

To build a better customer experience, start with the architecture

By [Richard Mullins](#)

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Most brands are looking at the customer experience as the most powerful way they have to set themselves apart in a market where it's becoming increasingly difficult to compete on price and product features alone. They're ramping up investment in customer experience management processes and solutions accordingly.



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Yet the reality for most organisations is that they are struggling to transform their customer experience in a consistent and scalable manner across multiple channels and touchpoints. They have mapped out customer journeys, yet cannot reliably identify people across different touchpoints or engage with customers in a uniform, coherent manner across different channels.

As a result, customers get a fragmented experience, with little consistency between different touchpoints and the brand loses out on opportunities to convert customers or to increase customer satisfaction. For instance, many banks will have a responsive team to manage customer interactions on social media, while responses on email will be slower and less thorough.

Often, the teams managing the different channels don't share data, with the result that a customer might need to ask the same questions twice and get different answers. Wouldn't it be great if the bank could identify a customer who ran a query on its bond calculator, then was able to follow up with an offer in an email or an alert in the mobile banking app?

The technology to create a more consistent experience across channels exists, but to take advantage of it, brands need to start transforming their processes and systems. One of the major challenges that they must address lies in breaking down organisational and technology siloes, allowing data across the business to be shared and used more effectively.

This means looking at customer-experience transformation from an organisation-wide perspective, understanding which data the company has about its customers, in which databases and apps it resides (CRM systems, social media, web analytics, transactional systems etc.), and how the brand can more effectively structure its engagement with the customer as well as identify the same customer across multiple systems and channels.

This is the discipline of customer experience architecture, and it is the natural starting point for a more effective customer experience management strategy. A customer experience architecture is a blueprint for mapping customer experiences across technologies and data points to the customer journey and touchpoints. It provides an understanding of the pillars brands need to drive and enable better customer experiences:

- Data—who the customer is, what the brand knows about them what they are going, and through which channels.
- Technology—which channels and systems form part of the customer journey, and how they interact with each other.
- Operations—operationalising data insights to trigger better customer experiences, whether that means giving people in the business insights they need for decision-making or triggering automated, personalised engagements for customers based on their behaviour and preferences.

Without a sound architecture, brands will struggle to translate their customer experience strategy into a functional operating model. It is the key to ensuring that the reality of the customer experience lives up to the vision.

ABOUT RICHARD MULLINS

Richard Mullins is the director at Acceleration. He opened Acceleration's Johannesburg office in 2000 and has played an instrumental role in the growth of Acceleration in South Africa.

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