ACQUIA

EXPERIENCE DIGITAL FREEDOM

THE PATH FORWARD:
DIGITAL ACCELERATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As this year has unfolded, communities, companies and governments have faced an increasingly complicated combination of economic, political and public health crises.

Responses on the part of governments and businesses quickly transformed the daily lives of millions. In a matter of months, work, education and commerce, to varying degrees, had to adopt a new range of remote, distributed and digital models.

Thanks to the rapidity of these changes and the uncertainty regarding what the future holds, many have struggled to find sure footing. Long-term planning has become difficult. And decisions about day-to-day operations end up involving a lot of guesswork and wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, companies have been forced to act. Employees across industries have worked from home for months. Organizations of all kinds have moved customer interactions to digital channels. With parts of the economy now opening up, everyone must adjust and adapt once more. These ongoing changes to business and daily life can seem unprecedented. Still, one can also see in them a rapid acceleration of trends long underway. When you realize this, we believe, a clear path forward begins to emerge.

For example, customer experience and digital experience have finally converged. From shopping, banking and entertainment, to education, healthcare and government, digital interactions are now the primary way — in some cases the only way — for customers to access information, products and services.

Companies have been gradually digitizing operations and customer interactions for decades. Still, it always seemed they could go at their own pace. The sudden appearance of a new, contactless, digital reality means that the timeline has accelerated. Organizations must now make the digital leap.

In this e-book, we will take a closer look at how customer experience is changing in this rapidly evolving landscape. We will discuss the reasons why companies need to adapt quickly. We will also show how agility, flexibility and resilience in the solutions companies adopt make much-needed digital acceleration possible. Finally, we will explore the impact of the current changes and challenges on a range of industries.

What we hope to convey here is simple: There are clear and concrete steps that organizations — businesses, communities, governments — can take to overcome the many challenges we now face and those that lie ahead.

In other words, there is a path forward.

SECTION 1

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE:

A Shifting Landscape

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

A Shifting Landscape

CX research we conducted in 2019 revealed that what customers appreciate most is convenience. That's the experience they want. Brands tend to overthink this. Believing that customers want to be surprised and delighted, brands miss the simpler truth that they just want things to be easy.

> " **Brands miss the simple truth that customers just want things to be easy.** "

Our research also revealed that customers want and expect a certain amount of personalization in their experience. Personalization doesn't have to be complicated. It can simply mean showing customers you remember them by pre-populating fields with information they have already given you, for example. It can even be simpler than that and consist solely of making relevant recommendations.

Regardless of how a brand personalizes the experience, it tends to have one critical result: It makes the experience more convenient. Convenience and personalization go hand in hand.

DONATIONS TO LOCAL NONPROFITS SINCE 1999:

$120 MILLION

DELIVERING CONVENIENCE IN COMPLICATED TIMES

Established in 1818 as Salem Savings Bank, Eastern Bank has always been community-focused. Giving back to the community is in its DNA. Indeed, for two decades the bank has contributed 10% of its net income to local nonprofits. These donations have totaled $120 million since 1999. Not surprisingly, this community focus has been the hallmark of the bank's response to COVID-19.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Eastern Bank has done everything it can to make banking more convenient. It has raised withdrawal and deposit limits at ATMs. It has also actively promoted online banking and use of its app. For customers who have loans and mortgages with the bank, it waived penalties for early CD withdrawals and provided customers with options for deferring mortgage and loan payments to avoid late charges. Finally, it spun up new offerings to address customers' emerging financial needs. These offerings include a $2 million Consumer Impact Loan Fund and a $5 million Small Business Impact Loan Fund.

New offerings, especially those aimed at customers in crisis, can only make a difference if customers know about them. With that in mind, Eastern Bank leveraged its digital capabilities to launch a campaign to reach potential loan recipients. It relied on its deep customer knowledge to identify the most appropriate campaign targets. It then focused on personalizing the web experience to engage customers who showed interest in these new services.

LESSONS FOR THE LONG HAUL

The approach taken by Eastern Bank and organizations like it highlights how you deliver a convenient and personalized experience in times of rapid and unpredictable change.

/ **Think about customer experience holistically.** This means not only reimagining how you interact with customers but reimagining your offerings.

/ **Recognize that customers have new and urgent needs.** You need to ensure that your current products and solutions address these needs.

/ **Adopt systems that are adaptable, extensible and open.** Responding quickly to evolving customer needs calls for a technical infrastructure that makes it easy to develop and deploy new digital experiences.

SECTION 02

SPEED MATTERS

Matching the Pace of Change

THE PATH FORWARD: DIGITAL ACCELERATION

SPEED MATTERS

Matching the Pace of Change

Only three months passed between the time the first case of COVID-19 was reported in the United States and the moment total or partial stay-at-home orders were in force. To put this in perspective, it took **Uber** close to seven years to provide more daily trips in New York City than taxi cabs.

In other words, there is no constant speed of disruption. It can take years, as in the case of Uber, or it can take months. Given that the present, accelerated rate of change is accompanied by persistent uncertainty, organizations need to be both fast and agile.

The good news is, several well-known public institutions have shown us how it's done.

FAST MOVERS

The City of Boston recognized early on in the pandemic that its nearly 700,000 residents would need clear guidance and consistently up-to-date information. To meet this need, the city quickly created a section on its homepage devoted to COVID-19. It also **spun up a separate page**, continuously updated and available in 14 different languages, dedicated to sharing critical information about the virus and preventing its spread.

In San Francisco, the University of California (UCSF) undertook a similar initiative aimed at helping clinicians and the communities they serve. In order to provide its staff and public health partners with critical health and emergency information, **UCSF created an entire site** featuring guidance on infection control and educating patients, students and others on how best to work with the hospital during the pandemic.

In addition to critical information on the virus, the site connects visitors with a host of resources for weathering the crisis. The site also lets visitors know how they can help, describing how to donate money, give blood or become part of a research study.

City governments and public universities are not always known for how quickly they get things done. When it counted, however, the City of Boston and UCSF were able to create these community resources in record time.

BUILT FOR SPEED

To get things done quickly, an organization's digital experience infrastructure needs several characteristics.

/ It must be built for scale. It needs to be relatively simple to add newly created digital properties – be they new pages or entirely new sites – to the organization's main site.

/ It must make it easy to create and deploy digital content. The tools this infrastructure offers must meet the needs of both site builders and content creators.

/ It must meet high standards for security and compliance. The process of adding new content, features or functionality to a site, especially when done quickly, must reflect the organization's requirements for security and regulatory compliance.

SECTION 03

AGILITY, FLEXIBILITY, RESILIENCE

Open Systems Are Key

AGILITY, FLEXIBILITY, RESILIENCE

Open Systems Are Key

If things had changed quickly and we had been able to settle into a "new normal" with relative ease, that would have been one thing. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Instead, the present moment continues to be characterized by the appearance of new challenges and lingering questions regarding what's to come.

PANDEMIC BAKING

King Arthur Flour is the country's oldest flour company. Due to the unexpected surge in home baking brought about by the pandemic, traffic to the venerable brand's site has reached an all-time high: website sessions are up 260% and e-commerce sales have increased 200% year over year.

To better engage this rising tide of visitors, the company built a new, content-driven web experience. By creating a site that tightly wove together content and commerce, the marketing team gained the ability to quickly set up new recipe pages, highlight key information and direct consumers to relevant products.

Creating this new web experience definitely demonstrated the brand's agility in the face of emerging customer behaviors. At the same time, the brand created the experience with an eye toward resilience. Built on a scalable cloud infrastructure, the revamped King Arthur Flour digital experience can respond to unpredictable traffic surges without a hitch.

To give you a sense of the scale demanded by these surges, consider this: King Arthur Flour's **sourdough starter page** received 2.5 million pageviews in a recent 10 week period. By contrast, even on one of its most heavily trafficked days in 2019, the day before Thanksgiving, there were fewer than a million pageviews for the entire site.

YOU HAVE TO HAVE OPTIONS

When faced with challenges that are entirely new, an organization needs to be able to try new things. This involves, first, quickly identifying and exploring options. You then pursue the options that seem most promising. Based on what works, you scale what you've done. At the same time, you continue to experiment in search of further innovation.

Experimentation and exploration require flexible tools. Specifically, they require tools and systems that are inherently open. From a technical standpoint, there are two ways that your systems must be open.

Open to other tools. The systems you rely on should make it possible for you to follow a best-in-breed approach, one in which you use the tools your strategy demands, not those dictated by the technology you own.

Open to data. Your systems need to be able to collect data from any source and use it to create persistent and actionable customer profiles. They also need to be able to push data to whatever tools or channels need it.

Because King Arthur Flour built its digital properties on an open platform, specifically Acquia's Drupal-based DXP, the company could take its website in a more dynamic, personalized direction. And it could do so quickly.

Organizations of all sizes need this kind of agility. As we've also tried to show, such agility calls for a flexible framework that supports both experimentation and, if the experiment works, scale.

WHEN YOU HAVE AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY, YOU ALSO HAVE A PATH FORWARD.

With a path forward, your organization can cultivate the resilience that keeps companies going for years. (Maybe even hundreds of years!)
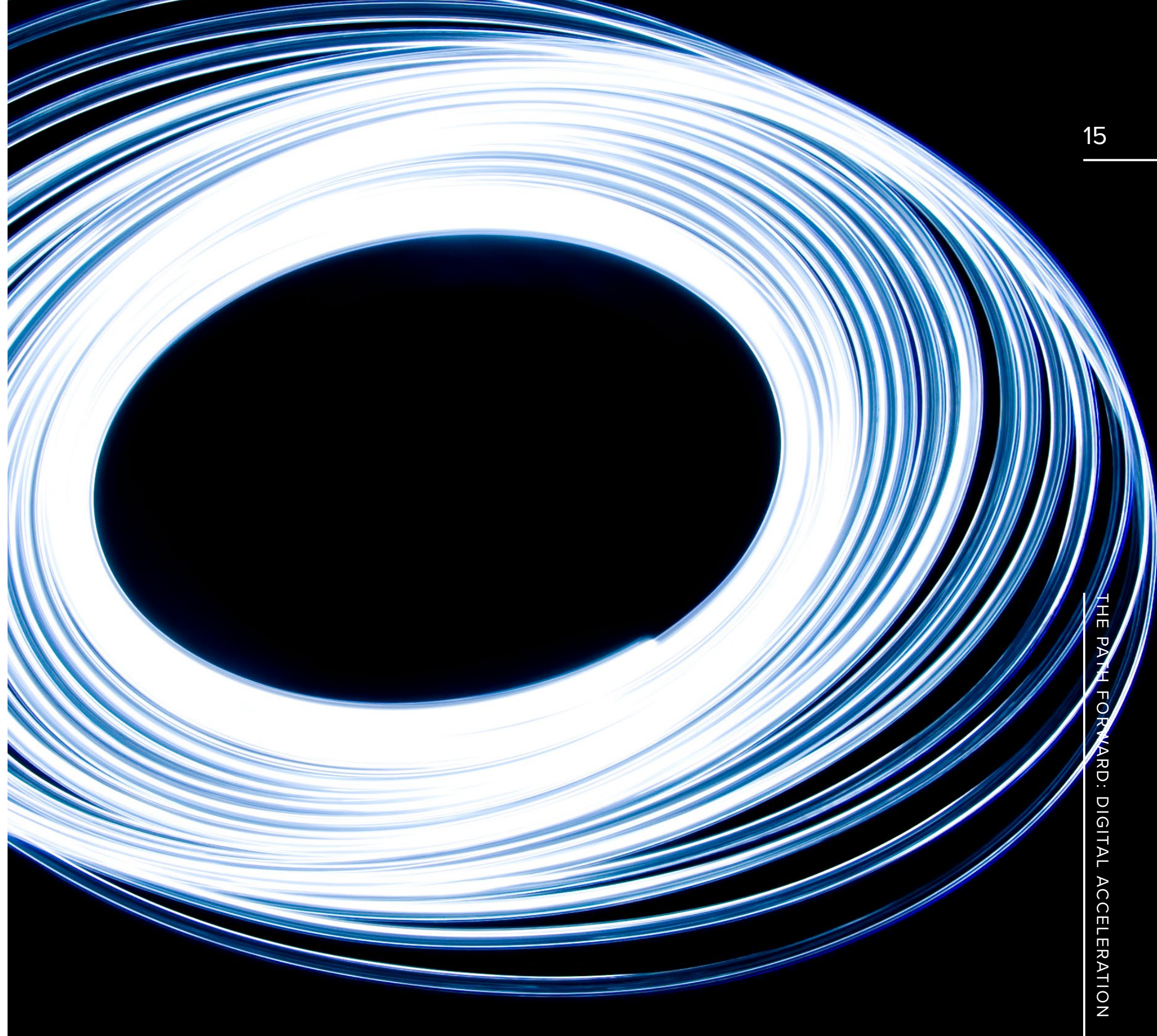
SECTION 04

CHANGE IN CONTEXT

Diverse Industries, Familiar Patterns

CHANGE IN CONTEXT

Diverse Industries, Familiar Patterns

The changes fueling this need for speed, agility, flexibility and resilience have affected every industry. In this section, we will dig into how this has played out across healthcare, media, entertainment and publishing, financial services and the public sector.

HEALTHCARE

Prior to the pandemic, the healthcare field already faced a range of challenges. Chief among these challenges was the industry's ongoing struggle to deliver a consistent customer experience. A leading reason for this has been that hospitals and individual medical practices lack a comprehensive view of the patient and the patient journey. The proliferation of patient data silos and an overall lack of automated processes have been the major contributors to this problem.

Once the pandemic struck, healthcare organizations had to drastically reduce physical contact between patients and providers. This meant new protocols for determining when an office visit or a procedure was necessary and new methods for delivering care. As a result, we have seen the rapid adoption of telemedicine and virtual consultations along with an overall increase in traffic to hospital websites and related digital properties.

While this move to digital modes of care in many ways has increased convenience for patients, it has presented practitioners with new challenges involving data privacy and security. At the same time, it has forced healthcare providers to explore technologies that allow them to engage with patients across the entire patient journey. These technologies include tools that allow for the remote monitoring of patients while also supporting greater patient autonomy and self-care.

Given the widespread belief that telemedicine is here to stay, healthcare providers and associated organizations will have to focus on several key areas:

/ Improving the digital experience. Delivering a consistent, personalized experience will play an especially important role as competition for patients heats up.

/ Treating patient data like customer data. By using data to better understand and engage patients, healthcare organizations will be able to deliver more personalized care, both in and out of the doctor's office.

/ Maintaining data privacy. As healthcare organizations increasingly rely on systems that support data-driven personalization of the patient experience, they must choose systems that also support rigorous compliance with data privacy regulations and laws.

MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT AND PUBLISHING (MEP)

The MEP industry has faced a host of obstacles over the last several decades: The decline of print and radio; the rise of the internet and digital forms of content distribution and consumption; the ongoing evolution of television from cable to streaming. All of these trends have made the industry volatile and ripe for disruption.

The pandemic has created a strange conundrum for the industry. Given the stay at home orders, the virus halted production work on new content and at the same time radically increased demand for content.

Even in the face of increased demand, MEP companies continue to struggle with their business models. Cinema closings meant that traditional film distribution has been paused. Some wonder if the long-term trend of declining theater attendance means that such distribution might stop altogether. And, with live sports offline, MEP companies have seen a steady disappearance of ad revenue.

MEP companies also face data management issues. On the one hand, popular streaming services are adept at capturing customer data and using it to refine recommendations and personalize the viewer experience. On the other hand, the fact that many customers subscribe to multiple services means that a comprehensive view of preference and consumption habits is out of reach.

WITHOUT SOLID CUSTOMER INSIGHT, EVERYTHING FROM ADVERTISING STRATEGIES TO CONTENT PLANNING SUFFERS.

Still, customers will pay for access to quality content, particularly if it means the absence of ads. They are also always looking for new content and will reward providers who help them find it. Of course, content creators will likewise reward providers who can effectively promote their content to the right audience.
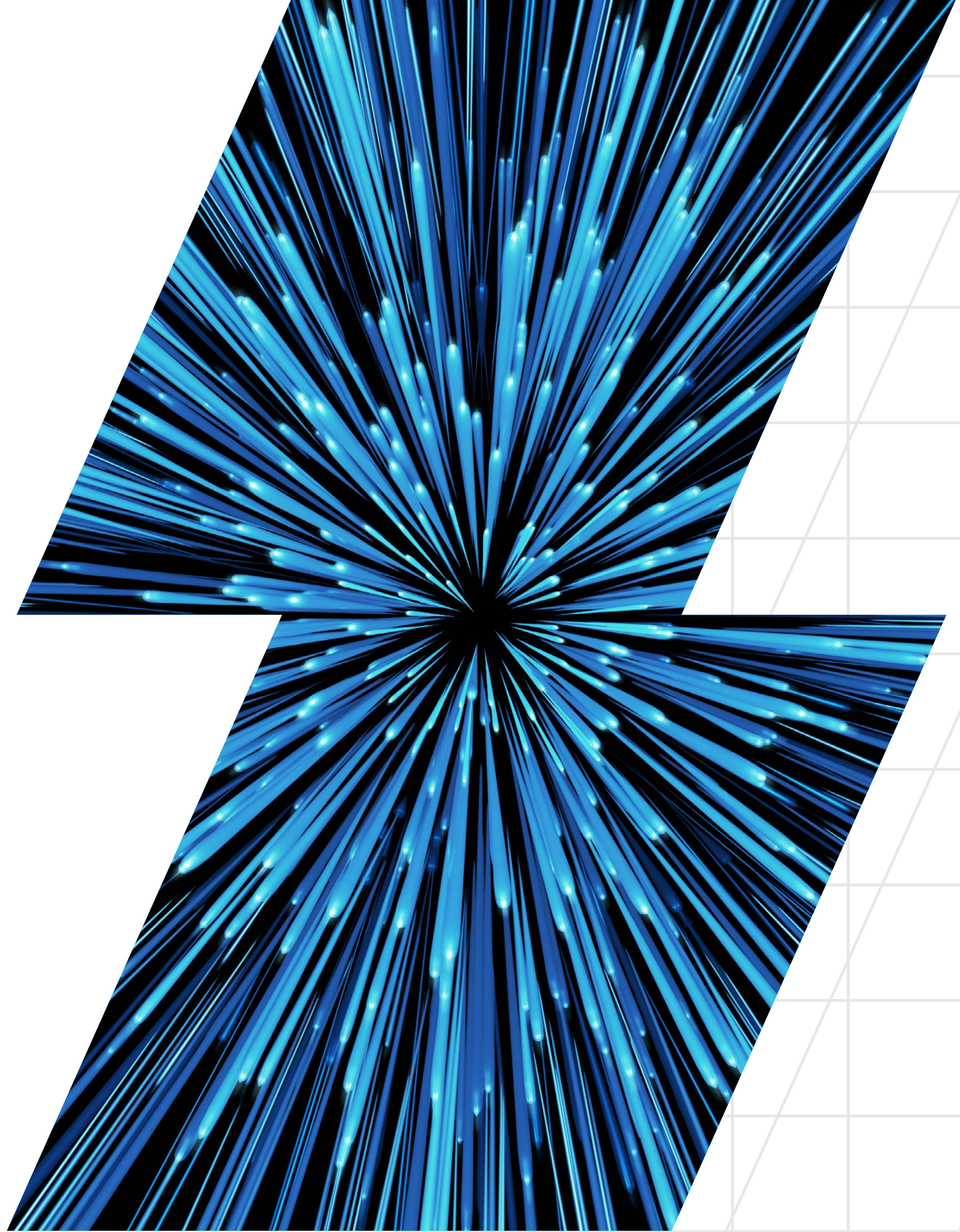
Looking beyond the pandemic, MEP companies need to focus on a couple things.

/ **Data-driven personalization.** Leveraging a deeper understanding of customer preferences and behaviors requires tools that facilitate comprehensive data collection and advanced data analytics.

/ **Speed, scale and stability.** Making sure that you can deliver content at scale across all devices means investing in an infrastructure that is open and secure. It must also be capable of multiplatform content delivery. Above all, it must allow you to create new experiences on new channels fast.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

The experience of Eastern Bank provided us with a glimpse into the challenges that financial services firms must overcome. The bank had to make digital interactions more convenient for their customers while also offering new products and services that address their changing financial needs.

Customer needs aside, a number of other issues confront financial services firms. Business is slow, with applications for mortgages and car loans down significantly. Insurers struggle with record high volumes of claims that will in turn necessitate record high payouts.

CUSTOMERS HAVE LONG TENDED TO THINK OF ALL BANKS AS THE SAME.

And with many in the industry working remotely, financial services firms have had to figure out new ways to satisfy regulatory requirements. (For their part, regulatory agencies have sought ways to modify these requirements in order to make compliance easier under unusual circumstances.)
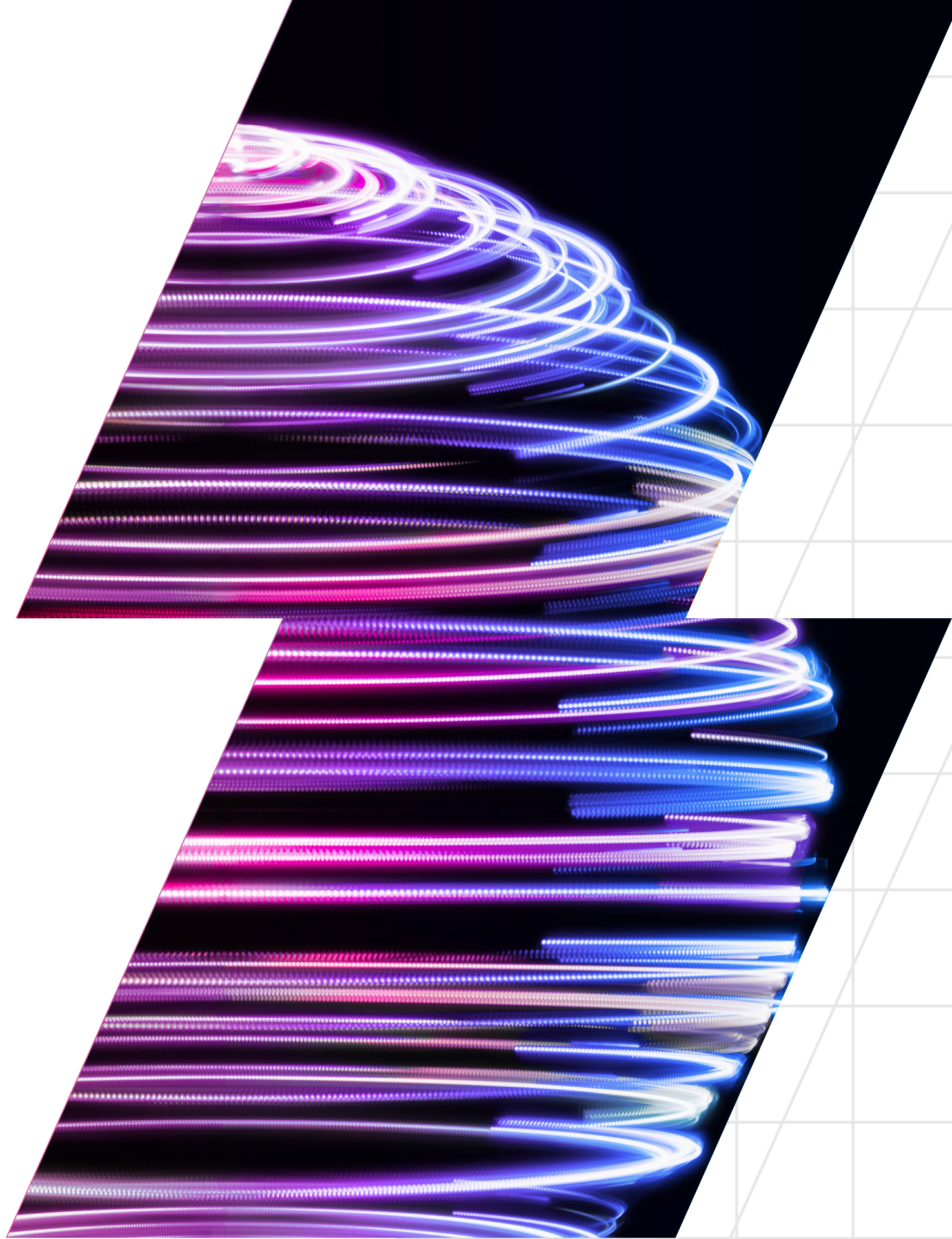
With banking shifting to a digital-first model, banks face pressure to ensure that the digital experience they provide is truly differentiated. This will require data. Unfortunately, managing customer data across siloed, legacy systems presents challenges of its own. Such a data landscape makes it difficult to create a unified customer profile and with it a consistent, personalized customer experience.

Finally, this traditionally conservative industry has been slow to innovate and pursue digital transformation. As a result, financial services companies lag when it comes to adopting technical solutions and best practices that are table stakes in other industries. Moving forward, firms need to focus on the following:

Accelerating digital transformation. Ramping up digital transformation involves getting new apps and other digital innovations to market faster.

Adopting new technologies. From AI to robotic process automation, there are a host of technologies that can make financial services more effective and efficient. The adoption of these technologies, too, must be accelerated.

Maintaining data security. The challenge here is that financial institutions need to be especially mindful of data security even as they become more creative when it comes to using that data to improve the customer experience.

PUBLIC SECTOR

We saw already how two public sector organizations, the City of Boston and UCSF, leveraged digital capabilities to provide their communities and constituents with information and guidance in the face of the pandemic. An increased demand for information is not the only pressure that COVID-19 has put on public sector organizations.

City, state and local governments have had to figure out how to deliver services in a new contactless environment. These services include everything from issuing driver's licenses to managing court hearings and trials. What's more, the virus and public response to it has driven unemployment rates to historically high levels. With unemployment offices closed, we have seen the volume of visitors push online systems to the breaking point.

Educators at public colleges and universities, as well as teachers in K-12 schools, have had to adjust to teaching classes online. School closures have also forced school districts to, among other things, find ways to support students with special needs and provide meals to children who rely on school breakfasts and lunches.

Burdened with an outdated and inflexible technical infrastructure, public sector institutions can't quickly create digital alternatives to in-person services. They also struggle to effectively scale existing digital services to meet surges in demand.

Finally, public sector organizations manage huge amounts of personal data. Unfortunately, keeping this data secure can be challenging. What's more, these organizations lack the ability to use the data they have to improve services and create a more personalized experience for everyone accessing government resources.

The public sector will need to pursue a strategy of improving technical infrastructure in order to weather the current crisis and better serve their communities. This strategy should focus on:

/ **Building an infrastructure that, while secure, is inherently open and flexible enough to support responsive innovation.**

/ **Taking a modern approach to data management so that the personalization one finds in the private sector can also be enjoyed by people interacting with public institutions.**
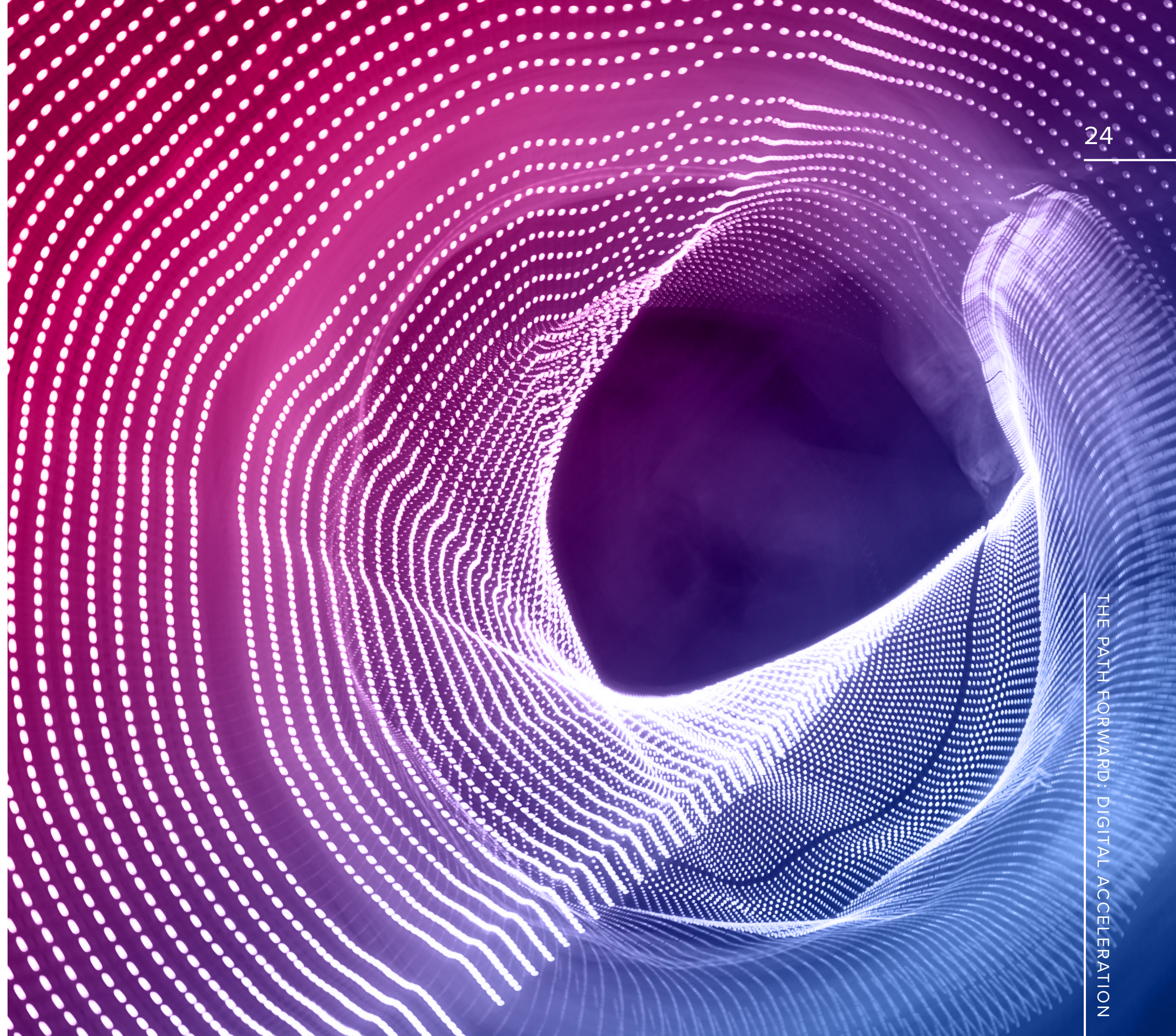
SECTION 05

THE PATH FORWARD

Start with a Strong Foundation

THE PATH FORWARD

Start with a Strong Foundation

Despite persistent uncertainty and constant change, there is a path forward. And that path is defined by the fact that customer experience has become a digital-first experience in everything from education and healthcare to work and leisure.

" **Despite persistent uncertainty and constant change, there is a path forward.** "

Providing the digital experience that customers need now and into the foreseeable future depends on the accelerated adoption of inherently open digital solutions. When your digital experience platform is open — meaning it can integrate with anything — you can pursue rapid digital transformation with best-of-breed tools for developers, site operators and marketers. As a result, you can quickly create and deliver new digital experiences at scale.

In pursuit of speed and scale, however, you can't forego stability or security. Fortunately, open source systems, built on open architectures with an eye toward open integrations, provide both.

Because they are built with integration and extensibility in mind, these systems are literally built to scale. And as open source tools have become a mainstay of enterprise infrastructure, they have evolved into some of the most secure in the world.

This path forward requires something else in addition to open systems. It requires solid data management and data analytics. This means breaking down data silos by putting data at the core of your digital experience infrastructure. When you consolidate your data and make it more usable by the organization, you enable efficiency, insight and the personalization that customers crave.

Times of change are also times of opportunity. To forge a path forward, you need tools that give you the flexibility to explore these opportunities. You also need tools that give you the power to innovate, adapt and act.

Acquia's open digital experience platform provides all this and more.
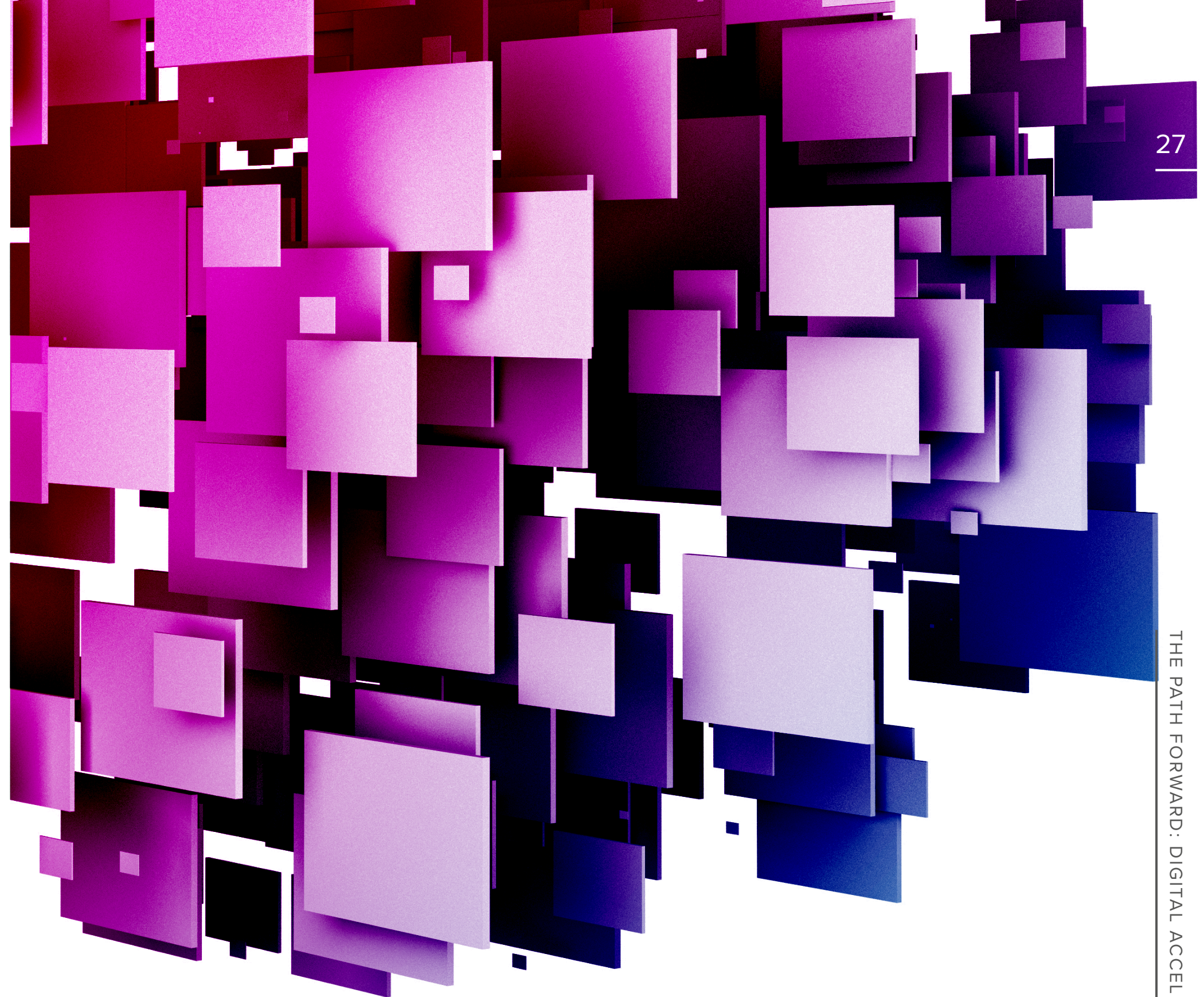
READY TO MOVE?

Acquia Can Help Your Organization Accelerate Into the Future.

LEARN MORE ▶

ACQUIA

ACQUIA.COM

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.

THE PATH FORWARD: DIGITAL ACCELERATION