

Driving Up The Digital Lane:

Excellerating your business to the new experience age.



WHITE PAPER



The radical rise of digital forces have shaped and impacted the global business landscape and consumer patterns. It is the hour of customer-centricity, data driven decisions, exceeding consumer expectations, driving differentiation and creating new capabilities via technology. The diversity and dynamism of digitization still has to cater to individual requirements and for that companies need to capitalize on emerging opportunities to improve their market position and experience meter.

This paper shares its perspectives on digital business, the matter of digital customer experiences, and modern-day consumer drivers. Further, it discusses approaches to up the ante in services and experiences, in tandem with digital technologies. It also offers assistance in attaining digital maturity by way of a competent, future-ready framework. In all, this paper presents a broad guide to businesses to better equip themselves for greater customer-company journeys and experiences.

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Introduction: Setting the digital business context.

By 2020, more than 7 billion people and businesses, and at least 30 billion devices, will be connected to the internet (source - Gartner). With new ways of collaborations, communications, transactions, negotiations and interactions occurring between companies, customers and even employees, a new world and business order is being formed - the order of digital business.

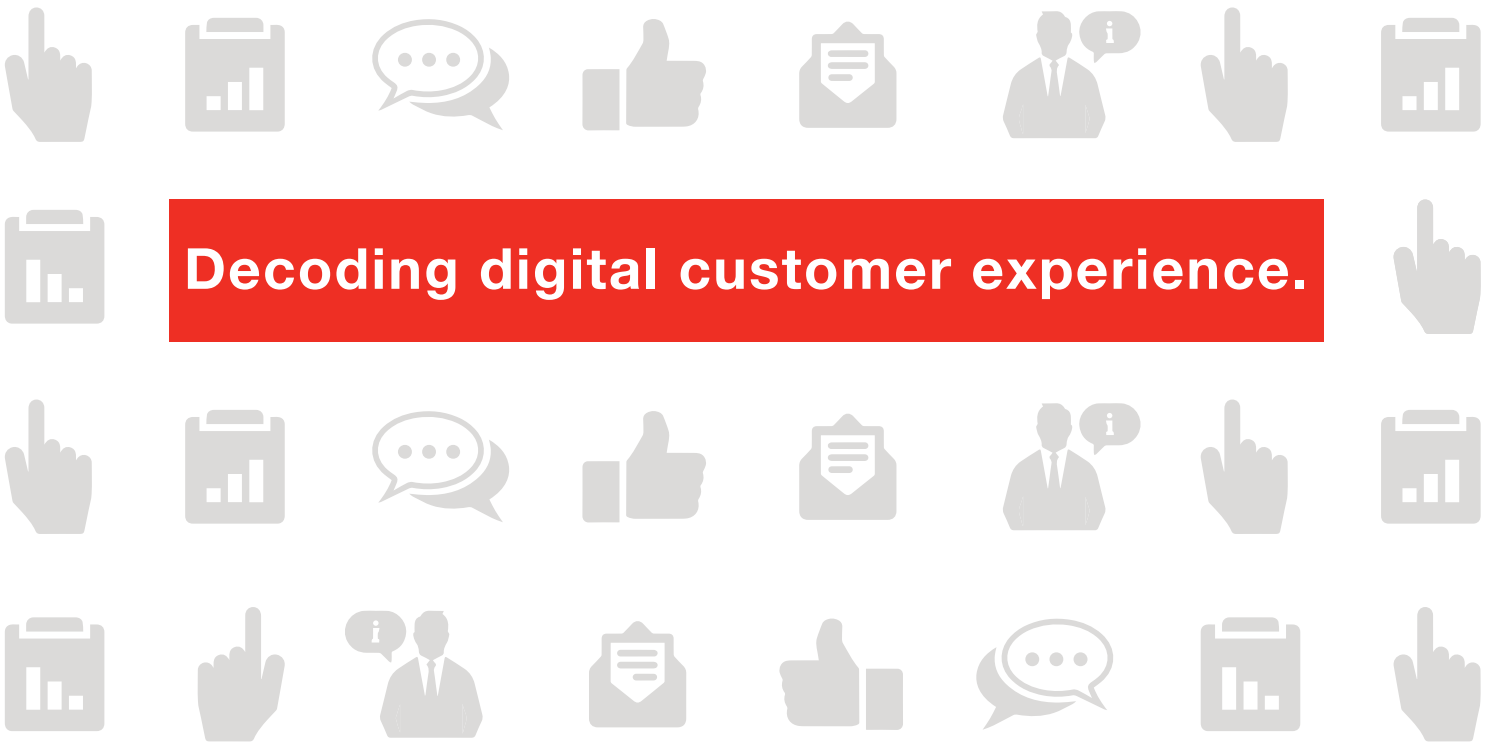
The blurring between physical and virtual worlds has changed the dynamics of the marketplace, business models and customer engagement. While there is no denying that digital business is on a rampant rise, the question arises what does it mean to be digital? There is a difference between 'going digital' and 'growing' digital. While going digital is putting a digitized patchwork on existing processes, growing digital is more about embodying it into the company's core, character and culture. That's why growing digital is harder to put into a boundary box definition. Growing digital, to some extent, is about technology. To another extent, it is about digitizing customer engagements. And to a greater extent, it is about embracing entirely new ways of doing business.

To crystalize the context of what it means to be a digital business, we have narrowed it down into three natures of being:

BEING CONNECTED: Being digital means staying omnipresent - having the ability to be conscious of and responsive to everything that matters. It is like having eyes and ears both in front of and behind your head so as to be aware of and attuned to the changes - be it new disruptive technology, new consumer behaviours or workgroup variations. The ability to proactively monitor and manage shifting circumstances with connectivity creates a boundaryless relationship between teams, technologies and turnouts. Technology enables us to be continually connected to each other and the world around us. When we can channel the collective efforts, intelligence and information from people and resources through seamless synergy, then we can do things digitally.

BEING CAPABLE: Driving to be digital is everyone's new motto, but it is important to know where your business stands before going for where it is to be headed. That means re-evaluating existing capabilities and rethinking new capabilities as per your digital agenda. Building digital competencies rests on two vital pillars - mind-set and system architecture. A business with the digital attitude of non-siloed cross-functional collaboration generates more agile and adaptive ideas and environments. Revamping legacy systems is also a key feature in optimizing processes and interactions.

BEING CUSTOMER - CENTRIC: Developing and disseminating value to consumers with anticipation and agility is a gateway to growth. That means being attuned to the evolution of customer journeys, grasping how customer patterns are emerging both internally and externally, and gaining a form of customer clairvoyance by extracting clarity from the big data clutter. Identifying and understanding present and potential futures despite the uncertainty and utilizing that to apply a people oriented, personalized approach to business facets is paramount to being digital.



Decoding digital customer experience.

Let us first understand that to a great extent 'experience' has an intangible quality. People love the 'Apple experience', the 'Netflix experience' or the 'Amazon experience' but the fact is in our daily lives we are faced with various types of interactions – shopping, banking, eating out, travel, bill payments and others - that could either be 'good' or 'bad'. That is the extent to which an average person thinks of these interactions. Most 'experiences' are not considered as experiences at all unless they truly stand out. Even more so, whether their 'experience' is digital or physical remains irrelevant to the consumer as long as they have a quick and quality engagement. In a digitally driven world, customer satisfaction is still what drives loyalty, attention, retention and acquisition. So more important than looking at whether an experience is digital, social or physical, is to look at the overall customer experience in itself.

Thus the 'digital' customer experience is still about quick, personalized, and relevant brand communications and engagements delivered consistently across customer journeys, irrespective of the channel, time or device. At best, creating digital experiences lies in ingeniously utilizing digitized processes and digital tools to improve every kind of customer experiences and maximize business value. In the end, it is still about creating end-to-end customer experiences, perhaps even simultaneously across omni-channels.

The point is that current consumer's focus is on 'all things digital' and in 'exciting experiences'. They are separate stand points in the eyes of the consumer; it is how businesses merge them, as per time and need, is what creates and sets digital customer experiences apart. When grocery chain TESCO wanted to expand their market in Korea they decided to do something big. They wanted to increase sales without increasing the amount of physical locations. So, they brought their store to the people. They added virtual displays of grocery aisles throughout subway stations where customers could scan items on their smartphone for purchase while waiting for the train. The items they bought would then be delivered after they got home. This increased sales, solved TESCO's capital problem, and improved online presence. The Ben and Jerry's 'City Churned' campaign integrated traditional marketing strategy with online technology. The company's goal was to create a new, custom ice cream flavour for each of 5 targeted cities. To choose ingredients, they asked city residents to vote both online and at in-person marketing events. Once the votes were in, the final flavour was revealed at a community event promoted online. (source – social driver.com). Ikea's new app used augmented reality to show how furniture would look in shoppers' homes. It was a new take on the 'try-before-you-buy' business approach. (source – The Guardian). These are inspiring examples of how to integrate 'digital' with 'experience' with simplicity to reach out to consumers memorably. With digital pervasiveness 'digital experiences' are all around us and 'digital customers' are each one of us.



Comprehending the consumer: Indicative patterns, trends and inclinations.

The advent of social media and digitization has created a paradigm shift in the way consumers behave and buy. Keeping pace with trends or even getting ahead of them makes the difference between reviving value and rescinding it. Here are ten top trends that we believe will impact and influence the working of business.



NETWORKED CONSUMERS:

While this is a given, it is also a continuing pattern. Majority of the masses have been increasingly using the internet to research and purchase products and services in the past few years. There is a recreation of the purchasing process as people are more brand aware, socially conscious and independent in decision-making. The connected consumer is 'always on' and 'always on the go' and expects experiences and services to reach him or her anywhere, and at any time.



BIG TECH TIDES:

The maturing of virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, chatbots and more have created mixed realities. These technologies lie at the forefront of how a business can create better customer experience. – For instance, the Pokeman Go app was a huge hit as it seamlessly merged virtual reality with actual reality. Those who realize that this 'virtual' world can overcome the physical limitations of cost, accessibility and innovation will be the ones riding new frontiers. Technology will not replace people, but it can help businesses make better business decisions, lend greater customer support and customize experiences.



PERSONALIZATION AT PLAY:

This is a time to make things personal. Consumers are not just looking for products and services that are fab but more so focusing on whether they fit. They expect that mass produced products, services and experiences can be customized to a great extent. The fact is technology has made it easier for us to garner consumer knowledge – profiles, preferences, histories and more with almost uncanny accuracy, so there is all the more reason for businesses to cater to 'individual' needs as best as possible.



SPEED IN SERVICES:

The digital world has shaped the consumer's psyche to one of immediate gratification – to get what they want and when they want it. Today's compulsive, impulsive consumers are no longer ready to play the waiting game. They want faster services across channels, better brand dialogues, and higher responses to queries or complaints. With customer convenience as a top priority, the companies that speed up business models will be the business beacons.



POST-PURCHASE FULFILMENT:

The after sale has become an increasingly important aspect of the value offer in a customer journey. Businesses that offer post purchase fulfilment either by identifying or predicting likely consumer needs obtain higher loyalty and recommendations. Most brands now come with an in-built post purchase support system for longevity of their business as well as customers.



THE POWER OF VOC:

Given the case of today's complex consumer, Voice of the Customer (VoC) research and information has a paramount significance to business. Consumers today are full of opinions, ideas, feedback, judgments and inclinations and that makes VoC data a business backbone. Ideally, VoC programs are to be used not just as a mere tool but more as advanced levels of lending support, expertise and information to the business for differentiation.



THE AUTHENTICITY ALLURE:

In a paradox, while the world blurs between reality and unreality, the consumers are keen on 'keeping things real.' Authenticity is the in-vogue catchphrase and the new cool. Consumers don't want to associate with anything that seems contrived – be it advertisements, products, services or experiences. The fact is the social media and selfie culture has created insecurity amongst people as well and so they seek things made of uniqueness with genuineness. While there is an on-going debate about what actually constitutes as authentic, the digital-first generation is gung-ho about things they find relatable.



PROACTIVITY IN POPULARITY:

With new softwares and systems, companies are getting ahead in identifying and eliminating problems before they are noticed. The trend of controlling and confronting 'issues' head on is resulting in better customer service and products. At the business end, taking initiative, playing an active role, and making conscious decisions helps create trust and confidence in consumer which leads to consumer success stories. Also, when there is scope for a consumer to be proactive with a brand it is a win-win for both.



EXTRAORDINARY EXPECTATIONS:

The consumers are bombarded with repetitive advertisements, multiple products and mass produced items and each claiming an experience to offer. To a great extent, regular experiences have become humdrum to the masses. They are looking at new ways to experience the new, and even the old. More so they are looking towards experiences that trigger an emotional rush – joy, excitement, nostalgia, adventure, aliveness and more. It is up to businesses now to create and respond to such demands.



THE PRIVACY AND SECURITY FACTOR:

Living in a volatile world has made people more paranoid and more protective. While at one end people are bubble-wrapped in their digital cocoons, at the other end people no longer believe privacy exists. Anything – product, service or experience - that can make the consumers feel like they have some level of control in their personal safety holds strong appeal. It is more than about just end-to-end encryption; it is about businesses walking the thin line between availing information and respecting consumer anonymity.



Digital driven? The big business challenges.

It is good to want to go full throttle on digitization, but it is not easy running a company in an ever-changing business world. Technology advances, social media strides, pressure competition and other aspects create critical challenges for businesses. Here are some of the key challenges faced by business today.

Meeting consumer expectations: According to a Harris Poll, 82% of US corporate executives said that customers' expectations of their company were "somewhat" (47%) or "much" (35%) higher than they were three years ago. Consumer expectations are not only more varied but they are also widespread and managing their expectations matter in the short and long run. For instance, Amazon and Uber business models have conditioned customers to shop and drive differently. It is necessitating CEOs to rethink customer processes and satisfaction to stay in favour.

Managing omni-channels: New devices, IoT, e-commerce, the Fitbit watch, wifi networks...have resulted in fragmented channels. This is a reality that can neither be controlled nor changed. Instead companies will have to internally standardize their digital business platforms to keep track of the on-goings across multiple channels and devices. But the fact is most businesses still run on fragmented systems themselves and find it tough to coordinate across the fragmented channels.

Increasing market oversaturation: In a fast paced world people are being given a plethora of options – more than they know what to do with. Further, they are overwhelmed by information, ideas, trends and brands. Differentiation has become a difficult challenge as companies need to look at unique ways to not only stand out but also convey that theirs is a brand that people need.

Rising cyber threats: Cybercrimes and cyber security threats are a critical challenge this year. When companies are in business generating money and producing value, with significant online/digital presence, they can be targeted at any time.

Vision alignment: There are many existing diverse perspectives on 'going digital' with vague leadership teams and business strategies. They often know where they want to go but a lack of vision-goal alignment stalls their progress. The result is often piecemeal development, misguided opportunities or false starts.



Developing the digital DNA: How to elevate services and experiences.

As digitization has upped competition, disrupted industries and marketplaces, shaped consumer trends, and mandated that businesses reappraise strategies, capabilities and cultures, it is evident that evolution is not only a priority but a necessity. Digital transformation is more than a pattern, it is a phenomena. It could range from anything – be it digitally oriented products and services, social media strategies, building a robust IT platform to digital interactions. But true transformation involves a gambit that is more than just the end product.

Digital transformation, which really is business transformation, means accelerating people, processes, methods and models, and ideas and innovation to fully harness the inherent opportunities in digital changes in a way that best prioritize and optimize. There are few approaches that can be applied for smoother transformation and seamless consumer experience journeys.

1. Select smart yet suitable strategies: It is important to understand things digital but even more so to understand what digital means to you. The start is for executives to understand current performance and position, then to set forth the digital goals and then create a strategy that aligns the two. Also, digital transformation strategies require inputs from entire business, so it is as vital to get employees to buy in as it is for senior leader to get on-board.

Step 1 is to identify the digital opportunities and threats

Step 2 is to understand the scale and speed of the digital vision

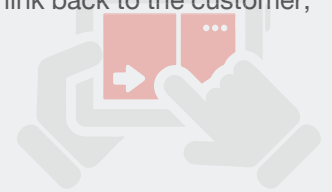
Step 3 is to proactively allocate or reallocate resources

Step 4 is to design or redesign a business model as per your necessity

The bigness or simplicity of it is entirely need dependant. For example, to help visitors at Disney resorts and theme parks, the Walt Disney Company, developed a suite of digital tools. These include the FastPass+ service, which allows visitors to reserve access to theme-park attractions, and the MagicBand, a tech-enabled wristband that facilitates reservations and customer routing at Disney World. Roughly 50 percent of Disney World’s visitors elect to wear it. The more efficient routing helped the resort’s Magic Kingdom to host about 3,000 more guests each day of the 2013–14 holiday season. **(Source-Mckinsey.com)**. This clearly shows that a best-fitting strategy is what works in the long run.

2. Develop holistic views: With digitization, there has been an increase in touch-points and so also an increase in complexity. Now, there are myriad moments when a consumer interacts with the organization – its offerings and experiences – and each of them is critical. A focus only on front-end or digital touch-points can make one lose sight of the bigger picture which is the consumer’s end-to-end journey. Although it is difficult to conclusively compute the extent of an experience, it is for every business to understand it, design for it and influence it as best as possible – at all levels. Every experience must be designed with thought of every point of contact, every customer interaction, and every channel. The key is to weave together disparate interactions and touch-points to create a connected continuum. That means breaking down and collaborating across silos, empowering employees with adequate information and a chance to act on it, and address root causes. Perfecting touch-points alone is not sufficient, but developing a holistic journey mapping of overall interactions results in improved value and experiences.

3. Offer omni-channel services: While omni-channel is not a new concept it is one that is still at a nascent stage. The omni-channel approach is about providing a unified experience for consumers across all channels. It is a synchronized operating model in which all of the company's channels are aligned to present a single face to the customer. No matter which choice of channel the customer picks, they will get a consistent message, experience, product and service. Companies that are able to do so can create the ultimate consumer-client journey. For instance in 2016, Zappos, the online shoe and clothing store, became a US top ten customer brand simply by investing money in their customer service instead of expensive marketing campaigns. They became a poster-child for exceptional omni-channel service by going to extreme lengths to please the customers across platforms. An example of this can be seen in the brand's mobile app, which allows consumers to shop and 'favourite' items across a range of different devices. They can also take photographs of items they see on the street, and then send these pictures to Zappos employees – via text, email or Instagram – who will then find the item and send the relevant link back to the customer, so that they can purchase it online.



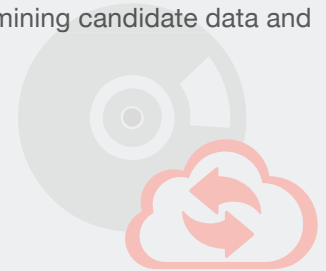
4. Create customer-centric innovation: It is true that a lot of technologies exist, but the trick is to work them in a way that enables your business to deliver what the customer needs, before or as they need it. The key is to put the customers first. For instance, during the 2015 Super Bowl football championship, McDonald's used social media to give away products related to commercials they aired throughout the game. They created a digital newsroom with a cross-functional team including members of the company's marketing, legal, advertising, and social media technology providers. The effort was a success and drew over 1.2 million retweets including high-profile celebrities. Another example is the simplicity of the Starbucks rewards app which first of all offers free rewards with every purchase. But unlike traditional loyalty programmes, Starbucks has made it possible to check and reload the card via phone, website, in-store, or on the app. Any change to the card or one's profile gets updated across all channels, in real-time. "Proactive innovation is one of the best ways to stay competitive in an evolving marketplace" – Forbes.



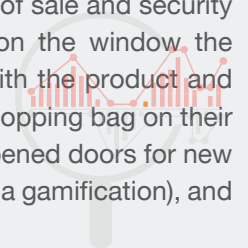
5. Adapt with agility: While strong skills and capabilities are crucial, adaptability with agility is the determinant of success. Velocity, flexibility, balance, change-readiness, external orientation and internal collaboration are some of the aspects of being agile. Forrester defines business agility as the quality that allows an enterprise to embrace market and operational changes as a matter of routine. Agility gives a sustained advantage when enterprises embrace its learning curve.



6. Get right recruiting and training: Despite the digital dominance, in the end it is people handling people. Finding the right talent isn't easy as also nurturing them. But in an increasingly virtual world, it is still the real people who get things done. More than a laundry list resume, top companies are looking for hires who will blend with and boost the company's vision and values. Furthermore, though digital enhances a user experience it is still human work to design and deploy experiences that shape customer's lives. Fostering expertise in employees is best way to do interesting, cutting edge work. Providing the right incentives with clear career paths creates a virtuous cycle of achievement instead of the vicious cycle of attrition. Thus, human capital management by proactively mining candidate data and targeting key skills gaps is the best way to improve productive and performance.

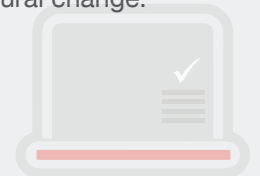


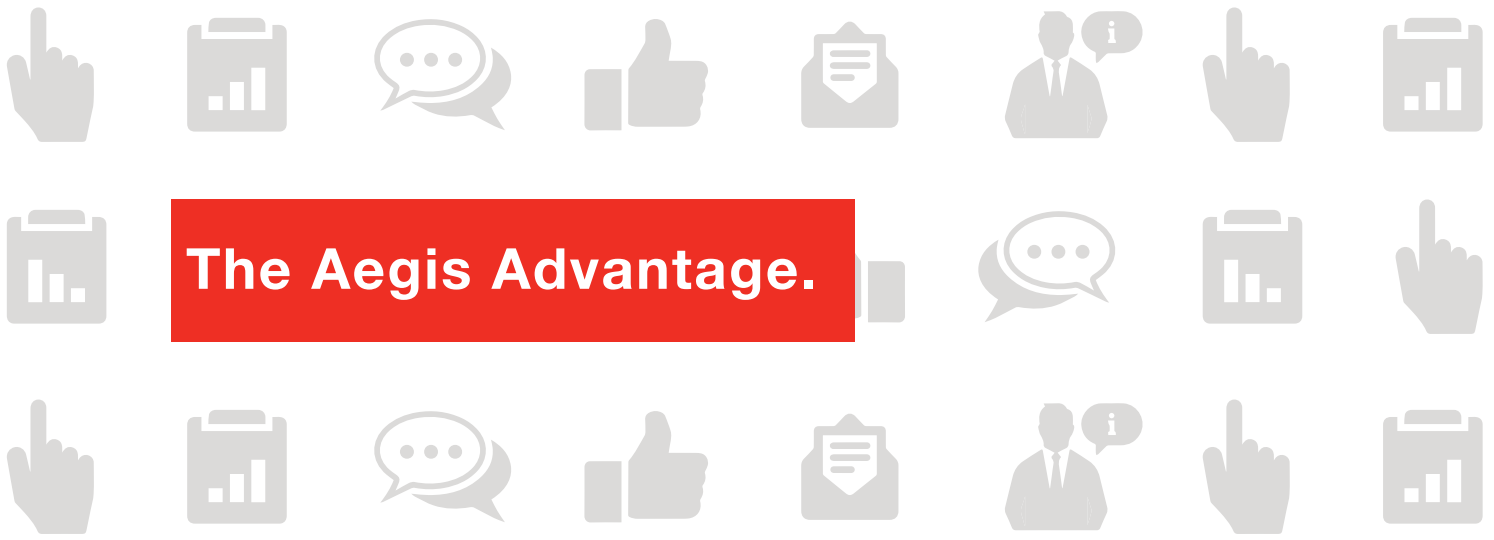
7. Turn tech-friendly: As a cornerstone, companies need to build modular IT platforms, nimble technology-delivery skills and process automation as their core capacity. Furthermore, they need to update themselves with technologies- apps, social media, chatbots, virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence and more. Being tech-savvy, be it in designing the user experience or deploying campaign initiatives, creates the breed of the best. For instance, Apple's product design is a stellar example of maintaining a regular experience across a range of products which earn brand loyalty brownie points. In another instance, Adidas has been driving digital innovation into the store experience across European cities. Their stores have RFID changing rooms, RFID inventory, and RFID point of sale and security scanners which automate information provision and stock accuracy. By touching hotspots on the window the shopper can browse life sized products, make the mannequin show product details, interact with the product and make playful actions and movements. The customer can then move products to their personal shopping bag on their mobile phone by tapping an NFC tag or zapping a QR code. New tools and technologies have opened doors for new ways of connecting with consumers, developing product and services, motivating employees (a.k.a gamification), and playing the business game.



8. Apply analytics: To give the consumer the best experience means knowing the customer in and out. Big data has been a big game changer but few companies know how to use it to benefit business and consumers. Engaging in real-time and the right time predictive, social, campaign and other forms of analytics helps asses the consumer culture, improve demand forecasting and know an organization's competitive stand. Garnering the right insights can help build an emotional experience based on intuitive intelligence – one that makes a customer feel special, valued and more importantly heard.

The journey to digital co-evolution is not just about pushing dreams, but is also about everybody in the enterprise putting in determination for a sustained investment in people, capabilities, technology, and cultural change.



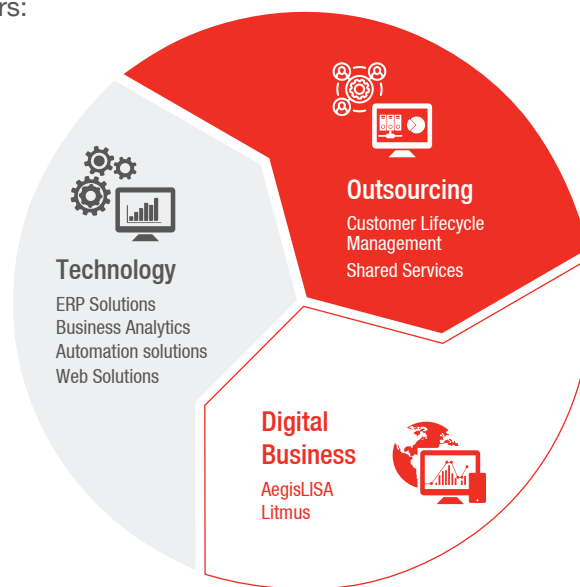


The Aegis Advantage.

In a significant strategy shift, many companies are outsourcing IT infrastructure, customer experience management and other digital sub aspects so they can re-focus revenue generating activities, product and service differentiation and budget bets.

In an overarching solution spectrum, Aegis offers:

Aegis: The Over-arching Solution Spectrum)



AegisLISA: The service and experience transformer.

AegisLISA (Listen, Interact, Socialize and Adapt) is built as a collaborative, customizable and customer-centric digital business solution. Our future-ready framework can help your business harness the full potential of omni-channel interactions to stay ahead of the customer curve. Better yet, we do so by adapting to your required roadmap and customer experience paradigms. It is built on a four foundation framework:

Technology: Our proprietary platform robustly tracks and monitors conversation threads across numerous niche social streams in relation to your business. It's a system that has content categorization capability, a self-learning sentiment engine and an inbuilt CRM capability.

Analytics: Our advanced analytics capabilities help you proactively derive intelligence and opportunities from the conversation clutter. We also provide 360 degree actionable insights for your brand to convert image to equity.

Execution: Our unique resources and specialities exclusively trained in social media help you define and standardize end-user engagements across channels.

Domain: We help you tailor-make your social media strategy by empowering you with in-depth domain knowledge and competitive benchmarks.

Litmus is an experience enhancing digital sub-solution designed to intelligently manage and measure real-time consumer perceptions via context-rich structured conversations. This leads to refined customer-company experiences at every touch-point; at every journey stage. Our end-to-end engagement and analytical solution lends to adaptive aerial view insights for real-world results. Better yet, satisfied customers at every step.

Litmus is a radical route to responsiveness and an intuitive indicator of you customer connectivity.



Whether it is digital leading people or people leading digital, the changes it has rung in people's lives and business functions is irrefutable. Long gone are the days when customer interaction meant phone calls or emails alone. Now every touch-point matters, more so experiences – for brand, product or service. In a digitized scenario, it is still the people centred approaches that bring favourable outcomes for your organization. It is important to remember that digital experience at the end of the day is the new face of customer experience. The basis for integrating 'digital' into experience should not just be about applying technology but leveraging it to enhance customer experiences and better suit their needs. In the age of the consumer, experience is a continuous improvement cycle for a better company-consumer relationship.

"Get closer than ever to your customers. So close that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves." ~ Steve Jobs

"Make a customer, not a sale." ~ Katherine Barchetti

About the Author

Ajay Guliya

Executive Vice President

Ajay heads Sales, Client Relationships, and Revenue Assurance for South Asia, Middle East and Africa for all the lines of business. He is the Global head for Presales & Solutioning for all lines of business, the Global Practice Head for Social Media & Analytics and the Global Sales Head for Back Office Services. He also leads the Transition and Technology functions for India. Spread over 20 years, Ajay's industry experience spans across BPO, Consumer Durables, IT and Office Automation. His forte lies in Business Operations involving business development, new market entry, revenue growth, operations optimization, cost reduction, process development, service standards and operational policies for business excellence. Ajay's people person nature is seen through his mentoring of large teams towards the corporate vision.