

What to look for in a technology partner

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Getting your digital media campaign off to its best possible start.

Choose right

With new online, mobile and social innovations emerging almost every day, digital marketing initiatives must draw on best-of-breed partners for every aspect of the project. No single developer or agency can deliver all outcomes.

There have been enough project failures to prove that online, social and [Digital.co.za/product/mobile-platform/ mobile platforms](#) are very different animals, each requiring a different strategic outlook and skill set. Just as an aeroplane mechanic will not presume to service a military tank, a creative agency does not have technology skills. The former does creative design while the latter does development, integration and SEO.

Important, risky and tough

Finding and assembling the right partners for your digital project is the first and most important step in the entire undertaking. Its success hinges completely on getting it right.

For clients that are new to digital ventures, and thus have no knowledge of mapping their business requirements to a set of technology solutions, the following guidelines offer help in finding the ideal partner.

- **Flexibility** - Industry mergers (between digital agencies, ad agencies, development firms, SEO specialists and marketing consultancies) have sought to gather all the right skills to handle digital projects, but this restricts clients to a pre-defined range of partners. *Choose one best-of-breed partner to handle each competency.*
- **Strong project management** - large, complex projects draw on the skills of multiple suppliers. On its own, the client does not have the specialist project understanding to undertake effective vendor management. *Pick a partner with proven programme management credentials.*
- **Partners versus suppliers** - while a supplier merely fulfils a request, a partner takes an active interest in understanding the client's business and strategic objectives and gives guidance in the formulation of solutions. Partners invest regular 'face time' to nurture the relationship while providers sell only. Partners give value while suppliers offer a commodity. And partners have an intimate understanding of the market, and the clients business, while a supplier takes instruction. *Find a partner that will invest resources into understanding your business.*
- **Shared risk, shared reward** - True partnerships involve reciprocated investments to sustain a preferential arrangement. Dependencies and risks are thus created, but to off-set this, rewards are shared. *Find a partner that shares your ethos and in which you care to invest.*
- **Applicability** - every man and his dog can claim to be able to build a database solution with an integrated Web frontend, but a portfolio of case studies can be quite revealing. *Determine if the developer has enough of the right experience.*
- **Scale** - one example of the right kind of experience is scale. A website with a catalogue of 50 products is not the same as one with a million. *Specify scale.*
- **Innovation** - successful creative campaigns may be technologically solid but still lack creative spark. *Team up with market movers rather than suppliers who copy others' successes.*
- **Entrenchment** - some developers are good with solving problems, others think ahead to what problems and opportunities may arise down the line. *Find a provider that gets repeat business.*
- **Humility** - It's a bad sign if the provider won't look beyond itself for solutions that better serve the client's requirements, or fosters a God complex about what's good for the client's business. *Find a partner who will take time to get to know your business.*

- Resources - What capabilities and capacity does the provider bring to the party? *Enquire about the skills and size of the development team.*

Don't gamble

Finding the right partner for your digital venture need not be a gamble. Look beyond skills and solutions and also ask about scale, repeat business, industry expertise and knowledge about the specific digital platform and campaign type you are after. There's a lot you can learn from asking the right questions.

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