

Full Service Digital Product Development Agency – from Design and Development to Commercialization and Product Launch



Keith O'Neill
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L4 Digital

CEOCFO: *Mr. O'Neill, would you tell us about L4 Digital?*

Mr. O'Neill: We are a full service digital product development agency. What that means in a nutshell is we help organizations to take an idea of digital products and make it a reality. We work with them to define what they have and want to implement and then design, develop and commercially launch.

CEOCFO: *Who is turning to you for services?*

Mr. O'Neill: We work with many Fortune 500 companies that have big ideas for game-changing and next generation digital products. However, it is often difficult for our customers to fully understand all the emerging technologies, they do not keep up with it and we do, so they turn to us to help them think through their product ideas. We do what is called a product discovery where we go in and help them flush out the product requirements, understand the technical architecture, complete user experience research that can involve some prototyping, and design, which then leads into a solid product specification.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us an example?*

Mr. O'Neill: A large public radio station came to us, WBEZ in Chicago, this is public knowledge. As a public radio broadcaster and they needed to do something big in digital or they were going to lose market share because terrestrial broadcast is fading away. We worked to outline what their product was today and help them define ideas of where they wanted to go from a digital product standpoint, educated them on some of the capabilities that were possible and some of the user experiences that the consumer was expecting in today's digital world. L4 was then tasked with a large amount of technical due diligence to fully understand their experience from programming to listening, and create a platform a product that enabled them to deliver a premium digital listening experience. That product was a year-long engagement and went from creation to delivery to market and continues on with version two and three now. The idea was to help them realize, design, develop and launch this new digital initiative and we successfully did that.

Sesame Street is the second example. They came to us and said they wanted to build a children's portal product, Sesame Street Go, which includes not only short and long form video for all the characters in full episodes but also educational games and different short interactions so kids can experience, learn and leverage the Sesame Street content in different ways. We work with them to design, build and deliver a product to market, which won an honorary WEBBY. There was added complexity to this project because when you design for kids, one of the things that you have to understand is COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) compliance. We needed to adhere to these standards to build a kid-friendly user experience for two to six year-olds.

CEOCFO: *When you are working on projects like the two you just mentioned, in your research and putting things together, what might you look at and consider that less experienced people may not realize is important?*

Mr. O'Neill: When looking at developing a leading digital product I think many people have a pre-disposition from experience in web technology which, when thinking about the reach and depth, is very one-dimensional. The digital market of today is multi-faceted, there are many points of consumption: from smart TV, to Fire TV by Amazon to Roku to integration with Apple Watch, Apple TV, to various cell phones and tablet experiences. One of the things that has happened is while the content at its core on the backend may be the same, the experience is vastly different. Therefore, on a product basis it is important to dive in and think about the goals and objectives of that product, and help our customers and partners to flush out what makes sense for the market and organization as well as the true cost and timelines to build what has been envisioned. All while informing them of consumer expectations and technical capabilities and experiences that would help them achieve their goals by launching a new product.

CEOCFO: Do clients understand the layers of what needs to be done or do they need to be informed ahead of time?

Mr. O'Neill: Generally, we do quite a bit of education. We coined the phrase “digital product agency” about three years ago. Before that, there were no digital product agencies. There were digital agencies and development shops. Moving into becoming a digital product agency, has been educating the marketplace about the gaps about what it means to build digital products. Many people have a misconception that it is just building an app or just building a TV experience or building a website. All digital today relies on the whole backend service layer and utilizing that to think through what the possibilities are today, what it means to provide tomorrow, and how you reach and interface with end-points whether the end point is an iPhone, android, Roku, or Apple TV. That education is incredibly helpful and can take time because people do not understand it and it is moving fast.

CEOCFO: Is it getting any easier to coordinate?

Mr. O'Neill: We are making it easier because we have process but without process it is just chasing the market because you do not have a planned approach.

“Our business is largely referral and the reputation we have is based on the quality of the products that we build for other organizations as well as the product’s success in the market.”- Keith O'Neill

CEOCFO: Your three core values are integrity, commitment to quality, culture of collaboration. Would you touch on these things for us please?

Mr. O'Neill: The quality side speaks for itself. Our business is largely referral and the reputation we have is based on the quality of the products that we build for other organizations as well as the product’s success in the market. In addition, we are one of the few fully on-shore companies. This is an important designation because there are many companies that compartmentalize components of development. For example, there is off-shore QA and development out there but we have invested a lot of money and resources into building our very robust team to ensure product quality. That is a huge differentiator for us. The collaboration is essential to the culture and to our engagements with our partners because they are not our products. We must work closely and efficiently with our clients to make sure that they have early access and a continuous involvement in the product development effort. If that does not occur, we are doing them a disservice because at the end of the day, as it is their product. We use that as one of our core principles because, if it is internally it is how we operate with each other, it is also how we operate with our clients, making sure that the hard conversations happen early. At L4 we are not scared to talk about challenges and we believe information allow everybody to collaborate and work together to solve the problem when you get into launching these types of complex projects.

CEOCFO: How is business?

Mr. O'Neill: Business is going well. We have been growing every year and last year we just received an American Business Award (“Stevie”) for fastest-growing tech company under 100 people, so many great things are happening.

CEOCFO: What about the Best Company to Work For Award?

Mr. O'Neill: That goes back to our founding belief, which is that great people make great products. We take hiring very seriously. We also take providing great benefits and a great work environment for our employees, very seriously.

CEOCFO: How do you find those people?

Mr. O'Neill: We have a rigorous recruiting process. We are always looking out in the industry and attending industry events. We publish a monthly blog as well as whitepapers to show thought leadership and build credibility for the organization for creating public awareness. We also have recruiting teams that are constantly looking and managing our hiring process. Once people dive into who we are I think people seek us out, we are fairly competitive, we have great benefits and we work on innovative market-leading products. It is a fun place to be.

CEOCFO: What has changed in your approach over time?

Mr. O'Neill: I would say the realization of how hard it is to keep track of the digital space in all the technologies and moving parts within that space. You take for granted what your team is capable of doing and then you have this kind of epiphany over time saying wow what we do is very unique and not a lot of people and companies can do it at the level that we do. The eye-opener is how unique we are with the team that we have created and the value-added thought leadership and digital product development. It is one thing to just build something that someone tells you, it is another thing for someone to ask you to build something. You provide constructive input into what you are building for the success

of their business. At the end of the day, that is what they are going to be judged for success on and what they are going to judge L4 on.

CEOCFO: *Why is L4 Digital a special and important company?*

Mr. O'Neill: We truly are an end-to-end digital product development agency. I do not think there are many companies in the marketplace that can say that. L4 has the product consulting on the front-end to help organizations understand the product in general, product design to define user experience and branding as well as and thinking through the experience. There is the breadth of platform expertise; today we work on sixteen different platforms and I do not think there are many companies that have that breadth to be able to say that. The quality of the market-ready product we deliver at the end, is why we are successfully referral-based and many of our clients are repeat customers. We have long-term relationships and are a trusted partner.

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



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