



CATHA PRACTICAL AI FOR CONSTRUCTION LIBRARY

Build, Buy or Subscribe for Construction?

Choosing the Right AI Delivery Model for Contractors

Guide 3

Practical AI for Construction. Responsible. Outcome-driven.

Catha Construction Services | 2026 Edition

How to Use This Guide

Most AI projects become expensive because the company chooses the wrong delivery model before it understands the workflow.

Use this guide to decide whether a construction workflow should use an existing SaaS feature, a general LLM subscription, an automation platform, a custom integration or a governed agentic system.

Best use

Start with the business requirement, then choose the lightest delivery model that can meet reliability, security and integration needs.

The Seven Delivery Models

Model	Best for	Strength	Watch-outs
Built-in AI in existing software	Common office/CRM/ERP tasks	Fastest adoption; vendor-managed	Limited customization; data boundaries vary
General AI subscription	Research, drafting, analysis, individual productivity	Low setup cost; broad capability	Weak process integration; user-by-user inconsistency
Vertical AI SaaS	Industry-specific workflows	Domain features and faster time-to-value	Lock-in; narrow scope; vendor quality varies
No/low-code automation + AI	Repeatable cross-app workflows	Fast integration; accessible	Complex flows can become brittle
Custom API workflow	High-value repeatable process	Control, integration and model flexibility	Engineering, monitoring and maintenance needed
Custom internal agent	Multi-step dynamic work	Can coordinate tools and decisions	Higher governance and evaluation burden
Self-hosted/open-weight stack	Sensitive or specialized environments	Infrastructure and model control	Ops complexity; skills and hardware cost

Decision Questions

Question	If YES, lean toward
Is the need already native to software we use?	Built-in AI first
Is the task mainly individual knowledge work?	General AI subscription
Is the workflow common in one industry?	Vertical SaaS
Does the process connect several SaaS apps with stable steps?	Low-code automation
Is the workflow strategic, high-volume or differentiated?	Custom API workflow
Must the system plan and choose tools dynamically?	Agent - only after controls exist
Are data residency/control requirements unusually strict?	Self-hosted or tightly controlled enterprise architecture

Total Cost of Ownership Comparison

Cost	Subscribe	Low-code	Custom API	Agent	Self-hosted
Initial build	Low	Low-Med	Med-High	High	High
Recurring software	Med	Med	Variable	Variable	Infrastructure-heavy
Internal skills	Low	Med	High	High	Very high
Integration burden	Low	Med	High	High	High
Governance burden	Low-Med	Med	High	Very high	Very high
Flexibility	Low-Med	Med	High	Very high	Very high

Default rule

Do not build custom AI merely to avoid a subscription. Custom systems create an operating responsibility that continues after launch.

Selection Worksheet

Factor	Weight 1-5	Option A	Option B	Option C
Fit to workflow				
Time to deploy				
Data/security fit				
Integration fit				
Reliability				
Customization need				
Vendor risk				
3-year total cost				
Internal skill requirement				
Exit/portability				

Construction Applications

Prefer existing construction software when it already solves the problem reliably. Build only where the workflow is differentiating, the data/integration requirement is specific, or existing products create unacceptable friction or cost.