

VERSION NEXT

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TEKSYSTEMS DIGITAL ISSUE | MARCH 2021

UNIFIED DIGITAL EXPERIENCES AT SCALE

How to Construct an End-to-End
Customer Journey

your car
will arrive in
10 MINUTES

When Every Touchpoint Matters, CX Must Get Personal

In late November 2020, I decided it was finally time to tackle a minor painting project in my family room. Eight months into the pandemic, with the long Thanksgiving weekend before me and no traditional family gathering to look forward to, it seemed like an ideal way to make the most of what would otherwise have been a depressing, frustrating break. But I didn't have enough paint.

I hopped online to order more from a ubiquitous big-box store. The site was intuitive, friendly and easy to navigate. Within seconds, I found the correct paint and started the checkout process. The ship-to-home option would have taken too long, so I chose contactless curbside pickup at a nearby store. I paid, waited for the email to confirm my order was ready, bundled my 9-year-old into the car and headed out.

I was pleasantly surprised at how smooth and seamless the process was, but, after all, I thought, this major retail chain had months to perfect the process. As a family, we'd diligently maintained "full lockdown" since March, even as my state eased restrictions. We avoided in-person school, shopping, socializing, going to restaurants and the like—why take the chance, when retailers had this down to a science? I assumed we'd drive up, grab the paint and drive away. Fast, easy and, most of all, safe.

We arrived at the store, and it was immediately clear how wrong I was. No signs, no directions.

I finally located a curbside pickup station, only to be told it was strictly for groceries—we needed to physically enter the store and go to a digital kiosk to pick up my order.

This was exactly the scenario I was trying to avoid, especially with my child in tow. But at this point, I didn't have a choice. Inside, it got worse. The kiosk was located at the furthest possible point from the lone entrance door, through crowds of shoppers. When we got there, the kiosk was out of order. I had to touch multiple surfaces to activate a "Call for Employee Assistance" button. In the meantime, other shoppers gathered, all waiting for their "contactless" pickup, all clustered together in front of the broken kiosk. An employee finally appeared, 20 minutes later, but had to make their way repeatedly back and forth across the store to retrieve everyone's order. Finally, almost an hour after arriving, we left the store.

I won't be patronizing that retail chain—or at least their "contactless pickup" service again. And that's the point—there's not a lot of room for error when it comes to CX. Consumers, myself included, were willing to cut retailers a lot of slack at the beginning of the pandemic as everyone adjusted to unprecedented circumstances. But now, a year later, patience is wearing thin. Poor signage, lack of direction, broken technology—these are not acceptable if you're trying to delight customers and provide a stellar experience, not to mention protect your guests from a viral pandemic. You have to get it right—or, ideally, better than right—the first time, or you won't get a second chance.



Sharon Florentine
Contributing Editor



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The global pandemic has clearly changed customer behaviors—perhaps permanently. Brands must quickly evolve their approach to address those changes and drive growth, as they bridge their digital and customer experience (CX) strategy.

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SECTION 01



THE CHANGE AGENT

Companies realize that simply being digital no longer qualifies as a differentiator. Future-focused brands are activating a holistic strategy, building end-to-end, frictionless experiences for their customers.

01 »

Focus Your Strategy to Unify the Brand Experience

The customer experience and the way brands interact with customers forever changed in 1994. AT&T purchased a small rectangle on HotWired.com, and the digital marketing era was officially off and running. Fast-forward past the introduction of search engines, the rise of social media and the iPhone, and we find ourselves in an era where digital is ubiquitous.

As marketing dollars have aggressively migrated to digital marketing over the last decade, the volume of digital messages consumers are exposed to has skyrocketed. Market leaders understand that canned marketing techniques and generic messaging quickly bore an increasingly savvy consumer. Creating a consistent customer journey is a critical component of brand strategy. It provides a clear roadmap for brands to build engaging customer experiences for their target audience. They know that a cohesive customer journey, focused on specific buyer personas, elevates the entire brand experience. They realize that simply being digital no longer qualifies as a differentiator. Future-focused brands are activating a holistic strategy, building end-to-end, frictionless experiences for their customers.

Companies have been evolving how they connect customers digitally to their brands for years. Whether through email, web, social, mobile and everything in between, brands have been building new experiences for their customers at an ever-increasing pace and scale. They aspire to blur the boundaries between the digital world and physical environments and deliver seamless experiences across multiple touchpoints. Then, a global pandemic forced lockdowns and restricted in-person contact. The digital experience was suddenly the only means of reaching their customer—and it happened, quite literally, overnight.



YOU HAVE ARRIVED

Someday, we'll return to in-person gatherings and experiences. But the global pandemic has clearly changed customer behaviors—perhaps permanently. Brands must quickly evolve their approach to address those changes if they haven't already. Organizations can drive growth as they bridge their digital and customer experience (CX) strategy, but only if they understand and execute on the following:

1. **Agility is the key to success.** Reaching customers with personalized content at the right time, and in the right context, is critical for survival.
2. **Connecting digital and physical experiences.** Orchestrating brand experiences across digital and physical experiences fuels customer delight.
3. **Use data to drive decisions.** The pandemic highlighted how quickly customer behaviors can change and made clear that brands must use data-driven insights to inform strategic decision-making.

SECTION 02



MARKET PERSPECTIVE

A fireside chat with Seismic Customer Success Director Ben Anderson about how brands can integrate technology to enable a better digital experience for their customers.

02 »

Personalization Enabled by Technology



How has the pandemic impacted the ways brands communicate with their target audience?

Ben Anderson: Along with a dramatic increase in using digital tools to communicate, we have seen a distinct shift toward personalization and storytelling as an effective model for connecting with your target audience. At this time last year, we all had to become experts in remote working, selling and communicating. Initially, this was simply getting to terms with the tools and understanding how to use them at a functional level. However, as the year progressed, becoming an expert in these tools to effectively communicate with your audience was essential for success. You can't just jump into a digital meeting with a client and have a conversation in the same manner that you may have picked up the phone or stopped by for an in-person visit before the lockdowns. You must be prepared to craft your message to your audience and engage them across the digital medium. Today you must be able to connect at a personal level through an inherently impersonal medium. To overcome this built-in disconnect, successful organizations are framing these conversations as storytelling, both through the way they address their topic and also the technology they are using. You must create content that is more engaging or interactive and customized to your client's specific challenges, rather than static and extending into social selling. Establishing yourself as a trusted expert in your field through social channels, while not new, is playing an even more significant role today than it did a year ago and will continue to do so. I expect our "New Normal," as it settles into a rhythm, will only see the continuation and refinement of all the adjustments we experienced in this last year. These were, on some level, good lessons in adaptability and creativity.



What criteria is most important for organization when evaluating new tools or technologies that enable a better digital experience for their customers?

Anderson: The easy approach is simply to consider the most feature-rich offering that fits the category of tool you seek and matches the available budget expectations. This requires finding the tool and partner that best align with your organizational goals and philosophy along with meeting the features, functions and budget requirements. However, the harder approach is finding the path that will yield the most beneficial choice to the organization. With that said, when it comes to the tool itself, I look to these six categories:

EASE OF USE | How many buttons do I have to click to use this thing?

» Regardless of the inherent power of a tool, if the workflow is forced and complicated, it is challenging to gain the intended value.

FLEXIBILITY | What can it do that I didn't think of?

A tool with multiple ways to leverage core functionality that can be bent to easily bring value to different use cases, departments or regions will be beneficial in initially unplanned ways.

INTEGRATION POINTS | Can I use this thing in conjunction with the other tools you make me use?

Meeting users where they are in their workflow is invaluable in ensuring efficiency.

BREADTH OF OFFERING | Can this tool also replace this other system I have?

» A tool with a forward-thinking roadmap and a comprehensive offering can continue to evolve with your organization and changing times.

ABILITY TO MEASURE | Can I get metrics that indicate what is happening, and can I prove ROI?

» Detailed measurability is table stakes for any digital-oriented tool, although the real key is ensuring that ROI can be identified through evaluating any metrics gathered.

VENDOR RELATIONSHIP | Are you going to abandon me after the sale and implementation?

» More and more, a close partnership with your vendor of choice is critical. The best partners invest in your success and ensure you are seeing value.

SECTION 02



How do technologies such as sales and marketing platforms, enable organizations to create personalized content and experiences for customers?



Anderson: Mass personalization at scale is hard. The best tools are going to provide a powerful combination of capabilities and control that ensure you are leveraging them to the degree that brings the most value to your organization. Ideally, a tool is going to be easy to use and flexible while still providing control and command from the marketing side to ensure consistency and adherence to brand standard.

On trend today are tools that allow a seller to customize a deck, an email or a social post with a few clicks, and then deliver that to their prospect or client from within the workflow they are already in on a daily basis. On the back side, tracking the results from that outreach is a proven method for driving better engagement and ultimately recognizable ROI.

For the marketing team, it is also about how easy it is to set up, configure and manage those slide decks, emails and social posts that allow the seller to easily customize and also ensure the right level of control over the content itself and the level of branding required.



What types of metrics should organization use to measure success?

Anderson: The goal for any metrics evaluation should be attributing action to a measurable outcome that identifies ROI, and that will vary by organization. There are tactical, foundational and strategic metrics that are important to any organization. They serve distinct purposes in both what a key measure is and what that means to the business.

Tactical/Foundational – Within the context of sales enablement, these are the “who,” “what” and some of the “why” metrics—who is using a system, what are they using when they use it and why they are using it in that way (what is the use case?). Knowing these things will help to recognize what content is beneficial and impactful, which will help the content owner team better prioritize what content to create in the future, saving time and effort by not investing in low-value materials. Understanding who is using the system helps support the value of the system (adoption) and also recognize the usage trends of key constituent groups, which can be used for behavior modelling and to help feed the strategic-level metrics. Understanding how key constituent groups are using a tool will help illuminate whether the intended and communicated use case is being followed or undesirable habits are forming.

Strategic – Again, in the context of sales enablement, this is the application of “why” and “how,” mixed with data from other business systems to illuminate the efficacy of strategic initiatives. Does using this tool have a definable impact on our sales, revenue or cost structure, and what is the attributable percentage of that tool’s impact? This is the area I generally refer to as directional and not definitive, as we must always make some assumptions of the correlation impact, which are imperfect. What metrics to focus on here really depends on what is important to your organization and how a tool that you are measuring is intended to support those goals.





OUR PERSPECTIVE

One North leaders Kalev Peekna and Ryan Horner share their points of view on how organizations can elevate the customer experience.

03 »

Achieving Agility in CX

It's well-documented that the events of the 2020 global pandemic accelerated digital transformation—from facilitating remote work, to delivering products and services via contactless experiences, organizations across every industry have been challenged in new ways. Despite unprecedented disruption, the No. 1 digital transformation goal remains the same in 2021—improving the customer experience. Where brands may struggle is in adapting their strategy in a paradigm where customers are demonstrating unusual buying behavior. The 2021 Digital Trends Experience Index, from Adobe, indicates customers across all sectors are behaving in ways that are completely unpredictable. Fortunately, there is a roadmap for organizations to better understand the new buyer journey and improve the overall customer experience.

*"Transformation is really about how brands apply a **digital-first mindset to every customer interaction.**"*



Ryan Horner
Managing Director, Technology
One North

Organizations are consumed with improving agility and increasing speed to market of products and services. Typically, agile transformation is directed toward development. "But true agility, whether from an operational standpoint, a product strategy perspective or from a design-and-build point of view, can only be achieved when considered holistically," says One North's Kalev Peekna. That approach helps brands overcome one of the biggest obstacles to improving their agility—an aversion to a true minimum viable product (MVP).

Organizations may embrace the concept of an MVP but often fall victim to the short-sighted view that the MVP is "not enough." Organizational blockades frequently slow or stop an MVP from going to market. Organizations invest a lot of money and resources into agile transformation efforts, and an MVP may not look sufficient in the short term. Pressure may come from the C-suite, which needs to justify those investments to make an impact, so they try and stretch the MVP and bloat it with features to make a big splash. This approach inevitably fails because the organization hasn't prioritized what's most important. The MVP should be laser-focused on specific functions or users. Then, once feedback and data on what works and what doesn't is gathered, the product can be recalibrated.

How was your **DELIVERY?**



"Another way organizations gain quickness and flexibility is by aligning truly cross-disciplinary teams that have shared ownership of the outcomes," notes Kalev. Too often, there are silos or a perception that the product is owned by a single function. The product owner then pursues a consultation-type model with other groups as they work to get the product to market. It's essential to have the right stakeholders seated at the table from the beginning. Your team must include expertise from functions such as marketing, product, IT, design and line-of-business from day one. Then, you can create a relatively level playing field where each member contributes to the definition, design and delivery of the product based on their area of expertise.

Sometimes, you have to slow down to be better and faster. In many cases, speed to market is paramount and being first is an imperative. But not always. Organizations should always question whether being first is really the best strategy and examine the motives for pursuing that strategy. It can be a question of relative scale. If a competitor goes to market with a new product in April, but you deliver your product in June, has that put you at a significant competitive disadvantage? [Apple wasn't first to market with a smartphone](#). They did, however, learn from what competitors like BlackBerry delivered, and then improved upon that with a better customer experience. Sometimes, the key is to be better—not faster.

*"Half of B2C and B2B organizations reported **unusual buying behavior** from existing customers.¹"*

Digital vs. Analog

Today's savvy consumer expects a frictionless brand experience, regardless of how or where that interaction takes place. Delivering a personalized experience, orchestrated across digital and physical domains, is quickly becoming table stakes. Consider this example: Your customer receives a relevant email promotion based on a previous purchase. They make the decision to purchase. Your mobile app, fueled by data-driven personalization, guides them through the order process, making recommendations and identifying the closest location to fulfill the order via curbside pickup. The experience thus far is seamless. But when they arrive, their positive feelings about a great brand experience evaporate. Poor or confusing signage outside the store leaves them confused. The customer doesn't know how to alert the store they've arrived. Almost instantly, what had been a great customer experience has turned into a frustrating one. And the brand might not get a second chance.

For all the herculean efforts organizations put forth during the pandemic, examples like this prove there's more to accomplish. Companies quickly stood up new services and delivery models to maintain business continuity and reach customers in new ways, and consumers were willing to allow for growing pains as everyone adjusted to the unprecedented circumstances. Now, however, brands must go back to the drawing board. They must evaluate the products and services created during the pandemic and decide what should be maintained, fine-tuned or retired. Then, armed with experience and data, they can thoughtfully and deliberately construct an end-to-end digital customer experience journey. Most organizations start with the better-understood elements of personalization, such as demographics, interests or order history. The next evolution of customer experience includes the notion of personalization according to context sensitivity.





Your order will arrive in
15 MINUTES

Organizations are recognizing that they cannot make assumptions the way they may have in the past, in part due to shifting buyer behaviors during the pandemic. Leading organizations are asking deeper questions about the context of customer behaviors, taking into consideration how and where the customer is interacting with the brand. Are they on a mobile device? Is the customer physically in the store?

Are they outside? Are they at home or at work? Based on this additional context, brands can create a better overall experience for their customers. "The key is to orchestrate an experience that seamlessly weaves the journey into a single path where behaviors are anticipated, and brick-and-mortar interactions mesh effortlessly with the digital experience," says Kalev.

Data-Driven Personalization

Data is at the core of delivering personalized customer experiences. "Without data, you're driving blind," says One North's Ryan Horner. Personalization is often driven by the experience design team, but to really be effective, it should start with the data strategy team. "Almost all personalization is not just data-centric, but data-driven," says Kalev. Data by itself or out of context is just noise. "You really need a data science team to refine and define the metrics that matter—and then glean insights that tell a story," adds Ryan. To drive the personalization you want, it's critical to have the right data and an understanding of that data from the very beginning, which sometimes means changing your data strategy. Rarely do brands start with the right data to drive the personalization they want. There's frequently a foundational step during which the organization must start collecting more of the right data in anticipation of fueling the personalized experience.

Next, clear KPIs must be established; then, perhaps most importantly, you must ask why you're deploying personalization. It's also critical to define where in the journey personalization will be deployed; otherwise, personalization efforts will fail or, at the very least, they will lack real impact. There are many great options for deploying personalization along the [customer journey](#). Some options are incredibly complex and might be AI- or chatbot-driven. Other methods are relatively simple and don't leverage as much technology. Really good personalization could be as simple as ensuring the right customers only receive the email promotions that are most relevant to them. When using data analytics to drive personalized experiences, brands should focus on the totality of the customer journey and pinpoint where on that journey personalization can deliver the most value

*"Almost all personalization is not just data-centric, but **data-driven.**"*



Kalev Peekna
Managing Director & Chief Strategist
One North

In many cases, speed to market is paramount and being first is an imperative. But not always. Organizations should always question whether being first is really the best strategy and examine the motives for pursuing that strategy. It can be a question of relative scale. If a competitor goes to market with a new product in April, but you deliver your product in June, has that put you at a significant competitive disadvantage? Apple wasn't first to market with a smartphone. They did, however, learn from what competitors like BlackBerry delivered, and then improved upon that with a better customer experience. Sometimes, the key is to be better—not faster.

TEKsystems' Tips



Be light, nimble, and agile. Start small, then learn and adapt. What starts out as an MVP is often stretched into something far too polished. Focus your MVP on specific functions or users and refine it from there.



Build inclusive design. Accessibility is often thought about first and is critical, but you also should consider context. Is my customer on a desktop or mobile device? When you create experiences that are accessible to everyone, you typically improve the entire experience.



Have a design system. Make sure you have a full-on digital design system, so apps and sites all look and feel like they're from the same company. Not only does this create a better overall brand experience, but it can also improve back-end system performance and efficiency.



Strategy directed by data. The pandemic highlighted just how quickly customer behaviors can change. Brands must use data insights to drive strategic decision-making and deliver precise messages to their customers at the right time.



Consider your martech holistically. Think about martech as a product within your business that can be used to create connected customer experiences. Silos break martech stacks; your technology must be fully integrated to harness that connection.



Real-World Application: Bumble

Personalization gets really personal when it comes to the **multibillion-dollar** online dating industry. The world of dating apps can be overwhelming to say the least. Users download apps and then just as quickly delete them if they have a poor experience. According to **Pew Research Center**, three in 10 adults have previously or are currently using a dating site or app. The companies that survive in this crowded market use data to drive personalized journeys for their users. But the market is wrought with apps that provide poor user experiences and unwelcome messages from other users that cause customers to abandon the app.

In 2014, Whitney Wolfe took a new approach when she founded the dating app **Bumble**. Rooted in kindness and respect, the platform differentiated the dating experience by enabling only the female users to initiate the conversation with a potential match. They've succeeded in growing their customer base by using data and machine learning to personalize matches based on your specific preferences. Growing to over 100 million users across six continents, Bumble has expanded far beyond a dating app into a networking platform, allowing people of all genders to make empowered connections in all areas of their lives, whether that means you're seeking a romantic relationship on Bumble Date, making new friendships on Bumble BFF or growing your professional network on Bumble Bizz.

All information shared herein was accessed from public sources as indicated.



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Kalev Peekna leads the Strategy practice at One North, a cross-disciplinary team of marketers, analysts, technologists and designers who help customers innovate, optimize and transform their digital experiences. Kalev often writes and speaks for national publications and conferences on topics such as design, innovation, strategy and digital transformation.



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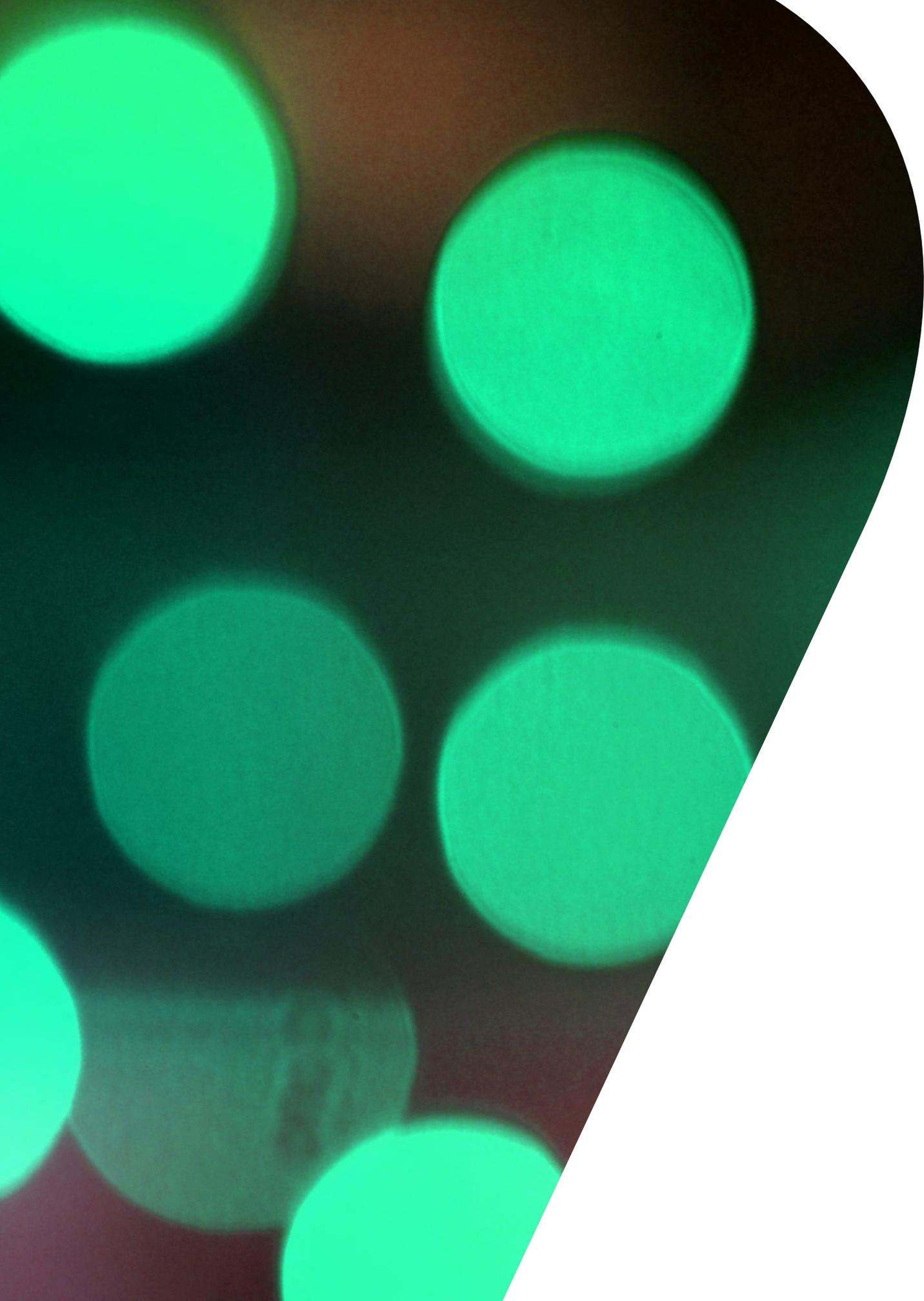
As the managing director of technology at One North Interactive, Ryan is responsible for maximizing the success of their business, their clients and their employees through technology. This includes the overall technology culture, platforms, process, tools, recruitment, thought leadership and client delivery.



Ben Anderson

Customer Success Director | Seismic

Ben Anderson has nearly a decade of experience in sales enablement consulting. At Seismic, Ben works to ensure clients get the most value out of their investment in the sales and marketing enablement software, through strategic alignment of Seismic deployments to organizational goals, and consultation and guidance on upstream and downstream processes impacted by the organization's sales enablement goals.



About TEKsystems®

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About One North®

One North Interactive is a digital agency based in Chicago and was acquired by TEKsystems early in 2019. One North's capabilities include digital strategy, brand, experience design and technology, expanding TEKsystems' existing offerings and allowing us to provide a unique customer experience and broadened capabilities to the marketing, technology and business groups within our customers' organizations.

OneNorth.com



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Sharon Florentine is the contributing editor for *Version Next, Now*, TEKsystems' quarterly publication. She is an award-winning independent writer and editor with more than 20 years of experience in the tech industry. Her work has appeared in Computerworld, PC Magazine, CRN and eWEEK, among others, and she is a passionate advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion in tech and beyond. Most recently, Sharon was a senior writer for CIO.com, where she covered software development, Agile, IT careers, learning and development, and DE&I. She lives near Philadelphia.



Listen Now

Don't miss Kalev Peekna and Ryan Horner on [The Agile World](#) podcast. In a three-part series, host, author and business expert, Greg Kihlström, sits down with Kalev and Ryan to discuss how organizations can elevate the customer experience.



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Sources

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