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**SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO
CUSTOMIZE**

Sometimes You Have To Customize

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However, there are some very rare times when customizing actually makes sense. Here are three scenarios where customization will make more sense than buying an off-the-shelf system to address it.

Scenario 1

An off-the-shelf solution is more than you need There are many, many stand-alone software products on the market. There are products that manage membership, or events, or product sales, or many other things that associations do every single day. So even if you're using an off-the-shelf association management software program, the program you're using may not provide all the functionality that you need. Yet sometimes, the off-the-shelf programs that DO address your needs are overkill. This is where customization might make sense.

To illustrate: a client of mine is in the process of selecting a new data management system. One part of their needs is for management of grants. The system they have selected does not support grants management as baseline functionality. But all of the stand-alone products for grants management are overkill for their needs; too much functionality, and too much price. So customizing the new system actually makes more sense than buying something off the shelf.

Scenario 2

An off-the-shelf solutions wont integrate Although this is becoming increasingly rare, integrating multiple systems can sometimes be too cumbersome or literally impossible. This may happen when older technology is in use or when a particular product has been designed as a closed system. In cases where integration cant be done, it may make sense to build a custom application, either within the central data management system, or as a stand-alone that can be integrated.

Scenario 3

Truly unique processes There are those rare occasions (they are more rare than many think) where an organization is managing some process that simply does not have a market for stand-alone products. Or, as in the case of certification management, where the processes are typically so unique from organization to organization that customization is almost required for the most effective product.

For example, while most certification programs involve some common practices (e.g., name of certificant, qualifying details, etc.), the details of the processes are so unique from that customization is required. For some of my clients there is a fee involved in the certification process; for others, there is no fee. For some of my clients, there are multiple steps for qualifying for certification; for others, its one simple test. And the list goes on. So customizing the software to manage such diverse processes is almost a given.

There are probably other cases like these above, which may be variations on a theme. But the general rule still applies: whenever possible, you should avoid customization like the plague. Customizing is always possible, but it should be your last option, not your first.

About the Author

For more than 20 years, Wes Trochlil has worked in and with dozens of associations and membership organizations providing a range of consulting services, from general consulting on data management issues to full-scale, association-wide selection and implementation of association management systems. Follow Wes on Twitter @westrochlil. His website is www.effectivedatabase.com