



No Code, No Problem

By Danny Gattas and Philip Lakin

How to leverage no-code solutions to drive efficiency in your business.

Gone are the days when coders were required to build and deliver custom software. Now, no-code tools such as Airtable, Zapier, and Unqork allow anyone to create a range of solutions, from minimal viable products (MVP) to robust applications that manage enterprise operations.

The no-code movement, which has grown significantly over the past five years, empowers individuals to make products quickly without writing technical code. No-code enables anyone to create custom solutions that can automate workflows and build working technical applications. Their intention isn't to replace conventional coding but to ensure that developers spend their time on more complex development, projects, and solutions. Microsoft Excel is an everyday example of no-code; Excel allows users to enter information, manipulate and organize inputs, and build triggers that execute defined functions, all without coding.

Recently, no-code software and solutions have seen a surge in quantity, quality, and interoperability. Adoption has grown exponentially as ease of use, business value, and functionality have provided an earlier return on investment than traditional solution development. While most of the spotlight has focused on business founders using no-code tools to build start-ups, no-code has the potential to empower intrapreneurs who are reimagining the future of internal innovation.

Organizational leaders must consider how best to empower their staff with the no-code tools necessary to develop custom solutions that automate work, unlock innovation, and foster efficiency. In this article, we'll showcase the five key benefits no-code solutions can provide your organization, the process for implementing and using no-code tools, and some of the challenges to avoid along the way.

FIVE BENEFITS OF NO-CODE FOR BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Today the no-code movement is growing due to the sheer abundance, functionality, interoperability, and scalability provided by cloud-based, software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions. Yet, most medium- to large-sized businesses have yet to embrace the no-code trend or take advantage of these five benefits:

1. **No-code allows businesses to build custom applications and solutions tailored to their needs**

When working at Compass as a Business Operations Solutions Architect, co-author Philip Lakin built an end-to-end onboarding solution for over 15,000 real estate agents across the United States using Enboarder. All the implementation, support, maintenance, updates, and feature additions were handled 100 percent by non-technical operations team members. This solution saved the average agent experience team member two and a half hours of manual work per week. In addition, it gave operations a level of restricted visibility while still allowing for local nuance in onboarding agents. As a result, agents were happier, the agent experience team felt heard, and the development team was left to focus on Compass's core product.

2. **No-code provides the building blocks to develop user-centric tools**

It's not only your employees who benefit from no-code operations. No-code can provide critical value to your customers and end-users. Because no-code tools allow your team to build solutions quickly, iteratively, and efficiently, they have more time to include customers or end-users in discovery and development. They can also quickly prototype and gather customer feedback, as no-code allows for rapid iteration and shorter cycle times between beta tests. Lastly, a key benefit of no-code solutions is their ability to act as an integration point, also known as an application protocol interface (API), enabling the completion of tasks in other applications.

3. **No-code enables pivoting and real-time adjustments**

Facilitating and adjusting products is also easy given no-code's customizability. Teams can make real-time adjustments and quickly pivot to build solutions that meet users' needs — without wasting valuable time finding bugs in code. Take Jabian Consulting, for example. Jabian built a no-code automation to help facilitate project management. Initially, the automation didn't work when tested. But, within five minutes, the team was able to identify the issue, restructure the workflow, and confirm that the automation worked. With traditional coding, this could have taken hours, if not days.

4. **No-code simplifies automation and allows employees to focus on more critical tasks**

By automating workflow across software, no-code saves time on manual tasks. In many cases, you can use the tools you might already have (e.g., Microsoft Power Automate) to build automated solutions within Microsoft tools such as PowerPoint or Word. Automating simple, repetitive, and high-volume tasks enables your workforce to focus on higher-priority work.

For example, Jabian built a simple workflow using Microsoft Power Automate to create SharePoint folders and then copy existing research templates into each folder using the proper naming convention. This simple automation took less than an hour to build, saved more than ten hours over the first month alone, and helped ensure a consistent structure to our research.

5. **No-code reduces IT spend, technical debt, and development time**

An organization's technical debt and IT spending should fall over time as business groups slowly sunset antiquated systems and replace elements of their technical architecture with no-code tools. In one case, On Deck, a forward-thinking and virtual cohort-based learning program, assembled an internal engineering sub-team dedicated to deepening its investment in a no-code-first culture and adding leverage to its operations team. The company anticipates that this unit will save the equivalent of five full-time employees' time over the next 12 months.



CUTTING OUT THE CODE ALLOWS YOUR TEAM TO BUILD SOLUTIONS QUICKLY, ITERATIVELY, AND EFFICIENTLY.

SIX STEPS TO IMPLEMENT NO-CODE

Adopting, incorporating, and building no-code solutions is like any transformational effort requiring vendor selection, agile/iterative development, and change management. Underscoring all of this is the need for senior leadership's support and buy-in while also being aware of potential pitfalls to mitigate risk and realize value.

1. [Gain C-Suite buy-in by highlighting cost efficiency and ease of use](#)

One of the benefits of no-code solutions is their cost savings and increased time efficiency. For example, Liberty Mutual, a Fortune 100 Insurer, reported 300 percent cost savings and 300 percent efficiency gains while implementing Unqork as its enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution. Initially, Liberty Mutual piloted Unqork in a specific business unit to address a complex application, but quickly realized its value and deployed it across the entire enterprise.

Despite the clear advantages to no-code, it still requires investment. This includes financial costs (e.g., software and labor) to design and define processes, drive development, test solutions, and manage change (e.g., stakeholder engagement, training, and communications).

2. [Aligning Cross-Functional Stakeholders](#)

Once the business leadership recognizes the value, they should focus on getting cross-functional stakeholders aligned on the purpose of no-code solutions. In many cases, this requires including IT leadership to outline the need and help to shape the process. Including IT and other cross-functional leaders and stakeholders ensures organizational alignment and identifies potential risks. Resistance is a common occurrence while implementing no-code. We recommend considering the key concerns and necessary controls to prevent issues.

CHALLENGES

Garnering executive approval and cross-functional support (e.g., IT, Finance, etc.) to adopt no-code building is not always easy. Leaders need to be prepared to justify cost savings with a solid business case. Operations leaders should consider a pilot or "show, don't tell" method by building something with their existing software or leveraging a free trial of a specific no-code tool. By building a solution to a particular problem, you can leave leadership asking for more. Consider how Liberty Mutual used a no-code tool to improve a specific application. After realizing the value, Liberty quickly expanded its use to the entire enterprise. This is a familiar story when adopting no-code.

CHALLENGES

One specific pain-point information technology and operational leadership must be mindful of is Shadow IT, or the use of information technology systems, devices, software, applications, and services without explicit IT department approval. At its core, adopting no-code solutions moves from a more centralized to a decentralized IT governance model. As a result, it becomes critical to set clear business rules to establish controls, such as requiring the input of IT and other functional leaders when systems touch finance, customer experience, or core processes. Additionally, providing sufficient training and documentation can help promote knowledge transfer. Excellent tools like Process Street and Minerva provide no-code alternatives to developing standard operating procedure (SOP) documentation.

3. [Select the right vendor and tools](#)

After gaining buy-in, the next step is to pick the right tool. Begin the vendor selection process by defining your business needs and objectives. Think about your operational pain points and manual processes as you evaluate where and how no-code can provide the most value. Then identify the key challenges to the overall business and at the department level. Lastly, take time to identify the high-level requirements that provide tangible business value. Once the business requirements are outlined, you can begin to navigate the no-code ecosystem to pick the tool or suite of tools that most aligns with your business objective and goals.

Note: selecting a no-code tool should not require the same due diligence as selecting an Enterprise Resource Management solution, as different tools might be leveraged for a focused team, function, or business unit. However, you still need to establish selection criteria and follow a similar process in choosing your vendor. As mentioned in point two above, we recommend including users and decision-makers in applicable demos. Be prepared to use free trials and piloting tools to discern what is right for your business.

In the end, remember that you might be repeating the vendor selection process down the road to acquire more no-code solutions tools. As such, mindfully approaching, assessing, and documenting the vendor selection process is critical.

4. [Adopt a user-inclusive development strategy when staffing](#)

Staffing for a no-code project can either be sourced internally, contracted, or a combination of the two. In each case, remember that adopting an iterative and user-inclusive development strategy is fundamental to no-code development. This aligns with agile delivery processes and principles.

However, the defined roles and responsibilities, meetings, and outputs associated with formal Agile development aren't required, since the scale of no-code development is more function- or task-focused. Additional resource considerations need to account for potential integrations with enterprise systems, data management, and ongoing support costs.

CHALLENGES

Because the no-code vendor selection process is more straightforward than other SaaS selections, such as an ERP, leaders often err by making siloed decisions and rushing the process. Make sure to include key users, leadership, and functional support in the vendor selection process.

We recommend including users and decision-makers on applicable demos, as well as including IT leadership. As mentioned above, ensure that you understand the core needs and functionality required from your no-code solution. You must also understand your IT governance policy and potential local requirements, such as HIPAA and SOC in the United States and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, when deploying software and managing data internationally.

Define clear assessment criteria to rate no-code vendors. Lastly, document the process because you will probably repeat no-code vendor selection, and documenting the process can avoid repeating mistakes.

CHALLENGES

We often see businesses and developers fail to include users in the development process. Incorporating end-user input during development is vital, and including users in the building process offers an ideal opportunity to showcase a no-code tool's ease of use and power. Ensure that you know who your core user group is, train them on the tools, and include them in building.

5. [Deploy change management to drive no-code adoption](#)

One of the most important but forgotten elements of building a no-code culture is change management. Change management includes providing training in the tools and incentives needed to build no-code solutions and focusing on communications. Often, no-code tools have exceptional communities and resources, but they are self-serve, requiring users to find their own information without formalized or centralized resources. We recommend challenging no-code solution builders to document how-tos and provide videos to promote adoption. In addition, building solutions with no-code is fun, so forming interest groups and change champion groups makes their use grow organically. This can be done internally or outsourced. Communities of interest include Makerpad, On Deck, No-Code Fellowship — intended for No-Code builders — and also No-Code Operations, which is focused on no-code for enterprise.

6. [Assess implementation and building processes to continuously improve](#)

As noted, no-code architecture, vendor selection processes, and training materials should be formally captured and included in existing knowledge bases. In addition, “agile-like retrospectives” should be conducted for larger-scale products where no-code development occurs. This is key to finding better ways to involve users when building tools, and address vendor limitations.

GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR NO-CODE JOURNEY

Building via no-code provides clear cost savings and efficiency gains, and it empowers staff. No-code can be a source of innovation and efficiency, all without traditional coding. However, it can also be daunting and challenging. Fortunately, there are numerous resources and communities mentioned above that support adoption of no-code in your business. ↔

CHALLENGES

One of the biggest pitfalls with no-code is stakeholder adoption. We’ve stressed how easy no-code tools are, but the platforms can still be intimidating to use. This can lead to some tools being underutilized. Builders also fall prey to the “build it and they will come” fallacy, thinking that users will want to build on a no-code tool because they are using a no-code solution. Since the apps they are using for no-code look like the other tools they use every day, this usually isn’t enough to motivate people to get started — and it’s why effective change management is vital to drive awareness and adoption.

CHALLENGES

Lastly, leadership needs to recognize the contributions of builders to reinforce building. We’ve seen organizations that implement no-code solutions but don’t promote and reinforce the core behaviors that drive innovation. Here, leaders should support staff who build solutions that save time and provide value. This further promotes both business and individual adoption.

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Source:

1 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/martingiles/2020/10/06/no-code-startup-unqork-hits-2-billion-valuation>