

Good to Great: Siloed Applications Versus a Unified Platform

Unified Platform



Growing businesses often find themselves a victim of their own success – their software applications do not scale with their growth.

Ultimately, a disconnect occurs between the demands on the company and the capabilities of their technologies. In fact, in a 2016 survey done by the Content Marketing Institute, [only 32% of business-to-business \(B2B\) marketers](#) reported their marketing maturity level as sophisticated or mature. A key component of companies being unable to mature can often be attributed to their inability to integrate various software applications used by different departments.

Interdepartmental data flow must be seamless to enable leadership to deftly transform challenges into opportunities. Unfortunately, they are impeded by repetitive data entry, tedious data ports, tragic data losses, and annoying data malformations. So, what is the alternative? This paper will explore the benefits of replacing multiple software applications with a single platform.



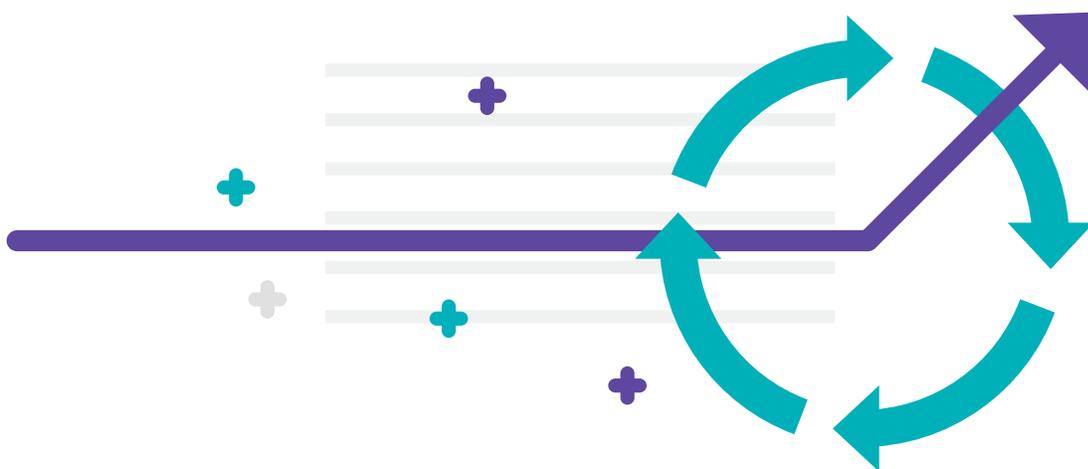
The flywheel effect in an on-the-fly world

The consistent evaluation of business tools is required to successfully navigate a dynamic business landscape. Business markets are increasingly concentrated and fragmented, and the resulting complexity and unpredictability require nimble steering to avoid getting dead ended as competitors win.

This problem is exasperated as different teams use different software applications that may work great within their team, but they don't "play nice" with other teams' applications. In a data sense, the inability for systems to share data inherently limits their individual and collective efficacy.

Jim Collins wrote about the flywheel effect in his 2001 book *From Good To Great*. His analysis revealed that consistent effort in one direction works the same in business as on a flywheel – speed increases over time. Eventually a breakthrough occurs moving the company from being good to being great, with no singly identifiable "big breakthrough" event. This was, of course, before Facebook changed marketing and Twitter changed everything, including the salient aspect of the concept of "in one direction."

So, how can a company push in one direction in our new reality? What is the compass, and where is the map? I suggest that a collecting a pile of disparate technologies is akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, and the alternative is a coherent platform from which to safely launch programs with competently supported and surgically targeted goals.



The platform as a solution engine

A single enterprise-class SaaS platform allows for a breadth of capabilities when compared to clunking together various ill-fitting software applications. With unified and fully integrated features and capabilities, it is possible to better manage and streamline business processes – from marketing, to sales, to finance, and beyond.

Using a single business management tool allows teams to effectively manage their operations under an entire cross-platform solution. Essentially, teams are enabled to leverage a flexible platform to select from hundreds of interoperable features that can be configured (and re-configured) to perfectly fit growing businesses.

A critical benefit of a centralized solution is that it empowers teams to obtain complete data sets, and then to organize them in such a way that executives can make good decisions in real-time, and not just initially, but ongoing. This series of good data-driven decisions generates the new flywheel effect, and the platform is the centrifuge.



Key capabilities of competent platforms

Let's look at five key capabilities and how they build on each other to create a platform.

1

Customer Relationship Manager (CRM)

Managing relationships with prospects and customers throughout the lifecycle - from first touchpoint to repeat business – is critical for the sales team. However, the data within a CRM loses value when it cannot be used by other systems within the organization. In order to improve marketing, visibility into the sales pipeline is essential.

2

Ecommerce

Marketing products and services via online storefronts is essential to many business models. Whether you have one hundred visitors a day or ten thousand, you need to ensure that every account and order is stored in order to facilitate greater engagement. Combining a CRM with an e-commerce store enables the fastidious tending of the customer journey.

3

Email Marketing

Email marketing is an essential tool for customer engagement. [44% of email recipients made at least one purchase](#) last year based on a promotional email. Often, however, email marketing efforts just result in filling the spam bucket, which has the disastrous effect of brand devaluation. Companies often either reach out to the wrong people with the right message, or just as bad, to the right people with the wrong message. Integrating a CRM with an email marketing platform breaks this pratfall, and integrating email marketing with an e-commerce store gives the recipients themselves a safe place to land.

4

Reporting and Analytics

Measuring and analyzing the performance of campaigns and activities, and then reacting correctly, leads to winning. Calibrating fact with action optimizes effort for maximum gain. Platforms containing full CRM data sets can create reports to direct the tailoring of ecommerce offerings, email campaigns, and LMS courses to maximize return of investment.

5

Membership Management

The capability to assign and sell memberships to CRM contacts cannot be understated. Access to certain products, content, courses, and discounts exponentially expands how you can think about and organize your business. This is an underutilized and misunderstood digital capability, particularly in the realm of managing associations. Prospects can become association members by purchasing subscriptions. The subscription grants the membership, and the membership allows access to association resources. A higher subscription grants a better membership level which allows greater access to resources. Ending the subscription revokes the membership and the associated resource access.



Further competencies of extraordinary platforms

Going a step further, extraordinary platforms continue to build on the basics, to make the flywheel gain serious momentum. Below are a couple of examples.

1

Marketing Automation

Extraordinary platforms enable you to craft messages using smart merge fields for personalization, auto-generate email distribution lists via intelligent filters, and schedule email campaigns based on meaningful system dates (eg, 30 days out from an event's start date). This results in sending the right message to the right person at the right time. It protects your brand from being associated with spam, and it respects your customers' time. Intelligently targeting your messaging via automation lets your signal shine, and it is a key differential between being good and becoming great.

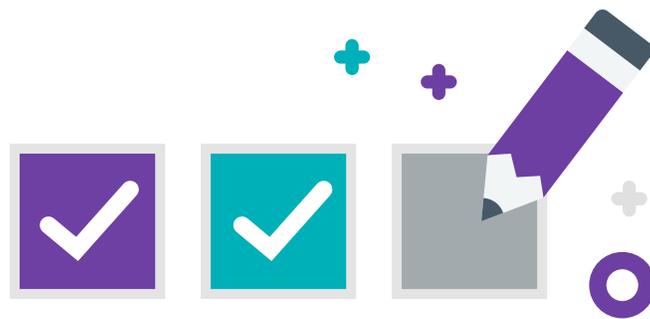
2

Custom Developed Solutions

Companies often rely on unique business practices that do not always have out-of-the-box support by SaaS platform providers. The fear of losing an innovative business practice will often inhibit companies from moving forward with a new technology. With most providers, they are often left requiring either to adapt their practices to the capabilities of the platform, or to spend excessive amounts of capital trying to duplicate their practice in a new environment. A select few platform providers offer to configure features to adapt to their clients business practices via reasonably priced custom development projects. They are geared to anticipate the unexpected, and are skilled at porting over novel business practices.



Key takeaway



Companies that struggle with inefficient and unreliable processes may still grow, but they are never going to be great. The speed of business is too fast to spend time on learning new tools, and to then to only learn that they don't work with the old tools.

SaaS platforms are the better alternative, as they enable the extended enterprise approach. Companies that successfully utilize a platform extend the capabilities of that platform to their customers. In their customers' eyes, it appears that the functionality provided by the platform is part of their company, when in fact it belongs to the vendor.

The chief benefit that customers receive is products and services that were created via intelligent data analysis in a holistic environment. This fly-wheel centrifuge is only possible when working in a suite of applications delivered via an enterprise-level platform.

Many platforms offer a good selection of features. A few platforms offer a great selection of features. The next time that you are looking for a new tool, consider using a platform that has that tool. Please note that it is not necessary to immediately replace existing tools with parallel tools in the platform, as you can often do so over time. And in time, you will understand the great benefits of having a suite of tools within a single platform.

[Learn more](#)



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