# VERSION NEXT
# NOW

**BREAKTHROUGHS**

# POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY

AND THOSE WILLING TO OWN CHANGE

# Let's Get Personal

## How brands approach personalized experiences and their martech stack

**BRANDS HAVE NEVER HAD IT BETTER.** After decades of struggling to fully understand consumers, they now hold the key to complete enlightenment: customer data. Armed with smartphones, tablets and laptops, many consumers relinquish their personal data so that brands can provide them with unique, personalized experiences.

Many brands have already figured out the digital customer experience. They brilliantly convert consumer insight into content and stylized offers that fit customers' needs, in real time. But their success didn't come after waving a magic wand. They first figured out how to make sense of all their customer data by aligning their processes with technology. This foundational work included putting the right people in charge, forming customer personas, creating relevant KPIs and figuring out which content management system and other technologies best integrate with all of that.

In this issue of *Version Next, Now*, TEKsystems' Burk Buechler and Steve Householder aim to make the big transition to digital-driven customer personalization seem not so big. By first taking a look at the value of personalization in the digital era and then highlighting how your organization can do it, Buechler and Householder put the big transition within arm's reach. Gene De Libero, director of industry strategy and digital transformation at Sitecore, provides additional insight on the role of the content management system in personalization. Hopefully, by article's end, you'll be approaching your personalization initiatives with confidence.

**ALBERT McKEON**
Contributing Editor

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Change agents stimulate progress and prompt businesses to innovate. **They power transformation**, whether subtle or bold. They foster evolution through people, processes and technologies. In this issue of *Version Next, Now*, we explore personalization and the digital experience as a change agent.

# THE RACE TO REMAIN RELEVANT

Bold organizational transformation is needed to effectively personalize through digital channels, but it's a change worth pursuing. Developing close relationships with consumers in the digital space will soon be the only way companies can thrive—motivating brands to step up their digital customer experiences by getting personal.

Brands are racing to remain relevant. Competing to win and sustain loyalty in an ever-changing, crowded landscape. Consumers, in turn, are hyperconnected, hyper-empowered, and hyperdemanding. They're willing to entertain multiple brands with similar offerings, bidding for their attention, consideration and ultimately, their money. Their loyalty is earned only when brands anticipate their needs and exceed their expectations.

When consumers enjoy the experience of interacting with a brand, they are more likely to re-engage. When that experience is consistent, these consumers share additional insights about themselves, enhancing a brand's ability to deliver a more personalized, relevant experience. Well-informed and well-executed personalized digital experiences turn prospects into customers, and customers into loyal brand advocates.

The customer experience has been turned on its head because of technology. Throughout every stage of a consumer's journey—whether in the awareness, consideration or decision stage—relevant content and on-demand service, delivered when and how they want it, is now possible. The digital revolution isn't just here, it's expected—across every digital touchpoint. Consumers want nothing less.

Consider the popularity of Amazon. With a brand promise to be "Earth's most customer-centric company," that customer-obsessed mentality is paying off. Consumers expect other brands to follow suit. The clock is ticking. Brands must embrace technology and leverage it for what it is: a transformational opportunity. More than half of organizations recognize the importance of the moment and will be considered "digitally determined" within the next year.[1] To that end, DX spending is projected to reach $1.7 trillion worldwide by the end of 2019, a 42 percent increase from just two years ago.[5]

An organization's ability to effectively implement, operate and optimize its digital experience platforms—often referred to as content management systems (CMS)—will determine how well it understands and ultimately satisfies customers. Understanding and insight come with a single, holistic point of view of each customer that is shaped by mapping customer data to each business interaction.

When coupled with an effective digital marketing strategy, a CMS bridges customized content to real-time, personalized experiences that create stickiness with customers. If there's no stickiness, there's no connection and little chance of thriving.

*Brands must embrace technology and leverage it for what it is: a transformational opportunity.*

## Digital strategy alone is not enough.

*Personalization is imperative. To achieve success, an organization must:*

**Undergo cultural transformation.**
Digital transformation impacts people, process and technology, and the entire organization is taking part in a cultural shift.

**Integrate with legacy platforms.**
Investing in full-stack technology solutions will better serve the organization than fragmented software supported by separate vendors.

**Understand technology needs.**
Decision-makers want to invest in digital platforms that are scalable and flexible to accommodate complex requirements.

**Navigating these challenges is difficult but not impossible. Organizations that go the distance to transform—motivated by the possibilities of digital experience as a change agent—unlock limitless business potential.**

# MARKET PERSPECTIVE

Technology is the engine that is fueling and enabling elevated **customer experiences**. And Sitecore, a leader in web content management and marketing automation, enables thousands of brands to deliver elevated customer experiences every day.

# Q + A

Working at the intersection of business, technology and marketing, **Sitecore** Director of Industry Strategy & Digital Transformation Gene De Libero lends his thoughtful perspective.

## What emerging trends do you see impacting organizations and their efforts to enhance customers' digital experiences?

**A few trends I see directly impacting organizations are:**

**Moving at the speed of the customer.**
The consumer moves faster than the brand. Many brands function in a constant catch-as-catch-can mode, which leaves little or no time to create the remarkable customer experiences their customers expect and demand.

**Inefficient martech stacks.**
Too many organizations are only using 15–20 percent of the features/functions of the martech stack and the stack is *not* integrated, creating data silos and absence of a 360-degree marketing view (and 360-degree customer view). Why? Because they rush out to buy a tech tool every time they have a problem. That means dozens of tools and no way to effectively and efficiently integrate or use them to enhance their customers' digital experiences.

**Measuring effectiveness.**
Research shows that in certain instances, about 10 percent of marketers' budgets are being spent on analytics. Yet, when I query marketers about their biggest challenges, "analytics" is always at the top of the list. Having insights you can use to make real-time business decisions (business intelligence) requires more than simply buying an analytics tool. You need a measurement plan that aligns with business goals.

## What role does CMS play in the ever-evolving digital experience space?

Some organizations believe that data is the heart of the digital ecosystem. I believe it's the CMS, especially an intelligent CMS that provides contextual intelligence to help marketers connect with their target audiences with the right content, at the right time, on the right device.

## Within what area of the enterprise do you recommend the CMS platform live?

The answer depends on the organization and the people, processes and technology that make it go. In some businesses, the marketing organization owns and manages the CMS. In others, it's an IT-led initiative. One thing is certain: Marketing and IT must be partners when choosing, implementing and managing the martech stack.
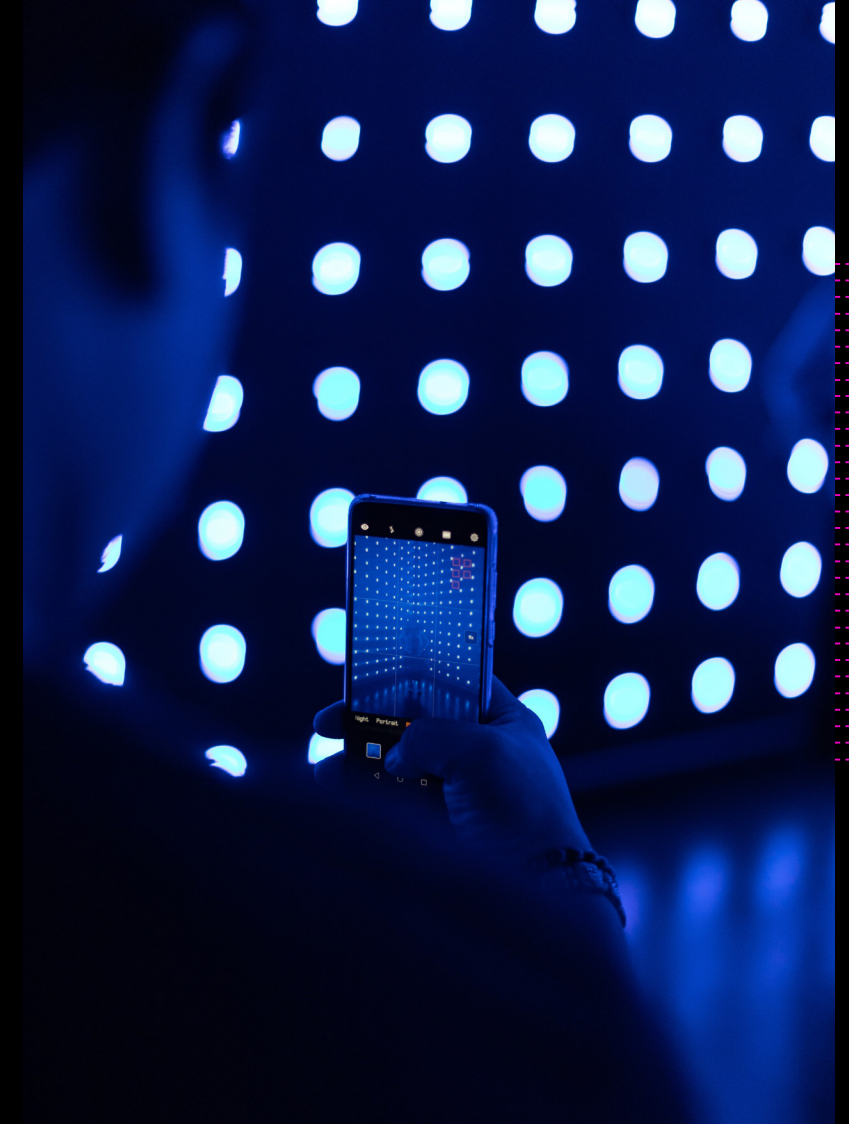
## How do companies differentiate their digital experiences from the competition?

**The most obvious differentiator is having a customer-first culture.**

Another way organizations differentiate their digital experiences from the competition is by understanding the answers to the questions who, what and why.

**Who?** This is your target audience(s), however you choose to define it. You can focus on the recipients of a particular marketing campaign, a certain audience segment as defined by your personas, or an existing customer who hasn't made a purchase in the past three months.

**What?** Dig in and determine what the customer wants from your brand, in what channels and what format.

**Why?** This is where you answer the question, "Why are we doing this and what do we expect when we do it?"

## What are the biggest challenges you see customers struggle with in order to get the most out of their CMS?

When marketers use a plethora of different tools—point solutions—to build out their marketing technology stack (the "best-of-breed" approach), they are forced to become product managers instead of marketers.

## How can organizations stay up to speed on technology and where their digital experience should be?

Success in marketing is driven by understanding your customers, the market and the technology you need to create remarkable customer experiences. Keeping up with technological change is like going to the gym—it requires a commitment. Building organizational digital experience chops is a continuous cycle, and design thinking plays a huge part. Design thinking requires organizations to focus on the people, users or customers they are creating products and/or services for.



## What are the right KPIs for measuring success?

This is a tough one. The answer here is, "it depends." Different businesses have different goals and metrics by which they measure success. Is it CSAT? Revenue? Employee satisfaction? There's a difference in approach between measuring a platform versus measuring a revenue-generating product or service. This is where taking the time to explore business goals and aligning them with people, process and technology is critical. Defining success is an ongoing marathon, not a sprint.

Sitecore Global Director Sean Rusinko offers this advice to clients on their digital journey...

**Typically we'll see that Marketing understands the need for personalization and has bought into the increased business value it delivers but struggles to achieve a solid level of personalization execution because it might not be an adopted strategy and lacks executive-level sponsorship.**

We'll work with the digital practice of an organization, and if we see there's no executive-level sponsorship for the first time delivery of their personalization program, it rarely gets off the ground. The main reason for this is that there are some fundamental changes that need to happen when setting up the foundation for the personalization program for the first time—both on the technical side and on the marketing side of the house.

Typically there are dependencies that are on the platform side and marketing side, and you need senior-level support that can knock down those barriers. We recommend developing a roadmap for personalization with the requirement that there's a senior-level stakeholder or executive sponsor as part of

that workshop, because sometimes additional budget is going to be needed to make changes to the technical, foundational architecture to support personalization. If personalization was easy to achieve, then every marketing organization would be doing it today.

There's a bit of demystification upfront from a planning perspective all the way through to execution. Another important consideration is that you need to weave personalization into your overall marketing program. You can't look at it as a project. Search engine optimization may have been a project 10 years ago, but now it's part of your day-to-day marketing program. And that's the way personalization needs to be—woven into a program in order to be successful.

*"There's a bit of demystification upfront from a planning perspective all the way through to execution."*

– Sean Rusinko,
Sitecore Global Director

# OUR PERSPECTIVE

Marketers are eager to better understand and implement personalization so they can deliver customized experiences. Today, technology provides a platform that equips brands to better optimize the customer experience. It's not only a more attainable strategic imperative but also an increasingly urgent business priority.

# CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

In a society where consumers are inundated with advertisements, sales pitches, emails, media and communications, personalization and 1:1 marketing give brands an opportunity to stand out by presenting meaningful, relevant solutions. Brands that can deliver 1:1 marketing at scale cut through the noise. Customer loyalty is earned by brands that establish a connection, cultivate trust and actively listen, seeking to understand the customer and their evolving needs. Brands that adopt an iterative process and develop a learning relationship with their customers are well positioned to maintain those customers over the long term, assuming they stay current with the latest technology trends.[7]

## Real-World Application: Disney

Disney has mastered the personalized experience. Consider the Disney MagicBand[8]—a best-in-class solution that enables frictionless, custom and immersive experiences. Launched in 2013, the wristband is a parkgoers' gateway to the entire Disney experience. From park entry to resort entry, to paying for merchandise and monitoring ride preferences, the power of the MagicBand far exceeds its simple, rubber appearance.

Each wristband is equipped with a radio-frequency identification (RFID) chip and radio that are constantly collecting data and communicating with sensors spread across Disney's property. Disney converts data into almost real-time business intelligence to provide unique, tailored experiences to each of the millions of guests who visit a Disney-themed park every year.

For instance, a young, impatient parkgoer in line to ride Splash Mountain will be surprised by a Disney character who pays him a visit and wishes him a "happy birthday" while distracting the child from the long wait for one of the park's most popular attractions. Instantly, this young customer goes from dissatisfied to elated. How did Disney know about the special occasion? That's the power of the technology behind MagicBand. It marries customer data with a consumer's in-the-moment experience, enabling Disney to deliver on its brand promise "to create happiness through magical experiences."

Technology breakthroughs are making personalization and an enhanced customer experience not just possible, but significant. Brands like Disney, who are taking full advantage of innovation to exceed expectations, are growing a loyal fan base and differentiating from alternative providers that aren't connecting on a deeper level. Connections, experiences, communications that meet unique needs and preferences resonate and captivate. If a brand wants to play and compete, they must start getting personal.

## Personalization Pitfalls

*Of course, if it was easy, every brand would be doing it well. There are many challenges to be mindful of before pursuing your own customer experience magic:*

**Velocity**
Organizations are transforming teams to adapt, but they can't respond to the business needs quickly enough.

**Agility**
Moving fast also demands the ability to change course on the fly—and many organizations struggle to do so.

**Complexity**
CMS platforms are getting more complex, and business and tech leaders aren't sure how to maximize their investments.

**Solutioning**
Anticipating the full scope of technology needs, in advance of implementation, is crucial. Often organizations don't plan far enough ahead and make the wrong purchase decisions.

**Talent shortage**
An organization's mission and culture need to attract digital natives capable of supporting and delivering rich experiences.

*"The talent gap is huge. Companies need that unicorn that can do it all. They need the ==creative thinker and the technology adopter and the customer-obsessive person."==*

– Steve Householder, Director of Digital Experience at TEKsystems

## Break Through the Barriers

*Brands that do it well are incredibly agile and adaptive. These brands communicate in a timely manner about relevant products and services that satisfy needs or problems for the customer. They anticipate and meet customers where they are.*

### How do brands deliver successful, holistic customer experiences?

**Build personas.**
Take time to understand your audience and then create personas that match the many segmented views you'll have of your customer base. Consider digital tools that understand the intricacies of personas and how they can be leveraged to establish emotional brand connections.

**Harness the power of data.**
More data has been created in the last two years than in the last 20. Organizations need to slice through and optimize that data in order to find meaning, drive informed business decisions and achieve measurable results.

**Actively listen.**
Your customer is human. Humans are constantly evolving. Watch for behavioral trends. Show empathy and evolve your messages accordingly.

**Own CX across the company.**
Your customer doesn't start and stop at the edge of your department. Every touchpoint is critical and shapes the brand experience. All employees need to be responsible for their roles in it.

**Resolve to scale.**
Think through how you're going to scale this experience across the business. Look for opportunities to leverage technology and automation to help scale.

# Technology has enabled organizations to truly understand their customers.

Some have embraced the opportunity as a competitive advantage; others are behind. But to remain relevant, there is a tremendous urgency to own this change.

Own it, now. Because the stakes are high and a well-crafted digital strategy, including effective personalization, has the power to elevate a brand and separate it from the rest.

**Let's partner.**

*"Customers must balance the needs around content management expertise with the right execution model for their business."*

– Burk Buechler, Managing Director of Digital Solutions at TEKsystems

## TEKsystems
## Digital Portfolio

*We are passionate and motivated
by the digital revolution.*

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**700+ clients, including
50% of the F100**

Delivering innovative solutions
in Creative and Design, User
Experience, Marketing Technology
and Strategy and Operations.

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Through our Talent Services,
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**In Good Company**

Transformational technologies
demand equally transformative
partnerships. TEKsystems is proud
to deliver solutions across the full
spectrum of leading platforms.

*The views and opinions expressed
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the authors and do not necessarily
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or its related entities.*

# Meet Our
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### Burk Buechler

*Managing Director of Digital
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Burk Buechler believes in
a business-first approach to
digital transformation. Digital
is at the core of the enterprise
and integral in driving business
impact. A dynamic leader with
over 25 years of experience
across industries and sectors,
ranging from healthcare and
commercial to financial ser-
vices and retail, Burk brings a
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### Steve Householder

*Director of Digital Experience,
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Steve Householder helps the
world's leading brands scale,
execute and optimize their
digital initiatives. He leans
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on how to create meaningful
experiences for their customers
and drive business outcomes.
Steve leads a Digital Leadership
Roundtable Series, where the
brightest minds in digital can
come together to network
and collaborate.

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### Gene De Libero

*Director, Industry Strategy &
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With over 30 years of digital
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De Libero has a passion for
leadership, change management,
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### Sean Rusinko

*Global Director, Sitecore
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Sean Rusinko is a senior-level marketing and technology
professional with expertise in customer experience strategy
and digital marketing. With over 10 years of experience, Sean
helps enterprise-level organizations achieve both near-term
results and long-term growth by formulating, implementing and
measuring transformational digital strategy programs—with a focus
on personalization and marketing data intelligence. Sean was the
first-ever recipient of Sitecore Digital Strategy MVP in 2014.

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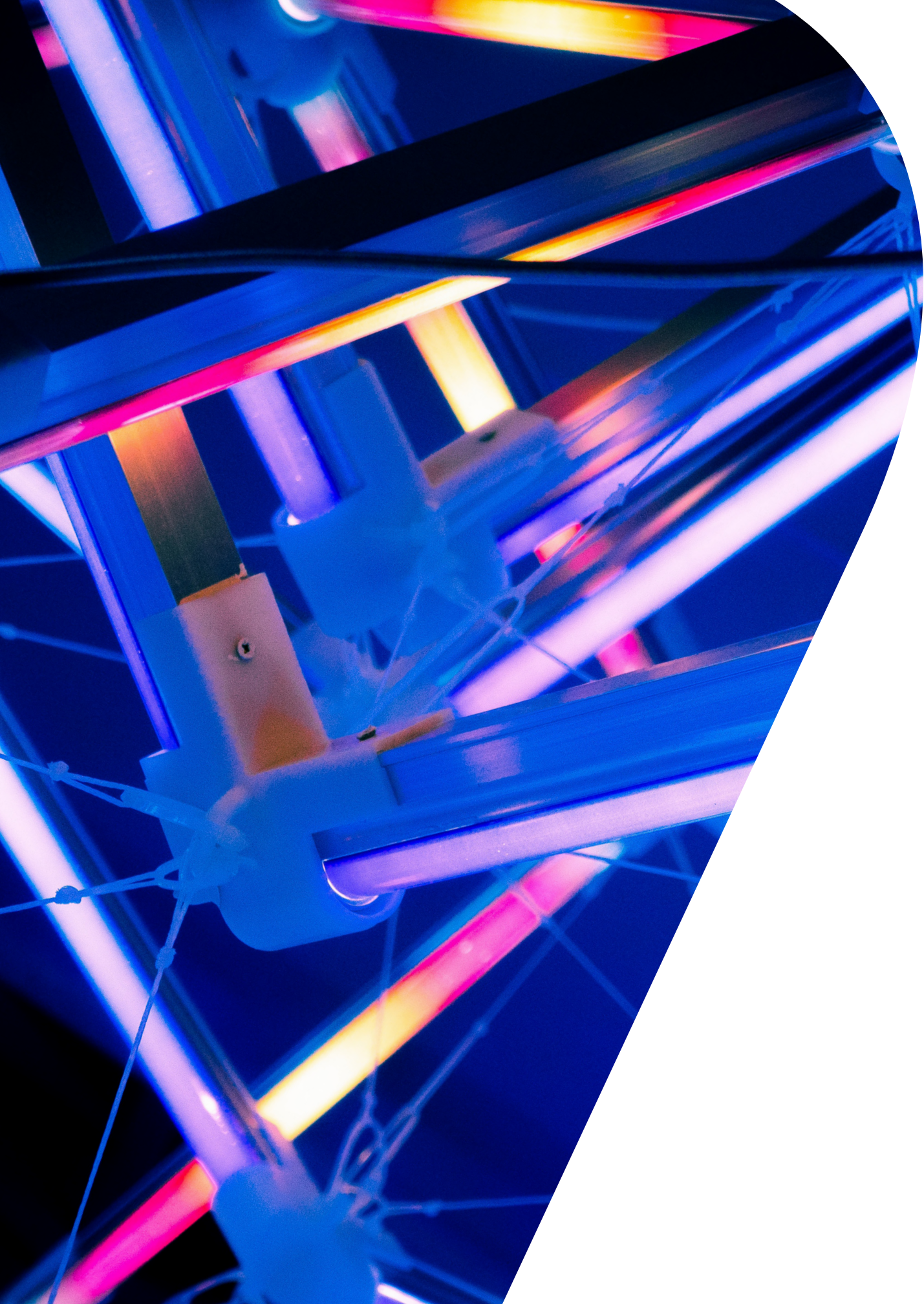
## About TEKsystems

We're partners in transformation. We help clients activate ideas and solutions to take advantage of a new world of opportunity. We are a team of 80,000 strong, working with over 6,000 clients, including 80% of the Fortune 500 across North America, Europe and Asia. As an industry leader in Full-Stack Technology Services, Talent Services and real-world application, we work with progressive leaders to drive change. That's the power of true partnership. TEKsystems is an Allegis Group company.

**TEKsystems.com**

## Albert McKeon, Contributing Editor

**Albert McKeon** has written an estimated 5,000 articles and has received leading journalism industry recognition, including the New England Press Association's Journalist of the Year honor. He writes for magazines and news services and creates content for organizations.

## Listen Now

For additional perspective on customer experience, tune into **The Agile World podcast**, where Burk Buechler answers key questions asked by host Greg Kilhström, author and industry expert on all things branding, CX and digital strategy.

## Follow Us

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