

# Accelerating the Delivery of Digital Experiences

Start Finished, Then Customize

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Today's** business leaders understand that delivering agile digital experiences is critical in order to engage, convert and keep their customers. According to Forrester, "Providing a great customer experience requires more than just a great product — it also takes speed and flexibility."<sup>1</sup> Speed is an important factor in engaging with customers across channels, as well as adapting services in response to market drivers.<sup>2</sup>

Companies that fall behind, however, will suffer the consequences. Gartner predicts that by 2020, "poor customer experiences will destroy 30 percent of digital business projects."<sup>3</sup>

Even for companies that are getting it right with digital experiences, meeting customer expectations has become more challenging. Changing preferences are the norm, and what resonates with buyers today could bore them tomorrow. Consumers want to interact with brands on their own terms. They expect to receive the content they need, when and where they want it, regardless of the digital device they may be using at the time.

Add to this the growing number of connected devices competing for consumer attention, and the race to deliver value to customers before

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1. "The Need For Speed: Drive Velocity And Quality With DevOps," Forrester Research, Inc., February 9, 2017.

2. "The Forrester Wave™: Low-Code Development Platforms," Q2 2016, Forrester Research, Inc.

3. "The 10 Habits of Customer-Centric Organizations in the Age of Digital Business," Olive Huang and Jenny Sussin, [Gartner](#), May 5, 2017.

the competition becomes even more complex. Against this backdrop, the ability to quickly adapt to changing customer needs and market shifts will differentiate the best companies from those that deliver mediocre digital experiences one second too late.

Marketing leaders in all industries will benefit from reading this report, which takes a deep dive into the four core concepts around delivering agile digital experiences:

- > **Why agility is critical to delivering immediate value to customers, and how that agility can keep them satisfied and loyal**
- > **The three biggest challenges to engaging customers at speed**
- > **How the strategy of “Start Finished, Then Customize” can give you a leg up on the competition**
- > **Four ways to jumpstart development and delivery of experiences that help you meet changing customer needs in real time**

## Engaging Customers at Speed Is Challenging

Many organizations find it difficult to stay ahead of customer expectations because businesses simply can't keep up with the breakneck speed of technology at the same pace that buyers can.

“We have built a world in which technology advancement operates at lightning speeds – but its impact is not just newer and newer generations of the same thing,” writes Forrester CMO Victor Milligan. “Customers are willing to experiment, veering from a linear path to try new services and new ways of doing business.”<sup>4</sup>

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4. “The Disruptive Force of Disruption,” Victor Milligan, [Forrester](#), March 28, 2017.

Here are some fundamental reasons why organizations find it hard to keep up:

- > **Scattered data:** If the teams that manage content don't know what their audience wants or needs, they'll never engage customers. In many organizations, customer data is collected and analyzed in other departments, and not shared quickly enough for content developers to make real-time decisions and react swiftly to changing customer preferences or market conditions.
- > **Organizational silos:** Customers interact with organizations in a variety of ways, from online chats with support teams, to working lunches with sales people. Because everyone's busy, these functions don't get a chance to collaborate to share customer insights, with each working in their own silo. In addition, with more teams working remotely, collaboration becomes even more challenging. This silo mentality results in inconsistent experiences, slower resolution times and frustrated customers.
- > **Complex technologies:** When technology is too complex, outdated, or doesn't integrate with other systems, even minor tasks such as updating content on your site or mobile app can take much longer than anticipated. Inefficiencies such as these result in missed opportunities for reaching customers at just the right moment.

## Customer Expectations Keep on Rising

Keeping pace with customers who are constantly switching devices, or interacting with their smart door locks and connected kitchens, can frustrate even the most savvy digital marketer. Consider this: Americans spend an average of 6.2 hours per day online with 4.3 hours on desktops or laptops, and 1.9 hours on mobile.<sup>5</sup>

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5. "'Digital in 2016," Simon Kemp, We Are Social, 2016.

Further, Gartner forecasts that there will be 20.4 billion connected devices by 2020<sup>6</sup>, while IHS estimates that this number will jump to 75.4 billion in 2025.<sup>7</sup> With access to so many sources of information, consumers will not wait for a slow website to load, nor do they have the patience to decipher disconnected experiences across channels or devices. In fact, 53 percent of customers will leave a mobile site that takes more than three seconds to load<sup>8</sup>, while a two-second delay in page load time can decrease conversion rates by 37 percent.<sup>9</sup> The price of these poor digital experiences is high.

Forty percent of consumers have a strong tendency to shift spend to a competitor if their needs aren't met, and an additional 25 percent consider doing the same.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, companies that address customer needs and wants quickly are rewarded. It's clear that speed is critical for keeping today's ever-demanding consumers satisfied and loyal.

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6. "Gartner Says 8.4 Billion Connected 'Things' Will Be in Use in 2017, Up 31 Percent From 2016," [Gartner](#), February 7, 2017.

7. "IoT platforms: enabling the Internet of Things," Sam Lucero, [IHS](#), March 2016.

8. "The Need for Mobile Speed," [Google](#), 2016.

9. "The State of Online Retail Performance," [SOASTA](#), 2017.

10. "2017 Predictions: Dynamics That Will Shape The Future In The Age Of The Customer," [Forrester](#), October 2016.

## It's Time to Change Your Strategy

If your digital experiences aren't moving as quickly as they should be, it's likely that your legacy platforms are holding up the works. Replacing these systems with modern technology that supports newer digital initiatives seems like the obvious solution. The problem is, because executives have already invested so much in legacy systems, many believe it's more cost-effective to modernize their existing technology rather than replacing it.

As a result, organizations are spending precious dollars trying to modernize existing technology that isn't ready for today's digital experiences and architectures. Or worse, they continue to work with platforms that prevent them from delivering experiences their customers want, leaving competitors to fill the void.

On the cost front, agencies in the government sector spend an average of 78 percent of their IT budgets maintaining legacy systems.<sup>11</sup> In the private sector, IT leaders expect that the number one business priority they'll need to support is improving existing applications and infrastructure, with development of new applications and support coming in second.<sup>12</sup>

Building a customized solution is also a costly option, both in dollars and time. These types of solutions often keep companies further away from focusing on what actually matters. Here's where the "Start Finished, Then Customize" strategy comes in: invest in "finished" technology that

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11. "Legacy System Money Pits – Our Federal IT Budget Analysis Spotlights the Problem," Shawn P. McCarthy, IDC, October 12, 2016.

12. "2017 Annual IT Forecast," TEKsystems, 2016.

allows you to get up and running quickly, with the ability to customize later in response to customer demand or market changes.

When Circa, a news and entertainment site for millennials, needed to revamp their site to keep up with the changing needs of their audience, they used the “Start Finished” strategy. Working with their digital platform, they delivered customers a new front end user experience and visual design, as well as improved workflows and advertising capabilities on the back end in just four months. They also migrated more than 10,000 articles and 7,000 videos in that same time frame.<sup>13</sup>

If you're wary of adopting a system that you think might not meet your needs later on, look for a digital experience platform (DXP) that provides a customizable back end and fully developed content modules like home page, section pages and article templates, specifically for your vertical. This kind of solution allows you to begin content development immediately, with the capability to scale as your needs grow. With these fully developed components in place, you and your team will be able to focus on modifying the things that are most important to your business — like refining your strategies, or creating engaging content — instead of worrying about how to lay out an article, or how content will display on mobile.

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13. Circa Case Study, [Perfect Sense Digital](#), July 2017.

## CASE STUDY

# BRIGHTSPOT

### **Sotheby's Engages Customers With Speed and Agility**

In the competitive world of art, Sotheby's is using speed and agility to help build deeper relationships with some of its most valuable customers. The international fine art broker is seeking to strengthen ties with the museum community by providing a deeper content experience for visitors through its Museum Network site, while instilling agility into its editorial processes.

Jonathan Pytell, VP and director of digital product at Sotheby's, says that although the first video-centric version of the site saw positive engagement, they wanted to extend the experience with other museum content, like articles, museum events and the ability for users to search for things they care about.

"One of our challenges is that we had a strategy and some ideas of where we were going with the user experience, but we didn't have a fully-baked end product," said Pytell. "We were under pressure to get something live that represented a good quality experience for users while still figuring out some strategic issues."

With the help of their new digital platform, they leveraged fully developed content modules and flexible taxonomies to quickly move the project forward, while dedicating more time to strategic issues.



“We were happy to apply some styles to these elements and get out the door fast, and then figure out where we might attack any user experience problems down the road,” said Pytell.

“With other systems, you end up spending a lot of time defining and building things you feel like you just built,” he said. “Instead of obsessing over these baked elements, you should be thinking tactically about how to scale and how to drive a deeper experience very early on.”

Pytell found this to be especially true while developing the art taxonomy for the site. He needed to ensure they could relate a piece of art and artist to a museum or an exhibition in a way that their editorial team could understand, while providing value to the end user.

“Typically, it can be very costly if you need to change your data model to represent a piece of content later in the game,” he said. “If you decide you need to have a relationship between different objects, or taxonomical relationships that you haven’t considered, those revisions can be very costly in terms of time and architecture. We found that we were able to turn pretty heavily against those waters without tremendous consequences in terms of project velocity.”

In addition, Pytell notes that they’re seeing increased engagement around time on site, as well as SEO benefits. They’ve also noted improvements in the time it takes to publish new content to keep their visitors engaged.

“When the editorial production team are working with a system they can understand, and that provides a good user experience for them, their velocity goes up tremendously,” said Pytell. “I think the content was always good, and users wanted to engage with it, but now we’ve gotten out of our own way in terms of allowing the user to lean back and enjoy a longer experience on the site.”

Source: Interview, Jonathan Pytell, Sotheby’s, August 24, 2017.

## How to Deliver Digital Experiences at Speed

**1 Anticipate customer needs:** Companies that take the time to listen to customers and understand their needs will be able to address issues quickly, and prevent problems from occurring. The right digital platform can help companies leverage their data in real time so they can make better decisions, faster.

**2 Act immediately:** If customers won’t wait more than a few seconds for your website to load, they certainly won’t give you much time to respond to a complaint, nor wait for you to email a coupon for the store you visited yesterday. Companies that can respond to customer needs at the right moment will stay one step ahead of the competition.

**3 Streamline workflows.** Consumers demand contextual content — relevant content that is delivered in the right channel at the right time. When it comes to delivering contextual content, automating often-used

workflows such as submitting content for editorial approval, or creating galleries or playlists, can cut the time needed to provide new experiences to customers.

**4 Accelerate time-to-value.** Delivering digital experiences with agility requires a nimble platform that has the ability to adapt as needed for all users, including product owners, developers, designers and editors. Referred to by Forrester as low-code platforms, these technologies require minimal setup, training and deployment, but offer lightning-fast delivery of business applications.<sup>14</sup> Low-code platforms allow businesses to quickly iterate on digital experiences in response to customer feedback, or market and industry changes.

To earn customer trust and loyalty, organizations need to change the way they build and deliver digital experiences. For the demanding consumer, this means creating new experiences in days, rather than months, or editing those experiences in seconds, rather than hours.

As we have pointed out, retrofitting existing legacy technology, or waiting months to build a custom solution to deliver those experiences aren't viable options. Even the slightest delay opens the door for competitors to steal consumer attention and market share.

Instead, companies that partner with the right DXP provider to implement a "Start Finished, Then Customize" approach will be able to accelerate delivery of digital experiences and rise above the competition. With a modern digital experience platform, brands can better observe and understand customer preferences and behaviors, enhancing the customer experience in real time, every time. ■

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14. "How to speed enterprise app development and meet digital transformation demands," Nick Ismail, [Information Age](#), August 18, 2016.

## THE AUTHOR



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