

Build vs Buy vs Customize a VMS — Decision Guide

Three ways to get a video management system. Match your project to a path on cost, time, control, and lock-in.

The three paths at a glance

	Buy	Customize	Build
What it is	License a finished VMS	Extend a VMS via SDK, or assemble on open parts	Write the whole VMS yourself
Time to production	Days to weeks	Weeks to months	6–18+ months
Control & fit	Vendor's workflow	Your 20% on their 80%	Total — own the roadmap
Lock-in	High (hedge: ONVIF)	Medium	None
Best fit	~80% of deployments	Off-the-shelf + a gap	Regulated / proprietary / you sell VMS

Four questions before you decide

Money — have you compared five-year cost, not day-one price?
Time — can you wait 6–18 months for a custom build to go live?
Control — does a standard off-the-shelf workflow actually fit yours?
Lock-in — are your cameras ONVIF-conformant so you can switch vendors later?

The five-year cost math

Buy \approx platform + (license \times cameras) + (annual-per-camera \times cameras \times 5). Build \approx build cost + (annual maintenance \times 4).
 Buying grows with every camera; building is a large fixed cost that barely moves with scale. The two cross near ~1,000 cameras: below it, buy; above it, custom wins on cost as well as control. (Figures illustrative — plug in your own quotes.)

The bottom line

Buy if...	Customize if...	Build if...
Standard workflows, a known camera count, you want it running this week, and roughly 1,000 cameras or fewer.	Off-the-shelf is ~80% right and an SDK plug-in or open components can add the missing 20% at a fraction of a full build.	The workflow itself is a mismatch, you need proprietary analytics, you sell VMS, or you run more than ~1,000 cameras.

Standard floor: any VMS — bought, customized, or built — should meet the IEC 62676 video-surveillance system requirements and keep the camera boundary on ONVIF.