

APIs: A Key Part of Any Digital Transformation Strategy



By ALYSSA MAZZINA



Hospitals. Pizzerias. Dentist offices and tax law firms and big box retailers. Today, nearly every business out there is also a software company or is in the process of transforming to one, with those that resist a digital transformation strategy losing—sometimes hemorrhaging—customers to those that have embraced the future.

The stresses of undergoing a transformation aren't always easy to bear, though. There's the pressure to innovate, the pressure to execute, and the immense pressure that comes with building the product, a tension directly proportional to the project's overall complexity. If the product's features are too limited or too similar to those offered by competitors, it becomes harder to justify the product's space in the market.

This high-level dilemma has contributed to the growing popularity of application programming interfaces (APIs). As part of a larger digital transformation strategy, APIs offer companies a faster way to implement advanced features within their products, saving short-term development costs and long-term ownership expenditures, which ultimately sets company initiatives up for success. While APIs have been used as critical digital transformation tools for about a decade now, there's still plenty to be gained from embracing them as soon as possible today—including the following perks.

Become Stronger Competition, Faster

Getting to market quickly is always a leading goal, regardless of the company's long-term digital transformation strategy. Strong products with a leisurely launch schedule may end up losing market space to competitors and may leave the company in a state of perpetual catch-up. This problem is exacerbated by the complexity even "simple" features represent on the development side.

For example, consider a maker of a high-end manufacturing product that wishes to add a click-to-call button to its in-revision mobile app. Besides providing better care and a stronger experience, this mobile addition will give the company a leg up on their top competitor's mobile app, which has outperformed their own for years. The problem? Adding over-network voice communication to an app without a specialized team is time-consuming and expensive. Equally problematic is the need to navigate (and maintain relationships with) a complex network of phone carriers.

In this situation, the appropriate voice API makes implementing the feature far easier. The company can now add the feature to their existing technologies without diving into ground-up development, getting the product to market faster and turning the tables on the competition—making them play catch-up this time around.

2FA, APIs, and Perpetual Technological Relevance

Of course, organizations implementing a digital transformation strategy don't always need a competitor to push them into improving. In finance and other sectors, the inability to stay technologically relevant—by offering a poorly performing app or a limited feature set, for instance—can be a certified reputation-breaker; in other words, companies that fail to get something competent, workable, and relevant out the door are bound to suffer no matter what the competition's doing.

APIs can be hugely advantageous here because they are designed with the express purpose of adding advanced features to new and existing products. These features can be minor upgrades or full-on experiential overhauls—it's ultimately up to the company, the products it offers, and the services their customers and clients desire.

A chain of health clinics that offers patients access to relevant medical records via a web portal or mobile app, for example, could benefit greatly from API integrations. If the parent company is concerned about the effect of breaches on their clientele, they may decide to mandate two-factor authentication (2FA) on any software program handling personally identifying information (PII). This move, stakeholders reason, will both keep clients safer and improve the chain's reputation as a leader in patient-friendly digital offerings.

While a full 2FA solution would be difficult—maybe even impossible—for the company to implement on its own, an API makes the process feasible. It's the difference between a few lines of code added by a small team and a huge undertaking staffed by whole internal teams or third-party vendors. Even though the organization is a healthcare company by trade, they can put out innovative products like a seasoned software company, allowing them to stay relevant with a big reduction in expense and labor.

Digital Transformation Strategy and Business-Side Improvement

APIs can impact external factors like clients and competitors—but the advantages don't stop there. A smart digital transformation strategy makes life easier for employees as well as customers, and the right APIs can help ensure companies realize the best possible outcomes on both sides of the counter.

Take fraud protection, an increasingly important part of a company's efforts to protect itself and its customers from unnecessary losses. While a company with a phone-based component would likely be hard pressed to build their own number-detecting, fraud-busting features, the correct API handles enough heavy lifting to make the project feasible no matter what industry the organization operates in. A company in finance, for instance, could use an API to automatically detect virtual phone numbers, helping them suss out scammers who

purport to be from one region based on a “spoofed” local number or ensuring that incoming calls are coming from legitimate business lines.

But here’s the main point: APIs can help improve a digital transformation strategy from all angles. Companies wishing to gain a competitive edge on their industry “neighbors” can use the tools to add advanced features to their digital lineup, just as organizations with practical concerns such as back-end fraud protection can immediately improve their capabilities with the tools. It’s fair to say there is no one best way to make APIs part of a transformation strategy. Rather, they can improve every aspect of a company’s overall efforts in countless ways.

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