ACQUIA
EXPERIENCE DIGITAL FREEDOM

THE CMO GUIDE TO WEBSITE REDESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

Companies rebrand, redesign and rebuild their websites all the time. It tends to be a huge (and sometimes costly) undertaking and not something anyone would do on a whim.

Nevertheless, there are times when it must be done. As CMO at Acquia, I have spoken with countless other CMOs, and I've identified the main reasons they give for embarking on this journey:

NEED FOR NEW MESSAGING

The need for a messaging refresh (or overhaul) is the main reason that CMOs decide to redesign their sites. Markets change, customers change and products change. This means your value proposition will change, and when it does, the site needs to change to reflect that.

NEW CMO

Related to the first reason, a new CMO will often undertake a website redesign to put their stamp on the brand and its vision. Average CMO tenure is a mere 14 months. A site redesign can be a way to have a visible impact, fast.

MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

When a company adopts new products and capabilities or changes its structure due to a merger or acquisition, site information needs to be updated. The new company, or newly transformed company, needs to (re)introduce itself to the world. The website is the place to do it.

TECHNOLOGY REFRESH

Sometimes a website was originally built on technology that is outdated, which can mean a degradation in performance. This could also mean you can't update or add new capabilities. In this case, both a redesign and replatforming of the site is necessary.

DIGITAL ACCELERATION

The pandemic has put a lot of pressure on companies, sometimes by forcing traditionally in-person interactions online. If your site can't function as a digital storefront and support the digital footprint you need, then it has to be updated.

There are a number of other reasons related to these. Sometimes your search traffic has plateaued. Sometimes you need new technology so you can learn more about customers and prospects. Sometimes you want to create a new category or redefine existing products. Whatever the reason, you have to have one to justify the effort a redesign demands.

I decided last year we should rebrand and rebuild our website. Acquia's offerings had changed significantly since our last redesign and I wanted to make sure our new site shone a spotlight on these products. Additionally, we wanted to upgrade to Drupal 9 to get the most out of Drupal, modernize the look and feel of the website and improve usability across all devices. And because our own products, like Site Studio, played such an important role in building the new site, I especially wanted to show them in action.

Using Site Studio and our other solutions on Drupal 9 gave us an opportunity to develop strategic best practices for getting the most out of our tools, while accelerating our digital transformation through a strategic component codebase infrastructure that let us move more quickly.

With the new site, I also wanted to make sure we were serving the needs of our visitors. People visit Acquia.com to learn about our capabilities as well as explore topics important to developers and the broader Drupal community. Streamlining the user experience and providing more content, with the right level of technical depth, was likewise top of mind for me.

A wholesale redesign of a website for a company of our size can be daunting. I've been down this road several times before, so I wanted to give those considering such an undertaking some guidance based on my experience.

In this e-book, we'll look at what you need to get a redesign project supported, funded and launched and how to make sure it's a success. We have also created a **companion piece focused on the developer experience** that goes into more detail on the technical aspects of bringing a new site to life.

> **Acquia's offerings had changed significantly since our last redesign and I wanted to make sure our site shone a spotlight on these products.**

LYNNE CAPOZZI
CMO

SECTION 01

REDESIGN OR REPLATFORM?

EVALUATE YOUR UNDERLYING ARCHITECTURE

Website redesigns are commonplace. Most contemporary content management systems make the process relatively easy through templates and databases of content kept separate from the actual pages they feed into. Some content management systems even offer themes for a quick-and-dirty redesign, though a redesign for most enterprise-scale sites generally calls for a great deal of manual intervention.

Sometimes, a site redesign also involves replatforming the site – that is, rebuilding the site on a new technical foundation. Replatforming can be grueling and complicated and, unlike a redesign, may not at first glance appear to change much on the surface. It will change how IT and developers manage and work with the site, however.

While our recent redesign did involve moving from Drupal 8 to Drupal 9, this was an upgrade, rather than a true replatforming. However, we did take this opportunity to change our content model and implement new site-building tools. Frankly, you should use any site redesign to evaluate the underlying site architecture. In most cases, you will find that, in order to implement a new design and prepare your site for future evolution, you need to modernize the foundation as well.

SECTION 02

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CURRENT SITE

So, you know you need a redesign, and you suspect you could also use a replatform. Now what? Where do you start? Well, it all starts with a site audit.

CONDUCTING AUDITS

Before you can bring in a digital agency to deliver on your future brand vision – or ask your developers to make it happen – you need to take a step back and evaluate your present-day site. This is where audits come in.

You will need to conduct several different kinds of audits focused on the following:

/ **Data**
/ **UX**
/ **Content**
/ **Demand generation**
/ **SEO**
/ **Operations**
/ **Tools, software and integrations**

You need to start with data. How is your site actually performing? Where do people go? Just as importantly, where do they NEVER go? It helps to have a set of baseline metrics, including average and historical performance,

along with key insights as to where your site fails to measure up. These metrics will allow you to evaluate your current site and can serve as goals for your future site.

Based on your data analysis, the UX audit will look into your current information architecture. The UX audit needs to determine where the needs of users are being met and where the architecture needs to be improved.

Given the central role of content on your site, the content audit will probably end up being the most time consuming. Using the data audit as backup, now is the time to purge any assets that are outdated or no longer performing. Before purging assets or pages, however, make sure to perform a demand generation audit in case there are active campaigns running that you need to end or reroute.

Your data and content audits will inform your SEO audit. Which content has SEO equity? What content drives real traffic? What content

ranks well? This may be the time for you to take another look at your SEO strategy. It's good to know what is actually working from an SEO perspective, but are there other topics/keywords that you should be ranking for?

While it's natural for CMOs to want the website to reflect their vision for the brand, it's important as CMO to remember that the website doesn't just belong to you. Many teams, both within marketing and throughout the organization, have connections to your corporate site. For this reason, I recommend an operations audit, especially if you are a global organization. This is also your opportunity to discuss and define how the workflow and process for managing and modifying the new site will work going forward. Addressing these operational issues ahead of time will ensure a smooth relaunch.

Finally, you have to complete a tools, software and plugins audit. Capture all the integrations you currently have on your site; you may even want to do a cursory compliance audit. Is your site up to today's compliance standards? Are there any upcoming or new regulations that you should consider with the redesign and replatform?

These audits will serve as the basis for the narratives you develop in the creative brief. The narratives will not only help provide your agency with direction, but will also help you start pre-selling and setting expectations internally for why you need a new site.
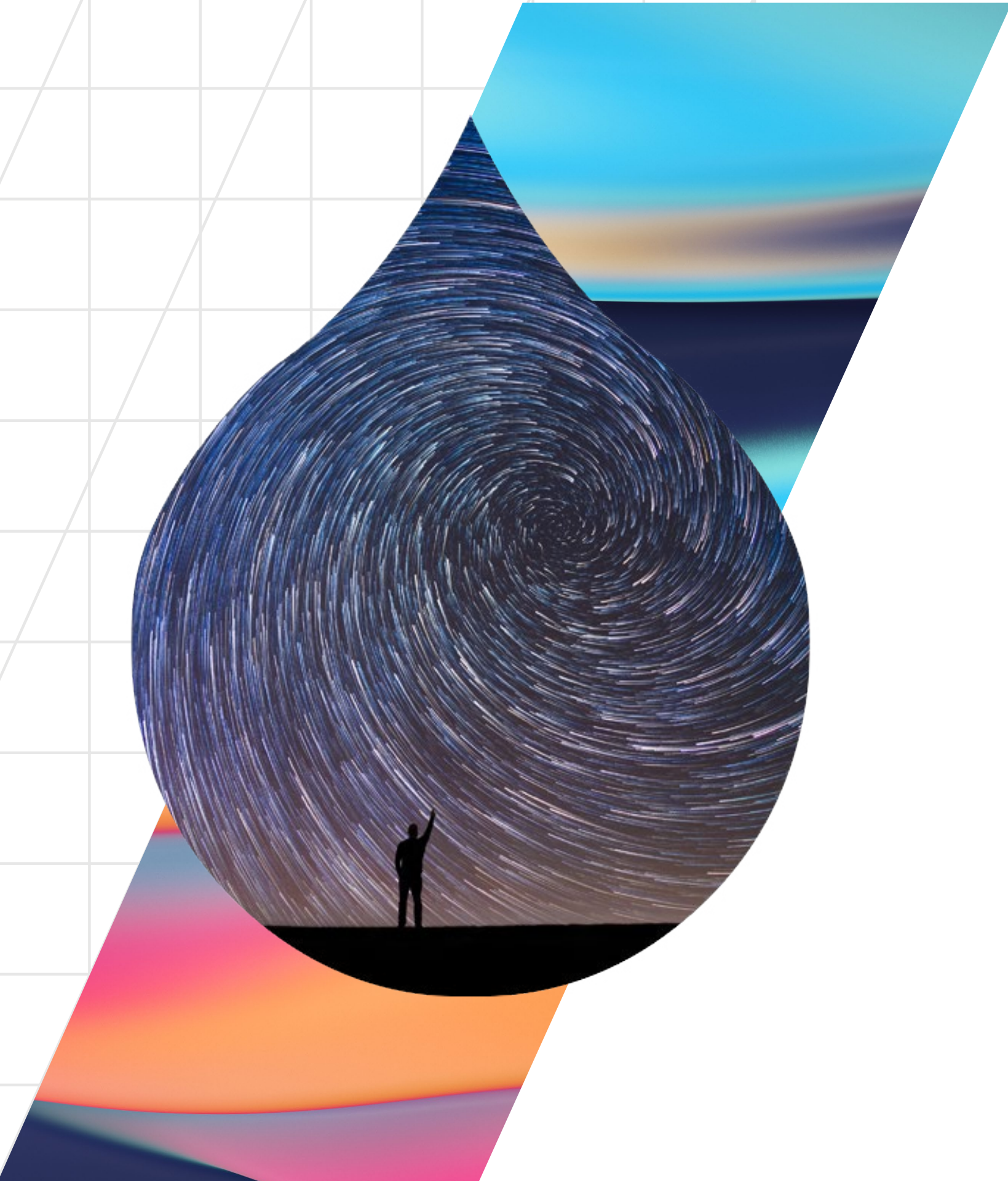
Start your pitch and build your allies going into the brief. Make sure your CIO/CTO, marketing ops and IT teams are ready to be your co-champions by recruiting them as supporters when you make your investment case.

SECTION 03

THE CREATIVE BRIEF

The creative brief is where the project first takes real form. It serves as the basis for the investment case and the starting point for your agency. Ideally, from the agency perspective, the brief will define the request and provide enough detail to anticipate the creative team's questions, but also be open-ended enough to give them the freedom to be creative.

In addition to specific creative and tech requirements, your brief should include what the site does now, what it does not do and what you want it to do in concrete terms.

Most importantly, the brief should lay out your "North Star." What is the overarching goal of your redesign? Make this goal clear and simple and circle back to it throughout the project. In Acquia's case, our North Star was modernizing the overall digital experience, both for customers and employees. We not only improved the usability of our site and created a better experience for visitors, but we also empowered our own teams to generate content faster than ever with the power of Drupal 9 and Site Studio.

There are many creative brief templates out there – the agency you select should have their own version – but the operative term here is "brief." Try to keep it short and tight for the agency. They will respond with questions to help them clarify your request.

Resist the urge to overshare or try to nudge the agency in a certain creative direction since the soul of a good brief is to provide the objective, the data and some context — not concepts — to get the agency started.

CORPORATE VISION AND BACKGROUND

When approaching an agency for the first time, it's crucial to preface the brief with a concise statement of how the company currently defines itself.

This should include a quick history, your corporate value proposition and a list of key products, competitors and customers. Don't overthink the corporate definition and resist the temptation to speculate about any problems or issues. Just state the facts — company size, global reach, names of a few key customers and number of overall customers, awards, revenue and existing agency relationships.

The brief should also reflect your corporate vision, mission and purpose statements. These expressions of corporate strategy will inform the agency about your North Star. Taken together, they should reveal the direction you're steering the company toward and highlight the goals the brief seeks to support.

Plan on using the background information you have assembled here for future briefs. And if/when the agency comes back with a request for more information or background, take their questions to heart. Questions indicate where you may be omitting some obvious information or have not adequately refined your message. The stronger you make this overview, the better an agency will understand your business.

THE GOAL

To develop the brief, start with a problem statement like this: "Acme will announce a new driverless car in the spring of 2022 and needs a name, logo, brand guide and global campaign for the new model."

Then, lay out all the challenges and opportunities relevant to the brief. Be candid about competition, delays, price and other potential issues.

Here's an example of some challenges that our Acme CMO might include in his new product launch brief:

/ **We are late to the driverless car market and must launch a new model at the Detroit Car Show on March 1, 2022.**

/ **The competition is Tesla, BMW and Chevrolet but we also see competitors from services like Waymo and Uber.**

/ **We believe the market for this new model is $15 billion USD in the first year and anticipate building 20,000 units to fulfill demand.**

SUPPORTING DATA

Some agencies specialize in market research and prefer to conduct their own discovery process to quantify and qualify the target market and opportunity. This section is where you can share your own research and internal data to help inform the design of the campaign or the rebranding exercise.

Following on the example given above, our Acme CMO may include these data points in the product launch brief:

/ **Our research indicates the target buyer is a male in his late 20s with a preference for performance, but a budget under $400 per month for a new car or lease.**

/ **Dealership data indicates the second quarter of the calendar year is when most Millennials start researching new cars, perhaps tied to graduation and end-of-school milestones.**

In addition to external research, include findings from your internal audits where appropriate.

THE ASK

Finally, you need to make your "ask" of the agency. Err on the side of being comprehensive. You don't want to omit something and have to tack on another request later. Last-minute requests typically mean a scramble at the agency and an upcharge to you, which can wreak havoc on your budget. Among other things, the ask should give the agency a clear deadline by which to respond and identify who on your team will be the primary contact.

The ask should clearly and concisely describe the end results you seek. When articulating them, try to anticipate any questions the agency's team may ask. Remember not to offer creative suggestions or concepts because it's the agency's job to amaze you. You're paying for their creativity and ideas, not just their execution of your ideas.

Here's how Acme's new product brief may look when it comes to the ask:

Our current name architecture is based on "cute marsupials," e.g., wallaby, lemur, etc. By Nov. 1, we need candidate names for the new product model based on consumer research to be performed by the agency.

CONTEXT

It's okay to give the creative team some context. For example, if your brand personality and tone are lighthearted, and there are campaigns you've run that you have liked, share those as reference points. It's perfectly fine to make the agency aware of what works for you, but understand that you're providing them with inspiration and food for thought, not a checklist of must-haves.

SECTION 04

BUILDING THE INVESTMENT CASE

Now that your brief is complete, it's time to put your money where your mouth is and ask for a budget to fund the project. You are going to need to make your case with data and metrics. Your ongoing performance tracking and audits should give you an idea of your baseline numbers. Now it's time to map out the improvements you envision and figure out what kind of investment the company needs to make to realize it.

The case for investment will depend on the performance improvements you foresee. By improving SEO, for example, the project should improve KPIs associated with site traffic. And by improving the user experience with clear site flows and expanded content offerings, you should be able to improve KPIs like time on site.

Nevertheless, what will have the greatest impact on company revenue, and thus make the most compelling case for a redesign, is improving conversion rates.

Improved conversion rates – specifically, generating more qualified leads through your site – should translate into both top- and bottom-line growth. What's considered a good conversion rate? That depends. Conversion rates can vary greatly depending on a range of factors, so your best bet is to measure conversion rate performance against your own baseline metrics and analytics.

TIME-TO-VALUE

Even when you focus on something as concrete and meaningful as conversion rates, seeing the impact of your investment almost always takes longer than you think it will. For this reason, when making your case, you will want to clearly calculate the new site's time-to-value (TTV). TTV refers to how long it will take before the promise of your investment case is fulfilled. And, although TTV goes well beyond site launch, the clock starts when you secure the budget.

It's important to note that there is a big difference in TTV when you're doing a redesign versus when you're doing a full replatform and migration. In many cases, you can anticipate a TTV of six months on a redesign project, but may need to wait nine to 12 months to see the full value on a replatform project. To make this concept a little more clear, let's consider an example:

Say you have secured a $600,000 budget for the redesign. Looking at the numbers, you anticipate that your new website will increase the conversion rate by 50%, which should in turn increase MQLs, deals in the pipeline and closed deals. You can use this calculation to estimate the ROI on the redesign:

```
(change in the revenue from
website redesign) –
(cost of website redesign)
= ROI on redesign
```

By these calculations, your TTV would be 1.2 months — which may

sound crazy, but should give you an idea of how the formula works:

```
Cost of Redesign / Monthly
Revenue Increase = Time to
Value (measured in months)
```

So, if the site costs $600k, and you're making $500k more per month, it will take 1.2 months to make it back. If you were only making $50k more per month, your TTV would be 12 months.

In the real world, you can expect the time needed for business results to overtake your original investment to be further out.

Building your investment case is about more than ensuring you can cover the costs of coding, design and all the rest of it. Above all, it is about selling the outcome of the project and setting the right expectations. Remember, this is a major change in the company's biggest asset, and change needs to be managed.

Now, imagine the new site has launched, producing the following results in the first month:

	OLD	NEW	INCREASE
CVR For a B2B website it can be lead captures on websites/sessions	2.57%	3.57 %	39%
AVG. MONTHLY MQL	450	550	22%
CLOSED	$1,500,000	$2,000,000	33%

According to the numbers, conversions went up after the redesign and that ultimately impacted revenue. Indeed, the website redesign correlated with an additional $500,000 revenue per month.

Thinking beyond the project itself, how will it impact the organization as a whole? And how can you prepare different parts of the organization to make the transition? My advice is to be as transparent as possible about the goals of the project and the status of the work as you proceed. Make sure your deadlines are realistic. Falling behind schedule can lead to tough conversations when stakeholders have their own high priority projects.

And always keep this in mind: Even when you've created a detailed project plan and tried to account for every possible contingency, rest assured that something will occur that you didn't plan for. When that happens, you'll need to adjust your expectations along with everyone else's.

Ensuring your math is solid at the beginning of the process and creating a clear vision will give you the confidence you need to overcome these hiccups and see the project through to its glorious completion.

SECTION 05

POLITICS OF A REDESIGN

Any project involving high-level stakeholders from across the organization calls for continuous diplomacy. Keeping everyone happy and gaining support while also maintaining forward momentum is a perpetual balancing act. It's not always easy, but there are some strategies that can help you keep the project on track.

Forming the right internal alliances from the outset is key. For a marketing-led project, your most obvious potential ally is sales. Considering how important the website is to lead generation, start by getting early buy-in from your head of sales.

After sales, head over to the IT department and rally the support of your CTO or CIO; you will likely need them as backup when it comes to approvals for new technology and/or additional technical resources.

With a project like this, it's also important to forge external alliances. As our marketing team began building a case for the Acquia.com redesign, we decided to keep it "in the family" when it came time to choose the right design agency. Over the years, we've formed strong partnerships with companies where we provide the tech and they provide UX, design and so on. For this project, we ultimately selected Acquia Gold Level Partner, **Third and Grove.**

SECTION 06

PREPARING FOR KICKOFF

CONGRATULATIONS!

Your team is raring to go and you're finally ready to kick off your redesign project. The plan is in place, your metrics are ready to back you up, and even accounting is prepared for invoices. Take a moment to breathe. Now that you've completed the first major milestone — getting the project approved — it's time to put your plan into action.

The kickoff begins with an initial meeting that lays out the plan, project milestones, roles, responsibilities and deadlines. While transparency is always important, kickoff is where you carefully select your attendees. When you start a project this big, you want representatives from all of the stakeholder groups rather than a full organizational kickoff. Save that for when you have approved creative to share.

When planning the agenda for your kickoff, make sure to include the following:

/ **Key aspects of how the stakeholder groups will work together**

/ **Protocols and processes**

/ **Rough plan of what the project schedule will look like**

/ **Roles and responsibilities that are aligned to the project plan and agreed to by all stakeholders**

Don't forget, communications need to also go to all the non-attendee stakeholders about the kickoff. Adhere to what we call the "no surprises" rule. This communication should include a recap of the kickoff, which keeps everyone informed but avoids detail overkill.

SECTION 07

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Based on my experience with site redesigns at Acquia and elsewhere, here are my best recommendations for handling the various facets of complex projects like these.

KEEPING IT REAL

Once you get the support you need internally, it's important to maintain that support. Be careful with promising too much and then under-delivering. Only make promises on things you can control. Be realistic about what your team can handle and where you will need outside support.

As it turned out, moving from Drupal 8 to Drupal 9 was not a full replatforming, so we didn't need external resources for that. It's also the case that our web team is relatively big. This meant that, although we were implementing new tools like Site Studio, our existing team could handle all the dev work. And as mentioned, we did use an external partner to handle the design.

MANAGING THE EXECUTION

A website redesign must also have executive support, although the executive team can't (and shouldn't) be in the weeds of day-to-day execution. As CMO, I was the executive sponsor of this project, but I needed a dedicated lead working with a core group responsible for managing various aspects – web development, content strategy, analytics, etc. – of the project. The driving force behind our redesign was our senior director of digital marketing. In addition to overseeing the project, she was also the primary owner of all operational communications. This meant managing internal comms in addition to the functional communications that take place with key external partners.

It was also up to the senior director of digital marketing to manage and communicate project expectations so that the C-suite is not caught off guard during project development. This included setting clear deadlines and realistic goals to fulfill the needs of the executive team, and quickly and effectively communicating any updates to or deviations from the plan.

To execute daily tasks, you must operate at a speed where critical decisions can be made by the core team. This means establishing the right balance between operational and executive execution. During our replatform at Acquia, we had many employees with a vested interest in the website redesign project. But as you can imagine, a project of this size would drag to a halt if all stakeholders gave input on every decision. Instead, the core team chose to update and engage with internal stakeholders during project milestones to ensure team priorities were all in line.

Perhaps most importantly, the team must be unified. Whether a team member is working at the operational or executive level, internal teams need to understand how they contribute to a universal project goal. The project lead must act as the bridge between operational and executive teams while keeping everyone aligned under a North Star.

CONCLUSION

Redesigning a website and/or replatforming can be a challenge, though if you do things right, it doesn't have to be painful.

In order to keep up with the rapidly growing demands of digital acceleration and provide customers with first-class digital experiences, CMOs must be ready to lead their organization through its own digital transformation, and this often begins with a website redesign and/or replatforming.

For Acquia, migrating from Drupal 8 to the new Drupal 9 was itself a fast and painless process. What's more, by implementing our own technologies in strategic ways, we found we could work more efficiently.

DOES EVERYONE HAVE WHAT THEY NEED?

For example, we empowered both developers and non-technologists with low-code site building tools like Acquia Site Studio. Site Studio allowed our team to deploy new content quickly through pre-built templates and drag-and-drop features. By equipping everyone across the organization with intuitive, accessible technology, we could execute on our goals faster and get to work on adding the features and functionality that mattered most to our customers.

Technology aside, there are other things that you can do as a CMO to help the entire process go more smoothly. Conducting audits helps you to get a clearer idea of your current strengths as well as areas where your site needs improvement. And developing strong creative briefs that provide your agency with the corporate information, insights and data they need will help ensure that you get higher quality proposals — and end results.

KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Of course, you also have to make the case for a redesign or replatform within the organization. A redesign process can get political fast, so forming strong alliances is key, as is doing an effective job setting expectations, communicating goals and keeping your team lean enough to keep moving forward. If you follow the process I've laid out here, I believe you can do it to great success.

DOES YOUR SITE NEED A REDESIGN?

Acquia DXP Ensures Brands Are Ready for Whatever's Next

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ABOUT ACQUIA

Acquia is the open digital experience platform that enables organizations to build, host, analyze and communicate with their customers at scale through websites and digital applications. As the trusted open source leader, we use adaptive intelligence to produce better business outcomes for CX leaders.

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