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10 Critical Elements Your Digital Strategy Should Include to Thrive in a Volatile World

Tariff hikes, global instability, and economic fragmentation are reshaping the landscape. Here's how digital leaders should respond.

Introduction.

Significant increases in political upheaval, including chaotic announcements and application of global tariffs - combined with wider economic uncertainty - has added to an already complex operating environment for enterprise businesses.

Recent moves simply add to broader trends: economic nationalism, customer confidence, supply chain disruption, and rapid advances in automation and intelligence will likely dominate board conversations this year.

For UK organisations, especially those with international operations, global suppliers, or dependencies on cross-border digital platforms, this moment is a reminder: resilient, adaptable digital strategies are not optional - they're essential.

In the following pages, you'll discover ten factors that every digital strategy must address to remain relevant in 2025 and beyond.



Geopolitical awareness in strategic planning.



What's changing?

Tariffs, trade disputes, and international tensions are no longer isolated events - they directly impact access to technology, data, infrastructure, and markets.

Actionable tips:

- Integrate a geopolitical risk lens into strategic planning.
- Maintain a register of platforms, suppliers, and services that may be affected - or even targeted - by geopolitical shifts.
- Consider contingency options for each, depending on the outcome of a simple combination of High/Medium/Low for likelihood and impact of service disruption.
- Ensure your strategy has a dedicated section on data security, considering how data held on these platforms could create liabilities, and work with your procurement and legal teams to ensure contracts support flexible renegotiation or exit if that becomes necessary.

Platform flexibility and technology resilience.

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What's changing?

Relying on a monolithic CMS, CRM, or DXP can create problems around vendor risk or pricing, with unexpected increases due to tariffs or regulations. Perhaps more importantly, it can also leave your business cut off from critical AI-powered advancements where these are not part of a closed ecosystem.

Actionable tips:

- Adopt a modular, composable architecture. This allows you to swap out underperforming or high-risk components without rebuilding your entire stack.
- Prioritise platforms that offer open APIs, cloud portability, and headless options. Where this isn't possible with your current providers then start a wider process of evaluating your digital estate and putting a roadmap in place that better supports your future business ambition.



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Real-time adaptability through experimentation.

What's changing?

In volatile environments, lengthy development cycles and fixed customer journeys hinder responsiveness.

Actionable tips:

- Empower teams to continuously test and optimise user journeys using A/B and multivariate testing tools.
- Build experimentation into BAU by training teams, setting KPIs around agility, and dedicating budget to iterative improvements. Even underperforming solutions can create significant improvements in conversions and drive value with focus on the right areas to test & learn.

**Resilient, adaptable
digital strategies are
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they're essential.**

Regionalisation and localisation at speed.

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What's changing?

New tariffs and trade barriers may force companies to shift their go-to-market strategies by region.

Actionable tip:

- Ensure your content and commerce platforms support region-specific versions of products, pricing, and content, not just simple translation.
- It's critical to be able to navigate different regulatory regimes (e.g. data laws, AI constraints, digital taxation etc.) so build and maintain company-specific notes on these to stay on top of changes, or factor this into the geopolitical risk lens called out earlier.

Cost transparency and prioritised investment.

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What's changing?

Economic tightening and rising import/export costs mean digital budgets are likely to face increased scrutiny.

Actionable tips:

- Always relevant: audit your digital spend across platforms, licences, infrastructure, and services.
- Tie every major item in your digital roadmap to a measurable business outcome that makes it clear how the ROI stacks up. In the context that business plans are unlikely to survive the year unchanged, shift toward rolling prioritisation to allow for quarterly or even monthly realignment based on emerging pressures and priorities.
- While not every business can accommodate this level of flexibility, the mindset shift towards a backlog and agile delivery can provide more value than fixed, immovable deliverables that may no longer be relevant by the time the business receives them.

Scenario-based, flexible roadmapping.

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What's changing?

Annual plans are often obsolete within months during periods of disruption.

Actionable tips:

- Replace rigid roadmaps with scenario-based planning.
- Develop at least two plausible macroeconomic scenarios and define the implications for digital investment, delivery cadence, and resourcing.
- Use tools like OKRs or rolling roadmaps to pivot quickly when needed.
- Ensure that internal communications around this are consistent, as otherwise holding multiple options 'in tension' can create confusion or uncertainty.



A hand holding a smartphone is visible on the left side of the image. The background is a soft-focus bokeh of various colored circles in shades of blue, teal, orange, and yellow. A large teal rectangle is positioned on the left, containing white text.

A resilient digital strategy isn't one that tries to predict every disruption. It's one that's built to flex, evolve, and flow through them.



AI and automation for efficiency, not just innovation.



What's changing?

With cost pressures rising, automation is not just about innovation at the edges - it's about survival.

Actionable tips:

- While generative AI feels like an obvious 'go to', especially in marketing, it also comes with challenges, including the need to define clear guardrails and governance to prevent misuse or ethical concerns.
- AI-powered automation can be harder to execute but can significantly reduce manual workload across operations, customer service, marketing, and data/analytics functions.
- Regardless of the approach and forms you explore, it's worth central co-ordination of potential AI tools and trials to ensure application of good practice and identify common use cases for creating an effective business case without spiralling costs.

First-party data as a strategic asset.

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What's changing?

Regulatory landscapes and consumer expectations around privacy are tightening. At the same time, global events raise concerns about data sovereignty and localisation.

Actionable tips:

- Develop a robust first-party data strategy.
- To strengthen your first-party data strategy, begin by investing in consent management tools that ensure transparency and compliance with privacy regulations.
- Offer customers tangible value - such as personalised experiences or exclusive content - in exchange for their data.
- Consolidate this data within a customer data platform (CDP) or a unified profile system to create a single, actionable view of the customer.
- Finally, map all data flows and storage locations to maintain full compliance with UK/EU/other data protection laws.

An agile digital operating model.



What's changing?

Rapid change demands operational flexibility, yet many digital teams remain siloed and overly dependent on linear planning.

Actionable tips:

- To build adaptability into your digital operations, shift toward an agile operating model that fosters speed, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Start by organising cross-functional squads that bring together marketing, technology, and data teams to work in tandem.
- Empower product owners to make tactical decisions quickly, supported by standard agile practices like retrospectives and daily stand-ups to maintain momentum and alignment.
- Equally important is enabling broader participation across the business. Invest in tools and training that empower non-technical users - such as low-code platforms and self-service analytics dashboards - so they can actively contribute to digital initiatives without depending on technical teams. Finally, reinforce this model by developing leadership capability at all levels (e.g. AI skills to help champion change).

Strategic alignment across partnerships.

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What's changing?

In times of uncertainty, the strength of your digital ecosystem - including vendors, integrators, and consultants - can be a make or break factor.

Actionable tips:

- Alongside maintaining a register of critical platforms, regularly assess your external partnerships to ensure they are equipped to handle volatility.
- Prioritise partners who bring strategic insight - not just delivery - and who have clear contingency plans in place. Just as importantly, their values around data privacy, sustainability, and ethical practices should align closely with your own.
- In uncertain times, the value of a proactive, collaborative digital partner lies not only in execution but in their ability to help you anticipate and adapt to change. That's made significantly easier if their ethos and ways of working are already aligned with your own.



Final thoughts.

The world will continue to change - economically, politically, environmentally, and technologically. A resilient digital strategy isn't one that tries to predict every disruption. It's one that's built to flex, evolve, and flow through them.

Businesses that embed these factors into their digital strategies in 2025 are at least set up with the best foundations to not only survive - but **thrive** in this context.



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Next steps.

If your organisation is looking to respond effectively to the economic reality in which you're operating today, and ensure you're set up for success, then talk to us about your Digital Strategy.

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