

Customer-led digital innovation strategies for sustainable growth

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29 Aug 2019

Global economies are under pressure and leaders are constantly on the search for ways to improve customer experience, innovation and growth.



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Deloitte recently reported that technology has created a multitude of ways to engage customers on their paths to purchase. But the tech stack required to engage and deliver an end-to-end customer experience can be incredibly complex and challenging if not developed within the parameters of a customer-led digital innovation strategy.

New technology trends and digital platforms emerge all the time. Keeping up to date with everything is a massive challenge and choosing who to partner with and what to implement is a difficult and costly decision.

Integration is a really big worry and instead of merely implementing once-off development projects, businesses now need long-term strategies and engagements to ensure that the best solution is developed and that it creates synergies with existing processes. This is the real key to future-proofing your business.

With this in mind, South African businesses and software development teams need to take a closer look at their approach. In many cases, this means rethinking the entire process – and making very practical changes from the start.

Clarity about what the business problem is and the desired outcomes

To begin with, the early engagements between clients and software development partners should be very carefully and thoughtfully approached. Often, the stakeholders present in early engagements are simply not close enough to the business problem.

Or, the business problem itself has not yet been properly identified and thought through. The result is that the client receives a solution that they perceive as different to what they had asked for. The entire process then becomes frustrating and far more complex than both parties had envisioned. This unfortunately wastes time and budget.

To avoid this, it is critical that businesses have a clear idea of the problem they need to solve, and the desired business outcomes. They must ensure that the right stakeholders are involved early to discuss and agree on the details of the project.

Deloitte states that CIOs and CMOs are finding they will have to collaborate more closely than ever in order to deliver not only on their company's new marketing strategies, but also on established digital agendas. Each party needs to be clear on the desired outcomes; the steps involved; and the roles that they need to assume in the process.

This will ensure that there is a strong element of both transparency and visibility and shared accountability.

A true partnership

Given the iterative and fast changing nature of technology itself, the entire relationship between clients and technology partners also needs redefining. It is no longer enough to invest in a once-off solution or 'intervention' – businesses need to view development teams as an extension of the modern enterprise environment. Once the initial groundwork has been done, the process yields a natural trust and transparency that benefits both parties in the short and long term.

For development teams, a transparent process leads to far higher productivity, as well as more consistency with regards to the quality of the software produced. For clients, they benefit from software that is not only more tailored and suited to their specific business and context, but they also achieve a solution that is future-proof and able to pivot in response to a disruptive business landscape.

As any development project unfolds and progresses, there is a continually shifting dynamic – whereby the demands of the customer, the technical teams, and the development and quality assurance managers have to be constantly balanced.

To ensure that this process unfolds in a way that both mitigates risk and supports innovation, we have Four Roles or Guardians that together guide each development project: the Product Owner, Senior Development Manager, Head Architect and Quality Assurance Specialist.

Make sure you have the right team in place

The product owner is primarily there to 'fight' for the customer. This person has a deep understanding of the customer's business and domain, and is also able to promote innovation and idea generation within that business.

The product owner not only ensures that the customer's needs and expectations are met, but he/she also plays a major role in developing the initial specs of the project. Their role is far removed from the technical aspects, and entirely focused on the business and its objectives/desired outcomes.

Moving from the customer to the software development team, the senior development manager ensures that the internal team delivers on the outcomes/specs that it committed to. This role requires a close relationship with the development team and a clear understanding of what makes it tick, i.e. which positions/roles are required, managing the workload, managing personal growth and development, checking that the team has the right tools and support, and ensuring that there is visibility and transparency across processes.

The experienced senior development manager allows for autonomy within the teams, while ensuring that deliverables and expectations are met (internally and externally).

The head architect is entirely focused on the technical elements of the process. This leader is the chief guardian of the software, and he/she works on creating best practices and blueprints to achieve the most impactful technical outcomes. The main focus, within this realm, is to develop software that has flexibility, extensibility and maintainability. Here, technical excellence is everything.

Finally, we come to the chief gatekeeper – the Quality Assurance (QA) Specialist. This person gives the final stamp of approval for any software that goes out, and he/she scrutinises every aspect (technical elements, usability, business impact, etc).

The QA assesses the deliverables from a macro viewpoint, and ensures that it meets the brief and expectations of the customer as closely as possible. In addition, the QA makes sure that there is a standardised way of automating tests – which confirm that the quality of the finished product is world-class and ready for the enterprise.

Sustainable and impactful

With this structure in place, the team can effectively mitigate risks – while delivering on customer expectations within the enterprise software environment. Such a structure is designed to enable agility and adaptability, so that customer expectations are met in a way that is efficient, structured and sustainable.

For any business today, it is critical to have a technology partner that can balance the enterprise need for speed and efficiency, with the technical need for agility and adaptability. Only when all these needs are met or balanced, do you get a finished product that can truly fuel growth and development within the enterprise.

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