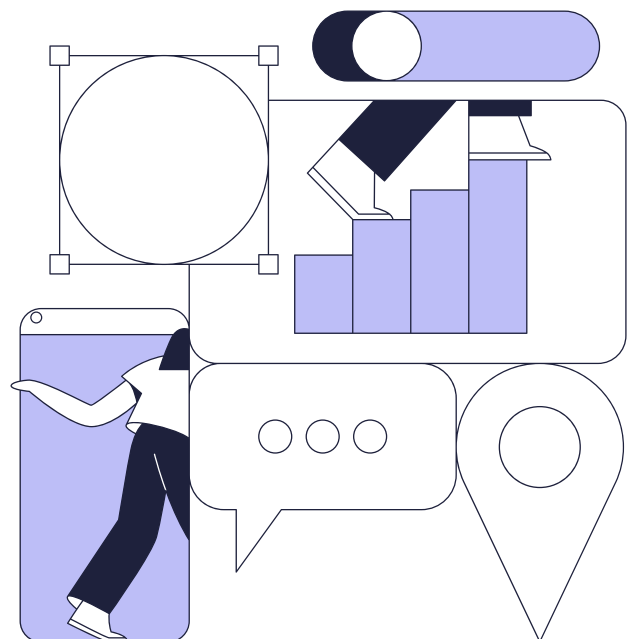
Selecting a GRC platform is a significant decision: one that impacts risk visibility, compliance processes, audit readiness, and your ability to scale. Without a clear structure, it's easy to get caught up in vendor marketing or lose momentum trying to compare fundamentally different tools.

A structured evaluation helps you focus on the right criteria, engage your stakeholders, and ultimately choose the platform that fits your actual workflows and priorities. It also creates transparency and alignment, especially if your decision will be scrutinised by procurement, IT, or executive leadership.

We have created a six-part best practice guide on how to structure a vendor evaluation in detail.

Download it now:

Download vendor evaluation guide



5 What success looks like.

Success isn't about going live for the sake of a deadline: it's about replacing manual effort with structured workflows, gaining timely insights, and building a foundation for risk maturity.

Setting goals for your first year

The best place to start is with your most time-consuming, error-prone processes, typically your risk register, compliance attestations, or incident tracking. Use these early wins to demonstrate value, win stakeholder buy-in, and create a foundation you can build on.

Practical 12-month objectives for first-time GRC buyers:



As your implementation progresses, track meaningful KPIs to validate success and guide iteration. These might include:

- Percentage reduction in manual reporting effort
- Time to generate board-ready risk reports
- Number of departments actively using the platform
- Percentage of compliance tasks completed in-platform
- Audit or regulatory feedback on process improvements

Examples of early wins

First-time buyers often ask, "What does good actually look like in year one?" These examples illustrate what early success feels like and how it can spread momentum across teams.

A compliance manager cuts time spent aggregating data by 70%, automating attestations and removing email-based approval loops.

An operations lead rolls out a consistent incident reporting workflow across three sites, eliminating duplicated effort and centralising oversight.

A CRO builds their first board dashboard using live risk data, replacing six disconnected spreadsheets and manual slide decks.

→ An internal audit team introduces issue tracking and closes findings twice as fast, thanks to workflow visibility and automated reminders.

A risk analyst identifies duplicated controls across departments using a shared taxonomy, saving time and reducing confusion for front-line teams.

Planning for long-term maturity

With core modules in place and adoption growing, successful GRC programs evolve into strategic enablers that inform decision-making, align with business goals, and embed risk culture throughout the organisation.

Maturity roadmap: Year 2 and beyond

Capability area	Mature practice
Control management	Control testing with automated scheduling linked to obligations, incidents, KRIs, and assurance reporting
Compliance management	Active regulatory change tracking with obligations mapped across frameworks (e.g. SMCR, CPS 230, DORA)
Risk culture	Risk ownership pushed to the front line, with integrated attestations and embedded responsibilities
Reporting & insight	Self-service dashboards across teams; reporting aligned with risk appetite and business performance
Integration	Real-time data exchange between GRC and core business systems (e.g. HR, Finance, Power BI, ServiceNow)
Governance	Regular maturity reviews; cross-functional ownership of GRC strategy; board-level alignment

Preparing for the AI-enhanced future of GRC

As your GRC program matures, AI can help you move from operational efficiency to strategic foresight.

Here's what you should expect AI to deliver as your program grows:

- Enhance incident and task management: Natural language guidance supports accurate, fast incident logging and routing, helping teams act quickly and consistently.
- Surface deeper insights: AI highlights anomalies and trends across incidents, issues, and KRIs, enabling earlier identification of emerging risks.
- Strengthen reporting and communication: AI-generated summaries and context-aware dashboards reduce reporting fatigue while giving executives clearer, actionable information.
- Automate controls and workflows: Machine learning can streamline control testing, validate evidence, and trigger escalations without repetitive manual effort.
- Keep obligations current: Regulatory intelligence tools use AI to detect, map, and apply compliance changes in real time, keeping registers up to date with less overhead.

When you assess platforms, consider:

- What's available now, and what's on the roadmap? Clarify near-term versus long-term capabilities.
- How transparent is the AI? Look for clear explanations, audit trails of AI-initiated changes, and human oversight.
- How much burden is reduced for control owners, risk managers, and assurance teams? Ask for practical examples or benchmarks.
- What's required to enable the features? Ensure they build on your existing registers, workflows, and data model rather than forcing you to start over.

How Protecht helps

Protecht helps you achieve quick wins: centralising risk registers, automating attestations, and building dashboards that replace disconnected spreadsheets. As adoption grows, you can expand into control testing, obligation tracking, and AI-powered insights with our intelligent AI assistant Cognita.

[Book a demo](#)



ABOUT PROTECHT

Redefining the way the world thinks about risk.

While others fear risk, we embrace it. For over 25 years, Protecht has redefined the way people think about risk management. Through our people, we enable smarter risk taking by our customers to drive their resilience and sustainable success.

We help our customers increase performance and achieve strategic objectives through better understanding, monitoring and management of risk. We provide a complete solution of AI-enabled governance, compliance and risk management software supported by training and advisory

services to businesses, regulators and governments across the world.

With our flagship Protecht ERM SaaS platform you can dynamically manage all your risks in a single place: risks, compliance, incidents, KRIs, vendor risk, cyber and IT risk, internal audit, operational resilience, business continuity, workplace safety, and more.

We're with you for your full risk journey. Let's transform the way you understand and manage your risk to create exciting opportunities for growth.

Visit our website:
protechtgroup.com

Email us:
info@protechtgroup.com