



Build vs. buy in the age of AI

**Can you create your own value
automation platform?**

The rise of the AI edict?

There is a broad shift happening across go-to-market (GTM) organizations, and it is starting to reshape how leaders think about their entire tech stack.

Sales, marketing, and customer success teams have accumulated layer upon layer of tools over the past decade. CRM, sales engagement, conversation intelligence, forecasting, enablement, value platforms, and more. The result is powerful, but also expensive and increasingly complex.

Now, with AI entering the picture, many CROs and GTM leaders are stepping back and asking a more fundamental question: Do we actually need all of these applications... or can we replace parts of the stack with AI, or perhaps, even the entire stack?

In many organizations, these questions are no longer just a bottom-up exploration. They are increasingly becoming a top-down mandate.



It's now common to hear:

"We need to reduce SaaS spend."

"We should build more internally with AI."

"Why are we paying for this when we could create it ourselves?"

For the leaders and practitioners responsible for value, enablement, and GTM execution, this

creates a very real tension. Because the question is no longer just build vs. buy, it becomes:

- Is this the right decision for our business?
- Where does AI truly create advantage?
- What are we underestimating in replacing platforms?
- How do we guide leadership toward the best outcome, not just the fastest perceived cost reduction or trend?

And increasingly, there is another layer to the discussion: ownership of the workflow itself.

The issue is not just whether software can be replaced. It is whether the workflows that support value selling, value realization, and GTM execution should be owned internally, adapted through a platform, or shared across both. That matters because workflow ownership influences how value is defined, how it is operationalized, and how it improves over time.

AI absolutely can replace parts of the stack. In some cases, it should. But blanket **rip-and-replace** strategies often ignore the complexity beneath what those platforms actually deliver, not just in features, but in structure, governance, repeatability, and the workflows they support. And that is where the risk begins.

Now, let's take a look at what this means for your Value-Led Growth scaling challenges and your Value Automation / Management Platform considerations.



A moment that makes you pause

I recently saw a demonstration that made this issue come to life.

It was a homegrown AI application, not a polished SaaS product, but something built internally. It pulled from Salesforce records, call transcripts, company data, and contact-level insights. Then, within moments, it automatically generated:

- A tailored pre-call briefing for the sales team
- A value story aligned to the customer's industry and role
- A value hypothesis grounded in real business challenges

What made this moment powerful was not just the automation, or even the speed. It was that the company had begun to orchestrate the workflow of value creation itself.

This was not a generic AI output. It was integrated with other tools for customer context and knowledge. It was deeply personalized and context-aware. It leveraged curated value stories by industry and persona. It incorporated a structured business value framework. It reflected how a seasoned value consultant would think about the account.

The AI wasn't the differentiator. The embedded workflow, content, and logic behind it was.

And it didn't have to stop there. The same approach could extend across the full pre-sales and post-sales lifecycle.

Upstream, it can power Value Prospecting, Qualification, and Discovery:

- Prospecting emails tailored to business outcomes, not product pitches
- Call scripts aligned to industry-specific pains and value drivers
- Qualification guidance to assess whether real outcomes can be delivered
- Discovery questions designed to uncover impact, not just requirements

Downstream, it can empower Customer Success and Value Realization:

- Automated value realization summaries
- Outcome tracking narratives tied to original business cases
- Executive-ready, outcome-focused QBR presentations
- Continuous storytelling that reinforces ROI and sets up expansion

At that point, the question becomes difficult to ignore: **If you can orchestrate and automate this entire workflow internally, how much do you really need to buy?**



The appeal of building: control, speed, and differentiation

For many organizations, the appeal is obvious. Building your own AI-driven value capability offers a level of control that SaaS platforms often cannot match. You can tailor everything to your business, your customers, your messaging. Your intellectual property stays internal. Your teams can iterate quickly as AI capabilities evolve.

There is also a strategic advantage. In a world where differentiation is increasingly difficult, owning your value methodology and how it is operationalized through AI can become a true competitive edge. And there is a new dynamic emerging that further strengthens the case: **speed of innovation through embedded engineering**.

When you have internal engineers, or forward deployed engineers aligned to the business:



A new idea
can be captured
immediately



Prototypes can
be built in days,
not quarters



Feedback
loops are tight
and continuous



Improvements can
be deployed in weeks
instead of waiting on
vendor roadmaps

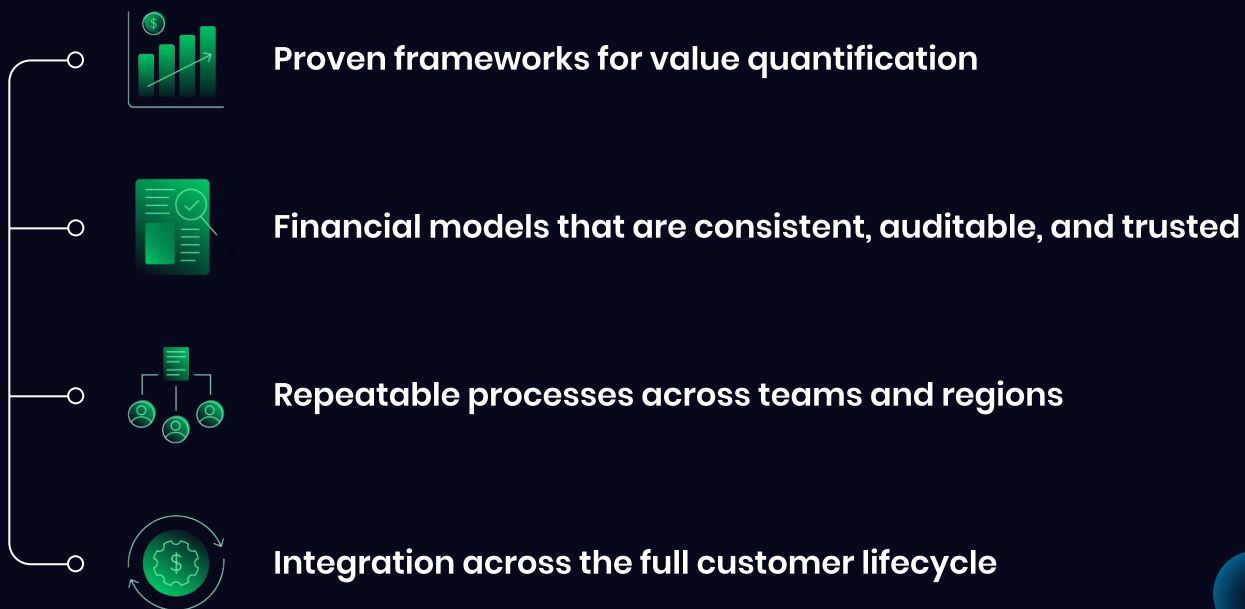
In this model, AI combined with
engineering proximity creates
a powerful advantage.



Meanwhile, the platforms are evolving fast

Value Automation Platform providers are not standing still. They are rapidly embedding AI to ingest CRM data and call logs, generate value narratives, populate financial models, and create executive-ready presentations.

Some can pull in industry benchmarks dynamically. Others can generate full business cases from scratch. On the surface, this looks very similar to what can be built internally. But the real difference is not just in features. It is in structure, governance, and scale. These platforms bring:



And increasingly, something many SaaS companies historically avoided: **Services.**



Where AI works best and where it still needs structure

From my investigation and reviews, AI is incredibly effective at certain parts of the value journey.

It can synthesize large amounts of information (structured and unstructured), generate personalized narratives, and create highly relevant value hypotheses. It can dramatically improve prospecting, qualification, and discovery by making every interaction more contextual and outcome-focused. But when you move into **business case development**, the rules change. This is where precision matters.

Business cases are not just stories. They are financial instruments. They require:



Deterministic calculations on pricing and outcomes



Transparent assumptions



Consistency across deals



Defensibility with finance teams and CFOs

And this is where AI, particularly LLMs, has limitations. It is probabilistic by design. It can suggest, structure, and draft, but it is not inherently built to guarantee financial accuracy. So a pattern emerges: **You can generate the story and hypothesis with AI. But you still need structured models to prove it.**



The real asset: your value workflow IP

As compelling as the technology is, one insight keeps surfacing: AI is only as good as the foundation behind it. And that foundation is not just data, it is your value workflow IP.

The most effective AI-driven workflows are powered by:

- Curated value stories by industry and persona
- Defined business value frameworks (BVs)
- Value-based pricing calculators
- Capability and maturity models
- Standardized templates for outputs and messaging
- Real benchmark data and validated assumptions
- Realized value telemetry metrics

Without this foundation, AI produces generic outputs. With it, AI produces outputs that are consistent, credible, and expert-level.

This is where many build vs. buy discussions underestimate the effort required, because they focus on the technology, not the workflow IP that makes it work.

You are not just choosing technology. You are choosing whether you can **build, govern, and continuously evolve the workflow IP that makes the technology effective.**



How value automation providers can differentiate

As the “we can build this ourselves” argument becomes more common, Value Automation providers need to evolve their positioning. Not just around AI, but around what AI alone cannot deliver.

Area	How providers can differentiate
Financial integrity & governance	Deliver consistent, auditable, CFO defensible financial models with transparent assumptions and standardized methodologies across all deals, regions, and teams.
End to end workflow & integration	Deliver a unified data model connecting prospecting, discovery, business case creation, value realization, and expansion, integrated with CRM, call intelligence, and CS platforms to eliminate fragmentation.
Scalability & total cost of ownership	Support growing revenue demands with fewer resources while avoiding the hidden, ongoing costs of home grown AI builds, offering a more predictable total cost.
Embedded methodology & benchmarking	Provide proven frameworks and proprietary benchmarks that are difficult to replicate internally, reducing the burden on internal teams.
Time to value & focus	Deploy quickly without extensive build cycles, keeping value leaders focused on high impact priorities instead of building and maintaining technology.
Activation	Deliver the training, certification, role play practice, coaching, and community needed to activate GTM teams, since adoption is the top barrier to success.

But increasingly, the real differentiation will come from something many SaaS companies previously minimized.



Services as a core value driver

To compete in this new landscape, providers must lean into services, not avoid them. Services are how workflow ownership is transferred, accelerated, or augmented.

This includes:

Capability and maturity assessments

Value methodology design and refinement

Deployment support and integration

Best practice sharing from across customers

Training, certification, role-play and coaching for GTM teams

Measurement of value outcomes and success

Ongoing support and adoption program

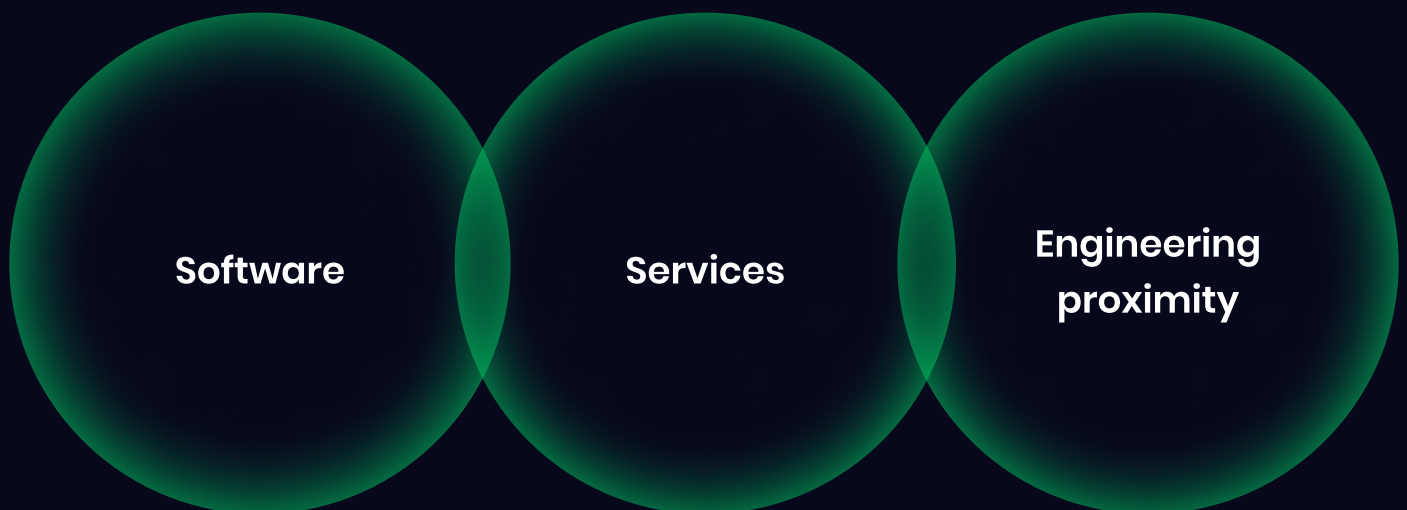


And critically Forward Deployed Engineering, where providers will take a page from the agentic-AI playbook, adopting a model where engineers are much closer to the customer:

- Capturing new requirements in real time
- Rapidly building and validating enhancements
- Delivering improvements in days or weeks, not months



This is where internal AI-driven teams currently have an advantage. To compete, platforms must accelerate innovation and assure outcomes, combining:



The most important service: assuring outcomes

But the most important evolution in services is a shift from merely *measuring outcomes* to actually *assuring outcomes*. Measurement tells you what happened. Assurance is a commitment to what will happen.

This includes:

Validating that value hypotheses are achievable before deals close

Ensuring business cases are grounded in reality and aligned to customer constraints

Supporting execution post-sale to realize the expected outcomes

Continuously refining models based on actual performance

And an increasingly important question emerges: Does the underlying data model support collaboration beyond internal teams?

For many organizations, value delivery involves external stakeholders such as channel partners, system integrators, and customers themselves.

Platforms that support multi-party engagement, shared visibility, and external collaboration will have a significant advantage over internally built tools that are often designed for internal use only.



How value leaders can make the case to build with AI

On the other side, innovative value leaders are exploring how to bring the value automation capability in-house. For them, success depends on positioning the build strategy effectively with CROs and GTM leadership.

Area	How to position a build strategy
Differentiation	Proprietary value frameworks and storytelling create competitive advantage
Customization	Tailor outputs to industries, personas, and deal contexts
Speed of innovation	Rapid iteration driven by internal teams and AI
Cost control	Reduce long-term dependency on platform licensing
Data ownership	Maintain control over sensitive customer and value data
AI leverage	Extend AI across prospecting, discovery, storytelling, and CS
GTM alignment	Build a solution that reflects how the company actually sells
Future flexibility	Avoid vendor lock-in in a fast-moving AI landscape

But this path is not “free.” In fact, it may have a higher Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) than you might be anticipating, as AI build requires:

- Investment in content and frameworks
- Usage fees and perhaps licensing of agentic platforms to help speed development and deployment

- Ongoing engineering support, especially from value experts, and one or more skilled Forward Deployed Engineers
- Governance of models and outputs
- Commitment to not just develop the platform, but still do all else required for success, especially: orchestration, evangelism, training, coaching and support

Without these, even the best AI will fall short.



Total cost of ownership comparison: build vs. buy over 3 years

One of the biggest drivers behind the shift to AI is the perception of cost savings. But is that actually the case?

In many organizations, cost is underestimated because the evaluation focuses on tools, not on the systems required to own and operate them. When you choose to build, you are not just developing software. You are committing to owning, governing, and continuously evolving the workflow behind it.

To better understand the implications, let's take a closer look at the total cost of ownership. The following comparison analyzes a Value Automation Platform versus an in-house AI build for a 120-seller organization.

What it reveals is often surprising: the most significant costs are not upfront, but ongoing, and frequently hidden across engineering, infrastructure, governance, and support.

The in-house AI build can cost anywhere from 10% to a, likely closer to, 1/3rd more expensive proposition over three years. This comes with much more uncertainty as to the on-going maintenance and consumption costs, especially as LLMs begin right-charging for their usage.



Cost category	Value automation platform (3 years)	In-house AI build (3 years)
Licensing / platform fees	\$360K (\$120K/year)	\$0
Initial build / development	Included	\$150K – \$350K
Engineering, maintenance & enhancements (ongoing)	Minimal / included	\$200K – \$400K
AI infrastructure & tokens	Included	\$470K (\$120K/year growing to \$200K/year)
Activation (content, support, evangelism)	\$900K (\$300K/year)	\$900K (\$300K/year)
Training & certification, role-play tools	\$360K (\$1K per seller/year)	\$360K (\$1K per seller/year)
Governance & model management	Included	\$75K – \$150K
Total (3 years)	~\$1.98M	~\$2.16M – \$2.63M

The TCO comparison helps us understand what may be hidden and easily overlooked in the rush to AI and rip-and-replace:

- The platform cost is highly visible, and as such subject to spendthrift targeting, but also predictable, bundled, and easier to forecast
- The build cost is fragmented and often underestimated, particularly across engineering, infrastructure, governance, and especially ongoing support
- Activation and training are required in both models, and remain the primary drivers of success or failure regardless of technology choice

- Engineering, maintenance, and continuous evolution become the largest hidden cost drivers in build scenarios

- But cost alone should not drive the decision

This is where many build strategies break down, not in capability, but in sustainability. The most effective organizations recognize that this is not a binary decision.

They use AI where it creates the most advantage, leverage platforms where structure and governance matter most, and increasingly combine both to balance innovation with scalability.



AI-led build: where it creates advantage?

AI is not just a cost consideration, it is a strategic capability.
When executed well, a build approach can unlock:

1



Speed of innovation

Rapid prototyping, iteration, and deployment without waiting on vendor roadmaps

2



Customization & control

Tailored outputs aligned to your exact GTM motions, industries, and personas

3



Differentiation

Proprietary value frameworks, storytelling, and deal strategy embedded directly into workflows

4



Data ownership & flexibility

Greater control over sensitive customer, pricing, and value data

5



Expanded AI leverage

Extending intelligence across prospecting, discovery, deal strategy, and customer success

For organizations with strong technical and value maturity, these advantages can be meaningful and, in some cases, worth the additional investment, especially in those areas most suitable for AI.



Platforms: where do they deliver structural advantage?

At the same time, Value Automation platforms continue to provide critical advantages that are difficult to replicate internally.



Predictability & financial integrity

Structured, governed models that ensure consistency and finance-level trust.



End-to-end workflow integration

Common data model and workflows spanning prospecting through value realization.



Scalability without headcount growth

Enabling consistent execution across large GTM teams with fewer resources.



Built-in governance

Standardization, compliance, and repeatability across regions and teams.



Faster time to value

Immediate deployment without long build cycles.



Bundled cost structure

More predictable and easier to manage compared to fragmented build costs.



Embedded AI innovation

Increasingly incorporating AI and agentic capabilities directly into the platform.



Bridging the two: what the TCO analysis really shows

The TCO comparison is not about declaring a winner. It highlights a more important reality:

AI build offers flexibility, speed, and differentiation, often at a higher and less predictable cost

Platforms offer structure, consistency, and scalability, with faster time to impact

Both require activation, training, and operational discipline to succeed

The organizations that get this right are not choosing one over the other. They are:

Using AI to innovate and differentiate

Using platforms to standardize and scale

Leveraging the fact that platforms themselves are rapidly embedding AI



The spectrum of workflow ownership

As organizations evaluate build vs. buy in the age of AI, the decision is often framed as a binary choice. In reality, it is not.

What companies are actually deciding is how much of their value creation workflow they want to own, a technology decision, it is an operating model decision.

Because the more of the workflow you own, the more control you have over how value is defined, operationalized, and improved over time. But with that control comes increased responsibility for building, governing, and continuously evolving it.

Across the market, organizations are converging around a spectrum of workflow ownership:

Model	Description	Tradeoff
Fully SaaS-owned workflow	Platform defines process, models, and execution	Fast, but limited differentiation
Hybrid workflow ownership	Platform provides structure, AI/custom layers extend it	Balance of scale and differentiation
Fully owned workflow (AI build)	Internal teams control end-to-end workflow	Maximum flexibility, highest cost and complexity

The question is not which model is universally better. It is how much workflow ownership is right for your organization, based on your value maturity, technical capabilities, and strategic priorities.

Most organizations will not operate at one extreme. They will move along this spectrum over time, often starting with platforms, introducing AI-driven customization, and selectively owning the areas where differentiation matters most.



So... build or buy?

The answer is rarely binary. Value maturity, technical capability, and differentiation needs determine the right path, often landing in a hybrid model: platforms for structure and scale, internal AI for customization and speed.

Spectrum	Build	Hybrid	Buy
Value maturity	Advanced maturity, frameworks already established internally	Growing maturity, some frameworks exist but need refinement	Early maturity, no defined value methodology yet
Differentiation need	Value methodology is a core competitive advantage worth owning	Some differentiation matters, but core process can be standardized	Value process is not a differentiator, consistency matters more
Speed to deploy	Willing to invest months for long term control	Need results in weeks, layering AI onto a platform foundation	Need immediate deployment, cannot wait on a build cycle
Total cost predictability	Comfortable with variable, ongoing engineering and AI costs	Want to blend predictable licensing with some internal investment	Need predictable, bundled costs for budgeting and forecasting
Scalability needs	Small or stable team, less pressure to scale without headcount	Growing team, need some automation to support scale	Large or rapidly growing team, must scale without adding headcount



Executive edicts: how to ensure the right path is taken

Executive mandates to reduce SaaS and “build with AI” are not inherently wrong. In many cases, they are directionally correct.

But when applied as blanket rip-and-replace edicts, they can lead to unintended consequences:

- Underestimating the complexity of what is being replaced
- Shifting hidden costs into engineering, support, and operations
- Slowing down teams during transition periods
- Losing consistency, governance, and trust in outputs

For value leaders and GTM stakeholders, the goal is not to resist the mandate. It is to shape it. That starts with reframing the conversation.

Instead of: **“Should we replace this platform?”**

Shift to: **“Where does AI create advantage, and where is structure required?”**

A few practical ways to guide leadership:

1. Decompose the capability - segment the platform into its core components:

- Content and value IP
- Financial models

- Workflow and orchestration
- Governance and compliance
- Training and adoption

This makes it clear what is easy to replicate and what is not.

2. Run targeted pilots, not full replacements - test AI in specific areas such as:

- Pre-call planning
- Value hypothesis generation
- Discovery support
- Role-play practice and coaching

Avoid full-scale replacement before validating performance.

3. Quantify total cost, not just license cost - move the discussion beyond “what we pay today” to:

- What it costs to build
- What it costs to run (especially as consumption pricing rises)
- What it costs to maintain
- What it costs to scale
- What it costs if adoption fails



4. Align to outcomes, not tools - anchor decisions in:

- Revenue impact
- Win rates
- Deal size
- Expansion
- Customer outcomes

Not technology preference.

5. Embrace hybrid by design - in many cases, the optimal path is not replacement, but combination:

- Platforms for structure and governance
- AI for speed, flexibility, and differentiation

The organizations that get this right are not the ones that build everything. They are the ones that **build selectively, leverage smartly and integrate intelligently.**



The bottom-line: the real question isn't build vs. buy

AI is lowering the barrier to building powerful capabilities. At the same time, it is raising the expectations for what “good” looks like in value engagement.

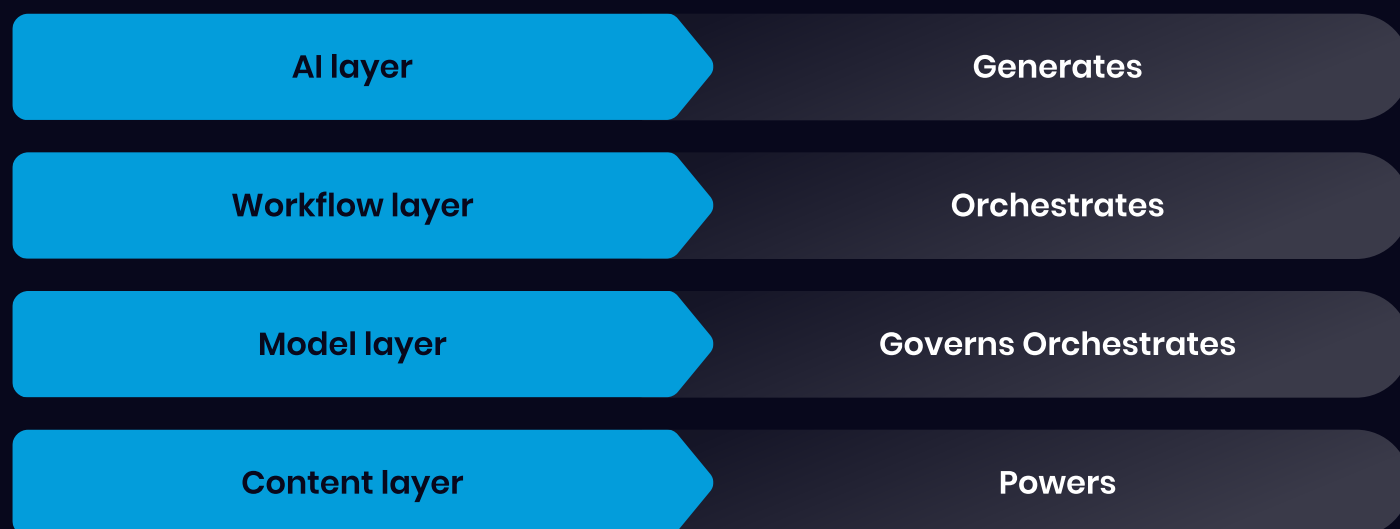
The real shift is not AI vs. SaaS. It is workflow ownership. The real question is not: “Should we build or buy?” It is: “Do we have the value foundation, content, and operating model to make either approach work?”

Build vs. buy is simply how you choose to achieve it.

The winners will not be the ones who adopt the most AI, or the fewest tools. They will be the ones who:

- Own the right parts of their workflow
- Structure the parts that require trust and scale
- And continuously evolve both

To think about this across the different layers:



Because in the end, AI will not be the differentiator. **Your ability to define, communicate, and deliver value, consistently, credibly, and at scale, will be.**

And the organizations that succeed will not be those that simply build or buy. They will be the ones that understand where structure is required, where flexibility creates advantage, and how to bring both together to drive outcomes.



Considerations for your build vs. buy decision making

AI absolutely has a role in Value Automation, and in many cases, a powerful one. But what we're seeing is that companies underestimate what they're actually replacing.

The question isn't whether you can build it, it's whether you want to take on the full cost, risk, and ongoing burden of owning it, and the results that may not be as expected.

Most of our customers don't choose between AI and a platform. They use AI to supplement and enhance what we provide, not replace it.

Dimension	In-house AI build (what executives expect)	Reality of in-house AI build	Value automation platform (Mediafly positioning)	Seller talking point
Cost perception	"We eliminate \$120K/year SaaS cost."	Costs shift, not disappear. Fragmented across engineering, infrastructure, governance, and support	Predictable, bundled cost (~\$120K/year) with platform + services included	"This is not cost removal, it's cost relocation, and usually expansion."
3-year TCO	"AI will be cheaper long term."	\$3M–\$4.5M+ total cost, often underestimated and untracked across budgets	~\$2M total, predictable and easier to manage	"Most AI builds cost 1.5–2.5x more over 3 years."
Time to value	"We can build quickly with AI."	Initial prototypes are fast, but production-grade systems take 6–18 months	Immediate deployment with proven workflows	"Demo speed is not production reality."
Engineering dependency	"We'll just use our existing team."	Requires dedicated FTEs (1–2+ engineers + value experts), ongoing forever	Minimal internal engineering required	"You are signing up for a permanent engineering commitment."



Dimension	In-house AI build (what executives expect)	Reality of in-house AI build	Value automation platform (Mediafly positioning)	Seller talking point
Maintenance & evolution	"AI will continuously improve itself."	Constant tuning, model updates, prompt engineering, integrations, bug fixes	Continuous updates included in platform	"AI systems decay without constant care."
Financial integrity	"AI can generate business cases."	Outputs are probabilistic, inconsistent, and often not finance-trusted	Deterministic, auditable, CFO-defensible models	"If finance doesn't trust it, it doesn't matter."
Consistency at scale	"AI will standardize everything."	Outputs vary by prompt, user, and data quality, hard to enforce consistency	Standardized methodologies across all teams	"Consistency is engineered, not generated."
Workflow Integration	"We'll connect it to Salesforce and data."	Integration complexity across CRM, call data, CS tools is high and ongoing	Pre-integrated across GTM workflows	"Integration is where most builds slow down."
Activation & adoption	"Teams will use it because it's better."	Adoption is still the #1 failure point, requires enablement, coaching, governance	Built-in activation, training, and adoption programs	"Tools don't drive adoption, programs do."
Content & value IP ("AI fuel")	"AI will generate the content."	Requires massive upfront and ongoing investment in frameworks, benchmarks, models	Pre-built + continuously refined frameworks and benchmarks	"AI without structured inputs produces generic outputs."
Scalability	"AI scales easily."	Scaling requires governance, QA, and support layers that grow over time	Designed to scale across global GTM teams	"Scaling AI = scaling complexity."



Dimension	In-house AI build (what executives expect)	Reality of in-house AI build	Value automation platform (Mediafly positioning)	Seller talking point
Governance & risk	"We'll control everything internally."	High risk of inconsistency, compliance issues, and lack of auditability	Built-in governance, compliance, and repeatability	"Internal control often becomes internal chaos."
External collaboration	"We can extend it later."	Most internal tools are not designed for customers, partners, or shared visibility	Designed for multi-party engagement (customers, partners, execs)	"Value delivery is not an internal-only process."
Focus of GTM teams	"We'll build exactly what we need."	Value leaders get pulled into product management, engineering oversight, and support	Teams stay focused on deals, value, and outcomes	"Do you want your value team building tools, or closing business?"
Outcome assurance	"We'll measure value outcomes."	Measurement without structure leads to inconsistency and weak credibility	Platforms increasingly move toward assuring outcomes	"Measurement is hindsight. Assurance drives revenue."

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