Outperforming your competitors takes a powerful digital foundation.
As a senior business consultant with Adobe, I can show you where to start.

Hi, I'm Sandy Martin. In my 10 years working in digital marketing, both as a consultant and as a practitioner, I've noticed a common problem as companies implement new technologies for a unified digital foundation. In my experience, it's all about the prep work. Unfortunately, that important groundwork is often skimmed over.

One customer who comes to mind wanted to set up an automated workflow that would tie in assets and delivery with their business process to help create and plan for future promotional campaigns. They knew they needed a system that could bring everything together in one place, and the good news is that they were using the right tools. However, because they hadn't spent time preparing for a unified foundation, they were still feeling the many effects of a disconnected digital platform.

Building a unified digital foundation is a joint effort that requires a multitude of teams and departments working cohesively toward your organization's goals. The truth is that most people don't adequately prepare for the task. Fortunately, there are steps you can take right now to make deploying a unified digital foundation easier and more effective.

Establish an executive sponsor.

While there are many challenges for any company transitioning to new technology, the primary hurdle to building a foundation and implementing an overall governance plan isn't technology — it's corporate politics.

Let's be honest here. At times, there are political forces within a company that — for whatever reason — prevent the best choices from being selected. And sometimes the choices made will send an organization down a path that is too hard, too expensive, or takes too much political capital to unwind.

Establish an executive sponsor.
Even though your digital team may be faced with what seems like an impossible task, you owe it to the company, project, and most importantly yourself to make sure adequate time is taken to ask the really hard questions at the heart of a solid governance plan.

That's why establishing an executive sponsor is so critical to your project's success. In my experience, I've seen how an executive sponsor provides the vision and direction needed to oversee the project, brings teams together, normalizes differing viewpoints, and determines priorities as issues arise throughout the process.

Executive sponsors are also responsible for bringing in business owners to help design the process you're going to use, identifying potential gaps, determining the cost and time of your project, and ultimately taking responsibility for project implementation.

Identify key players.

A project roadmap that doesn't include a list of key players is the equivalent of a map without a legend. Executing your project with precision takes a thorough understanding of who is responsible for each step of the process. Assigning responsibilities to specific individuals so you know who should take action and when, and to hold participants accountable should a particular task fall through the cracks.

Always remember that implementing and maximizing the benefit of a unified digital foundation takes a village. Meet with other departments and understand how they view the customer journey and where their customer touchpoints are. This will help ensure that their needs are met and that you have their support because they see how it will benefit them.

While each department may be doing good things on the digital marketing front, the customer experience they create in aggregate may be less than positive. When planning a comprehensive digital foundation, it's critical to think holistically and get input and requirements from a broad group of stakeholders and teams. Everyone must buy in to the idea that they all have the same customers and that, ultimately, they all share the same goal — to satisfy and even delight customers.

Create a roadmap for your wants and needs.

You can talk about plans all day long, but without a visual representation of the process, you're flying blind. That's why effective prep work for building a digital foundation starts with a clear vision of the customer experience you want to provide. Find a manageable starting point considering your available resources. Maybe you decide that you can create personalized email offers based on analytic data you have or will have. Fully explore your options — including creating email messages that are aware of the customer's location at the time of opening — and provide offers relevant to that moment.

Or, maybe you decide you should create dynamic and interactive content on your homepage — it's alright to create the work in stages. Do lots of A/B testing and revise your content often. Once you understand what is most important for you to accomplish, you can prioritize your deployment plan with the highest-value products first — the technology that will make the biggest difference — and grow from there. This way you can spread out the investment of time and money, without having to wait to see the benefits.

By creating a roadmap, you'll have a list that illustrates what you're trying to accomplish, while pointing out potential roadblocks along the way. For example, brands kicking off multi-channel campaigns will need to know where to appropriately store and route images to target certain segments. Be sure to walk through every step of the digital foundation from the ground up, prioritizing questions that may hold up the process and then working to solve additional problems as you go. To get you started, here is a sample roadmap from an actual Adobe customer.
Sample Digital Foundation roadmap outlining campaign flow, content needs, audience definition, and measurement vehicles.
Put the IT department’s mind at ease.

Silos continue to pose challenges to a unified digital foundation, and the disparities between marketing and IT in many organizations still exist. In most of those cases, IT doesn’t understand the end goals that marketing is trying to accomplish when establishing a single repository of content and centralized analytics solution to be used across multiple channels.

This is a common issue when companies try to build their digital foundation by, as I like to visualize it, fitting a square peg into a round hole. For example, many of the problems I run into involve ad agencies that try to dictate how brands should be targeting ads to their customers, without fully understanding how the technology will accomplish it. Additionally, companies often have very strict and archaic processes for promotional campaign development and attempt to fit new approaches into outdated processes, rather than re-architecting their processes to meet evolving needs.

This puts IT in a precarious position — trying to balance marketing needs while keeping data accurate and secure. When working toward your digital foundation, it’s important to remember not to marginalize IT. Instead, consider IT a marketing partner that you need to bring into the mix. They need to fully understand what it is you’re trying to accomplish, potential obstacles to the implementation process, and how long it’s going to take to assist in the build out. Learn to speak their language, and give them the assurances they need that you’re not going to compromise the integrity of their data. Communication is absolutely key.

Make digital excellence your new Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

You need a new mindset and new elements to measure if you’re going to be successful at creating outstanding experiences for your customers through the content you provide. Most businesses focus on sales revenue and view the experiences and content they create as they would a product brochure. But today, content generates experiences for potential customers before they ever talk to you. If you truly are going to succeed in today’s digital world, you may need to focus on successful engagement, with revenue as a likely byproduct of providing great content and experiences.

A solid digital foundation takes the right tools

Once you have the right people and processes in place, you need to implement the right tools:

- **Analytics is the backbone of your digital foundation**, helping marketers just like you measure how your customers react to your marketing efforts. By understanding how customers are responding to your predetermined KPIs, you’ll have a reliable place to start before making necessary adjustments along the way.

- **You’ll also need a content management system that gives you a rock-solid foundation for the assets you’ll distribute through multiple channels** — without the need to burden IT at every step. Use a CMS that integrates with targeting and analytics software to help you accomplish more without having to jump from one product to the next.

- **Targeting helps data-driven marketers just like you test personalized experiences across different landing pages, content, and creative to discover what’s working and what isn’t.** When integrated with the right analytics platform, customer data can be synced and better targeted for more precise test filtering.
Measuring digital engagement is not as elusive as you might think. In fact, it is quite tangible and can be measured through analytics such as website dwell-time, pages per visit, social shares, comments, and likes (including making individual content assets a “favorite”), product reviews, video views, and more. If you get the dynamic content right, then revenue won’t be far behind. But, get it wrong, and your customer will be long gone.

With a unified digital foundation, there’s no limit to how far your business can go. In fact, building your digital foundation in manageable, incremental steps makes sense and can take you where you want to be — within budget and on schedule.

Dive deeper into ways you can get started on deployment details and recommendations for all of the technology described in this use case.

For more information, visit helpx.adobe.com/marketing-cloud/how-to/digital-foundation.html

Learn more