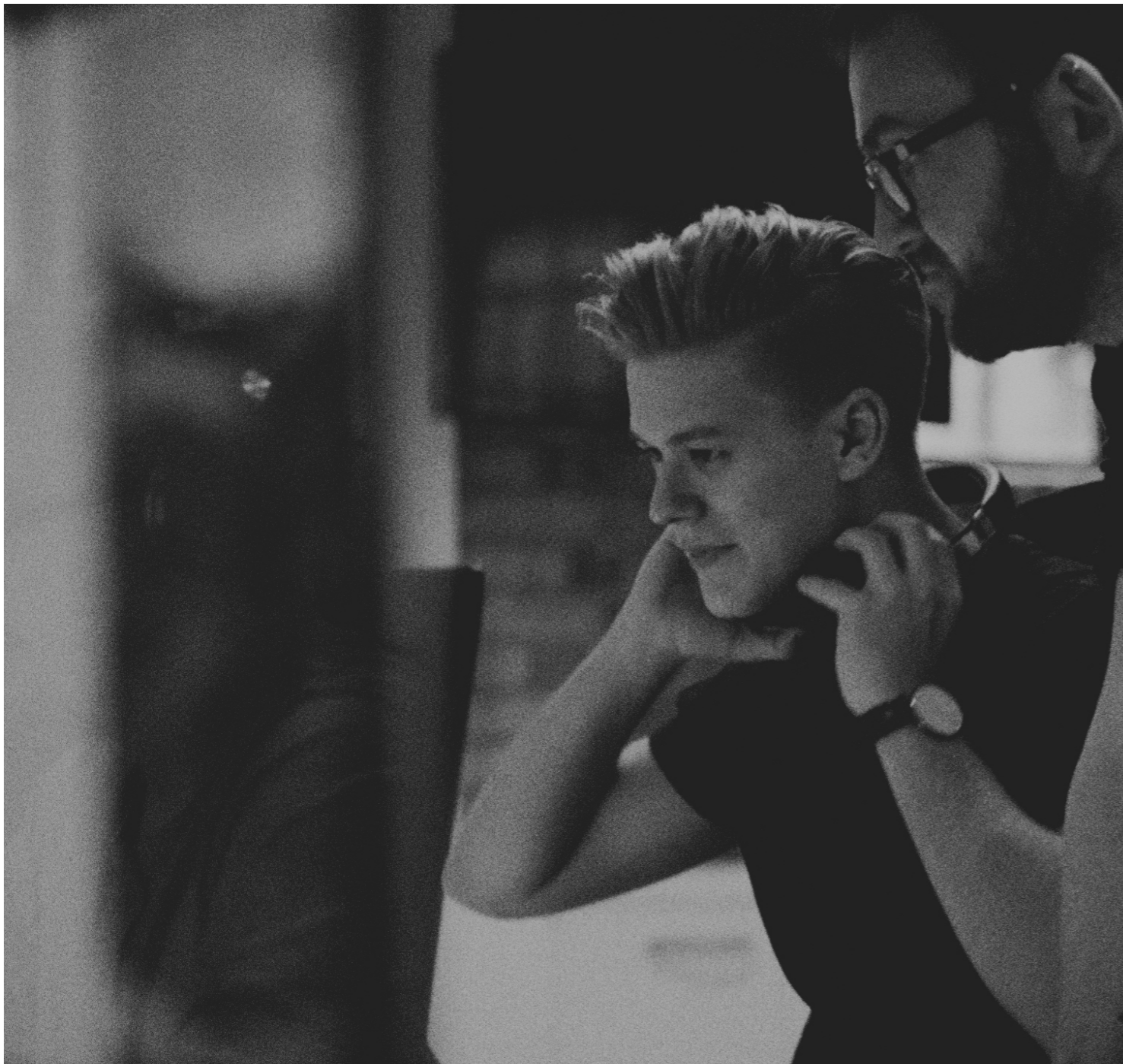# THE
GOOD
THE
BAD
& THE EVEN
UGLIER

12 eCommerce and IT experts share their experiences of replatforming

greenlight
commerce

Greenlight is a multiple award-winning digital and commerce agency that designs, builds, consults, trains and implements transformational strategies across: paid search & Shopping, programmatic display, SEO, content marketing, digital PR, creative, site design & build, analytics, eCommerce systems integration, conversion rate optimisation, user experience, affiliate marketing, and data & audience insights. With the consistent objective of achieving dramatic growth for its clients, Greenlight delivers innovative work for brands such as ghd, Dixons Carphone, Superdry, Furniture Village, and eBay in over 30 countries.

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FOREWORD

Providing a seamless, omnichannel experience is no longer a desirable for today's business, it is essential. As such a critical aspect of retailing today, how a business specifies, architects and deploys its front and back-end systems is a far bigger challenge than just the selection of the eCommerce platform technology. At Greenlight we are privileged to work with many businesses undergoing this transformation, and in this process, we have met many leaders, and experts who have tackled these projects, in some cases many projects.

Two years ago, we gathered a group of eighteen industry experts to share their opinions on the opportunities and pitfalls when undertaking an eCommerce replatforming project. We shared their advice in a publication we called 'Replatforming: The Good, The Bad & The Downright Ugly'. We couldn't have imagined the response we would get; the paper was tremendously successful and has gone on to be shared widely amongst the community of leaders who have responsibility to deliver these projects for their businesses.

That was two years ago. Here we are in early 2019 and at Greenlight we were reflecting on the rate of change since then, change that is further impacting eCommerce replatforming projects. The ubiquity of mobile, the emergence of voice, customer experience, the deep integration and orchestration of supply chain, the list is large. So, we decided we would go out again and ask the experts, and we are delighted to have gathered twelve leading practitioners in eCommerce to share their views once more. The result is 'Replatforming in 2019: The Good, The Bad & The Even Uglier'. ▶

Kevin Murray
Managing Director, Greenlight Commerce

In this paper, twelve experts share their current views. Some contributed to the first edition and reflect on the changes they have seen over the past couple of years, and the impact on projects. Some contributors are new and share their current experience and thinking. Together, the result is a body of work that draws on the combined experience of many, many projects. Experience that anyone involved in or planning an eCommerce replatforming can benefit from.

It's perhaps no surprise, but when you gather the experience of so many experts you are going to discover some common themes. Six big themes emerged in this paper, trends or advice shared across many of our expert contributors, these were:

1. Build what you need, not what you want. Too often, projects become aspirational beyond the needs of the business or the scope and budget of the project. Needs never get met and projects sit in the under-performing or failed categories.

2. The number of stakeholders has grown. Previously an eCommerce replatforming project involved a relatively small group of business stakeholders. Now, because of the scale of these projects, large stakeholder groups from across a business are involved which, if not managed effectively, can make decision making slow, or sub-optimal.

3. Measurement and metrics are critical to project success. Would seem obvious, but so often mis-managed with measures being misaligned with the business strategy, left until the end of the project rather than being

taken throughout, or set as so unachievable the project falls into question.

4. Build in contingency. They say that in life there are only two certainties, taxes and death. With an eCommerce project there is one certainty, the project scope or cost, or both, will change so build in contingency at the outset. Our experts offer some great advice on how to manage this process!

5. Microservices and APIs are growing. The days of immense platforms trying to deliver every business process are gone. Just look at what is happening in the IBM WebSphere and Oracle ATG worlds. The direction is towards more flexible, lightweight platforms operating within an ecosystem of specially developed microservices handling specific business processes like payment processing, reviews, search, etc.

6. Digital disruption is unavoidable. If you haven't begun to digitally transform, it's possibly already too late. There's still a window for putting the right digital strategy in place. But it will not stay open for long.

Outside of these big themes, our experts share their views, opinions and experiences on a whole range of other topics that affect the success of an eCommerce replatforming project. I am sure you'll find some valuable insights in the paper, I certainly have!

It remains for me to say an enormous thank you to our contributors for their time and expertise, and to say that I hope you enjoy and find value in the paper.

OUR EXPERTS

Andrew Martin International
Mike Durbridge
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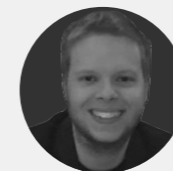**Prospero Commerce**
David Worby
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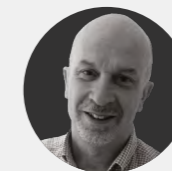Managing Director
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Paul Bratcher
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"REPLATFORMING IN A VERY LARGE RETAIL BUSINESS REQUIRES SUPREME CONFIDENCE IN THE PLATFORM.

Mike Durbridge
CEO, Andrew Martin International

With 20 years' experience leading Digital, Sales, Marketing and Operations divisions of companies including Vodafone, B&Q, Kingfisher, Mike is now CEO of Andrew Martin, a leading Interior Design Furnishings company. During his career, Mike has led a number of digital replatforming programs each one unique to the industry and customer needs in that market.

ANDREW MARTIN

What has changed in the past two years?

That's a good question, and you could say a lot has changed. Perhaps the biggest change has been the shift in favour towards self-built using open source platforms. The large, closed, proprietary platforms of the past are really starting to struggle, mainly because they require so much development time to integrate into other systems. The vendors of the big platforms try to get around the problem with 'proofs of concept', but this isn't really an answer. The open source route is bringing about a lot of agility, the ability to try, fail fast, and try something else, essential for a small retailer.

Is speed and agility necessary for all retailers?

I think that for the big guys they do have a dilemma. Replatforming in a very large retail business requires supreme confidence in the platform and perhaps inevitably, the old adage of 'never being fired for buying IBM or Oracle' kicks in. Agility becomes a less compelling reason compared to stability. In the medium to long term this may become a disadvantage to these retailers, but at the moment, you would be a bold leader taking the more 'agile' open source choice. For the smaller retailer then certainly speed, choice, flexibility, agility - these are all essential and far more accessible through the open source SaaS and Cloud platforms of today.

Has the business case to replatform changed?

Definitely, if anything it is now more complex and takes longer. It is a bigger decision. It is certainly a more democratic process with more stakeholders than in the past. Commerce, ops, marketing, digital, CX / Service, Tech, are all likely to be involved now and gaining consensus across a group of decision-makers this diverse is challenging. In the past the business case was built straight forwardly on cost and extra sales, but now factors like brand sentiment, engagement and customer experience are coming into the business case. In some respects, it is like building three or four business cases in one.

Increasingly important in the business case is the website. The website is an immediate perception about the retailer and exposes to the customer the physical experience of inter-departmental working, policies, and processes. It causes a customer to ask, is this easy? Does it make sense? When I have a problem, is there an easy solution? I use the analogy of the TV show presented by Gok Wan, 'how to look good naked', the website really is the 'retailer naked'. There's nowhere to hide.

So, what about the future?

There is no doubt that AI and automation are going to play a big part in the future of replatforming. As search becomes increasingly voice and image driven, the platform, along with the integration into back-end systems will play a crucial role. I also think that there will be more focus on process rather than work-arounds to ensure that the customer experience is excellent and that the right information is in front of the right customers at the right time. Predictive technologies will enable the redeployment of people in the business, again to better serve the customers' experience.

> ## "
> # THE WHOLE IDEA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS BECOMING SOMETHING OF A CLICHÉ.

David Kohn
Customer & eCommerce Director, Heal's

David is a multichannel retail leader with a career in retail spanning over 25 years. During that time he has held senior positions with major high street names including WHSmith, Waterstones, Borders and Snow+Rock. His most recent role is Customer & eCommerce Director at furniture retailer, Heal's, which he joined in 2016 shortly after the retailer replatformed from Venda to Magento 1.

HEAL'S

Replatforming, has it changed in the past two years?

There's no doubt that the replatforming of an eCommerce site is still a major undertaking, especially when complex integrations to ERP and other systems are involved. That said, there appears to be a greater acknowledgement by the platform vendors of this complexity, and this has led to efforts by them to help in the process. Generally speaking I feel that vendors are now providing more tools and middleware to assist a migration, which, alongside a trusted integration partner, can help. I wouldn't say it's easier but perhaps it can be smoother as a result.

An emerging eco-system

With the growth of cloud-based platforms and a more open approach to APIs there is now a broad ecosystem that supports each of the major platforms. The increasing numbers of plug-in services like search, payments, personalisation etc. mean the platform can be changed significantly, or indeed replaced, with less disruption than when these services are integrated or customised as part of the platform. I can see this approach expanding to the point where the platform (containing core functionality) could be swapped through a fairly straightforward process and so reduce the time and cost of replatforming.

So, are the drivers for replatforming still the same?

Fundamentally, yes. The big drivers like internationalisation, the broadening of an offer, new ways of selling, scalability, cost and efficiency, these are still the basis for replatforming. But another big driver of change is the constant drive for customer experience improvement and the desire to make customer experience more consistent across channels. This means that the mix of stakeholders involved in the process is broadening. Whereas a few years back, it would be driven almost entirely by the eCommerce Director, now most parties across the business have to get involved.

Is 'digital transformation' a thing?

The whole idea of digital transformation is becoming something of a cliche. If there is such a thing, it's about redefining the roles that stores and websites and online and offline marketing now play in acquiring, developing and serving customers. Some things are more important now than they were, others less and, of course, this affects budgets and resources. And, some ways of doing things do need to be changed. But whatever your 'digital strategy' is, it is only ever a part of a wider strategy for delivering your brand values and your customer proposition.

So, would you have done anything differently?

When I came into Heal's the replatforming project was underway and this also included changing the ERP and other systems. We came through this, but I certainly wouldn't advocate this approach to systems change. One at a time would suffice! Due diligence is so important. Had we been aware of the plans for Magento 1 ('end of life' in June 2020) we probably wouldn't have chosen it. Lastly, I'm not an advocate of the RFP process and even less so now. There aren't vast differences between platforms today and so if you have to run an RFP then do so only for the complex aspects of your requirements. I wouldn't waste time running the RFP for everything.

> ## "
> # THE MOST CRITICAL PART OF THE PROJECT'S SUCCESS WAS THE TOTAL BUY-IN OF OUR SI.

Anysley Peet
eCommerce Manager, Cox & Cox

An expert in eCommerce project management, Aynsley has successfully coordinated the integration of multiple website builds onto new eCommerce platforms (Hybris, Saleforce Commerce Cloud and Magento), his most recent being the migration of the Cox & Cox website from Magento 1 to Magento 2. This latest project involved the integration of a new ERP, Warehouse Management System, Online Payment Systems, Email Marketing Programs, Site Search and Third-Party Review Collection.

Cox & Cox

IN AYNSLEY'S WORDS

Navigating major system changes

At Cox & Cox we took the radical decision to make a series of significant system changes all in one go. We had been running Magento 1 for our website, as our ERP and Warehouse Management software, but to support growth we took the decision to bring new systems in for all of these applications. The choices we made were Magento 2 for the website, NetSuite and Microsoft Dynamics for our ERP and Ware–systems for Warehouse Management. I wouldn't advocate this strategy, but necessity was driving our approach.

We initially contacted vendors in August 2016. By November 2016 we were signing off deals and we started implementation in January 2017. If this wasn't enough, our plan was to go live in August 2017 and for all systems to go live on the same day! This wasn't going to be a change for the faint-hearted.

Change drivers

The business was becoming constrained by our Magento 1 environment and with constraints in ERP and warehouse management too, it was inevitable that all of these systems would need replacing together.

Top of our list of drivers for change was the need to support our plans for growth. Systems that were going to work well together was important. A mobile responsive website was critical, as was the ability for us to really showcase our products online. Selling a high-quality product set needs excellent display capabilities. In such a competitive space, SEO is also critical, so a site that is secure and would enable us to build excellent indexing properties was important.

Managing the project

The most critical part of the project's success was the total buy-in of our SI. Selecting our SI partner and having them work as fully integrated members of our team was probably the best decision we made. It was also essential that stakeholders from across the business were involved, and active in the project from day one. The stakeholder group represented everyone from the business owner to eCommerce, finance, marketing, vendors and SI.

The stakeholder group met weekly throughout the project, tracking the 'true-path' project plan. This support was especially important during development and testing, areas that we doubled up on to ensure we completed as much testing as possible across all new systems and processes.

And what about advice?

Well firstly I wouldn't advocate such a major change all in one go! Our circumstances were exceptional, but given the choice you would probably make these changes separately.

Be sure to get the upfront backing of all stakeholders, and to this end, make sure that you really do have all stakeholders identified. The areas of the business now impacted by website changes has expanded significantly in recent years.

Lastly, select and hire an SI that you can trust. One who is prepared to become part of the team, take ownership and reach compromises if needed. And build contingency into any budgets you set, probably 10-20%, as there will always, always be a surprise!

> ## MANY PROJECTS WILL FAIL BECAUSE PROCESSES AND PEOPLE HAVEN'T BEEN PROPERLY MANAGED.

Jim Herbert

eCommerce Technology Entrepreneur and Investor

A veteran with over 80 eCommerce implementations since 1999, Jim has been involved in replatforming clients onto package-based solutions such as Oracle ATG, SAP Hybris, Shopify and Magento, as well as bespoke micro-services implementations. As both a programmer and running his own Systems Integrator, Jim has many insights into the challenges involved in moving to a new platform.

What changes have you seen within the industry in the past two years?

Today's eCommerce solutions are increasingly becoming a turnkey commodity with the larger vendor-owned platforms. The open source packages and the smaller, natively cloud-based offerings all coalescing around a similar set of features and functions that reflect the maturity of the eCommerce user experience and retail space.

This maturity of the digital industry has also led to larger resource pool of front-end developers who are used to writing rich user experiences in native code and calling functionality through APIs. Coupled with good component-based architectural principals, cloud-based unlimited scaling, and a need to differentiate customer experiences, this is driving the move toward microservice eCommerce platforms.

How to approach a replatforming project

Understand why you are replatforming. What problems will be solved by a new platform? Could you fix the problems more quickly and cheaply by augmenting your existing platform with additional technology or does your current platform just need an improved user experience?

If replatforming is the right choice; before launching a formal RFP, reach out to your network and take some unbiased advice on platforms and delivery partners. Document your existing platform functionality and engage with the business and internal IT to understand the pain points in the current implementation, and the new features that are required to hit business goals.

Choose a platform by formally engaging the vendors, and even though the vendor may introduce delivery partners, ensure you spend some time with them separately. Partners and vendors have different cost models and perspectives of the proposed solution; "out of the box" for a vendor may be interpreted differently by the client and can mean increased costs from a delivery partner.

With a platform and delivery partner chosen, it's all about delivery. Key to this is user experience. If the project calls to use inbuilt platform templates – approach the project as a gap analysis to provide clarity to the development team and accelerate delivery. If you are after a rich bespoke UX, design this now and supply the user journeys and HTML click-thru preferably before a Discovery phase.

Many projects will fail because processes and people haven't been properly managed through the project delivery. Make sure you have an in-house project leader in your team driving communication and leading the daily meetings, but also make sure there is a product owner, empowered to make difficult decisions. Many a replatforming project has failed when managed by committee.

Data can make you more money

What hasn't changed is the fundamental basics of eCommerce:

· How do I attract more visitors?

· How do I convert them?

· How do I sell them more?

· How do I minimise returns?

Amazon spent over $22 billion on R&D in 2017 to basically improve on these four things and with the wealth of data that can be collected on customers, retailers can let data make more money.

> ## " TO DELIVER PROJECT SUCCESS WHEN REPLATFORMING, THE BUSINESS CASE AND THE PROJECT MUST HAVE METRICS THAT SHOW IMPROVEMENT ACROSS THE BOARD.

Paula Abasalo
Head of Operations and infrastructure, Dobell

Over the past 8 years, Paula has built up wide-ranging and hands-on experience in retail and eCommerce. In her current role, she is responsible for business change, software development, infrastructure and warehouse operations at Dobell, a growing and thriving menswear business located on the south coast of England.

dobell

Beware vendor promises!

With so many changes in eCommerce technology in recent years it can be hard to keep up, especially for SME businesses. Vendors will inevitably push to sell new capabilities, but it is vital that businesses really concentrate on their true needs when considering replatforming their website.

Of course, the vendor landscape has changed dramatically too. The newer entrants are pushing the more established brands to change. The landscape becomes even more complicated when acquisitions occur like the recent acquiring of Magento by Adobe. Users of Magento 1 will no doubt be finding themselves caught now by the end of life of this product's support and the vendor push to upgrade to Magento 2, whether Magento 2 gives additional benefits or not.

And what about the business case for change?

Build the business case on needs and not wants to avoid waste. It is very likely that your business case process and decision-making will now involve a much larger group of stakeholders. Building a case that involves and satisfies the wider constituent will involve some compromise along the way. Make sure that the final decision is democratic to avoid issues further down the line.

Measurement is key

To deliver project success when replatforming, the business case and the project must have metrics that show improvement across the board. Too often the business case rests on some future improvement in sales, but could be failing in a number of the smaller, incremental measures of improvement. For example, conversion rates, optimisation, presentation and customer experience all are areas that should see improvement with the implementation of a new platform, but may not be improving unless the over-arching business case and project encompass them.

Imagine entering a store, the product you want is in a box, high on a shelf, and there are no assistants to help you. It won't matter whether you like the brand or not, you're unlikely to buy. Your website is the same. If the experience, points of conversion, user journey, product displays aren't delivering, aren't accessible (what if your market is older people?) then visitors won't buy. If your project and business case aren't tracking these for improvement, then the project will not be successful.

Change is the biggest challenge

It seems obvious to say that the biggest challenge to a replatforming project is change, but this is true. Indeed, it is true for any project. Change gets overlooked, in my opinion, as inevitably the focus is on the technology, development, integration and so on. But change management is vital, which means bringing everybody along. This could be to educate people on new business processes so they can use them effectively, or to involve them in developments so they can give input.

The change plan should be built into the project plan and I am a big advocate of a rigorous project management process, for example PRINCE2. Whatever method you follow do not forget the people, the business processes, the work methods, the customers or indeed any aspect of the project that could be affected by the change.

> ## THERE IS A DANGER WHEN RE-PLATFORMING OR UNDERGOING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION THAT IT IS JUST ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A 'NEW WEBSITE'.

Michael Barker

CTO, Wex Photo Video

Michael started his technology career at the turn of the millennium and has been developing, architecting and consulting on technology systems, specializing in eCommerce, ever since. He is a keen advocate of Agile practices and other techniques for reducing friction and improving collaboration between technology and people which are often the source of issues in growth businesses.

wex photographic

What has happened in the last two years?

Two years ago, we had not long introduced the Agile Scrum methodology as a means of improving governance and change management for a major eCommerce replatforming project. This project had suffered previously from a lack of ownership and effective change management and, as a result, delivery had languished. While the new methodology quickly improved our visibility of requirements and progress, it took longer to become established across the business as a means of better managing change and facilitate collaboration between teams.

But now that Agile is firmly established, the business takes far greater ownership of changes, collaborating effectively with other teams and departments to deliver common goals. This collaboration, allowing the business to work as a single coherent entity, is the real goal of Agile methodologies and I recommend all businesses strive to achieve it.

The new website is just the beginning

Having completed the new website, our digital transformation hasn't stopped there. We are now rebuilding back office and support systems like warehousing, product management and non-web order capture. These back-office areas are often overlooked as sources of differentiation and value, but they are vital to success when replatforming.

There is a great danger when replatforming eCommerce or undergoing digital transformation that it is just about the implementation of a 'new website'. However, the website represents only a fraction of the overall customer experience. To achieve success, all supporting back-end systems must deliver and be well integrated in order to achieve a truly seamless and engaging customer experience. The integration project for these systems is very often more significant than the delivery of a new website and even more dependent on stakeholder engagement and cross-business collaborative working.

IT is becoming more than IT

The work we began two years ago with the deployment of Agile methodologies has led to IT bringing more than just technology skills to bear. Facilitation, coaching, communication and commercial acumen are becoming ever more important as IT team skills in order to collaborate effectively with the business to deliver successful projects. Non-technical skills such as these, along with cultural fit to the organisation may well be more important than the technical capability of an individual. Such multi-skilled individuals are often hard to find, but the value they add is enormous.

ROI needs to underpin changes

Another area of replatforming decision-making that has changed in the past two years has been the increased rigour in the development of a solid ROI case for changes, and the subsequent application of measurements that underpin this. This isn't to say that a solid business case wasn't produced in the past, but I think we now put more structure and cross-business engagement into this process. It ensures that projects have clear objectives, are creating business value, and can deliver results in a sensible time-frame.

Customer experience is driving everything

How we make change decisions is based on the improvement a change will bring to customer experience and the subsequent value added. We consider CX across all touch points for our customers and our objective is to make this experience seamless, consistent, and differentiated. A great customer experience comes when a company exudes passion, and that passion is reciprocated by the customer. Such an experience can only be delivered when change is managed and focused, stakeholders are joined up, and measures of success are in place.

> "
> # MOST RETAILERS NEED TO BE DOING EXACTLY WHAT THEY ARE DOING TODAY, BUT JUST MUCH, MUCH BETTER.

David Worby

Founder, Prospero Commerce

David has over 25 years hands-on experience with European brands and retailers such as Harrods, M&S, Debenhams, Jacques Vert and My Wardrobe. During this period he completed a number of replatforming projects, including putting IBM Websphere into Debenhams in 2004, Microsoft .NET into Harrods and then Salesforce Commerce Cloud into JV. In 2014, David founded Prospero Commerce, a consulting firm specialising in digital transformation.

PROSPERO COMMERCE

What are the biggest challenges for replatforming today?

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I believe we are now in the 3rd iteration of these types of projects, namely the delivery of an omni-channel experience; which is about connecting up and using more of the data that exists across the organisation. Way back in the first generation it was all about eCommerce and extended no further than the confines of the eCommerce platform, the second generation was the start of the multi-channel journey, and the integration of the website with other technology and services. What has fundamentally changed with this new generation perspective is the significance of the customer experience and how this is driving the need for real change.

The UK retail sector is under immense pressure with significant oversupply, many retailers lack the internal capability to deliver on these changing customer expectations and are therefore struggling to develop their business strategy.

How is the business case coming together?

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In many respects the business case is being driven out of necessity to deliver better results to shareholders or because it is no longer possible to survive on technology and processes that are not fit for purpose. In either case, these are not easy conversations for a board to have with themselves especially when capital is at a premium.

Having said that, some retailers are responding better than others. Pure play online retailers are generally far better positioned to respond to changing CX demands, and some traditional retailers have historically fared better because of their ability to embrace technology as an

enabling tool. For the majority, however, they are increasingly going to struggle, and many will lose this battle. We are reaching the point where poor strategic decisions aligned to a lack of organisational agility is weighing very heavily on some.

Darwin and the future

—

Are are facing a Darwinian moment on the High Street? It's probably true that many retailers and brands are struggling because their once loyal customers have been wooed away. There really is no choice now, businesses have to step up and deliver the experience customers want. It is no longer optional.

Against this backdrop of rapidly evolving consumer demands there are three areas that business needs to think very carefully about:

1. Seamless process exchange

2. Organisational agility and curiosity

3. Mobile consumers

Building the infrastructure that underpins these needs to be central to the business strategy for today's retailers.

Doing what they've always done just simply isn't going to cut it in the years ahead – those businesses that can look at themselves like customers do, whilst constantly reinventing reasons for customers to develop a relationship with them, is vital.

It's almost undeniably true that the winners of the future will be agile, partnership based and relevant.

> ## "
> # TOO OFTEN A NEW ECOMMERCE PLATFORM GOES IN AND IT IS THE BUSINESS MODEL THAT THEN FAILS, NOT THE NEW PLATFORM PROJECT ITSELF.

Kevin Murray
Managing Director, Greenlight Commerce

Kevin leads the team of technical experts at Greenlight Commerce who undertake eCommerce consulting advisory and enterprise implementations across leading eCommerce platforms, and has worked on projects in multiple sectors including retail, travel and financial services. Kevin has 15+ years' experience in the technology, eCommerce and omni-channel retail space.

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So, what has changed in the past two years?
—

I see three profound market changes since we last produced this paper. First, the changes in customer expectations and the realisation that the eCommerce platform is only the storefront. Second, consolidation in the market. There are now fewer platform choices with 'easy eCommerce' platforms maturing. Finally, and probably most importantly, businesses who are yet to change and modernise their eCommerce customer experience are finding this increasingly difficult to do. Customer expectations are accelerating to such an extent that if your business isn't on the train now, it may miss it.

Finding the best way forward
—

At Greenlight we are privileged to get involved in many projects enabling us to see all of the forces at play on a business when they replatform. When a project goes really well, we see some common ingredients. You could think of these as a set of core principles, or a 'code for success'. Firstly:

Stop!
Before beginning a project, stop, review, and fully understand what you want to achieve as business outcomes from the project. It seems obvious, but surprisingly often overlooked. The project takes over and the goal gets lost. If the project isn't materially moving the business forward, then question why.

Challenge
There is an old adage in the world of carpentry that says, 'measure twice, cut once'. Apply this thinking to your project. Stop and review your business objectives, but then challenge these and

be sure they move your business forward and are embedded throughout the project. Do this quickly and don't overthink it.

Do the detail
Look at the project from the perspective of your customer and use the customer view to guide how the project develops. Don't underestimate the scale and complexity of the project and importantly, make sure your business model can deliver against the new project. Too often a new eCommerce platform goes in, only to stress other areas of customer experience and it is the business model that then fails, not the new platform project itself.

Set metrics
Yes, be very, very clear about the measures of success, and do the due diligence to ensure that the metrics measure real forward momentum. You'd be surprised at projects that are undertaken against a set of business measures that show improvement, but not real forward momentum. If a new platform isn't delivering a real shift in business growth or customer experience, then it may not have been necessary to deliver the metrics required.

Don't go it alone
When you go live it is not the end of the project, in many respects it is just the start. The hard work starts now in terms of reviewing, tuning, developing the system, processes, people and business model in order to deliver the real impact set out in the metrics for the project. Don't do this alone, make sure you have a partner you trust and who is invested in your success to accompany you on this part of your journey.

> **IF A BUSINESS IS OPERATING ANYWHERE THAT THEY DON'T OWN ANY DESIGN OR OTHER IP THEN AMAZON IS A THREAT.**

Paul Bratcher
Chief Digital Officer

Paul has over 15 years helping businesses to change and adapt to the digital landscape, spanning from the birth of platform eCommerce to the availability and exploitation of the cloud. During his career, he has overseen four replatforming projects onto SAP Hybris.

Expanding eCommerce internationally

Organisations have some big choices to make when expanding their eCommerce business internationally. With the likelihood of a common back-end set of systems, ERP, middleware, micro-services, there is a tendency to take the same, single view for the website too, and try to deploy a single platform for all country instances. The problem with this model is many-fold, but if you consider the back-end systems and services as a reference layer, these systems aren't changing much. On the other hand, the website can change significantly, country-by-country, making the single instance sub-optimal.

This issue is most acutely felt when it comes to testing. Take the simple example of one country using a grid view of product and another preferring a list view for their market. The amount of testing now required has at least doubled, and the more differences, the more exponentially the test burden becomes. It also means that the platform becomes sub-optimal for all countries. Unless the platform is designed for super 'multi-tenanting' then a business will lose the flexibility to quickly flex a shop window in market, and the ability to conduct rapid micro tests like A/B testing. As we begin to adopt chatbots, and voice search, then this multi-tenanted' sub-optimal model has broken.

Adopting a multi-website approach, in country, with a common reference layer of the back-end systems, is a more flexible, and operationally effective approach. The reference layer is important too. Businesses who have built more logic into their websites, especially those running larger, older systems will hit problems in the future. Separation of business processes, like the delivery experience being managed by

the ERP, order management being managed in middleware, and the customer experience managed in the website, gives the flexibility businesses will require in future.

Where else does the future take us?

If you consider Moore's law and the exponential mindset, then I believe businesses who manufacture their products need to be thinking about DRM (Digital Rights Management) within their platform. Like music, games, and video, the value is in the licencing of intellectual property and not in the physical delivery. In the context of manufacturing and the development of 3D print and other techniques, then you could imagine buying a licence to make, for example, Lego. The print / manufacturing may be done yourself, on a 3D printer, or at a community print / manufacturing service where you take your licenced files to be made. I really do feel that DRM is where forward-looking businesses start to move.

The Amazon effect

It's hard to talk about the future and not consider the A word, or the 'Amazon effect'. For the past decade or more, Amazon has infiltrated, and laid waste to vast swathes of the retail sector, indeed many retailers fear the shadow of the behemoth. This is why I also feel that DRM has a significant future. If you look at Amazon's business model, they identify a product or market segment, test their ability to take it on, then use the scale to move in and take it over. If a business is operating anywhere that they don't own any design or other IP then Amazon is a threat. But Amazon taking on an intellectual property segment? That doesn't sound so likely!

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AS BUSINESSES CONFRONT GROWTH THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, THE INADEQUACIES OF A NUMBER OF EXISTING SYSTEMS CAN BE EXPOSED.

Tom Gathern
Technical Project Manager

Tom is an experienced project manager with almost a decade's experience working within digital. Having initially started his career as a developer on clients including Toyota, IHG & Visa Worldpay, he moved into project management for one of the UK's leading furniture retailers, helping them to replatform from the existing Sitecore platform onto Salesforce Commerce Cloud.

What has been your recent experience?
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Most recent has been a full replatforming project with a major furniture retailer. The project was significant because we also had to consider ERP system transformation, alongside the website implementation. How would the project integrate with future ERP changes?

This multi-system change approach is something that is happening more frequently within businesses. As businesses confront growth through digital transformation, the inadequacies of a number of existing systems can be exposed, which leads to these projects becoming extensive, and complex.

What was driving the changes?
—

Growth is the main driver for change, but this was really embedded in a programme of customer experience improvements. Throughout the project we worked closely with a partner to monitor the CX experience, which was used to develop a roadmap of improvements - driving a quarterly update programme. A combination of analytics, heatmapping and customer experience testing was monitored, changes made, tested, and then deployed.

This process continued throughout the project and was essential to its success. The analysis, testing, and improvement roadmap developed was conducted separately for desktop and mobile.

So, were these the key metrics for the project?
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They were certainly important to the overall project success. Of course, the overarching metric was growth, but closely monitoring and changing the CX was critical in helping to meet the growth targets. There were also a number of productivity and efficiency metrics gained from the project for example, the switch to paperless receipts helped save costs related to inefficient processes.

The business case and what it exposed
—

The furniture industry has been slower to digitally transform than some other industries such as fashion and project discovery was essential to highlight the project impact on the overall business. This was critical to expand the business case development and more importantly the project scope to include a much wider group of stakeholders than was originally anticipated.

The breadth of stakeholder expansion is a vital component of the success of complex digital transformation projects.

Benefits of experience
—

Project planning the systems changing is important, but as important is to understand and plan for changes to business processes, many of which may not be documented. Process changes mean the project will affect far more people than those directly involved, so the skill set of the wider organisation is important. Efforts to train and develop people through the process will be a vital part of the project.

Measure existing customer journeys and use these to validate any new design decisions that will affect the customer journey and experience.

Lastly, and most importantly, build trust in your team and the decisions being made and invest in selecting the right SI partner who will truly be your partner and offer sound, challenging advice.

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IN MY EXPERIENCE, BUSINESSES OFTEN CHASE THE 'WANTS' AND THESE GENERALLY COME WITH COST.

Jeremy Wilson

Global Chief Commercial Officer, Practicology

Jeremy is a seasoned retail and eCommerce expert, having been involved in multichannel retailing for over 28 years, including senior positions at Tesco, Boden, Long Tall Sally and Pentland Brands. In his role as CCO at Practicology, a multichannel consultancy business, Jeremy has personally been involved in the delivery of a dozen replatforming projects, while the business has advised on the platform selection process of 40-50 projects.

Practicology
[*defining*]comm/erce

So, what has changed in the past two years?

The biggest changes over the past two years have been the rationalisation of platforms and growth in platform eco-systems based around micro-services and APIs. The platform landscape has changed a lot. The large, traditional players like Oracle, IBM, Hybris are all having to rethink as SaaS and cloud platforms gain more traction. Salesforce's commerce platform is gaining a lot of traction right up to Enterprise level. Shopify is improving and Magento 2 has stabilised a lot albeit the relationship with Adobe needs to unfold properly.

Rise of the eco-system

There is now far more effort going into the platform ecosystem with micro-services and APIs growing considerably. There are some real benefits to be gained from this development when looking at replatforming in the future. Done properly, we could be heading towards a state where many services are run through APIs and these micro-services, with just core functionality being left in the platform. If this were the case, then you could imagine a platform switch becoming a simpler process with a more straightforward 'plug and play' change becoming potentially possible.

Has the buying process changed?

One thing has changed in my opinion, the days of the large "kitchen sink" RFP are gone. I would encourage anybody not to spend time and effort going down this route to purchase. Most platforms will do most things today, so the issues are less likely to be in features and capabilities and more in fit. Spend time considering how the

platform fits into your environment and avoid the lengthy features-based RFP would be my advice.

So, what is driving the platform purchase now?

Fit into your environment is critical. How well will a new platform integrate with your ERP, and other systems so that you continue to deliver customer experience improvements? You will likely be working with a wider stakeholder group as you work through the purchase process. Replatforming is no longer an eCommerce and ops decision.

It goes without saying, but whatever you do needs to be 'mobile first'. It's critical in today's decision-making process, and that's mobile in all respects, not just mobile responsive. Lastly, and most importantly, spend time selecting your SI. An SI can make or break the success of replatforming, and selection of a good one will contribute massively to any project success.

So, what about the future?

Well firstly, replatforming isn't going away, frequency may change, but you will be replatforming again at some stage. When you have to replatform then don't get fooled by the 'bells and whistles', be very clear about the needs and wants of the business. In my experience, businesses often chase the 'wants' and these generally come with cost. Make sure that your business case sets out the value you expect the platform to deliver so that real measures of return are built into the project from the outset. Perhaps most importantly, get a great project manager onboard, choose your SI well, and let your PM manage your chosen SI through delivery.

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TOO MANY BUSINESSES ARE SCRAMBLING TO TRY AND MITIGATE THE AMAZON EFFECT WHILE POTENTIALLY DOING THEIR OWN BUSINESS DAMAGE IN THE PROCESS.

Reggie Johal
Managing Director and founder, Predator Nutrition

Predator Nutrition has undergone four platform changes since the company started trading in 2009. Initially it began on InstanteStore, before moving to a Drupal platform, which caused them significant issues. In 2013 they replatformed to Magento, but following further challenges, they replatformed to Demandware (now Salesforce Commerce Cloud) in 2015.

PREDATOR NUTRITION
EXCLUSIVE SUPPLEMENTS

Things aren't what they used to be!

We run Salesforce Commerce Cloud, which the business re-contracted from Salesforce.com when the platform was rebranded from Demandware. The choices for us have been simple and I think we are pretty typical of a lot of the UK retail landscape. We are a SME business focused on a specific product set and so our expertise is in the area of our products, sport and health nutrition. We don't have a team of IT resources and frankly, we don't want to have.

The big vendors like Oracle ATG and IBM are having to adapt quickly to these changes. Once dominant in most analyst reviews, they now face challengers from the growth in SaaS, cloud, and open source offerings. It would have been the case that cloud, and SaaS-based offerings weren't enterprise class, but this has now changed too. Cloud and SaaS platforms are very much in the enterprise space

The market is also changing with respect to 'add on' services, with vendors providing market places for developers to create specific service plugins. This is something that we have taken advantage of, for example with site search, and I can only see this continuing to grow and be a valuable way for SMEs to access an extensive range of capabilities and features.

The future, it's not what it's cracked up to be!

I can only see the future of business systems accelerating towards even greater consumer-like models. Businesses like ours don't have large IT departments and aren't going to build them. At the same time, finding technical skills in the open market is getting harder unless you look offshore, which brings about complexity to manage through a project. Business systems that are simple to deploy, consumer-like in their customisation, is I believe the future.

Of course, there is much on the near horizon that is being hyped as 'futures.' Artificial intelligence (AI) is a good example. What website isn't benefiting from a robot today? Personally, I'm not entirely convinced. I can certainly see areas of benefit, but for many businesses, like our own, it is the knowledge and expertise of our people that makes the difference, which I don't believe is properly recaptured through AI.

There are businesses in the nutrition space that use AI like interfaces to help buyers tailor and select supplements, but behind the scenes? You'll probably find people running around actually doing this work. Automating processes, handling simple tasks, yes, but providing a vital part of the customer experience? I'm not fully convinced.

Words of advice?

It goes without saying that we, the UK, are in some difficult political times at the moment, with continued uncertainty about the trading future for businesses. If you're considering replatforming, then ensure the security of the business ahead of that decision to decide whether now is the right time. Too many businesses are scrambling to try and mitigate the Amazon effect while potentially doing their own business damage in the process!

IN THE LOFT... THE REPLATFORMING SERIES

If you're looking to replatform in the next 12-18 months, you won't want to miss our unique series of events where we'll be inviting one of our experts to join us for a no holds barred Q&A session.

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