

# U.S. Payroll Buyers Guide

Software Provider and Product Assessment



EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

**\*ISG** Research



## U.S. Payroll

In the ever-changing world of enterprise operations, payroll is a critical function that sits at the intersection of HR, finance and compliance. To say that payroll is complex is an understatement. Beyond ensuring accurate and timely payments to workers, payroll leaders



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must navigate a maze of regulatory requirements that vary by location, creating significant challenges. Payroll, therefore, becomes more than a routine process, it plays a pivotal role in minimizing risk, driving operational efficiency and enhancing the employee experience.

Payroll technology has evolved in response to new business models, a rapidly expanding remote workforce and the increasing demand for real-time, automated systems. As digital transformation in the workplace accelerates, enterprises are under pressure to adopt payroll systems that not only keep pace with regulatory changes but also align with broader HR and organizational strategies.

ISG Research defines Domestic (U.S.) Payroll as the administration of worker compensation within the United States, encompassing the management of wages, salaries, taxes and deductions in compliance with federal, state and local regulations. Domestic payroll systems must address the complexities of navigating multiple tax jurisdictions, which require frequent updates to reflect changes in legislation. While advancements in technology—such as AI and

automation—have improved efficiency by streamlining tax calculations and ensuring accurate payroll processing, the challenge of maintaining compliance across diverse regions remains a critical concern, particularly for smaller organizations with limited resources.

Keeping pace with regulatory changes—whether related to payroll taxes, overtime rules or benefits contributions—presents a major challenge, as failing to stay compliant can result in financial penalties, legal risks and damage to an organization’s reputation. Additionally, many enterprises are forced to manage payroll processes with limited resources, often requiring payroll teams to do more with less. This challenge is particularly pronounced for organizations that operate across borders or in multiple regions, where local expertise is necessary to ensure accuracy and compliance. By 2028, one-fifth of enterprises will benefit from payroll platforms that use AI to detect errors and omissions that would prohibit the payroll run, like missed punches, and nudge managers to take action and resolve.



Data accuracy is of the highest importance when examining the topic of payroll. Payroll data must be precise not only for the sake of timely payments but also to meet compliance obligations. Errors in payroll calculations can lead to discrepancies that frustrate workers and may even attract regulatory scrutiny. While many organizations have turned to automation to help address these issues, the complexity of managing large-scale payroll operations means that technology alone is not always sufficient. Human oversight, thorough audits and continuous process improvements are often necessary to ensure payroll data accuracy.

Remote workforce strategies have introduced additional payroll concerns for many organizations. The shift to remote work, accelerated by global events, has created new layers of complexity. Payroll teams must now account for employees working in different locations, sometimes across state or national borders, which brings up questions around tax withholding, jurisdictional payroll laws and the classification of remote workers or contractors. For many enterprises, existing payroll systems were not designed to handle the nuances of remote work, requiring rapid adjustments to accommodate this new reality.

Several key trends have emerged in payroll, driven by the demand for more dynamic, real-time solutions. The demand for automation continues to grow as enterprises look for ways to



**Automated systems that handle everything from tax calculations to compliance reporting are essential for organizations looking to scale payroll operations.**

streamline payroll processes, reduce manual interventions and improve overall efficiency. Automated systems that handle everything from tax calculations to compliance reporting are essential for organizations looking to scale payroll operations. While automation reduces errors and frees up valuable human resources, it also requires a payroll system that integrates seamlessly with other enterprise software, such as human capital management systems and time and attendance tools.

Another key trend is the increasing use of artificial intelligence and machine learning in payroll. Maximizing these technologies aids detection of anomalies in payroll data, ensures compliance with local laws and even forecasts payroll expenses based on historical data. AI-driven software help organizations reduce errors and mitigate compliance risks by identifying potential issues before they become critical problems.

However, while AI is promising, it's important to recognize that these technologies are still evolving, and enterprises must balance innovation with practical concerns about specific operational needs.

The role of payroll within the enterprise is also shifting. HR's influence on payroll has grown as payroll increasingly intersects with broader HR functions such as employee experience,



benefits administration and workforce planning. This shift highlights the need for payroll systems that integrate seamlessly with other HR technologies, providing a more holistic view of the worker's life cycle.

Innovations in payroll technology are transforming how large enterprises manage this critical function. One of the most significant developments is the rise of cloud-based payroll systems, which offer scalability, flexibility and enhanced security compared to traditional on-premises systems. Cloud-based platforms enable organizations to manage payroll operations from anywhere in the world, providing real-time updates and ensuring that payroll teams can stay on top of regulatory changes without delay. These platforms also allow for greater collaboration between payroll, HR and finance teams, ensuring that payroll processes align with broader business goals.

Another important innovation impacting payroll software is continuous payroll (or real-time payroll) which enables on-demand wage access. Real-time payroll allows workers to view and access their earned wages in real-time rather than waiting for the traditional pay period to end. This feature has become increasingly popular among employees who seek greater control over their finances and has proven to be a valuable tool for employee retention in industries with high turnover rates. Offering on-demand wage access requires an agile and responsive payroll system capable of processing real-time wage requests without compromising accuracy or compliance. By 2026, one-third of enterprises will offer earned wage access (EWA) to their workforce as on-demand payroll offerings become available for workers who desire and demand pay flexibility.

## Payroll Management

Market Assertion

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**Matthew Brown**  
Director of Research, HCM



**ISG** Research

AI-driven compliance is also transforming how enterprises navigate the complex web of tax laws and labor regulations. AI-powered payroll systems can analyze local labor laws, apply them to payroll calculations and ensure that organizations remain compliant across multiple jurisdictions. These systems reduce the risk of human error and streamline the compliance process, freeing up payroll teams to focus on more strategic tasks. However, while AI and automation offer new tools for compliance, many organizations are still grappling with the challenges of adapting legacy systems to today's software.

Despite these technological advances, many enterprises miss opportunities to maximize payroll systems for more than just processing payments. Payroll as a communication tool is often overlooked, yet it provides a unique touchpoint between the organization and its workers. Enterprises can use payroll to communicate important updates, share benefits information, or highlight key company initiatives. By integrating communication into payroll,





enterprises engage workers in more meaningful ways, fostering a stronger connection between the workforce and the organization.

As payroll technology continues to evolve, the role of payroll within large enterprises is transforming. Once considered a back-office, transactional function, payroll is increasingly seen as a strategic pillar that impacts worker satisfaction, operational efficiency and compliance. Payroll teams collaborate more closely with HR and finance departments, ensuring that payroll processes align with broader organizational goals. This shift underscores the importance of adopting contemporary payroll systems that integrate with other enterprise systems, providing a more holistic view of workforce management.

Enterprises that fail to update payroll operations risk falling behind in an increasingly competitive landscape. Embracing cloud-based platforms, real-time payroll, AI-driven compliance and innovative communication tools helps organizations streamline payroll processes and enable better business outcomes. Payroll systems of the future must be agile, adaptable and deeply integrated with other HR and business technologies to meet the needs of a dynamic and evolving workforce.

In an era where payroll is rapidly evolving from a back-office function to a strategic asset, the need for contemporary, integrated and scalable payroll software has never been greater. As



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enterprises face increasing complexity, shifting regulations and evolving worker expectations, it is essential to rethink how payroll systems can better serve the business and its workforce. Whether addressing compliance challenges, capitalizing on automation or seeking to enhance employee engagement, the next step in the payroll journey is to embrace innovation. Enterprises can transform payroll into a tool for operational efficiency and worker satisfaction by evaluating current processes; exploring new technologies like AI, real-time payroll or cloud-based platforms; and ensuring alignment with broader HR strategies.

The future of payroll is not just about processing payments—it's about creating a more agile, compliant and employee-centered function that supports the long-term success of the organization. Now is the time to take the next step and make payroll a driving force for positive change in the enterprise.

The ISG Buyers Guide™ for Domestic (U.S.) Payroll evaluates software providers and products in key areas intended to explore all aspects of payroll technology, including core payroll capabilities, domestic payroll, IT capabilities, manager capabilities, payroll administration



capabilities, payroll analytics, payroll strategies and process needs, integrations and overall support for worker pay needs.

This research evaluates the following software providers that offer products that address key elements of U.S. Payroll as we define it: ADP, BambooHR, Dayforce, Deel, Gusto, Infor, isolved, Namely, Neeyamo, Netchex, Oracle, Papaya Global, Paychex, Paycom, Paycor, Paylocity, Rippling, SAP, UKG, Unit4 and Workday.



## Buyers Guide Overview

For over two decades, ISG Research has conducted market research in a spectrum of areas across business applications, tools and technologies. We have designed the Buyers Guide to provide a balanced perspective of software providers and products that is rooted in an understanding of the business requirements in any enterprise. Utilization of our research



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methodology and decades of experience enables our Buyers Guide to be an effective method to assess and select software providers and products. The findings of this research undertaking contribute to our comprehensive approach to rating software providers in a manner that is based on the assessments completed by an enterprise.

The ISG Buyers Guide™ for U.S. Payroll is the distillation of over a year of market and product research efforts. It is an assessment of how well software providers' offerings address enterprises' requirements for U.S. payroll software. The index is structured to support a request for information (RFI) that could be used in the request for proposal (RFP) process by incorporating all criteria needed to evaluate, select, utilize and maintain relationships with software providers. An effective product and customer experience with a provider can ensure the best long-term relationship and value achieved from a resource and financial investment.

In this Buyers Guide, ISG Research evaluates the software in seven key categories that are weighted to reflect buyers' needs based on our expertise and research. Five are product-experience related: Adaptability, Capability, Manageability, Reliability, and Usability. In addition, we consider two customer-experience categories: Validation, and Total Cost of Ownership/Return on Investment (TCO/ROI). To assess functionality, one of the components of Capability, we applied the ISG Research Value Index methodology and blueprint, which links the personas and processes for U.S. payroll to an enterprise's requirements.

The structure of the research reflects our understanding that the effective evaluation of software providers and products involves far more than just examining product features, potential revenue or customers generated from a provider's marketing and sales efforts. We believe it is important to take a comprehensive, research-based approach, since making the wrong choice of U.S. payroll technology can raise the total cost of ownership, lower the return on investment and hamper an enterprise's ability to reach its full performance potential. In addition, this approach can reduce the project's development and deployment time and eliminate the risk of relying on a short list of software providers that does not represent a best fit for your enterprise.



ISG Research believes that an objective review of software providers and products is a critical business strategy for the adoption and implementation of U.S. payroll software and applications. An enterprise's review should include a thorough analysis of both what is possible and what is relevant. We urge enterprises to do a thorough job of evaluating U.S. payroll systems and tools and offer this Buyers Guide as both the results of our in-depth analysis of these providers and as an evaluation methodology.





# How To Use This Buyers Guide

## Evaluating Software Providers: The Process

We recommend using the Buyers Guide to assess and evaluate new or existing software providers for your enterprise. The market research can be used as an evaluation framework to establish a formal request for information from providers on products and customer experience and will shorten the cycle time when creating an RFI. The steps listed below provide a process that can facilitate best possible outcomes.

1. Define the business case and goals.  
Define the mission and business case for investment and the expected outcomes from your organizational and technological efforts.
2. Specify the business needs.  
Defining the business requirements helps identify what specific capabilities are required with respect to people, processes, information and technology.
3. Assess the required roles and responsibilities.  
Identify the individuals required for success at every level of the enterprise from executives to frontline workers and determine the needs of each.
4. Outline the project's critical path.  
What needs to be done, in what order and who will do it? This outline should make clear the prior dependencies at each step of the project plan.
5. Ascertain the technology approach.  
Determine the business and technology approach that most closely aligns to your enterprise's requirements.
6. Establish software provider evaluation criteria.  
Utilize the product experience: Adaptability, Capability, Manageability, Reliability and Usability, and the customer experience in TCO/ROI and Validation.
7. Evaluate and select the technology properly.  
Weight the categories in the technology evaluation criteria to reflect your enterprise's priorities to determine the short list of software providers and products.
8. Establish the business initiative team to start the project.  
Identify who will lead the project and the members of the team needed to plan and execute it with timelines, priorities and resources.



# The Findings

All of the products we evaluated are feature-rich, but not all the capabilities offered by a software provider are equally valuable to types of workers or support everything needed to manage products on a continuous basis. Moreover, the existence of too many capabilities may be a negative factor for an enterprise if it introduces unnecessary complexity. Nonetheless, you may decide that a larger number of features in the product is a plus, especially if some of them match your enterprise’s established practices or support an initiative that is driving the purchase of new software.

Factors beyond features and functions or software provider assessments may become a deciding factor. For example, an enterprise may face budget constraints such that the TCO evaluation can tip the balance to one provider or another. This is where the Value Index methodology and the appropriate category weighting can be applied to determine the best fit of software providers and products to your specific needs.

## Overall Scoring of Software Providers Across Categories

The research finds ADP atop the list, followed by Oracle and UKG. Providers that place in the top three of a category earn the designation of Leader. ADP has done so in seven categories, Oracle in six, UKG in four, SAP in two and Dayforce and Workday in one category.

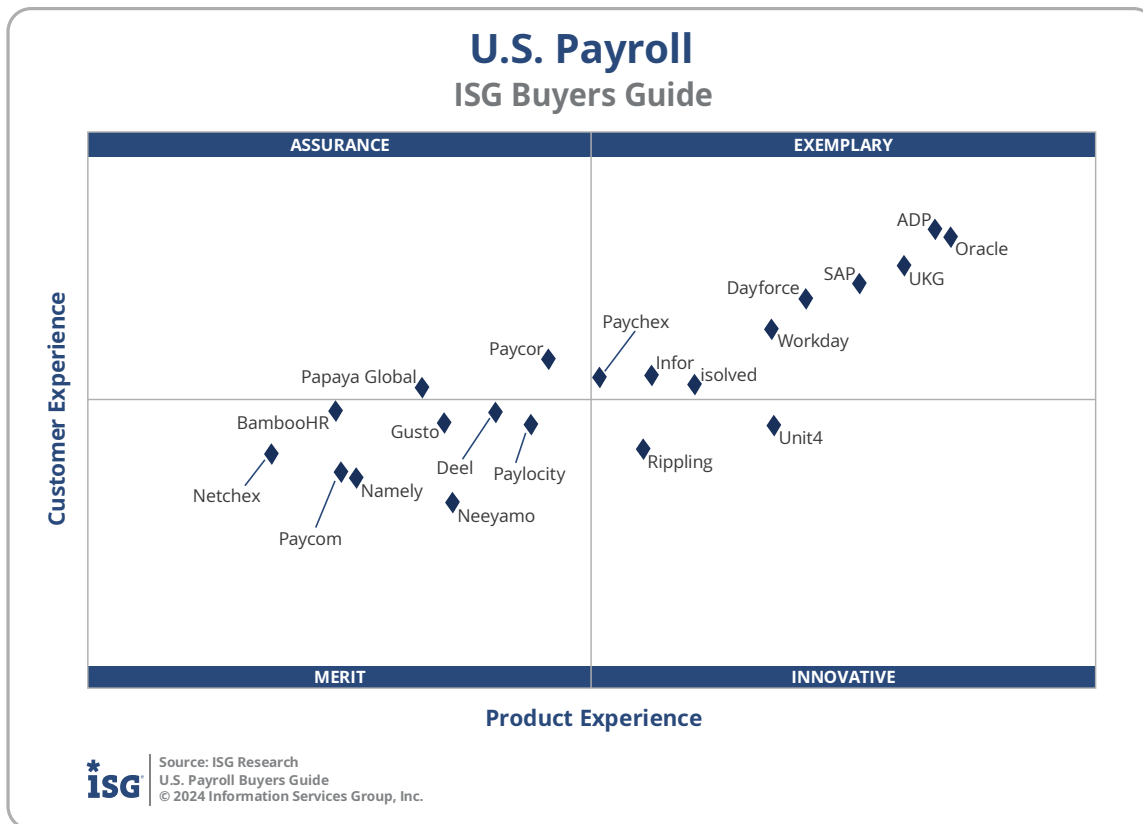
The overall representation of the research below places the rating of the Product Experience and Customer Experience on the x and y axes, respectively, to provide a visual representation and classification of the software providers. Those providers whose Product Experience have a higher weighted performance to the axis in aggregate of the five product categories place farther to the right, while the performance and weighting for the two Customer Experience categories determines placement on the vertical axis. In short, software providers that place closer to the upper-right on this chart performed better than those closer to the lower-left.

The research places software providers into one of four overall categories: Assurance, Exemplary, Merit or Innovative. This representation classifies providers’ overall weighted performance.

**U.S. Payroll**  
Overall

Providers	Grade	Performance
ADP	A	<b>Leader</b> 88.5%
Oracle	A-	<b>Leader</b> 86.6%
UKG	A-	<b>Leader</b> 85.7%
Dayforce	A-	82.9%
SAP	A-	82.8%
Workday	B++	78.4%
isolved	B++	77.6%
Unit4	B+	73.3%
Rippling	B+	72.8%
Infor	B+	71.1%
Paychex	B+	69.4%
Paycor	B	68.1%
Paylocity	B	67.0%
Deel	B	66.2%
Gusto	B	65.3%
Namely	B	63.3%
BambooHR	B-	62.1%
Netchex	B-	61.9%
Papaya Global	B-	61.5%
Paycom	B-	61.1%
Neeyamo	B-	59.2%

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**Exemplary:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Exemplary (upper right) represent those that performed the best in meeting the overall Product and Customer Experience requirements. The providers rated Exemplary are: ADP, Dayforce, Infor, isolved, Oracle, Paychex, SAP, UKG and Workday.

**Innovative:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Innovative (lower right) represent those that performed the best in meeting the overall Product Experience requirements but did not achieve the highest levels of requirements in Customer Experience. The providers rated Innovative are: Rippling and Unit4.

**Assurance:** The categorization and placement of software providers in Assurance (upper left) represent those that achieved the highest levels in the overall Customer Experience requirements but did not achieve the highest levels of Product Experience. The providers rated Assurance are: Papaya Global and Paycor.

**Merit:** The categorization of software providers in Merit (lower left) represents those that did not exceed the median of performance in Customer or Product Experience or surpass the threshold for the other three categories. The providers rated Merit are: BambooHR, Deel, Gusto, Namely, Neeyamo, Netchex, Paycom and Paylocity.

We warn that close provider placement proximity should not be taken to imply that the packages evaluated are functionally identical or equally well suited for use by every enterprise



or for a specific process. Although there is a high degree of commonality in how enterprises handle U.S. payroll, there are many idiosyncrasies and differences in how they do these functions that can make one software provider's offering a better fit than another's for a particular enterprise's needs.

We advise enterprises to assess and evaluate software providers based on organizational requirements and use this research as a supplement to internal evaluation of a provider and products.



### Product Experience

The process of researching products to address an enterprise’s needs should be comprehensive. Our Value Index methodology examines Product Experience and how it aligns with an enterprise’s life cycle of onboarding, configuration, operations, usage and maintenance. Too often, software providers are not evaluated for the entirety of the product; instead, they are evaluated on market execution and vision of the future, which are flawed since they do not represent an enterprise’s requirements but how the provider operates. As more software providers orient to a complete product experience, evaluations will be more robust.

The research results in Product Experience are ranked at 80%, or four-fifths, of the overall rating using the specific underlying weighted category performance. Importance was placed on the categories as follows: Usability (20%), Capability (20%), Reliability (15%), Adaptability (10%) and Manageability (15%). This weighting impacted the resulting overall ratings in this research. Oracle, ADP and UKG were designated Product Experience Leaders.

U.S. Payroll Product Experience			
Providers	Grade	Performance	
Oracle	A	<b>Leader</b>	<b>70.4%</b>
ADP	A-	<b>Leader</b>	<b>69.9%</b>
UKG	A-	<b>Leader</b>	<b>68.5%</b>
SAP	A-		<b>66.7%</b>
Dayforce	B++		<b>64.4%</b>
Unit4	B++		<b>63.0%</b>
Workday	B++		<b>62.9%</b>
isolved	B+		<b>59.7%</b>
Infor	B+		<b>58.0%</b>
Rippling	B+		<b>57.7%</b>
Paychex	B+		<b>55.5%</b>
Paycor	B		<b>53.5%</b>
Paylocity	B		<b>52.8%</b>
Deel	B		<b>51.4%</b>
Neeiamo	B-		<b>49.6%</b>
Gusto	B-		<b>49.1%</b>
Papaya Global	B-		<b>48.4%</b>
Namely	B-		<b>45.5%</b>
Paycom	C++		<b>44.9%</b>
BambooHR	C++		<b>44.6%</b>
Netchex	C++		<b>42.0%</b>

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## Customer Experience

The importance of a customer relationship with a software provider is essential to the actual success of the products and technology. The advancement of the Customer Experience and the entire life cycle an enterprise has with its software provider is critical for ensuring satisfaction in working with that provider. Technology providers that have chief customer officers are more likely to have greater investments in the customer relationship and focus more on their success. These leaders also need to take responsibility for ensuring this commitment is made abundantly clear on the website and in the buying process and customer journey.

The research results in Customer Experience are ranked at 20%, or one-fifth, using the specific underlying weighted category performance as it relates to the framework of commitment and value to the software provider-customer relationship. The two evaluation categories are Validation (10%) and TCO/ROI (10%), which are weighted to represent their importance to the overall research.

The software providers that evaluated the highest overall in the aggregated and weighted Customer Experience categories are ADP, Oracle and UKG. These category leaders best communicate commitment and dedication to customer needs.

Software providers that did not perform well in this category were unable to provide sufficient customer case studies to demonstrate success or articulate their commitment to customer experience and an enterprise’s journey. The selection of a software provider means a continuous investment by the enterprise, so a holistic evaluation must include examination of how they support their customer experience.

U.S. Payroll Customer Experience			
Providers	Grade	Performance	
ADP	A	<b>Leader</b>	<b>17.7%</b>
Oracle	A	<b>Leader</b>	<b>17.6%</b>
UKG	A-	<b>Leader</b>	<b>16.7%</b>
SAP	B++		<b>16.2%</b>
Dayforce	B++		<b>15.8%</b>
Workday	B+		<b>15.0%</b>
Paycor	B+		<b>14.2%</b>
Infor	B		<b>13.7%</b>
Paychex	B		<b>13.6%</b>
isolved	B		<b>13.4%</b>
Papaya Global	B		<b>13.1%</b>
Deel	B		<b>12.9%</b>
BambooHR	B		<b>12.9%</b>
Paylocity	B		<b>12.6%</b>
Gusto	B-		<b>12.5%</b>
Unit4	B-		<b>12.4%</b>
Rippling	B-		<b>11.7%</b>
Netchex	B-		<b>11.5%</b>
Paycom	C++		<b>11.1%</b>
Namely	C++		<b>10.9%</b>
Neeyamo	C++		<b>10.3%</b>

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## Appendix: Software Provider Inclusion

For inclusion in the ISG Buyers Guide™ for U.S. Payroll in 2024, a software provider must be in good standing financially and ethically, have at least \$25 million in annual or projected revenue verified using independent sources, sell products and provide payroll software supporting U.S. enterprises and have at least 25 customers. The principal source of the relevant business unit's revenue must be software-related, and there must have been at least one major software release in the past 18 months.

The research is designed to be independent of the specifics of software provider packaging and pricing. To represent the real-world environment in which businesses operate, we include providers that offer suites or packages of products that may include relevant individual modules or applications. If a software provider is actively marketing, selling and developing a product for the general market and it is reflected on the provider's website that the product is within the scope of the research, that provider is automatically evaluated for inclusion.

All software providers that offer relevant U.S. payroll products and meet the inclusion requirements were invited to participate in the evaluation process at no cost to them.

Software providers that meet our inclusion criteria but did not completely participate in our Buyers Guide were assessed solely on publicly available information. As this could have a significant impact on classification and ratings, we recommend additional scrutiny when evaluating those providers.



## Products Evaluated

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Product Names</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Release Month/Year</b>
ADP	ADP Vantage HCM	SaaS	November 2024
BambooHR	BambooHR Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Dayforce	Dayforce Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Deel	Deel U.S. Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Gusto	Gusto Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Infor	Infor HR Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
isolved	isolved Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Namely	Namely Payroll and Time	SaaS	November 2024
Neyamo	Global Payroll Core	SaaS	November 2024
Netchex	Netchex Payroll and Tax	SaaS	November 2024
Oracle	Oracle Payroll	24D	September 2024
Papaya Global	Workforce OS, PayrollPlus	SaaS	November 2024
Paychex	Paychex Flex Enterprise	SaaS	November 2024
Paycom	Paycom Pay, Paycom Beti	SaaS	November 2024
Paycor	Paycor Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Paylocity	Paylocity Global Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Rippling	Rippling Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
SAP	SAP SuccessFactors Employee Central Payroll	2H2024	November 2024
UKG	UKG Pro Payroll	2024.R2	September 2024



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Unit4	Unit4 Payroll	SaaS	November 2024
Workday	Workday Payroll	SaaS	November 2024

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## Providers of Promise

We did not include software providers that, as a result of our research and analysis, did not satisfy the criteria for inclusion in this Buyers Guide. These are listed below as “Providers of Promise.”

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Product</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Customers</b>	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Geography</b>
Darwinbox	Darwinbox Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Criterion	Criterion HCM	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Intuit	Quickbooks Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Keka Technologies Private LTD	Keka HR and Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
NEOGOV	NEOGOV Manage Module	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Patriot Software	Patriot Basic Payroll	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Payslip	Payslip Global Payroll Control	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ramco	Ramco Global Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Sage	Sage Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Trinet Zenefits	Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Zalaris	Zalaris Payroll	Yes	Yes	No	Yes



## About ISG Software Research

ISG Software Research provides expert market insights on vertical industries, business, AI and IT through comprehensive consulting, advisory and research services with world-class industry analysts and client experience. Our ISG Buyers Guides offer comprehensive ratings and insights into technology providers and products. Explore our research at [www.isg-research.net](http://www.isg-research.net).

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