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How to Build a Business Case that Gets a Yes

Securing a budget for new technology, tooling, or services often comes down to how well you articulate the problem, opportunity, and return. Below outlines the key steps and decision-making criteria that finance and exec teams expect from a strong business case.

Step 1: 🔍 Start Early

Strong business cases don't begin with vendor selection, they begin with identifying the pain and opportunity within your business. Things to document and research before you get started:

- Document clear employee and customer pain points
- Map current processes and where they break down
- Explore whether your existing tools can be extended or repurposed first
- Identify where time is being wasted or outcomes are being delayed

Step 2: 📉 Define the Business Problem

Before proposing any solution, clearly articulate:

- What isn't working and why it matters
- What outcomes are at risk (e.g. retention, revenue, efficiency)
- What success looks like and how it will be measured
- A business case built on vague frustrations or abstract benefits will struggle. Anchor it in concrete impact.

Step 3: 📊 Build the Case Around These 6 Criteria

These are the core pillars finance teams look for when evaluating investment requests:

1. ROI Clarity: Define both the expected return and the investment. Be explicit.
2. Holistic Fit: Show how the tool integrates with your current tech stack and processes.
3. Future-Proofing: Demonstrate how it will support your business 12–24 months from now, not just today.
4. Ease of Adoption: Choose simplicity over sophistication. Tools that are hard to adopt rarely deliver value quickly.
5. Scalability: Show that the solution can grow with your team and customer base without needing a full rebuild.
6. AI Readiness: Make sure the product is genuinely AI-ready, or AI is at the foundation of what they do, not just bolting on buzzwords, and aligns with your data and automation goals.

Step 4: ⚖️ Map Trade-Offs and Cost Offsets

Great business cases don't just justify spend, they justify change. You'll strengthen your case by showing:

- What you'll stop spending money or time on
- What systems or manual processes you'll consolidate or eliminate
- Whether the investment offsets the need for headcount or internal builds

Step 5: 🤝 Build Internal Alignment

Getting early buy-in builds momentum, surfaces potential blockers, and ensures you're not the only one advocating for the investment - critical for both approval and long-term success.

Before pitching to finance:

- Engage cross-functional stakeholders (data, ops, product, CS) to get internal buy-in and show how this can benefit multiple teams
- Scope the implementation effort
- Get informal buy-in from teams affected by the tool
- Create a clear path to value that everyone agrees on.

Step 6: 🏛️ Present to Finance Like a Partner

Your business case should:

- Lead with the problem, not the product
- Quantify risk and opportunity clearly
- Show total cost of ownership (TCO) over time
- Include time to value and implementation planning
- Emphasize cross-functional support
- Avoid emotion-driven pitches, focus on outcomes, trade-offs, and timelines.

❌ If You Hear "No"

Ask where the concerns were: clarity, timing, cost, or strategic priority?

Reframe and re-pitch with stronger metrics or more internal buy-in

Time your pitch around planning cycles or budget windows

Stay flexible: what's a "no" today may be a "yes" next quarter

💡 Final Tip

The best business cases feel less like a sales pitch and more like a confident plan. Treat it like you're hiring a high-performing team member because the right tool should deliver just as much leverage.