

HOW TO DESIGN, BUILD AND OPERATE A SYSTEMIC APPROACH FOR ENTERPRISE GROWTH

A point of view from WPP Enterprise Solutions



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Most enterprises aren't hitting a market ceiling.
They're hitting a growth ceiling of their own making.**

Most enterprises are adding capabilities when they should be compounding them. CX, Commerce, Marketing, and the platforms beneath them were each built to solve a separate problem, in isolation — and that isolation, not the platforms themselves, is what prevents reinforcement.

The underperformance enterprises feel is the symptom; the absence of a shared operating layer is the cause.

The numbers are stark. 37% of digital transformation projects fail.¹ 64% start without a clear roadmap or end goal.² 68% of business leaders say their transformation projects feel internally focused and aren't fixated enough on the end customer.³ And 29% now believe digital transformation can never be completed⁴ — an admission that the model itself is broken.

These aren't isolated execution failures. They are the predictable output of an architectural mistake: treating enterprise growth as a portfolio of separate projects rather than as a single system you design, build and operate.

This paper introduces an alternative: a **growth system** that addresses underlying roadblocks holistically, recognizing the connections between capabilities. It closes the fragmentation gap. It turns individual capabilities from a list of investments into a compounding asset. It gives a CEO one coherent architecture to invest in — assembled from the right parts for their business — rather than a set of overlapping ones. The result is an *agentic enterprise* — one that can sense, decide, and act continuously across every customer-facing surface, without waiting for the next project cycle.

A true, effective growth system not only needs a precise **design**; it also needs a committed partner to **build** the necessary parts and **operate** the system to help it evolve to meet new needs and market conditions.

What follows is how a growth system gets built, what it looks like in practice, and why it produces a different kind of return than transformation programs have to date.



HOW WE WORK TO ESTABLISH GROWTH SYSTEMS

Our experience — across enterprises like Ford, Sherwin-Williams and IKEA — has clarified four practices that separate growth-system work from conventional transformation engagements. They aren't four separate traits; instead, they form a holistic approach in which the people who diagnose the problem are the same ones who build and operate the fix.

Diagnosis-led entry.

We don't arrive with a fixed methodology. We diagnose where the constraint actually sits — in the customer journey (acquisition, conversion, retention) or in the operating layer beneath it — and then assemble the precise composition of capabilities that address it. For example, when IKEA approached WPP Enterprise Solutions, they wanted to scale local marketing. But we saw a different question underneath that request: how to be one IKEA to 100 million customers.

That reframe of the problem determined the design. Rather than make 30 local marketing operations individually better, WPP Enterprise Solutions designed one global engagement system that every market could draw from.

Field medicine.

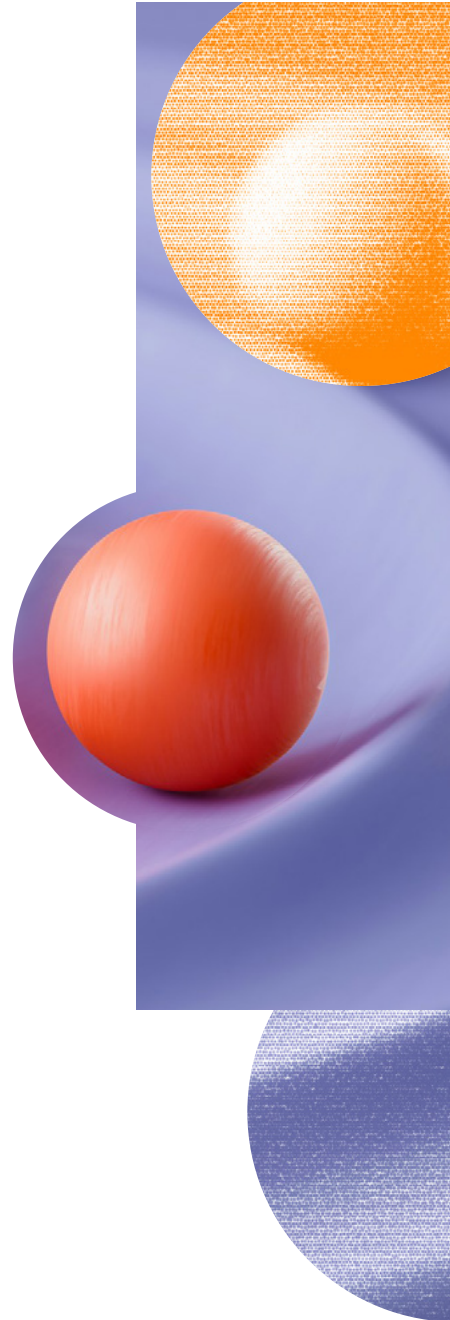
A growth system is built by operators who do the work — not by consultants who describe it and then hand it off. The teams who design the architecture are the teams who stand it up, integrate it, and run it after launch. The hand-off problem that defeats most transformation programs simply doesn't occur because there is no hand-off.

Shape-shifting up and down the stakeholder chain.

A growth system must translate from boardroom to engineering team without losing meaning. We staff to operate at both ends simultaneously — strategists who can sit in a CFO conversation and engineers who can sit in a sprint review, often in the same week, often the same people.

An insight moat.

WPP Enterprise Solutions sits inside WPP's infrastructure, giving us access to first-party signals about how customers actually move through markets. This is privileged data no consultancy or systems integrator can replicate — and it is what lets a growth system anticipate rather than react.





A NEW PARADIGM FOR VALUE CREATION

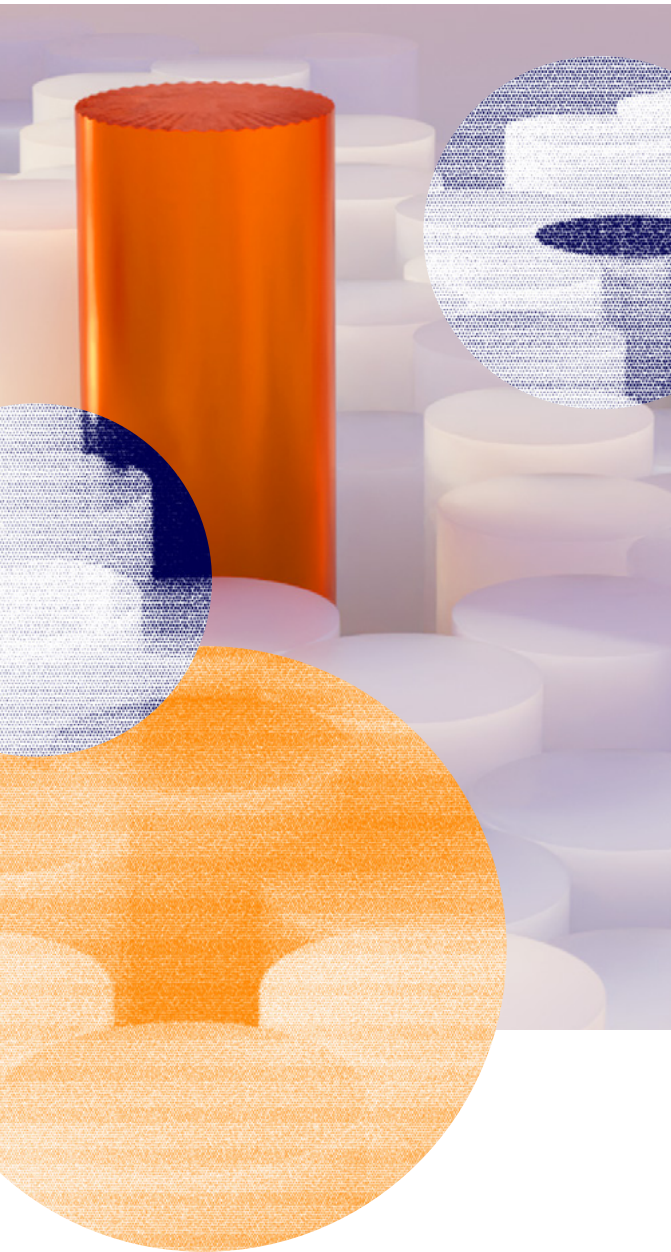
Most enterprise transformation work moves capabilities one at a time. A CX modernization here. A commerce re-platform there. A marketing tech stack consolidation. A data warehouse refresh. Each program is run by a different team, governed by different KPIs, and measured against different timelines. Each is "successful" on its own terms. And yet the enterprise as a whole gets only a fraction of the value because the systems don't reinforce one another.

A growth system inverts this: it is a strategic framework that shapes all the ways a business interfaces with its market — how it builds relationships, crafts experiences, delivers compelling stories, and drives exchanges — and builds those capabilities so that the whole produces more than the parts.

A growth system has three customer-facing capabilities (CX, Commerce, Marketing) built and run by a single engineering and operations layer, on one shared operating system: a shared memory, a shared trust and governance layer, and a shared layer that coordinates everything in motion (each defined on the following pages). No single function can own these outcomes. CX cannot deliver a continuous relationship without commerce intelligence. Commerce cannot anticipate demand without marketing audience signals. Marketing cannot operate live without an engineering layer that supports continuous release. And none of the three can compound their value without a shared operating system underneath them all.

A growth system is the architecture that makes this coordination possible — not as a one-time integration project but as a permanent property of how the enterprise runs.

THREE SURFACES, ONE FOUNDATION

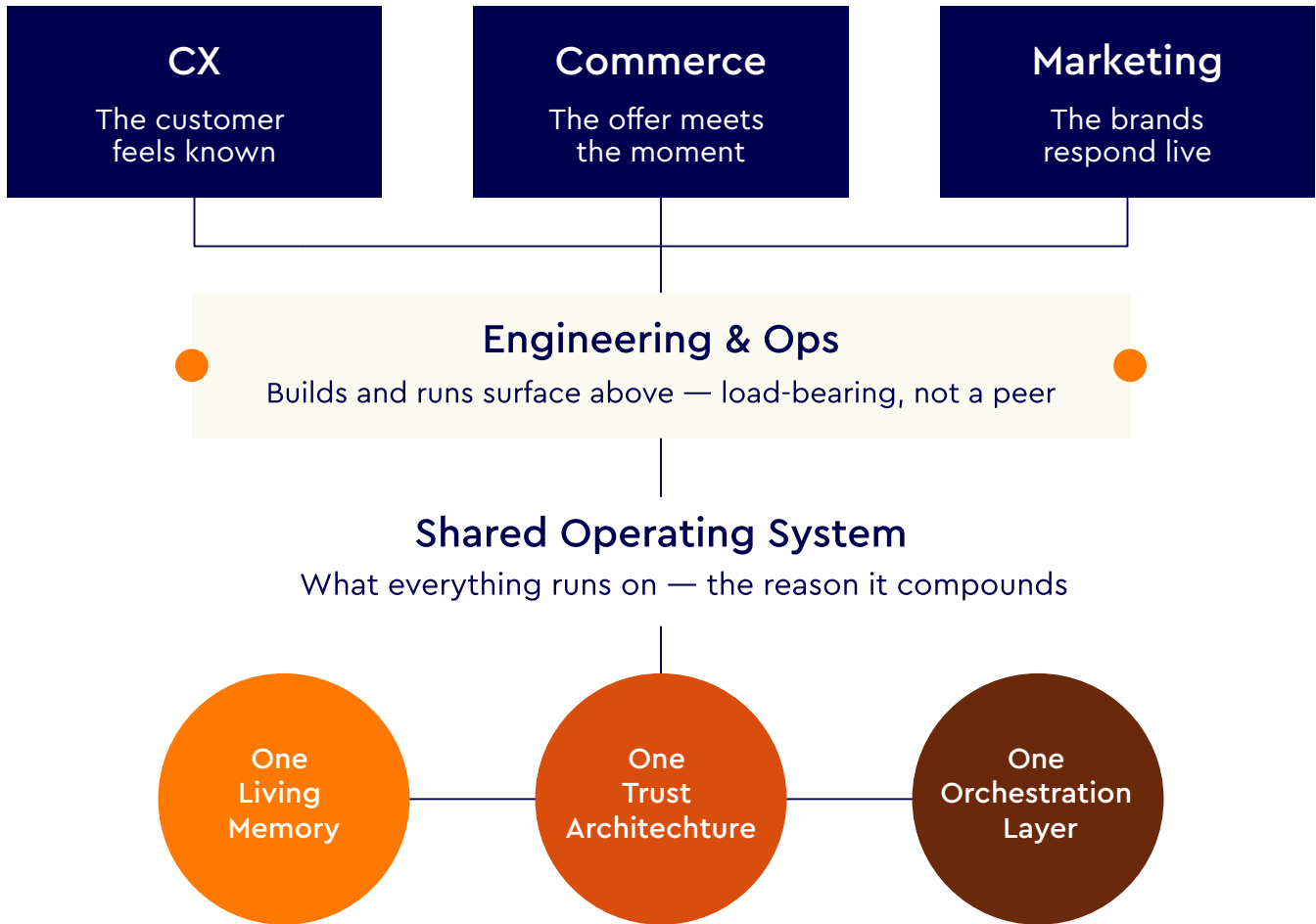


A growth system meets its market through three customer-facing surfaces — CX, Commerce, and Marketing. Beneath them sits one engineering and operations layer that builds and runs those surfaces; beneath that, one shared operating system they all draw on. Same architecture, same foundation, expressed wherever the enterprise touches its market.

The same shape repeats across every surface: customer feels known, decisions sharpen, intelligence compounds; growth flows from the system, not from any single campaign.

Read the matrix down any column, and you see what a single capability becomes when it runs inside a growth system. Read it across any row, and you see the same shift repeating — a different surface, the same logic. Read the band underneath, and you see why the columns reinforce one another instead of running in parallel.

Three customer-facing surfaces — where growth shows up



This is what compounding looks like architecturally. The customer-facing systems get sharper because they share a memory. They get faster because they share an orchestration layer. They stay safe because they share a trust architecture. None of those advantages is available to an enterprise running separate transformation programs, however well-funded each one is.

THE SHARED OPERATING SYSTEM

The compounding effect on the previous page is not a slogan. It comes from a specific architectural choice — building one shared operating system underneath the customer-facing systems *once* and letting every surface express it.

Most enterprises haven't done this. 62% of business leaders say data silos significantly hinder transformation progress.⁵ 73% say different objectives across different teams are a barrier to success.⁶ These aren't separate problems with separate solutions. They are two visible symptoms of the same missing layer.

A shared growth operating system is made up of three components:

- **One Living Memory.**

A shared intelligence layer that captures customer, market, content, product, and performance knowledge — and makes it accessible across every team, every surface, and every decision. Where a CDP unifies customer records, Living Memory holds customer, market, content, product, and performance knowledge together — and every surface writes to it and reads from it as it runs. It's operational memory, not a store. What does this look like in practice? In the IKEA example, a data foundation that began with CRM now extends into commerce, paid media, and content production, every new use drawing on the same shared intelligence layer, making the entire system faster and better.

- **One Trust Architecture.**

A governance layer for brand safety, compliance, security, explainability, responsible AI, and decision rights. As enterprises hand out more activity to AI agents and autonomous systems, the question of *who is allowed to do what, with what data, under what conditions* becomes a first-order design problem — not a downstream compliance check. The trust architecture is what makes scale safe.

- **One Orchestration Layer.**

A coordination layer that connects people, platforms, agents, workflows and decisions across the enterprise. This is where the system becomes responsive — where a signal in commerce can trigger a marketing adjustment; a service interaction can update the customer memory; an engineering release can propagate through every surface in hours rather than quarters.

Build the growth operating system once. Express it across every surface.

This is the architectural commitment that distinguishes a growth system from a portfolio of transformation projects. And it is the commitment most enterprises have not yet made — which is why most transformation work still produces the symptoms it set out to fix.



TRANSFORMATION IS A PERMANENT CONDITION

The next era of enterprise growth will not be defined by who launches the most initiatives or adopts the most tools. It will be defined by who can connect intelligence to action across every market interface inside a unified system.

This is a different ambition from the one most transformation programs were built for. The traditional model — assess, plan, build, hand off, sunset — assumed that transformation had an end state. 87% of business leaders now disagree.⁷ They have come to see business transformation as a constant and evolving state, not a project with a finish line. 29% go further and say digital transformation can never be completed at all.

We agree — but we draw a different conclusion. If transformation is permanent, the answer is not to run more programs. The answer is to build the architecture that makes transformation a property of how the business operates, rather than something it does in cycles.

That architecture is a growth system. Designed once. Orchestrated across every customer-facing surface. Operated continuously — as a permanent property of how the enterprise runs. Three customer-facing systems running on a shared operating system. The same shape repeating across every surface. Compounding rather than adding up.

This is what WPP Enterprise Solutions exists to build. Not because we describe it better than the alternatives — but because, uniquely, we have the consulting depth to diagnose where the constraint sits, the engineering depth to build the substrate that closes it, the creative and media infrastructure to express the system across every customer-facing surface, and the first-party signal that no consultancy or systems integrator can replicate.

If you have been investing in transformation projects and finding that the whole produces less than the sum of the parts, the diagnosis is in your architecture — not in your execution. The next conversation worth having is about what it would take to build the system underneath.

Sources

1, 2, 3, 4, 7 *Unlocking the Power of Digital Transformation* (April 2025). Stat sources within the report: 37% failure rate (Section 1, p. 7); 64% no roadmap (Section 2, p. 12); 68% internally focused (Section 4, p. 24); 29% never completed (Section 1, p. 7); 87% transformation is constant (Section 1, p. 8).

5 *Ibid.*, Section 7 (Data governance), p. 42 — 62% say data silos significantly hinder transformation progress.

6 *Ibid.*, Section 8 (People), p. 47 — 73% say different objectives across teams are a barrier to success.

To schedule a Growth System Diagnostic and identify your highest-priority system-level interventions, contact the WPP Enterprise Solutions team.

Contact: contact@es.wpp.com

ABOUT WPP ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

About WPP Enterprise Solutions

WPP Enterprise Solutions designs, builds, and operates the growth systems that competitive businesses rely on. In a world where AI is reshaping how companies drive growth, we lead clients in business transformation and marketing modernization, connecting strategy directly to execution. Our 12,000 experts in engineering and platforms, commerce, consulting, content transformation, CRM, and CX, work within a unified global operating unit across 40+ markets. WPP Enterprise Solutions works alongside best-in-class partners including Adobe, AWS, Braze, Google, Microsoft, Salesforce, and Shopify, as well as innovators in AI, to deliver growth solutions tailored to the needs of our clients' businesses. We have received distinction as a leader in Commerce Services and CX Strategy Consulting by the Forrester Wave™ reports and are designated by Gartner's Magic Quadrant™ as a Visionary in Digital Experience Services.

About WPP

WPP is the trusted growth partner for the world's leading brands. WPP combines cutting-edge media intelligence, world-class creativity, next-generation production, and transformative enterprise solutions to drive growth at scale. WPP is a publicly listed company (NYSE: WPP).

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