

A DECISION WORKSHEET

Build Your Own System, *or Just Buy One?*

Score your situation, price what the workaround already costs you, and decide in an afternoon. Written to talk you out of building, and to be clear when it cannot.

READ THIS FIRST

The Honest Default

Is Buy

This comes from a company that builds custom software: most businesses asking whether to build should not build.

Off-the-shelf is dramatically cheaper up front. Somebody else fixes the bugs, ships the features, handles the security patches and stays awake when the servers wobble. The vendor has watched thousands of companies use the product and has already solved problems you have not hit yet.

When someone tells us their CRM is not quite right, the useful first question is rarely what to build. It is whether the one they own was ever configured properly.

The thing that started this

Somewhere in your business there is a spreadsheet shadowing software you already pay for. Somebody exports from the tool, fixes what it got wrong, adds the columns it lacks, and emails it round. Nobody planned that. It grew because the software nearly fits, and nearly is not the same as fits.

STEP ONE

Score the *Four Signals*

Tick only what is true today, not what might be true at triple the size.
Any single signal has a cheaper fix than building.

☐ 1. The workaround has become a person

Somebody's actual job is now moving data between systems, or maintaining the spreadsheet that corrects the software.

Who, and how many hours a week?

☐ 2. You pay for three tools to do one job

One for the form, one for the approval, one for the record, and none of them talk to each other.

List them:

The Two That *Decide It*

The first two are common. These two are what actually change the arithmetic, especially together.

☐ **3. The process is genuinely yours**

Not "we do it slightly differently", because every company believes that.
Genuinely yours: an approval routing through a role no vendor models, or a rule from your industry or jurisdiction.

Name the specific rule:

☐ **4. The vendor's roadmap is not yours**

You have asked for the same thing for two years. It is not coming, because you are not the customer they build for.

What have you asked for?

0 to 1

Keep buying. Fix the configuration or the training instead.

2

Price it on the next page, then take the written process back to a vendor.

3 to 4

Building is reasonable, especially if 1 and 3 are both ticked.

STEP TWO

Price What You *Already Pay*

The workaround is not free. It is a recurring cost that simply is not itemised anywhere, and it is usually larger than people expect.

THE WORKAROUND CALCULATOR

Hours a week moving data by hand

Hourly cost of whoever does it

Annual cost of those hours

Hours times hourly cost times 52.

Subscriptions kept only to make the workaround work

What it costs when something is lost in the seam

Missed enquiries, duplicated work, a deadline nobody saw.

What this number is for

It is not a justification to build. It is the figure any solution has to beat, including a better-configured version of what you already own.

STEP THREE

Try to Buy It *One More Time*

You can now describe exactly what you need, which you could not do before. That changes the conversation with a vendor completely.

- 1** **"Show me my exact approval path, not a generic one."**
If the answer involves a workaround, you have found the gap you would be living with.

- 2** **"What happens when this rule changes next year?"**
Configurable, or a support ticket and a wait?

- 3** **"Who can see this record, and can I prove it?"**
Permissions enforced in the data layer hold. Permissions enforced by hiding buttons do not.

- 4** **"What does this cost at double our headcount?"**
Per-seat pricing is the cost that grows quietly with success.

- 5** **"Can I get my data out, in a format I can use?"**
A vague answer here is the most expensive answer on the list.

STEP FOUR

If You Build, Build *the Smallest Thing*

Custom projects fail for one reason more than any other: they try to be a platform when they only needed to be a tool.

☐ Write the excluded features down first

A task board that stops at four columns, with no sprints or story points, is not a limitation. It is the reason it ships.

☐ Answer the four questions people actually ask

A screen that answers them beats a report builder that answers any question badly.

☐ Put the rules in the database, not the interface

Rules in the interface can be bypassed by anything querying the data directly. That matters for permissions, money and employment.

☐ Insist it can be handed over

The biggest risk in custom software is not that it breaks. It is that only one person understands it.

We Will Tell You *To Buy*

Ezra Solutions builds custom internal systems, and we turn down work regularly because an off-the-shelf tool would serve the client better. A system nobody needed is the most expensive thing we could sell you.

Bring us the filled-in worksheet. We will tell you honestly whether what you have is a buying problem, a configuration problem, or a building one.

See what a focused build looks like

ezrasolutions.net/case-studies/jja-cmnv-staff-portal

Or talk it through with us

ezrasolutions.net/book-a-call

Ezra means help

That is the order we try to keep. If the answer is that you already own the right tool, that is a good outcome and we will say so.