

Selecting a Knowledge and Work System

A decision memo for Northline Studio

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Abstract

Northline Studio must choose between Notion Business and Airtable Team as the primary system for project knowledge and operating work. The binding need is coherent documentation—briefs, meeting notes, decisions, procedures, and project status—for twelve contributors and external guests, with a usable launch in two weeks. A weighted decision model gives Notion an illustrative score of 84/100 and Airtable 71/100. Notion is therefore recommended for a reversible 90-day pilot. The recommendation is conditional: if more than one quarter of active projects require repeated relational records across clients, campaigns, deliverables, vendors, and approvals, the team should switch to Airtable. The memo defines the evidence, assumptions, exit trigger, implementation plan, and failure controls required to make the decision auditable.

1 Recommendation

Decision: Adopt Notion Business for a 90-day pilot. The choice should be treated as an operating hypothesis rather than a permanent platform commitment. Northline’s central problem is fragmented context, not relational data scale. Notion’s page-first model is the better match for how contributors currently create and consume briefs, notes, decisions, procedures, and status updates.

Airtable remains the designated fallback if the pilot reveals workflows that depend on many linked records, strict validation, or purpose-built data-entry interfaces. The recommendation is therefore both directional and reversible.

2 Decision Context

The system must satisfy four non-negotiable constraints:

1. briefs, procedures, meeting notes, decisions, and status live in one discoverable home;
2. twelve contributors can edit without database training;
3. clients receive controlled guest access; and
4. a working system launches within two weeks.

The decision does not attempt to identify a universally superior product. It identifies the better fit for Northline’s current work and adoption constraints.

3 Evaluation Method

Each option is scored from 1 to 10 on criterion i . The weighted score is

$$S = \sum_{i=1}^n w_i s_i, \quad (1)$$

where w_i is the normalized criterion weight and s_i is the score. The model is intentionally transparent: leadership can change any weight or score and observe how the recommendation moves.

The 13-point advantage is meaningful only if the assumed usage pattern is correct. Docs and adoption account for half the model; a business with relational operations would rationally assign different weights.

4 Option Analysis

4.1 Notion Business

Notion is favored for documents with embedded structure. A contributor can move between a client home, brief, meeting note, decision log, and project view without treating every object as a database record. This reduces the conceptual distance between current behavior and the proposed system.

The main risk is entropy. Flexible pages and databases can produce duplicate templates, stale decisions, and inconsistent status fields unless ownership is explicit.

4.2 Airtable Team

Airtable is favored when repeated records and relationships define the work. It is stronger for tightly

Table 1: Pre-mortem and controls for the 90-day pilot.

Failure mode	Early warning	Control
Every team invents a template	More than five launch templates or duplicate project homes	One template owner; monthly review; archive rather than copy.
Knowledge becomes stale	Decisions lack an owner or review date	Require both fields; review aged decisions in weekly operations.
Status fragments across tools	Chat, spreadsheet, and system disagree	Declare one canonical status field and link to it from conversation.
Guests cannot work safely	Manual exports become the normal client channel	Test a real guest flow in week two and audit permissions before launch.
Relational work overwhelms pages	Contributors maintain shadow spreadsheets	Apply the 25 percent exit trigger and prepare a minimal Airtable migration map.

Table 2: Weighted decision model. Scores are illustrative and specific to Northline.

Criterion	Wt.	N	A
Docs and knowledge clarity	30	9	6
Project workflow	25	8	9
Adoption burden	20	9	7
Guest collaboration	15	8	7
Automation ceiling	10	7	6
Weighted total	100	84	71

modeled clients, campaigns, deliverables, vendors, and approvals, especially when teams need validated fields and purpose-built interfaces.

The main risk is adoption friction. If contributors experience the system as a database they must maintain rather than a place they work, they may retreat to documents, chat, and spreadsheets, recreating fragmentation.

5 Sensitivity and Exit Trigger

The recommendation changes if the primary job changes. Notion remains the preferred option if at least 80 percent of active projects run with one project database, linked notes, a decision log, and a client portal without duplicate status tracking.

Switch to Airtable if more than 25 percent of projects require repeated relational records that the pilot schema cannot maintain cleanly, or if teams create parallel spreadsheets to compensate for weak validation. This trigger should be measured from live work, not debated in the abstract.

6 Implementation Protocol

6.1 Week 1: minimum system

Build only five templates: client home, brief, meeting note, decision log, and weekly status. Assign one system owner. Migrate no historical content unless it is active or legally required.

6.2 Weeks 2–6: two client pods

Run two live client pods. Track weekly active editors, median decision find-time, duplicate fields, guest-access failures, and workarounds outside the system. A workaround is data, not disobedience: it signals a missing capability or unclear rule.

6.3 Week 12: evidence review

Interview five users and audit ten projects. Leadership should decide among renewal, targeted redesign, or migration using the original criteria and exit trigger. Do not add new criteria after outcomes are visible unless the business context materially changed.

7 Evidence and Uncertainty

Official product and pricing pages inform the capability comparison, but commercial terms and feature limits can change. They must be reconfirmed at purchase. The scores are judgments derived from Northline’s stated priorities, not independently measured product performance.

The largest uncertainty is behavioral: whether contributors will maintain the chosen system consistently. The pilot is designed to produce that missing evidence at low switching cost.

8 Open Questions

Before procurement, leadership should confirm current guest limits, export and retention requirements, single sign-on needs, and ownership of client data after offboarding. These questions may affect plan choice but do not presently overturn the platform recommendation.

9 Conclusion

Northline should adopt Notion Business for a 90-day pilot because documentation coherence and adoption are the present bottlenecks. The decision is protected by a measurable exit trigger: if live work proves that relational records, validation, and interfaces are the dominant need, migrate to Airtable rather than forcing the wrong model.

References

Airtable. Product and pricing information. Official pricing page. Accessed 7 August 2026.
Notion. Product and pricing information. Official pricing page. Accessed 7 August 2026.