A Manifesto for Digital Transformation

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Bureaucracies are honed by the past and almost never can they deal effectively with the future.

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

We build company culture, operating procedures and business strategy around past experience. As a result they fail to adapt to the emerging digital economy. What worked in the past no longer does and organisations needs to evolve.

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

We believe that the following steps need to be taken.
Establish a core digital team

Digital is not something that should be outsourced to a third party or bolted on to the business.

It is a tool that impacts 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 help that transformation. You will not need a digital team forever.

But you will need them to identify ways digital can help, provide training and establish a new digitally friendly culture.
Give digital its independence

With digital every aspect of your business, it makes little sense for it to report into a single department.

If the digital team reports into a department like marketing it will become seen as a marketing tool and nothing more. It needs to be an independent function with a company wide perspective.
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.

Digital teams should be identifying how digital can help business functions. They should be providing the lead in how digital can support broader organisational objectives. They need the authority to shape the organisation's digital presence.

After all, they have the knowledge and experience. They should not be just building the ideas of others irrespective of their effectiveness.
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

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

To prevent digital being an afterthought, companies should adopt a ‘digital by default’ approach. Organisations should turn first to digital for solutions, before looking at alternatives. This will raise the profile of digital within an organisation and show that digital has potential.
Ensure digital has executive representation

For an organisation to make full use of digital it needs digital expertise among senior management. They are the ones making the business critical decisions.

Most senior management teams have a pre-digital mindset. So it maybe necessary to bring in 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.

Digital oversight is necessary. There are many stakeholder needs to consider. But a committee is not the most efficient way of managing digital.

Consider a responsibility assignment matrix. This ensures only those with appropriate expertise make decisions. Everybody else is either consulted or informed of decisions.
Become customer focused

Digital provides unique opportunities to learn about and engage with customers.

In fact, online users have come to expect a high level of service from the companies with whom they interact. For an organisation to succeed in digital it needs to become customer focused. It must use the medium to better understand and engage with their needs.
Embrace continual development

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 more like a garden. Gardens need nurturing, pruning and planting on a continual basis. They need continuous improvement.

Organisations need to commit to an ongoing programme of monitoring digital.

They should focus on user behaviour and be look for new ways to meet their needs. This is not possible with finite projects.
Form a clear strategy

We believe that every organisation needs a clear strategy for how it intends to utilise digital.

The digital team needs to stop responding to the most pressing demand. Instead they should be working with other business units to put in place an agreed programme of work.

This strategy should not exist in isolation. The organisation needs to tie their digital strategy into broader objectives and customer needs. It should adapt to changing business circumstances and establish policies within which digital operates.

A great digital strategy focus on what the customer wants to do rather than on what the organisation wants the customer to do.
Resources

Transforming your organisation to be more friendly is hard. But help is at hand.

- Digital Adaptation – the book
- Posts on digital transformation
- Posts on web governance
- Video presentation on digital transformation
- Digital transformation specialist

To discuss any of the themes covered in this manifesto please feel free to email Paul or contact him via Twitter.