BORONG

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Purchase Smarter: 3 Powerful Ways To Modernise Your Procurement Function

A Southeast Asia Perspective for Enterprise & SME Buyers

Trusted by Petronas · Shell · Enterprise clients across O&G, Ports, Aviation, Plantation & Utilities

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Introduction

Across Southeast Asia, procurement has long been the silent lever of organisational efficiency - and the most underinvested one. Whether you are a multinational energy company sourcing MRO supplies across five countries, or a mid-sized manufacturer managing hundreds of vendors, the challenge is the same: too much spend flying under the radar, too many manual steps, and too little data to make confident decisions.

The good news? The gap between where SEA enterprises are today and where they could be with the right systems in place is enormous - and closeable. Organisations that digitise their procurement workflows see immediate bottom-line impact: fewer maverick purchases, faster approval cycles, and real leverage in vendor negotiations.

Borong was built specifically for this market. As Southeast Asia's leading B2B eProcurement and marketplace platform - trusted by enterprise anchor clients including Petronas and Shell, and operating across Malaysia and Singapore - Borong understands the realities of procurement in this region: fragmented supplier bases, multi-currency complexity, mixed digital maturity, and the need for compliance without bureaucracy.

~50% reduction in requisition-to-order costs via e-procurement[1]	**35%** increase in spend under management with digital systems[1]	**41%** of maverick spend eliminated through automated workflows[1]

[1] Aberdeen Research, referenced across global e-procurement studies.

This whitepaper outlines three practical steps any organisation in Southeast Asia can take to modernise its procurement function - starting today. Each step is grounded in what actually works for buyers in this region, not generic Western playbooks.

B2B Procurement Challenges in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is not a monolith. A procurement manager in Kuala Lumpur faces a very different operating environment from their counterpart in Jakarta or Singapore. Yet several pain points are remarkably consistent across the region:

1. Fragmented & Informal Supplier Networks

Much of SEA's supplier base still operates via phone calls, WhatsApp, and paper invoices. Getting reliable pricing, delivery commitments, and audit trails from informal vendors is a persistent headache.

2. Manual, Email-Driven Purchase Workflows

The majority of mid-market organisations still route purchase requests through email chains, spreadsheets, and verbal approvals. This creates bottlenecks, zero visibility, and a compliance nightmare when auditors come calling.

3. Maverick Spending at Scale

When approval processes are slow or unclear, employees route around them. Maverick spend - purchases made outside approved channels - routinely consumes 15–25% of indirect spend in organisations without proper controls.

4. Multi-Currency & Multi-Entity Complexity

Regional businesses juggling RM, SGD, IDR, and USD across subsidiaries need procurement systems that handle currency, tax, and entity-level controls without requiring a finance analyst at every step.

5. ERP Systems That Don't Fit

Many enterprises rely on ERP procurement modules that were designed as afterthoughts - expensive, rigid, and impossible to roll out to non-procurement staff. The result: teams bypass the system entirely.

6. Lack of Real-Time Spend Data

Leadership teams in SEA enterprises routinely make budget decisions with month-old data. Without real-time visibility into committed spend, organisations consistently over- or under-spend against their budgets.

> *"We were managing over 400 vendor relationships across three countries through email. When Petronas asked for a full audit trail of our indirect purchases, we had nothing we could confidently show them."*
>
> **- Head of Procurement, Malaysian Industrial Conglomerate (Borong Enterprise Client)**

3 Ways to Modernise Your Procurement Function

The following three steps are sequenced deliberately. Each one builds on the previous. Skipping straight to technology without policy, or deploying visibility tools without workflow automation, will only create expensive confusion. Do them in order.

1 Establish a Clear Procurement Policy

Before you touch any technology, define the rules. A procurement policy is the foundation everything else is built on. Without it, even the best e-procurement platform becomes a source of confusion rather than clarity.

In Southeast Asia specifically, policy design must account for cultural nuance. Hierarchical decision-making is common in Malaysian and Indonesian organisations; a policy that ignores reporting lines will be ignored. Equally, policies must be simple enough to be adopted by staff with varying levels of digital literacy.

How to Build Your Procurement Policy

1. Decide Your Spend Culture

Your policy must reflect how your organisation actually makes decisions. There are four archetypes to consider:

- Administrative - hierarchy-driven, procedurally correct, suits GLC and government-linked entities.
- Democratic - leaders own their budgets; suited to fast-growing tech companies.
- Agile - structured but adaptable; best for scaling businesses like regional distributors.
- Unrestricted - high autonomy; only works with mature spend culture and strong data visibility.

2. Define Spend Categories and Budgets

Map your indirect spend into clear categories: IT & software, facilities & MRO, professional services, travel, marketing, and so on. Assign quarterly or monthly budget envelopes to each category and communicate them to department heads. This single step eliminates the majority of budget-overrun surprises.

3. Set Purchase Authorisation Thresholds

Define who can approve what, at what value. A simple tiered structure:

- Executive / C-Suite - unlimited
- Senior Manager - up to RM 25,000 (or equivalent)
- Manager - up to RM 5,000
- Executive / Staff - up to RM 500

These thresholds apply to indirect and operational purchases. Direct production materials should be managed separately by supply chain or operations leads.

4. Establish Your Approved Vendor List

Pre-negotiate pricing and terms with a core set of approved vendors - ideally onboarded onto your procurement platform. When employees can see preferred vendors with pre-agreed pricing, they purchase from them by default. This is where Borong's B2B marketplace creates immediate value: a curated catalogue of suppliers, with negotiated pricing, available at the click of a button.

5. Document Your Maverick Spend Protocol

You cannot eliminate unplanned purchases entirely. But you can contain them. Define a clear exception process: what form is required, who approves it, and how it is logged. This turns rogue spend from an invisible liability into a tracked, reportable exception.

6. Write It in Plain Language

Your procurement policy will be read by engineers, warehouse managers, and executive assistants - not just finance teams. Write it simply. Use examples. Avoid legalese. A policy nobody understands is a policy nobody follows.

7. Apply It Consistently

No exceptions for senior staff, no side deals. Consistent enforcement is what builds a culture of procurement discipline. The moment a VP is seen bypassing the policy, everyone else will too.

8. Review It Quarterly

Markets in SEA move fast. Currency fluctuations, new vendors entering the market, and business expansion into new geographies all require policy updates. Build a quarterly review into your finance calendar.

Spend Policy Checklist for SEA Organisations

- Spend culture defined and documented
- Category map with budget allocations by department
- Authorisation thresholds set by seniority level
- Approved vendor list published and accessible
- Maverick spend exception process documented
- Policy written in Bahasa Malaysia / English (bilingual for MY/ID teams)
- Quarterly review schedule in the finance calendar
- All staff acknowledgement collected (digital signature preferred)

2 Deploy the Right E-Procurement Technology

Once your policy is in place, technology is what makes it real. The right e-procurement platform transforms a Word document policy into an enforced, automated, auditable workflow. The wrong one - or worse, an ERP procurement module that nobody uses - makes the problem worse.

Why Generic ERP Procurement Modules Fail in SEA

Many organisations in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia have invested in SAP, Oracle, or Microsoft Dynamics. These are powerful systems - for the finance and operations teams who use them daily. But their procurement modules consistently fail on three fronts:

- They were built as afterthoughts - the core ERP team prioritised inventory and finance; procurement is a bolted-on module.
- They are not designed for indirect spend - the requestor isn't always in the ERP system, doesn't have a licence, and shouldn't need one to raise a purchase request.
- They are enterprise-only - implementation costs for mid-sized SEA organisations typically run between USD 150,000 and USD 750,000, excluding hardware and ongoing licensing.
- They are inflexible - configuring a new approval workflow can take weeks of IT involvement. Modern procurement platforms allow it in minutes.

What to Look for in an E-Procurement Platform

The SEA context requires platform features that generic Western procurement tools often overlook. Prioritise the following:

Multi-Currency and Multi-Entity Support

Your platform must handle RM, SGD, USD and IDR natively - with correct tax handling (GST/SST) and entity-level spend segregation.

Marketplace Integration

A connected B2B marketplace - like Borong's - means employees purchase from pre-approved vendors with pre-negotiated pricing, rather than sourcing from scratch each time.

Mobile-First Approval Workflows

SEA executives are mobile. Approval workflows must work seamlessly on a phone, not just a desktop.

Tiered Approval Logic

The platform should enforce your authorisation thresholds automatically - routing a RM 3,000 request differently from a RM 50,000 one.

Real-Time Spend Dashboards

Finance leaders need live budget visibility, not month-end reports. Look for dashboards that show committed vs. actual spend in real time.

ERP Integration

Your procurement platform should sync cleanly with your existing finance system - whether that's SAP, NetSuite, QuickBooks, or a local ERP.

Vendor Portal Capability

Suppliers should be able to receive POs, submit invoices, and track payments through a portal - reducing the WhatsApp and email back-and-forth that dominates SEA procurement today.

Audit Trail and Compliance Reporting

For enterprise clients, GLCs, and any organisation subject to regulatory scrutiny, every purchase decision must be traceable. Your platform should generate audit-ready reports on demand.

Procurement Technology Scorecard

Use this matrix to evaluate any procurement platform against your organisation's needs. Rate each item 1–5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Consideration	Rating (1–5)
The platform supports multi-currency and multi-entity operations.	
The platform integrates with our existing ERP or finance system.	
Non-procurement staff can raise purchase requests without IT support.	
The platform enforces our authorisation thresholds automatically.	
The platform provides a real-time spend dashboard for finance leaders.	
The platform includes or integrates with a B2B supplier marketplace.	
Approval workflows are configurable without IT involvement.	
The platform has a mobile app suitable for on-the-go approvals.	
The platform generates audit-ready compliance reports.	
Vendor onboarding and PO management are handled within the platform.	
The vendor has local support presence in Malaysia or Singapore.	
The platform is priced appropriately for our organisation's size.	
Implementation timeline is under 90 days.	

TOTAL SCORE

3 Build Visibility and Control Into Every Purchase

Policy tells people what to do. Technology makes the policy enforced and trackable. But the real power of a modern procurement function is visibility - knowing, in real time, exactly who is spending what, with whom, under which budget, and why.

This matters more in SEA than almost anywhere else. In a region where finance leaders are routinely questioned by auditors, regulators, and enterprise clients about their vendor relationships and spending patterns, real-time visibility is not a nice-to-have - it is a competitive and compliance necessity.

What Visibility Actually Enables

- Pinpoint approval bottlenecks - see exactly where purchase requests stall and who is causing delays.
- Identify rogue spend patterns - detect categories or individuals consistently bypassing the policy.
- Negotiate from strength - arrive at vendor negotiations with 12 months of purchase data, not gut feel.
- Close the books faster - automated PO-to-invoice matching reduces month-end reconciliation from days to hours.
- Satisfy enterprise and GLC audit requirements - generate a complete, timestamped audit trail for any purchase on demand.
- Give the CFO a real seat at the table - when procurement data flows into the financial model in real time, finance leaders can make better capital allocation decisions.

Building Visibility Step by Step

1. Establish Spend Baselines

Before you can improve, you need to know where you stand. Pull 12 months of historical purchase data, categorise it, and establish your baseline unit costs for the 20 most common purchase categories. This becomes your benchmark for everything that follows. For organisations new to structured procurement, this exercise alone typically reveals 10–15% of spend that was previously untracked.

2. Automate Purchase Documentation

Every purchase should automatically generate a digital paper trail: purchase requisition, purchase order, goods receipt, and invoice - linked and timestamped. This is not bureaucracy. This is the data infrastructure that makes everything else possible. Borong's platform creates this trail automatically, syncing it to your finance system.

3. Configure Spend Limit Enforcement

Your platform should enforce authorisation thresholds automatically - blocking or escalating requests that exceed the requestor's limit, without requiring a finance team member to manually police every submission. Set it up once; it runs itself.

4. Build Real-Time Dashboards for Each Stakeholder

Different people need different views:

- CFO / Finance Director - total committed spend vs. budget, by entity and category.
- Procurement Manager - open POs, pending approvals, vendor performance.
- Department Heads - their team's spend against their allocated budget.
- Internal Audit - exception reports and policy breach flags.

One platform, multiple dashboards. No more emailing finance for spend reports.

5. Run a Monthly Procurement Review

Visibility only creates value if someone acts on it. Build a monthly procurement review into your finance calendar. Review the top spend categories, flag any policy exceptions, identify cost-saving opportunities, and update your approved vendor list accordingly. This single habit compounds over time into significant savings.

6. Use Data to Renegotiate with Vendors

Once you have 6–12 months of structured purchase data on the Borong platform, you have something most SEA buyers have never had before: leverage. Walk into your next vendor negotiation with precise volume data by SKU, historical pricing trends, and competitive benchmarks from Borong's MIDAS price intelligence layer. This is where data becomes money.

> *"The moment we had real-time spend dashboards, our CFO stopped asking for monthly spend reports. She could see everything herself. That changed the conversation from reporting to strategy."*
>
> **- Finance Director, Singapore-based Port Infrastructure Group**

Borong's MIDAS: AI-Powered Price Intelligence for SEA

- MIDAS is Borong's AI-driven price benchmarking engine, built specifically for the SEA market.
- It aggregates real transaction data across thousands of B2B buyers to give you live market pricing for MRO, consumables, and indirect goods.
- Know whether you're paying above or below market for every category - before you sign the next contract.
- Available as part of Borong's enterprise eProcurement suite.

Final Note: Procurement is Fundamentally About People

> *"Mindless habitual behavior is the enemy of innovation."*
> **- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Harvard Business School**

The three steps in this whitepaper are not complicated. Clear policy. Right technology. Real visibility. Organisations that execute all three - in sequence - consistently see measurable improvements in operational efficiency, vendor relationships, and bottom-line savings within 6–12 months.

But the hardest part is never the system. It is the people. Finance leaders in SEA organisations routinely face resistance from department heads who see procurement controls as bureaucracy rather than enablement. The way through this is not to force compliance - it is to demonstrate value. Show a department head that the new system gets them their equipment faster, with less back-and-forth, and they will become your strongest internal advocates.

Borong's implementation team works with every enterprise client to drive adoption - not just deployment. Because a procurement platform that sits unused is not an asset. It is an expensive reminder of a problem that wasn't solved.

The opportunity for SEA organisations is significant. Those who build the procurement infrastructure today will compound the advantage every year. Those who wait will spend the next decade reconciling spreadsheets and explaining audit gaps.

Start with policy. Add technology. Build visibility. That is the Borong way.

About Borong

Borong (formerly Dropee, YC W20) is Southeast Asia's leading B2B eProcurement and marketplace platform. We help enterprises, GLCs, and growing businesses take control of their procurement - from purchase request to vendor payment - through a single, integrated platform built for the realities of the SEA market.

Enterprise Clients	Trusted by Petronas, Shell, and a pipeline of 15+ enterprise clients across O&G, ports, aviation, plantation, and utilities sectors.
Markets	Operating across Malaysia and Singapore, with expansion across ASEAN in progress.
Marketplace	Access to thousands of verified B2B suppliers - pre-screened, with negotiated pricing and SLA-backed fulfilment.
Technology	AI-powered price intelligence (MIDAS), embedded MSME financing (Borong Credit), and a full procurement SaaS suite.
Backing	Backed by Y Combinator, Ondine Capital, Sampoerna Group, Mavcap, and Resolution Ventures.
Recognition	Ranked #1 in the Financial Times High-Growth Companies Asia-Pacific 2026 list.

Ready to transform your procurement?

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