Integrated Digital Platforms
Flexible technology to meet the consumer challenge
High performance. Delivered.
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Flexible technology to meet the consumer challenge

Can organizations measure up to the integrated infrastructure of a consumer’s mind, where thought processes are dynamic yet interconnected, and decisions can turn on a dime? If so, what will it take?

Consider a fairly typical journey today’s consumer takes when looking for a product. A new mother, for example, wanting to freshen her look, is browsing for hair color. For her, brand engagement begins with a Twitter post about a new color formula revolutionizing the product. She is intrigued and goes to Google Search, which sends her to a product website. There, she reads the opinions of other users and views their satisfaction ratings, watches a video on application techniques, finds out whether or not the product is environmentally friendly, and even checks out a blog link to a well-known hair stylist. The product site also gives our consumer the option of becoming a member, joining a Facebook community and signing up to receive special promotions on hair color products. The ultimate stop in this journey: store, shelf (or online) and purchase.

Now consider the intricate web of technologies that support a consumer’s journey from anonymous browser to engaged buyer: social media, paid search, content management systems, e-commerce and customer database, to name a few. All are intertwined, integrally connected to support one goal: conversion. There’s just one problem: Today, most companies do not have an integrated technical infrastructure to support that journey without interruptions. Instead, companies have developed multiple so-called “best-of-breed” systems, each supporting a distinct stop along the way, but not the entire journey.

Growing Complexity of Digital Interactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer</th>
<th>Search</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Display</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytics</td>
<td>Keyword Analyses</td>
<td>Site Analytics</td>
<td>Media Analytics</td>
<td>FB Analytics</td>
<td>Mobile Analytics</td>
<td>E-mail Analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>Search Bid Management</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Media Buying (DSP)</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Mobile Apps</td>
<td>E-mail Apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content &amp; Data</td>
<td>Queries, Keywords, Catalogs</td>
<td>Cookies, Behavioral, Site</td>
<td>Interests, Likes, Tweets</td>
<td>Check-in, Apps</td>
<td>1st Party, 3rd Party, Registration</td>
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Against the new digital yardstick, most platforms that claim to be at the top fall flat.

From “best-of-breed” to integrated platforms
Not so long ago, when technology changed at a slower pace, business applications took years to build. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems could take three years to plan and another three to execute. In today’s digital climate, time is a luxury organizations can no longer afford. The underlying architecture of business applications needs to be flexible, to meet the rapidly changing demands of consumers, yet robust, to ensure security of data. And consumers want a seamless and relevant experience across all touchpoints—online, offline and on the go—the “R Factor” consumer challenge.

Measuring up to this new digital yardstick is, indeed, proving demanding for most platforms. To accommodate the ever-expanding universe of consumer touchpoints, platforms need to be readily adaptable to any context—from the corporate website, to social media pages, to customer contact systems. They also need to be dynamic and smart enough to allow publishers to execute different experiences with individualized e-shopfront presentations to elicit different customer behavior. This means that truly “best-of-breed” platforms are highly responsive and relevant to customers (even anonymous ones); they anticipate their needs and create appropriate offerings on-the-fly.

Just as other functions have gone through massive paradigm shifts (remember the 1980s and the era of supply chain reengineering), digital marketing has reached a tipping point. It is both mature and strategically important enough to warrant a re-think of fundamental approaches. Just like the Six Sigma push of the 1990s, the need of the hour is to shift from a mentality of siloed areas of excellence to seamless operations.

Digital’s own paradigm shift is marked by a focus that is first, last and always on the overall consumer experience—from consideration to loyalty. Technology solutions should be selected based on delivering the full consumer lifecycle. Too many brands select platforms based on only one aspect; consequently, one system focuses on product information, another on loyalty and yet another on purchase. Integrated platforms can support multiple brands, languages and geographies, not to mention a multitude of channels including the Web, e-mail, mobile and more.
From Point Solutions...

Social Media (Radian6) → Manual Rules Setting

Content Management (Adobe CQ5) → Manual Rules Setting

Faceted Search (Google) → Manual Rules Setting

Toward Integrated Platform Architecture...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform Services</th>
<th>Business Cockpit</th>
<th>Site Enablement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital Marketing</td>
<td>Digital Dashboard</td>
<td>Site Accelerator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Profile</td>
<td>Digital Controls</td>
<td>Conversion Tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Optimization</td>
<td></td>
<td>Asset Gallery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Platform</th>
<th>Base Services</th>
<th>Common Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Channels &amp; Devices</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rendering</td>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syndication</td>
<td>Access Controls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration Services</th>
<th>Operations &amp; Admin</th>
<th>Data Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Integration Services</td>
<td>Platform Admin</td>
<td>Consumer Data Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposed Platform Services</td>
<td>Operations Services</td>
<td>Content Management Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| | Analytics & Reporting Services | |
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Ready to build consumer-centric integrated digital platforms?

The digital ecosystem

Ready to build consumer-centric integrated digital platforms? Not quite. The most critical element of a flexible and constantly evolving digital ecosystem is an end-to-end process supporting seamless consumer experience. Current processes must be understood, documented and optimized. These processes will cross organizational boundaries and seemingly lead to new digital operating models.

At the very least, companies need to have a clear understanding of the following aspects when developing integrated digital platforms:

- **Corporate goals and communication objectives**
  Both need to be actionable and prioritized for each segment of the audience to ensure optimal design.

- **Needs of consumers, employees, investors and partners**
  Businesses have a complex matrix of constituents, both external (consumers, prospects, press, investors, potential employees) and internal (sales, marketing, HR, operations). A clear understanding of their unique needs and respective priorities is critical before mapping out a technology solution.

- **Brand goals**
  These will drive the look and feel of a technology solution as well as the design of an interaction, which significantly influences the consumer experience.

- **Enterprise-level technology platform**
  Technology departments should consider a short list of technical components that can be leveraged to support vastly different communication needs. An orchestrated review of the technical requirements will help reduce duplication of effort, and speed up the launch of new tools.

- **Centers of excellence**
  Integrated operating structures demand a complex mix of staff to be involved in content development and publishing, spanning product groups, geographies, and functional areas. Talent and skills to meet these needs may be hard to come by. By creating centers of excellence, companies can leverage valuable skills effectively and efficiently across the organization. This approach also enables the establishment of formal, yet flexible change management processes that can be adapted to the disparate needs of different groups.

Eventually, integrated digital platforms will help consolidate agency relationships under one unified governance model and help achieve cost competitiveness, better content management and reuse, and brand consistency across geographies as well as channels.
So, what should we focus upon first when building enterprise digital platforms?

Data
Today, we have abundant (structured and unstructured) data on prospects and current customers. This data is locked in a variety of function-specific applications and channel-specific databases, and often stored in third-party systems. In order to strive for a seamless and relevant consumer experience, we need to bring it together. Does it mean that all data must be consolidated into a gigantic database available in real time? No, we should focus only on actionable data supporting meaningful dialog.

Content
It is what makes conversations relevant. Content is produced by a variety of internal and external organizations, and it comes from multiple sources. The real cost and value of the content production and distribution is rarely understood. It must be viewed as a mission-critical asset and managed accordingly.

Analytics
Digital is highly measurable, and it is about time that we started measuring it! Interactive channels generate an enormous amount of statistics, but the key questions about digital marketing performance often remain unanswered. Companies need to define an analytics infrastructure that allows management to understand digital business performance vis-à-vis other channels and the competition, generating meaningful insights.

The goal of digital platforms cannot begin to be fulfilled unless the underlying technologies facilitate seamless interaction across rapidly evolving digital channels such as websites, portals, mobile, social, e-commerce, campaign management, and more. Companies, therefore, need to be prepared to plug and play and update current as well as future technology components while maintaining the integrated core backbone—data, content and analytics.
New mindset

To really give the consumer center stage in the organization of tomorrow, it is imperative that companies embrace a technology strategy today that helps drive consumer-centric digital platforms—critical for achieving consumer relevance at scale. Executives should challenge any current thinking which may limit their world of possibilities and prevent them from taking a leap in a new direction. Instead, they should adopt a "growth mindset" that believes in unlimited possibilities, and yearns to learn and conceptualize new approaches to problems. A mindset that is comfortable stretching and adapting to new realities and making connections across all technology and business touchpoints.2

To learn more about creating integrated digital platforms, contact:

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2 Carol Dweck has done a great deal of research on the “fixed mindset” and “growth mindset”; both are highly relevant to the corporate world, given that they influence the outcome of a strategy. See Carol S. Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (New York: Random House, 2006).
About Accenture Interactive

Accenture Interactive's 1,500 professionals help the world's leading brands drive superior marketing performance across the full multi-channel customer experience. Leveraging the full scale of more than 249,000 Accenture employees serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture Interactive offers integrated, industrialized and industry-driven marketing solutions and services across consulting, technology and outsourcing powered by analytics. Follow @AccentureSocial or visit accenture.com/interactive.

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