



BECOME MORE 
EXPAND - EXPLORE - EVOLVE

DIGITAL BUSINESS STRATEGY

AUGUST 2021

1 Purpose

The purpose of the Digital Business Strategy (DBS) is to direct digital transformation at the university, preparing the university for the future educational landscape.

2 Overarching Vision

Implement a range of digital initiatives across the organisation to optimise and automate processes, create quality stakeholder experiences, enable new offerings, and provide integrated reporting and analytics to ultimately result in new competitive advantages for the NWU supporting the positioning of the NWU as an institution of superior academic excellence.

3 Goals and Enablers

The DBS is organized into several goals and enablers. The goals provide a framework for the types of digital projects that the NWU will endeavour into over its various environments, while the enablers pinpoint specific initiatives in the organization that support attainment of the goals.

3.1 Overview

Goal 1

Drive operational efficiency in the various environments of the NWU.

Goal 2

Create intentional experiences for all stakeholders of the NWU.

Goal 3

Transform the university business model to unlock alternate revenue streams.

Enabler 1

Establish a systems integration middleware platform to ultimately enable a digital ecosystem.



Enabler 2

Enhance integrated data warehousing, analysis, and reporting capabilities.

Enabler 3

Increase agility in the organization through rapid prototyping capabilities.

Enabler 4

Provide special funding avenues for digital projects.

Enabler 5

Create an innovation culture within the university.

Enabler 6

Develop the digital competencies of staff and students.

Enabler 7

Apply innovative solutions to bridging the digital divide.

Enabler 8

Support IT with sufficient capacity for implementation and support of digital initiatives.



3.2 Detailed description of goals

3.2.1 Drive operational efficiency in the various environments of the NWU

The NWU is to prioritize broad-scale initiatives in all environments that drive operational efficiency by maximizing automation to minimize employee effort and turnaround time of business processes.

3.2.2 Create intentional experiences for all stakeholders of the NWU

The NWU believes that its competitive edge is founded in creating intentional experiences for its stakeholders through digital initiatives. Intentional experiences refer to prioritizing stakeholder centredness, enhanced support and personalization through innovation to drive engagement and retention. Stakeholders are defined broadly to include students, personnel, alumni, prospective students, and the public.

3.2.3 Transform the university business model to unlock alternate revenue streams

The NWU will prioritize digital initiatives that have income generation potential, ultimately reducing the dependency on government funding. It is foreseen all environments at the NWU have potential for such initiatives and that the nature of the initiatives will vary between different environments at the NWU.



3.3 Detailed description of enablers

3.3.1 Establish a systems integration middleware platform to ultimately enable a digital ecosystem.

To achieve the agility that the university needs for rapidly implementing and integrating new systems into the digital ecosystem, an integration middleware platform is envisaged. This platform enables systems to seamlessly communicate with each other via a standardized interface, reducing the integration effort of new systems.

3.3.2 Enhance integrated data warehousing, analysis, and reporting capabilities

Initiatives to enhance strategic, managerial, and operational reporting throughout the university by:

1. Designating a single point of responsibility for integrated reporting strategically allocating the required resources.
1. Developing a data integration best-practice framework that should be followed for new and existing systems at the NWU. New systems can consume data, but they are required to share new data with the rest of the eco-system.
2. Implementing a robust data warehouse that integrates data from all systems at the university.
3. Widespread availability of reporting tools integrated into everyday communication platforms.
4. Upskilling of staff regarding data literacy and the use of BI-tools.

3.3.3 Increase agility in the organization through rapid prototyping capabilities

To support innovation and efficient response to changes in the environment, rapid prototyping capabilities are to be established. These capabilities are to utilize the latest technologies and should be able to support the university by developing solutions at efficient costs with rapid turnaround times.



3.3.4 Provide special funding avenues for digital projects

Funding is a vital prerequisite to the implementation of digital projects. Sufficient funding avenues need to be established with efficient application timelines and reporting processes. These avenues should cater for different project magnitudes.

3.3.5 Create an innovation culture within the university

An innovation culture is to be established within the university where staff and students are confident to experiment and innovate within their respective environments.

3.3.6 Develop the digital competencies of staff and students

As the technological nature of the university increases, it is important to ensure that our staff and students have the required digital competencies to function within the digital environment.

3.3.7 Apply innovative solutions to bridging the digital divide

Given the socio-economic condition in South Africa and the rising number of students from previously disadvantaged families, the digital divide is an unfortunate reality faced by the NWU. The digital divide poses a risk to student success as students without access to the required technology will face significant barriers to performance. These barriers will increase as the technological nature of the university surges. To ensure that the student experience is fair and equitable, the digital divide needs to be investigated and solutions are to be found to reduce these barriers.

3.3.8 Support IT with sufficient capacity for implementation and support of digital initiatives

As digital projects increase at the university, pressure on NWU IT will escalate. Successful digital transformation requires sufficient financial and human resources for implementation and support. It is important that this is considered in budgets and policies.



4 Environment-specific vision statements

Each environment within the NWU has a specific vision statement for the DBS.

4.1 Research and Innovation

Capitalise on digital initiatives to help shift researcher focus away from administrative matters, supporting more productive research activities with higher overall research outputs. Initiatives should further create a premium online presence as a quality research institution that supports and attracts top-rated researchers and funding. More specifically, digital initiatives are to be aimed around:

1. Supporting the research process.
2. Optimising time and resources in the research environment.
3. Increasing online research presence.
4. Attracting funding.
5. Enabling researchers to collaborate more efficiently (locally and internationally).
6. Generating new revenue streams through digital channels.

4.2 Teaching and Learning

Implement a range of digital initiatives to enable a higher quality of student engagement; a more clearly defined and shared understanding of self-direction; collaborative and cooperative learning; and problem-solving skills development. These initiatives will be targeted at:

1. Providing individually tailored teaching and learning experiences.
2. Aligning learning experiences across campuses.
3. Gathering relevant data for advanced student analytics to drive student support and ultimately, student success.
4. Equipping academics to function optimally as educators within a digitally enhanced teaching and learning environment.
5. Ensuring students are provided for digitally.



4.3 Community Engagement

Enable community-engaged research and innovation, teaching-learning, and outreach by utilising various digital initiatives. These initiatives are applied in the scholarship of engagement by focusing on sharing of expertise, knowledge, and experience for community development. Ultimately enabling sustainable impact in the development of communities through digital platforms, technologies, and opportunities.

4.4 Registrar

Digitally transform the registrar's environment to support the business and operating model with agility through a series of integrated systems that enables:

1. Stakeholder-centred business processes with a premium user experience;
2. End-to-end automated workflows;
3. Integrated data and analytics to drive responsive decision making;

More specifically, digital initiatives are to be focussed around:

1. Reducing turnaround times on processes.
2. Removing paper-based forms.
3. Automating processes from start to end.
4. Making data and analytics available for rapid decision making.
5. Creating premium student experiences.

4.5 Finance and Facilities

Implement a range of digital initiatives that:

1. Provide stakeholders with a premium, digital self-help experience when interacting with finances or facilities at the NWU.
2. Automate workflows to shift employee focus to higher levels of work.
3. Generate analytics to drive decision making.



4.6 Corporate Relations and Marketing

Target and support stakeholder interactions with premium digital offerings that create intentional experiences and brand equity while generating data for agile strategic decision-making. Digital initiatives are to be focussed around:

1. Creating purposeful experiences across the entire range of stakeholders of the NWU.
2. Enhancing digital marketing initiatives.
3. Automating workflows to shift employee focus to higher levels of work.
4. Generating data and analytics guiding decision making.

4.7 People and Culture

Attract and retain talent by providing a first-class employee experience through digital platforms, increasing agility and productivity through data-driven decision making and equipping employees with the skills required for optimal functioning in a digitally enabled workplace. Digital initiatives will be focussed around automating workflows, digital records and digital tools throughout the HR value chain that results in a focus shift from away from admin, allowing for an enhanced value contribution.

4.8 Student Life

Create individualised, quality, holistic student experiences through innovative digital platforms encompassing all aspects of student life regardless of presentation method. Digital initiatives will be focussed around:

1. Extending the high-quality student life experience to all students at the NWU – including students in the distance and online modalities.
2. Individualising the experience for students based on different needs.
3. Providing a unique and enriching common NWU experience with specific graduate attributes geared towards empowering students into the future.
4. Providing reporting and analytics that aids in understanding the needs of the student population, ultimately driving rapid decision-making.



4.9 Integrated Planning and Reporting

Implement the widespread use of integrated data analytics to drive decision making on different levels across the organisation. Digital initiatives are to specifically focus around digital reporting, warehousing, analytics and machine learning that:

1. Regularly integrates and links data from all aspects of the organisation regardless of source.
2. Implements predictive modelling.
3. Automates the delivery of reporting and analytics to relevant decision-makers.
4. Implements integration, reports and modelling with agility to allow for effortless adaptation when the underlying ecosystem changes.

4.10 Information Technology

Establish an educational technology ecosystem, that integrates students, partners, things and employees, to connect people to contextualised information and services through modern digital delivery channels and a resilient integration platform sitting on top of stable, hybrid, responsive, manageable and secure infrastructure and enabling systems, in support of business and operating models, analytics-driven insights and exceptional customer experience, to differentiate this university from others.

5 Implementation of the strategic plan

The DBS will be implemented via a digital transformation plan. This plan is a living plan that is updated yearly to reflect digital initiatives both planned and under implementation. The plan helps track progress and goal achievement on a yearly basis. It is particularly important as large-scale system deployment might be more resource intensive, making timing essential.

The plan contains a timeline with projects from 2020 to 2025. Projects are allocated under specific goals or enablers and are classified according to required capacity and resources.

