WHAT'S THE GLUE THAT HOLDS YOUR TECH STACK TOGETHER?

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With companies continuing to incorporate more and more apps into their tech stacks, interoperability has become a critical success factor. Fragmented data is a surefire way to stifle innovation. A centralized tech stack, therefore, is especially vital as two-thirds of global CEOs will start focusing on digital strategies to improve customer experience by the end of 2019, according to data curated by Forbes. That's because bringing together data from disparate systems will be a key differentiator in an organization's ability to deliver consistent digital experiences.

At Modern Commerce Day 2019, Mark Lowndes, senior director analyst, commerce technologies and experience at Gartner, posed the concept of the Digital Experience Platform (DXP) acting the "glue code" for an experience-led commerce platform.

For sure, the notion that your DXP should be the glue that connects your different technologies together has sprouted from the rise of headless CMS and headless DXPs that leverage APIs to push, pull and organize content, assets and data. With this in mind, it's easy to pinpoint the DXP as a single source of truth for all the content, information and data that needs to be fed to different systems and channels.

To see if this view is shared by brands in the wild, we talked to business leaders to learn what"glue" holds their ecosystem together. Here are some alternative opinions on the most critical element of a modern DXP.

Is ERP the Centrepiece?

Kevin Beasley, CIO at VAI, believes an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system can easily adapt to specific industries and business needs, and provide a robust ecosystem to form the backbone of a business.

"Nearly every organization today is responsible for housing important data while making sure it's accessible and secure," he said, "which is why having a centralized place to store this data is vital to a company's long-term success." It's challenging to guarantee the security and availability of data when employees are frequently accessing information from a wide range of systems. ERP, therefore, can be an efficient way to run multiple applications simultaneously while leveraging a data platform to enhance business practices.

The real power in an ERP, however, is when it's tightly integrated with the entire tech stack. "By integrating with other tools such as advanced tracking, analytics, mobile applications and more data management systems, an ERP solution acts as the central base for housing all technology needs," said Beasley. He believes this allows companies to focus on their business without worrying about their technology performance and

updates.

"From a security standpoint, data can also be stored off-premises in a secure, manageable cloud that is available at any time, in any location," he said. The greatest advantage, therefore, is that an ERP is a reliable and comprehensive data management solution that enables employees to reference one place to view all their data.

Is Cloud the Backbone of Digital Transformation?

David Friend, CEO of Wasabi, believes cloud storage serves as the backbone of digital transformation because it streamlines application development and data storage for many industry-specific use cases. "Data is collected everywhere — traffic lights, security cameras, genome labs and more, and it is the most valuable currency in business," Friend stated. Data can fuel a variety of machine learning or other advanced algorithms, for example, to fuel highly personalized digital experiences. And this data that enterprises are collecting is growing at a rapid pace as well. "With all that data collection," he continued, "the glue that holds it all together is efficient and inexpensive cloud storage."

In terms of application development, affordable and easy to manage cloud storage can streamline the process of building and deploying new software. "High-performance access to storage improves time to production, improves application quality, and lowers costs," Friend stated. That's because developers can more easily deploy and test their applications with live data without requiring extensive on-premises computing resources. Superior data storage, therefore, means companies can more easily adapt their tech stacks to changing needs by getting new applications and functionality to market faster.

"Advances in how we store data haven't kept up with our ability to generate and process data, which causes considerable concern for organizations that deal with data at petabyte (PB) scales," Friend said. Along with the challenge of storing large amounts of data from a variety of software, however, organizations will need to cope with data silos and fragmented systems. That's the only way this data can be easily incorporated into the DXP. "Don't let storage capacity get in the way of telling a good story," Friend warned.

Either Way, Data Centralization Is Key

While experts may not agree on exactly which technology is the glue that holds together a digital ecosystem, the underlying trend is clear: centralizing the data of a disparate tech stack is critical for delivering modern digital experiences. That's because a unified DXP forms the backbone of a successful digital transformation.

However, this may look different for each organization depending on their industry or specific business goals. Some enterprises may take an experience-led approach with a CMS at the forefront of their tech stack, while others may choose to focus on an ERP that improves business processes. Either way, choosing a technology to unify disparate systems will be an integral part of enterprise digital transformation and evolution going into 2020.