

A GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHED BUSINESSES

Build, buy or managed

How established businesses replace manual work
with software

For owners and managers who run an important process on spreadsheets, email,
paper or an aging internal tool, and for funded teams building something new.

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WHERE TO START

Signs the work is worth digitizing

Many established businesses run something important on a spreadsheet and a shared inbox: orders, scheduling, approvals, inspections, client intake. It started as a quick fix, and it works. That is why it has lasted, and why it is hard to replace.

Information is retyped

The same details are copied from an email into a spreadsheet, then into another system.

Approvals live in email

Sign-off happens in reply threads, and nobody can see what is waiting on whom.

Versions multiply

Copies named "final" and "final v2" circulate, and nobody is sure which is current.

People work around it

Staff keep private notes and side sheets because the official one does not fit their job.

One person holds the knowledge

A single employee knows how the spreadsheet really works, so a vacation is a risk.

Status requires a question

To learn where something stands, someone has to ask someone else. Customers ask too.

Mistakes are found late

Errors surface when a customer complains, not when they are made.

Paper on site

Checklists and forms are filled in by hand, then typed up or phoned in later.

One or two of these is normal. Several at once usually means the process has outgrown its tools.

Start with one process

Resist the urge to digitize everything. Pick the process that costs the most or breaks the most. A narrow first step is easier to finish, easier to judge, and easier to get your team to adopt. Before you talk to anyone, answer these on paper:

- Which single process costs us the most time or causes the most errors?
- Who does that work today, and what do they wish were different?
- What data would have to come across, and how clean is it?
- What must connect to it: accounting, email, a customer system?
- What would tell us, quickly, that it is working?

Write down how the work really happens, not how it is supposed to. The side sheets and informal rules are often where the real business logic lives.

YOUR OPTIONS

Three ways to get software

Before features or design, decide how you will get the software at all. Each route trades control against effort. The right one depends on what the software is for.

1

Buy

Off-the-shelf software, SaaS, or no-code tools you assemble yourself

License a finished product, or put one together from existing tools, and use it more or less as it comes.

GOOD WHEN

- The need is common, such as scheduling or basic invoicing.
- You need something running soon and cheaply.

WATCH FOR

- You adapt your process to the tool, then stack workarounds when it falls short.
- Per-seat pricing that grows faster than your team.
- How easily you can get your data out.

2

Build

Custom software, by an in-house team, a development company, or both

A team designs and writes software for your specific need. It does what your business does, and if the contract says so, you own the code and the IP.

GOOD WHEN

- The software is part of what makes your business valuable.
- Your process is unusual enough that a product would fight you.
- You need the freedom to move the code to another team later.

WATCH FOR

- An up-front cost, and time to build what the scope requires.
- Upkeep after launch: operating systems change, libraries age, users ask for things.

3

Managed

A branded app built and run for you on a provider's platform

A provider builds an app shaped to your brand and use case on a platform it already runs, and operates it for a monthly fee, usually with one-time launch services.

GOOD WHEN

- You want a working app and no engineering burden.
- The need fits standard parts: login, content, booking, chat, forms, payments.

WATCH FOR

- The provider owns the software. You should own your data, customers and brand.
- Usage or feature limits that matter at your scale.

YOUR OPTIONS

Comparing them honestly

Control	Build gives the most. Managed gives control of your brand and data. Buy gives the least.
Speed	Buy is quickest to start. Managed is built to go live in weeks. Build takes as long as the scope requires.
Ongoing effort	Build: you, or a team you hire, own upkeep. Managed: the provider does. Buy: the vendor handles the product and you handle the workarounds.
Ownership	Build: you own it, if the contract says so. Managed: the provider owns the software, you own the data. Buy: you own your data and little else.
Cost shape	Build is a project cost plus upkeep. Managed and Buy are recurring fees.

Four questions that usually settle it

- 1 Is the software part of what makes your business valuable?
- 2 Does your process differ enough from the usual that an existing product would fight you?
- 3 Do you need to own and move the code?
- 4 How soon do you need to be live?

If the first three are yes, build. If they are no and you need to move quickly, look at managed or a bought product. If your need is common and small, buying may be all you need.

When Fluxweave is not the right answer

- Your need is common and small, and a product already does it. Buy the product.
- You need to own the code. Then our Managed Apps are the wrong deal; a build you own is the right one.
- The lowest hourly rate is the deciding factor. We compete on seniority and a known cost, not on rate.
- Nobody on your side has time to explain the work and try what we build. The project depends on that feedback.

You can change your mind

These are not permanent choices. Some businesses start on a managed app to learn what their users want, then commission a custom build. Others build first and later move a secondary app to a managed plan to cut upkeep.

COST

What drives cost

Any price quoted without knowing these is a guess. Expect a good vendor to ask about each one before giving you a number.

Users

Who uses it (staff, customers, members), how many, and with what roles and permissions.

Data migration

Years of history in spreadsheets. What moves over, what gets cleaned, what stays archived.

Languages

Screens, emails and notifications in one language or several, such as Japanese and English.

How unusual the process is

Standard parts can be configured. Rules specific to your business have to be built.

Integrations

Each system it must talk to: accounting, email, a customer system, devices, an old in-house tool.

Compliance and security

Personal or health data, audit trails, access rules, and any security questionnaire you must answer.

Platforms

Web only, or native iOS and Android apps as well, each with its own release work.

Who runs it after launch

Hosting, monitoring, patching and updates, done by your team or by a provider.

Every option has ongoing costs

Software needs upkeep like anything else. Plan for it from the start, whichever route you pick.

- **Build:** hosting, monitoring, and work to keep up with operating system changes for as long as the software lives.
- **Buy:** extra charges for users, integrations or storage as you grow.
- **Managed:** a monthly plan, with limits on usage or features that may matter at your scale.

Ask every provider what you will pay in year two, not just month one.

How Fluxweave prices

- **Fixed price** when the scope is clear. We agree on the result, then fix the price.
- **A dedicated senior team**, billed monthly, when the work is ongoing.
- **Managed Apps plans**, published and priced by monthly active users, from USD 499 per app per month, plus one-time launch services scoped and priced before we start.

There is no price list for custom work. Full details at fluxweave.com/pricing.

OWNERSHIP

Who owns the code and the data

Nobody owns every line of their software, because so much of it comes from open source and libraries. The real question is whether you own the code written for you, and what happens to your data if you leave.

Our stance: when we build for you, you own the code. If you want, we also run it. With our Managed Apps, we own and run the software, and your data, your customer relationships and your brand stay yours.

Build

Software built for you to own

SOFTWARE AND IP

You

DATA, CUSTOMERS, BRAND

You

WHO RUNS IT

You, or us through a dedicated team

IF YOU MOVE ON

The code is already yours.

Managed

Your branded, white-label app

SOFTWARE AND IP

Fluxweave

DATA, CUSTOMERS, BRAND

You

WHO RUNS IT

Fluxweave

IF YOU MOVE ON

We export your data and help you migrate. Custom work is charged.

Custom on our platform

Your app on our platform

SOFTWARE AND IP

Your app's code: you. The platform: Fluxweave

DATA, CUSTOMERS, BRAND

You

WHO RUNS IT

Fluxweave runs the platform

IF YOU MOVE ON

Your app's code goes with you but needs a new backend. Custom work is charged.

What to check in any contract

- Does the contract give you the code and the IP for what is written for you?
- Can you export your data, in a usable form, at any time?
- Can your users move with you if you change provider?
- If the provider goes away, what happens to your data and users? Is an export or a source code escrow arrangement available?
- How much notice does the provider give before changing terms?

Switching later is much easier when you asked these questions before you signed.

REDUCING RISK

Start with a fixed-price first step

Every project has a part that is the hardest, the most uncertain, or the most important. Build that part first, for real, at a price agreed before work starts. Then decide on the rest with evidence instead of promises.

Proof of concept

When there is a question to answer first.

Will this approach work? Will your staff use it?
Can it connect to what you run today? Build the piece of software that answers it.

Phase 1

When you already know what you need.

Build the part that matters most as the first phase of the full project. The next phase builds on it.

What a good first step includes

- **A written question.** What it must show, in a sentence or two. For example: "A staff member can enter a job from a phone and the office sees it immediately."
- **Working software, not a mockup.** You can log in, do the thing, and see the result.
- **Real conditions where it matters.** It connects to your real system, or a realistic stand-in, and is tried by someone who does the job.
- **An honest list of what is left.** What it did not cover, what the full project involves, and what is still uncertain.
- **A path forward, and no lock-in.** If you continue, the work carries forward. If you stop, you spent a bounded amount to learn what you needed. Stopping is a legitimate outcome.

What fixed price means

Scope and cost are agreed before work starts, and the cost does not grow because the work took longer than someone guessed. If the scope changes, scope and price are renegotiated openly. We do not publish a typical price or length for a first step, because the right size depends on what you need to prove. On a free assessment call we give you a sense of both for your project.

How it runs with us

- 1 **A free assessment call.** We learn how your business works, and together we pick the first step.
- 2 **Agree.** We define what the first step covers and fix the price.
- 3 **Build and decide.** We build it, you and your staff try it, and you decide what comes next.

CHECKLIST

Questions to ask any vendor

Use these with anyone you are considering, including us. Clear answers make a short conversation. Vague ones tell you something too.

Scope and price

- ☐ What exact question will the first step answer for us?
- ☐ Will we be able to use the working software ourselves?
- ☐ What is in the fixed price, and what would change it?
- ☐ What will we pay in year two, not just month one?

Quality and security

- ☐ Who reviews AI-generated code for security, and how?
- ☐ Who leads the project, and will that person stay our contact?
- ☐ How will we see progress: working software or status reports?
- ☐ Can you answer our security questionnaire in detail?

Ownership and leaving

- ☐ Who owns what is built, and does the contract say so?
- ☐ What carries forward if we continue?
- ☐ Can we export our data, and can our users move?
- ☐ How much notice do you give before changing terms?

After launch

- ☐ Who runs it: hosting, monitoring, patches and updates?
- ☐ Who fixes it when an operating system update breaks something?
- ☐ What will you tell us at the end if the idea is not working?
- ☐ What do you need from our team, and how much of their time?

On AI. Most vendors now say they use AI, and it does make building faster. It can also write security holes quickly: an endpoint with no access check, a query open to injection, secrets left in the wrong place. The code often looks fine and runs, which is why these slip through. Ask where AI is used, and who checks what it produces.

NEXT STEP

About Fluxweave

We build software for established businesses, either as software you own outright or as a managed app we run for you. Many of our projects begin with a business that has a working manual process and wants to move it to software without breaking it.

Since 2014

Shipping production software

Boston and Tokyo

Senior leads in the US and Japan

10+ years

Our platform in production

- **Senior review.** Senior engineers review every change before it ships, including everything AI produces.
- **You see progress.** Working software at regular demos, and progress, estimates and budget visible at the feature level.
- **Web and mobile.** iOS, Android and web from one team, with HIPAA-ready data handling for health work.
- **Bilingual in Japan.** For international companies in Japan: proposals, software and support in Japanese, English, or both, from a lead who works in Japan's business day.

Clients include Boehringer Ingelheim, Medigate, WOLL and Osaka Metropolitan University.

Start with a free assessment

A free call with a senior lead. We hear what you are working on, tell you how we would approach it, and recommend the right first step: a proof of concept or a phase 1, at a fixed price.

[Book a free assessment](#)[How the first step works](#)

Book: landing.fluxweave.com/meetings/rob-gagne

First step: fluxweave.com/scope · Pricing: fluxweave.com/pricing · Message us: fluxweave.com/contact