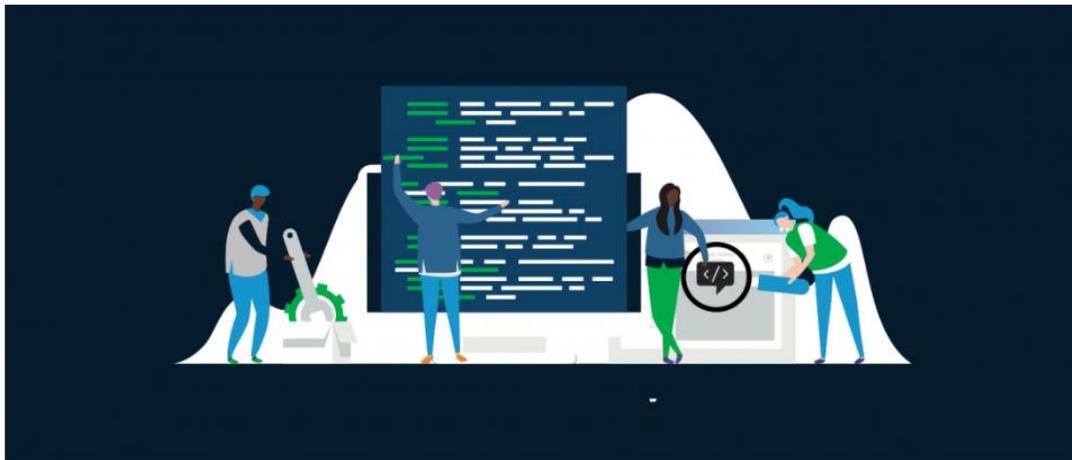


Ghostwritten blog post for field service management software company Dispatch



To Build or to Buy: 4 Questions to Ask Before Deciding

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There are many reasons you might be considering building your own enterprise field service management software. A custom solution tailor-made to your unique needs is certainly an attractive option—but is it really the best choice for your business?

Depending on the complexity and number of integrations you need built into your software, building it can be a major undertaking. Before jumping in with both feet, consider the pros and cons of building your own solution, rather than buying an off-the-shelf platform.

Should You Build Your **Own Enterprise Software?**

When deciding whether to build or buy your enterprise software, you need to ask yourself a few important questions:

- **How much will it cost?** Building your own field service software might seem like a cheaper choice, but big IT projects have the tendency to blow their budgets. Typically people don't feel like it's the cheaper choice in the short term. It's capital intensive up front, but they think they will make it up after they build it vs ongoing SaaS costs. What they forget is all the maintenance and upkeep and operational costs, ongoing licensing, compute, etc.
- **Can I afford to maintain and adapt it?** Having a software platform built just for you is an appealing option, but it comes with added maintenance costs.
- **Will it grow with my business?** Sure, your in-house-built software can grow with your business, but do you have the permanent developer staff to pull off those upgrades?
- **How much time will it take?** From planning and designing to implementation and training, building your own FSM software involves a lot of hidden costs in the form of staff time. And tech projects invariably take longer than expected due to unknowns and scope creep.

Need some help deciding whether buying or building your own enterprise software is the right choice for your business? Here, we expand on the key considerations:

Build or Buy Question #1: **How Much Will It Cost?**

Whether you're buying a software suite outright or – more commonly these days – looking at a subscription model, the price tag might give you pause. But if you're thinking that building your own software in-house will be cheaper (or easier), you might be in for an even bigger sticker shock.

Why? For one thing, you'll need to think about servers and server upgrades, plus licensing or subscription costs for various software features you want to include (such as [a map functionality](#)). Building your own software also means assigning or hiring a project manager, assembling a team of designers, and engineers to make sure your software will do what you need—and coming up with a cost estimate for all of the above and more.

That last task can be the hardest. It's difficult to look into the future of a project and spot problems before they come up. Maybe your developers can't meet the original due date you put on this project—so now you need to hire more personnel or stretch the project timeline. Or maybe an integration with some part of your existing system ends up being trickier than your team's first thought, and fixing it drives up costs.

On average, large-scale IT projects run [45% over budget](#) and 7% over time. Scarier still, 17% of IT projects get so off the rails that they threaten to sink the company.

That's not to say every software build will get that out of hand, but even small budget overruns can put a serious dent in your other business goals. On the other hand, an off-the-shelf solution can give you predictable cost estimates based on previous projects, and lets you budget accurately for ongoing subscription fees. That reduction in guesswork may be the tipping point for you.

Build or Buy Question #2: **Can I Customize It?**

Maybe the cost isn't the deciding factor. Maybe the ability to create a highly customized solution that gives you complete control over the coding is worth the higher initial price tag – since you can change the software whenever you need it. Adding a new process that needs to be integrated with your software? Simple—just build it into the next update. Right?

The reality is: *maybe*.

If the developers who built your software are staying with you long-term, then they'll be familiar enough with the code to maintain it, push bug fixes and other updates, and maybe even add features as they become necessary.

But what if you only hired those developers to build the software, and didn't intend to keep them on once the project was finished? Did they build the software in a way that other developers can edit it without too much time and effort? Will your in-house IT team be able to take over the patches and troubleshooting that? What about security and compliance? Security threats are always changing and keeping the software compliant with evolving security, privacy and compliances are expensive. For example, maintaining compliance for things like PCI and SOC II can cost \$100's K/year.

Compare that with a pre-built solution, where the burden of creating updates, patches, and new features is on the vendor's team, rather than your own. And while all new software installations have a learning curve and require on-site IT support, you'll have the benefit of documentation and tutorials that you don't have to create in-house.

Build or Buy Question #3: **Will It Grow With My Business?**

Got big plans for growing your business quickly? Custom software might be an attractive choice. Assuming you've kept engineers on your team who can modify and upgrade your software as you go, then you can expand it to grow with your business needs.

But again, you'll need to weigh the importance of this ongoing customization with the costs and labor needed to perform it. Modifying software might not be as huge a project as the initial software build, but it still requires a cost/benefit analysis, a project manager, and developers familiar enough with the code to make the changes you need.

And if you think an off-the-shelf solution can't get you close to the features you need, you might be surprised. Vendors selling software for your industry are familiar with industry needs and will listen to your requests for new features to add to their platform. While it won't be the same as having your in-house team customize your software at will, you might find that an off-the-shelf solution gets you close to what you're looking for with lower costs than having your own developer team.

Build or Buy Question #4: **How Much Time Will It Take?**

As we mentioned in an earlier post, [time costs](#) are built into every stage of software development. You'll need to spend time planning, designing, building, and implementing your new software. You also, as we mentioned earlier, have to develop end-user training materials—and then spend time giving your users that training.

These time costs go along with any new software, whether you buy it or build it yourself. But bought software might have the advantage here, since vendor teams have already worked on implementation with multiple clients, and can help your IT team plan for potential hiccups in the process. Off-the-shelf software also comes with its own training materials, so you won't have to spend time creating them.