Five key talking points from the 2017 EMEA Adobe Summit in London

By Kirsty Barkhuizen   6 Jun 2017

The annual EMEA Adobe Summit in London is a huge calendar event for us at Cognifide, as part of the WPP Adobe Alliance.

We get to sponsor, host clients and engage with some of the leading marketing minds from around the world.

Adobe London Symposium: Putting customer experience first
Kirsty Barkhuizen 26 Oct 2016

This year, we also collaborated with Adobe in creating the very popular Summit App, built on Adobe Experience Cloud. And our head of business development, Leigh Gammons, co-presented a session with Adobe to share our learnings around this collaboration. During the Partners' Day our CEO, Miro Walker, took to the stage to demonstrate our latest innovation on the Adobe I/O platform.

It's hard to convey the sheer size of Summit, with over 5,000 attendees from more than 50 countries and 110 breakout sessions to choose from. But for me there were some key take outs that will most likely prove to be the game changers over the next 12 months. So, to share these with you, I'm going to try to condense three incredible days into just five key talking points:

The experience cloud

In this, the experience age, 90% of senior marketing professionals believe that they are now competing around the experience. Not the brand, not the product, but the customer experience. And it's no longer the charter of the marketing department but a collaboration across the enterprise. We are all stewards of the experience in the experience age.

To help enterprises compete on this new level, Adobe have realigned their product portfolio, as we reported from the US Summit in March.

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The Adobe experience cloud now comprises the analytics cloud, the advertising cloud and the marketing cloud, and features enhanced integrations into the creative cloud and the document cloud. It offers marketers and digital technologists a one-stop shop for building the digital experiences that put their customers at the heart of their business.


In pure technology terms, it gives companies the capabilities to breakdown traditional ways of working and re-write the operating model, taking on the disruptors, to become experience first businesses. But that brings me to my second talking point because, whilst it 'gives companies the capabilities', technology alone will not bring about the organisational change required to become a truly digital business.

Disrupting the enterprise

Disruption is often talked about as the preserve of the new breed. Uber, Spotify and Airbnb are cited *ad infinitum*. But the truth is, and this was played out time and again at the Summit by companies of all shapes and sizes, if we are not challenging the way that we work, we will get left behind.

This is reflected by the fact that whilst 90% of marketers believe they must compete on experience (as quoted above), only 20% think that they meet CX expectations all the time. So, there's a massive gap between what we know we need to do and what we are actually doing.

Enter the new operating model, stage right. Enterprises need to think completely differently about the way that they work to create and manage personalised customer experiences 24/7. The traditional, siloed organisation can only really create a fragmented consumer experience. We heard that Adidas, for example, are now organising their teams around the consumer. It's not about delighting customers with technical innovation, it's about sustaining a relevant conversation, served up at the right time, on the right device. And that takes the right people and the right processes.
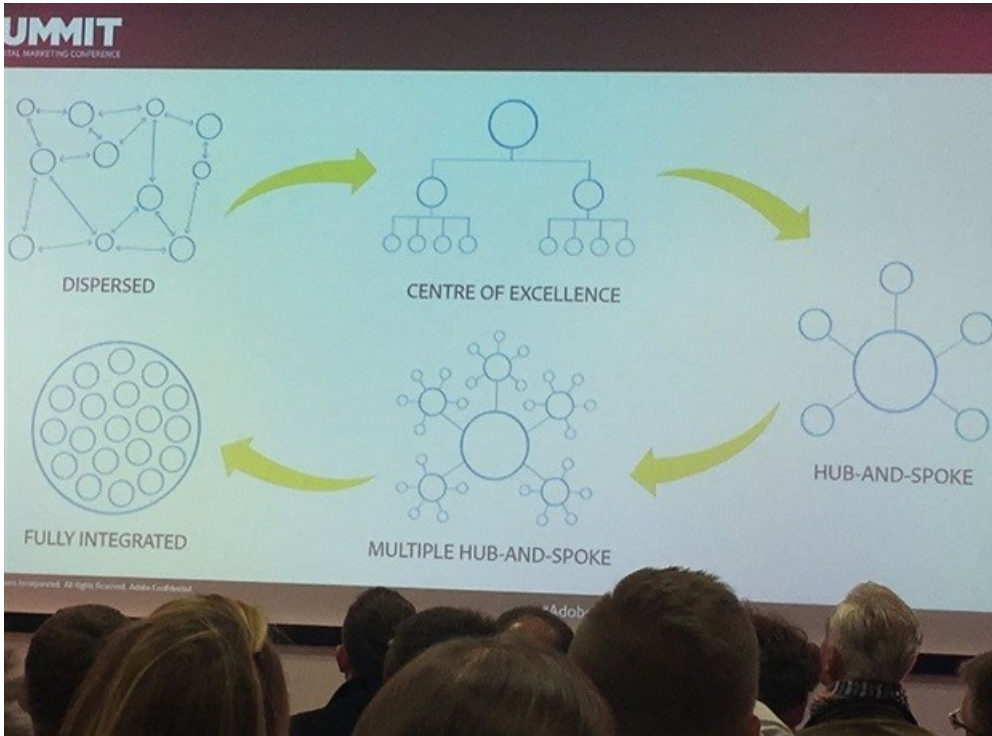
This may mean creating new roles. We have clients who are head of customer experience or journey managers. These job titles didn't exist 18 months ago. This is all about putting the customer first.

And the connected world means that organisations are not as solid as they used to be. They can now operate as loose, fluid, geographically dispersed groups with (hopefully) a common purpose. We are seeing all kinds of interesting new operating models as shared by Econsultancy. Many organisations are establishing Centres of Excellence to manage their customer experiences. Others are setting up a hub-and-spoke model where the spokes are cross-functional teams that historically may hardly have collided, never mind, collaborated.

And finally, Volvo reminded us that success today is not just about organisational change; operating in the experience age also requires a fundamental mindset shift. Agile is not just a development methodology, it is a mindset that the entire organisation will need to adopt.

Partnership

Partnership was a buzzword from start to finish and exemplified by Adobe's new partnership with Microsoft. The partnership aims to put Microsoft's best of breed apps on Adobe's industry-leading platform to jointly enable customers to achieve digital transformation.

The marriage of the experience cloud and Microsoft Dynamics 365 provides a missing piece in the jigsaw by bringing together the marketing and sales capability. This new partnership will make connections between both people and systems and, for the first time, closes the loop between CRM and customer experience. It's the result of a truly integrated team, which brings together engineers from both sides of the marriage. It's the way that we work with our clients and, in our opinion, the way forward in this new, more collaborative age.

Partnerships don't have to be just two-way. Adobe I/O was launched in 2016 and the platform is already seeing the benefits of many collaborative efforts. It's an open developer platform that brings partner applications into the ecosystem and we are one of the first innovators on the platform with our unique event routing system that allows brands and their agencies to easily share marketing assets across the globe.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning

How many times have you read, 'not if, but when' in articles on AI? Well, the truth is that 'when' is 'now' and Adobe Sensei is already shaping marketing innovation. Sensei is a machine-learning framework, built into the Adobe cloud platform. It aims to amplify human creativity and intelligence, not replace it, and builds on years of Adobe learning and experience. It's already enhancing personalisation capabilities and helping organisations to really use their data as fuel to drive business.

Digital transformation – getting started

With so much talk of digital transformation, you'd be forgiven for thinking that we're all almost there. But the truth is, most traditional organisations are really still taking their first steps. So how do you get started when the task feels so enormous that its very size can be the biggest barrier?

There was some great advice from Otto Rosenberger, CMO of Hostelworld. Firstly, acknowledge the present but always look forward, don't spend too much time interrogating the past. Have a clear mandate and check in regularly that you are still aligned with key stakeholders. And, importantly, make sure that you persuade the 'coffee-machine terrorists'. It is so important to bring the naysayers on side; an experience business cannot be built without buy-in across the organisation. Finally, adopt a beta mindset. Marketing in a digital world really does require a new way of working – think big, start small, test and iterate.

So, a pretty chunky five talking points, I'll admit, but hopefully this gives you a flavour of Summit and things to come. Oh, and finally, Partners' Day held a fantastic surprise for us at Cognifide and our Wunderman colleagues as they were announced Agency Partner of the Year. Congratulations to all and here's to another 12 months of exciting innovation before we all meet again at Summit 2018.

ABOUT KIRSTY BARKHUIZEN

Kirsty Barkhuizen is the Regional Director - Africa for Cognifide, based in Johannesburg...
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