

From someone who gets paid to build custom

THE LEAK REPORT

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Don't pay
anyone to
reproduce
Zapier

That includes us. Four thresholds that flip the decision.

Standard shapes form to CRM, new row to Slack — the connector exists

The crossover per-task pricing at volume can exceed ownership cost

Branching logic rules that live in someone's head need custom

Most projects are a mix — purity is not a virtue here

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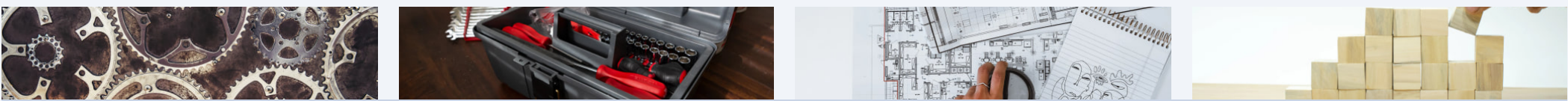
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"You don't need me for this."



| About forty minutes with a tool you're already paying for.

Someone asks us to build a custom integration roughly once a week, and the honest answer is usually "you don't need me for this — you need Zapier, and about forty minutes."

That is not false modesty. It is the same scoping discipline as everything else in this magazine: decide what a workflow actually needs before deciding who builds it.

A 20-person service business paying for custom software to reproduce a form-to-CRM connector is not buying capability. It is buying a maintenance obligation it didn't need.

What follows is the version of this argument that costs us business where it is true — which is most of the time a buyer asks the question at all.

Ramanjit Singh Founder, AT Innovators



THE FEATURE

Don't pay anyone to reproduce Zapier

If a scoping call ends with "actually, just use the tool you're already paying for," that is not a failed sales call. It is the correct outcome, and it is one we reach more often than you'd expect from a company that sells custom builds.

Buy the boring tool when the flow is a standard shape. Build when the logic isn't.

Ask the first before you ask us the second.



Is this a standard shape?

Form submission to CRM. New row to Slack message. Calendar event to email. A stranger would recognise it in one sentence.

Someone has already built the connector, and it is priced for exactly this.

Use the tool.



Does it branch on your rules?

"Route to the senior tech if the job is over \$2,000 and the customer has called twice this month" is not a standard connector shape.

Once branching depends on knowledge that only exists inside your business, off-the-shelf tools run out of road fast.

Now it's worth pricing.

No single signal decides it alone. A high-volume simple workflow often stays on a platform comfortably; a low-volume workflow with real branching can be worth building anyway.

The four things that flip it

01

Volume

Low to moderate stays on the platform comfortably. High enough that per-task pricing dominates is worth calculating against ownership.

02

Number of systems

One or two well-supported systems favour the tool. Several systems, or one with no usable API, favour custom.

03

How much the logic changes

Rarely changing logic suits a platform's own interface. Rules that branch on knowledge in someone's head need code.

04

Who has to maintain it

A platform's interface, or a run log and someone who can debug a failure — decide which one your team actually has.

Calculate the crossover, don't assume it. Owners guess wrong in both directions about as often — the arithmetic is worth doing properly before committing either way.



The flow is a standard shape.

STANDARD

Form submission to CRM record. New row to Slack message. Calendar event to email. If you can describe the flow in one sentence and a stranger would recognise it, someone has already built the connector.

Existing platforms price per task or per run, and at low volume that is cheaper than owning infrastructure — even infrastructure that costs nothing to run, because someone still has to maintain it.

Check the catalogue before assuming otherwise. It is larger than most owners expect.

BRANCHING

"Route to the senior tech if the job is over \$2,000 and the customer has called twice this month" is not a standard connector shape.

Once branching depends on knowledge that only exists inside your business, off-the-shelf tools run out of road fast.

This is the single most common reason a custom build genuinely earns its cost over a platform.



Logic branches on your own business rules.

RESIDENCY

Some contracts and some regulators require it, and self-hosted inference is a real, separately priced option for exactly this case.

A model running on infrastructure you control, not a third-party platform processing your customer data as a side effect of routing it.

Worth flagging early — retrofitting this after a security review says no is far more expensive than scoping for it up front.



Data can't leave your environment.



You need visibility the tool won't give you.

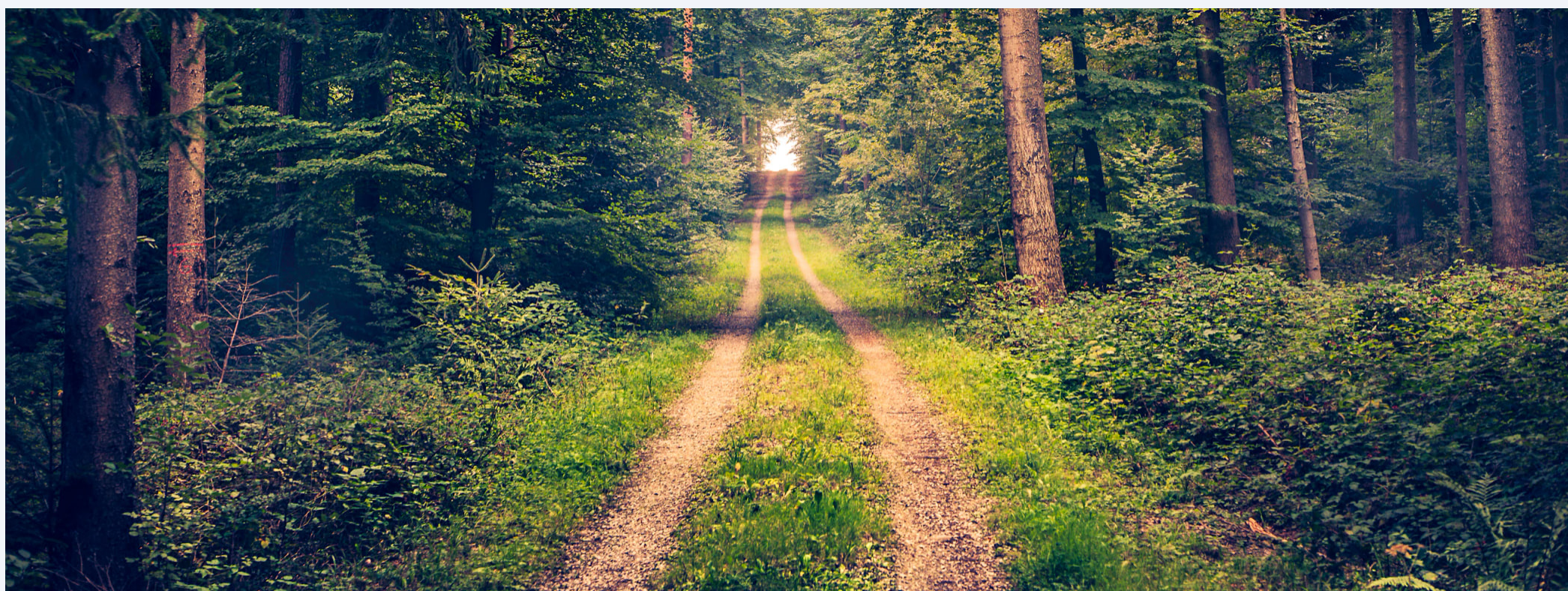
TELEMETRY

A run log with per-step outcomes, visible retries, a state you can reason about after a partial failure.

Most off-the-shelf platforms give you a green checkmark or a red one and not much in between — issue 10 covers why that gap matters.

If debugging a failure means guessing rather than reading a log, that is a build signal, not a platform limitation to live with.

Say it in one sentence.



| A stranger recognises the shape, or the sentence needs an "unless."

Describe the workflow to a stranger. What happens to the sentence tells you which side of this to price first.

1

Does a stranger recognise the shape?

"Form fill creates a CRM record" is recognisable. Price the platform first.

2

Does the sentence need an "unless" or a "depends on"?

That branching is the signal that custom is worth pricing against the platform.

3

What does the per-task fee cost at your real volume, for a year?

Calculate it before assuming either direction — most owners guess wrong.

4

Who debugs it when a step silently stops working?

If the honest answer is "nobody would notice for a week," that is a build signal on its own.

Purity is not the goal. The best answer is often a mix: the platform for the mechanical connection, custom logic for the part that actually needs it.

We have an incentive to say "build it."

We priced this deliberately against our own incentive.

Read it as the argument that costs us business where it's true, not as marketing copy dressed as advice.

"Off-the-shelf" is not free.

Per-task platform pricing at real volume is a genuine cost, not a rounding error — worth calculating, not assuming.

Migrating later is real work.

A workflow that starts on a platform and later needs custom logic isn't wasted — the platform earned its cost while volume was low — but the migration itself is a project, not a toggle.

One sentence, then four checks.



| Most real projects turn out to be a mix of both.

1

Write the one-sentence description

If a stranger recognises the shape, price the platform first, regardless of what you originally assumed.

2

Check for branching on your own rules

The single most common reason custom earns its cost over an off-the-shelf connector.

3

Calculate the volume crossover

Per-task pricing at your real volume, projected over a year, compared against ownership cost.

4

Decide who maintains the result

A platform interface someone already knows, or a run log someone can actually debug.

Most real projects are a mix — the platform for the mechanical hop, custom logic for the part that actually needs it. Purity is not a virtue here.



WHAT IT COSTS

Published, because “contact us for a quote” wastes your time.

AUDIT

Free

One workflow, mapped. Often concludes you should not build yet.

PROTOTYPE

Contact for pricing

A working slice you can put in front of one real user.

PILOT

Contact for pricing

A system a real team uses in production, with a run log.

Send me the workflow. I'll tell you if it needs custom at all.

The useful first message is one sentence: what gets missed, repeated, delayed, or is hard for you to see.

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