BUILD WHAT DIFFERENTIATES YOU

MODERNIZE WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MGAS AND PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS EVALUATING HOMEGROWN TECHNOLOGY

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Many successful MGAs and program administrators have built their own technology for good reasons.

They needed speed. They needed control. They needed systems that reflected the way they actually underwrite, quote, bind, issue, service, and report on business. They may have had a unique program strategy, proprietary underwriting logic, specialized distribution relationships, or operational requirements that standard systems could not support at the time.

For many organizations, building a homegrown platform was not a mistake. It was part of how they launched, grew, and differentiated. But the technology that helps an MGA get to market is not always the technology that helps it scale.

As the business grows, the platform must support more programs, more carriers, more producers, more states, more users, more data, more reports, and more exceptions. Over time, custom technology that once created speed can become harder to maintain, harder to integrate, and harder to adapt.

Which parts of your technology still create advantage, and which parts are now slowing the business down?

Why MGAs build their own platforms

MGAs operate in a complex part of the insurance market. Program business often requires speed, specialization, delegated authority oversight, carrier-specific reporting, and workflows that vary by product, state, producer, or risk type.

A homegrown platform can give an MGA the flexibility to move quickly when vendor systems feel too rigid or generic. It can help the business launch a new program, create a differentiated broker experience, or encode underwriting rules that reflect specialized expertise.

MGAs often build their own technology to support:

- Proprietary underwriting workflows
- Custom rating or appetite logic
- Broker or agent-facing portals
- Submission intake and triage
- Program-specific data enrichment
- Capacity or carrier reporting
- Portfolio analytics
- Unique quoting and binding experiences

These capabilities can be valuable. In some cases, they are part of what makes the MGA different.

But as the organization grows, the same platform may also be asked to support functions that are less strategic but increasingly complex: policy administration, endorsements, renewals, claims, accounting, bordereaux, compliance reporting, document generation, and integrations.

That is where the build-versus-buy decision becomes more nuanced.

When homegrown technology becomes operational debt

Operational debt builds slowly.

A spreadsheet is created to handle one reporting gap. A developer hard-codes a rule to meet a carrier deadline. A manual workaround is added for one program. A long-time employee knows how to reconcile the data, but the process is not fully documented. A custom workflow works well enough, so it becomes permanent.

None of these decisions feels risky in isolation. But over time, they accumulate. As the platform expands, the organization **may begin to see signs of strain:**

- New program launches require too much custom development
- Developers are pulled into routine operational changes
- Underwriters rely on spreadsheets outside the system
- Carrier reporting requires manual cleanup
- Data is difficult to trust across teams
- Endorsements, renewals, claims, or accounting workflows are disconnected
- Key system knowledge lives with a few people
- Reporting takes too long or requires too much reconciliation
- Integrations are fragile or expensive to maintain

At that point, the issue is not simply technology. It becomes an operating model problem.

The platform may still work, but it requires more effort to keep working. It may still support the business, but it makes growth harder than it should be. It may still contain valuable proprietary logic, but that logic is surrounded by manual work, maintenance burden, and process risk.

That is operational debt.

What should stay proprietary?

The strongest MGA technology strategy is not “build everything” or “buy everything.” It is knowing which parts of the platform are truly strategic.

Some capabilities may be worth owning because they directly support the organization’s underwriting, distribution, or data advantage. **For example, an MGA may want to preserve:**

- Proprietary underwriting logic
- Rating strategy or appetite models
- Broker or agent experience
- Risk scoring methods
- Data enrichment workflows
- Program-specific decision rules
- Portfolio analytics
- Capacity-facing insights
- AI models tied to underwriting judgment
- Specialized submission triage logic

These are the areas where custom technology may create real differentiation. If a capability helps the MGA select better risk, improve speed to quote, strengthen broker relationships, manage portfolio performance, or give capacity partners better confidence, it may deserve continued investment.

The key test is whether the capability helps the organization compete. If it improves underwriting performance, distribution efficiency, program growth, or capacity relationships, it may be part of the MGA’s strategic edge.

What should be modernized or standardized?

Other capabilities are essential, but not necessarily differentiating.

Every MGA needs reliable operational infrastructure. Policies must be issued. Endorsements must be processed. Claims must be tracked. Documents must be generated. Accounting must reconcile. Bordereaux must be delivered. Data must be accurate. Workflows must be auditable.

These functions matter deeply. But they may not be where the organization wants to spend scarce technology resources forever. **MGAs should be cautious about custom-building and maintaining:**

- Policy administration
- Claims workflow
- Billing and reconciliation
- Accounting workflows
- Bordereaux
- Compliance reporting
- Document generation
- Endorsements and renewals
- Producer management
- Audit trails
- Routine integrations
- Operational reporting

These workflows can become expensive to maintain because they involve constant exceptions, regulatory requirements, carrier-specific needs, product variations, and downstream dependencies.

The question is not whether these functions are important. They are. The question is whether maintaining them as custom infrastructure creates enough strategic value to justify the cost, complexity, and risk. If a workflow is necessary but not differentiating, it may be a candidate for modernization.

A practical build, buy, or integrate framework

For MGAs evaluating their current technology, a simple framework can help.

Build or own when the capability:

- Creates underwriting advantage
- Uses proprietary data
- Improves broker or agent distribution
- Supports a unique program strategy
- Strengthens capacity partner confidence
- Helps the business make better risk decisions
- Cannot be easily replicated by competitors

Buy or modernize when the capability:

- Is required but not strategically unique
- Creates recurring maintenance burden
- Requires constant compliance or reporting updates
- Pulls developers into routine operational work
- Depends heavily on manual workarounds
- Is already solved well by purpose-built platforms
- Makes scaling harder than it should be

Integrate when the capability:

- Still has strategic value
- Should not be replaced immediately
- Needs better connection to the operational core
- Contains important data or logic
- Can coexist with a modern platform
- Supports a phased modernization strategy

This framework helps avoid two common mistakes.

The first is assuming all homegrown technology is bad. It is not. Many MGAs have built valuable systems that reflect their expertise and market position.

The second is assuming all homegrown technology should remain custom forever. Some systems were built because the business needed a solution at the time. That does not mean every part of the platform should continue to be maintained internally as the organization scales.

For enterprise MGAs, the decision is also about autonomy and leverage

For larger MGAs, program administrators, and acquisition-driven insurance platforms, the technology decision is not simply whether to build or buy. It is also about where to preserve autonomy and where to create leverage.

Some systems, workflows, and data assets may be closely tied to the way a specific program, underwriting team, or acquired business creates value. Those areas may need to remain flexible, specialized, or connected to existing technology.

Other parts of the business may benefit from a more consistent operating foundation. When multiple teams, programs, or portfolio companies are solving the same operational problems in different ways, complexity increases. Reporting becomes harder. Data becomes less consistent. Maintenance costs grow. Leadership visibility becomes more fragmented.

Integrate where autonomy matters.
Consolidate where it creates leverage.

Integrate where autonomy matters

Integrate around the capabilities that make the business distinct: proprietary underwriting models, specialized program workflows, broker relationships, rating logic, and data assets.

Consolidate where it creates leverage

Consolidate the workflows that become stronger when standardized: policy administration, claims, accounting, bordereaux, reporting, document generation, integrations, and operational visibility.

The goal is not to force every part of the organization into one rigid model. The goal is to create a technology strategy that protects local advantage while giving the broader business more control, consistency, and scale.

The executive question: would you build it again today?

One of the most useful questions for leadership teams is simple:

If we were starting over today, would we build this ourselves?

For each major part of the technology stack, ask:

- Does this capability help us win business?
- Does it improve underwriting results?
- Does it make us faster or more scalable?
- Does it improve the broker or agent experience?
- Does it strengthen our capacity relationships?
- Does it give us better control over the portfolio?

Or does it mainly consume resources and create maintenance burden?

The answer may vary by function. An MGA may decide to keep its proprietary rating logic, broker experience, or data model, while modernizing the systems that support policy administration, claims, accounting, reporting, and workflow management.

That is not a failure of the homegrown platform. It is a sign of a maturing technology strategy.

Where ALIS DX can fit

Modernization does not have to mean a full rip-and-replace.

For many MGAs and program administrators, the right path is to preserve the technology that creates differentiation while strengthening the operational foundation around it. That is where ALIS DX can support both sides of the strategy: integrating with proprietary systems where autonomy matters, while helping consolidate the operational workflows where consistency, visibility, and scale create leverage.

As a platform built for MGAs, wholesalers, and program administrators, ALIS DX helps connect core operational workflows across the insurance lifecycle, including submissions, underwriting, policy administration, claims, accounting, integrations, reporting, and intelligence.

For organizations with existing proprietary technology, ALIS DX can serve as a modern operational core that works alongside the systems the business wants to keep. That may include custom underwriting models, broker-facing experiences, rating tools, data assets, or analytics environments.

The goal is not to erase what makes the MGA different; it is to reduce the operational drag around it.

By connecting workflows, improving visibility, and reducing reliance on manual workarounds, ALIS DX can help MGAs focus technology investment where it matters most: underwriting performance, program growth, broker experience, and capacity confidence.

Keep what makes you different

Homegrown technology can be a powerful asset. It can reflect the judgment, specialization, and speed that helped an MGA grow.

But as the business scales, leaders need to keep asking whether each part of the platform is still serving the strategy.

Some capabilities should remain proprietary. Others may be better standardized, modernized, or integrated into a broader operating platform.

The strongest MGA technology strategy is intentional.

Build what differentiates.
Modernize what holds you back.
Integrate what needs to work together.

That approach helps MGAs preserve their competitive advantage while creating a stronger foundation for growth.

ALIS

Questions to ask your team

What parts of our platform create true differentiation?
What would we build again today?
What would we not build again today?
Where are manual workarounds increasing?
Which workflows require too much developer involvement?
Where is reporting too slow or too manual?
Which systems need to connect better?
Where is key-person dependency creating risk?
Could we modernize in phases instead of replacing everything at once?
How can our technology better support underwriting, operations, and capacity relationships?

Next step

If your MGA has invested in proprietary technology, the conversation does not have to start with replacement.

It can start with a more practical question: where should your existing platform continue to lead, and where could ALIS DX help create a stronger operational foundation around it?

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