



- Is custom software right for you?

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Introduction

You have a requirement that cannot be easily satisfied by off-the-shelf (OTS) software. You are new to custom software development and before spending too much time you probably want to know if it's a viable option both technically and commercially.

- **Top 8 Reasons Why Businesses Develop Custom Software**

Features and Functionality	33%
Performance	7%
Usability	6%
Management Information	14%
Price	8%
Cost of Ownership	10%
Technology	9%
Integration	13%

At this stage you probably don't have a detailed specification, more likely a mix of the following:

- An idea of what you are trying to achieve
- A system diagram showing the main building blocks
- A list of key requirements
- Specific features and functionality that must be incorporated
- An example of an off the shelf solution that comes close

So what are your options and how do you go about choosing and evaluating a supplier?

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Custom software approaches

There are typically three options if you have special requirements:

1. Ask an off-the-shelf vendor to customise their application
2. Develop custom software for the special requirements only and integrate this with an OTS solution
3. Develop a complete custom solution

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In most cases an off-the-shelf solution makes the most sense and should be your default of choice even if you are asking for customisation:

- Deploying an off the shelf solution is generally faster than developing a custom software application. Even with complex installation and configuration it is typically faster than developing new software.

2

- OTS software is generally cheaper than developing your own. The development cost of an off-the-shelf package is spread across the thousands, possibly millions of customers. By contrast you alone bear the cost of a custom development.
- OTS software typically has years of testing and use, and incorporates feedback and improvements so is proven and mature.

You can find out more about selecting off the shelf software from our partners at www.iep.co.uk.

2

Adding custom software to an OTT solution may not always be possible since OTS vendors are rarely prepared to share the detailed knowledge about the workings of their product. There are also potential support issues. However, some products are designed with this concept in mind, in particular **open source** solutions and those with industry standard application programming interfaces (APIs).

3

In relation to the third approach, there are good reasons to consider custom development, especially in mid-sized or large companies. Often the benefits can outweigh the advantages of off the shelf software.

- You can specify exactly what you want
- Gives you an edge over your competitors
- The support is very focused & knowledgeable
- New requirements can readily be incorporated
- Custom can be cheaper than some BoB or enterprise software *

* When considering total cost of acquisition and ownership.

• A General Comparison of Product Features for Off-the-Shelf Versus Custom

Feature	OTS	Custom	Comment
Special Requirements	Poor	Excellent	Exact needs fulfilled
Rich Functionality	High	Low	Only specified features
Depth of Functionality	Low	High	No need for generalist approach
Features Actually Used	Low	High	Built to specification, no more no less
User Interfaces	Fair	Good	Can be tailored to exact needs
Reporting	Fair	Excellent	Not limited to out of the box*
Configurability (by User)	Good	Fair	Unless part of specification*
Customisation	Poor	Excellent	At a price, beholden to developer*
Workflow	Fair	Excellent	Exactly as specified*

*changes may require development

3

The 8 biggest concerns

You are not alone! We polled a selection of new customers to find out their top concerns in assessing the viability of a custom solution:

1. Fear of being ripped off
2. Working with an unknown entity
3. Evaluating technical skills and ability

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4. Ability to deliver on time and to budget
5. Being held to ransom
6. Adequate post project support
7. IP protection
8. Not getting what we want

If you would like help in evaluating the feasibility of doing a custom software development, check out Sibilo's quick and easy evaluation package. You can find out about this [here](#).

You can also follow our 8 step feasibility process detailed below.

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8 things you can do to assess feasibility

In order to gain confidence that your development is feasible (ahead of doing a detailed evaluation), talk to a selection of custom software developers.

1. Invest as much time as you can in creating a good requirements specification.
As a minimum you should have an outline specification.
2. Spend time with vendors explaining your requirements or clarifying any points so that there can be no misunderstandings.
3. Ask for a written response detailing their understanding of your requirements and an explanation of their approach citing any problems areas or complexities they envisage.
4. Ask for a written statement of their compliance to your specification.
5. Make sure they specify the technologies proposed and do your homework to ensure that these technologies are current and don't have limitations (for ex. avoid proprietary things if possible to avoid being locked in)
6. Find out about other similar developments that have been undertaken.
7. Ask about the top three challenges and issues they faced and how they addressed them.
8. Be inquisitive; keep drilling down from one answer to the next: Remember the truth is often buried in the detail.

Together the feedback you obtain will not only help assess the technical feasibility, it will also allow you to check whether it feasible to do it in your timescale.

If you need help in assessing feasibility consider obtaining professional advice, especially in technology related areas. Talk to expert technologists such as www.iep.co.uk for more details.

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The Sibilo Feasibility Assessment Service

This service is for organisations new to custom developments, who wish to find out:

- If it is feasible to develop a solution
- The potential risks involved

- An estimate of how much it will cost
- An idea of how long it will take

The service is conducted by experts in custom development who have undertaken scores of developments in a wide range of applications. The benefits are numerous:

- Our approach is to provide objective input and to handhold you through the process
- Our developers have undertaken hundreds of custom developments and understand the pitfalls and issues with first hand experience and the scars to prove it!
- Because of our track record it is quite likely that we have encountered a similar requirement previously and therefore we are often able to add insight and knowledge plus of course speed up the process.
- Our size is such that we can manage multiple concurrent projects yet we remain agile, responsive and caring in our approach.
- Not only are we fluent in technical 'geek speak' we are also seasoned businessmen who understand the language of business and can interpret complex requirements effectively.
- We go out of our way to communicate in plain English, avoiding jargon and demystifying technical wizardry.

For simple, well documented requirements, we offer this service free of charge. For more complex applications or where documentation is limited, we provide a fixed price quotation, typically in the order of £1 to £2k.

[Contact us now](#) to see how we can help you.



- How to choose a developer?

How to choose a developer?

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6 things to look out for when choosing a developer

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Ask them to produce a system diagram identifying the key functional blocks and interconnections. Get them to talk you through each block, what is involved, any potential issues and risks, levels of complexity, typical development times for similar work undertaken. The explanation is key because most developers will probably say “it’s possible”, the truth is hidden in the detail and their response will help.

2

Ask what technologies/languages will be used and why? Ask about deployment options available and their recommendation (whether it should be desktop or cloud for example, ask them about the pros and cons). Ask about the database approach. If proprietary ask searching questions about future-proofing, continuity of supply, APIs, etc.

3

Before you undertake a detailed evaluation or take up references obtain a demonstration of a sample of products they have developed (ideally similar in requirements and/or complexity to your needs). A demonstration will reveal a lot about their work and the look and feel of what you might expect. It will give you confidence if they can show something similar in action.

4

Ask to meet the actual programmers and ask them a selection of these questions. See how closely their responses match those of the “front of house” representatives. Often the programmer will be more honest about potential problems since they know they will have to solve them!

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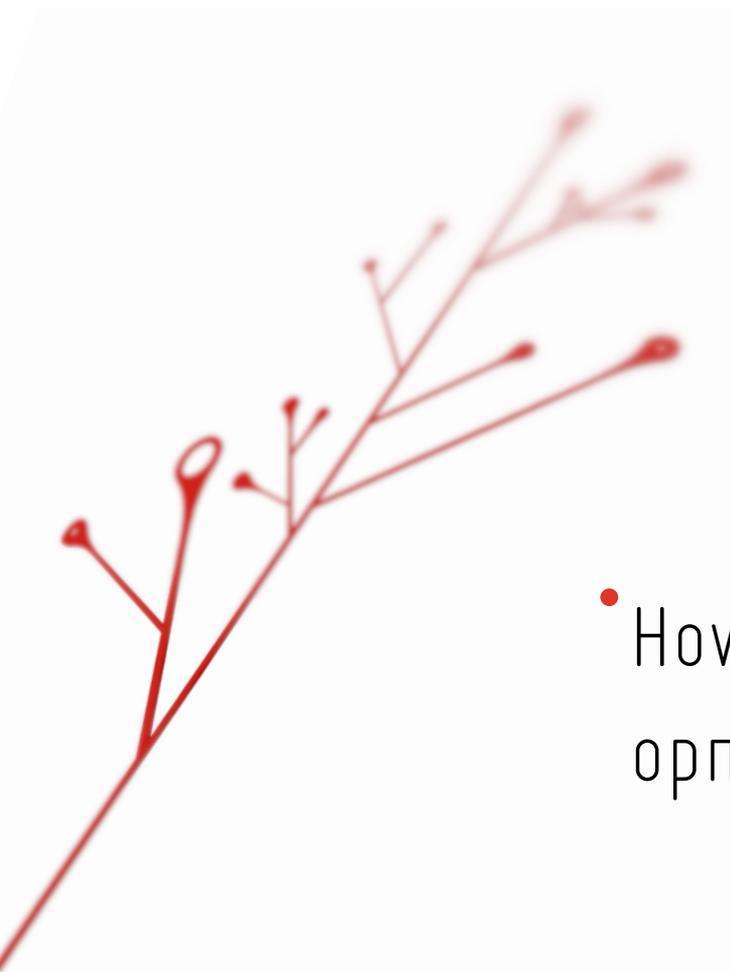
Cast your eye over project documentation for a similar project they have undertaken. This will give you a good idea about the steps involved and the complexities. It will also tell you about the professionalism and capabilities of the vendor.

6

Obtain an estimate with as much detail as possible. Ask for a breakdown of costs, noting where necessary the spread of costs and the reasons. Make sure support costs are identified. The estimate should include project management, testing, any consulting activities, implementation services and so on. In other words a complete picture albeit most likely subject to more detailed analysis and hence a range of costs at this stage.

Later should you decide to proceed with a custom development you’ll want to do a more detailed evaluation and for example obtain references, sample contracts etc. We can help in this process if you so wish.

You can find out about the benefits of the Sibilo approach [here](#).



- How to manage your development project?

How to manage your development project?

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To ensure your project comes in on time and to budget with no surprises, it is important to select a development company that understand the importance of good project governance and who have in place the structures and processes necessary to deliver successful outcomes.

Depending upon the size and duration of you project you should expect to see a mix of the following:

- Management Summary
- Project Organisation
- Roles & responsibilities
- Project Work Plan
- Resources
- Communication Plan
- Project Reports & Reviews
- Risk Assessment/Mitigation
- Quality Standards
- Change Control
- Issue Management
- Acceptance
- Success Criteria
- Budgets

This lot can be accommodated in a single project management plan which should be agreed between the parties at the outset. The project manager, whether part of your team or the custom developer's team (or indeed a third party) should take responsibility for maintaining the plan and ensuring that everyone involved understands their role and makes the appropriate contribution at the right time. Good communication and regular project meetings are clearly very important, as is the updating of the project plan.

Most projects fail because some of the governance and communication processes that make up the project management plan are either absent, poorly defined or inadequately followed when the plan is executed.

If you are a large organisation you might be familiar with ITIL or PRINCE2 and other such best practice methodologies for project management and IT service delivery. These methodologies may be right for your organisation or size of project but for some organisations they may impose overheads that are considered too onerous.

At the other extreme, many software companies adopt RAD (rapid development) methodology and agile development techniques, both of which appear by definition to be at odds with the more formal structured approaches of the project management methodologies.

In practice they can very easily co exist; what is important is that the project management plan identifies how the processes are to be managed, the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved and of course the communication activity. In other words the plan does not need to be onerous or restrictive, it just needs to define the working practices so as to ensure there are adequate project controls for monitoring and managing risk and for bringing the project in on time etc.

Here are some things to consider:

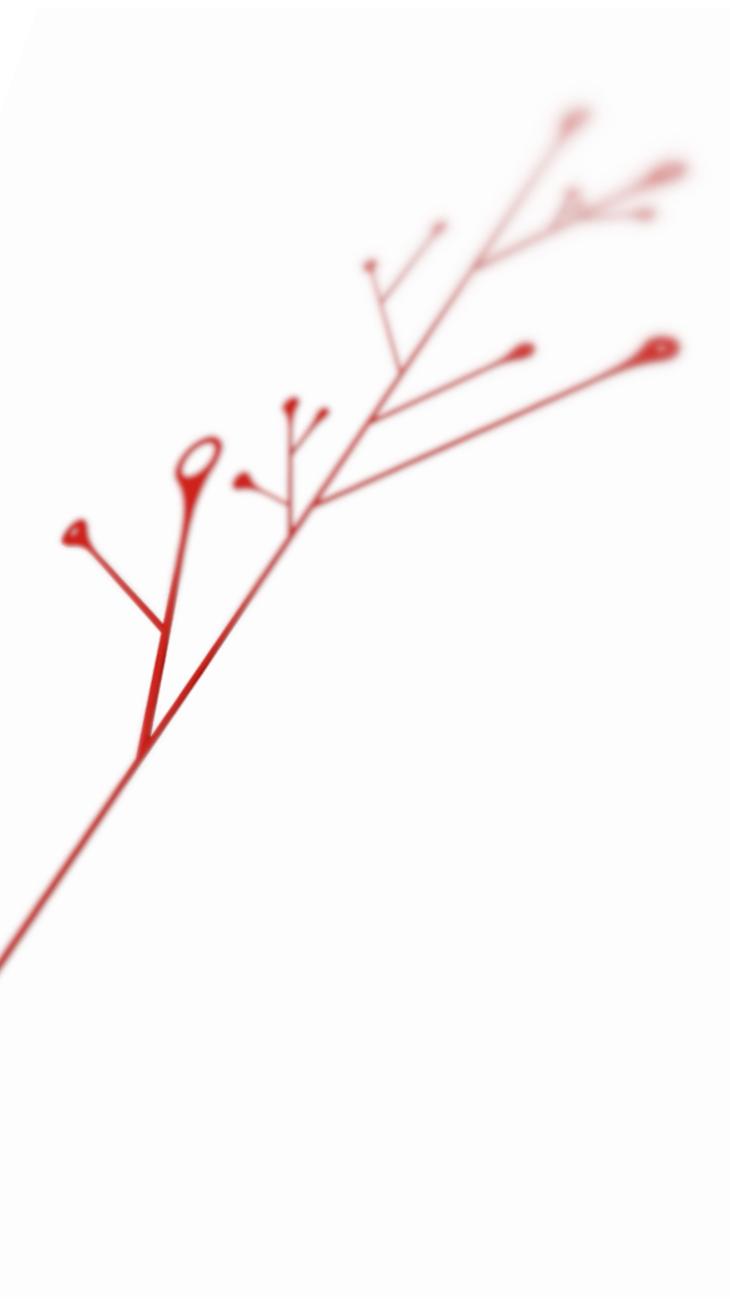
- Consider implementation scenarios – how to migrate from current systems to new with minimal impact and risk

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- Develop an implementation plan identifying key resources and milestones ensuring the plan works alongside existing business commitments and activities
- Ensure any process changes are adequately assessed, properly designed and agreed with staff as an integral part of the plan
- Project manage the implementation ensuring good change management disciplines such as regular staff briefings and proper training provision
- Manage third party suppliers to avoid surprises and ensure things come in on time and to budget

It is also worth mentioning ISO9000 quality standard and in particular ISO9001 which is based on a number of quality management principles including a strong customer focus, the motivation and implication of top management, the process approach and continual improvement.

Organisations that adopt ISO9001 might typically take a more structured and disciplined approach to project governance and project management and those that are accredited will probably be able to assimilate your own quality standards more readily.



• About Sibilo

About Sibilo

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Vision & Mission Statement

Sibilo develops world-class custom web applications for organisations that don't have the in house expertise or breadth of experience to address the challenges and opportunities of today's digital economy and internet enabled world.

The company's proprietary design technology and DataSmart development platform reduces time to market and programme costs, whilst the mix of on and off-shore resource delivers a cost-effective quality service.

The vision is to provide best in class custom software applications commensurate in all respects with off the shelf, best of breed software.

The Company

Sibilo is a software development organisation based in London with an off-shore subsidiary in Istanbul Turkey and a design partnership in Rousse, Bulgaria.

It was founded ten years ago and is a Microsoft Certified Partner and an early adopter of Microsoft's Azure Cloud platform. It is also an Oracle Partner.

The company is certified to ISO 9001:2000 and is a member of UK Web Design Association.

The team has developed over fifty software applications – mostly internet, portal or database related. In addition to custom software development the company offers commercial R&D services and provides dedicated outsourced development teams.

The business uses its proprietary SSDM and DataSmart technology to deliver outstanding customer benefits and to maintain its competitive advantage.

The team has specialist skills in web/portal design and significant experience in the following technologies: C#, VB.Net, ASP.NET, UML, ORM tools, MVC architecture, SQL Server.

Testimonials

“ Their SSDM system created a functional prototype in 2 days. It wasn't the finished thing but it gave our users something to evaluate and comment on at a crucial stage of development. ”

Sagar Gohel —Consultant BT Global Services

“ The Sibilo guys always went that extra mile and more beyond other software houses/IT consultants. ”

Barbara Jotham —FD Landmark Trust

“ They took the timeout, at their own expense, to understand our business — really get under the skin. As a result they gave us some great ideas which we incorporated in the spec; now we have a far better product. ”

Richard Harris —MD Totally Free Wills

“ It was our first development project & even before we gave them the job, Sibilo gave us some invaluable advice, acting like consultants to question and guide our needs and approach. That level of support has carried on into the project and we are most grateful. ”

Douglas Rice —Partner Carpe Diem

“ The great thing about working with Sibilo is that they always do what they say, they always deliver the goods and there are never any nasty shocks or surprises; everyone knows exactly where they stand and as a result the projects flow really well. ”

Stuart Beet —MD Inflow

“ Great project governance & good communication helped tremendously with implementation and the change management process before we went live. We've now adopted Sibilo's PM Plan for our own internal projects! ”

Simon Dickinson —MD Aperia

“ I have worked with several outsourced developers and I can tell you that the Sibilo team are second to none. Fast, accurate and knowledgeable on so many different technologies and interface standards. It's a winning combination. ”

Oguz Erkan —Product Manager Stravinci

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Opening Times (GMT)

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