WHAT IS A DIGITAL BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM?



Every business is a digital one. At least, that's the premise of a digital business technology platform.

Here's the idea: In some ways, every company is a software company because companies today must function in ways that many software or technology firms do, by embracing technology in-house. Companies can no longer wholly outsource IT, unless they want to spend more money, waste more time, forget innovating, and lose their competitive edge.

But bringing all, or most, of your technology in house can be a daunting, expensive exercise, especially when your product may not be technical at all, or you are working within the confines of a legacy company. If so, the digital business technology platform is your answer for achieving faster, better decision-making processes.

Is every company a digital business?

At this point, pretty much yes. A digital business has much less to do with your product and industry. Instead, a digital business is the idea and practical application of creating new approaches to business, discovering new patterns, and building new practices all because of the blurred lines between the digital and physical worlds. A digital business is a place where people, business, and things converge.

This can show up differently for everyone: businesses see ways of improving the connections between factories and consumers or getting a wholly digital product into the world. Cities

understand digital business as a key component to smart cities, where services and people and parking and amenities are connected for efficiencies. In our personal lives, we can easily point to car-sharing technology like Lyft and Uber or apartment-sharing technology like Airbnb. What used to be difficult – finding the right customer for your product – is now much easier as technology supports the convergence of digital and physical spaces.

This means that every business, even if you sell handmade art, likely relies on technology and could utilize even more technology than you already are. But technology alone isn't enough: you also need leadership, talent, skills, resources, and perhaps even new business models to better align technology in support of your business needs.

This is where a digital business technology platform comes in.

Understanding platforms

Technology thought leader Gartner has formalized the idea of a digital business technology platform. First, it's important to understand a platform not as a haphazard set of legacy and SaaS software and applications, as many companies currently function. Instead, they promote a platform as an intentional set-up that is built on service-based principles and architecture.

The goal of such a platform is to create a symbiotic collection of technology, so that various services can interoperate to create and support applications, users, and workflows. A platform shouldn't be a single product or system unit from one vendor, but rather a compilation of them that is flexible, allowing IT to move the pieces to support a range of needs.

A platform that supports digital business technology, then, can handle a whole range of activities and processes, including microservices, event-driven architecture, serverless architectures, machine learning, and even edge intelligence. Digital business technology platforms also support changes in culture that come with agile methodologies, bimodal IT, and DevOps. By combining technologies with culture at the heart of the business, the company can seek fast and innovative data-driven decisions at the company's edges.

Gartner's 5 areas for technology platforms to support digital businesses

Taking the holistic approach, a platform offers a high-level view through a lens of business capabilities and applications. Gartner therefore recommends five areas through which a technology platform should support digital businesses:

- **Information systems**, which support back office and operational areas, such as ERPs and core systems
- **Customer experience**, which create and support customer-facing elements, like customer and employee portals, commerce channels, and consumer apps
- **Data and analytics**, which supports information management and analysis and algorithms, allowing to automate discovery and action and promoting data-derived decision making
- **Internet of Things (IoT)**, which connects the physical assets of core and operational systems, in order to promote connectivity, analytics, and integration by monitoring, optimizing, controlling, and monetizing
- **Ecosystems**, which supports the creation and relation to any ecosystems, marketplaces, and

communities that are external to the business – such as security and API management

Just as important as what's included as what isn't included in the macro-level digital business technology platform:

- Infrastructure and operations, such as data centers, clouds, and networks
- Data management and retention, including processes for cleaning, moving, storing, and prepping data
- Information and semantics integration and consistency, particularly related to data
- Comprehensive integration strategies, like how to integrate for flexibility as business needs change
- Guidelines for insourcing, outsourcing, as-a-service sourcing, and even cloud sourcing

Gartner holds that these latter areas are the more detailed areas that don't have to go into the platform but can exist outside it, because the platform promotes speed and knowledge, not necessary but detailed processes that can exist in other areas of IT.

Implementing a digital business technology platform

Pervasive integration is the key to embracing a digital business technology platform. The foundation is the platform that supports different users, such as developers and business users, while also supporting diversity in deployment. Such platforms rely on both on-premise and cloud apps and data sources, as well as IoT devices.

The ease and efficiency a digital business technology platform can offer is vital to ensuring business success. It's also the key to imagining the next step in a digital business: scaling it in a way that allows for improving both core and edge IT. For example, what if your platform was so comprehensive that automation by machine learning and AI could allow any user to simply ask a question and the platform gives the answer?