How Mature Are Marketers' Digital Transformation Efforts?

Executives at Dmexco weigh in on industry progress and challenges

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eMarketer Editors

Digital transformation is very much an ongoing endeavor. While agencies, brands, media and ad tech companies have all talked about the need to embrace the process, implementation is not so easy. Some have the basics down, while others are starting from the ground up.

To gauge how the industry is doing, we chatted with several executives attending digital marketing conference Dmexco 2018 in Cologne, Germany, last week about the current state of digital transformation for the industry, and for their own companies. These conversations were part of a project we'll be unveiling next month that will layer qualitative insights from industry experts alongside our quantitative data.

Here's a sampling of how Dmexco attendees are thinking about their own digital transformation efforts—what's contributing to their success and what's holding them back.

Damon Reeve, Project Lead, The Ozone Project

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"We work with publishers and marketers and try to drive our clients to use data to drive all of their decisions. We preach that the data should sit at the heart of the business and our clients, with our help, use data to make decisions. But if we actually look at our own business, we probably don't actually use data today as much as we could. Does data actually drive our decisions in terms of who we focus on, how we prospect and how we run our business in terms of KPIs? We aren't there yet."

Fatih Bakay, Solution Engineer, Customer Experience, Oracle

"It's hard to leave the legacy systems behind you and then make it to the transformation. [Many marketers] are relying on their legacy systems for as long as they are working. Oracle is coming from a database infrastructure background, so it will take maybe another five years until we get even a step further and done with the transformation."

Jeffrey Rohrs, CMO, Yext

"Digital transformation implies, to me, having all the different products of the stack in place, working optimally. We've made a conscious decision to push on the implementation of several things that people are saying: 'Oh you need this and this.' Because we've discovered that we don't. There are certain parts of marketing automation that we don't need to implement immediately because we need to focus on the people and the process they expect of us first, and get that aligned. People rush to technology too quickly."

Tiankai Feng, Senior Manager, Global Analytics, adidas

"The technology is evolving faster than people and processes. We're going in the right direction, and everybody's making a lot of efforts, but we're not 100% there yet.

"I will say, there's a lot of visionary and top leadership in our company. We get a lot of young talent and also very forward-thinking talent. So top-down and also bottom-up, it's all basically helping to contribute to the success, and just not being stuck in this traditional thinking and being stubborn about it."

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Lewis Rothkopf, General Manager, Media and Growth Channels, MediaMath

"We are at the halfway point of the transformation. Marketers have recognized, and acknowledged that to be a marketer you need to be a digital marketer. Marketers and their partners are understanding what that means, and what goes into that, and a lot of the groundwork has been laid. More and more, the CMO is the most data-driven person in the company, and the CMO is now a very close partner with the chief information officer and the chief data officer. Companies [now] have chief digital transformation officers. These are acknowledgements that this has to happen, and that it has had to happen for quite some time. We see the horizon, but we're not quite there yet."

eMarketer defines digital transformation as the process by which business leaders harness the capabilities and advances of emerging technologies to digitally reinvent their company's operations, products, marketing, culture and goals for future growth. Technology is the means to transformation, not an end in itself.

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