

TTG

Six expert tips on how to digitally transform your business

The journey of digital transformation appears, unfortunately, to be never ending – that was the consensus of the panel on the night.



However, the experts did shed some light on how travel companies can adapt...

Defining transformation

The first step to solving any problem is to define it – but unfortunately it may prove to be never ending. Phil Scully, chief technology officer at Whitbread, said no company will ever be able to say it has been “digitally transformed”. “Does it ever end? No. Just as you think it’s ended, it starts again,” he told delegates.

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“Transformation is here to stay. That ability to be flexible, to adapt, to change, that is the measure of success. Are we nimble, are we fast to market? “Our challenge is that we have a big physical estate. Digital transformation doesn’t stop at the URL, it stops at the customer.”

Put the customer first

Adam Gill, the former IT director at dnata Travel, said looking at the customer’s online booking journey was key to staying ahead of the competition. “Why are people thinking about booking funnels, herding them like sheep?” he asked. “We should let the customers define the map, not us. Travel Republic is the most advanced [of the dnata brands]. There’s no rules to [transformation], as long as you’re moving forward, as long as you’re saying the c word – customer.”

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Alex Shchedrin, vice-president, strategic services, DataArt, agreed: “Follow the customer, because it’s not a direct journey. There are different ways they interact with us. Then ask, what’s the optimal way? Should we abandon a [particular] path, for example?”

Don’t be afraid

A strong theme to emerge from the Question Time event was risk. DataArt's Shchedrin said: "Some of our clients had a 'business as usual' approach and we had to shake them, to get them to experiment. Some ideas work, some don't – but there's a bigger risk to not doing something."

Whitbread's Scully added: "We're not risk averse – look at our hub by Premier Inn launch. You have to have an idea of ROI – even if it's negative, it may have business benefits, such as market perception [of your brand]."

Have a fresh perspective

Joanna Dobson, senior director, UK and Ireland at Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT), said she believed the appointment of Andrew Jordan as chief technology officer has helped the company. Jordan joined in April 2016, and was previously at NBC Universal International. "Since we had a chief technology officer from outside the industry, it's ramped up. Culturally, everyone had to come onboard. It's good when people come in from outside a sector – that works well for any sector."

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Restructure your teams

Hilary Roberts, senior product manager, flights at Skyscanner, said: "We've always been a digital company, our challenge is constant renewal as we try to be at the front of the digital wave. Our traditional teams had to [become] growth hacking teams; our data team had servers round the world, then it had to go to the cloud."

Act quickly

"In business travel, traditionally it would take one to two years to launch something, we'd test the life out of it. But now it's quarterly – you can't wait, otherwise by the time you launch it, it's out of date," added CWT's Dobson.

Look around you

Monitoring consumer behaviour is also key. Paul Saggart, chief information officer, Capita Travel and Events, said: “Regarding Airbnb and Uber, we had our eyes off the ball, we were doing what we do. We didn’t realise the customer wanted to use them, so we either work with those firms or we replicate the service.” Whitbread’s Scully agreed: “Disruption and innovation – it’s differentiating. That definitely drives customer demand. [Before Airbnb] nobody wanted to book a spare room. Everywhere you look, there’s that digital competitor. And how you respond will determine if you survive or not. Companies must look at the marketplace, and disrupt back.”

Original article can be found here:

<https://www.ttgmedia.com/news/technology/six-expert-tips-on-how-to-digitally-transform-your-business-11044>