FIRING ON ALL 4 CYLINDERS

DELIVERING WORLD CLASS DIGITAL EXPERIENCES AT CHANNEL 4
OVERVIEW

The UK’s Channel 4 has been a beacon of innovation, experimentation and creativity since its launch in 1982. With a strong belief in the power of digital and a significant share of the prized 16-34-year-old audience, the broadcaster plans to stay that way. But in a rapidly-evolving market shaken by digital disruptors and characterised by regular introductions of new products, features and services, how does Channel 4 stay ahead of the curve?

Together, Channel 4 and Accenture set up a Digital Delivery Service (DDS) to consolidate digital delivery for 4’s flagship digital video product, All 4, and the 18 million+ registered users who consume live and on-demand video through it.

**CENTRAL SERVICES**
Modern micro-services data architecture enabling rapid development of new data services and content syndication with strategic partners.

**DOTCOM**
Cutting-edge HTML5 video player, custom built to enable cross-browser flexibility and freedom from constrictive commercial player offerings.

**iOS**
4’s most consumed digital platform, enabling offline boxset and catch-up viewing via 30-day downloads.
In its first year of operation, the new delivery model drove greater output at lower costs whilst improving service quality.

The increased delivery agility and flexibility helped Channel 4 to achieve strategic goals, such as becoming the first UK broadcaster to integrate with the Google Assistant ecosystem, enabling viewers to enjoy a screenless user experience and the ability to use voice commands to access their favourite shows. Alex Mahon announced that Channel 4 will be ‘increasing investment in All 4 substantially, to make it a better experience’ as part of a response to growing competition.

“Before Channel 4 I ran a tech business and it is clear that we must rapidly accelerate our digital capabilities and our mindset.”
- Alex Mahon, Chief Executive of Channel 4

With recent announcements firmly placing All 4 at the heart of the broadcaster’s increasingly prominent digital strategy, flexibility, velocity and quality have become ever more important.

Though a market leader, the rapidly evolving digital video ecosystem has resulted in increased competition from digital natives and huge platform players.

Channel 4 recognised the need for a step-change in the pace and agility of its delivery organisation in order to maintain its digital credentials in the new marketplace against organisations benefiting from substantial capital budgets and a lack of technology legacy.

Development teams formed of highly skilled agency developers and contractors generated creativity, but Channel 4 needed more flexibility to deal with the demanding peaks and troughs of digital product development. As a global leader in interactive delivery, Accenture has enabled Channel 4 access to modern engineering skills at scale.
Providing a scalable pool of resources, spanning multiple disciplines and technologies, able to flex at the push of a button.

Relentless focus on exposing detailed delivery metrics, enabling rapid feedback and simplifying the decision-making process

A single partner, providing accountability across multiple platforms; smoothing out product launches and squashing dependencies

Creating a culture of quality – with ownership of production performance driven down directly to developers

Increasing throughput of delivery teams and decreasing cycle times to live

Accenture’s DDS unified people and processes across Channel 4’s Central Services, Dotcom and iOS platforms—the heart of the ecosystem delivering Channel 4’s digital customer experience.

It brought rigor to processes, introduced a single set of methodologies and ensured knowledge flowed across boundaries. The new, super-charged joint initiative empowered everyone to channel their creativity into the things that mattered.
Partnership (rather than “supplier-ship”) is one of the keys to success in modern Digital Product Development.

Gone are the days of large, up-front requirements handed from client to supplier (with little collaboration during delivery) and the wave of change requests that inevitably follow.

Clearly, no two client situations are the same, and so Accenture and Channel 4 worked closely to design the optimal collaboration model surrounding the core DDS. This ensured that the right checks and balances were put in place to stimulate healthy delivery tensions across the teams and was achieved without stifling the legendary creativity of Channel 4 or choking Accenture Digital’s proven passion for cutting-edge digital engineering in the UK digital video space.

The vibrant fusion of people, culture and engineering has been the underlying secret to success.
SUCCESS TO DATE

1st to Market

Integrating Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa into Channel 4’s viewing platforms was a complex technical programme with substantial metadata supply and identity management engineering within Central Services - the beating heart of All 4 - but clearly a feature that would deliver huge benefit to the audience.

The DDS was able to scope, plan and scale up the team in just three weeks to commence delivery... a feat not possible before Channel 4’s partnership with Accenture. The project went on to deliver ahead of schedule and was first to market with these features amongst UK broadcasters.

DevOps Architecture Patterns

Channel 4 became one of the first organisations to fully exploit the latest DevOps architecture patterns provided by Amazon Web Services (AWS), utilising the DevOps prowess of Accenture engineers embedded within the DDS.

Already an early adopter of AWS, the broadcaster is significantly reducing its spending on cloud infrastructure thanks to rapid implementation of AWS Elastic Container Scheduling, with Fargate.
SUCCESS TO DATE

**Hackathon Testing**

Introduction of presentational-based and data-based multi-variate testing has enabled the joint team to test out new ideas quickly and cheaply through hackathons, providing a platform to take successful prototypes through to productionisation.

Cobble together a rough version of a potential feature, expose it to 1% of the audience (who don’t even realise they’re experiencing anything different), and get a real-world steer on whether an idea is worth pushing forward into a fully-baked feature. There’s a culture of continuous innovation because everything is so easy to test.

**Custom HTML5 Player**

Following a re-evaluation of the video technology architecture underpinning channel4.com, Accenture led the development of a custom HTML5 player, providing flexibility in support of DRM protection across the diverse content-base at Channel 4.

Key to this implementation was Accenture Digital Video’s breadth of knowledge in the AdTech space; ensuring the product is able to support future innovations in the advertising sector is essential for Channel 4’s continued success.
Channel 4 has never been afraid to make bold decisions in pursuit of exceptional video products, from commissioning edgy content to introducing the first web-based catch-up site from a UK terrestrial broadcaster. That site evolved into the All 4 platform, Channel 4’s premium digital product and the primary gateway through which more than 18 million registered users interact with the broadcaster.

The DDS ensures the path, integrity and wise usage of the data flowing through All 4, as data is increasingly seen as the lifeblood of a digital company. Accenture helps Channel Four to use its data to:

- Personalise content recommendations and advertising
- Suggest new products and services
- Test hypotheses quickly and accurately
- Monitor delivery efficiency and performance of new features

Deliver effectiveness metrics relentlessly measured and exposed in Screenful* dashboards

*we use Screenful to expose delivery metrics - see screenful.com

Transparent reporting metrics provide key management information without stifling the Agile delivery process
Speed is everything in a market where voracious consumers are constantly attracted to new things. Without a second, or a penny, to waste, Accenture helped Channel 4 pinpoint the activities most likely to deliver sustained value. Investment and resource only go to areas that will have the biggest impact on the audience and Channel 4’s brand value.

Accenture collaborated with Channel 4’s Digital Product team to document and analyse the key value drivers and how they enable the channel’s key objectives. The implementation of a multi-variate test capability enabled rapid testing of product MVPs, and enables a “fail fast” mechanism to avoid wastage.
RESULTS

With its teams now organised within a single DDS, with a key focus on value that ensures all effort is deployed effectively, Channel 4 can evolve with the speed and innovation required to sustain its leading role in digital broadcasting.

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The vibrant fusion of people, culture and engineering across the partnership has been the underlying secret to success.
Charlotte Light | Controller of Systems Delivery

The Accenture Digital Delivery Service has provided the scale, rigour and transparency to take our delivery model to the next level.
Paddy Gordon-Steward | All 4 Programme Manager

We are able to deliver time-sensitive projects due to Accenture’s flexibility to bring on additional expertise at the push of a button.
Sarah Milton | All 4 Head of Product

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ABOUT ACCENTURE

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions – underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network – Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With 459,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com