SEIZING THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITY

Why the marketing-IT partnership is crucial

CONTENTS

LONDON RESEARCH

ABOUT LONDON RESEARCH

London Research, set up by former Econsultancy research director Linus Gregoriadis, is focused on producing research-based content for B2B audiences. We are based in London, but our approach and outlook are very much international. We work predominantly, but not exclusively, with marketing technology (martech) vendors and agencies seeking to tell a compelling story based on robust research and insightful data points.

As part of Communitize Ltd, we work closely with our sister companies Digital Doughnut (a global community of more than 1.5 million marketers) and Demand Exchange (a lead generation platform), both to syndicate our research and generate high-quality leads.

For more information, visit https://londonresearch.com.

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ABOUT JAHIA

Jahia Solutions Group makes digital experiences simpler. Leveraging a cloud-based platform, Jahia helps companies around the world better leverage their content and customer data while connected to their existing technology stack. With an unparalleled level of flexibility and connectivity, Jahia's solutions can be customised to meet the specific business needs and challenges of each customer.

Founded in 2002 and headquartered in Switzerland, Jahia has offices in Boston, Toronto and Paris. Jahia's customer community includes hundreds of global brands and organisations, including Ben & Jerry's, Nationwide, NASA and General Motors.

For more information, visit www.jahia.com, read our blog and follow us on LinkedIn.

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Michael is a London Research writer specialising in digital media and marketing. He was head of content for London Research sister company Digital Doughnut between 2012 and 2016, and during that time edited the European channel of Adobe's CMO.com website. Before that he was editor of New Media Age, the UK's leading news publication for interactive business from 2000 to 2007, and its editor-in-chief from 2007 to 2011. He has written widely about the sector, is a regular speaker in the media and on the conference circuit, and has lectured on the future of advertising and publishing at the London College of Communications.

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Introduction

Customer experience is now the key driver of competitiveness, more than price, choice or quality.

According to the 2020 Global Customer Experience Benchmarking Report, the overwhelming majority of companies (82%) agree that CX gives them a competitive edge, with over half saying it's their primary source of competitive differentiation[1]. That means businesses need to understand who their customers are and what they need at every stage of their relationship, from awareness to purchase and beyond. They need to do this at scale, and often in real time too.

As a result, the relationship between the IT and marketing functions within organisations has become crucial. There is, however, no 'one size fits all', no model that can be applied across all businesses to ensure a successful partnership between the two functions. Among other things, the nature of the relationship hinges on the size of the business, the sector in which it operates, and its digital maturity. It also depends on the personalities involved, the way departments and employees are measured and rewarded, and on the culture, structure and processes of the organisation.

Technology: the cornerstone of a successful relationship

However, nothing plays a bigger role than the marketing technology an organisation uses. It must strike a balance between the requirements of both departments. For marketers, it should provide the autonomy they need to do their jobs without requiring them to make constant requests to IT. Meanwhile, IT needs to know that their technology is a carefully balanced stack that feeds into itself, and any future integrations won't create complexities that become a drain on resources.

> *"Relationships between marketing and tech work well when you have strong ties between the people who choose the technology and the people who use it. Both need to know the overall direction of the business, and if their visions are aligned, it allows them to make better decisions more quickly."*
> ***Jon Bains, Founder, What & Why***
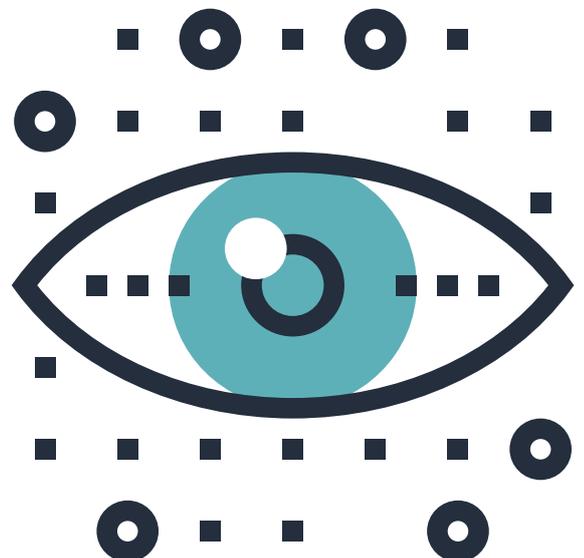
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Customer data is the common ground

Data is a crucial link across all these technologies, but it's not just a question of making sure it's shared across the marketing stack. As the basis of a customer-centric organisation, it's vital that customer data is made accessible to all the people and systems that need it, from marketing and customer services to new product development, logistics and beyond. At the same time, as privacy regulations become more stringent and people become more concerned about the way their personal data is used and stored, data security is fast becoming a business-critical issue.

For these reasons, customer data is also the ideal place to start, as it represents the common ground between marketing and IT. How it's collected, stored and used is crucial for both business functions. As the foundation of digital transformation, it creates a unified overall vision for the business towards which both sides can work.

> *"Data is an easy place to begin working together towards a shared goal, but with different agendas."*
> **Andrew Campbell, Martech Director, The Home Agency**

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Culture and organisation

With open customer data, the next step is to use it to bridge collaboration between the marketing and IT departments. Divergent priorities often create misunderstandings or conflicting perspectives. Allowing technology to bridge the gap helps showcase how much their goals are interlinked.

Crucially, outside of technology, both sides need to recognise the other behaves in the way they do for good reasons. IT may appear to be risk-averse, but marketers must appreciate that the security and integrity of business-critical systems are their top priority. Likewise, IT departments must understand that the ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances and customer expectations is vital to marketing's success.

Transparency around resources and how they are prioritised is also hugely important. This goes back to marketing's status as one of IT's many clients. Marketers are much more likely to tolerate a slow response from IT if they understand why their requests are given lower priority than those of other departments. Otherwise IT can gain a reputation as a blocker to getting things done, and marketing will start acquiring its own technology outside IT's influence.

"If IT is saying they want to be the one-stop shop for technology, but they're not willing to staff it in a way to support the marketing organisation, then there's a conflict. But if IT says they want to do all these things and they're willing to staff them, or they want to do all these things but they're not willing to staff them so they're going to give up some ownership, that's where the relationship really thrives. It's a matter of knowing your limitations within your organisation so you can deliver on what the business needs."
Justin Sharaf, VP Marketing, Jahia Solutions

Overcoming the language barrier

Another major issue impeding the IT and marketing relationship is the language barrier between the two disciplines. This is lessening as marketers become more knowledgeable about technology, but it can still be a source of misunderstanding and friction. For this reason, many organisations have created roles that straddle the two departments. This can be the CIO, business analysts, marketing technologists or dev ops.

However, it's not enough to rely on one person to resolve the cultural and linguistic differences between departments. Nor is it sufficient for there to be a good relationship between the CMO and CTO. The culture of co-operation and teamwork needs to exist at all levels. That means involving people from each department in the other's regular meetings, seconding people from one department to the other, and locating IT teams with marketing.

"There needs to be a structure, and there needs to be someone who pulls it all together, who makes sure the heads of departments are in sync and that they're talking to each other. It all comes down to communication and teamwork."
Zoltan Vass, Business Consultant and Remote Working Specialist, zoltanvass.com
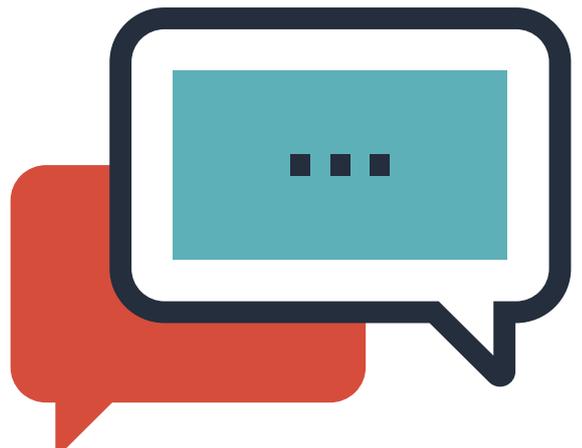
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Process

If the first step in empowering marketing and IT to work together is to foster greater understanding, the second is to formalise co-operation. There should be a clear process for working together on projects that involves all the relevant departments; legal and finance, for example, as well as marketing and IT.

One of the hangovers from the historic view of IT as a service department is that marketing tends to involve IT in projects when they think of it, and then wonder why IT doesn't respond immediately. Instead, best practice is to assemble a cross-departmental team at the start of the project and establish the project plan so that each department understands what is required of them and can make it clear how long those tasks will take to achieve.

"Setting expectations as far in advance as possible is really important. If marketing is going to need IT's help, they shouldn't say, 'I need your help tomorrow.' They need to ask for help three months in advance. That way IT can allocate resources appropriately, and it builds trust and partnership."
Justin Sharaf, VP Marketing, Jahia Solutions

Once the process has been agreed upon, it needs to become 'the way we do things.' New people coming into the organisation need to be made familiar with the process and how it works. They also need to understand their responsibilities within it. Liaison with HR is crucial here.
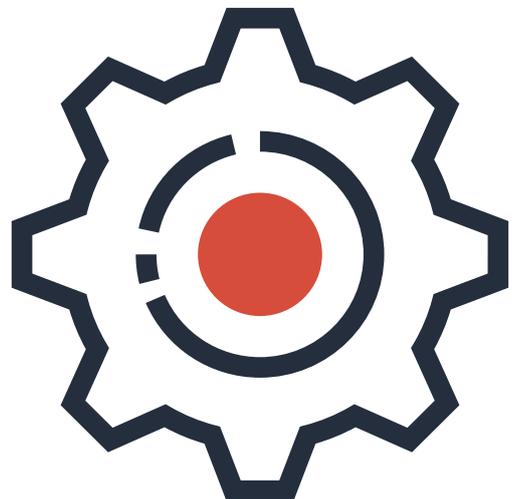
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Technology

Once the culture of collaborative working has been established and the processes embedded, we come back to technology. However, as said before, the requirements for the two sides are significantly different.

What marketers want from marketing technology:	What IT wants from marketing technology:
Flexibility Marketers need their marketing technology to allow them to respond to changes in market conditions, competitive activity and customer behaviour. **Agility** The response needs to be quick. A lengthy product evaluation, procurement and integration process will mean missed opportunities. This is why marketing tends to prefer all-in-one solutions, where built-in functionality can simply be turned on when required. **Simplicity** Although marketers are becoming increasingly savvy about technology, they still want martech to be easy to use. They don't want to have to go to IT every time they want to make a minor change to a website.	**Interoperability** For any business to be truly customer-centric, a single view of the customer is essential. That, in turn, means every piece of the martech stack must be able to draw on the data generated by every other piece, and provide the data it produces in a form every other element can use. **Security** Post-GDPR, data security is an existential issue for business. Any new marketing technology must maintain or enhance the security of the company's data, as well as supporting compliance with data protection laws. **Stability** IT needs to be certain any addition to the company's software infrastructure doesn't compromise the stability and reliability of the whole. Because of the time and resource involved in evaluating, purchasing and integrating new technology, IT will also be keen that any additions to the martech stack come with a development roadmap that matches the company's strategic aims.

> DXPs that allow the simple integration of specialist point solutions can be a way of bridging the gap between marketing and IT. They should enable the flexibility, agility and simplicity required by marketers, combined with IT's need for security, stability and interoperability.

Seizing the customer experience advantage

As we saw earlier, more than half of businesses see the quality of the customer experience they deliver as their prime competitive advantage. That means making sure those experiences are available across all the channels customers choose to use; are personalised, relevant and timely; and are consistent and coherent across all those channels.

This task has become more challenging as the number of channels has increased. As a result, the technology required has had to evolve. In the early days of digital marketing, when all that was involved was a website and some emails, all that was needed was a CMS to handle the content on the site.

As more channels such as mobile, social and apps have been added to marketers' portfolios, all requiring content, the 'headless' CMS emerged. This, in effect, detached the content engine from the website front-end, allowing content from the CMS to be directed to any owned marketing channel. However, it also took control of the look and feel of these channels away from marketers, who relied on IT to create new pages or make changes to existing ones.

This led to the rise of the hybrid CMS, which includes the editing facilities marketers were used to in their traditional CMS, but which retains the flexibility to deliver content to multiple channels.

The latest stage of development is the Digital Experience Platform (DXP). These build on the foundation of the CMS to include the ability to take customer data from across the business and process it via artificial intelligence to produce insights that can drive real-time personalisation at scale. They also include the capability to handle marketing automation, and to integrate ecommerce.

Towards best-of-breed

At the same time as this evolution has been taking place, another trend has seen businesses move away from single-supplier solutions, and towards those built from individual best-of-breed elements. Partly this is because the use of APIs has made integration of multiple solutions much easier for IT.

Partly it's because most businesses already have some martech in place, and are unlikely to want to – or have the resources to – rip out and replace their entire stack. And partly it's because every company's requirements for their tech stack are different, and not every single-solution supplier will have the capabilities they need.

As a result, DXPs that allow the simple integration of specialist point solutions can be a way of bridging the gap between marketing and IT. They should enable the flexibility, agility and simplicity required by marketers, combined with IT's need for security, stability and interoperability.

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Key takeaways

It is increasingly business-critical for marketing and IT to work together as a team. Close collaboration around a shared vision for the business will mean better decisions around technology are made more quickly, and time-to-value is reduced. It will also reduce risks associated with data privacy and permission, and better equip the organisation to become truly customer-centric.

The greatest barrier to close co-operation is each side's misperception of the other. Education is crucial to show that both departments behave in the way they do for good reasons. The aim must be to align both departments around a common goal, while respecting their individual agendas.

Once a culture of collaboration has been established, it must be supported by an agreed process that involves all relevant departments at the appropriate time.

The choice of technology is fundamental to support collaborative working. The choice of a martech and digital experience platform should be made on the basis of meeting the needs of both marketing and IT.

Get in touch

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