PURPLE SQUARE

Dispelling the myth

No-one ever got fired for hiring the big four

I was re-reading a very interesting Forbes article from 2016 recently, entitled **"Nobody Gets Fired For Buying IBM. But They Should"**. It got me thinking about how this translates to the present-day landscape of Marketing Technology and Customer Experience, where we see the proliferation of cross-functional, cross-platform system integrators and Management Consultancies doing battle for dominance in the hearts and minds of Marketing Leaders of organisations on the FTSE 100, the S&P 500 and beyond.

Updated for relevance, the phrase today might well be **"No-one ever got fired for hiring the big four"**, variations of which I have heard many times over my semi-storied career in marketing on both client and agency side, and usually represents the last psychological domino to fall before an organisation decides to embark on a glorious, horrendously expensive and it has to be said, many times ill-advised quest of business transformation.

And like all the good quests you may have seen in books, films and television, a sacrifice or two is going to be required along the way before you get to where need to be.

Since this is the last domino, it makes sense to start out by looking at all the other domino's that need to fall first to get us to this point when this is uttered, or more often quietly thought before signing on that dotted line and explaining to the CFO why you need a purchase order with quite so many zeroes, since it is worth noting also that it's not a cheap dotted line either. We've even seen marketing departments go to the board to effectively mortgage years of future marketing budget against this sold dream of a better, transformed tomorrow. A tomorrow where all systems talk to each other in real-time, empowering seamless process, where externally your happy customers experience rewarding journeys that keep them loyal for life, and internally, staff operate

transparent, open, easy-to-use interfaces to access aggregated analytics to inform where their efforts are best spent to drive incremental value to keep you ahead of your competitors.

The dominos in question are best considered through our familiar Customer Experience (CX) lens, of people, operations, technology, and data, since these are the business levers that every organisation of every size should be able to recognise as the levers they can operate to improve their relationship with their customers, and consequently, their bottom-line revenues.

People

Services delivered by providers like the big four are often offshored (and in some cases even outsourced to specialist vendors like us) for anything beyond basic Business Analysis and client-facing status update meetings. We've seen and heard frequent issues emerging concerning language, culture, and time zone availability.

The disparity between sales and service delivery in this world of Management Consultancy and System Integration is also pronounced, after signing on the dotted line it is likely you'll never hear again from whoever sold you the dream, since delivering on it is a very different departments problem. With functional specialist agencies, you retain access to the dream-weavers (who are often the founders it has to be said), since it is very much in their best interest to ensure your project is successful, as for them retained revenue is so, so much easier to win than new logos, given the scale and scope of the sales and marketing arms of the big four and their kin.

Operations

The aforementioned army of Business Analysts work to produce reams and reams of process flows, status reports and documentation, all in the name of dragging the project and your organisation kicking and screaming through quality gates that serve as the milestones on the journey to the wild blue. In the old days this was reworded and repurposed from prior engagements, or in some cases copied verbatim from the documentation of whatever technology vendor the big four are currently below sales targets for. In the new days Generative AI are in every Business Analysts back pocket – expect some further thought leadership on this in particular soon as it is one of the areas we are monitoring closely as it continues to disrupt and perplex the modern CX landscape.

Technology
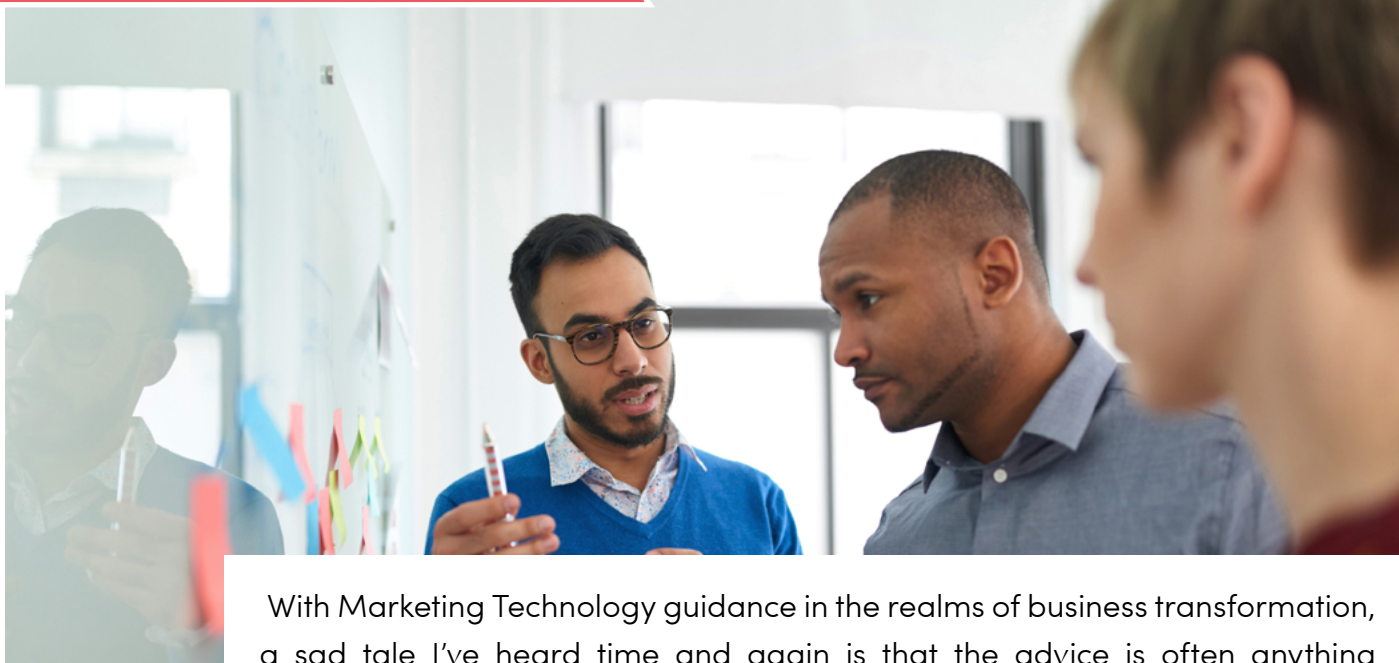
With Marketing Technology guidance in the realms of business transformation, a sad tale I've heard time and again is that the advice is often anything but agnostic, where the vendor recommendation can be primarily driven by whichever B2B quarterly sales target might need to be hit to satisfy the commission payouts from vendor to the partner acting as your license reseller.

If you are lucky, the big fours quarterly technology sales targets will harmonise with your requirements, but do you really want to be relying on luck? As the Roman philosopher Seneca famously remarked "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity", and going into an agreement with your eyes closed is hardly likely to indicate a huge amount of either, in my humble opinion.

As another partner told me once, "Always assume a partner has an ulterior motive until you have worked with them long enough to develop a trust-based relationship". This is magnificent advice, since it is a solid gold principle that in all healthy relationships between human beings, trust must be earned, not assumed.

Data

This is often the least considered during business transformation projects, leading to endless integration issues. Thanks in part to a possibly compromised technology selection process, the ability to plumb in all your disparate data sources, whether they be marketing data, purchase data, advertising responses, social media mentions, surveys, or other forms of analytics that must drive your best endeavours could be even more difficult than I've made it sound.

Between many different vendors, and often within the single technology stacks offered to the marketplace, integrations vary wildly, leading to one of my most hated phrases, "near real-time", which basically means the same thing as "not real-time". Is the data flowing two-way? How often it is happening? Is it automatically populated? How often is it checked? What happens when it goes wrong? Will I get alerted? When does it retry? These are all vital questions, and often the answers will surprise you, in some cases I've seen near real-time refer to a CSV upload that must be undertaken manually.

With all our bases covered we come onto the last domino itself, the perception that no-one got fired. Perhaps it even used to be true. But just as in the seminal masterclass in storytelling "The Usual Suspects", where the main character pointed out "the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist", the greatest trick the big four ever pulled was convincing the world it is still true.

As will surprise nobody, I am a strong advocate of regional functional specialist agencies to satisfy the true needs of marketers in the organisations looking to untangle **sins of the past**, repay **MarTechnical Debt** and prepare your organisation to adapt itself for the future. The work of true business transformation is never easy, but neither should it be the purview of one system integrator to rule them all. There is a phrase I'm particularly fond of, attributed to the Royal Engineers, who for centuries have employed some of the cleverest problem solvers, "Through mud and blood to the green fields beyond".

Finally, I'd like to leave you with the words of one of my learned colleagues, which might seem a little on the nose, but when you come to know and love him like I do, you'll appreciate that it is meant from the heart.

Give us a call when it goes wrong.

About the author

Timothy Biddiscombe

With over two decades of experience in navigating marketing-centric technical challenges, Purple Square CX's Managing Director is a seasoned authority. Spearheading diverse industry verticals, including the dynamic landscape of iGaming, he has played a pivotal role in positioning the company as a leading customer experience advisory.

Drawing from previous experience at industry powerhouses such as Acxiom Data, Wegener Direct Marketing, and Alchemetrics, his expertise has been instrumental in shaping Purple Square's success. Outside the professional realm, his interests span filmmaking, writing and traveling whenever possible!

About Purple Square CX

We are a Customer Experience Advisory that offers a diverse range of services aimed at enhancing customer interactions for businesses.

Our expertise lies in three key areas:

1. CX Advice and Strategy

2. Marketing Automation

3. Customer Data Platforms (CDPs)

Our team comprises CX strategists, architects, engineers, developers and builders, all focused on delivering against the 5 Core Principles of CX: Vision, Operations, People, Data and Technology.

We build long term partnerships with our clients, that deliver their Customer Experience goals, both short-term and long into the future.

Let's talk!

www.purplesquarecx.com