Choosing the Right Digital Experience Platform to Improve Business Outcomes

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Digital experience delivery is a core competency for every organization that hopes to engage its customers through digital channels. However, delivering a great experience that boosts engagement, conversions, and customer advocacy is a daunting task without the right technology foundation. This paper examines the critical role that digital experience management platforms play in enabling organizations to transform as digital businesses. It also looks at the role of Progress and its Sitefinity solution in the strategically important market for digital experience platforms.

Introduction

Delivering a great digital experience is a strategic imperative today. Poor digital experiences quickly result in disaffected customers. In fact, customer expectations continue to rise: A customer's last great experience — with any brand — resets the customer's expectations for all experiences that follow. A great digital experience is no longer a competitive differentiator; today, it's table stakes. Consistently delivering a great digital experience is a mission-critical core competency for any organization hoping to build its business online.

The importance that organizations are placing on digital experience is reflected in their level of investment. IDC research shows that nearly two-thirds of organizations have a customer experience initiative under way, and nearly three-quarters are increasing budgets for digital experience delivery.

What Makes a Great Customer Experience?

There's widespread agreement that good experience design puts customers at the center. After all, customers drive the journey to a large degree. As the journey unfolds in a series of interactions — or micromoments — customers expect the organization to engage with them via their favorite channels and devices.

Architecting an appropriate digital experience requires understanding customer intent from one micromoment to the next and providing the customer with relevant content, options, or offers. It also requires leveraging insights gleaned from previous interactions to deepen the customer connection.

What Makes Digital Experience Delivery Challenging?

IDC sees five key challenges for digital experience delivery:

■ **Siloed systems of data, content, and interaction.** Too often, organizations lack a single source of truth for content and customer data. In addition, they use a variety of separate systems to create, manage, and publish different digital experiences, including web content management systems, campaign management systems, social marketing systems, and mobile content management systems. The result is often a disjointed, disconnected customer experience.

- **Proliferation of devices and channels.** Different devices have different display characteristics. Every social channel — from Facebook to Instagram to Twitter — has its own vernacular; it is essential to "speak" to customers in the channel vernacular. It can be prohibitively expensive to deliver and support a native mobile app or a new channel when the organization must build a separate supporting system.

- **Personalization.** The need to personalize experiences across all the channels and devices that customers use creates tremendous complexity for organizations that have siloed systems of data, content, and interaction.

- **Coordination of cross-functional teams.** Diverse teams must collaborate effectively to create, manage, and deliver the digital customer experience. Lack of workflow automation makes it challenging for teams to coordinate their work and gain visibility into status and tasks. It also creates risk.

- **Rapid pace of change.** New devices, new channels, and new patterns of interaction will continue to emerge over time. The demand for personalized experiences and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to optimize experiences will grow. Organizations that are already struggling to keep up will find it difficult to change and evolve in the future.

Digital experience is an extraordinarily complex function and requires a robust technology platform.

Benefits of a Digital Experience Platform

Digital experience platforms enable organizations to manage the complexities of today's digital customer experience and position them to respond to future needs. Such platforms enable organizations to deliver consistent, connected experiences across all the devices and channels customers wish to use, in customers' native languages, with appropriate levels of personalization.
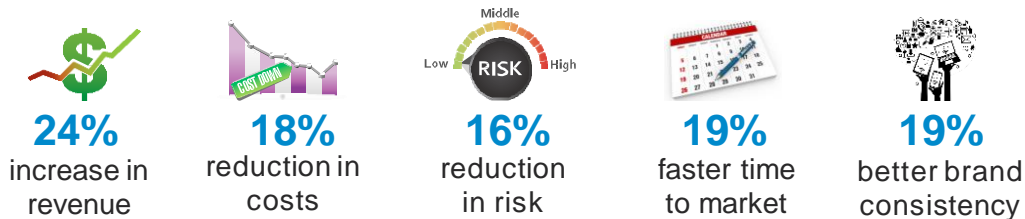
A digital experience platform can provide significant business benefits. By improving the digital experience, it boosts customer engagement, conversion, and advocacy. By streamlining the digital experience delivery process and eliminating silos, it accelerates time to market, reduces costs, and improves team productivity. By automating many of the processes involved in the creation, management, and delivery of digital experiences, it reduces risk. Moreover, it builds brand equity by improving consistency.

IDC research shows that organizations believe they can realize significant, quantifiable business benefits from implementing a digital experience platform (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Business Benefits of a Digital Experience Management Platform

Q.   What percentage improvement would a unified digital experience stack bring for your organization?

| **24%** | **18%** | **16%** | **19%** | **19%** |
| increase in revenue | reduction in costs | reduction in risk | faster time to market | better brand consistency |

n = 750

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Source: IDC's *Digital Experience Management Survey,* December 2015

Key Capabilities of a Digital Experience Platform

Digital experience platforms enable business and IT to collaboratively create, manage, and deliver personalized, omnichannel experiences.

Content and Data Foundation

Great digital experiences are part art, part science: The magic lies in how content and data are combined to create relevant, engaging experiences. Digital experience platforms provide the content and data foundation required for digital experience delivery, along with the analytical capabilities required for optimization.

From a content perspective, digital experience platforms manage content of all kinds, whether editorial content, images, rich media (such as audio and video), or new, immersive content types. The platforms also manage the metadata about the content, enabling content to be dynamically served according to business rules. We will see increasing use of AI and machine learning for autotagging — that is, automated metadata generation.

From a data perspective, digital experience platforms combine customer data and interaction data to provide real-time insight into customer intent — that is, they provide a customer journey database. Predictive analytics, in conjunction with targeting and testing, enable organizations to serve up content and offers that will resonate.

Content Authoring and Publishing

Digital experience platforms enable teams to manage and publish content independently of presentation. We can think of digital experience platforms as the natural evolution of web content management systems.

Web content management systems were designed to create and publish HTML-based experiences, and this continues to be a critical role for digital experience platforms. Templates dynamically adapt content for different devices/channels, enabling responsive design. Additional capabilities include site navigation, site search and search engine optimization (SEO), multisite management, content syndication, and customer interaction analytics. Easy-to-use authoring tools enable marketers and other business users to create and publish websites, launch sites, and mobile HTML experiences without help from IT or developers.

We've seen growing interest in non-HTML-based experiences over the past few years — that is, experiences that are not rendered by a browser. Many organizations need to serve content to installed app experiences that have custom-developed user interfaces (UIs). Examples include messaging apps, chatbots, voice and gestural apps, apps installed on connected (or Internet of Things [IoT]) devices, and immersive experiences such as augmented reality apps. Digital experience platforms provide application programming interfaces (APIs) that enable developers to build and deliver non-HTML experiences using their tools of choice.

Workflow

Digital experience platforms provide workflow capabilities that enable teams to automate their work where possible. Workflow automation makes processes more manageable and consistent, reduces risk, improves process visibility, and improves team productivity.

Extensibility

Extending back-end business applications to digital customer touch points is an important aspect of digital experience delivery, and this makes integration with the organization's business applications a key requirement. Digital experience platforms must integrate with customer relationship management (CRM) systems for customer data, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, and inventory management systems to support commerce, as well as repositories such as Microsoft SharePoint that store relevant documents. Digital experience platforms may provide integrated commerce and email marketing capabilities.

Digital experience platforms are open and provide APIs, software development kits (SDKs), or microservices. Ideally, these platforms also offer prebuilt integrations to popular business applications.

Future Outlook: Digital Experience and the Cognitive Cloud

Looking to the future, we can expect to see the trend to mobile, social, and location-based experiences continue as new devices and channels proliferate. We'll see innovative new IoT experiences for connected cars, smart TVs, smart speakers, digital signs, and wearables. We'll see content delivered to new social channels, messaging apps, and chatbots. In addition, we'll see growing interest in augmented reality apps that overlay the physical world with digital information. We believe the need to manage the resulting complexity will help drive investment in digital experience platforms.

We'll also see the trend to analytics-driven experience continue to unfold. Cognitive computing — including AI, predictive analytics, and machine learning — will play an increasingly important role in the creation, management, and delivery of digital experiences. Machine learning is already enabling organizations to generate and revise editorial content, generate optimized renditions of image or video content, and dynamically adapt content to personas. We're seeing growing interest in autotagging content, improving searchability, and accelerating time to value. Journey analytics, automated persona creation and targeting, and the use of predictive analytics for real-time offer management are areas of increasing adoption. Cognitive computing will help organizations not only increase customer engagement but also scale their digital experience delivery processes and free up staff time for product and service innovation. This too will help drive investment in digital experience platforms — especially in the cloud.

Considering Sitefinity from Progress Software

Progress Software, headquartered in Bedford, Massachusetts, is a global provider of mobile and web application development, data management, predictive analytics, and content and digital experience management software. Cognitive computing and cloud services are important focus areas for the company. Progress estimates that more than 2 million developers use its solutions today. Progress has a large worldwide partner network of over 1,700 independent software vendors (ISVs), and more than 100,000 organizations rely on its solutions to power their business-critical systems.

### *The Sitefinity Digital Experience Management Platform*

Progress acquired Telerik, a large and rapidly growing vendor of developer tools and the developer of the popular Sitefinity web content management system, in 2014. Since then, Progress has brought its strengths in application development and deployment, data and application integration, and predictive analytics to bear in building Sitefinity into a comprehensive digital experience platform. Today, more than 2,000 organizations use Sitefinity, including ABB, Air Asia, BNP Paribas, Dubai Airports, Fujitsu, Gatorade, and Wärtsilä.

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The Sitefinity digital experience management platform (see Figure 2) consists of the following:

- **Sitefinity Web Content Management,** which provides robust content management, commerce, and development capabilities

- **Sitefinity Digital Experience Cloud,** which provides customer experience analytics, experience optimization, and personalization

FIGURE 2

The Sitefinity Digital Experience Management Platform
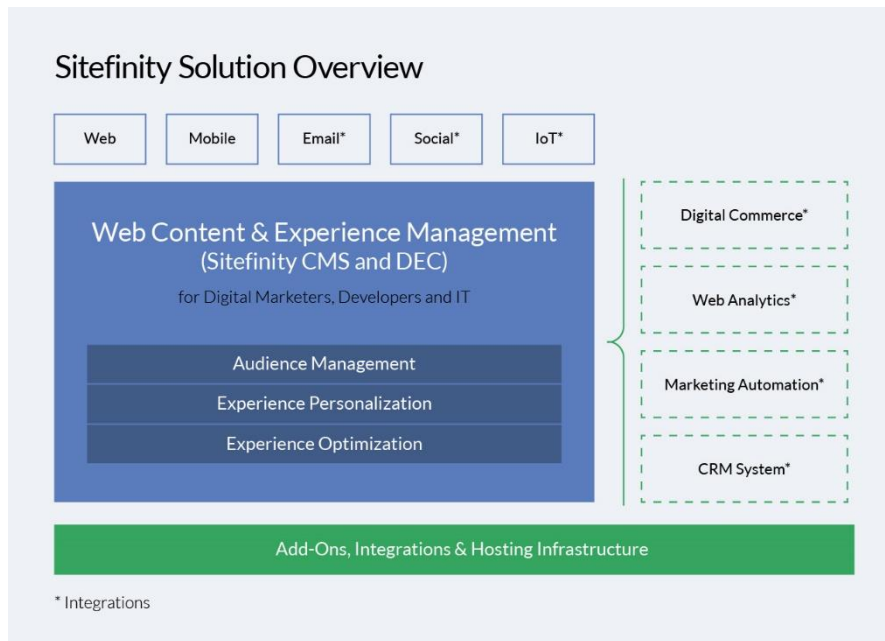
Source: Progress, 2018

Sitefinity is designed to support the needs of both business users and technical users.

Ease of use is a core platform strength. Sitefinity's intuitive UI, which provides WYSIWYG inline and drag/drop editing, and digital asset management capabilities enable content authors and casual contributors to create, maintain, and publish sites without help from IT.

Sitefinity is also developer-friendly, easy to deploy, and extensible. Integration with Microsoft Visual Studio, JavaScript tooling, and APIs gives developers the power and flexibility they need to create customized experiences. Out-of-the-box integrations with widely installed business applications such as Microsoft Dynamics, Microsoft SharePoint, Salesforce, and Marketo accelerate time to market.

The platform's robust workflow capabilities automate routine tasks and streamline cross-team collaboration — key to improving organizational competency in digital experience delivery.

Sitefinity's customer journey database, predictive analytics, targeting and personalization, and A/B testing capabilities enable organizations to optimize the experiences they deliver via web, mobile, social, email, or emerging channels.

Further, Sitefinity provides integrated commerce capabilities, including catalog management, storefront, payment processing, and order management.

The Sitefinity digital experience platform enables organizations to:

■ Quickly and easily create and publish responsive websites and launch sites with SEO and built-in search, ensuring a great user experience for all visitors, no matter their device

■ Syndicate content to social properties, mobile apps, emerging channels, and email campaigns, ensuring a high-quality, consistent, on-brand experience across customer touch points

■ Efficiently and effectively manage global websites, extranets, and intranets in multiple languages, accelerating time to market

■ Build rich and engaging content experiences using the organization's development tools of choice

■ Streamline and automate the many workflows involved in creating, managing, and delivering digital experiences; improving consistency and reducing risk; and improving team collaboration and productivity

■ Deliver a personalized, optimized omnichannel experience, increasing engagement, conversions, and customer advocacy

Progress is also investing strongly in cloud services and cognitive computing, and organizations can leverage its suite of "cognitive cloud" services to extend their investment in Sitefinity.

Challenges

Digital experience management is a hot topic today, and Progress must compete for mindshare among business and IT stakeholders in a crowded and highly competitive market.

Progress' large global network of ISV partners, vast installed base, and large developer community give the company an important competitive advantage. In addition, because integration with business applications and back-end systems is such a critical component of digital experience delivery, we believe customers running mission-critical applications atop Progress solutions will find Sitefinity a natural fit in extending their existing investments to digital customer touch points.

In competitive situations where marketing is taking the lead, Progress will need to clearly articulate the boundaries between digital marketing and experience delivery. Sitefinity's integrations with Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics, and Marketo will help the company here.

Conclusion

Delivering a great customer experience must be a core competency for every organization that hopes to attract and retain customers — especially millennials and other digital natives who have little patience for disconnected or poorly designed experiences. Customer expectations will continue to rise, and as they do, organizations that are unable to deliver connected, relevant experiences across all the channels that customers want to use will find themselves at a significant competitive disadvantage.

IDC believes the rapid pace of innovation that has characterized the past few years will continue unabated as new channels, devices, and user interaction patterns emerge and gain adoption. Whether the next new thing is messaging-based visual commerce, experiences that leverage new kinds of media such as CGI or 360-degree video, augmented reality apps that blend the digital and physical worlds, or apps installed on the growing array of connected IoT devices, organizations must be able to respond quickly.

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Further, the cognitive cloud will play a key role in transforming digital experience going forward. Organizations must be prepared to exploit it to optimize the digital experiences they provide.

IDC expects spend on digital experience management platforms to continue to grow strongly over the coming years. We believe that given Sitefinity's strengths, Progress is well positioned to succeed in this market.