

To Build or Buy AI: For Construction, That Is the Question.

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I've spent a lot of time with construction leaders over the past few years. One thing is impossible to miss during our conversations: The race to gain an edge using artificial intelligence (AI) is at full sprint. But not everyone is running in the right direction.

Here's the question many companies are now facing head-on when it comes to AI: Do we build an AI solution ourselves or partner with someone who has already done the heavy lifting?

I get the instinct to build. This industry is full of people who solve hard problems with grit and pride. But before anyone commits to building a system internally, there are a few honest questions worth sitting with – about speed, cost, workflow alignment, security, and whether the organization is truly ready for what “building AI” actually demands.

Because here's the truth, as plainly as I can say it: In a high-stakes industry like construction, “good enough” AI isn't good enough because accuracy isn't a nice-to-have. It's the entire ballgame. Automating workflows with AI is one thing, but to build a system that ensures best practices, accountability, and transparency? That's called building a PRODUCT.

FIVE QUESTIONS EVERY CONSTRUCTION LEADER SHOULD ASK WHEN DECIDING TO BUILD VS. BUY

1. Time tradeoffs – Can we balance fast deployment with the long-term customization we think we'll need? In other words, vibe coding AI is one thing, but building an enterprise-grade platform takes considerable time, energy, and excellence.



- 2. Cost considerations** – Do we fully understand the ongoing investment, not just to build AI, but to maintain, tune, and support an evolving platform over time? How do we take advantage of the hyper fast advances of AI and embed that into our systems?
- 3. Workflow alignment** – Will an internal system realistically support the nuance and complexity of how our teams actually work?
- 4. Data privacy and security** – What level of control and protection do we need for the sensitive project data we handle every day?
- 5. Organizational readiness** – Do we have the expertise, infrastructure, culture, and leadership commitment required to sustain an AI initiative for the long haul?

These questions sound simple, but they're the difference between a promising experiment and a system that truly moves your business forward.

THE ALLURE (AND HARD REALITY) OF BUILDING AI INTERNALLY

The idea of building your own AI makes sense on the surface. You know your workflows. You have years of project data. And open-source models make the barrier to entry feel lower than ever.

But AI isn't a tool you "finish." It's a living, evolving system that requires constant attention. Same as any good product or platform that you would build on top of it.

Models shift. Regulations change. Teams need new use cases. And shortcuts like relying on shallow search or generic summaries are where things break down. I've talked to teams who built internal proofs of concept only to realize they were spending huge amounts of time maintaining the system, troubleshooting edge cases, and correcting missed context. It wasn't because they lacked passion; it was because construction documents and workflows are complex, and generic AI simply isn't made to understand them at the depth this industry requires.

That's why organizational readiness is such a critical part of this decision. You're not just building a tool: You're building a second business that needs ongoing engineering, data governance, and constant reinforcement to stay current.

IF YOU BUY AI, MAKE SURE IT'S CONSTRUCTION-SPECIFIC

If AI is going to help teams make better decisions and work faster, it must be built for the realities of construction, not generic or adapted from another industry.

1. Accuracy That Matches Construction Complexity

Specs, drawings, schedules, and contracts aren't easy material. They're dense, interconnected, and full of nuance. Generic AI looks for snippets and stitches them together into something that sounds plausible. But in construction, plausible isn't enough.

Teams need the right answer – and the defensible one. The kind you can take into an owner, architect, and contractor (OAC) meeting, a negotiation, or even a dispute, and know it will hold up. Your relationships matter, and you need to maintain credibility.

That's why accuracy matters so deeply. If the AI can't see the

whole story of a project, it can't support the decisions that shape it.

2. Empowering Experts – Not Replacing Them

AI shouldn't replace the superintendent, the project manager, the pre-con manager, or the legal team. It should extend their judgment. It should help them find what matters faster, align more easily, and spend less time buried in documents and more time applying expertise where it counts.

And transparency matters. Teams need citations, context, and a clear path back to the source. That's how trust is built and how AI becomes a tool people use.

3. Data Privacy And Security You Can Rely On

Construction companies work with intensely sensitive information. Protecting that data isn't optional. So, the real questions become: What level of control do we need? What can't we compromise on?

Your data should stay yours. And any AI partner worth engaging should treat that as a foundational principle, not a feature request.

4. Continuous Learning Through Partnership

AI gets better through real workflows, real feedback, and real projects. It is also evolving faster than any other technology in history. That's why partnership matters so much. You're not just buying a system; you're gaining a partner that's committed to evolving the technology with you.

A SMARTER WAY FORWARD: PARTNER, DON'T PROTOTYPE

The debate about whether construction should adopt AI is over. The real question now is how to do it in a way that delivers value from day one and sustains that value for years.

Building in-house may feel right for the same reasons standing up a self-perform business for every scope may feel right. But we have specialty trades for a reason. And in this AI world, too often, those efforts drain resources, stretch teams thin, and ultimately produce systems that are slow to scale or too brittle to trust in moments that matter. (Need a gut check? Refer back to those five questions at the top.)

The companies that join strategic AI partners – not starting a side project – will be the ones that run in the right direction and win the race. 🏆



About the Author

Josh Levy is the co-founder and CEO of [Document Crunch](#), the AI Risk Reduction Platform built for the construction industry. With more than a decade of experience as a construction lawyer and executive, he has supported billions of dollars in projects as a litigator, transactional attorney, and lead project counsel, and has led departments generating over \$1 billion in annual revenue. Josh earned a Bachelor of Science in Construction Management from the University of Florida. His combined legal, executive, and industry expertise drives his mission to elevate standards across the construction industry.

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