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How to Choose the Right Digital Experience Platform for Your Business

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Building a digital experience customers love is no easy task—the right DX platform can help.

Our lives are increasingly intertwined with digital. From how we shop to how we date, how we bank to how we access healthcare, how we consume media to how we learn new skills. Yet most organizations fail to deliver a consistently beneficial digital experience. An experience that provides people with exactly what they need, at exactly the right time, with zero friction or frustration.

Imperfect digital experiences abound. Of course, most product leaders know that this is not for lack of awareness or even for lack of effort—but because delivering a seamless digital experience is really *really* hard.

It's hard because "digital experience" is massive and multifaceted. It encompasses every digital interaction a person has with a brand, from website to app, digital ads to digital in-store experiences, email communications to push notifications, and so much more.

Within an organization, individuals across functions and teams across departments own different parts of the digital experience, but rarely are these teams operating in sync. They are often siloed, disparate, pulling in multiple directions with misaligned objectives, using different tactics and strategies. The result is a disjointed, imperfect experience for the customer—and each imperfect experience is costly.

6.3
The average U.S. adult spends 6.3 hours per day with digital media

3.6
of those hours are spent on mobile

59%
of everyday transactions are made via digital payment

55%
of customers prefer digital channels over traditional channels

*Source. **Note:** These numbers are based on data collected prior to the COVID-19 global crisis and may not reflect current levels.*

Each time your end-user is frustrated, confused, or inhibited when interacting with your brand, they lose patience. Whatever loyalty they had evaporates. This translates to long-term impact on your bottom-line. According to PWC, one in three people walk away from a business they love after just one bad experience.

1 in 3

32% of all customers would stop doing business with a brand they loved after one bad experience.

*Source. **PWC***

On the bright side, it works in reverse, too. A great experience served at the right time can strengthen your connection to your customers in a big way and help you differentiate from your competitors—who are only a click away.

That's where a digital experience platform comes into play. The right platform combined with the right strategy will allow you to confidently manage and improve your digital experience. It should help you reduce operating costs, optimize experiences and boost conversions, and ultimately increase customer happiness and loyalty.

But how do you select the right platform for your business? You start by defining your biggest digital experience challenges.

What problems are you trying to solve with a digital experience platform?

First things first. When evaluating a digital experience platform, you should focus on the organizational challenge(s) you are trying to solve. Clear problem definition will allow you to zoom in on the capabilities and features that are most important to achieving success with a DX platform.

The most common challenges we hear from customers and prospects can be traced back to two primary causes:

1. A lack of visibility into the customer's digital experience (aka The Problem of the Unknown), and

2. An inability to move quickly due to internal barriers (aka The Problem of Time-to-Value)

The Problem of the Unknown might sound like...

"We don't have enough visibility into where and why our users are experiencing friction and getting frustrated."

"We don't know how user frustration is impacting conversions and overall customer happiness."

"We are receiving complaints about poor experience from customers via support or social media, but struggle to replicate the issues."

"We aren't sure how changes to our website or app are impacting key funnel metrics."

"We feel like we're missing opportunities to up-sell and cross-sell, but we aren't sure where they are."

"We hear that our site or app is difficult to use, but struggle to prioritize the most impactful UX adjustments."

The Problem of Time-to-Value might sound like...

"Our organization is siloed and we struggle to communicate and make improvements quickly."

"Different teams look at different sources of data, which makes it difficult to all get on the same page."

"We struggle to create consensus across leadership around where to invest resources to improve the digital experience."

"It's difficult for our engineers to prioritize between fixing bugs and developing new feature functionality."

"We've been using a DX solution for months now, but can't point to a single improvement we've made as a result."

"Once we ship an experience, we move on. We don't have a way to quickly iterate and improve."

"Our competitors are setting the standard for digital experience and we are worried we aren't keeping up."

While no digital experience platform is a silver bullet on its own, the right platform wielded in a strategic way should help you resolve your most pressing challenges—including the challenges listed above.

In the next section, we outline 11 factors to consider when you are evaluating a digital experience platform. Depending on your organization's most pressing issues and objectives, you will want to prioritize certain capabilities over others. If at any point while reading this guide you have questions, don't hesitate to reach out to our team.

Solving the Problem of the Unknown.

If your most pressing problems revolve around what you *don't know* about your digital experience, you'll want to select a digital experience platform that can help you eliminate blind spots.

You should select a platform that can collect every digital interaction and provide you with trustworthy, complete data so that you can answer any question you might have. Your platform should also surface actionable insights based on this data—to point you to questions you didn't even know to ask.

If getting a complete view of how users interact with your site or app is a top priority, you should look for a digital experience platform that offers comprehensive, unsampled data ingestion. This comes down to how the platform is instrumented and its data retention capabilities.

Traditional web analytics often require that you manually tag every element that you want to track on a page so you can report on it later. If you predict users will behave one way and tag accordingly, only to discover users behave in a totally different way, you then miss out on that data. You have to stop, tag the new set of activities, and wait in order to report on what users are actually doing.

In contrast, there is a new kind of digital experience platform that leverages instrumentation-free analytics. Some of these platforms utilize one simple JavaScript snippet to index every user interaction on your site or app from day one; this ensures you don't miss a single datapoint. With this kind of platform, any additional instrumentation you do only enhances your reporting; it isn't a requirement.

Some of these platforms utilize one simple JavaScript snippet to index every user interaction on your site or app from day one—ensuring you don't miss a single datapoint.

Note: When evaluating a platform that claims to be "instrumentation-free," make sure to do your homework. In order to truly benefit from this feature, you'll want to ensure all interactions are automatically captured, indexed, and made searchable without the need to continuously adjust and add to the code snippet that sits on the page. You should also understand how the platform secures its data before adding any additional code to your site or app.

☑ **DOES THIS PLATFORM PROVIDE QUANTITATIVE DATA (WHAT IS HAPPENING) AND QUALITATIVE DATA (WHY IS IT HAPPENING)?**

> To drive significant improvement, teams that own the digital experience need to understand both what is happening and why it is happening when it comes to user interaction with their site or app. You can't fix what you don't know is broken and you certainly can't fix something if you don't understand why it's broken.
>
> Web and product analytics provide visibility into engagement, adoption, and high-level trends but rarely illuminate *why* something happened. Your digital experience platform should help you deeply understand your user's digital experience, including the root causes of any issues. It should simultaneously highlight where those issues happen along the customer's journey and the impact of these issues on your conversion rates. Every insight or hypothesis should be easily tied back to an actual human interaction that can validate and support your next steps.
>
> Your platform should provide both quantitative data and qualitative data so that you can quickly understand and prioritize improvements.

☑ **DOES THIS PLATFORM PROACTIVELY FIND AND SURFACE USER FRUSTRATION INSIGHTS?**

> A complete record of user interaction data is essential to make well-informed DX decisions. However, a data lake of that magnitude can be overwhelming if you don't have a team of analysts extracting and delivering insights. Ideally, your digital experience platform can help you surface actionable insights regardless of organizational resources.

For example, your platform should enable your business intelligence team to extract and analyze all of your digital experience data in a completely customized way. Or, if analyst resources are limited, your platform should be able to automatically surface your most important opportunities for improvement, ranked by potential business impact.

Note: Many digital experience solutions will proactively surface insights, but you'll want to understand as much as possible about how these recommendations are being made. For example, is there transparency around the formulas used? Can you validate these recommendations with individual user session replays? Proactive insights can be extremely helpful in pointing you to problems you didn't know existed. But you should have total confidence in the science behind the recommendations.

☑ DOES THIS PLATFORM SUPPORT MOBILE APPS?

If your organization has a mobile app, you will want to select a digital experience platform that can be deployed on mobile apps. Because your user is in a different context when they are using their mobile device, you can't always apply insights from your website experience to your mobile experience. In fact, the jobs your user is trying to accomplish are often completely different.

With the ever-growing importance of the mobile experience, you'll want a DX platform that allows you to collect and analyze data about mobile user interactions *specifically*—data that is as accurate and high-fidelity as what you're gathering from your web experience.

Solving the Problem of Time-to-Value.

More and more, we're seeing that digital success is linked to organizational agility. To an organization's ability to identify and fix bugs and UX issues fast. To its ability to efficiently prioritize, develop, and deploy new products and features that add value to customers' lives. These organizations move with agility because they are able to reduce or eliminate the impact of internal silos. The right digital experience platform can be a huge asset here—fostering better cross-team communication and collaboration.

☑ **IS THIS PLATFORM EASY TO IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN?**

If speed is an issue, the last thing you'll want to do is select a digital experience platform that takes weeks, months, or even years to implement. Many platforms on the market require considerable event instrumentation up front as well as continuous maintenance. This can be a time consuming and labor intensive process because you have to manually tag certain elements in the codebase during onboarding and with every deploy.

If your goal is to get up and running quickly and reduce time to actionable insights, you'll want a platform that takes days (not weeks) to implement and that can automatically collect, organize, and store all of your digital experience data without continuous event instrumentation.

Your organization may already have custom events that you've instrumented using a Customer Data Platform, like Segment or Tealium. Because custom events can add additional context to your digital experience data, the DX platform you select should be able to easily ingest these events. Custom event tagging should always be an option—but never a necessity—to gain insight into every customer journey.

☑ IS THIS PLATFORM ACCESSIBLE AND USABLE FOR BOTH TECHNICAL AND NON-TECHNICAL TEAMS?

In most organizations, multiple teams are responsible for the customer's digital experience: product, IT, engineering, customer support, UX design, etc. If your organization has a business intelligence team responsible for generating actionable reports and surfacing department-specific insights, you may be less concerned with platform accessibility.

However, it is becoming clear that the more agile an organization is, the better. According to data from McKinsey, agile companies are far more likely to display high overall organizational health than their slower counterparts.

The ability to pivot and act quickly is often a result of individual teams having access to the information they need when they need it.

This ability to pivot and act quickly is often a result of individual teams having access to the information they need when they need it. If increased agility is a goal, you should source a DX platform that is easy to use, search, and customize for technical and non-technical teams alike.

☑ DOES THIS PLATFORM SURFACE INSIGHTS THAT ARE RELEVANT AT EVERY LEVEL IN THE ORGANIZATION?

If your organization is plagued by internal debate when it comes to prioritizing digital experience improvements, you'll want to source a platform that can translate insights to a variety of audiences.

A product manager may want to understand the factors that most strongly correlate with dropout in a specific funnel. A VP of Ecommerce, on the other hand, is looking for holistic insight into the digital experience so they can strategically understand and improve the experiences that matter the most. One will need a more granular view of user interaction data, the other will need a high-level, aggregate view of the entire digital experience.

Ideally, you can source a digital experience platform that acts as a common source of insights for individuals and teams at every level in the organization, reducing back-and-forth and ensuring your organization can quickly align on its most important opportunities.

☑ **HOW WILL THIS PLATFORM ENRICH MY EXISTING TECHNOLOGY STACK?**

Extensibility is a critical consideration when you are shopping for a digital experience platform. Your DX platform should integrate seamlessly with your existing stack and provide data and insights where your teams already spend their time.

You should consider whether the platform you're evaluating has:

· Robust APIs that empower developers to enrich their tech stack with platform data and deepen the insights they receive within the platform itself.

· Webhooks to power workflows across the business and allow you to set up automations and take action in real time.

· An ecosystem of integrations that allow you to connect your tech stack and create a shared language around digital experience across your business.

To facilitate cross-team alignment and efficient collaboration, you'll want a DX platform that can act as a single source of truth. Any user should be able to find the information they're looking for within the DX platform. They should also be able to access digital experience data in the platforms where they already spend their time.

For instance, if your support team spends their time in a support ticketing platform like Zendesk, can they access digital experience data within that system? Can they quickly share that data to your engineering team with all the necessary context?

A well-integrated DX platform will amplify your entire tech stack with digital experience data, providing a common language for disparate teams.

☑ **HOW WILL THIS PLATFORM ENABLE EFFICIENT ITERATION AND OPTIMIZATION?**

Most digital leaders know that there is always more to improve when it comes to digital experience. Customer expectations and needs are constantly changing, which means you should be continuously iterating your digital experience. It isn't enough to source a DX platform that can help you ship an improvement—because even if you understand the issue, you can't always be sure that your solution is the right solution.

That's where experimentation comes in. You need a DX platform that can quickly point you to the most impactful opportunities for experimentation as well as help you pinpoint why a particular variant performed better than another.

Building an optimal digital experience isn't a one-and-done. You have to iterate continuously to meet ever-changing customer needs, which is why experimentation is critical to your business. You no longer have to guess what your customer wants, and your digital experience platform should surface powerful insights into how users interact with your website or app. It should also easily integrate with your experimentation platform to fuel smarter experiments that drive stronger results to delight customers.

Glenn Griffin

VP GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND CHANNELS AT OPTIMIZELY

Two final key considerations: Platform performance and responsibility.

Ultimately, you are shopping for a DX platform because your goal is to optimize your customer's digital experience. You'll want to ensure that any platform you implement will have minimal negative impact on that experience—both in terms of performance impact and also in the greater context of end-user responsibility.

☑ **HOW WILL THIS PLATFORM IMPACT THE PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE OF MY SITE OR APP?**

Performance should always be a part of the conversation when you are evaluating a new software—particularly page load time. It's a known fact that slow site load time correlates with user abandonment. You don't want to bring on a platform to help you improve the digital experience only to find it slows down your digital experience.

Ask your vendors to walk you through how their platform is instrumented and how that instrumentation impacts the perceived performance of your site or app for end-users.

This consideration is particularly important when you are evaluating platforms for your mobile app. Legacy practices for gathering digital experience data on mobile involve literally hijacking a user's device to take a screenshot of the application every few frames. This is extremely resource intensive. Not only does it place the burden of gathering performance data on the customer's device (using their battery, data, and bandwidth) but it directly impacts how much energy the device has to run the app, resulting in a frustratingly slow, disjointed user experience.

Responsibility should be a factor when you are evaluating any kind of data platform: What is the company's stance on protecting end-user privacy? How do they ensure the data they do collect is secure? How do they adhere to existing legislation? What do they view as their ethical responsibility?

As you evaluate digital experience platforms, look closely at their policies on end-user privacy, security, and compliance with legislation such as CCPA and GDPR.

Choosing the right digital experience platform for your business.

Digital channels will continue to become more and more important for most organizations. It is critical that companies prioritize the digital experience—each suboptimal experience is costing your business in lost conversions and eroded customer loyalty. And it's a missed opportunity to strengthen customer happiness and connection with your brand!

The right digital experience platform will help you streamline your efforts around digital experience management and improvement. Use the factors outlined above to zoom in on the capabilities that are most important to your organization. Once you've selected the perfect platform, you can hit the ground running, differentiating yourself from competitors through experience and fueling continuous growth.

About FullStory

FULLSTORY PROVIDES A NEW WAY TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE.

FullStory's digital experience platform enables businesses to continuously improve their digital customer experience across websites, web apps, and mobile apps. The platform proactively surfaces actionable insights from billions of data points, helping product teams at ecommerce and SaaS companies make digital improvements that reduce costs and reclaim revenue.

FullStory's industry-leading technology is flexible and easy to use, making it a clear choice for organizations that want to operationalize digital experience management and break down internal information silos, while upholding end-user privacy.

FullStory was founded in 2014 on the belief that everyone benefits from a more perfect digital experience; today the company has 200+ distributed employees with offices in Atlanta and London. FullStory is the go-to solution for thousands of product leaders across the world's most innovative consumer brands and Fortune 100 companies. To learn more about FullStory, visit http://www.fullstory.com or peruse our reviews on G2Crowd.