



Appunite

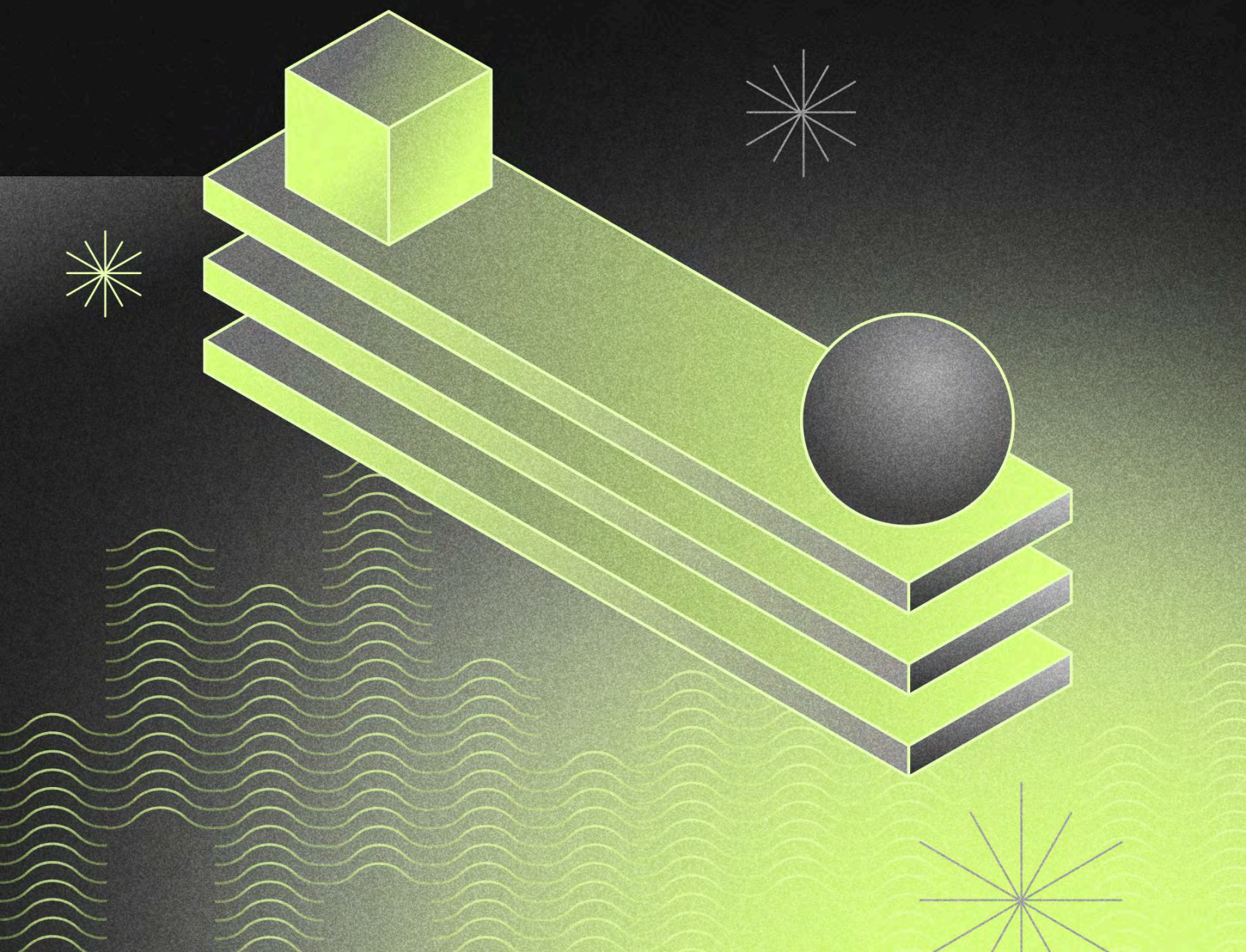
The Non-Core Growth Accelerator

How SaaS Leaders Can Scale New Initiatives
Without Compromising Focus

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Introduction: The Growth Dilemma



Every successful SaaS company eventually reaches a point where there are many more ideas and opportunities than the current team can deliver in a reasonable time. Your reality is likely that the core product might be stable, product-market fit has been found, and revenue is steadily climbing. Yet the pressure to accelerate growth is from investors, board members, and your ambitions, somehow doesn't go away.

This is where the growth dilemma emerges: How do you expand your offering and capture new market opportunities without losing focus on your core product, the very foundation of your current success? Breaking what is working will be the opposite of growth and progress.

The answer lies in what we call the "non-core approach": strategically developing new initiatives outside your primary product focus, while maintaining the integrity and momentum of your core offering. It's a version of the classic "Buy vs. Build" dilemma, and this overview aims to help you decide when to best call for external help and how to get it.

This guide is specifically useful for:

C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES

at SaaS companies with \$100K+ ARR looking for sustainable growth paths

PRODUCT LEADERS

facing pressure to expand their product portfolio or feature set

FOUNDERS

exploring options for new revenue streams without compromising existing products

We'll show you how leading SaaS companies are successfully implementing non-core initiatives to drive growth, and provide you with actionable frameworks to determine if this approach is right for your organization.

What's our expertise? We've been helping to build successful digital products since 2010, and we've solved many problems that repeat or at least rhyme.

So, how to find the right opportunities that you could potentially outsource?

Identifying High-Impact Non-Core Opportunities

Not all growth opportunities are created equal. Before allocating precious resources to new initiatives, it's crucial to identify which non-core opportunities will deliver the highest impact with manageable risk. While external partners will likely take on any work you throw at them, let's remember it's still about getting positive ROI and getting it with acceptable risk levels.

Let's start by knowing the time is right to open another development thread:

How to Tell It's Time to Pursue Non-Core Initiatives



Customer Adjacent Needs Keep Popping Up

Your customers consistently request features or solutions that fall outside your core product scope, but align with their overall workflow. This can be handled with an integration with another product, but even such an initiative might be a distraction when you have a full backlog of more pressing improvements to the product. Of course, an integration will likely have an upkeep cost, so the build or buy question is super relevant for this case.



Approaching Your Market Ceiling

At some point, you will notice that growth in your core market is slowing, despite strong product-market fit. That can suggest you may be approaching saturation. There are only so many clients that you can win over, and some of them will stay with your competitors for whatever reason. In such a case, a pivot to a different product or initiative will be a necessary investment to keep those growth figures high.



Complementary Revenue Potential

You might have identified an opportunity that could create new revenue streams without cannibalizing your existing business. At the same time, it's basically starting from scratch, and you do have your core product to run. An external team might be just the growth hack you need to get the other idea off the ground and earn new business as soon as possible, while keeping your foundation offer running and improving smoothly.



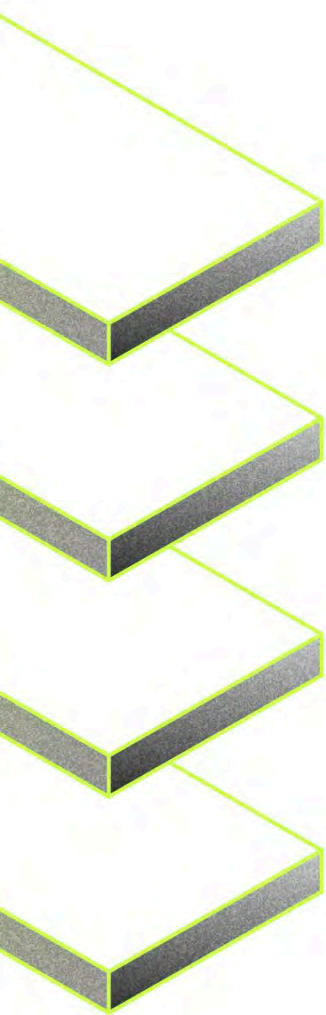
Competitive Pressure

If you see that your competitors are expanding their offerings into adjacent spaces, that can create problems for you in the long run. This is why Teams, while being objectively worse than Slack, is ahead with the user count: because it comes bundled with Microsoft 365, making it a waste to buy Slack as an additional tool. At the same time, your competitors might simply be bigger or better invested or have more resources, and the only way for you to keep up with the industry standard offer is to utilize the services of an external team.



Internal Resource Imbalance

As odd as this point may sound, you might be inefficiently using your developers' time on the new initiative. Of course, a senior backend engineer can easily set up a new server structure for your new project. However, a junior or external team can do that with similar ease, while your senior deals with database issues, and only he is able to diagnose and fix them within a reasonable time horizon.



Assessment Framework

In the previous chapter, we provided you with the scenarios when you should put an opportunity on your radar. However, this doesn't immediately mean that each one of those constitutes an immediate search for a development partner. To easily determine whether an idea is one where an external team is likely your best bet, consider the framework below:

BUSINESS ASPECT	KEY QUESTION	HIGH SCORE INDICATORS
Strategic Alignment	How well does this initiative complement our core offering?	Enhances core value proposition, shares target customers
Revenue Potential	What's the realistic revenue contribution within 12–18 months?	Clear monetization path with favorable unit economics
Resource Requirements	What resources are needed vs. available?	Can be developed with minimal disruption to core teams
Speed to Value	How quickly can we deliver a viable solution?	Can produce demonstrable value within 3–6 months
Risk Profile	What's the downside if this initiative fails?	Limited brand or financial exposure

This framework is a simple yet effective decision-making tool for evaluating whether a new initiative is worth pursuing, especially when you're looking at a completely new development thread.

It breaks the decision down into five key business aspects:

- STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
- REVENUE POTENTIAL
- SPEED TO VALUE
- RISK PROFILE
- RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

For each of these, you answer a key question that brings clarity to what should be prioritized. The scoring is straightforward: each dimension gets a rating from 1 to 5, and the closer you get to 25, the stronger the case for moving forward. You can consider a total score above 20 as evidence of a solid candidate for non-core development.

What makes this framework so practical is that it forces you to look at both opportunity and risk. Strategic Alignment asks how well the idea fits into what you're already doing: if it builds on your value proposition and goes after the same customers, that's a good sign. After all, it's best to pursue a market you already know and understand.

Revenue Potential pushes you to estimate future gains within a defined timeframe and consider the potential ROI. This will highlight whether you are looking at an opportunity to improve your income or something that might become a money hole. Plus, if you know your return on investment, it will be easier to convince whoever you need to convince to pursue the cost, as it is worth it in the long run.

Resource Requirements keep you honest about whether you can build this without derailing core teams. After all, if you have a team of really eager 0-to-product developers relegated to polish and maintenance work, it's in your best interest to fuel their passion rather than see them leave.

Speed to Value ensures you're not waiting a year to prove the concept. As mentioned, being the first to market gives you a substantial edge. However, the longer you delay the release, the smaller that edge becomes and transforms into a burden once it's your competitor that is the first to market.

Finally, the risk profile is all about downside. What will happen if this new initiative turns out to be a bust? Can you afford to burn some money on R&D? Perhaps pursuing the new direction will determine if your product company will even survive?

The framework described is especially helpful when you're having tons of ideas and need a fast and structured way to compare them. It's not about perfection but clarity and alignment with your broader strategy. If something scores high across the board, it's likely worth betting on. If it doesn't, you're probably better off keeping it on the shelf.

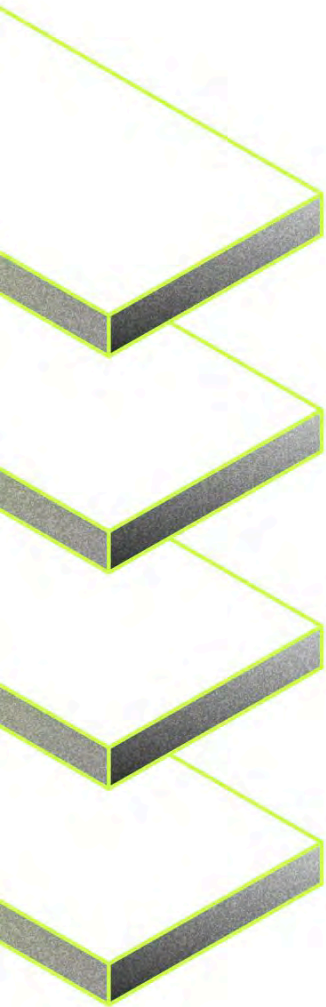
So, what would be an example of a product that could successfully begin a new development stream with an external team?

Quick Case Study: HR Platform's Success with Non-Core Growth

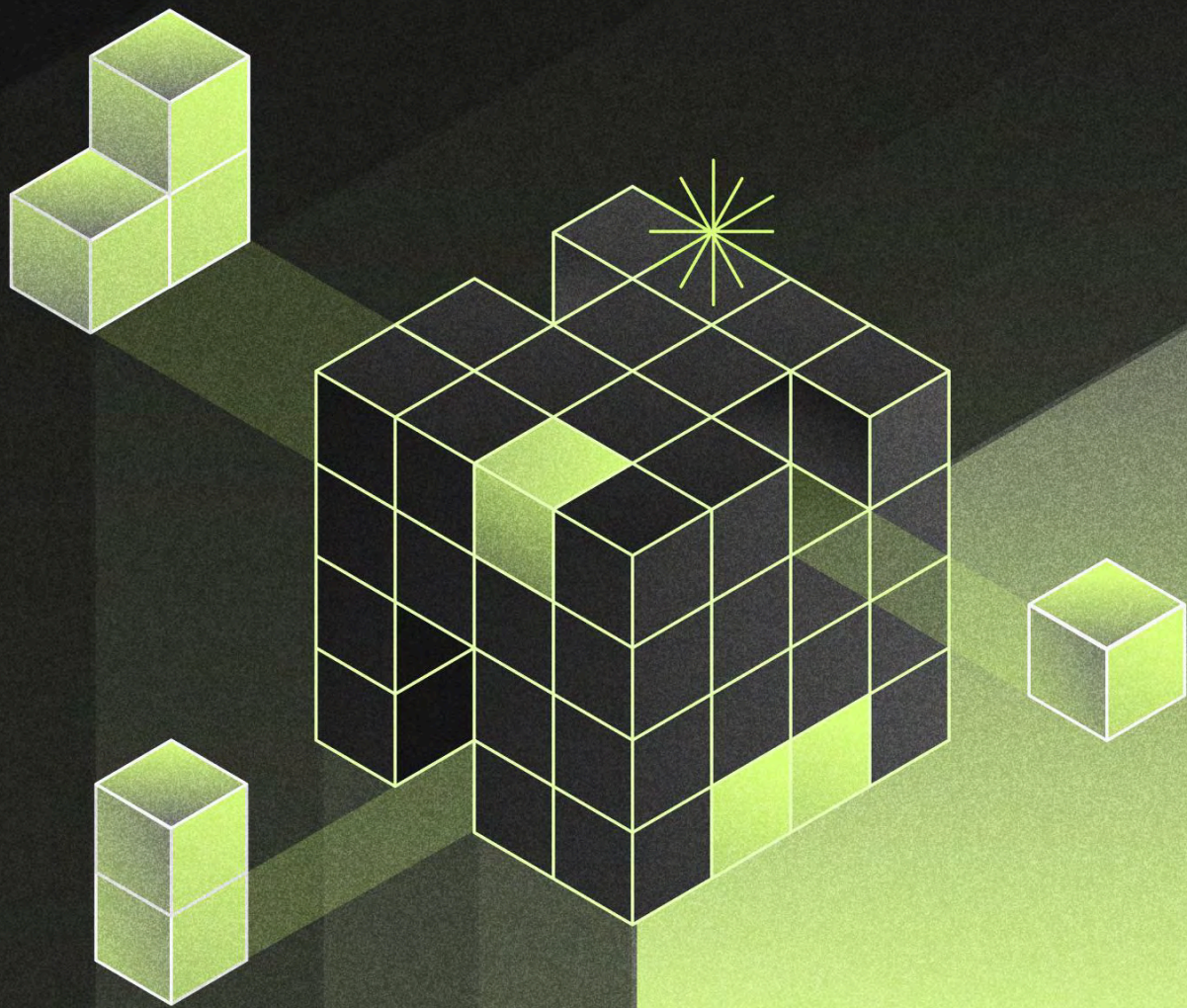
Let's imagine a mid-market HR platform with \$5M ARR that has established a strong product-market fit with its core employee onboarding solution. Their customers consistently requested functionality for ongoing employee development tracking, a feature set outside their core focus but highly complementary. Thus, this request has a strong strategic alignment as the company would be doing something it knows how to do (train users to use software). The risk appears low (request coming for multiple clients directly). The upsell potential is enormous; developing such a functionality extension shouldn't take long, but at the same time, your internal teams' roadmap is packed to the brim for the next 2 years with priority updates.

Thus, rather than diverting their primary engineering team, they established a separate non-core initiative to develop this capability with an external partner. The new team onboarded quickly and began work. Within eight months, this new offering contributed an additional \$800K in ARR while actually increasing adoption of their core product.

Key takeaway: By treating the new functionality as a non-core initiative rather than a core product extension, they maintained development velocity on both fronts while creating a valuable new revenue stream.



Setting Your Non-Core Initiative Up for Success



The difference between non-core initiatives that enhance the business versus those that drain resources often comes down to how they're structured and managed. Here's how to set your initiatives up for success from day one.

Establishing Clear Goals and Success Metrics

The first domino of success, regardless of whether this is for a core or non-core initiative. Non-core initiatives require even more clarity of purpose than core product work, as they must justify their existence against the established importance of your main business. On top of that, you may need to make sure that such a pivot will excite the investors, not concern them.

Consider the following metrics for your non-core direction:

REVENUE GOALS

Specific revenue targets at 3, 6, and 12 month intervals. This needs careful planning and, ideally, early commitments or even pre-orders.

ADOPTION METRICS

Number of existing customers adding the new non-core offer. This will also help you estimate the expected additional revenue.

CORE PRODUCT IMPACT

Measurements of how the initiative affects core product metrics. Is it likely to increase Monthly Active Users (MAU) or LTV?

Crucially, these metrics should be documented and agreed upon by all stakeholders before significant resources are committed. It will also be great to share that with your partner so they can build your non-core update with those goals in mind.

So, once you know what your non-core functionality is supposed to achieve, you can now move on to defining how to easily verify the main premise of the initiative.



The "Minimum Viable Mission" Approach

One of the most common traps for non-core initiatives is scope creep. This happens when a simple idea becomes bloated with additional requirements and functionalities. This gradual expansion of objectives can ultimately create a piece of work that will drag on for ages, beating the whole premise of agility and efficiency. Not to mention, you will delay the discovery of whether the whole idea will be successful with your market or not.

Thus, while having a long-term backlog of ideas and additional features is fine, it's best to kick off with a Minimum Viable Mission approach that will conclude with a specific MVP (Minimum Viable Product). To achieve this, be sure to define the following before you commit to working with a partner:

- 01** Define a singular, narrow mission statement for the initiative (one sentence). On an epic level in your backlog, this would be called a "User Story."
- 02** Establish clear boundaries of what's in-scope and out-of-scope. Having a frozen set of features for the release will help to maintain the clarity and predictability of progress.
- 03** Decide on the prioritization framework in order to make sure the updates following the MVP will bring the most value to the product and company as possible.
- 04** Set a specific reassessment timeframe to decide if it is worth continuing to invest in developing the given non-core initiative (typically every 6–12 months).

For example, a CRM company launching a non-core communication tool might define their Minimum Viable Mission as:

Enable teams to conduct and record video calls directly within the CRM interface, with no functionality beyond what's required for that specific use case.



This clarity empowers teams to say "no" to good but distracting ideas that don't serve the focused mission.

The next step is to decide how to divide the manpower for the project.

Resource Allocation Strategies

As already mentioned, the resource allocation challenge for non-core initiatives is maintaining appropriate investment without compromising core product development. You may want to pursue the project without external involvement, but with the people you already have on the payroll.

You may also decide on a complete hand-off to the development partner, but even then, you may want to relegate some "core" staff to help with the onboarding and integration of the core and non-core elements.

Successful companies typically employ one of these models:

THE 80/20 SPLIT

For a fully "in-house" model, companies usually dedicate 80% of total development resources to core product work and 20% to non-core initiatives. This creates meaningful progress on new fronts while preserving core momentum. That "20%" is your "R&D" department, where the ROI pressure is much lower than for the rest of the company.

THE DEDICATED TEAM MODEL

Here, you create fully independent teams for non-core work, either internally or through external partners. This provides clear ownership while insulating core teams.

THE ROTATING FOCUS MODEL

Concentrate resources on either core or non-core work in alternating time blocks (e.g., quarterly focus shifts). This works well for smaller teams but requires disciplined planning. In this model, the external team might come in to work on fixing bugs and general maintenance, while in-house engineers can focus on tinkering with the non-core offering development.

But which model should you choose?

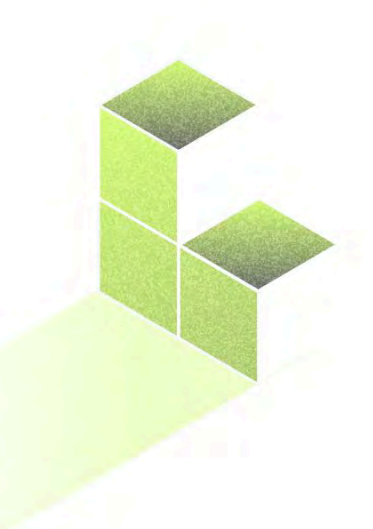
The Core/Non-Core Balance Matrix

To answer this question, consider the following decision framework to determine the appropriate management approach for your company's current set-up:

	HIGH MARKET Pressure need speed & differentiation	LOW MARKET PRESSURE More room to experiment, less urgency
HIGH RESOURCES Large team, solid funding	Dedicated Team Model Spin up separate teams (internal or external) to shield the core from distractions and move fast on non-core.	80/20 Split Model Stable resource split enables continuous progress on core and innovation without thrashing.
LOW RESOURCES Small team, limited bandwidth	Rotating Focus Model Maximizes limited bandwidth while adapting to shifting priorities; allows bursts of innovation.	80/20 Split Model or Minimal R&D Preserve the core while nibbling at new ideas without sacrificing stability.

This matrix will help you identify the most suitable approach based on two key dimensions: available resources and market pressure. It's a practical guide, not a rigid rulebook, and in the end, you can distribute your resources any way you choose.

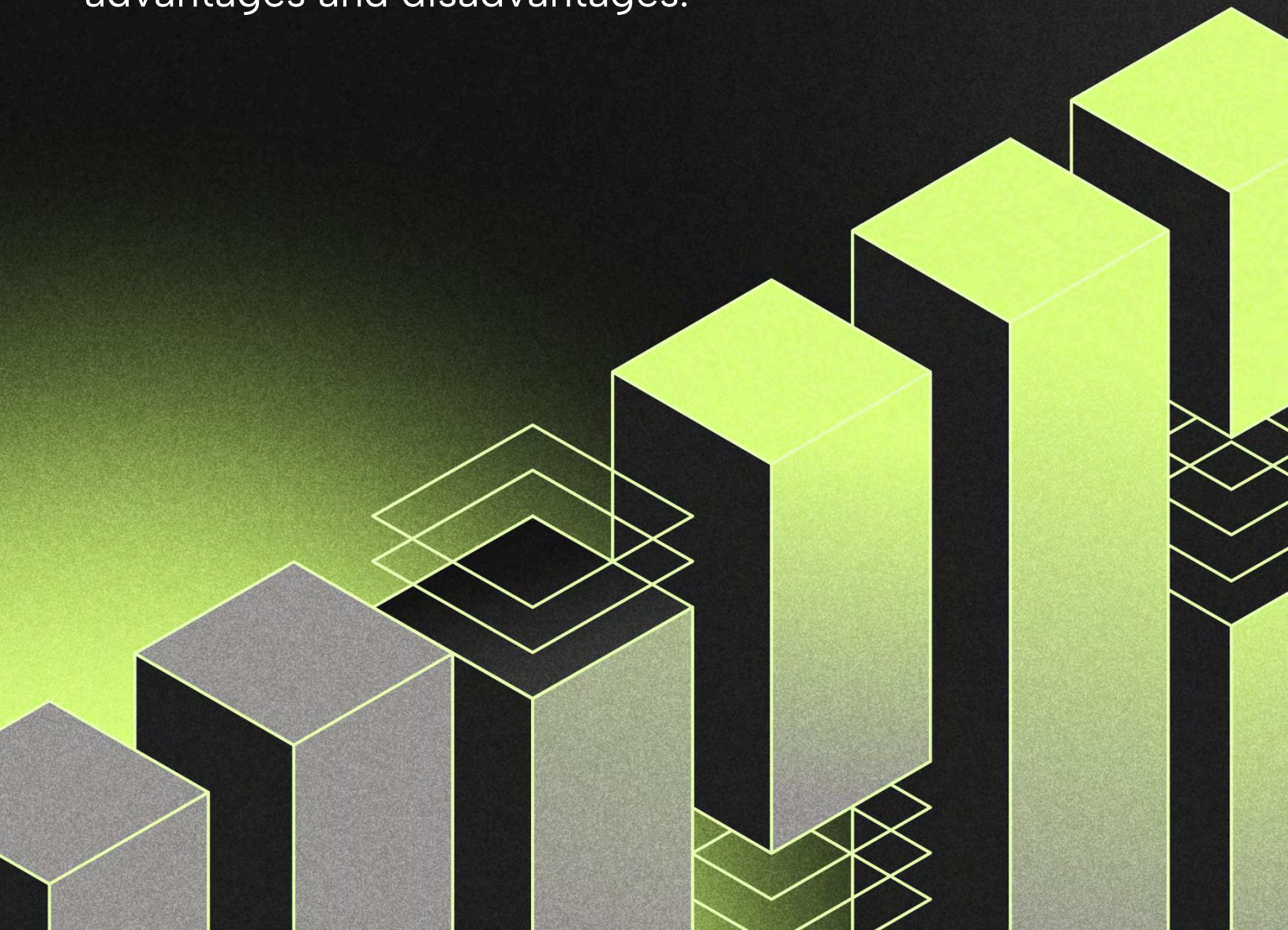
However, when you factor in external teams to these equations, you suddenly gain even more freedom to have your cake and eat it when it comes to running core and non-core initiatives in parallel.



Implementation Options

Once you've identified a promising non-core initiative, established its mission, and decided on the resource allocation, another important question you face a critical question: how should you implement it?

The configuration of your internal and external teams will be the key to your ultimate success. So, let's review your options with the advantages and disadvantages.



Internal Team Approach



ADVANTAGES

- A deeper understanding of company culture and values
- More natural integration with existing systems and processes
- Easier knowledge transfer between core and non-core teams
- Proven team dynamics



DISADVANTAGES

- Often slower to mobilize specialized talent
- Risk of resource competition with core product needs
- Higher likelihood of priority conflicts
- Potential waste due to context switching

So, in short: You probably can start a project asap, but you risk losing focus and jeopardising the development and stability of your core product, which would also mean delaying the non-core initiative. That leaves you with two alternatives:

External Team Approach



ADVANTAGES

- Faster access to specialized expertise
- Clear focus without distraction from core product priorities
- Brings fresh perspectives and approaches
- More flexibility when it comes to scaling additional developers to the project



DISADVANTAGES

- Requires clear communication of company vision and values
- Requires effective knowledge transfer processes
- It may take longer to understand existing product nuances

To summarize: You can omit the risks of the internal approach if you are ok with investing effort in choosing the right partner. Agencies that optimize for results will nullify all the risks that working with agencies had

a decade ago: internal oversight needed, potential code integration challenges, and organizational overhead when sunsetting agency support. If you're willing to find a results-oriented agency, not just a software house or body leasing company, the cooperation it's almost like giving money to gain money (by releasing non-core initiatives as quickly as possible).

Hybrid Model



ADVANTAGES

- Combines institutional knowledge with specialized expertise
- Provides flexibility to scale resources based on initiative phases
- Creates knowledge transfer while maintaining development velocity
- Internal engineers can iron out any issues originating from external teams' layman status and assign more universal, yet time-hungry tasks to external developers.



DISADVANTAGES

- Requires a clear role definition to avoid management confusion
- May create coordination overhead
- Demands strong alignment mechanisms
- The internal and external teams will need time to adjust to working together

Thus, other than additional investment, the core risk in this approach is that internal and external teams might not mix well. This, however, works both ways, and they can get along just fine from day one.

The External Team Advantage

While it may not be your instinct, there are multiple reasons why including an external team to deliver your non-core initiative might bring better results than if an in-house group were reassigned. After all, external teams bring specialized expertise, fresh perspective, and focused execution. Agencies or external partners typically work across multiple clients and industries, which sharpens their skills in particular domains, be it design systems, growth experimentation, AI implementation, or rapid prototyping. This enables out-of-the-box thinking, powering potential innovation that might never emerge for (too) focused internal teams.

Additionally, external teams are less encumbered by internal politics, legacy systems, or multitasking across multiple initiatives. With a well-defined objective, they can often move faster and with more discipline, especially when internal teams are spread thin or are stuck in constant firefighting mode.

The flexibility here is also important here. Agencies can provide and onboard talent faster than traditional hiring channels. It's also in their interest to provide high-performing experts. If it looks too good to be true, the catch is: not many agencies are truly results-oriented. Verifying their approach and experience is the real challenge.

Implementation in Action: Case Study

A compelling example of such an approach comes from the gaming industry. We would like to bring up a collaboration between Epic Games and the external digital product agency Work & Co. Despite Epic Games' typical preference for in-house development, they partnered with Work & Co to enhance their digital experiences for both players and creators.

This collaboration led to the successful launch of the Epic Games Store, which exceeded expectations by grossing over \$680 million within its

first year, becoming one of the few real competitors to a leading platform called “Steam”. Additionally, they developed a content management system (CMS) that enables developers to launch, manage, and sell games directly to players, as well as the Party Hub feature for in-app voice chat within Fortnite.

This partnership illustrates how engaging an external team can bring specialized expertise and fresh perspectives, resulting in significant enhancements to a company's offerings and substantial commercial success. With such an approach, a game and game engine developer could venture into the digital game collection store business and sell their own products without paying a cut to their Steam competitor.

While this is a great example, let us now tell you how we, AppUnite, would be able to help deliver your non-core projects with excellent quality.

Walking the Walk: What It Takes to Deliver Non-Core Success

Throughout this guide, we've outlined frameworks and strategies for pursuing non-core initiatives. But why isn't this approach universal for agencies?

The reality is that executing effectively on non-core projects requires specialized capabilities that are challenging to develop:

- Building teams that can quickly understand both business context and technical requirements takes years of experience across multiple industries
- True ownership of outcomes (versus just shipping features) demands different incentive structures and team composition
- Maintaining a product mindset (versus a project mindset) requires deliberate culture-building and training
- The ability to operate autonomously while staying aligned with a client's vision is a delicate balance

At Appunite, we've spent years refining our approach to overcome these challenges. Our experience with over 160 digital products since 2010 has helped us develop processes that consistently deliver results for non-core initiatives:

CONTEXT-DRIVEN ONBOARDING

We've developed methods to rapidly absorb business context and product strategy, allowing us to make autonomous decisions aligned with your goals.

PRODUCT DEVELOPER MINDSET

Our teams are trained to think beyond code. They consider success metrics, analyze user behavior, and propose solutions that support the overall product strategy.

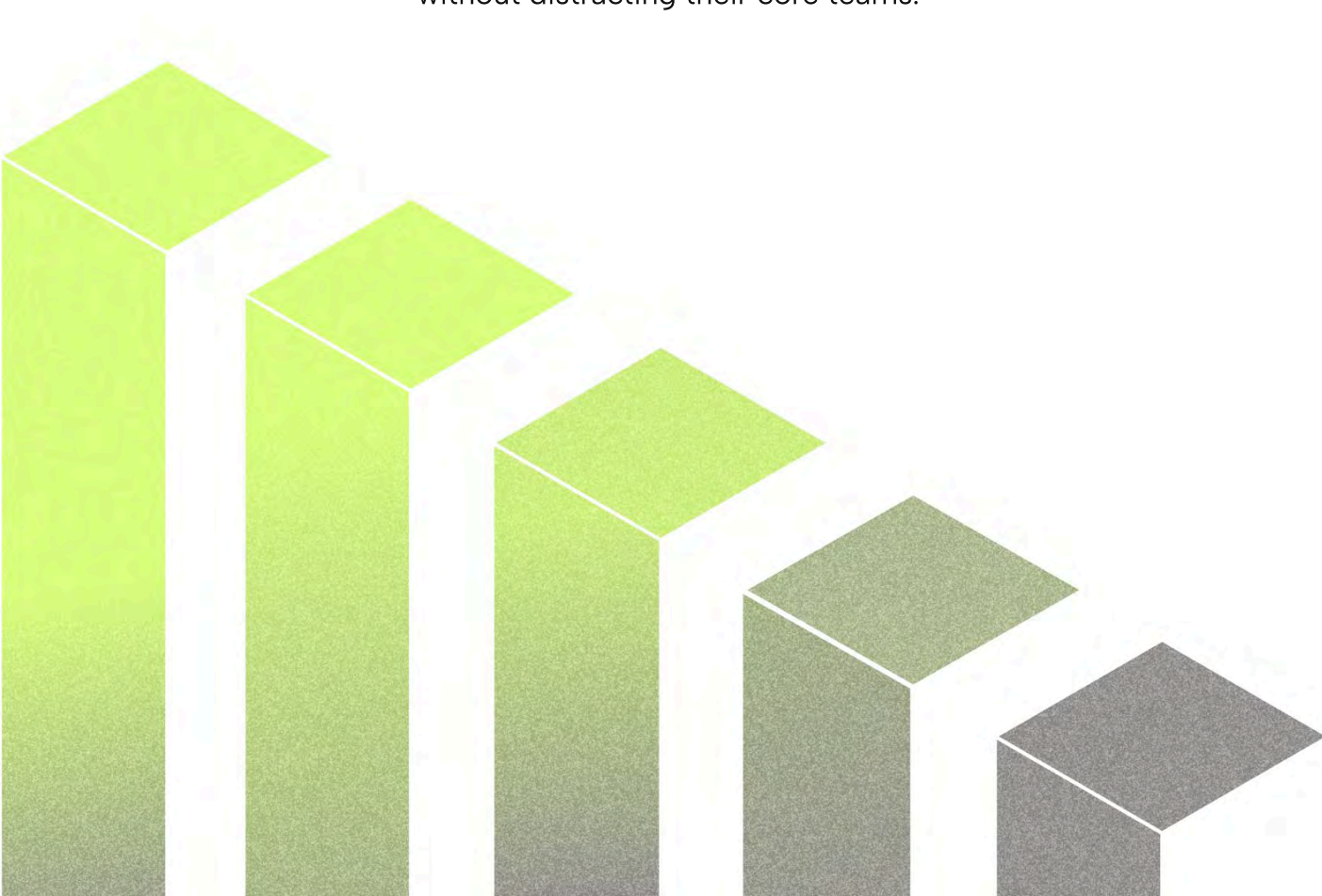
GOAL-ORIENTED COLLABORATION

Once we understand what you're trying to achieve, we establish clear metrics to track progress and impact, reducing management overhead for your team.

FLEXIBLE TEAM COMPOSITION

We assemble teams with the right mix of technical and product skills for each specific initiative, supported by both engineering and product leadership.

This approach has allowed us to help SaaS companies launch new features, enter new markets, and develop complementary products without distracting their core teams.



Next Steps



Quick Assessment: Is Your Company Ready for a Non-Core Initiative?

So, hopefully, by now you see the advantages of working with an external team on your non-core projects. However, is it the right move for you? Answer these five questions to determine if a non-core initiative approach is right for your current situation:

- 01** Have you identified opportunities that customers value but fall outside your core product focus?
- 02** Is your core engineering team at or near capacity with existing product commitments?
- 03** Would pursuing new capabilities with your core team create unacceptable tradeoffs or delays?
- 04** Are you seeing any risks that would lower your company's/ product's current growth rate?
- 05** Do you see some gaps between you and your competitors that you can't realistically close within your current roadmap?

If you answered "yes" to three or more questions and you have the budget, there is no time to wait!

Moving forward

There are many capable agencies that can help you execute non-core initiatives. When evaluating potential partners, look for teams that demonstrate:

- A track record of delivering business outcomes, not just completed projects
- Experience in your industry or with similar challenges
- A clear methodology for understanding your business goals
- Transparency about their process and communication approach
- References from clients with similar needs to yours

Whether you work with us or another partner, the key is to find a team that can truly take ownership of your non-core initiative, allowing your internal teams to maintain focus on what drives your core business forward.

Appunite

If you're interested in learning more about how Appunite approaches non-core initiatives and the results we've achieved for companies similar to yours, we're happy to share case studies and discuss your specific challenges

Email us at hello@appunite.com



Directly schedule a meeting



Fill out the contact form

