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Do You Need a CTO for Your Startup?

by Ashley Alexander // Jan 22, 2018

Tech Tips



A lot of founders come to us seeking advice on hiring a Chief Technology Officer for their startup. They want direction on what to look for in this process and how to ensure they hire the best CTO.

The thing that a lot of these founders don't realize is this: They don't actually need a CTO. But they aren't alone in this, many companies end up hiring a CTO, when what they need is something different altogether. We're here to break down if you actually need a CTO, and if not, what the other options are for your small business.

When to hire a CTO

Often, a founder might look to hire a CTO without fully understanding what that position entails. Put simply, a CTO is the technical visionary of a business. They will be in charge of managing all things technical including the development team as well as any major technical decisions. CTOs typically are not expected to write code or ship product, so if you are trying to hire a CTO to build your product, you may want to rethink that approach.

Keep in mind that hiring a CTO can often be incredibly expensive. So, if what your business is in search of is a technical leader, then go ahead and hire away! If not, you might want to refine your hiring search, and target a developer instead.

When to hire a developer

We mentioned that CTOs don't normally write code, so what should you be looking for if writing code is what you need? One option would be to hire a developer. Onboarding developers is a good idea if you need custom development for your startup because their job is to actually write code and build your product. Still an expensive hire, developers require management as well as a full benefits package.

When deciding if a developer is your best option you should consider that you will need a developer who's a fit for your product needs. For example, do you need a [full-stack developer](#), or will a [front-end developer](#) do for now? Additionally, depending on your project, you might need to hire several different developers with different skill sets (e.g. if you want an app for both iOS and Android, you may need to hire two different developers: one who is familiar with Java, and the other familiar with Swift.)

When to look for other software development services

CTO? Developer? Are these things a non-tech person like you absolutely does not want to deal with. Luckily there are other options that are designed for early-stage companies. These are the solutions (like [Hatch!](#)) that build apps or websites for your business, no coding required.

Code-free development solutions tend to be less expensive, without sacrificing quality. And if you're not sure if your idea is a winner yet, they also provide you the opportunity to create an MVP ([minimum viable product](#)) and test your idea before taking on the large expense and risk of building your own solution. (PS. they might even provide a few additional benefits like [taking care of your servers](#) and deploying on multiple platforms, no additional charge!)

So what's the moral of the story? Most startups don't need a CTO. We've seen too many people spend countless hours searching, networking and recruiting for this role when it might not even be the right choice for their business. Most often, what businesses are actually looking for is someone to develop their product, not manage it. They are looking for people who can write code.

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2/2