



MANDOGROUP

2026

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

Cost pressure, platform risk, and accelerating AI adoption are reshaping the digital landscape. Here's how leaders should respond.

# Introduction.

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Ongoing geopolitical tension, sustained cost pressure, and rapid shifts in technology adoption have created a more constrained and complex operating environment for enterprise businesses.

These pressures sit alongside longer-term realities: tighter budgets, rising platform costs, higher expectations of AI, and growing scrutiny on the value delivered by digital investment.

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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 stay relevant and optimised in 2026 and beyond.



# Geopolitical awareness in strategic planning.

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## What's changing?

Geopolitical shifts now directly affect platform access, pricing, data residency, and long-term vendor viability, turning global events into everyday digital cost and risk factors.

## Actionable tips:

- Integrate a geopolitical risk lens into strategic planning.
- Maintain a register of platforms, suppliers, and services that may be affected by geopolitical shifts, and assess contingency options using a simple High/Medium/Low view of likelihood and impact.
- Ensure your strategy has a dedicated focus on data security and contractual flexibility, working with procurement and legal teams to support renegotiation or exit if required.
- Identify where geopolitical risk is introducing unnecessary cost, duplication, or operational complexity and address it through consolidation or platform optimisation.

# AI and automation for efficiency, not just innovation.

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# 2

## What's changing?

With sustained cost pressure, automation is essential. AI initiatives that don't remove cost, time, or friction become expensive distractions.

## 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.
- Centralise AI activity to prioritise use cases that deliver operational efficiency, reduce manual effort, and prevent fragmented experimentation from inflating cost.

# Continuous optimisation through experimentation.

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# 3


## What's changing?

In volatile environments, long delivery cycles and fixed customer journeys slow learning and limit the ability to optimise in real time.

## Actionable tips:

- Create a test-and-learn culture by empowering teams to continuously test and optimise user journeys using A/B and multivariate testing tools.
- Make experimentation part of BAU by training teams, setting KPIs that reward learning and impact, and dedicating budget to continuous improvement. Focus on high-impact journeys and commercial pressure points where optimisation delivers measurable value.
- Treat experimentation as a decision-making tool, not an innovation exercise.



A man in a blue button-down shirt stands on the right, pointing at a whiteboard. He is addressing a group of people seated at a long white table. The seated individuals are seen from the back or side, focused on their work. One person in the foreground is using a laptop, while others have papers and a yellow mug on the table. The office has large windows in the background, letting in natural light. A teal-colored text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**Resilient, adaptable  
digital strategies are  
not optional -  
they're essential.**

# 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 that prioritises decision speed over certainty.
- 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.



# 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 first-party data strategy focused on activation, not accumulation.
- Invest in consent management tools that ensure transparency and compliance with privacy regulations, and 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, and map all data flows and storage locations to maintain full compliance with UK/EU/other data protection laws.
- Unused or poorly governed data increases risk and cost, rather than creating value.



# Cost transparency and prioritised investment.

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# 6

## What's changing?

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

## Actionable tips:

- Continuously review and optimise 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. Optimisation is as much about stopping low-value work as it is about accelerating the right initiatives.
- 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.

A hand is holding a black smartphone, with the screen facing away from the viewer. The background is a soft-focus bokeh of various colored circles in shades of blue, green, yellow, and pink. A teal-colored rectangular block is positioned on the left side of the image, 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.**



# 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. More critically, it can lock your business into higher costs, slower innovation, and limited access to emerging AI capabilities.

## 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.
- Flexibility helps reduce long-term cost, platform lock-in, and under-used capability.

# Regionalisation and localisation at speed.

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# 8

## 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.
- Poor localisation increases cost through duplicated effort, manual workarounds, and rework across regions.

# An agile digital operating model.



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## 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 digital operations, shift toward an agile operating model that optimises flow, decision-making, and delivery efficiency.
- Empower product owners to make tactical decisions quickly, supported by standard agile practices like retrospectives and daily stand-ups to maintain momentum and alignment.
- 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, and reinforce this model by developing leadership capability at all levels (e.g. AI skills to help champion change).
- Agile practices should reduce friction and waste, not add process overhead.

# Strategic alignment across partnerships.

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# 10

## 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 actively help reduce complexity, manage risk, and improve return on digital investment. 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.





# Optimise for what comes next.

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 2026 will be better placed to focus spend, remove waste, and optimise what they already have, rather than chasing constant reinvention.



## Jonathan Seal – Strategy Director

Speaker and digital business consultant. Jonathan consults for global brands to help them maximise value from a digital and connected world. He is Strategy Director at Mando Group, an organisation dedicated to making technology work for everyone.

# Need more than this guide?

If this guide resonated, it's unlikely you're lacking intent or leadership support. More often, the challenge sits elsewhere.

You may recognise one or more of these realities:

- A digital strategy exists, but it isn't consistently guiding decisions or trade-offs.
- Roadmaps are defined, yet priorities still shift under pressure or become overly platform-led.
- Investment is supported, but confidence drops when value is hard to evidence or sustain.
- Teams are busy delivering, but the link between activity and business impact feels thin.
- You can describe where you need to go, but aligning funding, governance, and delivery around that direction remains difficult.

In most cases, the issue isn't the absence of strategy. It's the need to optimise what's already in place.

That often starts with an objective view – and a safe way to test assumptions, pressure-check priorities, and focus effort before decisions turn into long-term commitments.

**Let's take the next step →**

# A complimentary half-day of senior consulting (£5,000 value).

We're offering a free, remote half-day working session with Mando Group.

This isn't a presentation or a sales pitch. It's a focused session built around one real issue you're dealing with now. **You set the agenda.**

That time might be used to:

- Sense-check a digital vision, strategy, or investment direction
- Align senior stakeholders around shared priorities and success measures
- Stress-test a roadmap against outcomes, risk, and delivery capacity
- Clarify governance, decision-making, and leadership accountability
- Shape board-level narratives that connect digital activity to value

You'll leave with clearer decisions and a grounded view of what happens next.

If continuing makes sense, we'll outline options. If it doesn't, you'll know that too.

## How to take it up

Email Andy Deakin  
[andy.deakin@mandogroup.com](mailto:andy.deakin@mandogroup.com)

Tell us the challenge you'd like to focus on.  
We'll confirm suitability and take it from there.



**Terms & eligibility:** This offer is available to eligible organisations only and is intended for established businesses facing complex digital strategy and roadmap challenges. One complimentary session is available per organisation, delivered remotely, subject to qualification and availability. Mando Group reserves the right to decline requests that fall outside our focus or are not a strong fit for this engagement.



**MANDO**GROUP

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