

Custom Software: Foolish or Brilliant?

To meet the software needs of your business, there are two main paths:

1. Buy software “off the shelf”
2. Build custom software (in-house, or with a development firm)

In most cases, off-the-shelf makes the most sense, and it should be your default choice:

- Acquiring and deploying off-the-shelf software is usually faster than getting custom software developed. Even complex installation and configuration it typically faster than developing new software.
- Off-the-shelf software is generally cheaper than developing your own. The development cost of an off-the-shelf package is distributed among multiple firms, possibly many firms worldwide. These many customers more than offset the extra cost of mass production and distribution. Comparatively, with custom software your business alone bears most of the costs.
- Off-the-shelf software typically has years of testing and years of production use, as well as feedback and improvement, giving confidence that it actually works.
- Off-the-shelf software may include a money-back guarantee in case it does not meet your needs.

For all these reasons, the option of designing custom software bears the burden of proof in your decision-making process.

There are good reasons, though, to consider custom development, especially in mid-sized or large companies. Under the right circumstances,

these advantages can make the decision to develop software the best choice.

Exactly the Software You Want

With off-the-shelf software you start with the features the vendor chose, and then perhaps try to persuade the vendor to add additional features. You may or may not convince the vendor that the features you want are worthwhile and in their interest. Moreover, the features may turn out to be a mirage:

- The features might not actually work.
- The features might work but still not meet your needs.
- The features might interact with each other badly, even though they work in isolation.

Custom software, though, is almost infinitely adaptable to your needs. A custom development firm will develop the features you request, and will make them interact properly for your specific needs.

Top Notch Support

An off-the-shelf package typically offers some level of support. Virtually every vendor will *claim* to provide excellent support, but you will not know about the quality of the support until you need it. At that point, it is usually too late to undo your purchase decision, leaving you stuck with a frustrating shortage of real service. Your support contacts might lack knowledge of your problem domain, of your specific usage of the software, or might even lack good English skills. An off-the-shelf vendor’s highest tier of support may prove insufficient for software that you use to run your business.

With custom software, you can generally get in-depth support from the team who creates and

maintains the software. Such a team can offer in-depth expertise, and the ability to not merely work-around problems, but also enhance the custom software on-demand to solve them.

Change Happens

The needs of your business are likely to change and expand. An off-the-shelf software package might leave you stuck with features that no longer work well, and require a “forklift upgrade” to move forward.

Custom software, though, can be continually enhanced to meet your growing needs, incrementally, so that users are never forced to violently switch to an entire new system.

Custom Software can be Cheaper!

Off-the-shelf software is cheaper most of the time, but not always! Occasionally, custom can be less expensive. How can this happen?

- The best off-the-shelf package still requires a great deal of customization.
- The best off-the-shelf package requires a great deal of changes to your business.
- The off-the-shelf package with the features you need, is prohibitively priced for a higher market tier.

More than once, Oasis Digital has created custom software for our clients which solved their specific problem at a lower cost than their off-the-shelf options. In one such case, our client needed a highly flexible rules-based system for calculating their sales quotations and product configurations. This sort of function is typically available in large Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. The ERP systems they found with the required flexibility, were high-end packages aimed at large enterprises, with a price to match. But they did not need such a system, they needed only the specific features for sales quotations and product configurations. Oasis Digital’s custom solution met their needs at an attractive price.

To Get Different Results, Use Different Software

If you are running a for-profit business in a competitive industry, you have an added incentive to consider custom software. With off-the-shelf software, you will end up using the same software that your competitors are using. Why play on a level playing field when you can develop advantages that are unique to your way of doing business? If you have proprietary ideas or processes in your business, custom software can capture those processes, amplifying your ability to operate more effectively or efficiently than your competitors.

Create a Corporate Asset

Custom software becomes a corporate asset. This can benefit you in several ways.

In the event of a company sale, your custom software adds to your unique operating capabilities, potentially giving you leverage to ask for a higher price.

Alternatively, your custom software might become an asset you can re-sell to others in your industry.

Choose Wisely

Two pages later, the point at the start is still correct: prefer off-the-shelf software. But once you consider all the factors, custom software might be the right decision for you.

To learn more about Oasis Digital Solutions Inc., please visit us online:

<http://oasisdigital.com>