amaze

Driving competitive advantage through efficient digital operations management

March 2015

The rise of the digital economy

We live in a global digital economy where consumers can (and do) access over a billion websites[i], on an ever widening variety of devices. The battleground for customers now firmly focuses on who can offer the best digital experience.

Investment in digital marketing is set to outstrip TV advertising spend by 2016[ii] and Forrester predicts that marketing leaders will spend more than $103 billion on digital marketing by 2019. In addition, a recent Gartner survey revealed that digital marketing budgets will increase by eight percent in 2015, specifically to enable better digital customer experience[iii]. Indeed, companies that deliver exceptional digital experiences outperform the stock market by a factor of three, while those who do not deliver have lost 34% of market value over the past five years.[iv]

From multi-national corporations – with scores of local websites across the globe – to home grown start-ups – with an array of social media accounts to manage – maintaining a variety of digital outlets is now the lifeblood of modern business.

Unsurprisingly, there is a direct correlation between the growth of digital operations and the need to manage them. What is unexpected, and concerning, is that while resources in terms of time, money and people have been allocated to help drive digital growth, the same cannot be said of digital operations management. Yet efficient digital operations management directly supports effective digital customer experience.

Historically, digital management has not been top of the agenda for a variety of reasons, not least because it means so many different things to different people. Many organisations, especially large multi-nationals, have up until now taken a fragmented approach to their digital operations; leading to silos forming across different business disciplines, with no clear lines of responsibility.

In addition, the ROI of driving digital growth is more quickly realised, in terms of better customer experience and increased sales; while the same cannot necessarily be said of the way the digital estates are managed. If overlooked, however, poor management of digital operations can, and will, lead to a myriad of costly issues, including putting reputations severely at risk. This happens when organisations fail to join the dots and see clear, actionable ways to implement digital operations management strategies.

Indeed, there are many – especially global organisations with multiple, local websites – that have long believed that effective and efficient control, of an over-arching digital presence, is simply not possible. And even those who do believe in it have long been of the view that the risks of not doing so are not great enough to warrant the time and resource it would take to implement such a strategy. There are also many others that think they have a robust digital management framework in place, but in reality, they are only scratching the surface.

$103 BILLION
ON DIGITAL MARKETING
BY 2019

[i] [ii] [iv] Forrester: Web Content Management for Digital Experience report 2014
[iii] Gartner Presentation for CMO Survey: Eye on the Buyer 2015

Digital operations models

Running and maintaining a digital estate can undoubtedly be challenging, with resources and strategy often being approached from conflicting perspectives and from different levels. Amaze has identified four distinct digital operations models that are currently being practised:

1. The independent model

Build, design and management of 'local' (being country, market, regional or sub-brand) websites is entirely delegated with no central framework. Local agencies are often used. The central marketing team, if one exists, are generally not involved and there is a lack of guidelines to be followed.

2. The devolved model
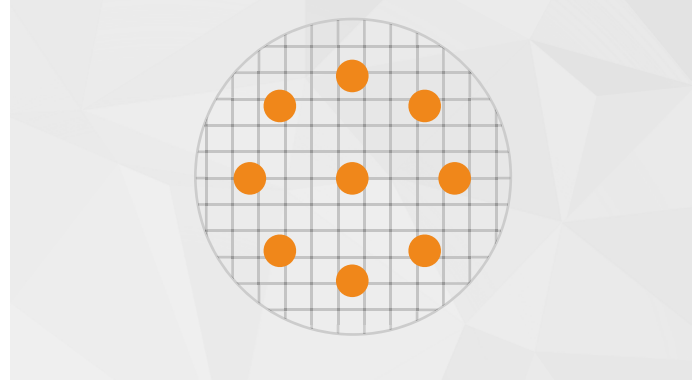
Build, design and management of the websites is delegated but controlled within a central platform and framework with guidelines. Local agencies are often used. The central marketing team are only responsible for the parent website.

3. The centralised model
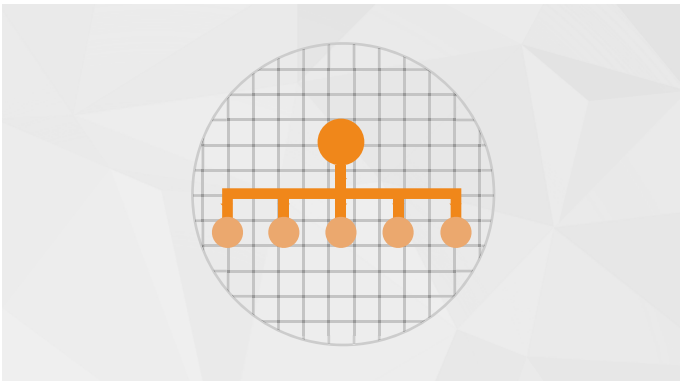
Everything is built, designed and managed by a central team. Generally it is broadcast content with no flexibility for suggestions and changes at a local level.

4. The evolved model

Local flexibility with central overall responsibility. Look global, act local, is the ethos. There is a central framework with guidelines and the build, design and management is a collaborative effort between the central marketing team and the subsidiaries at a local level.

The evolved model is the holy grail that we at Amaze urge customers to work towards, as each of the alternative models comes with its own set of challenges, even the centralised one, which would appear to be the most controlled approach. What they demonstrate is that there is not a silver bullet, but instead an overwhelming need for a change in mind-set towards digital operations management.

Recent research found, that only 10% of organisations with a very centralised decision making process in digital, report a 'strong, shared sense of purpose and identity' whereas 50% of organisations with distributed decision making as per the evolved model outlined above, report a 'strong, shared sense of purpose and identity'[v].

[v] 2015 Digital workplace survey, Netstrategy/JMC

The digital management journey: four key elements for success

To really drive operational change for digital management and enjoy significant competitive advantage, Amaze recommends four key elements that need to be considered by any business looking to implement and deliver a successful digital operations management framework.

1. Digital operations maturity
How ready are you?

The first step in any digital operations management framework should be to measure an organisation's capability to manage its digital footprint.

There is no escaping the fact that the maturity of your digital operation matters, regardless of industry or size. Implementing a continuous means of monitoring and improving the capabilities of an organisation to manage its digital estate is vital.

An organisation cannot move forward with efficient digital operations management until it develops an understanding of its current maturity, especially in terms of highlighting the improvements that can be made to elevate them to a greater capability of digital management.

Levels of maturity vary widely, from those who are unaware of what they need to do for digital management, to those who have an awareness but are at the beginning of their digital operations maturity journey, to those at the other end of the scale who have established what they need to do, and look to continuously improve.

Only once maturity levels have been assessed can recommendations for change be made and new solutions implemented and monitored for success or need for further change.
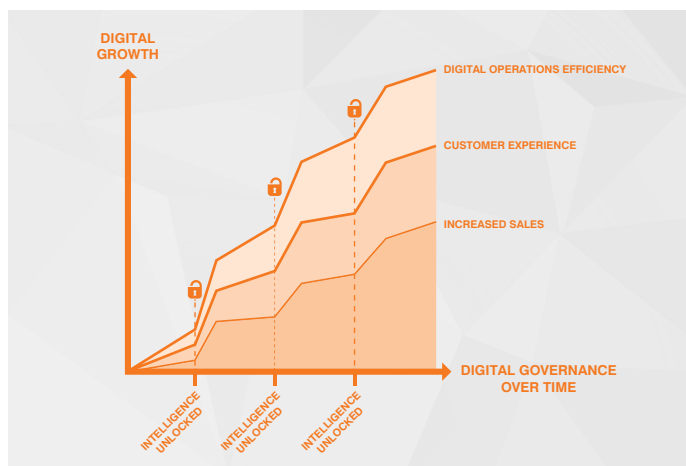
2. Digital governance
Turning data into meaningful intelligence

There is a common misconception that digital governance is merely about who has the authority to add and remove content to websites and social media accounts, as well as having a chain of command in place to ensure no unauthorised activity takes place. Though this is key, having a roadmap that clearly defines roles and responsibilities for managing a digital presence is only one point in the triangle of governance. Equally, if not more, important is monitoring that policies, standards and guidelines are being adhered to and then translating the resulting data, combined with multi-sourced information, into actionable and meaningful intelligence, to continuously improve the digital presence and the management of the web estate.

What is absolutely vital in terms of driving change and achieving competitive advantage is recognising that governance is not just about implementing a framework to control digital processes, but realising the value of the information that implementing tools to monitor this (such as Sitemorse) can produce, and creating governance analytics to embed into the process.

What is digital governance?

Digital governance is a term that is increasingly being used in the marketplace. Yet while there is currently a lot of talk about this topic, in Amaze's view very few people are adopting an approach that exploits the insights that can result from monitoring adherence and compliance to digital governance. Many organisations will have now put in place policies and guidelines and even tools to assist with digital governance, however if these are not monitored then the effort made has been redundant. Even for the more digital governance aware organisations, data and report outputs from monitoring tools are often not understood or converted into actionable intelligence, leaving them with just a small fragment of the story.

3. Becoming 'data detectives'
### Drive operational change in digital management
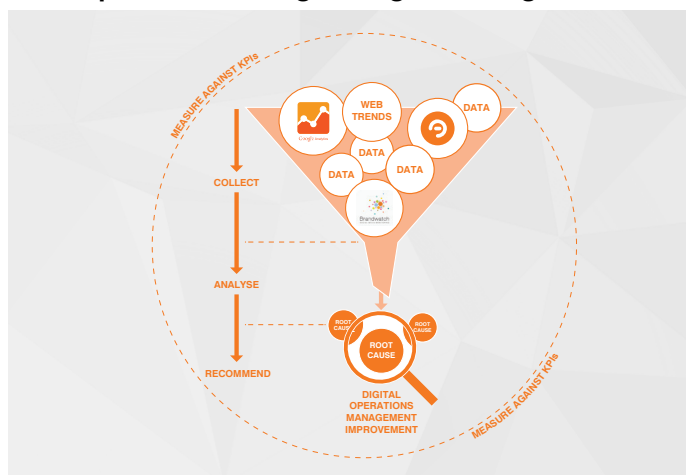
Evaluating and reporting on organisations' KPIs to highlight areas for improvement and inform future optimisation of the digital estate and its operation is, by majority, an untapped area that can give insights and help gain competitive advantage. Key to this is the ability to analyse data collected through multiple sources including

that generated by governance tools, to give a big picture view on how digital operations are performing and ensure that digital processes are as efficient as possible. For example, if a business has a very high error count on its website or sees a drop in its engagement within its analytics program, by tracking back through the multi source data to the root cause it can highlight where and why issues are occurring in effectiveness and then implement a structure for improvement in the efficiency of its operation. It may be that a local branch of an organisation is not adhering to guidelines and that a firmer protocol is needed, or that a new member of staff has joined and is in need of some training. While these issues may seem simple, translating the available data to pinpoint them can be highly complex – a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack – unless you have the expertise and tools to do so.

4. Tailored training
Context not content
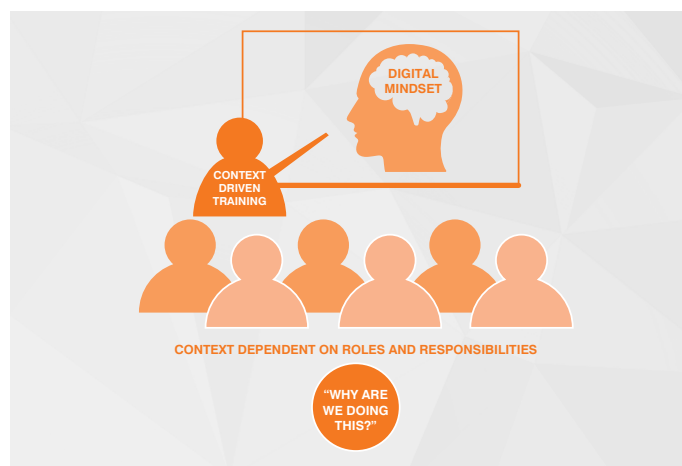
The final piece in the digital operations management puzzle, and key to ensuring that processes are continuously monitored and improving, is implementing structured training. Client knowledge can be improved through formal training sessions, Q&A surgeries (for ad-hoc training) and master classes, each providing expert-level tuition on all or specific aspects of digital operations management.

What is important to highlight here is that this does not refer to just practical training in terms of how to publish content on websites. What also needs to be prioritised as part of the over-arching strategy is the need for on going training that focuses on context of their role and their responsibilities, not just content, and ensures that staff are being as efficient and effective as possible.

Creating order from digital chaos

Encouragingly, we are beginning to see a shift in perspective starting to occur.

Organisations are beginning to wake up to the reality that a tipping point has been reached, where there is now a real need to fulfil the potential of digital operations ensuring they are efficient, deliberate in practice and measurable in order to maintain and improve customer experience. Developing a structured and actionable strategy for digital operations management is becoming a necessity.

Having such a strategy in place can not only mitigate risk, but by actually unlocking and understanding the content and data available, good digital management analysis can provide actionable insight to actively drive operational change in digital management, and deliver distinct competitive advantage.

Global digital operations management in action - a case study

An organisation, which has worked with Amaze for the last four years for its corporate website, is a good example of how implementing comprehensive digital operations management processes can significantly drive operational change, and in doing so also deliver credible competitive advantage.

Amaze reported to the organisation that the error counts on its websites across the globe were extremely high; running into the tens of thousands and that the content editors across the world were not taking action to address this. Amaze then undertook a project to correct these on their behalf, with the aim to hand back the ownership of the sites at a later date.

Amaze reduced the errors, but instead of the country level staff maintaining and clearing the remainder, the error count rose again to the point that intervention and a firmer approach for prevention was required. As a result, Amaze worked with the organisation to develop a set of these KPIs that editors needed to follow. There was one primary aim: to create a globally consistent presence.

Non-adherence to policies and guidelines would mean the country editors would no longer be allowed to manage their websites. This also led to the organisation improving its operational framework for managing its websites, establishing new roles and responsibilities at a local level. Countries are also now continuously monitored to ensure they are meeting KPIs and the analysis of the resulting data reveals where training and improvements are needed. As a result, the overall efficiency across the global network has continued to improve and it can be seen that this has had a positive impact on the effectiveness of its web solution. Twice the amount of local countries are now adhering to the standards that have been set, as opposed to previously. In addition, the organisation rose into the top five of the Bowen Craggs index of Corporate Online Effectiveness as published in the Financial Times.

Final thoughts

At Amaze we firmly believe that organisations are standing on the threshold of a new era in driving even better customer experience through digital effectiveness. Improving digital operations management is absolutely vital to this and understanding how one's web presence is being managed is not only possible, it is necessary for success.

A shift in perspective is needed from businesses, looking at digital operations management less as a means of just publishing content and more as a means to provide consistency within the digital estate - even at a global level and - unlock valuable intelligence and insight to drive and improve digital operations, and ultimately customer experience.

By triangulating insight from multiple sources, new digital governance tools can help reconnect decision makers with the impact of their actions. At the frontier of a new age, evaluating maturity and understanding digital governance will encourage and empower clients to carry out the first step towards the type of analysis that will one day be commonplace in the management of digital estates.

Those forward-looking organisations, that can see the intrinsic value of investing the time, resources and effort into implementing a new approach to digital operations management that encompasses the four key steps outlined earlier, will be the ones to ultimately profit from the very real business benefits such a framework can deliver. If digital experience is the new battleground for gaining competitive edge, then efficient digital operations management is a key tool in an organisation's arsenal.

About Amaze

Amaze is a leading, full service digital marketing, technology and commerce consultancy and was born 20 years ago inside the Learning Methods Unit at Liverpool John Moores University.

We like to look past boundaries – between countries, media channels and especially services - to deliver integrated solutions right across the digital spectrum from strategy to solution design and global implementation and ongoing optimisation. Our thinking is truly global, with solutions live and supported in 104 countries including in 28 languages for an impressive client list that includes ASICS, Pizza Hut, Coats plc, Lexus, Toyota and Unilever.

We combine the thinking of a creative agency with the rigour and scale of a global consultancy, but no matter what we're doing you'll find a fascination with human behaviour and technology at the core.

In 2014, Amaze was positioned 5th in the Digital Elite category in The Drum's Digital Census based on its financial performance, peer status and high level of client satisfaction; the agency also achieved 14th position in the Financial Poll. Amaze also came in at 22nd in the UK's Top 100 Digital Agencies Report by Econsultancy and 4th in the design and build category. In B2B Marketing's 2014 Agencies League Table, Amaze ranked 2nd in the UK's top B2B marketing communications agencies and In The Prolific North Top 50 Digital Agencies Table, Amaze ranked 1st.

To find out more about how Amaze can help you implement an effective digital operations strategy for your business, contact us on **+44(0)20 7440 0596** or **info@amaze.com.**