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Instant White Paper:

Build or Buy?

A Framework for Evaluating External Procurement Versus Internal Development Decisions using Lync Archive Search as a Business Case

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Introduction

Theoretically, build versus buy decisions are based on three factors:

1. Time to market
2. Features and functions
3. Total cost of ownership

In practice, however, IT effectiveness consultants—and years of historical data—condense your decision into one simple maxim:

Buy to standardize, build to compete.

This paper discusses the points you need to consider as part of your own build versus buy decision.

Three Factors for Your Business Case

Let us consider in turn each of the three factors listed above.

I. Time to Market

In a build situation, time-to-market pressures will dictate the functionality that you can include in your solution. Do you have enough time to match the stability and maturity of commercial software products that have improved over numerous versions via feedback from the market?

In a buy situation, you have the opportunity to evaluate multiple solutions—quickly, immediately, and without risk. And depending on the vendor, you might also be able to request custom features enhancements.

II. Features and Functions

This is where you need to apply the maxim we mentioned in the introduction: Is this solution related to a commodity business process or is it part of a core process that differentiates my company?

If the latter, then a build decision will very likely yield a competitive advantage. If the former, a buy decision makes more sense economically and strategically and it will free your developers to focus on projects that are critical to the success of your company.

Do not let politics lead you into a build decision for a product that meets the criteria for a buy, or vice versa. You must make an objective analysis of the strategic value of the solution and then proceed to build or buy on that basis.

III. Total Cost of Ownership

Whether you build or buy, the solution must be supported, maintained, and evolved as your business requirements and the underlying technologies (operating systems, server platforms, etc.) dictate. In a build situation, these costs are unknown—as is the initial development cost itself.

If your core competency is not software development, you can be unpleasantly surprised by the total costs of the typical seven– to eight-year software lifecycle. In fact, 70% of software costs occur AFTER the initial implementation. A rigorous lifecycle analysis that realistically estimates ongoing maintenance by in-house developers (including knowledge transfer requirements resulting from employee turnover) often tips the balance in favor of buying.

A commercial software developer, conversely, is able to spread those costs across many customers; therefore, it is much less onerous to build support for 64-bit hardware or the latest version of Windows.

Build-or-Buy Business Case: Lync Archive Search and Discovery

Microsoft Lync natively logs IM conversations to a SQL database, but it does not provide end users or administrators with an easy way to search, retrieve, view or even export past conversations to impact business and legal decisions. We frequently see customers struggle with build-or-buy decisions around Lync IM archive searching so let's use HR Auditor to illustrate the decision process.

I. Time to Market

With regards to Lync IM chat history specifically, regulatory requirements, FRCP regulations and other public and internal usage policies all add significant pressure to timelines—your financial and legal risks increase the longer you live without a solution (or live with an inadequate solution). Are you content to hope that you will not be hit with a legal discovery order, or can you be certain your employees are not misusing the system, while you wait for IT to build an internal solution?

II. Features and Functions

The complexities of complying with regulatory requirements, meeting discovery orders, and enforcing internal policies give rise to a host of technically challenging feature requirements. Whether it's built or bought, your solution needs to address these (and many more) issues:

1. Security and Confidentiality

♦ Granular role-based access control

♦ Windows pass-through client authentication

♦ Integration of AD and SQL

♦ Server-based authentication with Active Directory and/or SQL

♦ Allow authorized users (legal, HR) to search vs. IT to maintain privacy of data and employees

2. UI Design

♦ Ease of use so authorized users can search quickly without relying on IT resources

♦ Integration with and deployment within the Lync network

♦ AJAX enablement