

Digital Solutions for Consulting and Midsized Direct to Consumer Brands wanting to Create Better Shopping Experiences



BJ Cook
CEO & Co-Founder

CEOCFO: *Mr. Cook, what was the focus when you started Digital Operative and what is the focus today?*

Mr. Cook: Our initial focus was around providing digital solutions and consulting for midsized companies that either had a staff in house or needed some higher level consulting to insure that they were achieving and executing digitally and successfully. Today our focus is a more integrated approach to digital commerce - designing, creating and delivering better shopping experiences for direct to consumer brands.

CEOCFO: *What types of companies are turning to you?*

Mr. Cook: A typical customer is an early stage to midsized company who do in the range of one to twenty-five million dollars a year in their ecommerce channel.

CEOCFO: *Do companies tend to look to you when things are bad or when things are good but they want them to be better?*

Mr. Cook: It is a little of both, but we always strive for doing better.

CEOCFO: *When you first engage with a company, what do you review when devising a strategy?*

Mr. Cook: First and foremost, we start with a strategic framework in place; we are looking at putting the customer at the center of what we are doing. We are taking into account not just their digital marketing and what their website looks like and how it converts, but what is the complete customer experience across touch points? We also look at how the product mix is performing. Are there opportunities from a product development standpoint? Do they have a consumable product that we could apply a different business model to like subscription? Even outside of digital, we are looking from a holistic experience and understanding, where the challenges are but what opportunities that might exist across their customer experience. That includes both digital and physical spaces.

CEOCFO: *What is an example of a somewhat typical project and something more complicated?*

Mr. Cook: For instance, a recent project, we are in charge of creating an attendee engagement strategy for a big event in the outdoor space. That project consisted of developing a strategy around messaging, one around logistics, where people are going to be, how we will engage them, what we are going to say to them and how we are following up with them and activating them throughout the event. That engagement included both crafting the right messaging and the mobile application, configuring the application and then installing beacons which were location based and allowed people to receive certain messages when they walked within a range of these different devices.

CEOCFO: *When you are creating a design, is the fact that it is an outdoor event trump whatever the product might be or is the product itself always the focus? How do you weigh the different pieces of what you are working on to get them to all mesh properly?*

Mr. Cook: I think the context is probably the most important. If you just look at the world today, in the world of digital, context is everything. People have access to digital everywhere and anywhere. Picking the right solution at the right time is actually the most important. It does not really matter that something was an outdoor event; it could have been a festival or a conference around technology. It is definitely about finding the right solutions in the right context for the audience.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach potential clients? How do they find you? Do many people start with search?*

Mr. Cook: Search is a big focus for us and a big part of my career history as well, so we put a great amount of emphasis on it. I would say most people are finding us through organic search. We have done great job of making sure that we appear on Google and other search engines for the keywords important to us. Folks are also finding us through events where we can have that human interaction and that human element and they can put a face behind the brand vs. ending

up with a website there is just a logo and bunch of case studies. How we stand out in search, we are using both tactics like SEO as well as content marketing. Folks may interact with a piece of content on our blog or on a social media channel first. Hopefully, they are getting something of value from that and wanting to get to know us more and click into the website to read more about the company.

CEOCFO: Do people understand the depth of your service and the expertise or are they often surprised as time goes on and they realize what you actually do?

Mr. Cook: At a service level, folks understand the realm of digital. I do not think they understand what goes into connecting all the dots and I think as people work with us and get to know us more, they realize that we have a very deep understanding of technology specifically and how it is driving marketing today. That marketing is more than just messaging and visuals, it is its partnership with technology that allows it to be pervasive across multiple channels and enables brands to reach their customers in the right context. Often times we are asked to do things that we have never done before and in most cases, we take on the challenge and are able to figure it out because of the breadth of experience from the team.

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CEOCFO: How do you know when something new is ready? How do you stay ahead of what is becoming a means that you might need to use and what is falling off the radar?

Mr. Cook: That is sort of the bane of our existence. You do the best you can to keep up with everything. Because we are a digital agency, the team is a part of the beta programs with various partners in technology companies. We are invited to beta different products. I think you are always thinking in the back of your mind how something contextually applies to one of your customers. Could it be that extra thing that gives them a competitive advantage? I think often times it is not the right time to jump in from the beginning because you end up just chasing another sort of shiny object. I think when you know it is the right time is when it aligns with that target audience. It is a channel that you can really take advantage to and really invest in to deliver something that is memorable to the audience. The things that seem to be falling off right now, take QR codes for an example. It was a hot thing a few years ago and it was in every single print ad because it was the traditional marketer’s way to say they had some digital element to their campaign. Even today, people do not have these scanners and QR code readers in their phones and it is just another thing for someone to worry about. They do not have the time to go and deal with that, nor do they want to. I think what is replacing that is technology is something like beacons and more location aware types of technology that will continue to evolve and mature. That is the area that we are tracking as an agency and are most excited about.

CEOCFO: Why do you have a Director of Culture?

Mr. Cook: An agency’s business is all about its people. It is about bringing together smart people with diverse backgrounds. I think in order for those people to care, at the end of the day it is both vision and culture. It is about what we feel is important to invest and what we stand for. It is important that we have someone who has their finger on the pulse of what is happening around the office day to day from just birthdays to company events to employee anniversaries and even personal events that are happening. At the end of the day, it is the people that make this business. We thought it was important to have someone who was in charge of making sure that we are maintaining our culture as the business scales.

CEOCFO: What is the basis of your culture? Why do people want to work at Digital Operative?

Mr. Cook: We have the work hard play hard environment. We are an active company. We often say we are sort of like ducks; we are very calm at the top but the feet are furiously peddling under the water. We are very laid back being San Diego and Denver based, but we are also very passionate about what we do here and passionate about doing quality work and delivering that to our clients. I think people appreciate that professional setting where they can have a work-life balance; they can do great work and still get to see their family. We also take our employees’ health seriously as well, making sure that we are providing things like healthy snacks at the office, time to go out and do activities or building those into our quarterly company events.

CEOCFO: What might be different a year from now? How do you continue the trajectory?

Mr. Cook: A year from now, the goal is to be larger, to bring in and fill more strategic roles. I would imagine we would most likely be in a different office space that will be our new home base for five to ten years looking forward and starting to provide services and solutions where the digital and physical environments meet.

CEOCFO: *Why choose Digital Operative?*

Mr. Cook: At the end of the day, we have founded the company based on integrity and that means that there is a relentless pursuit from doing things better here. Our approach to digital is much more data driven when it comes to strategy, technology, design and marketing as well. We are very much able to understand the 360-degree touch points for today's digital consumer and can definitely provide a full service approach to help companies reach their goals, execute where needed and guide them into the future.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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