

The Future: Omnichannel and your brand



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Welcome to the dark side

The future is exciting if you are a consumer. In our personal lives technology has provided us with almost limitless possibilities to share our thoughts, seek out services, digest information and air our grievances. The winners in the corporate world are the ones who can mirror that experience - providing a consistently great user offering and experience, whatever the channel used. This is what the marketers have termed “omnichannel” and what many IT departments consider an integration and logistical nightmare. Nevertheless, omnichannel is the only option for many businesses looking to attract and retain customers in rapidly commoditising markets. So, no matter how a customer comes in contact with your business, whether it be through a bricks and mortar store on the high street or via a flashy new mobile app, they will experience your brand and offering in a consistent and hopefully delightful way.

Pie in the sky? No. Very hard to achieve? Certainly. But it is far from impossible if you consider omnichannel projects in terms of the overall experience you are trying to deliver, rather than a series of interrelated IT projects. After all, there is a lot at stake.

For CMOs and CIOs, providing an omnichannel experience means that some business systems will be exposed to consumers on a daily basis and the brand therefore at risk of reputational damage - should they fail. But while CMOs tend to think in weeks and months

in terms of bringing new services to customers, IT often thinks in months and years. This can lead to projects going live without a thorough understanding of how they operate together (undermining the omnichannel idea in the first place) or without the necessary stress testing to make sure they work in the first place.

Let's take Black Friday, the biggest shopping day of the year, as an example. In a recent blog, we pointed out that Black Friday quickly turned into Blackout Saturday. This was a day when servers crashed, in-store systems went down and also a day during which websites performed poorly. This left brands exposed. Consumers left stores or abandoned online carts unhappy. Some consumers took to venting on social media and others simply vowed never to return to the brand that, in their eyes, just failed them. This is what can happen to your business if you do not get omnichannel right, the first time.

The fear of failure coupled with the pace of change in the digital world, which we will come on to discuss in this paper, are forcing CMOs and CIOs together to have an open, honest and productive dialogue. What they have to figure out is how to make things work in the context of the business' objectives, how to deliver omnichannel against mutually agreed timeframes and how to minimise risk to the brand while delivering a brilliant user experience.



Stepping into the light

There are some good example of omnichannel delivered well John Lewis has always been focused on great customer experience and it could be argued that it has been on an omnichannel transformation journey ever since it was founded. So, if the likes of John Lewis, Argos and Topshop can get it right, how can you, too?

We believe the answer is in putting the end user at the heart of everything you do; test the experience and not the IT in isolation

When setting your objectives and requirements for a big new SAP project, or any project for that matter, the journey must start with communication and transparency. All parts of the businesses' business process owners together with IT have to be speaking the same language right from the outset. Each party needs to understand what is being built and what the finished product will be there to achieve in the context of the customer experience. They also have to be

honest with one another about their expectations and limitations. This may seem obvious, but you would be surprised to find out just how many people overlook these critical steps to success.

The IT and development teams need to be able to explain to the business teams, in laymen's terms, what the technical requirements are that will enable them to deliver on the business's objectives. At the same time, the business teams need to be very clear on their objectives - thinking about it from a strategic perspective and how achieving it will feed into the overall end user experience.

Creating this simple communications platform will, in the majority of businesses, require all parties to make a cultural shift. It will not always be easy, but it will be worth it. And when the going gets tough, just remind all participants that simply throwing money at a development project will not ensure a successful outcome.



Embrace the change

Much is written about the pace of technological change today. It is now time for you to embrace it. To do so, you have to be brave. You have to challenge the status quo of how you develop and test. This is because technologies and project methodologies are constantly changing - but your traditional partners such as systems integrators and offshore outsourcers are probably lagging behind. You only have to look at the rate of cloud and mobile adoption in the enterprise to know that you have to keep on your toes. After all, how can you deliver a modern and innovative omnichannel experience to your customers by using old and inappropriate methodologies that slow down the process, test the wrong things and cost more in the long run to put right?.

If your internal resources do not allow you to keep pace with the advances in technology and the technical realms of testing, you need to engage

a testing partner and not a supplier to help guide you through the pass. Choosing the right testing consultancy (and we mean consultancy, not 'outsourcer') is the most critical element to success. Your testing consultant must be a part of your team. Their consultants will be able to act as an advisor on your project. They will be able to explain to both sides of the table (IT and business), in terms they can relate to, how the project will impact business processes. They will also be able to highlight how challenging the status quo will help drive innovation into the project to ultimately deliver great user experiences.

Above all, you engaging the right testing consultants will add value. The right consultants will have the domain expertise that will help you safeguarding your brand from risk while still lowering the total cost of testing.

Test right, the first time

The proof of the pudding is in the eating as they say, so allow us a moment to indulge ourselves. Experior has an incredible track record of working with large enterprise clients from retailers to utilities. The great relationships we have built with CIOs and the brilliant applications we have helped go live at a fraction of the cost of the traditional testers - and with no P1 incidents post-live to boot - is a testament to this.

And this is all about one such a relationship and execution with Anglian Water.

Anglian Water supplies drinking water to roughly 6.3 million domestic and business customers across England and Wales. As a consumer facing business, everything Anglian Water does has an impact on its ability to deliver great and consistent user experience - no matter the channel through which the customer touches the brand. One of these channels is of course through the company's enormous mobile workforce - which includes field workers and engineers.

To ensure that Anglian Water's mobile workforce is able to provide the best customer experience, while at the same time driving efficiencies into the field, the company required a mobile solution. The solution had to accommodate all types of field-working, needed to be flexible to changes in its operating model, had to support the use of contractors and enable the delivery of operational savings. To achieve these objectives, Anglian Water commenced the rollout of the new SAP Sybase Unwired Platform (SUP).

This technology choice meant that Anglian Water would be leading the way as one of the first organisations to implement SUP in the UK. Being a 'first of its kind' implementation meant that Anglian Water was embarking on a huge change and would be challenging the status quo of its competitors. It also mean that it would need an expert partner to help it navigate the complexities of the testing and implementation.

This new technology platform required an innovative ‘outside the box’ approach. Working with our experienced consultants, Anglian Water’s initial testing focused on the main operational scenarios. This enabled Experior to robustly test the performance of the SUP and Afaria servers. We further used HP LoadRunner to ascertain the expected peak and stress loads onto the SUP server and found that it was unable to recognise the client front-end during recording. As a result, scripting was focused on the capture and posting of the HTTP messages that sit behind the client front-end. Additionally LoadRunner Controller was used to control and monitor the load to ensure the load profile was realistic and in order to launch multiple applications at once, we hosted the application on a Citrix server. We also developed a Visual Basics script to enable testing of the Afaria server’s performance.

The results speak for themselves. The out of the box innovative approach ensured the new application performed to the required load, guaranteed a good

user experience, provided confidence and reliability, and facilitated a smooth Go Live. In addition it provided Anglian Water with:

- Opportunities to increase system performance
- The ability to optimise the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) by eliminating the need to purchase additional servers
- Gains in efficiency in both testing time and costs were achieved from robust, structured performance
- Ease of use and reliability - which gave Field Engineers confidence in the system, enabling them to make a positive impact on customers from day one
- A go live that had zero P1 incidents.

We have many more examples of our work with companies such as Halfords, Howdens, Kingfisher and Twinings, here. As we say, do not take our word for it, take our customers’

Get in touch with us

Our clients choose to work with Experior for three simple, yet unrivalled reasons:

1. We behave with integrity and exude experience to improve the technical user experience
2. We bring agility and clear advantage for the business user experience
3. We deliver smooth transition to new technologies and business models, acting as a trusted adviser to the CIO and wider board.

We are brilliant at testing, but even better at delivering the user experiences you desire for your customers.

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