

# **No Programming Experience? Zoho Wants That To Be No Problem With Its Creator Platform**

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By **Patrick Moorhead**

Two years ago, I published an article introducing Zoho as “the most successful SaaS company you may have never heard of.” Headquartered in my hometown of Austin, Texas, Zoho offers a suite of over fifty web-based business applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases, web conferencing, project management, and much more.

In this analysis, I focus on the Zoho Creator Platform, which has the simple goal of empowering anyone to build business applications on a unified platform. This particular software has been around for quite some time, with the first version released fifteen years ago. Every few years, Zoho has added new functionality, bringing us to the latest sixth-generation version with new features, functionality, and capabilities.

What is the Zoho Creator Platform? The platform allows everyone to build secure and scalable custom enterprise business solutions. It is called a “unified low-code development platform.” As the name suggests, low-code requires little or no coding to build applications and processes. Graphic interfaces replace traditional coding with drag-and drop features. These tools allow users with no formal coding or software development knowledge to create applications.

You might call it the democratization of the software development profession. Platforms like Zoho Creator have become increasingly popular as a fast and easy alternative to traditional software development. For professional developers and non-professional developers alike, a low-code platform is a vital tool to accelerate digital transformation.

## What is new in Zoho Creator?

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In previous generations of Zoho Creator, if a developer wanted to get creative and leverage the capabilities of other applications, it required leaving the builder. The new version has three popular capabilities; blueprinting, integration, and analytics built into the platform. No external applications are required.

A complex application could have hundreds or even thousands of workflow actions. At that point, it becomes hard to visualize step by step. The new version includes what Zoho calls Process Blueprinting, which maps out the process visually. A drag-and-drop builder graphically allows visualization of a business process by specifying each step, assigning responsibilities across stakeholders, and automating actions based on pre-set conditions. It will also identify bottlenecks and potential future scalability challenges.

Developers can now write, store, and execute reusable code blocks in the Zoho Creator Platform using Deluge, Java, or Node.js in the new version. IT teams can now use familiar languages to develop more complex workflows

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and plug them into an application. For example, a business user can build a workflow to take a picture from an iPad and print an ID card. IT can perform the more complex task of applying a watermark to the image.

Zoho currently sees that 90% of all Zoho Creator applications have a spreadsheet imported into them at some point in time. About 65% of them have spreadsheets imported into them multiple times. The ability to import data from a spreadsheet into an application is not rocket science but based on customer feedback, Zoho has streamlined the process using artificial intelligence (AI). Zoho's intelligent AI assistant (Zia) imports data from anywhere with one click, including building data models and automatically detecting data relationships via Smart Import.

Zia can identify data models, column types, and relationships and bring a more logical structure to the application. In addition to model detection, there are also automatic data cleansing operations such as fixing inconsistent spelling, spotting missing values, and standardizing phone numbers. Common AI tasks such as predictive analytics, keyword extraction, sentiment analysis, optical character recognition (OCR), and object detection are available in a drag-and-drop user interface for easy deployment

## Help for the IT teams

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Several new features will make the IT team happy in this new version.

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Unified Solution Builder provides the ability to create, integrate, analyze, and manage custom business solutions at scale from a single dashboard.

Zoho Creator also covers all three phases of solution building - development, deployment, and management. Traditional application deployment involves a testing phase that can be rigorous. Low-code platforms do not require testing of every line of code. Also, the development environment resides in the cloud making for simpler testing and quicker deployment.

Based on the application's readiness, it can be launched into development, staging (testing), or production with a single click. Users can also add features continuously or make changes without disturbing the existing application in production.

A toolbox of features is now available to help IT teams achieve centralized governance in a low-code development environment. These tools include rolebased access controls, audit trails, backup options, application integrated development environment (IDE), dashboards to view and manage users, billing, and personalization options such as localization and branding.

## Wrapping up

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Many competing tools favor either the business user or the professional developer. Tools for business users are seldom powerful enough for IT developers to build complex applications. Conversely, tools designed for experienced developers are too difficult for business users.

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The Zoho Creator Platform appears to hit the sweet spot for most customers. Let's face it, Zoho has been improving the product for 15 years which is a lot of customer feedback!

In this latest version, it is also noteworthy that Zoho has added capabilities such as integration and analytics into the platform, which may well be a first in the industry.

We have all heard of the term "shadow IT ." We saw it in the early days of the cloud when business units whipped out credit cards to pay for services in the cloud. Making it easy for anyone to build an application allows the proliferation of applications across the organization.

Zoho has plugged this gap with the new version of Zoho Creator by ensuring business users can build solutions and, at the same time, the IT team can manage the ongoing challenges of security, compliance, integration, and governance. I think many IT professionals will sleep a little easier as a result.

***Note: Moor Insights & Strategy writers and editors may have contributed to this article.***

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