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A Manifesto for Digital Adaptation

As web professionals we often find that the organisations we work for are more of a hindrance to digital success than a help.

Company culture, operating procedures and business strategy are rooted in the past and have failed to adapt to the emerging digital economy. What worked in the past no longer does and your organisation needs to evolve.

If your organisation is going to harness the full potential of the web, we believe it needs to make fundamental business changes.

Specifically we believe that the following steps need to be taken.

Establish a core digital team

Digital is not something that should just outsourced to a third party and bolted on to an existing business model. It is a tool that should impact every part of the business from how we interact with customers to how we empower employees.

For digital to become ubiquitous across a business it will need a digital team to facilitate that transformation. Although ultimately a transitory requirement, a digital team will help identify opportunities where digital can help and provide training and support to utilise its full potential.

Establish digital as an independent business function

With the potential to support almost every aspect of most businesses, it makes little sense for digital to report into any one single department (such as marketing). It needs to be an independent business function in its own right, if it is going to equally support all areas of business. If the digital team reports into a single department like marketing then it is inevitable that digital will be seen purely as a marketing tool.

Empower your digital team

Because of their technical skills, web professionals are often perceived as implementors. The vision, strategy and direction of digital are set elsewhere in the organisation.

It should be the digital team that identifies how digital can help business functions and how it can support broader organisational objectives. That means they have the authority to shape the organisations digital presence. They have the knowledge of the medium and so should not be required to blindly implement the ideas of others within the company irrespective of their effectiveness.

Appoint a strong digital lead

If the digital team is to take such a pivotal role in transforming a business to better utilise digital tools, it cannot be made up solely of junior members of staff. It requires strong, experienced leadership. Somebody with the knowledge of digital, and business experience to shape how the organisations uses digital.

This person requires complete authority over digital. They also need the strength of character to challenge and disrupt organisational culture where it interferes with the effective delivery of digital solutions.

Look to digital for solutions first

Often digital can offer ways for organisations to do things better, faster or for less money. However, many companies fail to use this potential, instead falling back on the ways they have always done things.

To counteract this tendency to think of digital as an afterthought companies should adopt a 'digital by default' mentality. That is to say, organisations should turn first to digital for solutions, before looking at alternatives. This will raise the profile of digital within an organisation and demonstrate that digital has considerably more potential.

Give digital a seat at the top table

For an organisation to make full use of digital as a tool it needs digital expertise among senior management, where critical decisions are being made. Because most senior management teams are made up of individuals who were schooled in business before digital was a critical business component, it maybe necessary to bring in this experience from the outside or give your digital lead a position on the management team.

Streamline digital oversight

Many organisations manage digital with a web steering committee. These committees slow down decision making in a medium where speed is essential.

Although digital oversight is necessary and there are many stakeholder needs to consider, a committee is not the most efficient way of managing digital. Consider instead a responsibility assignment matrix, which ensures only those with appropriate expertise are involved in decision making, while still keeping other stakeholders informed.

Become customer focused

Digital provides unique opportunities to learn about and engage with customers. In fact, online users have come to expect an exceptionally high level of service from the companies with whom they interact. For an organisation to succeed in digital it needs to become customer focused and use the medium to better understand and engage with their needs.

Move away from finite digital projects

Most organisations view digital in much the same way they would a building project. It is a one off, finite cost, followed by a small amount of maintenance. Most organisations view digital in much the same way they would a building project. It is a one off, finite cost, followed by a small amount of maintenance.

We believe organisations should view digital as more like a garden. It is something that needs to be nurtured, developed and grown on a continual basis. It needs a continuous improvement model. The metrics must be focused on outcomes, not inputs. Forget about the technology or the content. Focus on the customer and measure success on an ongoing basis based on whether the customer is successful or not in doing what they came to do.

Establish a clear strategy

We believe that every organisation needs a clear strategy for how it is intending to utilise digital. Instead of responding to the most pressing demand at any one time, the digital team should be working with other business units to systematically implement an agreed programme of work.

This strategy should not exist in isolation, but rather be closely tied to overall organisational objectives and customer needs. It should adapt to changing business circumstances and establish policies within which digital operates. Great digital strategies focus on what the customer wants to do rather than on what the organisation wants the customer to do.

To learn more about this Manifesto,

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