7 Factors to Consider Before You Build a Software Solution

By Kendall E. Matthews

AppointmentPlus.com
You’ve got a dilemma

Imagine you’re the CIO of a multi-location enterprise in desperate need of a solution to its inefficient manual appointment scheduling process. (Or maybe you don’t have to imagine.)

From your vantage point, you’ve identified a multitude of operational problems that could be solved by integrating appointment scheduling software into your operations:

- Broken intra-location communications
- Rampant no-shows
- An irritating customer experience
- Redundant processes

And on, and on.

You have no doubt that if you’re the one to bring the solution to your organization, you will more than prove your value.

So you build a solid business case. You present it to all the business leaders (and, you’re pretty sure, a couple of their grandmothers). A couple of months go by, and all the while, you continue to muddle through internal snafus that your proposed solution could have handled, or prevented.

Finally, that magical day arrives when you get the green light! You start to breathe a sigh of relief, but before you’re able to finish, the reality starts to sink in: That was the easy part.

Congrats. The C-suite’s grandparents gave your proposal for scheduling software the thumbs-up!
Now you need to determine whether you should go with an enterprise SaaS solution, or have your in-house IT department take on the build.

1 **Build it**

You’ve probably got a team of perfectly competent developers already on the payroll. Get them off that ridiculous self-driving-car project and get them working on an appointment scheduling solution.

2 **Buy it**

If you're going to go this route, you know you have to find a vendor with a track record of solving problems for multi-location enterprises.

Which is the right way to go?
Before you start to answer, let's look at this challenge in a way that will help define your options.

Now I want you to imagine that you're a CIO on vacation in Las Vegas. You play a couple of hands of poker at the Wynn, and that's exactly what happens — you win (sorry, couldn't help the pun). Big.

What's the first thing you plan to buy with your newfound wealth? Why, a Bugatti Veyron 16.4 Grand Sport Vitesse — what else?

You've read everything there is to read about it. The local sales guy is your newest Facebook buddy. You're ready to sign the papers and drive it home.

Of course, a vehicle of this stature comes loaded with features. But if you want customization beyond those options, you know you can do that in the after-market.

So, do you fire up the blowtorch and start building one from scratch?

#$@# NO!

You may be wealthy, but you haven't lost your mind. Even if you're an accomplished mechanic who restores classic cars on the weekend, we're talking about building from scratch one of the most complex vehicles ever designed.

It's a purposely extreme example, but I wanted to bring home the impracticality of building your own solution.
However, if you already went down that road . . . don’t despair

In fact, if you’re in this situation, you’re actually in luck, because I’ve got a real-life example for you.

A Fortune 500 retail service provider with more than 2,000 stores and 750,000 appointments per month found itself in this exact position. They knew an enterprise scheduling application would streamline both operations and the customer experience. And they decided that their IT team had the experience and manpower to build their own solution.

The IT team had already begun building the in-house appointment scheduling application when the company had second thoughts, and started looking at AppointmentPlus.

They looked at the 7 Factors.

Sure, it would have been better if they’d covered these before they started to build. But better late than never.
7 factors to consider before you build (or even after you’ve started):

1. **Is the application intuitive?**

You know that the introduction of new software to your enterprise is going to involve training. But it must be minimal. The more intuitive the solution, the smaller the learning curve.

Since a custom build means you’re in control of the UX, “build” probably wins this one most of the time.

2. **Does it solve the problem without disrupting existing business processes?**

In either the “build” or “buy” scenario, you have to consider how seamlessly (or not) the software integrates with your other IT systems. But only in the “build” scenario do you have to worry about disruption throughout the entire build process as well.

On the “buy” side, all that’s been done for you. The end product has been tested and, unless it’s a brand-new offering, it’s been upgraded based on user input. Yeah, “buy” gets the checkmark for this one.

3. **Will the application deliver measurable results?**

Reporting capabilities can be built into the application. However, whether the software delivers results the business will like depends on how well it does on the two questions above.

4. **Does the software developer / enterprise SaaS vendor have a demonstrated track record of meeting key SLAs?**

Enterprise IT may have SLAs with the business in these areas. But assuming IT hasn’t ever built online scheduling software, then the answer to this question is “No.”

When you’re looking to buy, make sure your enterprise SaaS vendor offers a comprehensive SLA as part of your due-diligence process.
5. Does the developer/vendor have proven experience effectively managing complex end-user requirements in large organizations like yours?

In other technology deployments, certainly. In other technology builds, maybe.

But the complexity associated with building an enterprise scheduling application for a company with hundreds or thousands of locations gives “complexity” a new definition (and it’s four letters long).

6. Will the online scheduling software seamlessly integrate with your current IT systems?

Maybe yes, maybe no (see above reference to the new four-letter definition for “complexity”).

When the application doesn’t integrate well, the end result is not only an ineffective solution, but often a pile of other mess too.

7. At what cost?

Back to that “build” stage we talked about earlier. When a company uses its internal IT department to build and manage a new system, you have to consider staffing, bandwidth, and other resource management conflicts. Does the business rely heavily on IT for “lights on” responsibilities? If so, will your team really be able to add a project of this magnitude to its existing workload?

Even if you can manage the resource demand, how much will it cost you to build the software? And what happens if you hit a snag, or need to incorporate new technology? It’s going to become a never-ending project, whether you want it to or not.
On the “buy” side, you don’t have the enormous upfront build costs or the associated companywide disruption. With SaaS, costs are spread out over time and across users. And they’re variable — you pay for what you use. Plus, as technology changes, upgrades are rolled out automatically. And don’t forget that the final “S” in SaaS stands for service: If you need help, it’s the provider’s responsibility to take care of it.

No matter where you are in the process, the “Build v. Buy” decision boils down to this: Can you really build a better Bugatti? If not, there’s one that has been road-tested and proven right here.

Take us for a spin. Kick our tires. Look under the hood. See what our online scheduling software is made of and where it can take your organization.

See what’s under our hood:

Get Developer’s Guide

If you need a little more ammo, take a look at the SlideShare presentation in this post. It does a great job of spelling out all the pros and cons associated with the “Build v. Buy” dilemma.
About Kendall E. Matthews

Vice President of Global Marketing and user of “The Force.” I’ve been a growth hacker since 1995, producing like a ZILLION inquiry leads (ok . . . a couple hundred thousand). Also good at taking 2 pm naps.

About AppointmentPlus

AppointmentPlus scheduling software is a configurable, rules-based, pure SaaS product. Our software — combined with our deep product integration knowledge, customer experience focus, and amazing ability to both analyze synergies and synergize analogies — has made us the vendor of choice for many Fortune 500 companies.

Since 2001, AppointmentPlus has been working with businesses to automate their complex customer, staff, and resource scheduling rules. And our Scheduling Cloud™ API has helped more than 215,400 locations worldwide schedule more than 54 million appointments.

Who else wants some awesome-sauce?