AGILE CREATES A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE FOR CAR BUYERS

By Karen Lellouche Tordjman and Benjamin Rehberg

THE EXPERIENCE OF BUYING and owning a car has never been seamless—or digital. But it can be, as customers of one global carmaker will soon discover. The carmaker is using agile principles and practices to create a best-in-class digital buying and ownership experience for individual and commercial customers.

For a long time, automakers have offered customers the ability to comparison-shop and access certain services online, but it has been a bumpy ride. A potential buyer might set up an appointment to test-drive a particular model at a local car dealership only to discover that the model is unavailable. Or the customer might configure a car online with a specified color and options only to have to repeat those selections with a salesperson at the dealership.

These glitches often originate in the auto industry's siloed way of working, its lack of data flow, and its legacy practices and regulations. For example, in many countries, auto dealerships are independently owned, complicating efforts to create a system in which data flows seamlessly between headquarters and the field. In other markets, privacy rules prevent the sharing of personal data, a limitation that can slow the credit approval process.

Today's customer interacts with dozens of brands and services every day. In each of these interactions, companies have the opportunity to excite the customer with an intuitive, digital experience. Car buying should not be an exception. Increasingly, car buyers expect and demand the same experience they have when buying a book online or requesting a ride through an app. Agile can help create such an experience.

Agile Cuts Through the Clutter

One innovative carmaker recognized the need to compete not just with other carmakers but also with leading companies from other industries. Its senior leaders envisioned an end-to-end personalized online experience—from search to ordering, tracking, delivery, and service. The carmaker would understand each customer's prefer-

ences across all channels and be able to suggest helpful add-ons or preventive maintenance services that matched his or her driving habits.

The best way to realize this vision, the carmaker's senior leaders recognized, was by having employees work in agile teams across channels and customer journeys. Executives in many industries are harnessing the power of putting suitably skilled people in a room together, having them iteratively test their work in the market, and giving them responsibility for a specific outcome. This is the essence of agile.

The carmaker identified the elements required to create a seamless digital experience for customers, and then it mapped those elements onto various customer journeys and channels. This exercise helped the carmaker identify broadly applicable cross-functional capabilities as well as more narrowly specific journey- or channel-related capabilities.

The carmaker then created dozens of teams with clear purposes and measurable outcomes to develop these different capabilities. One cross-functional team, for example, was responsible for APIs and documentation across all mobile and digital channels. Another ensured that the same data would be available across all channels.

The company organized its narrower teams into categories such as mobility, personalization, and omnichannel. Within each cat-egory, cross-functional teams worked on distinct business outcomes. For example, one team was responsible for devising the overall car configuration engine to be used across all channels, while another was in charge of building the mobile app.

The carmaker carefully assembled teams with either specific or more general responsibilities and gave each one decision-making authority. By empowering these frontline teams, the company could move more swiftly than a traditional organization because it had the right people in the room, and they did not have to continually run decisions up traditional chains of command.

Although theoretically it may be possible to create a seamless digital experience for car buyers and owners by working within traditional organizational silos, agile is a more practical approach. The inevitable tradeoffs and negotiations among different parts of the organization occur earlier in the development process, and teams can test a concept and then revise it in response to feedback from customers and end users.

The Payoff

With this agile approach in place, the carmaker expects to dramatically improve its customer satisfaction ranking and establish digital connections to buyers in key markets. It also expects to generate hundreds of millions of dollars in fresh revenue from connected-car and mobility services and business development.

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