

Build or buy a routing engine

Six questions that decide it, the three cases where building your own is the right answer, and the parts of a build that nobody costs up front.

Six questions

1. Would a customer pay more because your assignment decision is different from your competitors'?
Yes ? build
2. Do any rules have to be un-overridable - a licence, a certification, a jurisdiction - rather than a warning someone can click past?
Yes ? buy
3. Will anyone ask, months later, why one specific job went to one specific person?
Yes ? buy
4. Does the work have to be spread fairly across people, not only matched to the best one?
Yes ? buy
5. Is the rule set small and stable - three or four tags and a round-robin, unchanged for a year?
Yes ? build
6. Who owns this in year two, after the person who wrote it has moved teams?
No answer ? buy

Two or more "build" answers and a stable rule set: build it. Any single "buy" answer in rows 2 to 4 outranks the rest - those three are the ones teams rewrite from scratch the second time.

Build it yourself when

Routing is the product.

A marketplace's matching is its moat. Do not rent your moat.

The rules genuinely are simple.

Round-robin over one skill tag is a week of work, and it stays a week.

You cannot take a dependency.

Air-gapped or sovereign deployments with no external service at all.

What a build actually costs

The decision trail.

Not a log line - a record of who was considered and who was blocked, and why, that answers a question asked six months later.

Fairness.

The part that gets rewritten three times, because "best fit" quietly means "one person does everything".

Nobody answered.

Deadlines, escalation ladders, re-offers, and the backlog that builds while you decide what to do about it.

A console.

Someone in operations needs to see the queue and override it, at 07:00, without you.

Why we can afford to write the left-hand column honestly

The engine underneath Fivexer is MIT-licensed and public, so "buy" still ends with code your own team can run. That is what makes the case for building a real one rather than a rhetorical move - if our price stops working for you, the exit is a git clone.

Work out whether you are ready yet - 5xer.com/tools/dispatch-complexity-assessment/

Seven questions about your operation. Two of its four answers tell you not to buy anything.

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