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Use service partners to import fresh thinking to your industry

An agricultural equipment manufacturer partners with Infosys to ensure farmers have the tools and capabilities they need to feed the world

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Defining Future Business Operations

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In a relatively short period, business leaders have shifted the focus of their competitive lens from their industry neighbors to those in verticals further afield. In many respects, digital transformation has broken down traditional barriers, accelerated by the encroachment of ubiquitous tech giants. For forward-thinking business leaders, pursuing innovations in other verticals can reveal opportunities to transform their operations. There are many examples of firms using their service provider partners as the lens to contextualize digital innovations.

One firm taking advantage of its partner's ability to cross-pollinate ideas from inside and outside of its sector is an agricultural equipment manufacturer that has the straightforward goal of ensuring farmers have the tools and capabilities they need to feed the world. Recently, the firm partnered with Infosys for help with a multi-year global digital transformation program.

Agricultural businesses face unprecedented levels of change

The traditional view of farming has become so ingrained in our culture that it is sometimes hard to see agriculture as a business. With billions of people to feed globally, this traditional view is out of pace with its industrial necessity. As the world's population expands further, the agriculture industry is adapting to several challenges:

- **Meeting an ever-increasing demand for food production as land availability decreases.** As the population increases, food demand grows. The scarcity of land intensifies this challenge, particularly in the US and Europe.
- **Dealing with price instability.** Prices for commodity food products can vary greatly, making it hard to predict profits and plan investments.
- **Keeping up with regulations.** Food safety concerns and environmental concerns are giving rise to sharp increases in the number of regulations and the frequency of regulatory changes. Substantial regulation changes can change the cost profile of produce or cause short-term disruption while the industry complies.
- **Covering increasing costs.** Many costs associated with agriculture have been rapidly increasing—land, equipment, technology investments, fuel, regulation responses, and many others—but prices remain unpredictable.

The firm's customers are being squeezed between fluctuating prices and expanding costs. This squeeze is driving the industry to examine new ways to remain profitable and productive while adhering to ever-demanding regulatory frameworks. The squeeze is particularly challenging in the agriculture business. Technology needs to operate, quite literally, in the field. Agriculture is embracing and using technology more, but it's still a conservative and risk-averse industry with demanding buyers who want predictable returns from tried-and-tested approaches. Farmers don't want to be guinea pigs. They expect R&D to be finished before technology arrives on their land.

The company recognized early that it needed more than one response to help its customers keep pace with modern agriculture's demands and challenges. The first is the industry's increased use of technology; agriculture now sits on a high-tech foundation, and every year it brings fresh innovations. The second is the new wave of talent entering the customer base—the new generation of agricultural leaders, as with all industries, are increasingly tech-savvy and have higher digital expectations than the previous generation. To tackle these challenges and continue its mission to deliver the tools farmers demanded, the firm set about building a transformation roadmap.

Finding a partner with the right technical expertise and the capability to bring fresh ideas to engagements is key to success

According to the client, the engagement started with the need for a partner to help build out its new digital customer experience program. The client selected Infosys because it submitted the most attractive proposal, based on a comprehensive blueprint, in the tender process. Infosys and the client kicked off the project by selecting the best resources to deliver on the ambitious goals, focusing on finding the appropriate blend of onsite and offshore resources. While there were initial challenges onboarding talent and freeing top-performing professionals to work on the program, the client advised that throughout the project, Infosys demonstrated tremendous strength in being a fair and performant partner.

This large agricultural manufacturer was focused on top-line growth as an outcome of the program, with an emphasis on using new channels and approaches for customer engagement to bring in fresh revenue. The broader transformation project enabled the firm to integrate platforms across the business from front-office sales and marketing to core operations in the back office. The project meant the firm could service customers more efficiently, and it highlighted new areas for incremental improvements as the program continues.

Further, the digital customer experience project is designed to bring all business stakeholders closer together—from distribution partners through to farmers as the end consumers of the firm's products—all linked in a digital platform. According to executives at the client, the approach has also enabled the company to focus on agile models that enable the firm to react to customer feedback in real time and ensure its products and services meet demands.

Outside of the broader transformation program, the customer could leverage Infosys' broader expertise outside of manufacturing to bring fresh perspectives and insights to ensure the best tools, technology, and approaches are used to deliver real business results.

Smart executives look for innovation both inside and outside of their industries

We can attribute this engagement's success to the value Infosys adds as a trusted technical partner that brings fresh perspectives from its work with other clients and other industries. HFS Research has observed that many of these engagements have similar grounding philosophies and approaches. Here is some key advice from the trenches:

- **Be willing to look beyond your industry for innovation.** A key differentiator for many firms is their capacity to look beyond their peers' direct innovations and instead import fresh thinking from other verticals. Service providers like Infosys are often able to bring this important perspective to engagements and help frame innovations in a way that is contextually relevant to their clients' domains.
- **Be responsive to customers and market changes.** A critical success factor behind any digital transformation is the ability to take the product to the customer, listen to feedback, and improve it. The agricultural industry has faced multiple challenges recently due to external factors like changing weather patterns across different continents, the impact of COVID-19 on the movement of farm workforces, and an inability to move perishable farm produce because of different regulatory restrictions. These hurdles required quick adaptation to meet market and customer demands. This customer adopted an agile execution methodology to become

responsive. The customer gained better visibility into the “Conceptualize—Implement—Deploy” process and retained full control over the time to market.

- **Understand what success looks like.** A challenging exercise with sweeping transformation programs is measuring success. In this case, the client had a clear measure for success: it wanted to boost top-line revenue growth. Both Infosys and the client could use this yardstick to measure program results and correct the direction.
- **Find providers with a proven delivery track record.** One of the benefits of working with Infosys, according to this client, was its ability to provide a fresh perspective and best practices that it had nurtured over decades of involvement with upgrading digital customer experiences. Both the client and Infosys could deploy tried-and-tested methodologies to ensure project success.

The Bottom Line: Executives must leverage their service providers’ insights and experience across industries to ensure they stay at the spearpoint of innovation.

The reality for many enterprises, regardless of their industry, is that relevant innovation is no longer restricted to specific domains. However, finding the right best practices is a challenging endeavor without an experienced partner present to help contextualize them. The vital process of cross-pollinating ideas, then, is a task best done with a collaborative partner looking to help its clients drive measurable digital change into their business.

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DEFINING
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