20

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE STARTING YOUR SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

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CLEAR LAUNCH

As a company owner, or CTO, you're in charge of steering growth and new projects. Perhaps you've discovered a problem with your current software platform or have a novel idea for a completely new product, but you're still weighing your options on how to launch this new technology project. While researching the steps to developing custom software you may be faced with a swirling set of "what if" and "how" questions.

Investing in custom software development is a big decision, but it doesn't have to be scary. You're making a choice to build an innovative new solution rather than settling for a band-aid for your existing technology. To ensure that your project gets started on the right track, we've compiled a list of 20 questions to consider before diving into custom software development.

General

01. What is the goal of your project?

Before commencing work on any project you must first understand what you're trying to achieve. Your goal for the final solution will determine what work is to be done and who will do it.

02. What problem does it solve? What is the benefit of building this solution?

You need to clearly understand the technical problem your company experiences today and how your company will benefit from building a new product. By starting with a clear understanding of your company's current technical roadblocks, you can look forward to see what benefits the new solution is likely to bring.

03. Why is it a problem today?

Now that you've identified the problem, ask yourself: "Why is this a problem?" "What are the consequences of NOT fixing this technical challenge?" "What will happen if the problem goes unsolved?" "How will your new solution solve future headaches?"

04. Is there funding to move this project forward? What investment amount do you expect to spend on this project?

Commonly people know they need to modernize their technology to fix a persistent technical challenge, but they have not dedicated any budget to actually address the problem. Develop a budget for your project and include some additional padding to allot for unexpected costs.

05. When would you like to release the new solution?

In an ideal world, when would your company like to share the results of your custom software project? Delays and hurdles are to be expected and can be factored into the timeline, but it's a good idea to have a long range estimated time for completion.

06. What features must be developed? Have you assigned priorities to each feature?

It is important for planning and budgeting purposes to clearly define each feature required for your new technology solution. Additionally, assigning a priority level can help you create a plan to develop your features.

07. What platform will the software use? Or with what legacy systems must it integrate?

Ask yourself this important question: "Is there existing technology that could affect your new solution or that will dictate what/how you develop?"

08. How do you define success?

Knowing what you want to build and why you want to build it are not the same as knowing what success looks like at the end. If you build a new technology solution, how will you know you've invested wisely and the project is a success?

09. What are the business objectives of the solution?

How does this solution help your business? What processes or services does the solution positively impact?

10. Who are your competitors? What differentiates you from them?

This question can be framed differently depending on whether the new technology solution is internal or customer-facing. **Internal:** Is there a solution off the shelf that could be used, and does it solve all of your needs? **Customer-facing:** What solutions currently exist in the market for the technology we want to build? And how would our solution effectively distinguish itself?

11. What is the impact of not moving forward with this project?

If you don't move forward with building this new technology solution, how will your company be impacted immediately? And, what will be the future impact?

12. What is preventing you from getting started on this project?

Define the obstacles, budget restrictions, lack of specialists or management decisions that are restraining your company from moving forward with fixing this technical challenge.

13. Who has attempted to fix the problem already? What happened?

In many organizations an attempt has already been made to tackle technology challenges. How would you define these previous attempts and what were the persistent problems that prevented a successful launch?

14. Who are the subject matter experts (SMEs) in your company who can help your development team meet their goals?

Are there members of your company who should be involved in the development of a new technology solution? Who will manage this project? Defining ownership of a project is critical in seeing success with building a new technology solution.

15. What kind of support and maintenance will be needed after the project is complete?

It's not enough to build a new technology solution. You have to maintain it and ensure that anyone using the solution is properly trained. Additionally, it's critical to plan for product updates so that your new solution continues to perform optimally as other technology changes around it.

16. Who are the target end users?

No matter if the solution is internal or customer-facing, you should define who will be using the new technology solution and how they intend to engage with the product. This allows you to make intelligent decisions for user experience, user interface design, and feature development.

17. ## How do the end users benefit from solving this challenge?

Defining your target users also requires an understanding of what goals or objectives they are trying to achieve and how using your new technology solution will help them. If they don't benefit, what's the point of building the solution?

18. ## What pain points are my end users faced with today?

Conversely, how are your target users negatively impacted by your existing technology challenge? Does this in turn affect your business' ability to perform?

19. ## How are my end users solving this challenge today?

Have workarounds been created to solve this technology challenge, or are there applications that exist today that achieve the target users' goals? If your target users have already developed their own solution, you might experience low user adoption and an unsuccessful launch of your product.

20. ## Have you defined the ideal user experience? Have you designed wireframes or mockups to visualize the user flow?

You can ensure greater success with developing your new technology solution if you have already visualized how the product functions, what the user experience looks like, and how the product is designed. Even a rough sketch (or flow chart) to define the steps in the process is better than nothing at all.

Conclusion

We've routinely asked clients the questions above and found them to be helpful in narrowing the scope of their projects. Maybe you don't need to answer all 20 questions, or maybe you need to expound upon certain sections and add more. Regardless, the above questions are a primer to get you thinking about your end goals and what you really want out of a custom software development solution.

If you've decided that a custom solution is the right choice for you, think critically about the development team you hire. When researching software shops, make sure to vet their knowledge, ask them tough questions, illuminate their experience and try to gain a solid understanding of how a particular firm can provide the team, and ability, to see your project to successful fruition. We at Clear Launch geek-out over new custom software projects and are always happy to talk shop and share our experience. If you have questions about building your solution, give us a ring today and let's get started.

About Clear Launch

Based in Austin, TX, we are an established, custom software development agency implementing technology that drives business results. From complex systems integrations to custom web applications, we tailor our solutions to fit your needs.

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