

Complex, diverse market outgrows 'one-stop shops'

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Claims and confusion

The e-business provider arena has grown into an enormous, complex industry with numerous specialist areas in the last 10 years. And yet providers continue to claim one-stop shop status and fail to carve out clear niches.

As a result many top-flight projects stutter and fail as teams are forced to hire more help and members flounder in confusion about their respective roles and responsibilities.

Discrete work areas

Notwithstanding the industry's complexity and differentiation, all e-business projects can be sub-divided into three discrete work streams – digital strategy, technology and creative.

This segmented view helps with differentiating the three main types of websites, and the providers to whom they can be assigned without undue risk of failure.

- The first major type of e-business project is the common brochure site, populated with information and nothing else.
- The second is a strategic or campaign site, typically created around a product launch strategy with an accompanying marketing message.
- The third entails building full-blown online businesses, including e-commerce sites, online reservation systems, e-banking sites, media portals or other high-complexity online businesses.

The main difference between the first and second types is the digital strategy underpinning both (and, to a degree, the creative thrust). A campaign site has a marketing objective while a brochure site aims merely to inform. The difference between the first two and the third type is enormous – a great big technological leap entailing integration, automation, service intermediation and much else besides.

The gap

In short, there are huge gaps in the current landscape of e-business development. While these gaps mirror the abovementioned strategic, creative and technological gaps, they manifest in different ways.

Commonly, yawning gaps will be encountered in projects, between:

- The front-office (customer experience) and back-office (technology);
- Creative and technology (the technology work stream might underestimate the complexity of creative's output, while creative may not understand the technology);
- Marketing and operations (from the operational viewpoint, the website's objective is to sell a product, but it may disregard the use of social media, affiliate sales or campaign measurement, which pose different integration requirements); and
- The agency and IT

Provider types

The abovementioned gaps are further mirrored in the different types of e-business providers entrusted with building sites.

While a regular Web development firm can do the first site, it cannot build the second, as it lacks a marketing company or creative agency's experience in formulating digital strategy. A creative agency, on the other hand, may not have the front-end experience required to pass a usability test.

And neither of these companies has the wherewithal to attempt the third type of site without the help of a back-end integration specialist. Indeed, not even a back-end specialist generally possesses the necessary front-end, creative and strategic experience to attempt a full-scale e-business site by itself.

In short, just as heart surgeons are not paediatricians and architects are not quantity surveyors, none of the above specialists should claim to be anything they're not.

The real deal

Ultimately, e-business projects don't fail because of incompetence; they fail because gaps are left unfilled, in turn the result of a lack of clarity about the roles of project members.

What is needed to realise your e-business dream is a holistic e-enabler with proven development expertise and an eye on the big picture, obtained through partnerships and project coordination.

Your partner's delivery framework should encompass a proven solution portfolio that integrates into best-in-class e-business platforms, lead development capability and comprehensive partner management framework, backed by a solid track record of complex deployments that scale massively. Failing that, crucial tasks will fall in-between the cracks and endanger the project.

About Realmdigital

Realmdigital is a top South African e-business strategy and technology partner, specialising in Internet and mobile platforms. The company <http://www.realmdigital.co.za/page/portfolio/> has proven local and international success in building leading online businesses including Avusa (incorporating Exclusive Books), Naspers, Die Burger, Media 24, Ford and Mix Telematics (Matrix Vehicle Tracking). Founded in 1999 by CEO Wesley Lynch, the company lists industry-leading clients across all industries, with a strong install base in retail and travel. Realmdigital's e-business engagements are grounded in a strong solution portfolio that integrates with best-in-class technologies, including payment and booking/reservation engines, SEO techniques, CMS, CRM and Intranet platforms. In addition we offer an established lead development capability and an advanced partner management and project methodology. Together, these elements make up a comprehensive e-business enablement portfolio comprising a full spectrum of work streams – digital strategy, creative and technological.

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