

Buy vs build vs hybrid

What's the right call for your data infrastructure in first-time launches?

As you stand up your commercial data ecosystem, decisions about what to buy, build, or buy+build (hybrid approach) will directly impact launch readiness and long-term scalability.

Use this quick guide to learn about:

- Market pressures affecting these decisions
- How your peers approach this decision for different data and technology types
- Common missteps and how to avoid them
- Core trade-offs with each approach
- How to make the right call

MARKET PRESSURES

Launch pressure complicates early infrastructure decisions

What's making it harder now:

- First-launch timelines leave little room for rework.
- Early infrastructure decisions are costly and disruptive to unwind.
- Lean teams must reconcile commercial, medical, and access data needs.
- Vendor and AI proliferation increase choice and integration complexity.



**#1 BARRIER TO
COMMERCIAL SUCCESS:**

**Data, tech, and analytics
gaps/weaknesses**

SOURCE:

Commercialization That Works research:

"Looking back, what were the top 3 actions you or your team took that had a negative impact on commercialization outcomes or put commercialization success at risk?" n=40 emerging biopharma respondents

WHAT PEERS ARE DOING

CRMs are bought, data is built, and AI is a hybrid of buy and build

Our *Commercialization That Works* research shows how industry leaders are currently approaching buy vs build vs hybrid (combination of build and buy) decisions. Teams frequently balance trade-offs around budget, integration, speed to value, and flexibility in their purchasing decisions.

	Most common decision	
CRM	Buy (80%)	
Omnichannel marketing platform	Buy (60%)	
AI tech stack	Buy (50%)	Hybrid (50%)
Master data management (MDM)	Hybrid (57%)	
Customer master data	Hybrid (57%)	
Patient support program	Hybrid (37%)	
Commercial data warehouse	Build (50%)	

Key takeaways:

- Established technologies like CRMs are usually bought because commercial solutions are mature and configurable.
- Emerging areas, such as AI tech stacks, tend to skew toward buy or hybrid, most often due to limited internal expertise.
- Build or hybrid approaches are often used when off-the-shelf options don't fully fit the organization's needs.

SOURCE:

Commercialization That Works research:

What do you think is the best approach to establish and maintain the following for commercialization success? (choose one per category); n=30 data and analytics respondents

COMMON MISSTEPS

6 infrastructure decisions that create downstream launch risk

COMMON MISSTEP	WHAT BREAKS AS A RESULT	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO AVOID THIS
1 Underestimating integration effort	You go live quickly, but connecting systems becomes the real work and teams spend time reconciling numbers instead of using them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Map data flows and ownership before vendor selection• Evaluate the integration model (aggregator vs. custom) early• Require vendor transparency on APIs, identifiers, and refresh cadence
2 Lacking cross-functional alignment	Systems technically work but don't reflect how teams actually operate, slowing adoption and requiring workarounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align system and data decisions to clear business use cases• Involve cross-functional stakeholders early (commercial, medical, access, finance)• Pressure-test workflows with end users before go-live
3 Prioritizing customization over scalability	The system's tight tailoring to current workflows makes expansion, automation, or new capabilities more difficult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define what truly differentiates vs. what can be standardized• Design with modular components• Stress-test decisions against future use cases (new indication, geography, channel)
4 Using a hybrid model without a clear architecture	The mix of tools technically works, but no one is fully accountable for how they work together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define the target architecture before selecting components• Clarify which capabilities you will own vs. outsource and why• Assign a single accountability owner for cross-system integration
5 Assuming decisions only need to solve for launch	The solution works in the short term but doesn't fit when an indication or new brand is added.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design for a longer horizon• Avoid asset-specific architecture where possible• Build with components that can scale or be repurposed
6 Misunderstanding the time and effort to stand up infrastructure	Implementation takes longer than expected, and launch year is spent fixing systems instead of driving performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Map the implementation timeline and dependencies to milestones• Account for development, testing, rework, and stabilization time for each major step in the process• Separate "must be live at launch" from "can phase in later"

CORE TRADE-OFFS

Evaluating cost, integration, and long-term scalability

Each path (buy, build, or hybrid) trades speed for control in different ways.



Todd Foster
Associate Partner,
BEGHO

Budget

Upfront savings vs. sustained investment

“This is really the biggest lever that will shape all the other decisions you make, so it is important to determine your budget early.”

Speed

Speed to launch vs. depth of capability

“I’ve seen even the best builds end up trapped in a cycle of ‘almost there’ solutions that never quite meet their promised potential.”

Integration

Ease today vs. control tomorrow

“Working in data management for 20+ years, integration is a major pain point. I’ve seen great point solutions where clients had to email their data to someone else to get it into the warehouse, and that is not where you want to be long term.”





Innovation

Vendor roadmap vs. competitive advantage

“I came in at the tail end of a custom-build project for a data warehouse that had already been ongoing for five years and cost millions of dollars. The company ended up scrapping the project because the business requirements and technology landscape had changed so much. The solution was never going to meet their needs.”

CORE TRADE-OFFS

How the trade-offs play out in practice

	BUY	BUILD	HYBRID
 <p>Budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower upfront investment • Predictable licensing costs • Vendor pricing model driving long-term spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher upfront development cost • Ongoing maintenance and staffing required • Greater long-term cost control if sustained internally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced capital allocation • Targeted internal investment where differentiation matters • Clear governance needed to avoid duplicated spend
 <p>Speed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster deployment • Proven workflows • Lower near-term execution risk • Data security and compliance built in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer time to usable capability • Testing and stabilization required • Higher pre-launch execution risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits from buying launch-critical components • Ability to build differentiated layers over time • Requires disciplined sequencing
 <p>Integration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-built connectors (varies by vendor) • Integration still required across systems • Limited visibility into and control over underlying logic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full control of data model and logic • Heavy integration lift internally • Governance responsibility remaining internal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to internally own core data backbone and layer on select tools • Clear integration owner required to avoid fragmentation
 <p>Innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to leverage vendor roadmap and R&D • Dependent on vendor innovation priorities (including scalability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full flexibility and customization • Innovation funded and staffed internally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vendor-driven innovation for mature areas • Internal ownership where competitive advantage matters • Requiring long-term architectural vision

MAKING THE RIGHT CALL

Anchor to a launch-aligned roadmap

Under launch pressure, it's tempting to optimize for speed or control. The better approach is to focus on converting your commercial strategy into actionable, investible activities and tie your investment decisions to a clear roadmap.

- **Design for a long horizon while keeping an eye on immediate needs.**
Your architecture should support growth, but it's important to separate what must be ready on day one from what can scale post-launch.
- **Align systems decisions to business needs.**
Shape infrastructure choices around cross-functional stakeholder priorities and end user workflows.
- **Own your data backbone. Buy where differentiation doesn't matter.**
Mature workflow tools can be bought, but foundational data layers require intention.
- **Be explicit about ownership.**
Hybrid works well when accountability for integration and governance is clear.
- **Stabilize before you scale.**
Don't layer advanced capabilities (AI, automation, orchestration) before core systems are stable.



If you're weighing buy vs build vs hybrid decisions, connect with us to pressure-test your approach and sequence the right capabilities at the right time.

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