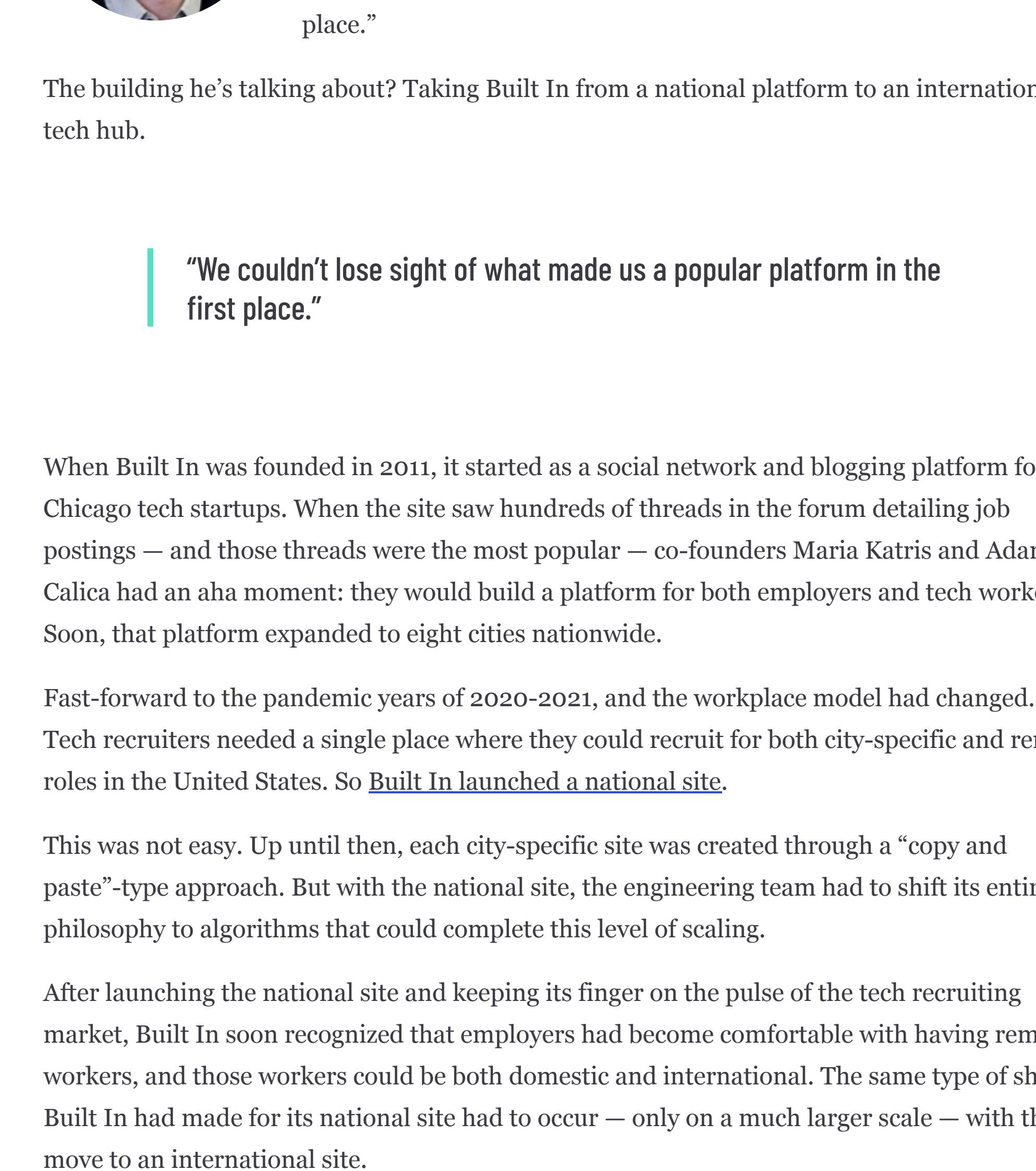


Built In Growth: How the Company Went From Local Job Sites to an International Tech Hub

Members of Built In's engineering team tell the story of how the online community for local tech companies, jobs and news went global.

Written by Taylor Rose
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Engineering for Growth: How Built In Went From Local Job Sites to an International Tech Hub

When **Jamie LeSuer** thinks about the work that he and the engineering team at **Built In** did over the last year, he said it felt like being a restoration architect standing over a drafting table with stacks of blueprints. The job at hand was to figure out how to keep what was so special about the historical building while outfitting it to be part of a futuristic tech-forward city.



"There was an upgrade that needed to happen, but [the building] needed to continue being comfortable and functional during the restoration process, so we couldn't completely tear it down," said LeSuer, a staff data scientist at Built In. "We changed our platform, but we couldn't lose sight of what made us a popular platform in the first place."

The building he's talking about? Taking Built In from a national platform to an international tech hub.

"We couldn't lose sight of what made us a popular platform in the first place."

When Built In was founded in 2011, it started as a social network and blogging platform for Chicago tech startups. When the site saw hundreds of threads in the forum detailing job postings — and those threads were the most popular — co-founders Maria Katris and Adam Calica had an aha moment: they would build a platform for both employers and tech workers. Soon, that platform expanded to eight cities nationwide.

Fast-forward to the pandemic years of 2020-2021, and the workplace model had changed. Tech recruiters needed a single place where they could recruit for both city-specific and remote roles in the United States. So **Built In** launched a national site.

This was not easy. Up until then, each city-specific site was created through a "copy and paste"-type approach. But with the national site, the engineering team had to shift its entire philosophy to algorithms that could complete this level of scaling.

After launching the national site and keeping its finger on the pulse of the tech recruiting market, Built In soon recognized that employers had become comfortable with having remote workers, and those workers could be both domestic and international. The same type of shift Built In had made for its national site had to occur — only on a much larger scale — with the move to an international site.

"Our goal as a company is to be the best place to connect talented tech workers with talented technical companies — but global tech talent isn't centralized to just the United States, right?" said **Tripp Weiner**, senior software engineer II. "There are hundreds of thousands of great developers out there, but they don't all live here. And so by making all the data available to them, we're helping good tech workers find good companies. We're opening up all these doors in order to make those connections — and it helps us grow."

Photo: Built In

How They Did It

Creating a malleable and responsive back-end structure for an international site was no small task. The engineering team needed to make sure that the platform not only maintained its monumental user experience, but also that it was designed in a way that made it simple to maintain and update quickly.

"It was a challenge working in a legacy code base," said **Bhavani Anugonda**, senior software engineer II. "And within reasonable time frames as well. Making sure we abstracted things as much as we could within the infrastructure and application codebase was important early on in this work."

As a small team, making quick adjustments, additions and revisions is critical and can only happen with a back end that is easy to maneuver. The decision to shift to a .NET framework allowed these quick responses to happen on a global scale.

"We're a lean engineering team," LeSuer explained. "It's really important that we can move quickly, and having a simple architecture makes that easier. With the international expansion, it was a big focus that we had to get away from this hard-coded taxonomy model to something that is more dynamic."

What It's Like to be an Engineer at Built In

Ravi Budigelli, chief technology officer, explained that an engineer joining Built In can expect to work with a tight-knit team and immediately feel like they are making a big impact. At larger companies, an engineer typically works on a small slice of a project and then hands it off to the next person. At Built In, there is room to be creative; members of the engineering team are able to stay hands-on through many stages of the product.

Budigelli described the engineers at Built In as the ideal athletes that you want on your team: "They can run defense and offense strategically and simultaneously."

Another major challenge the team faced in launching an international site was how to sort a whole new level — and type — of data. The job postings needed to shift to an automatic import, and the data related to the location of each job needed a transformational shift.

"We had made the assumption that all data is U.S. data," said LeSuer, noting that the shift to international involved combing through the codebase and going back to add things like a country field that didn't exist before. "Then we ran into the problem of, 'OK, how do we populate that field? Do we assume?'"

Built In is Hiring | View 5 Jobs

Photo: Built In

'The Engineer is the User'

With the move to an international site, Chief Technology Officer **Ravi Budigelli** explained that Built In is actively competing with renowned global job platforms. However, those competitors often require recruiters to manage sites for every location. The site that Built In has engineered makes it simpler for every location.

Getting to be part of a small and nimble engineering team that is building this kind of competitive advantage, he said, makes now a particularly impactful time to join Built In.

In many engineering roles, it can be difficult for product team members to understand what is valuable for the user. With Built In, Budigelli noted, "The engineer is the user, so the user experience is built into everyone's role."

"We can actually internalize what we're building on the user side and then say, 'Is this something that I would use if I were job seeking?'" said Budigelli.

The nature of the platform makes UX research, open feedback and iteration a critical part of the culture. Budigelli described the engineers at Built In as the ideal athletes that you want on your team: "They can run defense and offense strategically and simultaneously."

"There's a real opportunity to kind of grow outside of your box here," said LeSuer, recalling that he was the first data scientist to kind of grow outside of his box when he joined Built In.

"We're not only a data scientist but also a data engineer, and do some API development, analytics work, product management, along with machine learning and AI research for GPT ... that's a lot of opportunity here to go beyond your job description and expand your skill set."

Weiner and Anugonda agreed, "I feel like we have pretty broad voices here," noted Weiner.

"We're actually going to be able to have a lot of input into what we're doing," said Anugonda.

"You get to have an outsized impact," added Budigelli. "You're not told to stick to your role. Any idea that you have is fair game. Bring it up and then we'll talk about it and we'll try it. And sometimes we're right, sometimes we're wrong — we try to pick the best idea and then make it successful."

"You get to have an outsized impact. You're not stuck to your role."

Anugonda concluded: "For me, the reason to join the engineering team at Built In is the ability to take ideas, get buy-in and run with improvements that kind of empowerment.

With an expansion to international data, the team had to find a way to automatically differentiate between things like Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Cambridge, England. And when companies are hiring for remote roles that can be filled by anyone working from Europe or the United States, for example, the data can become muddy.

Weiner explained that many applicant tracking systems only have a single field for "location."

"And so when people are putting data in, we just get a string, and they can format it however they want," said Weiner. "They might use commas, hyphens — we just don't know what they're going to do. And we have to make assumptions on how to extract all that data out."

To improve the accuracy of the team's assumptions, Weiner explained that Built In engineers have essentially been performing a series of smaller releases and implementing fast cycles of feedback and iteration.

"Thankfully, we've been building these smaller systems, standing them up, and getting them out to get feedback. We're doing this in minutes rather than days or weeks, where we were before."

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With new ways to automate some of the data, alongside a simple and scalable platform, the engineering team was able to address the job ingestion issues and get a proof of concept up in record time.

"Maybe a week and a half for the whole thing," Weiner said, smiling. "And then it's just been small tweaks from there, but we were able to get the bulk of the work done significantly faster than if we had to do the same work two or three years ago."

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