

Integration Strategy: Build versus Buy

Should we build it or should we buy it?



When it comes to integration needs, many colleges and universities find themselves in a quandary when evaluating the prospect of purchasing versus building an integration solution. The uncertainty stems from an abundance of pros and cons with the prospects of each approach. At Constituo Software, we think, why limit yourself to just one option? Why miss out on the advantages of the path not taken and suffer the corresponding consequence of being locked into the other? Constituo Integration Suite lets you combine the advantages of both strategies while avoiding the associated pitfalls of each by providing a robust and flexible platform on which to build your custom solutions.

As mentioned above, there are many variables to consider when evaluating one's options. Let's start with the three traditional factors which are **cost, time and scope**.

How does our decision impact our cost?

Cost is typically at the top of the list of key factors when evaluating an integration solution. Typically, the upfront cost of purchasing an off-the-shelf, cloud solution is actually lower than building an in-house solution. This can be counter-intuitive for those who fail to calculate an accurate “true cost” of in-house resources. True cost requires close scrutiny. Software and the systems on which it runs, need continual investment. This includes end user support, solution monitoring, software patches, OS patches, database patches, hardware upgrades, etc., and these associated costs should not be overlooked. Security unto itself requires its own lane in the integration solution maintenance plan as threats and tools continuously evolve.



For some, it remains tempting to weather the storm of the short-term investment spike of building from scratch with an eye toward the long term cost advantage of owning your own solution. However, once the reality of misaligned resources, gaps in functional in-house expertise, and other frequent project management miscues set in, the true cost of developing your own solution begins to span way beyond your estimate. At that point, not only are your perceived cost savings negated, but timelines begin to slip and scope is sacrificed as corners are cut to “get back on track”.

To compound the miscalculation, many times when a college or university first ponders the “build versus buy” dilemma, they limit the scope of the evaluation process to a specific project or related projects. At Constituo,

while we believe that our platform will measure up against any solution in an evaluation process focused on a short-term specific project, we also think it’s critical not to lose sight of the long-term benefits. With an enterprise license of Constituo Integration Suite, there are no limits on the number of users, data sources, workflows, etc. so when it comes time to build new integrations there are zero additional license fees.

Considering Constituo Integration Suite is priced specifically for Higher-Ed, you won’t find a comparably priced solution that matches the robust and flexible feature set offered by our platform.

How does our decision impact our timeline?

Time to deliver is always a key factor when evaluating build versus buy. Unlike cost though, where you may struggle to get a true cost comparison, there is no comparing the time to deliver between the build versus buy options. The only real consideration when evaluating timeline, is *can you live with the time required to build your solution from scratch?*

Even with this understanding, it's also important to scrutinize your targeted delivery date. According to Harvard Business Review, at least one in six IT projects turns into a "black swan" with a cost overrun of 200% and a schedule overrun of 70%.

Providing system integration is what Constituo Software does. The Constituo Integration Suite platform comes with the standard building blocks to serve as the foundation of any integration. This has made us very successful when it comes to meeting tight timelines. We measure the time from a signed contract to testing your first custom integration in mere weeks whereas building your own solution (correctly) would likely be measured in months.



How does our decision impact project scope?

Similar to cost, scope may require a bit more consideration than it first seems on the surface. When building your own software, it's quite easy to fall into the trap of thinking the end result of your custom build will meet your every need especially in comparison to some off-the-shelf solution. Aside from the inevitable alterations to your plan by the previously mentioned cost and timeline considerations, one of the most common mistakes is overlooking deficiencies in your team's applicable functional expertise. Your team may be technically proficient in building software and may even have several integrations under their belt but it does not mean that they have tried and true best practices for things like student matching algorithms or usability concerns for end users performing data remediation tasks, etc. As a result, one of the considerations when building custom software is the risk of building the wrong solution.



Constituo Integration Suite is a platform on which your solution will be built. This is really where “just do both” really rings true. With this hybrid approach, you license the platform which provides the fundamental building blocks of any integration and then build the integration solution that meets your specific requirements. The flexibility and robust features of the platform let you tailor your solution to your needs. Out of the gate, Constituo will work with you to develop and deliver your first integration. Along the way we will be providing training on the platform as well as integration best practices. Our goal is that you then continue, as proficient users of the platform, to build many integrations across the enterprise. Of course, as an integration partner, we are never out of reach to field “how to” or “how would I” questions.

What are some other things to keep in mind?

Although much of any build versus buy evaluation focuses on the traditional big three factors, the story shouldn't stop there. Here are some other things to consider when evaluating Constituo Integration Suite for your integration needs.

One of the real advantages with the approach of licensing the Constituo Integration Suite platform and building your own solutions is that you truly own those solutions. You have the freedom and flexibility to tweak existing integrations, adding new integrations, or whatever else you desire.

Constituo Software focuses exclusively on Higher-Ed. We have a community comprised of architects, analysts, developers, users, etc., that have likely already done what you're looking to do. Many times, an opportunity to address a challenge for one customer translates to helping many customers. We take pride in listening to our user community and incorporating their requests and feedback into our roadmap. We have an open library of integration components that are there for the taking with no additional fees. We are always working to connect solutions to opportunities.

Speaking of roadmap, it's also worth mentioning that while Constituo Integration Suite is already a flexible and robust platform rich with integration features and functionality, we are continually making it better. These improvements come from a roadmap which is heavily influenced by our user community. Roughly ten times a year, you will automatically receive the latest updates along with release notes, updated documentation, etc. Of course, one of the advantages to a truly cloud based offering is that you won't need to do anything to be on



the latest and greatest version.

All Constituo Integration Suite licenses come standard with dedicated support. We do not have tiers or any other fee-related support structure. You have no other option but to receive the very best support we can offer. As a Constituo customer, you will have direct access to knowledgeable support resources with platform expertise; professional services resources with firsthand knowledge of your specific solution; and the technical team who actually built the platform. With three easy channels (email, support portal, phone) you will get timely responses to your every support need.

To expand a bit on “support”, Constituo resources aren’t just here to help when something is not working. Our goal is to ensure that you are successful with our platform. With this in mind, we certainly work with each customer to provide a reasonable amount of guidance and assistance for the “how do I...”, “do you have any examples of...”, “what do you think about...” type questions.

Constituo Software is first and foremost a software company. Having said that, we do offer professional services. It is our services organization’s mission to 1) educate, train, and prepare our customers to be self-sufficient on our platform and 2) be able to augment our customers resources when they do not have the capacity, expertise, or appetite to take on a task themselves. The Constituo Professional Services team is trained on the latest and greatest software features and integration best practices and are always prepared to hit the ground running.



What conclusion makes the most sense?

It can certainly be tempting to let the appeal of a perceived long-term cost benefit of owning your own solution together with a grandiose plan (on paper) for the perfect solution lead you astray. At Constituo, we believe the best answer to the build versus buy question is to avoid limiting yourself to just one approach.



Considering cost, Constituo is priced for Higher-Ed. Our economies of scale allow us to provide cost value that is impossible to match short-term or long-term with an in-house solution. Considering time, integration is what Constituo does. You will be testing your first integration anywhere from days to just a couple of short weeks. Considering scope, Constituo provides a robust and flexible platform on which your solutions can be specifically tailored. Your purchased solution will still fit like a glove because we'll use your hand as the model.

There can be only one answer to Build versus Buy...buy Constituo Integration Suite and then build with Constituo Integration Suite!