ShiftUp

Build vs Buy?

Questions to Ask Before You Decide to Build AI Sales Tools

67% of build vs. buy decisions fail

Using AI to impact your sales team is all the buzz. Let's unpack one of the top questions:
Should we build or build a solution?

The Resource & Vision Reality Check

1. **What are you building with AI?** Is it a research engine? Which LLMs will you use? The data isn't current on the LLMs, so which APIs and who will build the web scrapers to collect quality data?
2. **What is the purpose of the research engine?** Educate sellers on the account? Help them find new opportunities? Guide them to advance opportunities? Forecast better?
3. **Someone needs to be accountable for the platform from vision to execution to maintenance and iteration, to delivering business value for allocating resources and time on it.** Who is that person? What is the delta between designing what it is and how it's built? Who oversees that? Who will build it and maintain it?
4. **It sounds cool to own this internally, and have a RevOps person lead the charge, but do they really have the expertise on how to design a solution like this?** You are going to need to allocate resources? What are these people doing now in their role and are you ready to make this their full-time role?
5. **AI engineers command $300K+ salaries, plus bonus and equity (minimum)** — Facebook and OpenAI are paying millions. Are you prepared to compete for this talent? And when they leave for 40% more money in 18 months, what happens to your system? Internal build: $2-5M over 24 months, plus ongoing maintenance costs.
6. **Enterprise solution:** $300K-500K annually, implemented in less than 30 days. Which gets you to revenue faster?

The Decision-Making & Timeline Reality

1. **How does your company make decisions?** Is it quick, in 1-2 meetings, or does it take several weeks, months or even quarters? Who makes the ultimate decision on what the solution should be, how it should be built, and how it will be used by the field?
2. **Which resources will architect and build the solution?** Do you have a team or is it 1-2 people? What if those people leave — what happens to your system?
3. **Speed to making a decision and then building is so slow at companies.** How much revenue and opportunity are you leaving on the table by waiting while your competitors are already implementing solutions and capturing market share? Can CROs afford to wait these days?

Maintenance & Integration

1. **How will you maintain the solution?** Bugs, breakage, data problems, security. Does that fall back on the business or the builders to fix and maintain?
2. **Are you building an AI tool or will it integrate with the other systems and data sets internally?**
3. **What if building it internally doesn't work?** Who takes the fall on your end?

Accountability

1. **It is easy for people to speak up and say, is this worth what it costs? Can't we build this internally?** The question to ask though, is if you do build it internally, and it doesn't work, who is responsible for the lost revenue? The turnover? The growth challenges? As long as you are clear about who is held accountable for those things, then they are the people who should be making the decision on what is best for the business.
2. **What indicators do you have in place to say this is working and adding tangible value to the business versus we have a system in place?** Who reports on those metrics and how do we know they are true? In this case the business value is one lever, but what if you are unclear if the solution is working or not? How long do you "wait to see" if it drives results?
3. **Are you willing to take the risk that you can do this better internally versus your competition buying a solution and driving results 5x faster?**

The Reality Check

Most honest question: If this AI project fails, who gets fired? If the answer is you, should you bet your career on building something outside your core expertise?

According to Forrester, 67% of build vs. buy decisions fail when companies choose build. At the end of the day, history shows that companies operate a certain business, sell their products, and deliver value to their clients in their unique way. When they try and step into a new business because they want to do things internally, it doesn't work.

The Bottom Line with Build vs Buy

We are not saying you shouldn't do it internally, we are just asking who owns all the questions above — and is this a new business that you really want to be in?

Because if you are building it internally, that's a business within a business and needs to operate as such. Unless you are not serious about driving change and results versus just saying you have something in place ... **or you could have a working solution driving revenue in 30 days. Which timeline works better for your next board meeting?**