



Activating the digital enterprise

Deployments are dead. The notion that implementations are a singular, pivotal, one-time event is over.

Welcome to the *“Age of Activation.”*

But what do we mean when we say “activation.” The idea of activation has been used in marketing and advertising for years; it’s the idea of turning on or lighting up something – a campaign, a brand, a new product – and promoting adoption to the end-consumer. Proven methodologies describe how best to activate a brand or campaign when targeting consumers. For example: viral messaging, social posting, video trailers, and gamification techniques inspire buying or sharing behaviors and promote customer loyalty and referrals.

The modern marketing department arguably operates more like the Central Intelligence Agency than an advertising agency. Today’s Chief Marketing Officers apply cognitive and behavioral scientific methods, and harness artificial intelligence and big data analytics to test, track, interpret, calibrate and re-apply insights across many connected platforms to shape and influence human behavior. Despite the sophistication of the techniques and tools used by marketing departments, however, departments such as

IT, Human Resources and Corporate Communications still roll out software to employees in 2016 much the same way it was done in the 1970s.

Does anyone else see a potential problem here?

The organizational approach, techniques, and metrics that comprise the modern enterprise IT toolkit are fundamentally stale and have remained unchanged since the dawn of corporate computing. The result does not require a crystal ball:

pervasively low return-on-investment, shadow IT, and widespread lack of post-deployment consumption of systems designed and promised to make our work lives better.

The growing disconnect with employees and their workplace expectations, and the explosion of shadow IT and rogue purchasing of cloud platforms, points to an urgent need for a new approach to deploying and supporting IT at work. And these trends are not slowing or reversing course any time soon. Business unit-level IT functions will keep emerging, and shadow IT will keep growing, if only because IT no longer belongs to IT; it is now just a recipe of services that we consume to help us do our job better. We, as employees in the digital age, show up to work readily equipped with the only three ingredients needed to consume it: a browser, an internet connection, and a credit card.

Now, imagine if enterprise IT departments applied the proven techniques from marketing and design departments, not just to help promote new systems, platforms and features, but as the basis for re-imagining the very purpose of the IT department itself. Instead of solely organizing resources and priorities around defining requirements, implementing, and maintaining applications, this newly re-imagined model would:

- shift the emphasis from technology features to business users,
- elevate the role of design to be on par with architecture,

- stay mindful that employees are also “consumers” with the same expectations at home or at work,
- continuously find unmet needs and develop personas to understand users as part of end-to-end enterprise experience management process,
- prototype new ways to solve problems as a standard practice (not just on the innovation team),
- continuously inspire and reward new behaviors with a hyper-care approach that blends support and training into the on-going activation model,
- actively monitor and measure business outcomes, sharing accountability for the value realized post-deployment.

Wow, imagine that!

Why would an IT department voluntarily sign-up for such drastic change? Why would CIOs aspire to operate, and be held more accountable for outcomes, like CMOs? The answer is that most aren't; this is not a widely adopted practice yet....yet! This is aspirational, but is quite possibly the critical path for the future of work in the digital enterprise.

Unlike the disco deployment days of the '70s, a large portion of enterprise IT is moving towards cloud-enabled models, such as software-as-a-service (SaaS); this eases the burden for managing IT infrastructure and enables IT to be more agile and responsive. Microsoft Office 365, Salesforce.com, Workday, ServiceNow and SAP Cloud Solutions, for example, are changing the way we work by providing more flexible, ever-evolving solutions for doing business. The sun is setting on the age of versions with one- to three-year release cycles, replaced with tighter, more iterative development cycles that push out updates every few weeks or days. We expect this now with apps on our smartphones, but it's relatively new and disruptive in large corporate environments.

As technology platforms require less and less upfront technical integration and configuration, enterprise IT leaders are also left with an identity crisis: “how do we implement and maintain software that doesn't need to be implemented or maintained?” Or put more broadly, “how do we add value in the digital age when IT

becomes a service that can be purchased and consumed without our help?” The answer is the same for both questions – embrace the shift from implementation to activation, the shift in the purpose of technology at work, and the shift to focusing beyond go-live.

So, how do companies make the shift to a digital enterprise?

We know that digital is changing the world as we know it. At work, digital is transforming the way we connect with our customers, the way we manufacture products, and way we build and deploy systems. Today, the idea of a “workplace” is more about “how we work” than “where” and employees – like consumers – demand anytime, anywhere, flexible, collaborative, always-on ways to do their jobs...on their terms. This may sound very similar to the expectations we have for video-streaming services (like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video) and that’s because they are the one-and-the-same; this is the new normal.

We believe the engine of the digital enterprise runs on three primary sources of renewable energy:

- *Content* ...digitizes enterprise information assets including signals.
- *Collaboration* ...connects and orchestrates actions between and across networks of people, content, and machines.
- *Automation* ...infuses efficiency, convenience, reliability, and intelligence into business processes.

These building blocks of the digital enterprise equip business leaders to move with the agility and speed necessary to satisfy the insatiable desire, by both customers and employees, to have better, faster and cheaper ways of doing things. But these components are just the fuel and need an activation engine to achieve real business results.

For example, Microsoft’s feature roadmap for Office 365 for the next year will likely include over 1,000 new enhancements, a significant on-going value for customers. That kind of new feature velocity also

represents an unprecedented challenge. Unless the value of those features are put in context, mapped to use-cases and employee personas, and communicated through social networks, digital channels and informal peer networks in ways that support discovery, testing and adoption, consumption by employees may be low. A stream of promotional emails about new features is likely to become an intolerable stream of noise that leads to limited adoption and almost no business benefit.

Absorbing and benefiting from more robust vendor roadmap and release schedules requires the ability to inspire and reward “consumer” behaviors across the enterprise in the same way that marketing departments inspire loyalty and engagement by external customers. Building awareness is helpful, and will trigger adoption among certain segments, but the recipe for driving consumption (and delivering value back to the enterprise) lies in the use of proven marketing and design techniques based on behavioral, cognitive and information science domains. This sort of capability does not emerge or occur organically, of course. It must be a deliberate, sanctioned and funded investment, and it may ultimately be situated inside or across IT, HR and Corporate Communications, or somewhere in between.

Traditional deployments of SharePoint are another classic example that demonstrates how the fuel of the digital enterprise – content, collaboration and automation – can cause stalls when powered by a deployment mindset versus an activation engine. Of course we all know that platforms such as SharePoint are powerful and flexible tools breaking down borders and automating business processes, but all too often SharePoint (and its many features) sit on the shelf with only a fraction of its capability used for real business benefit. That’s because of the way in which SharePoint has been deployed: simply thrown to the wilderness for the business to figure out for themselves. It’s like IT handing its business customers a blank book and telling it to write the great American novel; it’s just not the way we do things in this digital world. That’s the “deployment mindset.” It is no wonder that powerful tools like SharePoint go unused, underused or used inappropriately when the business is left to fend for itself.

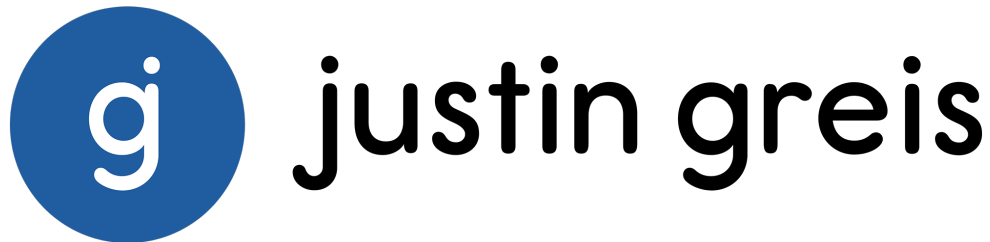
The activation mindset flips this model on its head, shifting resources and accountability to what happens post-deployment. Sure, there may be a build and development phase for a SharePoint site or application;

it is not reasonable yet to assume that all software (be it cloud or more traditional packaged software) is 100% plug-and-play ready to go out of the box. In other words, some assembly may still be required to make the software meaningful to the business. However, activation focuses on driving behaviors that lead to business outcomes by harnessing the innovation of new technology features, not letting them sit idle only to be discovered by accident.

Admittedly, the concept of activation is nothing new; this is not about using radical approaches, but rather the adoption of proven approaches to radicalize the traditional enterprise IT model. It is naïve to think that culture and mindset of enterprise IT departments, HR, corporate communications, and other shared services departments will change overnight – this is a journey that is measured in years – but there are insights and techniques that can have immediate impact on near-term IT efforts.

The digital revolution isn't coming, it's here and it's all around us. So it's time to shift the focus from "putting technology in" to "getting value out," and continuously driving adoption by treating business users as consumers of a digital enterprise experience.

This article is co-authored with [Keith Strier](#).



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