The Role of APIs in Media & Entertainment

The new script for delivering the experiences that customers demand

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"I think we're cursed that the love affair with TV persists in the face of all this disruption," says Roger Keating, senior vice president of digital media at Hearst Television. "It makes many in our business feel that we will be immune to the level of disruption other media markets have seen. That won't be the case." [1]

The viral spread of mobile devices, the rise of social networking, and advances in cloud computing have sent tremors through the media and entertainment industry, leading to a seismic shift in how consumers expect to enjoy content.

This presents a challenge for media and entertainment companies, who must become digital in all aspects of their business, and understand their customers' preferences like never before. They must make it simpler to join "digital ecosystems," where a host of partnership opportunities translate into broadened reach and revenue opportunities. They must deliver the right experience to the right device at the right time.

The move to digital also presents a unique opportunity to better understand your customers and how they interact with your business. For example, how could you tune a recommendation engine without a clear view of how and when your customers engage with your content?

Going digital also enables you to mask the complexity of disparate back-end content management systems and simplify the delivery of your services to an ever-expanding variety of devices. And it enables you to quickly add new products and features.

In this business brief, we explore four ways that APIs enable media and entertainment companies to meet the expectations of customers and stay ahead in the constantly and rapidly changing competitive landscape.

[1] Forrester, "Quick Take: Top 10 Cloud Challenges Facing Media and Entertainment," April 24, 2014

Play a starring role in your ecosystem

Speedy and smooth content delivery from a server to a television screen, tablet, laptop, or smartphone is no longer a cutting-edge experience for the consumer—it's become an expectation. Every interface should be simple and intuitive for your customer, but behind the scenes, a complex supply chain of actors play roles (digital rights management and ad serving, for example) in bringing content to its final destination.

The interaction among these partners, whether they provide DRM, advertising, or venue data, has to be seamless and lightning fast. An API-based approach enables this ease of partnering.

For example, Adobe, a company known for helping its customers derive value from creative assets, launched its Adobe Pass product to help broadcast media companies and service providers handle the authentication and authorization challenges that arose with TV Everywhere.

With the explosion of different devices and platforms, Adobe's Primetime Pay-TV pass team struggled to handle the unique requirements of each of these content destinations. Creating a separate native client API for every type of device could accomplish this. However, the ever-growing variety of devices made this method laborious and costly.

An API management layer was the answer for Adobe. It enables Adobe to expose and manage its data and service through a single facade. It also enables partners to consume those data and services in a simple and intuitive way.

The API management layer

The digital ecosystem moves at a far faster pace than most enterprises do. A core advantage of implementing an API management layer is that it enables new, fast-moving apps and partner integrations alongside stable, secure enterprise systems.

APIs enable developers and partners to onboard and produce value for end-customers in a fraction of the time and at much less expense than more traditional approaches. They provide the agility to adapt to the requirements of new devices and protocols.

An API management layer enables an enterprise to secure, monitor, scale, and analyze its business and operations to meet the demands of the digital world.

This in turn enables those partners to plan for new device platforms while Adobe focuses on core capabilities, and on extending TV Everywhere.

"There's no way we could have gotten the time to market that we needed with confidence without the Apigee management layer in front," says Joel Huff, group product manager at Adobe Primetime pay-TV pass. [2]

[2] http://apigee.com/about/customer-story/ adobe-primetime-pay-tv-pass

Deliver the right experience, on the right device, at the right time

Many companies who built their businesses on content also built their technology stacks on a panoply of different systems. Interoperability becomes a hurdle to presenting a seamless experience to consumers.

These days, customers expect multi-screen viewing to be simple and smooth. Behind the scenes, an API layer facilitates this seamless exposure of content, delivering it to any device, from multiple back-end systems. APIs also present a simple, intuitive interface that enables developers to consume the enterprise's content and create apps for any device, without having to deal with myriad different languages and protocols. BBC Worldwide is a prime example of how an Apigee customer used APIs to simplify content and platform management.

Delivering a retail platform with APIs
BBC Worldwide operates a complex, multi-tier IT architecture, using a variety of suppliers to provide a variety of platforms. The top U.K. broadcaster faced a challenge when it decided to pull together all these suppliers into a new, direct-to-consumer retail platform—dubbed BBC Store—that would enable consumers to buy and keep their favorite BBC shows.

"BBC Store enables the creation of an integrated platform that brings together content entitlements, metadata around that content, interfacing with financial and ID systems; everything that has to come together to create a comprehensive business-to-consumer digital services platform," says Michael Fleshman, senior vice president of consumer digital technology at BBC Worldwide.

The delivery of this reliable, global, end-to-end e-commerce platform required the creation of a set of consistent, scalable APIs. Apigee Edge enabled the BBC to integrate internal systems and transform the company's data to create the desired APIs. Apigee Edge acts as the internal API management platform for BBC Worldwide, mediating and brokering traffic from application to application and improving interoperability between front-end and back-end systems.

Read about BBC Worldwide's journey with Apigee >

Stay agile, adapt, and win

Before they arrived on the scene, it would have been hard to predict the effect that digital natives like Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube had on the media business. Many established market players, like brick and mortar bookstores and video rental companies, were toppled by these nimble competitors. And the threat remains.

Becoming a digital business—with APIs as a keystone of your strategy—is an imperative business decision that's key to compete and stay relevant. At the same time, it's a technology decision, one that lets you build the speed and agility needed to deliver the experiences your customers expect while maintaining the reliability, security, and stability of your systems.

APIs enable what is sometimes referred to as "two-speed IT," which in turn enables companies to maintain the stability of their operational systems of record while fostering the agility and speed necessary to create powerful new apps, services, and experiences.

In the case of Live Nation, remaining competitive meant growing fast. Through its 2010 merger with Ticketmaster, Live Nation suddenly found itself managing the world's fifth-largest ecommerce site.

"With this technology in place, we have the ability to expand the business without worrying if our infrastructure is incapable of growing with it," says Live Nation senior product manager Adam Colson.

"If you're growing as aggressively as we are, you can't manage your APIs on a homegrown platform," Colson says. "You need an industrial solution that can deliver the highest levels of security, performance, and developer support."

"Just making good content won't be enough. In the pre-digital age, what chance would you have of getting your content to people if you were relying on Trappist monks copying things out by hand, when your competitor had got hold of a printing press?

Publishers need to be as obsessed with investing in technology, and most importantly, the right technology, as they are about creating the right content.

There may be little chance of taking on the tech giants at their own game, but using the right tech, and employing the right people to use it, is the only way publishers have any chance of making sure all that quality content gets in front of their audience, and delivers enough of a return that they can keep paying the people who produce it."

TheMediaBriefing.com

Understand your customer's context with data

Gone are the days of attempting to forecast what kind of content consumers want. Consumer-guided entertainment and content is rapidly becoming the norm. Increasingly, your customers are determining what, when, and how they'll watch, read, or otherwise interact with your offerings.

Designing the customer experience quickly is important, but doing it accurately, in a way that meets user needs and expectations, is equally important. How do you easily gain an understanding of what, when, and how your customer's interact with you?

If you deliver a data feed to somebody, it's gone. You don't know how they consumed it or what they did with it. But every digital interaction with your business generates data. When those interactions are powered by APIs, you have the opportunity to capture and analyze the data in near real time. This in turn provides valuable context about which products and services are being used, which are most popular, and even which path a customer takes to interacting with your content.
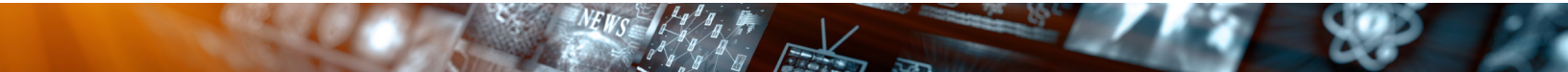
For the BBC, everything it does for its BBC Store sits behind the Apigee API platform, which "will enable us to provide recommendations to individuals and some customization of the user journey based on what they like and what they've done," Fleshman says. "The overall aim is to have a global platform that provides the best experience possible to the consumers of BBC content, whether free or commercial, while also layering on additional services and different ways of interacting with rich video content."

"With thousands of new ways to distribute content, experience it, and find it, there has been no better opportunity for broadcasters to get intimate with their core audiences. Rather than attempt to maximize revenues through a general-purpose mass distributor, studios now have the chance to engage highly focused audiences and serve them content they find highly valuable and relevant."

Forrester: "Top 10 Cloud Challenges Facing Media and Entertainment," April 2014

Conclusion

A host of media and entertainment companies, including BBC, Live Nation, Adobe, ITV, GraceNote, and Thomson Reuters, understand the importance of APIs in keeping up with the expectations of their customers in an always-connected digital world.

These Apigee customers employ APIs to do just that, and stay relevant in the face of the constantly and rapidly changing competitive landscape.

Our customers' API approach is helping their IT organizations maintain the stability and security of back-end systems, while enabling the delivery of experiences that differentiate the business in a competitive marketplace.

With the pace of innovation and disruption in media and entertainment, your technology has to face the challenges of today, while preparing you for whatever unexpected plot twists the future holds.

APIs are key to managing new devices, new competition, and new content types, and to leveraging your ever-expanding partner ecosystem.

Remaining competitive and adapting quickly requires a new approach, and a technology that is purpose-built for the demands of the modern media and entertainment business.

About Apigee

Apigee provides the intelligent API platform for digital business acceleration. Through Apigee Edge API management and Apigee Insights big data analytics, we help businesses move at the new pace and scale of digital, and enable them to predict and continuously adapt to change. APIs and predictive analytics create a powerful adaptive cycle of continuous improvement— and the faster an enterprise goes through this cycle, the faster it becomes a digital business.

Many of the world's largest organizations select Apigee to enable their digital business, including 20 of the Fortune 100, five of the top 10 Global 2000 retail brands, and five of the top 10 global telecommunications companies. Apigee customers include global enterprises such as BBC, Walgreens, eBay, Burberry, Shell, Live Nation, and First Data.

For more information, visit apigee.com.

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