



# *Leading the Charge Through Digital Transformation*

By Ida Cheinman

For decades, we've heard about the promise of how digital technology would change the way A/E/C firms do business. We've imagined a future where the cloud, 3D printing, augmented/virtual reality (AR/VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and the internet of things (IoT) would change everything.

This technology has been talked about so much that at a certain point it started to sound like a lot of hype.

Then it happened—the future of digital arrived. Companies in all industries found

themselves standing on the precipice of a new industrial revolution, one fueled by connectivity and one for which many A/E/C firms were unprepared.

Now, digital transformation (DX) is infiltrating every industry and, as a result, broadly impacting how all companies function. The era when firms had a choice about whether or not to step onto the DX bandwagon has long passed.

Like it or not, your firm is on the bandwagon. The question is how to stay on, embrace, and leverage it to create a competitive advantage.



## What Digital Transformation Is—and What It Isn't

Digital transformation is the process of integrating digital technologies and changing the ways in which a business operates—from strategies and processes to products and services to culture and customer experience.

Digital transformation isn't about technology or becoming more digital just to be more digital. It's not dependent on what a firm does or sells, and its relevance is not reliant on organizational structure or a specific business function or department. It's not a project or a program. It's an ongoing and ever-evolving process.

With this perspective in mind, you must approach digital transformation as a firmwide operational and cultural change. It's achieved by continually identifying and applying innovative processes and business models and by using technologies and data to deliver new value for customers, employees, and other stakeholders.

In this way, digital transformation is a growth generator and disruption fail-safe. It's the doorway to total business transformation.

This means that digital transformation is also the answer to the most pressing challenges facing A/E/C today—specifically, challenges related to:

- People and culture: recruitment, retention, multigenerational workforce, and knowledge transfer
- Differentiation: commoditization, communication, and delivering value
- Workplace: multiple offices, global companies, and remote workforce
- Operations: efficiency, enablement, agility, and integration

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Of course, as the linchpin to winning these long-fought battles, digital transformation brings with it technology, software, and data analytics. While these tools are a mandatory part of implementation, they're merely facilitators of the fundamental change that's so desperately needed. They aren't the drivers.

## Deploying Digital Transformation To Evolve Marketing

Challenges facing A/E/C firms and their marketing departments can't be solved by simply acquiring the next, newest digital tool or platform. Successfully deploying digital transformation requires taking a holistic, long-term view of marketing; building cross-functional teams; and owning the engagement, experience, loyalty, and value.

Marketing can have the greatest impact on solving firmwide and industrywide challenges by employing digital transformation to:

- **Make Better Decisions.** Having access to the right data at the right time leads to faster and more accurate decision-making because decisions are made based on real-time information, not guesswork. This not only brings efficiencies but also dramatically improves your firm's ability to deliver greater value to its stakeholders.
- **Modernize the Customer Experience.** Differentiating through customer experience has become a top priority for A/E/C firms. Digital technologies are central to firms'

understanding of audience behavior and using data-driven insights to make the experience more seamless, intuitive, and customer-centric. Digital transformation also facilitates better connection between touchpoints (resulting in a more connected experience) and enables your firm to connect digital channels with physical environments and experiences, opening the door to new opportunities with omnichannel marketing.

- **Personalize Communications.** Today's A/E/C customers expect personalized, contextually relevant experiences and content. Personalization also creates marketing efficiencies because customer engagement grows exponentially with tailored communications—even more so when personalization is done in real time. Digital tools, automation, and analytics are essential to personalizing communications so that they speak directly to an individual customer (by name, company, challenge, need, or any other variable). Fortunately, the increased accessibility of data and proliferation of technologies have put personalization within reach of most companies.

## The Facilitators of Marketing's Expanding Power

Even though it's important to differentiate the concept of digital transformation from the technologies that enable it, the fact is that mobile, big data, AI, machine learning, and digital influence are necessary for taking marketing beyond traditional





The Predictive Index headquarters, Westwood, MA. Little Dragon Decor. ©Sabine Nordberg Architectural Photography, sabinenordberg.com.

communications. Equally, they're the reason for changing customer behaviors and ever-higher customer expectations.

Putting the bigger vision of digital transformation first is essential, but executing that vision is impossible without an understanding of, well, what is possible.

Tools, technologies, processes, and approaches are what enable digital transformation to turn marketing into the growth engine for your firm.

- **Unified Data.** An accurate and comprehensive view of the customer requires robust and connected customer relationship management, data-mining, and analytics platforms. It also requires sharing customer data and insights

across departments and offices, with vendors and partners, and, ideally, with customers.

When deploying new processes and technology platforms, think beyond the marketing department and consider how all your firm's functions must collect, analyze, and share data to create and deliver a seamless, unified, and modern customer experience. Do your due diligence to learn what safeguards a technology provider offers to eliminate any chance of data loss and to stay compliant with data privacy laws.

- **Automation.** Leveraging the value of unified data enables you to present personalized communications and experiences to individual customers, while

addressing their wants and needs in real time, at each stage of the decision-making process. Delivering these experiences simultaneously is essential—and impossible without technology.

Choose technology that's intuitive, easily integrates with other systems you already have, and allows unlimited customer segments and workflows for maximum scalability. (A workflow is a series of automated actions triggered by an individual's behavior and/or based on a segmentation strategy.)

- **Continuous Optimization.** In today's fast-changing marketing environment, your firm must continually test and improve based on real-time feedback. Marketing's ability to iterate quickly and cost-effectively requires agile approaches and technologies that reduce the risk of wasted time and resources.

## Digital Transformation in Action

### Imagine a traditional A/E/C firm.

Customer data may or may not be collected. If it's collected, it's fragmented across multiple systems and teams. If marketing and sales communicate, it's often to assign fault, not share customer insights. Operations and marketing rarely cross paths. Project management holds a great deal of valuable information but keeps it close. And then there's IT, frustrated that embracing the inevitable is happening at a snail's pace.



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As a result, employee relationships break down and silos take hold, preventing cross-functional collaboration. Lack of unified and engaging employee experience results in poor customer experience. This leads to the firm being seen as a commodity, stuck in the “lowest price wins” RFP cycle—while competitors charge a premium.

**Now imagine a digitally transformed firm.** Marketing works closely with the CEO and IT to modernize internal processes, implement data-driven decision-making, and unify all functions of the firm around creating a better customer experience.

As a result, data is now collected across the entire customer life cycle and includes insights on trends, regulations, performance, and more. No single department owns a piece of data. Rather, the data is amassed by and accessible to every department, enabling cross-functional teams to tackle major challenges and contribute to the future success of the firm. Internal collaboration flourishes, and people are more inspired to develop and share ideas.

Adoption of new tools, technologies, processes, approaches, strategies, and tactics happens quickly due to the firm’s ability to make data-driven decisions. Best of all, the improved employee productivity, engagement, and loyalty translate to customers’ views of the firm as a true collaborative partner, worthy of paying premium.

Think it’s impossible to get your firm out of the commodity game and into a new way of operating and growing?

Then it’s time to take a harder look at the underlying reasons those common A/E/C challenges exist.

### **What Will Get in Your Way**

Deploying digital transformation is a complex, lengthy, and expensive initiative. Becoming more familiar with the process and what’s possible involves understanding the common roadblocks you should anticipate and prepare for:

- Limited or no integration between systems
- Lack of marketing professionals with multidisciplinary knowledge and digital skill sets
- Challenges securing leadership buy-in and companywide adoption of new technologies
- Lack of cross-functional collaboration that would enable marketing to more quickly leverage knowledge and information
- The need for broader cultural change
- Risks associated with data security and privacy

As with any large-scale effort, start with a sound strategy and assess your firm’s digital capabilities, including people, processes, systems, and tools. Establish benchmarks and identify any gaps that exist in skills, technologies, and cross-departmental practices and communications.

### **The New Role of the CMO: Leading Firms Into the Future**

The responsibility for digital transformation and its associated

budgets no longer lives in the IT department alone. The CTO now shares the leading role with the rest of the C-suite, especially the CMO.

To help its firm grow and thrive, the marketing department needs the right technology and the ability to use it without relying on IT or outside consultants. It also needs to be able to influence technology purchasing decisions.

Aside from technology, marketing’s job has already expanded beyond traditional responsibilities. It encompasses everything from increasing customer lifetime value and growing brand equity to managing the total experience across all touch points and end-to-end customer and employee journeys, including the firm’s every strategic function, department, and communication.

This expanding reach of marketing leads to the expanded role for the CMO as Chief Growth Officer, making marketing an ideal partner to help the CEO lead the digital transformation charge.

And there’s no better way for marketers to secure a seat at their firm’s strategic table than by being in charge of guiding their firm into the future. ■