

You lost me at “Hello”: How CDO candidates evaluate opportunities

By **Lindsay Trout**



As software continues to “eat the world,” the corresponding demand for digital talent from chemicals to insurance to retail is fierce – so fierce that top candidates have the luxury of choosing the roles they want. In this environment, our advice to our clients is to invest upfront to clarify the need, define the role and frame the pitch to attract and retain the best CDO for their strategy. On the talent side, we find that the best digital leaders rely on three filters to vet these opportunities.

ONE: I want a commitment.

The CDO wants to know the organization is committed to digital transformation and innovation. And the position has to come with a seat at the table—which typically means being a direct report to the CEO. They will ask about the budgets and staff needed to execute the strategy – because, naturally, top-tier candidates are wary of high expectations with no enablement.

TWO: I’m not a magician.

Leadership has to nail the job spec. Organizations have to show that they understand the CDO isn’t a digital magician--it’s a C-level role tasked with delivering strategic value within the core business and very likely tasked with establishing new businesses. When organizations demonstrate this from the start, they benefit from clarity for all parties on scope, which is typically some combination of the following objectives:

1. **Creating omnichannel:** Creating a holistic user experience
2. **Adding personalization:** Adapting and creating products to individual requirements
3. **Creating the experience:** Rethinking the customer journey beyond today’s products and services
4. **Building community:** Entering into dialogue with customers and embracing shared ownership of the brand
5. **Engaging millennials:** Readjusting the organization’s service level to meet the expectations of this always-on, high transparency cohort.

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THREE: Help me help you.

The organization needs to envision the impact of the CDO role on the structure, identifying key points of collaboration and how functions will be centralized or shared. Like any healthy relationship, there is no perfect answer; two common alternatives to the appointment of a central “Chief Digital Officer” are “Digital Marketing + Digital Experience” and “Ecommerce Channel + Digital Innovation.” Whatever the starting point is, the organizational model will evolve along with digital maturity.

Our role is to help our clients articulate their vision for digital transformation, and guide them to their best CDO — a process that involves articulating expectations, empowering leadership to succeed and positioning the organization for a sustainable and competitive edge in today’s ever-changing and fickle environment.

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