

Modern Day Build Versus Buy

I recently watched an interview between CVS Health Chief Digital Officer Firdaus Bhatena and Executive Director of Engineering Mike Michel. During the online session, called CVS Health Live: Office Hours, the two discussed the latest trends in digital health and shared their perspectives on what's coming next. One poignant moment dealt with the company's decision to build, versus buy, new technology.

Of the decision, Mike Michel says, "Buy what accelerates you. Build what differentiates you." Michel's summary is the most succinct and thoughtful opinion that we have heard from a resource-rich organization that understands that they need to focus their internal development on technology solutions that will differentiate their health offerings. Other software vendors can help them accelerate their business.

Not surprisingly, the topic comes up occasionally with bigger retailers that are deciding the best way to drive store execution through improved store communications and task management. Many think that if they build their own solution, and it's fully customized to their business, it will work better than buying a solution from a software vendor. Here's what we tell them.

It's the little things that make the difference

Retail is a special use case. The blend of enterprise complexity with consumer grade ease of use is a tricky balance to strike, and finding developers who can deliver to both priorities is difficult in today's market.

When it comes to efficiency and clear communication in a retail world, it's really the little things that make the difference. While other retail technologies can support long training guides or features that require people to learn the workarounds, a solution that gives retail employees the information they need right when they need it has to be very deliberate in how it performs.

Should tasks be shared across the whole store, or should visibility be restricted to only the specific person responsible. While that question may seem like it's an easy choice, the small situational details can make all the difference between something getting completed or missed.

A team that cares deeply about the success of the project can iterate to find the right balance, but that's not a quick process and that's just one of the examples. The thousands of small nuances that make retail communication effective each add incremental complexity to a system that may seem at its outset to be very straight forward.

It takes a lot of care, knowledge, and work to build something that is truly simple.

Time matters at the speed of retail

Business decisions can be made very quickly, but if you have to wait for the development schedule to free up to support the change it can slow your business down dramatically and have a material impact on your business.

While it's easy to find people who want to start a new development project, sustaining it over the long term can be difficult when the project isn't the number 1 priority of the company. We've seen it time and time again; resources get reallocated, team members leave, and the projects get dropped or slowed down in order to support true priorities for the organization.

When that happens, making the changes you need can take months instead of hours. The number of meetings to determine the priority alone can be hundreds of hours of valuable time across cross functional teams. Sometimes even when alignment is reached, business changes and projects get re-stacked. Internal debates and decision making can hobble the process and cause people to lose focus on the real goal: Delivering an amazing customer experience, increasing brand loyalty, and driving growth in the business.

Working with an existing team that is 100% dedicated to making sure the communications of the organization are delivered effectively and accurately gives you the speed you need to run your business and the foundation for decision making.

Employees' expectations are changing quickly

In the last 5 years alone, the way people communicate has dramatically changed. The applications that people use in their daily lives are constantly changing and becoming more engaging.

The methods of communication have changed as have the different devices that people are using. In order to build a truly effective communications platform you need to reach people where they're at. That means having expertise in multiple dimensions, from Android and iOS development to behavioral design and research.

Organizations that think they can throw a few developers on the problem for a few weeks will likely find themselves with a solution that meets a few needs in a few places. But, what about all of the other moments when it's critical to deliver the message that could change your business?

Meeting users where they are by staying on top of their behavior and delivering solutions for the tools they use requires a dedicated team of people with deep knowledge of the space. Outsourcing providers rarely have this level of care and depth, and the time you'll spend helping them develop it is a direct hit to your success.

You can't build what you don't know

It often seems like a dream to have something that meets your specific use case and solves your specific problem. But, you may be missing out on best practices that you've never known about.

In contrast, having a quality solution that takes best practices from other retailers who have the same goals you do and puts them together into an easy to use solution helps your teams level up and perform at their best.

You will definitely spend more money in the long-term

When you look at the cost of great product, engineering and testing talent, the expense adds up quickly. Now add cloud hosting, training, UX research, integration, security and more, and it becomes quite clear that building your own communications and task management solution won't be a money-saving project. In fact, you will spend far more in the long-term.

Want to learn more about how Zipline can help you accelerate your business and improve store execution. Please reach out for more information. We would love to chat.