Most organizations have robust processes in place to manage their data. With content, however, it's a different story. IT has an excellent opportunity to leverage its expertise in agile collaborative systems and artificial intelligence to advance the organization's digital transformation and customer experience agendas.

IT, Meet Your New Partner, Content

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Questions posed by: Adobe
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Q. How is IT's role evolving vis-à-vis the customer experience technology stack?

A. IT is taking on an increasingly strategic role as organizations evolve their technology stacks to support a wider range of content across the entire customer journey. IT has the opportunity to empower, not hinder, marketing teams in using new technologies that support a complex customer experience strategy.

The rapid growth in digital channels has marketing organizations scrambling to build and equip their digital teams with the latest marketing tools. Innovations in customer data platforms, headless content management systems, and advanced analytics require new skills and adjustments to existing practices. Heavy IT development is giving way to savvy business teams using front-end design tools and native frameworks to create the experience at a faster pace.

Depending on who owns the marketing technology budget, IT either plays a supporting role in technology selection and implementation or is left out when marketing outsources the solution to a digital agency or software-as-a-service (SaaS) vendor. With the growing list of applications tailored to specific marketing roles, there is little or no integration between them or to enterprise applications and content management systems. Today, the average enterprise marketing team runs a few dozen applications. It's no wonder we see signs that marketing organizations are tiring of managing technology stacks.

Siloed applications leave organizations at a significant disadvantage when orchestrating the customer journey from awareness to advocacy. The bar for great customer experience is continually rising, and organizations need an enterprise platform that makes them agile. Customers want a consistent, connected experience across their preferred channels and devices, which in turn requires a consistent approach to information management and the ability to deliver more complex and immersive experiences in real time. Mandates for data trust, safeguarding personal information and ensuring regulatory compliance, are board-level discussions that impact the technology stack.

What's needed is a cohesive design for experience management that can automate user interactions and support collaborative workflows. It requires expertise in modern architectures, information management, systems integration, and data analysis — all high-value skill sets that IT possesses. Organizations that lack this critical infrastructure will find it increasingly difficult to compete and future proof business agility.

Q. Are content and data equal components of a digital experience platform? What is the relationship between content and data?

A. Yes, we believe data and content are symbiotic to the digital experience — data enriches information to bring understanding and context to created or curated content. Transactional or "utility" experiences tend to be data centric, while experiences that educate, persuade, or entertain tend to be more content centric. Every experience combines content and data in some proportion.

Content that is more data aware plays a bigger role in differentiating the brand. Content forges the emotional connection with the customer. Rich, immersive, and selective content is even more important today given our short attention spans and the channel fragmentation that has made it more difficult to build awareness and brand equity. The relationship between customers and businesses will be built on cognitive empathy – requiring strategic data-driven content decisions that emphasize intelligent multi–touch point interactive journeys founded on data trust. Data and content are the "art and science" of digital experience. As content becomes more atomic in nature and the content creation and reuse process more agile, using intelligent data-driven decisioning to dynamically stage the audience scene is where the magic of a great experience lies.

For example, organizations leverage customer profile data together with content metadata to serve exactly the right piece of content to a customer based on the device, location, or time of day, as well as the customer's transaction and interaction history and other factors. Well-tagged content is easy to find, repurpose, and transform, and organizations can put it to use in automated ways to personalize the experience, boosting engagement and revenue.

Customer behavioral data should be leveraged to inform the next best offer/action and other predictive engines.

The customer's interactions with content are an important part of that interaction history. Knowing what content resonates — and what content doesn't — is key to understanding individual customer goals, actions and preferences, and the overall effectiveness of the experience.

Q. How should IT be thinking about content in the context of evolving business needs?

A. IT should think about content as it thinks about data: well managed, trustworthy, and secure. Content together with data strengthens a customer relationship, builds corporate memory of how and why an action was taken with a customer, or influences business strategy. IT has decades of experience managing data and can bring its formidable skill set to the content management discipline.

Content is relatively expensive to create; organizations incur a tangible cost whenever it is difficult to find or must be recreated. With every new channel added, there is a cost to transform and render the content in a pixel-perfect format. The level of customer satisfaction with the experience depends on flawless device-aware delivery. Organizations also put themselves at risk for noncompliance when out-of-date or incomplete content is published or distributed. New data protection laws expand the scope of risk and need to establish a data trust relationship with the customer.

When IT is left out of the technology decision, blind spots evolve regarding business requirements of the content. With IT's seat at the business table, it can offer expertise in agile development methods to encourage collaboration, content velocity, and personalization.

IT should also champion the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to automate tagging and enhance metadata in useful ways. AI/ML can extend existing solutions with "content intelligence."

IT can also provide significant value in helping streamline and automate the many workflows associated with content creation, approval, publishing, and distribution to improve "content velocity."

The need to publish content into a variety of applications coupled with the tremendous popularity of JavaScript frameworks such as React, Vue, and Angular has increased demand for developer-friendly content services. Customer experience technology stacks must support "headless" use cases with security, accessibility, and scalability that IT can advise on.

> IT should also champion the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to automate tagging and enhance metadata in useful ways. IT can be the hero here.

Q. What shared goals do marketing and IT have around content and its place in the customer experience? How should IT be approaching the technology infrastructure in terms of supporting the marketing role?

A. At a high level, marketing and IT are key stakeholders in every digital transformation or customer experience initiative. They have a shared interest in ensuring the organization can create, manage, and deliver engaging digital experiences at scale, with the agility to innovate and respond to competitive threats. They also care about "operationalizing" digital experience delivery by putting in place the processes, best practices, and supporting infrastructure to achieve this goal.

Marketing and IT should forge a strong partnership to assess current capabilities and resource skills and perform a gap analysis to guide the technology road map. Content management is a core component of the experience management platform, and the road map must give equal importance to content and data.

Both IT and marketing play a key role in meeting the high customer expectations for personalized, responsive, and empathetic experiences from their preferred brands. It is no longer enough to optimize interactions based on separate contexts; there must be continuity across every interaction. Browsing and cart activity data should inform the next set of content the customer receives. That requires an infrastructure of connected data and AI decisioning that enables every interaction to enhance each subsequent interaction, regardless of channel or app. Customer experience architectures must be designed so that customer data is aggregated from multiple sources and runs AI-powered analytics to select the best content assets.

We believe most organizations can realize immediate benefits from adopting a compliant and agile content management methodology and implementing an omni-channel publishing solution. As marketing and IT evaluate content management solutions, they should pay particular attention to:

» Role-specific interfaces designed to make individual stakeholders, including editors, designers, developers, and IT support staff, maximally productive

» Collaborative capabilities that automate repetitive tasks and foster teamwork

» AI/ML capabilities that automate metadata tagging to optimize and transform content, improve relevancy and discovery, or automate workflows and processing of creative assets to streamline manual work

Q. What benefits would organizations realize if they could scale the delivery of content?

A. Benefits should be measured in light of both business goals and technology acumen.

Marketers need to accelerate the time to launch new products and services and/or increase the number of campaigns they launch each year. Creating all the content required is a huge challenge. Removing that constraint enables organizations to move to global launches, shorten time to market, and increase revenue opportunities.

Scaling content delivery also helps organizations increase relevance and customer engagement. Marketing can personalize the digital experiences it delivers, further increasing revenue in addition to fostering customer loyalty and advocacy and building the brand.

Organizations can also support more channels without incurring significant additional costs. Brands need to "speak" to customers in the channel vernacular. Engaging customers through their preferred channels will improve customer lifetime value and brand loyalty.

Scaling content delivery also helps improve the consistency of the customer journey to similar effect. The ability to scale saves on content creation costs. Every organization we speak with tells us they need more content today to market effectively with a limited content creation budget.

The interdependency of data and content is critical to delivering the empathetic experiences expected today. Headless technologies offer flexibility in combining new types of data and content — offering marketing a serendipitous competitive advantage and ensuring the customer experience is frictionless and responsive across device or app interaction. IT can help marketing to navigate the decision to use a technology stack that has known best practices built into the seamlessly connected platform to enhance marketing automation and provide a future-proof content management, digital marketing, and commerce function.

In the future, new technologies will emerge that analyze, manipulate, and even generate content. That will help somewhat with the scaling issue. But the foundation will be the same: strong content management capabilities that are built into the modern digital experience platform.

About the Analyst

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Marci Maddox leads IDC's research on digital experience management software. Her coverage area encompasses solutions for web content management, digital asset management, content marketing, user-generated content (UGC), mobile content apps, online video solutions, customer communications management software, and rich media analytics to support the digital experience.

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