

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLE CARRIER AND ROB WILL

Eric Green: Hello and welcome to a new podcast series from IBM software that explores the challenges IT managers and business professionals are facing today. I'm Eric Green and I'll be talking with a range of experts to discover new perspectives, approaches and examples that can help meet these challenges and introduce you to the capabilities of smarter software from IBM. So let's get started.

Welcome back to the show. In today's episode, we're going to be talking about the web experience with Nicole Carrier, who is Program Director for Web Experience Software at IBM, and Rob Will, who is Chief Architect for Web Experience also at IBM. Thank you both for joining us today.

Rob Will: Thanks Eric.

Nicole Carrier: Thanks.

Eric Green: Nicole, I guess we'll start with you. Could you please talk a little bit about what you mean with web experience and why this matters to organizations?

Nicole Carrier: Yup I can do that. When we talk about web experiences, we're referring to the online experiences that organizations can deliver to their customers and in turn to their partners. So this includes, for example, the ability through the internet to make purchases, get information, solve problems, let folks collaborate with each other, and do other sorts of transactions. You know, sometimes when we talk about web experiences, people think that just means a company's dot com site, but that's actually not the case. And truly when we talk about web experiences, or what we call exceptional web experiences, what we're talking about is delivering very consistent and very engaging experiences to customers through a bunch of online channels – mobile devices, kiosks, e-mails, even social sites like Facebook.

So in terms of why this matters to organizations, delivering these really great web experiences matters, I guess there's just one key reason, and that's that the web is really becoming the primary face of an organization. There are some statistics that I was looking at the other day, you know, there's two billion people that are projected to be on the web by the end of this year, one trillion different connected devices. If you look at Facebook, people

spend about, you know, over 11 billion hours a month on Facebook alone.

So if you think about it, you know, with all of these smart devices, social networking tools, you know when people are trying to do something like make a meaningful purchase, they don't just go to a store and buy the item. Right? It's om, they do research online, they can talk to friends using social networking tools, maybe they go to Facebook. So really this web is becoming this great channel for when people want to buy things, they're going to the web first, when people need service, they're going to the web first. And so from a customer perspective, you know, making these great, exceptional experiences is really important because it can help drive more business through that channel, you know, make customers more happy and more loyal, and it can also help organizations save costs by delivering experiences through these lower cost channels.

Eric Green: Very interesting. So Rob, it sounds like this is a fast-moving landscape. How are companies grappling with the speeds at which technology is progressing?

Rob Will: It really is moving pretty rapidly. I mean, you know, years ago, people got onto the web, have some content, you know, provide some access to their services so they could sort of avoid the call center. It was good enough. Customers would come and they would do whatever they were trying to do. But, you know, in more recent years sort of the bar for providing a really good web experience is rapidly going up. You know, search engine authorization so people can find you, now mobile access so people can get at you from their tablet or from their mobile device, or their desktop. Right? The ability to start to integrate in these social sites that Nicole was talking about. How do I do that? How do I integrate with Facebook? How do I make my site more like Facebook so that my users can form a community of interest around my site and within my site? Right? They can help each other instead of them just relying on me.

All of those kind of things, the bar continues to rise, and customers struggle with how can I implement the core infrastructure of that, and at the same time, how do they add their own unique value on top? Right? So many of these customers look at commercial software that can help them provide the core underpinnings, the key enablement for mobile, the key enablement for social integration, right? The key enablement for publishing web

content, those kind of things. And that frees up their technical teams to innovate above that core and to provide unique value for their particular business.

Eric Green: Very interesting. So let's talk a bit about customer loyalty and how the web experience can help organizations stay ahead of the competition. Nicole, what are your thoughts?

Nicole Carrier: It's a good question. What we find is that, you know, organizations that have what I was talking about before in terms of an exception web experience can really differentiate themselves from the competition and they can improve customer loyalty. There's a couple key aspects here in terms of how you could differentiate. First, I want to talk about personalization. A lot of companies today still deliver really a one size fits all type of experience to their customers. But what customers are really looking for is an experience that is personalized to their needs, to their behaviors, to their preferences, the language of their choice, the device that they're using.

I'll give you an example. Lufthansa Airlines is one of our customers. And if you go to the site, you can do it now, you know, bam, right up front, the first time you get there, it asks you for your country, it asks you for your language. It's personalized for more than 80 countries and 12 different languages. If you log in, you can then see your information personalized to you, so your flights, your awards, your content all tailored to your preferences. If you hit the site from your device, you're not going to see a huge site that you need to scroll around with and it's hard to use. You'll get an experience optimized for the form factor of your phone. So one key here to understanding customer loyalty is to make sure you understand your customers and then to deliver the right tailored experiences to everyone depending on what I mentioned before, their preferences and their behavior.

I think the second key is really all about what we call the social web. So making sure that your online experiences aren't just shouting out information to the customers but they're also asking users to participate in the conversation. The social web has really been, you know, a great equalizer in terms of getting customers' voices to be heard. So it's the job of our customers, of these organizations, to now support customer feedback and then listen to it. And it could be as simple as, you know, allowing users to express their feedback by commenting or rating, or participating in forums and communities on your site. And one last point I'd like

to make, and that is, you can improve customer loyalty simply by delivering an experience that helps your customers achieve what they want in as simple and as easy of a manner as possible.

You know, I'm not sure about you, but you know, I've seen a large number of sites where they're absolutely beautiful, they're like completely flashy, and you go there and you try and get something done, but it's so hard to navigate, it's really hard to get the task accomplished. So the third key is to really focus on usability, simplicity, ease of use, and making sure that those key use cases, the reason why people are coming to your site, is as easy to execute as possible. And you know, if you achieve all three of these keys in terms of social and personalization and usability, I'm sure customers are certainly going to keep coming back and keep being loyal.

Eric Green: Indeed. So Rob, can you elaborate from your point of view a little bit here?

Rob Will: Yeah, I think what Nicole is saying that the key thing most customers are looking for is to make their web experience the preferred way that their customers or citizens or employees interact with them. Because it is the lowest cost way, it is the way that most of those users would prefer to do it. Right? _____ and all of those reasons everybody understands. Right?

So when we talk about exceptional experience, when we talk about, you know, web experience, we're really talking about making it the preferred way. And that's key, because people have different needs on different days. I might want to come to the site, and I might want to browse around, because I have some time to kill and I want to understand some more of the products available here or the offerings here, or talk to other people involved in a similar interest. And other days, I just want to go to the site, do whatever transaction I went there for, and move on with my life because I have something else going on. Right? And so the ability to construct experiences that can be fast paced as well as leisurely, right? Really important, right? This idea of personalization, this idea of targeting the right experience to the right device to the right time. Right? And to have a framework that's flexible enough to do all of those different things.

And you know, under that is the core underpinnings of the ability to make sure it is responsive and available and always there. Right? And then, you know, beyond that, to really make it the

exceptional experience, you know, things like personalization and social and things that Nicole talked about are important. But another really important thing is analytics. It's really important that sites pay attention to what are people doing on my site? How can I improve this experience month to month? Right? And so it's really important to have an analytics tie-in so that they can analyze their results.

Eric Green: So technology-wise, Rob, is the demand first for say, cost cutting, cost savings, is it for customer support, is it for revenue, or does it differ by industry? How does it work in this space?

Rob Will: Well we've found it varies a lot by individual customers and, to some extent, the industry. I mean there are certainly industries today that are very focused on being able to execute the transaction or to be able to support their customer at the lowest possible cost, because they're in a more of a commodity industry, or they're in an industry where every dollar matters. Others are looking for a very, very personalized experience. They are able to and they differentiate themselves by providing the most targeted and most up to date and the most one-on-one experience. Right? And so you see customers whose primary focus is I need to make this the lowest cost way to interact with my customers.

And then quite often you also see customers in either the same industry, because they have a different brand value proposition, or in other industries that are really focused on providing the very best and the very broadest possible experience for those customers. And we also have, you know, cases of course where customers have different levels of support for different kinds of customer relationships. And so it's important to have a framework that lets them build different kinds of experiences targeted at different customer segments within their business.

Eric Green: So Nicole, our listeners definitely like examples. I was hoping maybe you could give us maybe an example or two of the web experience and success stories and the like.

Nicole Carrier: Yup absolutely. You know, I talked a couple of minutes ago about Lufthansa. They're a great example. I encourage folks to check that site out for sure. You know, we have thousands of amazing experiences built on our technology with customers across the globe. Some of the more I like to think of them as fun sites, like Wimbledon.com, US Open, Tony Awards, all built on our technology. In terms of customers that use our products to, you

know, grow revenues or to improve customer support, we have a lot of great examples there. One customer, Reliance Life Insurance, they're actually based in India. They use our technology to build both an agent portal and a customer portal. From a customer perspective, you can log in and you can access your portfolios and your policies. You could do self-service type tasks, you know, simple stuff like changing address or more powerful features like switching funds around.

And from a success perspective, by leveraging our platform, Reliance was able to reduce their customer and their agent self-service costs by nearly 50%. They saved millions of dollars also because of these self-service capabilities. In addition, Rob was talking little bit about from our platform perspective, but the agility of it – they can bring products to market in half the time. And that, you know, a year ago led to a 100% year on year growth in premiums. That's a pretty good case study there I think in terms of cost savings and in driving revenue.

I'll give you one, I think we probably have time for one more example. And this is a – we have lots of governments that leverage our technology. There is a large county government located here in the US that basically needed to make it a lot easier for citizens and various associations to do business with the county without having to, you know, drive all the way into the offices or fill out tons of paperwork, notarizing stuff. And they built this really exceptional web experience, and they eliminated a bunch of information silos and they presented information in a really nice aggregated citizen's view instead.

And what that means is citizens can log in, they can pay property tax bills online, contractors can get permits online. Heck, you can even reserve golf or tennis times online. Right? And as a result, just last year alone from January to April, on this site they had ten million visits and they collected 468 million dollars in revenue. So another real great example of what you can do and some of the benefits that you can achieve through exceptional web experiences. There's a lot more examples but I think those are probably good enough for now.

Eric Green: Yeah, those are great. So Nicole, maybe you could talk a little bit about where IBM is innovating in this space.

Nicole Carrier: Yeah, sure. We're always innovating, of course. Let me – I'll just pick one or two areas to talk about. One area that we're spending a

lot of time and research dollars on is around social business. And we really continue to push the envelope on providing technologies that will help our customers leverage networks of people to drive innovation and improve productivity. One of the areas within social business is social analytics. That is a hotspot for us. And for those of you not familiar with social analytics, that could provide capabilities like, for example, we could recommend certain content or certain offers, or even new relationships and new recommendations of who you should contact based upon a person's social network.

We're also investing a lot of research around leveraging gaming techniques to drive more compelling customer experiences. For example, we're trying to see if by integrating badges and leader boards and virtual awards and top user type of lists into a site if users will be more likely to participate and to engage. You know, I could probably go on and on here. We're investing in mobile, of course, given the proliferation of mobile devices and the importance of those technologies. But we're continuing to be on the cutting edge so that our customers can rest assured that our platform will continue to evolve and adapt as technology changes.

Eric Green: So you've been talking about a lot of different tidbits and places to go for things. If our listeners really wanted to get down to specifics, is there anywhere they could start?

Nicole Carrier: Yeah, we have a lead offering in this space for customers that are looking to deliver exceptional web experiences. The offering is called IBM Customer Experience Suite. Basically, that offering provides a foundation for organizations that want to deliver these very compelling, differentiated, socially infused, mobilely aware types of experiences. To find out more, customers can, they can simply Google if they want to IBM Customer Experience Suite. Or we have a bitly URL, it's with bitly and then IBMCEXP at the end.

Eric Green: Excellent. Well thank you Rob and Nicole for some great information. This has definitely been a very worthwhile podcast today.

Rob Will: Thanks Eric, we enjoyed it.

Nicole Carrier: Yeah thanks, my pleasure.

Eric Green: Thanks for listening. Please do visit IBM.com/software to connect with our experts, continue the conversation, and to learn more about smarter software from IBM. Let's build a smarter planet.