5 Things Your Agency Must Know Before Establishing a Low-Code Practice

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Gartner predicts that 70% of new software applications will be built using low-code or no-code platforms over the next three years. Adoption will have surged by almost 45% when compared to 2020 data. What's driving this growth?

Along with the high demand for new applications, the global developer shortage and resource costs are undoubtedly playing a role. In response, digital agencies, consultancies and other software development firms need cost-effective ways to create software while reducing complexity and risks.

Why low code?

Low-code platforms can deliver significant productivity boosts while enabling developers to configure many common elements of modern software applications without code — while not inhibiting their ability to infuse code wherever needed. This flexibility allows agencies and their staff to design, develop, deploy and run applications more effectively and efficiently.

- **Architecture:** Low code simplifies the architectural work required to build new applications. Technical architecture and the application underlying architecture are eliminated using these tools. The focus often becomes data and integration architecture. However, low-code tools provide simple ways to iterate on both

options, minimizing the need for up-front or waterfall architecture. These time savings can then be passed on to clients.

- **Design:** Rather than designing every single screen and user interface interaction, you can build a style guide and a few key screens. These can then be implemented into the low-code platform, and detailed design can happen inside the low-code application rather than in the design tools. Some low-code tools additionally allow for the import of designs done in Figma or Sketch for rapid integration.
- **Development:** Low-code tools infuse improvements into the development process. Developers work differently, configuring pre-packaged components whenever possible and creating custom code when necessary. The best low-code platforms are fully extensible – providing the ability to import external code libraries and user interface components. Although the development process is faster and different, it does not negate the need for a professional software development lifecycle that includes different development environments and capturing versions in repositories such as Github, Gitlab, etc. For client projects and to satisfy compliance requirements, utilize low-code tools that accommodate these version control and environment capabilities.
- **Quality assurance:** Quality assurance processes should be greatly simplified because of the more iterative nature of low-code development. That said, each new change to an application can break existing functionality, so the best low-code platforms offer regression testing capabilities. Beyond regression, unit and integration tests should be conducted by your team and managed using existing software development lifecycle tools.

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What to expect in terms of productivity and financial outcomes

Implementing a low-code practice can transform your team's productivity. A low-code platform — and its out-of-the-box components and capabilities — can eliminate errors, save time, prevent headaches and improve project delivery.

Digital agencies are poised to reap the benefits delivered by using low-code tools. Here's how:

1. Less reliance on highly technical developers

ZDNet recently cited a report in which engineering managers and HR professionals said backend developers were the most in-demand hires. Instead of searching for more developers, consultancies have learned they can use a low-code platform to maximize their existing staff.

Once your team is up to speed, they'll work like full-stack developers. You can focus talent more on where value is added, resources can move easily across projects, and you'll be able to address career paths in new and compelling ways.

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2. Delivering projects with compact and affordable teams

Low-code platforms help agencies take on more client work with the same — or fewer — resources. Low-code platforms dramatically cut the manual coding typically required, which can significantly increase developer productivity.

Smaller teams mean fewer friction-laden hand-offs and a reduced project management burden.

3. Delivering faster and at higher profit margins

As digital agencies consider acquiring tools or developing their repeatable capabilities to deliver client projects more rapidly and consistently, low code may provide the biggest return on internal transformation efforts. According to 451 Research, switching to low code reduces development time by 50% to 90%.

By using a low-code platform to configure and customize application development, project scope, cost, time and quality shift in your favor. A low-code option is faster and less expensive than a traditional custom app. Your firm will have the edge over competitors that haven’t yet explored low-code solutions.

4. More maintainable applications

Code is a liability. Reducing the amount of manual coding means introducing fewer errors. This can prove significant at scale, especially considering a Harris Poll survey that found developers spend at least 42% of their time maintaining and debugging code.

With low-code platforms, visual development, configuration, automated code generation, and platform automation contribute to massive productivity gains. These capabilities bring an application’s features to life faster, making them far more maintainable.

5. Easier sales and greater customer satisfaction

When a digital agency can tell a prospective customer they can reliably deliver in a shorter amount of time, at a lower price point and more rapid rate of iteration, the prospect is thrilled.

By presenting a low-code option that's faster and less expensive to execute, your firm will have the edge over competitors that haven't yet explored low-code solutions. You're also better positioned for repeat wins, allowing you to become more entrenched as a vendor. Once you've successfully delivered your first low-code application, you'll likely have the opportunity to discuss your client's application backlog and present similarly priced bids for additional work.

In short, leveraging a platform that reduces the time and complexity of delivering a client's project enables repeatable success.

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The opportunities and risks

While programming languages and frameworks have evolved, software development is still done the same way it was 20+ years ago. We have witnessed productivity gains in other functional business areas due to software efforts focused on process improvement and digital transformation. Unless you believe software development is immune to disruptions – highly specialized and customized to each scenario – logic will dictate that it is a business process that can be radically transformed.

Low code presents a financial opportunity for digital agencies

while highly disrupting existing business models.

The benefits of low code for digital agencies are realized in an enhanced ability to scale the business, reduced staffing complexity and cost, increased client satisfaction, and delivery of projects with far higher profit margins. On the flip side, a reluctance to adapt to this new paradigm introduces risks as competitors transform their businesses.

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