



**Builder.ai<sup>®</sup>**

# **App Development: The Definitive Guide for SMBs in the US**



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## The big picture: **Why your business needs an app**

Apps have completely revolutionized the way US businesses connect with their customers. Since the dawn of smartphones, they've evolved from basic tools to complex platforms that impact businesses across industries.

Today, **49%** of people access an app 11 or more times daily, and around one-fifth of millennials open an app more than 50 times a day. Couple this with the fact that, according to Statista, the app market is projected to reach a total revenue of **\$673.8bn** by 2027, and one thing is clear:

Having a robust app isn't just an option – **it's a necessity for ambitious businesses that want to scale.**

As technology keeps improving, the future of apps in business looks even better. Innovations in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are making apps smarter and more interactive. This will give businesses even more powerful tools to connect with customers and manage operations better.





## Challenges in building a successful app

Building a successful app isn't just about having a great idea. It involves overcoming a series of challenges that can make or break your app project.

From choosing the right app development route to making sure your app can scale as your business grows,

you need to address a range of issues like cross-platform compatibility, backend stability, and data protection, which require deep technical expertise and careful planning.



### What's more:

The costs involved in app development can also spiral quickly if you're paying an hourly or daily rate, with many projects running beyond agreed timelines.

The quality of software builds varies widely, and apps with poorly designed user interfaces, complicated navigation, and slow performance lead to user frustration and high abandonment rates.

Vendor lock-in models are a sad reality of app development — essentially, this means you don't have access to your app's code. As a result, you may have to pay a large fee if you want to develop your app independently of your vendor or start development completely from scratch.



# Cost of developing an app

While apps can be free or available at a very low cost, it’s generally accepted that the average app development cost ranges between **\$5,000-\$500,000**. The price range is so wide because the type of app you create has a huge influence on your cost estimate.

The type of app you create dictates the core features you'll need, the mobile app development process you follow, and the length of your project. Here’s an analysis of the two main categories you need to think about:

	Templated apps	Custom apps
Development time	2-8 weeks	3-12+ months
Development cost	\$5,000-\$20,000	\$50,000-\$500,000
Development process	No-code app builders (DIY)	Expert agencies/platforms
Example apps	Ecommerce, travel, e-learning, gym, salon, loyalty	Order management system, voting app, logistics services, financial services

## 1. Templated apps

Templated apps are made up of pre-made features that can be personalized with your branding, while you can add and subtract certain features via a drag-and-drop, no-code interface.

But these apps **are not** custom apps.

Templated apps provide a quick means for your business to go online and get your app up and running, and often include integrations with APIs, databases, and third-party services.

They usually give the user a range of ways to interact with the app, including:

- **Social features** – make it easy for target users to share on social media
- **Activity feeds** – users get real-time updates and see new and personalized content
- **Ecommerce solutions** – allow users to buy and sell items within the app
- **In-app communications** – engage users with contextual messages as they use the app
- **Device features** – request permission to use contact list and location to get access to more user data

The cost of templated apps can range from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars and support early-stage businesses.



## 2. Custom apps

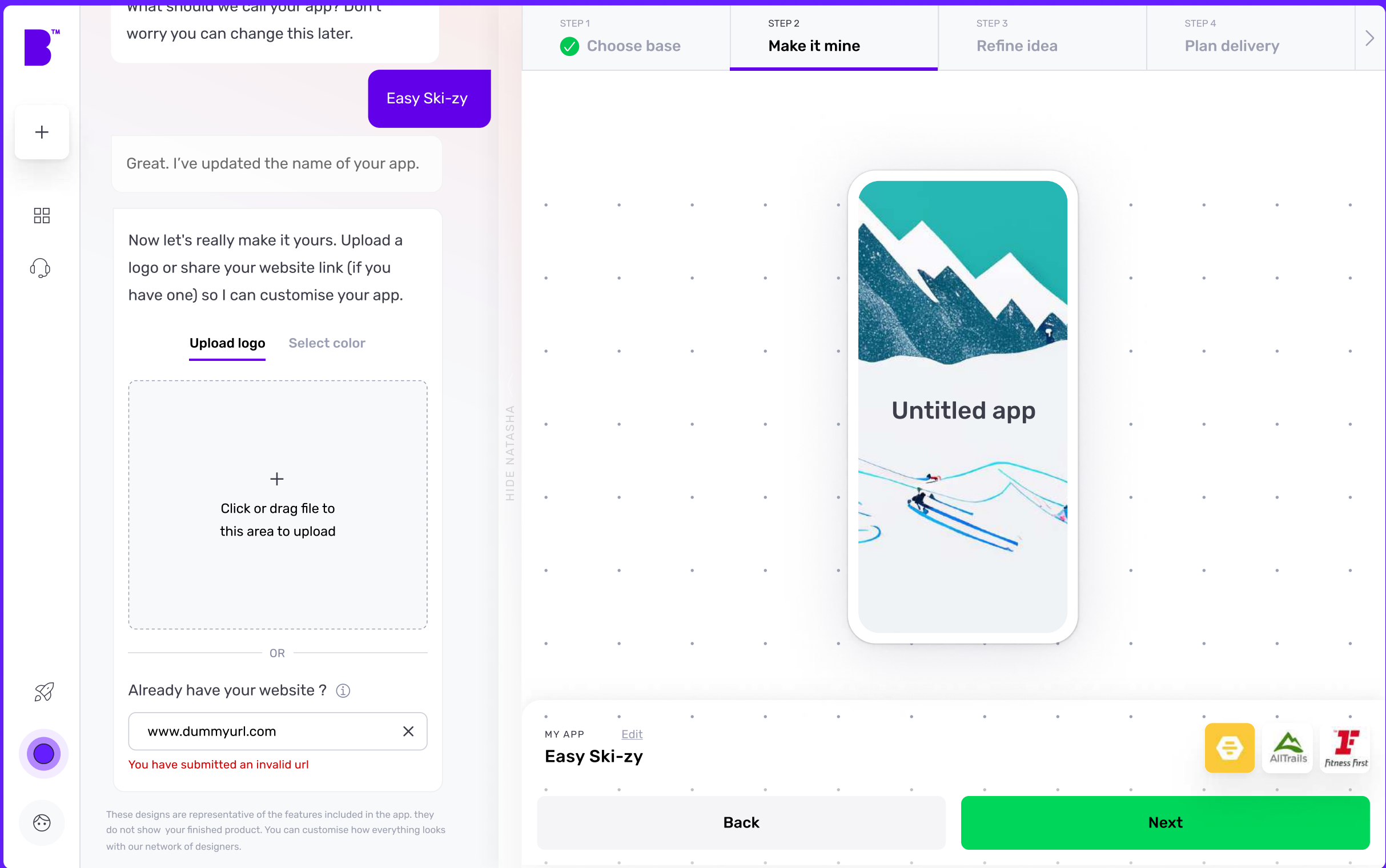
These are typically cutting-edge, larger-scale apps with advanced and complex features, extensive interactions, and back-end infrastructure, developed for specific business needs.

They're built by experts either from scratch or with the help of a low-code app builder.

An app like Uber is a good example of a custom app. It uses location data and sophisticated algorithms to pair drivers and passengers. It also includes extra security features such as “verify your trips,” meaning passengers must share a code with the driver before their trip starts. Innovations like these are what make Uber a custom app.

Custom apps often require a team of developers, designers, and project managers to build and the cost of custom apps can range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

These apps make sure you have flexibility, customizability, security, and scalability and help businesses with more unique and complex use cases.





# Routes to create an app

While there are many ways you can go about creating your app, some of them aren't worth considering – especially if you want to build robust, scalable software.

That's why we haven't included building an app yourself or hiring a single freelancer below. Instead, we've focused on the most serious contenders...

	No-code app builder	Software development agency	Builder.ai
Clear costs	✗	✗	✓
Scalability	✗	✓	✓
Clear timelines	✓	✗	✓
Own the code	✗	✓	✓
Project management	✗	✗	✓

## 1. No-code app builder

No-code app builders are DIY app-building platforms. They allow non-technical users to quickly and cost-effectively build simple web and mobile apps by dragging and dropping pre-made features. Here are their key pros and cons:

### Pros

- No tech expertise is needed to build an app, thanks to the drag-and-drop interface
- Fast to build because templates are reusable and can be personalized

### Cons

- **You're locked into monthly payments** for your app as long as it's in use, meaning you could pay over the odds to keep it live
- **Rigid templates mean you can't scale your app as you grow**, or improve your app's sophistication over time
- **You don't have access to your code**, so it may be challenging to migrate your app to another provider or make customizations to your app without starting completely from scratch
- **You may need to complete educational courses** just to use your chosen app builder, eating into time you could otherwise spend growing your business



## 2. Software development agency

Plug-and-Play development teams fill skills and resource gaps for SMBs, allowing you to create powerful, custom apps. Here's what you need to know:

### Pros

- **You don't need to burden internal teams with your app project**, as outsourced teams take responsibility for everything
- **You have access to your code**, meaning you have complete control over your mobile app development roadmap
- **Your app is secure and scalable** because it's custom-coded, meaning you can protect customer data and meet emerging business needs

### Cons

- **The cost of app development can skyrocket** if you're on a retainer and the project overruns
- **Liaising with developers can be difficult and confusing**, particularly if you lack technical skills internally
- **You have limited visibility on your project**, meaning you may not be happy with the final product

## 3. Builder.ai

Builder.ai is an all-in-one solution, offering a middle-ground between no-code app builders and dev agencies. On the one hand, you can create apps cost-effectively and at speed. On the other hand, templates don't restrict you, and you can level up your app as you scale.

### Pros

- **No coding skills are needed** as humans and AI work together to assemble your app
- **Guaranteed pricing** means there are never any nasty surprises down the line
- **Project progress is viewable in a central dashboard**, meaning you're never out of the loop on timelines and activity
- **You have access to your code**, so you have total autonomy over your app development roadmap and can easily migrate to another platform (once your payment plan is complete)
- **Dedicated project managers** liaise with developers so you don't have to (once you've shared your app idea and chosen your features)

### Cons

- **Startup costs are higher** than no-code app builders
- **No free starter plan**, although you can create free prototypes



# Choosing the perfect app development platform

As you choose an app development platform for your app, there are five key considerations that you need to keep in mind, regardless of the price and type of your app.



**Get a guaranteed price upfront**



**Make sure features are updated automatically**



**Get complete project visibility throughout**



**Go with a trusted advisor**



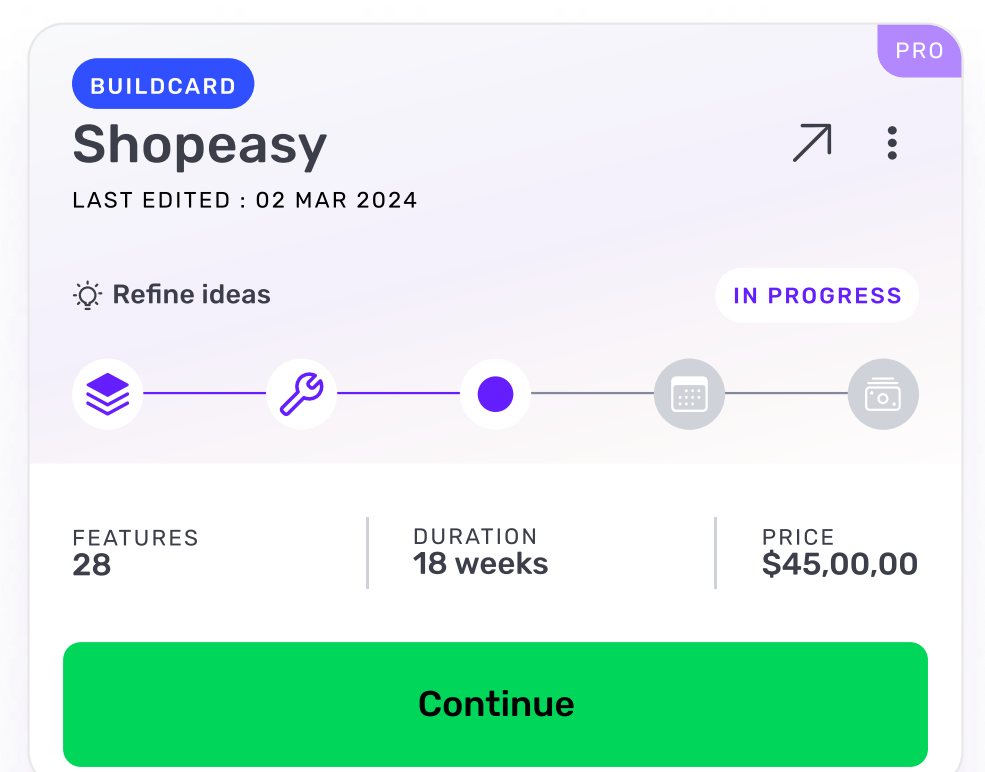
**Get access to your code**

## 1. Get a guaranteed price upfront

When you seek a guaranteed price upfront, you're making sure that the cost of your app development is transparent and agreed upon before the project starts. This approach protects you from the risk of going way over budget.

If an app development platform hesitates to offer a fixed price, you should think twice, because it could mean they're not confident about sticking to the timelines you've agreed on.

It's also a good idea to look for options where you can pick additional features or support as you go, with clear pricing for each. This prevents "hidden" costs like maintenance and hosting from creeping up on you in the long run.





## 2. Make sure features are updated automatically

When you're launching an app or an online business, a lot of effort goes into just getting it off the ground. However, the real challenge begins once your app is published to app stores.

Technology and user expectations evolve rapidly, and without continuous updates, your app risks becoming outdated or even obsolete. This is where automatic feature updates become vital.

By choosing an app development partner who commits to keeping your app's features and capabilities current, you safeguard your business against the relentless pace of technological change.

This commitment from your app development platform means that as new trends emerge and technologies advance, your app won't be left behind. It'll evolve and adapt, maintaining its appeal and functionality.


## 3. Get complete project visibility throughout

Unmet expectations are one of the most common bugbears of businesses that invest in app development. This is often caused by a lack of visibility into the progress of their project.



As a result, it's extremely important to look for vendors with tools that can give you a 360-degree view of every stage of the design and build process.


Such transparency not only helps you stay informed, but also enables you to provide timely feedback, making sure the final product aligns closely with your expectations.

### Our experts






Holly Burke








Yasmin Walker








James Carr





Emilia Holland









## 4. Get access to your code

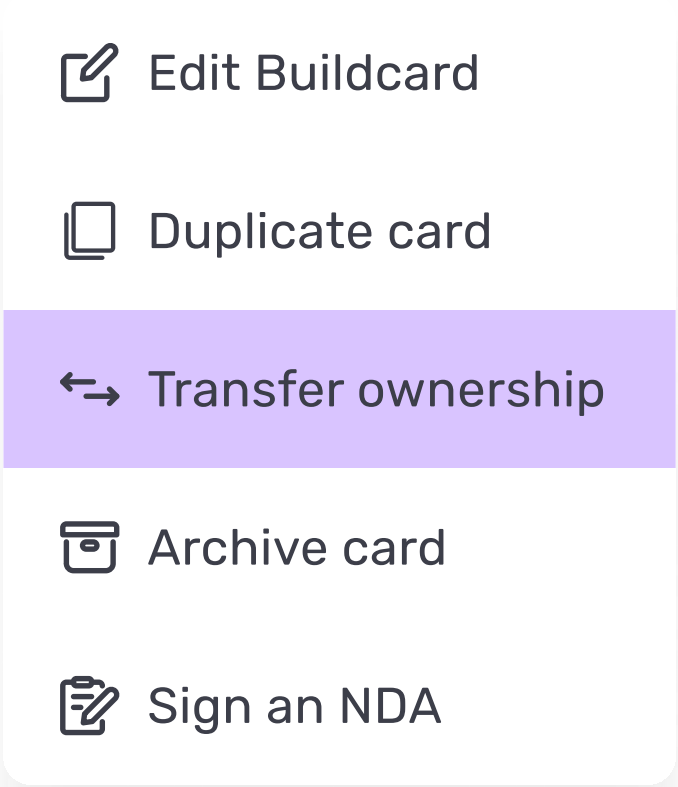
Finding out that you can't access the code of the app you've worked so hard to create is a huge setback.

So when you're building something – especially something as crucial as an app for your business – you need to make sure that you own the intellectual property (IP).

This ownership is essential for scaling your business because it gives you the freedom to modify, sell, or expand your software without any restrictions or additional costs.

To avoid any nasty surprises, it's important to clarify ownership issues right from the start. Make sure that your agreement with the development vendor explicitly states that you'll have access to your app's code and all related IP once it's built. This way, you won't find yourself trapped, facing huge fees to "break up" with your vendor or to continue using your own app.

Getting access to your code also means you have the flexibility to host it on your own infrastructure, integrate it with other systems, or adapt it as your business grows and changes. This is a crucial aspect of maintaining control over the tools that are fundamental to your business operations.



## 5. Choose a trusted advisor

Lastly, going with a trusted advisor underscores the importance of choosing a development vendor that not only offers a good deal but also brings a wealth of experience and reliability.

While it can be tempting to cut costs wherever possible, opting for the cheapest option or the fastest turnaround might lead to poor quality results or even bigger costs down the line.

The saying "you get what you pay for" really applies here. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

This is why doing your homework on potential development vendors is crucial. Look for vendors that have been in the business for at least 5 years. This level of experience generally means they've seen a lot and know how to handle different challenges that can arise during the development process.

Experienced vendors are more likely to deliver quality work, avoid rookie mistakes, and provide realistic estimates that reflect the true cost of the project. They can guide you through the development process, offer valuable insights based on past projects, and help you make informed decisions that benefit your business in the long run.



# Builder.ai: Resolving app development challenges through AI

Builder.ai is an AI-powered app builder that takes care of the entire app development process from idea, to prototype, to build. We also help our customers launch and maintain their apps, giving them the best chance of achieving long-term success.

Natasha, our AI Product Manager, helps you choose from 650+ app features (things like Login, Shopping Cart, or Notifications). We customize these features any way you like – and if we don't have a feature you need, we can build it for you. It's endlessly flexible and because you don't start from scratch, it's faster too.

This simple idea is why Fast Company voted us as one of the top 3 'Most Innovative' companies in AI in 2023.

## No learning curve

Builder.ai allows anyone to create high-performing apps regardless of their technical knowledge. We offer a fully managed service, meaning there's no learning curve and no drag-and-drop dread.

## Highly customizable

By simply sharing your app idea, you can get tailor-made apps with infinite customization options.

Using our composable platform you can build sophisticated, custom functionality with us, in comparison to the rigid templates used by some no-code app builders.

## Pay-per-feature pricing

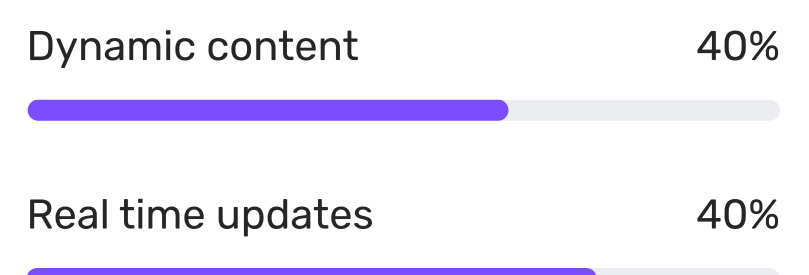
When you work with us, your app development costs are guaranteed in a Buildcard before your project begins.

This is possible because of our pay-per-feature pricing plan, which allows you to truly tailor your app to your unique use case.

You never pay for anything you don't need.

### Features in progress

16/29 completed









## Bring your **idea to life**

Building your app has never been easier. With the wealth of expertise available today, anyone with a vision can turn their app idea into reality.

In an era where apps have revolutionized nearly every aspect of traditional business, the process of building the software itself has remained largely unchanged.

This is where Builder.ai steps in. Committed to unlocking the potential of every human, Builder.ai is redefining the landscape of software development.

Builder.ai supports your app development journey, making the process as seamless and efficient as possible. With our innovative approach, we make sure that you have all the tools and support needed to bring your app from an idea to a fully functional reality.

👉 [Get in touch with a US-based expert today](#)

