Digital Futures

Successful Digital Partnering

Digital Futures Core Strategic Partner Group

Contents

Foreword

In our second Digital Maturity & Effectiveness paper in 2021 we cited the 2020 McKinsey report that stated 70% of digital transformation strategies fail. In other papers, 44% of CEOs stated that digital transformation strategies fail due to poor planning and execution, which resulted in the failure to realise the value initially stated by partners.

The past two ukactive Digital Maturity and Effectiveness reports have cited the desire for clarity by operators on what constitutes good digital partnering attributes. This paper seeks to provide you with some thought through our research, however, the theme of discovery emerges repeatedly and the crucial role it plays in the assessment of your own capabilities and achieving your desired outcome. It will also explain how some of the free tools can help support you in digital partnering.

The digital landscape is rapidly evolving. You need only to reflect on peers and what your children are engaged in, not to mention ChatGPT and the move by big tech from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 solutions. It seems daunting and somewhat exclusive to those organisations that are in the private sector and able to make incremental adjustments, however, ukactive's Digital Futures Group challenges this idea.

By seeking complementary digital partners, operators can leverage their strengths and gain access to new capabilities, reach new members, as well as enhance the experiences of existing members. This can help improve your offerings, streamline operations, increase existing and new member engagement, and drive growth. However, digital partnering requires careful planning, clear communication, and a commitment to building strong and trusting relationships.

In this Digital Futures paper we explore the understanding around the key factors that contribute to successful digital partnering which are essential to any operator seeking to maximise the benefits of collaboration in the digital age.

David Gerrish
ukactive Strategic Lead Digital Transformation

Executive Summary

The past two annual ukactive Digital Maturity and Effectiveness reports have cited a need for greater understanding on what constitutes successful digital partnering. While this seems like a simple question, its answer is anything but. However, an emerging theme is the ability for the organisation to capture and articulate its needs through consultation, and to agree a defined course of development. This allows robust guardrails to be put in place to ensure the key principles of project management — time, cost and quality — are met. For those familiar with process design, this may seem obvious, yet new digital services can appear daunting, complicated, and costly, and that's if you get it right.

However, using the principle of discovery, you can help designers of digital services understand the needs, wants, and behaviours of your customers they are designing for. By conducting research and gathering information during the discovery stage, designers of digital services can gain valuable insights into what their target audience wants and needs from the digital service. This information can be used to create a user-centric design that meets the needs of your customers and provides a positive experience. Discovery can also help designers of services identify pain points and areas for improvement in existing digital services, allowing them to design solutions that address the issue.

Furthermore, discovery can help designers of digital services validate assumptions and test hypotheses about your customers and suppliers of third-party solutions. This can help designers of solutions create more effective and efficient designs that better meet the needs of your target audience.

Overall, discovery is a crucial step in the digital service design process as it helps designers create user-centric solutions incorporating an omnichannel approach to meet the needs of your target audience and improve the overall user experience and operational benefits. To support you in this discovery process, ukactive, through our Digital Futures partner, Leisure Labs, has offered a 'no obligation' discovery call, which you can access **here**, or we encourage you to speak to your main digital service provider about a discovery session.

The Role and Importance of Digital Partnering

So much of how our sector supports its customers relies on the smooth delivery of digital experiences and touchpoints. From booking systems to self-check-in desks, CRM to video platforms, no matter the size of the organisation or diversity of an operator's portfolio, at some point it will have to engage the services of a digital partner. Usually, fitness and leisure operators will require the services of multiple digital partners, as they have a wide variety of needs that one supplier cannot fulfil.

With multiple platforms supporting numerous needs, the inevitable crossover requires people and systems to work together to meet the ever-rising consumer expectations for high-quality services and seamless experiences. Digital evolution continues at pace, both inside and outside the sector. Without some commitment to ongoing investment in digital provisions and solutions, operators risk finding themselves falling further behind and potentially losing members and revenue.

The challenge for operators is to implement digital measures that drive the success of their organisation and provide the best return on investment. For providers, the smooth delivery of digital partnering can help to secure the longevity of their service. But difficulties can arise on both sides of a partnership that limit the positive impact of digital services. Having the wrong partnership in place can create delays and potentially derail an initiative. So, operators and providers must work together to ensure successful delivery of digital operations. Partners too must collaborate to ensure that their multiple interfaces work effectively with each other.

Knowing how to set yourself up for digital success, how to select the most appropriate and effective digital partners, how to ensure that your digital systems talk to one another and how to get the best return on investment isn't easy. In this guide, ukactive, Sport England and our Digital Futures Group partners and operators share the insights developed over decades of partnering that will help you to prepare for, and deliver, successful digital partnerships that benefit all parties.

Digital Partner:

An external agency, product or service that supports your internal resource to deliver digital products or services to your organisation or its customers.
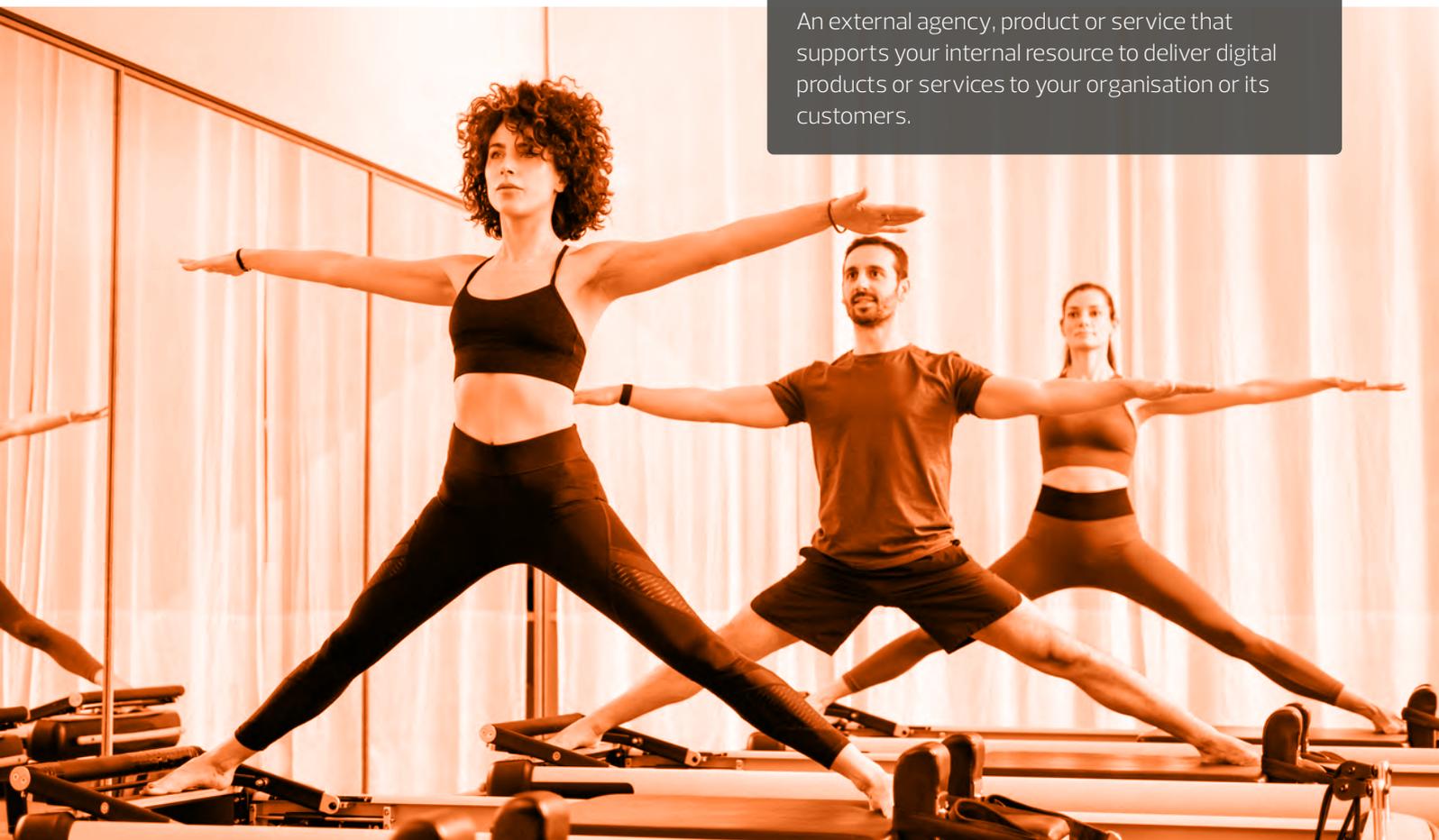
Challenges in Digital Partnering

Digital partnering relies on operators and sometimes multiple suppliers working collaboratively towards shared goals and maintaining a consistent and productive line of communication. We brought together operators and digital service partners from the ukactive Digital Futures Group to share the challenges they, and those they represent, often face.

Operators

While the scale of operators varies wildly, from solo independant gyms to major, multi-site leisure providers, many of the challenges remain the same:

Financial pressures:
Working within budget constraints and, as a result, difficulties sourcing appropriate partners and internal resource.

Legacy systems:
Old, creaking IT systems and digital tools that struggle to perform or integrate with modern technology are often expensive or challenging to replace.

Member expectations:
Members naturally compare the fitness and leisure sector to other sectors that are outperforming ours in the digital environment, such as retail. These expectations continue to grow as technology advances along with the consumer adoption of it. Priorities on spend need to be assessed across the business to ensure you are not making digital spend options that could be better deployed. Do you need an all-singing dancing app or one that allows the biggest benefit to the consumer, such as 'Book a Class' or 'View Membership Details'?

To buy or build?
There are many considerations to take into account when you are deciding what is the most appropriate option — either to buy an existing product or build your own:

- **Time to market:** building from scratch can be time-consuming. If speed is critical then buying an existing solution may be the better option.

- **Cost:** building a new digital service can be expensive and inherently risky, especially if you need to hire developers and invest in infrastructure. Buying may be more cost effective.

- **Customisation:** if your digital service requires extensive customisation, building may be the best option, or buy a base stack which allows you to build on top. You must consider if this allows you the flexibility you may need in the future to customise, integrate and build on top.

- **Expertise:** if you have the in-house capability, building may be the better option. However, you need to ensure their knowledge and range of expertise has been assessed to ensure it meets your needs.

- **Scalability:** if you expect your digital solution to scale rapidly, you may need to build a custom solution that can meet specific needs. Buying an existing system may limit your ability to scale if it's not an open system.

- **Integration:** is your current system open to others or has it been built in a way that it can integrate with others? If not, then you need to assess the potential impact this will have on your digital and leisure strategy.

Stakeholder alignment:
- Digital development requires buy-in from stakeholders and involvement from multiple parties, including the consumer. It can be challenging to receive the necessary acknowledgement and support to start the journey.

Internal understanding, knowledge, and skills:

- There are many factors to consider when implementing digital projects, including: understanding how digital could, or should, help and where it may not be appropriate; understanding consumer needs and user journeys better; understanding how to maximise return on investment; understanding the problem you want to solve. These may not all be understood fully with the internal resource available. This is where a thorough discovery that captures all the niche scenarios should be implemented, to ensure you don't waste time and resources later trying to adapt development.

Product development processes:

- Digital projects require particular project management skills that follow a process. These skills may not yet exist within the organisation. Understanding which process will be best can also be a constraint. Agile, waterfall, or the combination of these methods described as 'wagile' — each approach has its merits. The delivery methodology may also depend on the 'triple constraint' – if your primary constraint is scope (i.e. you have a clear idea of exactly what you want to build), waterfall might be the best option as it will allow you to create certainty around the cost and timeline before you move forward. If you're not sure exactly what the solution will be, but you have a fixed budget or deadline, agile might be a more effective way to deliver the best possible solution within your timeframe and budget.

Trust and transparency:

- As digital partnerships evolve — sharing confidential information, data, and resources — trust and transparency is vital. However, trust can be challenging, especially in cases where partners have never worked together. The procurement process should, if managed correctly, provide this.

Integration and interoperability:

- Different digital systems may use different standards, formats, and technologies, which can make it difficult to integrate them. This can lead to interoperability issues, which can affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the partnership.

Intellectual property rights:

- Protecting intellectual property rights can be complex when partnering with other companies, particularly when it comes to sharing knowledge and ideas that could potentially overlap.

Governance and decision making:

- Digital partnerships can involve multiple stakeholders with differing priorities and goals. Agreeing on governance structures, decision-making processes, and dispute resolution mechanisms can be challenging.

Risk and uncertainties:

- Digital partnerships involve uncertainties and risks such as technology failures, cyber-attacks, regulatory changes, or changes in market conditions, which can impact the success of the partnership.

Addressing these challenges within your initial design scope requires clear communication, shared goals, and alignment of interests between partners. It also involves establishing a strong legal framework that defines the rights and obligations of each partner and creates clear governance structures and decision-making processes.

> " Embarking on a digital transformation journey can be a daunting prospect in any industry. Ensure that you have an agile, creative agency that are well versed in the challenges that you face as a business; complimented by a best in class software solution that you know works. No one wants to build from scratch when there are effective tools for the job already out there.
> Kris Shaw, David Lloyd Leisure

Digital Partners

Digital partners have the advantages of understanding digital projects, and the experience of working with a broad base of operators to deliver their digital solutions. But the partners around the table were candid about the common challenges that they face when operators are not fully prepared for digital partnerships.

Clarity of strategy from operators:

- When operators lack direction, purpose, and planning for what they want from the digital solution, it makes it very difficult for partners to deliver a fitting digital service.

> ❝ We very rarely get someone that says, 'This is what I want to achieve, because I know this is what my customers want'. Then it's for us to say, 'Yes, we can do that,' or not. Because that gives operators the opportunity to then actually find someone who can, and not have us try and spin them into a journey that suits us, but really doesn't work for the customer.
> ukactive Digital Futures Partner

Scope creep and sign–off:

- When the scope of a project isn't outlined and agreed fully ahead of its beginning, this lack of transparency co-ordination can lead to a significant resource drain or disputes.

Operator expectations:

- There is a need to manage expectations and ensure that the demands of the consumer and the financial resources available in leisure to develop digital offerings is very different compared to that of the retail sector, and to get the process right does take time.

> ❝ There is sometimes an expectation that a single platform can be expected to solve all problems, which is almost never the case. Making a platform do something it wasn't really designed to do will always lead to sub–optimal outcomes. In this scenario, using different tools which can be interconnected is generally a much better approach.
> Alex Peacock, CEO, Leisure Labs

Variety of bespoke demands

- Operators often have bespoke demands that partners work to develop. This variety of different needs is timely for development and costly vs shared requirements that could help to make digital delivery faster and more cost effective while setting an agreed standard of expectations for the consumer.

Lack of investment

- Operators want to improve their digital ecosystem, but many are not willing to invest properly in it. This leaves partners faced with making compromises on quality or scope of work.
- Operators are also sometimes reluctant to invest in custom development on top of a platform, out of concerns that it creates vendor lock–in without owning IP rights to the development.
- (Note: A combined approach here can work – using platforms to deliver 80% of their needs really well and focusing their own investment on building their own solutions for the remaining 20%. Operators should also have the confidence to look at multiple partners to deliver their digital service. This would be derived through robust discovery to empower procurement.)

> ❝ Often operators expect the software supplier to do it for free because ¨it improves the product¨ and ¨we pay you a lot anyway¨. Whilst there is truth in this, we have many customers with many different demands, and we can't do everything for free.
> ukactive Digital Futures Partner

Ownership and control of processes:

- Often the ownership of the project is either undefined, or shifts throughout the project, leaving responsibilities unclear and the potential for the delivery of the project to slip.

Are You Ready To Partner? A Checklist...

Internal barriers for operators, and challenges for partners, make it apparent that without strategy, stakeholder alignment, funding and robust processes in place, digital implementations are being set up to fail. Preparation and setting realistic expectations are key. So how do you prepare for digital partnering, and how will you know when you're ready?

Do you know your 'why'?

• What is the problem that you are trying to solve or the opportunity you are trying to capitalise on? Is it a guess, or do you have research available to back it up? This should be discovered as part of a robust discovery process. Your 'why' may be influenced by a need, a want, a trend, or out of industry learnings. Consider what mechanisms need to be put in place to capture insights (particularly from your customers and your competitors) and convert these into system requirements.

• A good method for this is to use the Lean Canvas approach. This is an efficient approach to developing a one-page business plan for deconstructing your business idea into key assumptions for better analysis. This includes knowing your value proposition, target market, channels, cost structure, and revenue streams. A guide to this free tool can be found here.

• An important consideration is to have oversight of the needs and create pathways to support those with limited digital skills (digital divide) or do not have access to digital (digital poverty). You must be mindful of the digital literacy of your target audience.

> " Sometimes in the process of determining your why, you discover that a digital solution isn't what's needed — maybe it's actually a staffing issue, or a process matter. But you won't know unless you do the research.
> ukactive Digital Futures Partner

Do you understand your internal resources and competencies?

• Before you begin any digital project, it's essential to assess where the knowledge, competence and resource gaps are. It may be that upon assessment that you have the skills internally to deliver the digital solution, or you may need to fill gaps in essential resources through training or by introducing new roles.

Project Scope:

Once you've determined the answers to all of these questions you arrive at your scope, incorporating:
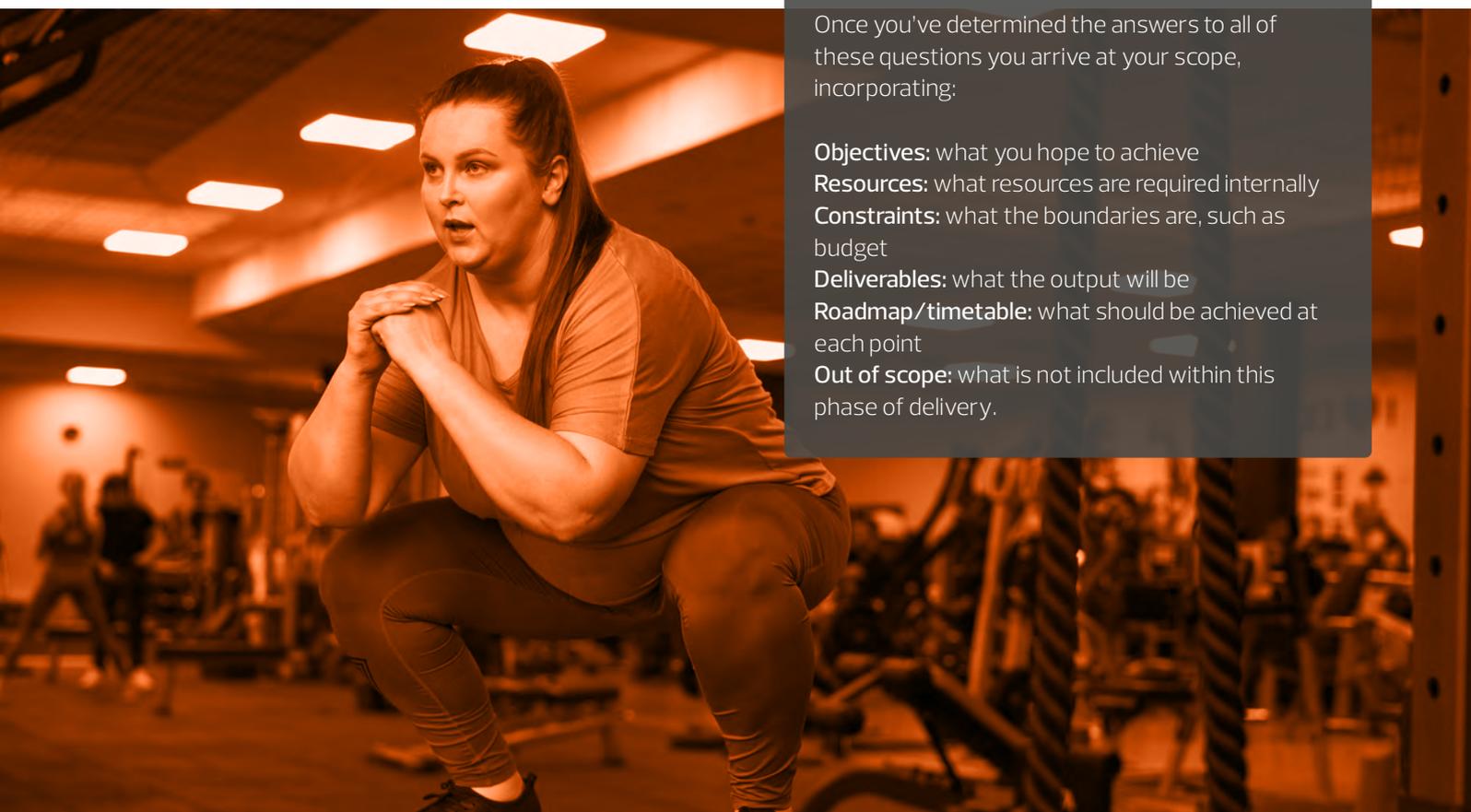
Objectives: what you hope to achieve
Resources: what resources are required internally
Constraints: what the boundaries are, such as budget
Deliverables: what the output will be
Roadmap/timetable: what should be achieved at each point
Out of scope: what is not included within this phase of delivery.

Do you understand what you're trying to achieve?

• You may know the problem that you're trying to solve, but do you know what results you want to achieve and how you want to achieve them? For example, do you need to build something new, or can you buy something that's already built or reuse something? It may be useful to talk to your technical supplier, who may already have a solution. It's not necessary to have all the answers, but a fair understanding of what you want to achieve is necessary before engaging potential partners. However, you do need to make sure that the proposed solution is well defined before you start development work. Many agencies will offer a discovery engagement as a standalone piece of work, or you may want to do this internally or with an independent party. The result should be a clear solution design, budget and high-level timeline for the project.

Do you know your three constraints of project management?

• Time, scope, and budget are the three constraints of project management. Understanding what these are will provide very clear boundaries to the partnership, helping to determine a realistic outcome. If budget is a constraint, it may be possible to outline a value-in-kind partnership, or you may be able to crowdfund or join up with other operators who are also interested in delivering the same, or similar, digital experience. Make sure that any agreements are documented officially to ensure you have a record to refer to in the event of any confusion.

Have you considered the technological infrastructure?

• The success of digital projects relies heavily on the technological infrastructure that they are built on: Wi-Fi coverage and strength, hardware for staff, legacy software. Are they up for the job of supporting the newest digital implementation? If not, what are the measures you'll have to take to get them ready for the upgrade?

Do you know what success will look like?

• It's important to understand what return on investment (ROI) you're hoping to achieve in order to look for the best way to achieve it. This should align to strategic objectives. Is it shorter waiting times at check-in, is it more class bookings, or smoother access to services? Considering the ROI will help you determine the scope that your digital partners will work to.

> We realised early on in our digital journey that we were going to need to partner with a variety of organisations, either in order to create bespoke solutions for our customers, such as our joining processes for both fitness and swimming lesson customers, or partnering with best in class solutions.
> Ben Beevers, Everyone Active

> What became important was the ability for our partners to work together with us to create a seamless experience for our customer. This meant that they all needed to be invested in achieving the project within the same timeframes and work as part of a wider Everyone Active digital team.
> Ben Beevers, Everyone Active

> In the early years of partnering we hosted monthly strategy meetings to ensure this alignment was achieved and over time have developed contracts and relationships with partners with this in mind.
> Ben Beevers, Everyone Active

Selecting a Digital Partner Well

After looking under your own hood to determine the project scope, it's time to put potential partners under the same scrutiny. There are often multiple options available to support the delivery of a project, but researching each potential partner to understand their capabilities and their alignment with your expectations is essential to deliver the best outcome for your organisation and your customers.

4 key questions for digital partners:

1. Can they meet the time, scope, and budget?

These three criteria are the backbone of a project, but it's important to understand which of the three can be compromised if needed. For example, if you have a completely fixed budget, you may need to be willing to reduce scope to meet your budget and desired timeline. If you have a delivery date you absolutely need to hit, you should plan to have some contingency in your budget in case complications arise. This same flexibility can be afforded to suppliers. If a supplier can meet two out of the three criteria, it may be that the operator could adjust expectations to fit, if the supplier otherwise seems appropriate for the partnership.

2. Do they have ways of working that match your organisation's capabilities?

A partner may introduce new ways of working for you. This is fine, if your organisation is capable of adapting to the new system. If not, and the agency isn't willing to work flexibly within your constraints, it will be impossible to work effectively together. Ask them:

- How do they expect to run the project?
- What is their cadence of communication?
- What tools do they use to communicate with you during the project?
- What inputs do they expect from you?
- How fast do they expect you to provide feedback?
- What deliverables will be provided and when? e.g. will you get regular design updates and demos during the design and development?

3. What evidence do they have of delivering digital products or services to a similar scope?

Case studies, analytics and other metrics are extremely useful in providing confidence when it comes to selection of digital partners. Ask for the evidence that what they have done in the past has met the relevant criteria and achieved successful results. Determine whether they have done anything similar in the past, and if they've worked in this domain before. If not, it will take them much longer to build the context they need to deliver a good solution. Don't just settle for testimonials – talk to their existing clients to see how they have found the experience. If you're buying a platform or off–the–shelf solution, you should also expect to be shown a demo. If you're hiring an agency to build you a solution, they almost certainly won't have anything to demo before you start work, but they should be able to provide demos of previous work, and possibly similar solutions they've built in the past.

4. Does their attitude and ethos align to your organisation's?

When you meet a potential partner, make sure you're meeting not just the salesperson, but those who will be doing the work. Being in attitudinal alignment is every bit as important as being practically able to deliver the work. You'll potentially be working with these partners for years, so it's important that as an organisation their values and ethos align to your own, and their people demonstrate those values. Ask them for details on what their team structure looks like, and who you will be working with day to day. It's important to make sure that the people you build a relationship with during the 'courting' phase are the ones you'll be working with once you commit.

" It's easy to forget that very few digital initiatives and solutions are fully autonomous. Whether through ongoing staff training and familiarisation, or understanding updates and new developments, we need to commit time to incoming and integrated technology to see the best results.
Ben Hackney–Williams, Myzone

" The benefits of factoring in ongoing time investment for the right digital schemes and platforms far outweighs the alternative of not bringing them on board in the first place. The key is always in communication as an ongoing process, and finding a flexible partner with an understanding of your business needs instead of a one–size–fits–all.
Ben Hackney–Williams, Myzone
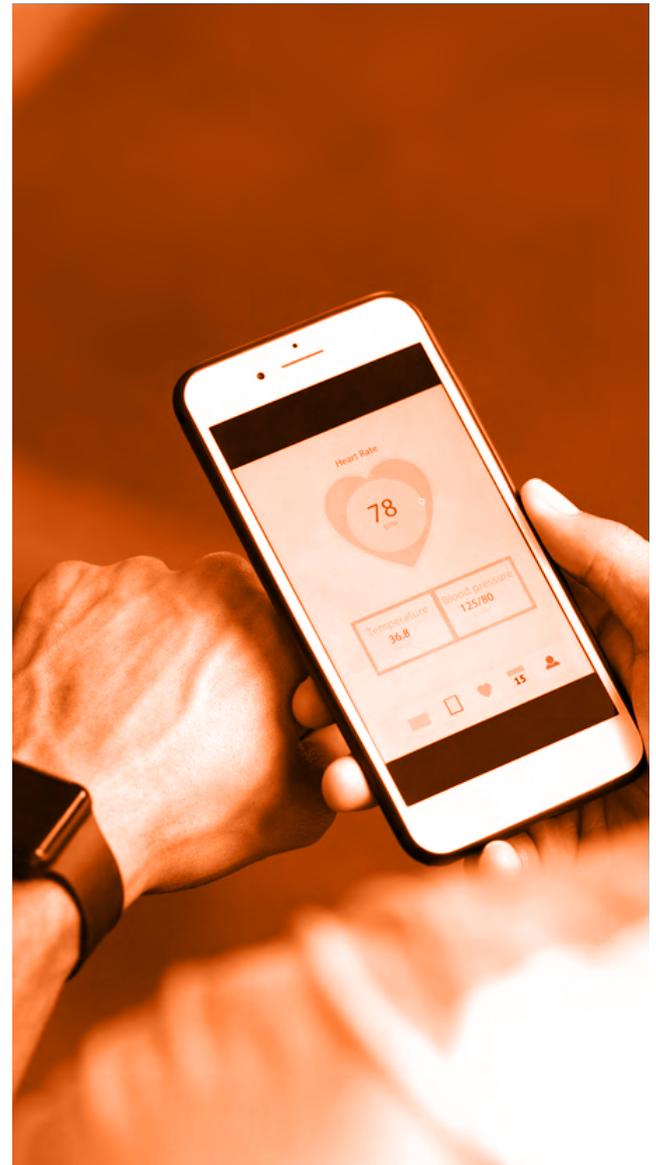
Doing Partnering Well

Once you've found your digital partner(s), the real work begins. Careful planning and mindful execution of project management is necessary to ensure smooth delivery of digital services. If all partners in a collaboration implement these core considerations, you'll be well on your way to achieving successful digital partnering.

1. Create clear stakeholder mapping on all sides

Who is going to be involved in the project and who needs to be kept in the loop should be determined by all partners and operators before the project begins. Stakeholders not appropriately brought in throughout the project could potentially derail or create delays by requesting clarifications, raising concerns, or introducing new evidence late in the process.

Core stakeholders to consider in digital development may include internal or external stakeholders, such as:

Internal

• Digital team
• IT staff
• Marketing staff
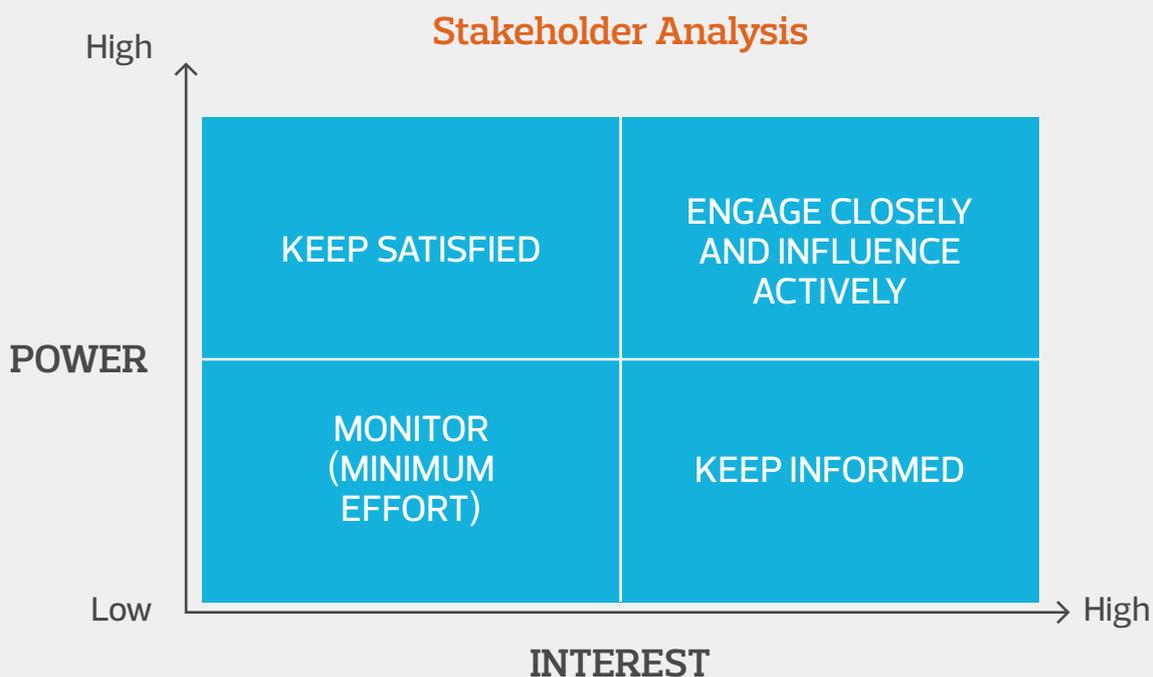• Product owner/director
• Executives

External

• Investors
• Partners
• Customers who may be affected by changes.

> All digital development impacts on the business in a multitude of ways, We need to answer a number of questions as part of the discovery process to ensure that we can maintain our overarching infrastructure. Over time we have developed a structure that we need all departments to link into to ensure we maximise their impact, minimise the need for 'operational work arounds' and ensure we build sustainability into our long term plan.
> Ben Beevers, Everyone Active

In each phase of the development process, it's crucial to involve customer insights. During discovery you may want to use existing analytics, or gather new research through a number of methodologies, from interviews to click tracking, to observation. During testing, a focus group of customers should also be involved.

Stakeholder Analysis

High

POWER

KEEP SATISFIED

ENGAGE CLOSELY AND INFLUENCE ACTIVELY

MONITOR (MINIMUM EFFORT)

KEEP INFORMED

Low   High

INTEREST

2. Determine and adapt development roadmaps

Development roadmaps are used to outline expectations for delivery throughout each stage of development. Understanding supplier and operator roadmaps and how they come together as effectively as possible will help to identify any potential challenges and give you the opportunity to adapt them where possible to deliver the best results.

To build your roadmaps, there must be clear strategy from operators, who may benefit from having suppliers, with their knowledge of the digital space, as a strategic partner. Working together, a truer understanding of business and customer needs and impact is gained. This allows providers to develop a tailored approach to these needs, rather than simply supporting feature requests or providing ill-fitting, out-of-the-box features.

Development roadmaps also replace knee-jerk reactions with sensible planning and joined-up thinking from end to end, giving a stronger likelihood of adding customer value and delivering improvements.

While planning pays, it's worth being open to further define scope and digital needs through partner input and consumer insights, particularly as you move through Beta (initial trial launch) into the review phase. So where possible in your roadmaps, allow for flexibility.

3. Nurture a culture of collaboration

When you create and nurture relationships that you can trust, digital project delivery becomes a significantly smoother process. Great collaboration begins with clarity and transparency: Clarity of scope and transparency about what is possible at every stage of the process. This all comes down to effective communication. It's necessary for providers and operators alike to be able to discuss requirements at a non-technical level, to ensure they are well understood.

There is an onus of responsibility on suppliers to proactively guide operators, rather than being reactive when asked, or responding to challenges that arise as a result of a lack of guidance, which can lead to a breakdown in trust that could be irreparable.

Adopting an open working approach, where updates and ideas are announced internally, builds internal collaboration and may be useful to gain feedback and refine before development is underway and changes are more expensive.

Open Data and APIs:

As technology advances, open data use is becoming more common, with the understanding that digital delivery is faster, and applications can integrate better when working with the same data sets. Seamless APIs with clear API specifications help to deliver smoother integration between applications, supporting the longevity and quality of the digital experiences for operators and customers alike.

Funded collaboration:

This is an area of interest for ukactive to explore and keen to capture interest. In many other sectors and within leisure non-compete operators have come together to fund digital development. This has proven to be a cost-effective method of development. Funded collaboration where cost is shared by forming a coalition of investment in digital services that's shared across organisations is a cost-effective method of developing your digital offering. This form of collaboration requires event greater need for clear communication and potentially contractual obligations to be drawn up and agreed.

Partnering: a communication checklist

Throughout the partnership, there are times when clear and transparent communication is absolutely essential, such as:

- Providing a thorough scope
- Agreeing KPIs and success measures
- Providing a continuous feedback loop with regular check-ins
- Stakeholder communications throughout
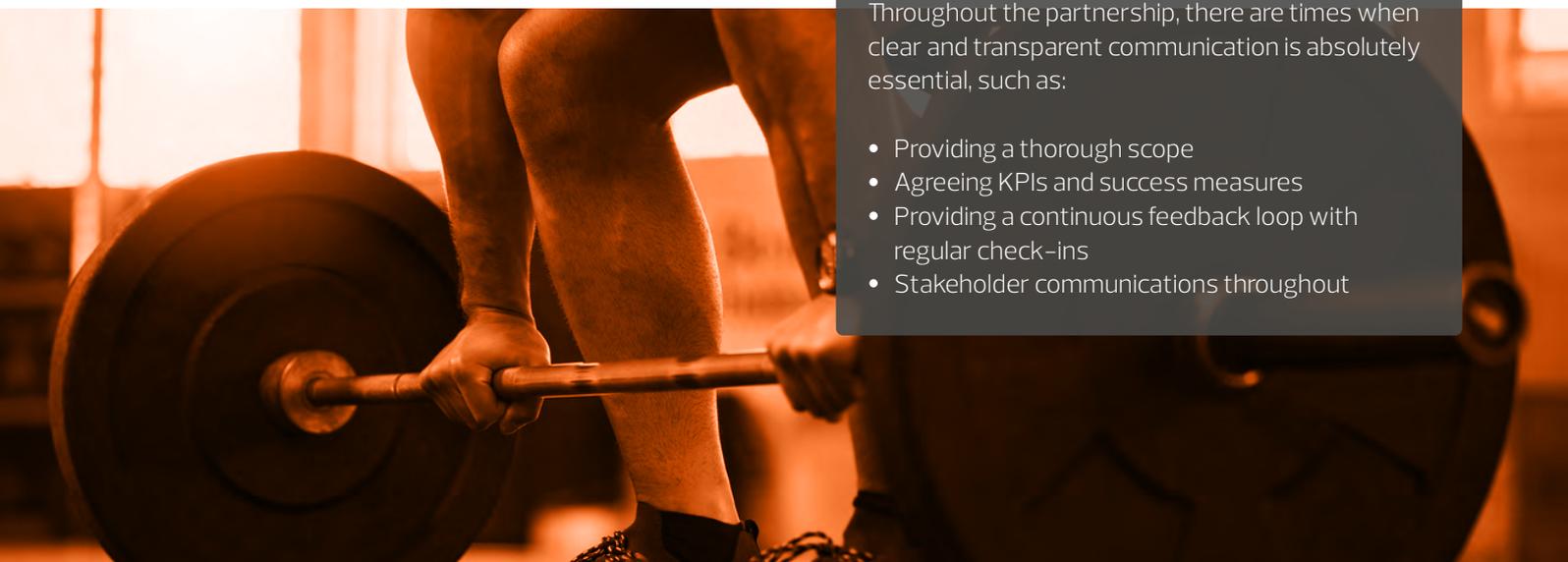
4. Keep it smart and simple

While there is plenty of planning and project management to do for effective digital partnerships to be successful, keeping things as simple as possible will also help to deliver projects effectively. This rule applies for organisations of any size. For example, if you think smartly about what is truly required, you may be able to cut steps out of the process, saving time and money with the same results.

Think out-of-the-box:

While bespoke solutions may more accurately address the needs of the business and customer, this should be balanced against the benefits of out-of-the-box solutions, which can be both more cost effective and better at integrating with other digital solutions. There is an argument for the provision of more of these out-of-the-box solutions to satisfy a need from smaller organisations in particular, that have restricted cost and resource.

Get the basics right:

The temptation may be to latch on to a trend, or bring in the latest, most exciting technology. But are the basics even in place? Often not. And where this is the case, the essential customer needs aren't being met, making it difficult to justify the expensive delivery of advanced functionality.

> " You've just got to understand what your customers problems are. Because when we did that with our customers, actually, it was really basic. It comes back to making sure customers are getting what they need, and then making sure you're taking that back to an agency or supplier to work with, as opposed to not having that really defined.
>
> ukactive Digital Futures Partner

Conclusion

Digital partnering is not without its challenges. **Operators** are often working with cumbersome legacy systems, tight budgets, limited experience, and governance challenges. **Digital partners** are often faced with high expectations for a limited budget, multiple bespoke requirements, and a lack of clarity. **Operators and digital partners** must come into the process with a mindset of collaboration and be willing to compromise in order to deliver fantastic digital experiences for the customer.

The core foundation of successful digital partnering is preparation, and this begins with a thorough **discovery**. It will always pay to spend the time and money necessary up front to understand the problem you are trying to solve or opportunity you are trying to capitalise on, to determine the needs, the limitations, and the possibilities. Take time to interrogate the customer research and the internal capabilities. Consider the potential solutions (be they existing, new or adapted) and who you can engage with to support delivery. Digital project delivery requires creativity and thinking outside of the box, always considering what the best solution could be within the parameters and being as flexible as possible to enable its delivery. But it's important to come into a partnership knowing what you want, why you want it and how could potentially deliver it. Creating a robust project scope before entering a digital partnership is essential to avoid confusion and costly changes further down the line.

> " **Successful partnerships go beyond the present and require clear communication of each organisation's vision. Understanding each partner's direction is imperative, and key considerations include assessing internal needs, prioritising work streams, and having a shared vision of success. Digital partnering is an ongoing investment with the potential for incremental revenue growth, supporting current and future consumers as organisations expand. In short, a strategic digital partnership is not just a one-off capex cost, but rather an investment in your business's future.**
> Steve Scales, CRO, Gladstone

Digital partnering is not a matter of having the agency do all the work – digital project delivery thrives off exceptional planning and communication. This requires all parties to pull their weight and to understand what is expected of them. This can come into alignment through creating and reviewing stakeholder maps and roadmaps by all parties to identify potential barriers before development begins.

Once development begins, communication and nurturing that culture of collaboration is crucial.

We hope that in reading this guide, you now have a greater understanding of how to achieve successful digital partnering. Remember that while it may seem overwhelming, there are plenty of resources and support available to help you achieve your digital delivery goals. We've outlined some of the resources below, and ukactive, through our Digital Futures partner Leisure Labs, is offering a 'no obligation' initial discovery call, **which you can access here.**

Resources

CAST Innovation and Digital Accelerator blog on Working with Digital Agencies and slide deck from the session

McKinsey – unlocking success in digital transformation

Retail Week – The Digital Spend Report

Kepios – Digital trends and online behaviours and acclaimed Global Digital Reports series

FitTech Council podcast – evolving legacy stacks Alex Peacock Leisure Labs

Business planning free-online tools

Lean Canvas business planning free online tool

Strategyzer

ukactive Digital Futures resources

2022 Digital Maturity and Effectiveness report of the UK leisure sector

Digitally Fit – rising to consumer demand for the connected digital experience

One Step At a Time – Setting the right foundations for digital transformation

With Thanks

With thanks to the Digital Futures Advisory Group members, Gladstone, Xplor, Technogym, Myzone, EGYM, Leisure Labs; and invited operator guests, Everyone Active, Parkwood, David Lloyd, in the support of this paper. Special thanks to Niki May Blane at Big Bee Content who co-facilitated the workshop and co-authored this report.

STRATEGIC DIGITAL PARTNERS:

CONTRIBUTOR DIGITAL PARTNERS: