

WHY CX SHOULD STAND FOR CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

The go-to guide for turning creativity into a growth accelerator



Customer experience (CX) is one of the most popular phrases in marketing, with google searches nearly tripling in the last decade and hashtags like #CX being thrown around like crazy. The concept, however, is still misunderstood.

Your CX is your brand - it communicates *why* you are in business, *who* you are, *what* you stand for and *how* you are different compared to all those other brands out there.

In a world of chaos, CX is your anchor. It is how you set your brand apart from others and entertain, engage but also inform and guide your customers.

But how exactly do you create an exceptional CX? Some marketers might say "You need technology to transform your CX!" or another favorite "You need the emerging technologies of today to shape the CX of tomorrow." But let's dig a little deeper, into what truly makes a great CX and differentiates a brand.



Times like these make us realize how dependent we have become on the digital world. The shift from offline to online is being fast tracked and focusing on your unique key brand qualities has never been more important. We are on unfamiliar grounds and it's crucial to make the right strategic choices not only for our brands, but for our people too.

We can either hit the panic button and focus on the short-term or we can seize this moment as an opportunity to design the CX that delivers your brand promise and where you don't fall prey to the CX of others.



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Introduction

CX is king

The technology curse



Put your money where your brand is



Brace for impact



INTRODUCTION

Over the past 5 years, the rat race to own the CX has been on. Across industries, brands have increasingly invested time and resources to design, manage and improve their CX. In fact, research by Reports and Data indicates that the CX management market will grow at a compound rate of almost 30% per year for the next six years. The secret is out, every marketer knows how important their CX is for brand differentiation.

As a result, marketers have invested and adapted technology at an unprecedented rate. Fear of failing to keep up and following the outdated marketing dinosaurs into extinction had tech spend skyrocketing - with the global MarTech industry now estimated to be worth a whopping \$121.5 billion.

But where do we draw the line for relying on technology to improve the CX? Can you even differentiate your brand and create a memorable experience with tech alone?

We don't think so...and probably most of you do too. Heck, even the researchers at Forrester agree.



In one of their recent reports, Jay Pattisal, Forrester's principal analyst, looked at how brands can set themselves apart by focusing on creativity instead of solely investing in technology to improve the CX. He writes that "CX has become homogenized and table-stakes technology have created a sea of digital sameness." Customers are no longer able to distinguish one brand experience from another.

Which is pretty easy to demonstrate. Grab your phone and go to two of your food delivery apps, followed by a browse at the sites of three major banks in your city and four beauty retailers. It's not difficult to notice how similar they are. The same applies to when you book flights or a hotel room. As Forrester describes, "every brand offers the same digital experience because they all address the same customer needs, use the same technology platforms, and design for the same mobile use case."

Any obsession always comes with a cost. In this case, a stagnant CX. It's hard for customers to buy your products if they can't remember who you are in the first place. So, how can brands set themselves apart and grow their customer base?

The answer is creativity.



Think about how Aesop quietly conquered the world by embracing design in a unique way, how Aldi revolutionized grocery shopping by positioning the brand as the "good different" and how Pixar combines storytelling with technology to differentiate from the competition.

These brands are successful because they apply creativity to all customer touchpoints and put it at the heart of the experience.



I - Introduction





Certain terms are used so often that they can become unclear or lost in translation. CX is such a term. CX as we know it, stands for customer experience. Your customers' perception of their experience with your brand.

The "C" in CX stands for "customer", not communication or campaign or content. This is about your customers. The "X" stands for the experience customers have with your brand. How customers interact and journey through your brand's touchpoints will determine how they remember your brand and whether or not they will come back again.

In a nutshell, your CX will basically determine who of your customers will be loyal to you and who won't. The importance of CX has been long recognized by marketers and it's no wonder why we have declared it king.

- CX is king





We have been suffering from the shiny object syndrome

Technology is created to help us scale our marketing and communicate our brand to more people than we could have ever imagined. Unfortunately, at some point, we got so caught up in the process, that we forgot what we were using it for in the first place: as a tool, an enabler, to get us closer to the people we wanted to reach.

It's easy to over rely on technology. But technology without a vision or purpose will never create a distinctive and memorable CX that meets your customer expectations.

Despite what some sales people say, you can't just plug in a tool and expect magic to happen.

- CX is kind





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The true meaning of CX

What if CX stands for creative experience instead? Where we combine creativity and technology for a transformative sweet spot. Because, in our opinion it's not a question of one or the other, you need both to create a CX that differentiates your brand and exceeds customer expectations. Now, however, the balance is out of whack.

Like yin and yang, the Ancient Chinese philosophy of dualism, where contrary forces complement and interconnect with each other in the natural world, creativity and technology can and should exist together in harmony.





But how?

Let's take a step back and start with the beginning, your brand. Michael Vromans, one of our creative directors, has strong views on what it takes to build a unique brand. Many years ago, while he was still with JWT, he learned early on that everything in marketing begins with the brand.

Contrary to popular beliefs of "marketing begins with the customer", building your brand should be your first priority. If you don't know who you are as a brand, what you stand for and why you are in business, how can you communicate and connect with cus-

tomers? Well, exactly, you can't, at least not in a memorable and meaningful way.

Customers connect with brand personalities they can relate to. Here's how Michael and the team have done that for one of our clients, Forward You (FWU), a German tech-financial company.

2 - CX is king



FWU: life insurance is anything but boring

FWU provides life insurance through AI investment methods. They are ambitious and were about to make a big move when they reached out to us for help. Transitioning from a traditional business to business brand to a business to consumer brand is never easy, even more so in an already crowded and competitive insurance marketplace.

We started with a rebranding first and looked at three pillars: *strat-egy*, *personality* and *identity*. Together these form what we call the brand design system which essentially holds all brand elements. This brand design system facilitates the communication and production process and informs us on look and feel, behavior and tone of voice. This way we ensure a consistent and coherent brand experience across all touchpoints, no matter what we are developing; the website, a client portal or a lead generation funnel.

But how do you make a life insurance brand stand out and appeal to millennials, FWU's target audience? FWU is a tech company with people at its heart. They stand for possibilities and are all about making people's lifelong dreams come true by offering tailor-made investment solutions. Whether this is buying a big house, a beautiful new car or sending your kids to university.



We brought this vision to life by using creativity as a differentiator and bringing this to the forefront of the CX, where the brand, content and product come together. Hybrids, a trending animation style, that combine illustrations, photography and film, were developed and became the creative focus. They were hand-drawn and convey the promise of FWU by making a customer's dream world a reality.





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The artwork shows the target personas in real life, while the hand-drawn illustrations display their dreams and goals. The vivid and original animations connect with the audience on an emotional level, painting a dream world where all of their life goals are reached. The hybrids support FWU's brand narrative, set it apart from competing brands and make it appealing to FWU's target audience.





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FWU is a great example of integrating brand, content and product into a CX that engages and converts. Working alongside a bold client who is not afraid to innovate certainly helped us to use creativity as a differentiator.



Michael Vromans DPDK Creative Director

It's tough to define what a brand stands for and then communicate the brand consistently in everything an organization does. You need skills to understand your brand, what it stands for and how to connect this with an audience. These are precisely some of the skills that are lacking today.





The world's best built brand

When it comes to examples of exceptional brands, marketers normally look to the likes of Apple, Nike or Coca-Cola. To say they aren't great would definitely be a flat-out lie. But sometimes we need to look outside our profession to keep our thinking fresh and embrace other creative crafts.

In his book *Hegarty on advertising: turning intelligence into magic,* John Hegarty, one of the world's most famous advertising creatives, describes why the Catholic Church is the best example of a well-built and consistent brand, if not the greatest of all.

Hegarty describes that "It has the best logo: a simple cross, with which they also branded their churches." He mentions that "The churches were always in the center of a town and back then the tallest building", "The Church also went global and kept on diversifying their offerings by extending its services to weddings, funerals and christenings." Then we have not even discussed how they kept top-of-mind and applied creativity "The Church employed the best architects, painters and musicians; from Michelangelo to Leonardo to Mozart, Beethoven and Bach."



Hegarty also adds that the Church was selling belief, which should resonate with modern brands, because nowadays "We're increasingly selling things you can't see and 2000 years after its founding, the Church is still going strong."

At DPDK we believe in the power of consistency, but we also need to be constantly refreshing our brands as times change and evolve. You have to be *consistently new*.



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It's an understatement to say that marketers have become obsessed with technology. It's easy to see why - any book or article that you read or conference that you go to is always talking about the next trends in technology you should not miss out on or invest in. When you look around, everywhere you see people on their phones, laptops or ipads, trying to stay connected to one another.

Technology has become the star of the show, but at what cost?

Even though we have tried to improve CX by investing in technology, unwittingly CX has become stagnant instead. Customers are having difficulties distinguishing one experience from another. Nowadays, everyone is "customer-obsessed", "green" or "innovative" and digital sameness has taken the center stage.

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When you go online and look at websites or apps of travel, retailers, banks or food delivery, it's not difficult to see the striking similarities. Functionality is prioritized above everything else.

How are customers supposed to choose between hundreds of brands that are more or less the same? Kinda like Doug, the dog from the Pixar movie Up, who gets distracted every time he sees a squirrel. The same goes for customers, they are tuning out and losing their attention.







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Tech-enabled experiences powered by emotional creativity

Your technological solutions and offerings can be perfectly on point. But did you think about making an emotional connection? You might just have homogenized your brand and find customers slowly losing appetite.

The relationship you have with your customers is powered by people, not technology. Your customers are human and make a lot of decisions based on their emotions. Connecting with their hearts and minds is the foundation of an emotional, unique and differentiating brand. This is done best when you include that emotional connection in every aspect of your brand's development, from artwork, logos, slogans, social media engagement, helpdesk, e-commerce, supply chains and more.

Vittorio Bonori, CEO of Publicis Groupe Italy, said last year that "Technology has become a commodity, while culture, creativity, and strategy make all the difference." It's a message that we as marketers know to be true. It's also probably why most of us became marketers in the first place. Using creativity to differentiate our brand and spark growth, is one of the cornerstones of successful marketing. The basics of marketing have not changed. We are still trying to understand our customers and build closer relationships. You know that investing in technology helps you reach more customers, but what do you do once you have someone's attention? Combining both together and investing in creativity helps to:

Create a lasting brand impression

Creativity helps you cut through the noise and helps you become more interesting and real. As said before, if a customer does not remember who you are, it's really difficult to get them to buy your products.

9 Attract more potential customers

Great creative experiences bring people together and generate more interest from potential customers. It's like 1 + 1 = 2. One customer likes you, talks about you and shares your brand on their social media networks. They might even mention your brand offline to family and friends too.



Retain more loyal customers

In the end, every marketer wants loyal customers, but not everyone is willing to go the extra mile. Great creative experiences show customers the benefits of their connection and patronage with your brand.

Now is the time to change and start thinking about a thorough CX architecture. Wait. An experience what?

3 - The technology curse

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Why CX architecture is not User Experience (UX)

CX is the experience a customer has when interacting with your company or brand. It connects all aspects of the customers' experience, the business and the brand. It maps customers' needs, expectations and highlights major opportunities.

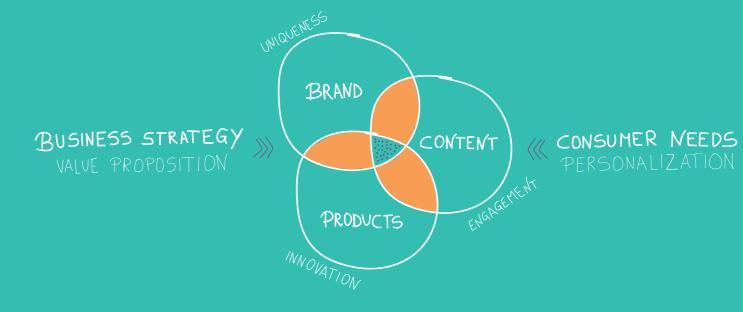
UX is usually product or service-specific. It is the experience a customer has when interacting with that product. This makes UX a subset of CX.

At DPDK we see CX architecture as the only way to truly differentiate your brand. CX architecture is a combination of your unique brand identity, innovative products and engaging content. Which should be brought to life with tailored strategies and custom code.

A customer experience architecture that is based on a templated framework, standardized software package and a basic understanding of customer needs can not and will not support your brand promise. At best it will give you a mediocre experience that just functions. Which is exactly the problem, it just works.



An exceptional and unified CX is the only way to truly differentiate as a brand.



Be critical of success stories of people who have an innovative new take on something and stuff this into yesterday's processes without thinking twice. If it was that easy, anyone could do it. You see what happened here?

Building a CX architecture is like designing a building. Architects give meaning to space and create unique buildings from scratch that enhance people's lives. They believe that every inch in and around a building should enrich the overall experience. Architects are masters of merging form with function and plan, design and execute their work meticulously.

Here's how our own team of architects has created a CX architecture that supports the brand promise of a brand that needs no introduction.





Nike: a holistic experience between technology, brand and CX

In 2018, Nike React, one of the company's most important innovations in years, was about to be launched. To unify both the online and offline experience, the Beaverton-based brand partnered with DPDK and asked us to bring the experience and feel of the ultra-soft, ultra-springy Nike Epic React to potential customers through mobile, desktop and in-store.

By building a customizable digital experience, potential customers could virtually explore Nike Epic React and match the shoe to their specific running style and requirements. Visual elements varied from asking what Nike Epic React feels like (as soft as stress balls, as light as feathers, as responsive as springs) to particular running style and favorite colors.



We created an innovative experience that was personalized, fun, engaging and could easily be shared online. The campaign was a true extension of Nike's brand promise of bringing inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.



Pim van Helten DPDK CEO



The end result was a personalized Nike Epic React in-store running experience that could be named, downloaded and shared through social media. People could try and test the revolutionary shoe and share their experience with friends and followers.



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On top of that, the digital part of the React experience won multiple Webby's, Lovie's and CSS- awards and turned out to be a perfect example of technology hitting the emotional sweet spot between brand, CX and business requirements.





PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR BRAND IS

A brand promise is an extension of your brand positioning and essentially comes down to the experience customers can expect every single time they interact with your brand or company. It's called promise for a reason and holds you accountable to a certain standard. The more you deliver on that promise, the stronger your brand is in the mind of your customers.

A good brand promise defines you as a brand and sets you apart from others. It's the reason why you get out of bed every day beyond making money. Fedex "peace of mind", Lego "endless play" and BMW "the ultimate driving machine" are all examples of successful brands that are consistently delivering on their promise.

When you're building a digital experience, it's important not to lose sight of your brand promise. It's what should shine through in everything that you do, whether this is a website, portal or online campaign for that matter.

More often than not brands are prioritizing technology and chasing efficiency and in the process lose touch with their values and qualities that made them successful in the first place. Efficiency focuses on optimizing what there already is and by doing this you often miss out on the opportunity to create something better.

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3 considerations for bringing creativity into the experience

As mentioned above, your brand promise should be reflected in everything that you do, it's the foundation from which you start building your CX. But, instead of applying creativity at the end of your CX process as part of a defined checklist, you should put creativity at the heart. It's not easy:

1. Creativity doesn't follow a set-out process. That's why it's called creativity

Without a defined path to take, many brands struggle with applying creativity on a brand level. Creativity is hard to grasp, let alone manage. Creativity has to have elements of surprise, needs to challenge and be daring, while inspiring at the same time. Marketers look at peers and best practices and build generic solutions on that. Without keeping the core of your brand in mind, digital sameness lures on the horizon.

Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios, describes creativity as: "Unexpected connections between unrelated concepts and ideas." We would add to that: "Unexpected connections between unrelated concepts and ideas, at the right time for the right audience."

2. Creativity is dependent on craftsmanship. Execution is the only thing customers will see from a strategy

Creativity is all about ideas and ideas are dependent on execution. In his book *Creativity Inc.*, Catmull describes "If you give a good idea to a mediocre team, they will screw it up. If you give a mediocre idea to a brilliant team, they will either fix it or throw it away and come up with something better. If you get the team right, chances are that they'll get the ideas right."

It's cliche, but true, an organization is only as good as it's people. Once a tone of voice for your revolutionary Al-bot has been decided, it is up to great copy and UX writers to execute.

It's the same on a tech and coding level: instead of relying on set templates, predefined design guidelines and copying others, coding creative experiences starts with craftsmanship, a thorough understanding of the brand and pinpointing opportunities to make the difference. Custom code, tailored design and hand-drawn animations will bring out the DNA of your brand, set it apart and leave a lasting, positive impression.

Creative brand experiences stand and fall with consistency

Creativity should be applied to all touchpoints in your CX. Each touchpoint represents an opportunity to establish an emotional connection with your customers and all touchpoints should be equally important. Consistency is key here.

Refrain from resorting to generic templates. Instead, a design system might help you manage consistency while having the freedom of bespoke solutions for each and every touchpoint. View this design system as the evidence of keeping your brand promise and a reference for all of your brand's activities.

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Digital Realty: the foundation of a strong brand

The San Francisco based global data center provider asked us to design a best-in-class online experience that positions Digital Realty as an industry leader and differentiates them from competing brands.

To understand the brand better, we started with multiple workshops between brand advocates and stakeholders. This led to a redefinition of brand fundamentals, as well as renewed brand and campaign messaging.

We found freedom of use within the Digital Realty realm one of the most important differentiators when compared to competitors. Clients of Digital Realty have the freedom to work with any technology partner inside their data centers. Competing brands on the other hand work with a "walled garden" concept, which is a closed platform in which all operations are controlled by the operator. Essentially this comes down to no freedom of choice whatsoever.

This brand promise was further amplified by visually explaining and showcasing Digital Realty's technical capabilities. Focusing on the people behind the expertise and staying away from the more

corporate identities of some competitors. Positioning Digital Realty as the trusted foundation for digital ambitions, leading to freedom.

A logo is a key part of a brand's digital identity. It's a symbol customers connect with their memory of what your company does and even more importantly how it makes them feel. Digital Realty's logo - a building with squares, where the squares represent data needed a breath of new life. We created an animated waterfall of data that pours into the logo and into their new corporate website.

Next to the website, we also built a client portal. The newly developed client portal turned out to be a great example of a brand promise that meets business requirements by connecting technology and customer needs. As an important touchpoint in the customer journey, it became living proof of Digital Realty's 'Freedom' proposition.

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"Managing customer expectations always starts with a strong, clear and consistent brand. It's a crucial and powerful starting point for any CX, that's often overlooked in the process."

> Rob Nolten DPDK Creative Director Brand, Campaigns and Content









Brand foundation, from the inside out

The strongest brands mostly originated from a company culture, a founder's passion, a drive to change or strong storytelling. Not all brands can leverage such history. Some of the most well-known brands started as a label or a product.

Magnum, the ice cream bar, grew into a successful icon of selfindulgence. Yet, it was bought as a product and further developed by Unilever in 1989, who consistently built the narrative and nurtured the brand story. Strong brand, less authentic heritage.

In these examples, the brand starting point was either created or available. Assess what is there, what is not and what needs work. Develop or improve your brand positioning and base everything that comes after on these fundamentals.

4 - Put your money where your brand is

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Establishing the foundation of your brand is key for CX success.



Wonder of workshops

A workshop is a great tool to keep all involved aligned and gather insights and inspiration from different levels within the organization.

Bringing in outsiders with a fresh view on things works wonders when developing a brand from an existing culture, product or company, but is equally valuable when creating a brand from scratch. Brand foundation workshops often bring out solutions that were hidden in plain sight, but would never have seen the light of day without proper guidance. "Why didn't we come up with that ourselves?" is usually the best compliment we get.



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BRACE FOR IMPACT

Continuously delivering an experience that surprises, delights, engages and connects with customers while exceeding their expectations, is a company-wide undertaking. It's certainly not something left to marketing alone. Customers expect to engage with brands, but we force them to deal with departments. Every department creates its own experience, from sales to customer service all the way up to IT.

Someone has to stand up and define what the overall experience should look like and work with each department to get their input. The CX architecture helps brands understand how each department can maximize their impact through an exceptional customer experience.



5 - Brace for impact



What's the ROI?

A highly creative CX, why should I care? What's the return on investment (ROI)? It's a question everyone gets asked at least a hundred times in their careers. You can't avoid ROI and that's a good thing. Questions about ROI are important.

You always need to measure the key performance indicators (KPIs) that connect the dots back to your business and the customers you're trying to reach. What is the return you want as a business and what's the return for your customers? How can you create value for both sides?

Building a relationship with your customers takes time and begins with delivering value. ROI should be a long-term consequence of engaged and loyal customers. A relentless pursuit of short-term ROI is often harming the returns in the long run.

Creativity is a big driving force behind brand success. Think about it, have you ever heard of a successful brand that's not embracing creativity? Chances are slim to none. An article published by Marketing Week last year confirms that creative brands deliver better business results. The article mentions that 67% of brands with top ratings on the McKinsey's Award Creativity Score, which measures quantity, consistency and breadth of categories of Cannes Lions awards won, have above-average revenue growth.

In addition to Marketing Week, we found that a highly creative CX improves customer engagement metrics and online success, keeps customers coming back for more and helps increase conversions.

ORTEC

20% drop in bounce rate, increase in average session duration with over 15%.

FWU

42% of the website visitors are returning visitors.

PEUGEOT

Number of test drives at dealerships increased by more than 150%.



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Exceeding customer expectations in 4 steps

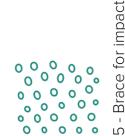
It's all about creating a mindset and culture that embraces and celebrates exceptional customer experiences.

Bring out your unique brand qualities

Start with your brand foundation. Find your narrative, define your purpose, your why, who, what, how and deliver on a great brand promise. It is your brand, but customers have to embrace it.

Emotionally connected products that bring success to customers

Whether it is customer service, AI chatbot or remotely accessible locker boxes for delivery, make sure your offerings come from business requirements, address customer needs, solve a real problem and creatively and emotionally connect to your brand promise. Only then you entered the sweet spot of maximizing relevancy and preventing digital sameness.

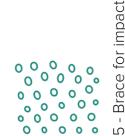


Brand awareness through engaging content

Make an emotional connection by leveraging storytelling. Create engaging content from the heart and soul of your brand that focuses on the story you want to tell, not the story you want to sell. Do that and be prepared to be remembered by customers and potential customers for a long time.

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A strong creative mindset should be in your company's DNA and is not owned by a specific department. Start by instilling creativity company-wide and foster an environment where creativity is valued. Tearing down silos is also key for getting a complete overview of customer needs and wants. By integrating departments and critical data across the organization, you'll get a better understanding of your customers and can provide a better CX. It is crucial to go beyond boundaries of departments and roles.





What can make one brand different from another when the experience is built from the same common technology platform, designed to solve the same user or category need, and programmed for V V V the same two devices?

Creativity."

Forrester, 2019 The Cost Of Losing Creativity

Creativity becomes the defining differentiator

Normally, change doesn't happen overnight. Except this time it did. Due to the coronavirus, you are forced to quickly adapt to a world, where digital has become central to every customer interaction. Where you would usually map out your digital strategies over multiple years, now this is a matter of weeks or months.

Sticky brands that create meaningful experiences will be more successful during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Creativity has never been more important in making sure that your CX stands out in the sea of digital sameness.

A CX that sets you apart from others is more than implementing the latest tech trends. In your mind and heart, you know what's important. Inspire your customers to do or feel something. Let's no longer make creativity the forgotten C in CX. Let's put it back where it belongs, at the heart of your experience.

5 - Brace for impact



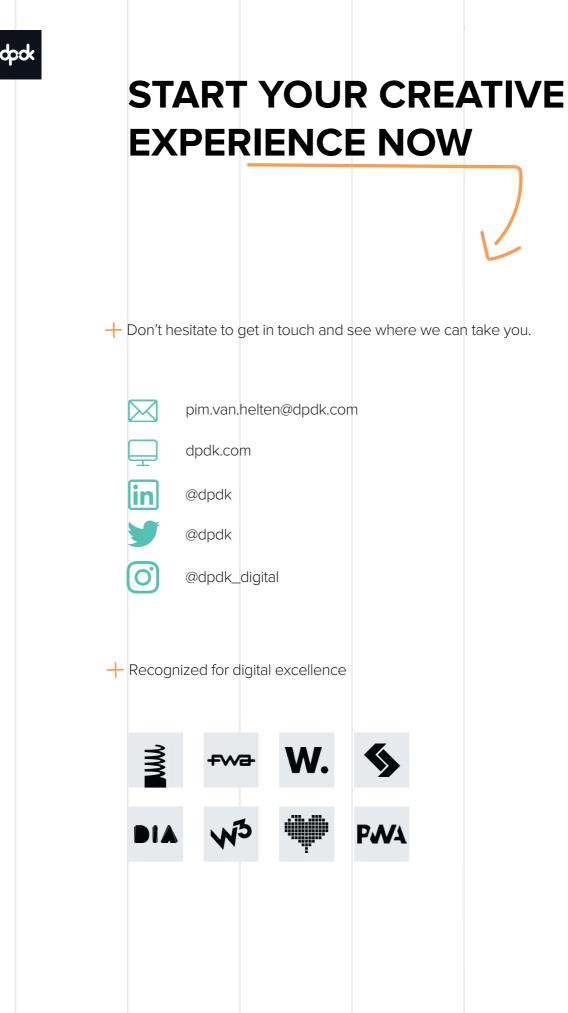
Your focus determines your reality

What we learned in the last 20 years is that for most brands, creativity and technology might be a focus, but it's never their core competency. Brands talk about having a focus on putting the customer and their experiences at the center of their company, but that is easier said than done. They invest in tools and people, but then the focus changes and people move on. Or vice versa.

Being successful in this space requires a relentless commitment to innovation. At DPDK, we learned to be new every day. We are solely focused on transforming brands through exceptional digitalism by using creativity and technology as enablers.



5 - Brace for impact



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pim van Helten is CEO and co-founder of DPDK. He simply couldn't pass the opportunity to co-found the agency in 2004 to make brands a better version of themselves than that they occur in a 30-second commercial. As the agency's CEO he has made it his mission to transform brands through exceptional digitalism. Pim is ill-suited for prefab and ready-made and as an energetic strategist, he loves to keep his eyes on the horizon and fight the ordinary with passion and craft.



ABOUT DPDK

20 years of transformation, change, innovation, and adaptation. We saw tech emerge and disappear, trends come and go and customer expectations change and grow.

Today more than ever, our clients count on us to be new every day. As an innovation partner, they rely on our experience and expertise dealing with continuous transformation and resilient adaptation. We help them answer and exceed customer expectations in a hyper-personalized landscape, keep them on the offense, and have their brand differentiate through customer experience.

From 20 years till now, and from offices in Rotterdam, New York, and San Francisco, we can proudly say we are still living our mission:



Transforming brands through exceptional digitalism.