

Designed for transformation



Quick Look

Company: Infusion

Industry: Software development

CEO: Greg Brill

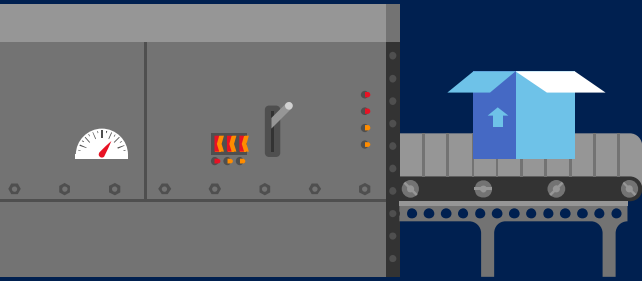
Headquarters: New York, New York

Website: infusion.com

Founded: 1998



User experience (UX) is often the deciding factor between choosing one product over another. From deciding which grocery store to shop at to choosing a cell phone to buy, the experience we have—or think we'll have—can be as influential as other aspects of a product like price and functionality.



“Some great stuff has been coming out of Microsoft lately. Microsoft’s been turning out new things every day. That innovation has definitely been exciting and it’s been great to be part of that ride.”

- Kayla Spiess, VP
Partnerships at Infusion

Why Microsoft?

Microsoft Partner Network connects businesses around the world with the opportunity and expertise to grow and transform.

Historically, UX has often taken a back seat to other aspects of an offering. Sometimes panned as decoration and considered less important than functionality or feature set, user experience has recently started getting the widespread recognition it deserves. This change in perception is even finding its way into enterprise software and services.

Infusion, a design and innovation agency, was founded in New York City in 1998. It touts a broad set of offerings including business and technology consulting, software development, and design services for financial, travel and hospitality, retail, healthcare, energy, and public sector verticals. In addition, it offers branding and retail store design. As business has grown, Infusion has opened offices in Toronto, London, Houston, Boston, Malta, Wrocław, and Krakow.

User experience as a differentiator

The firm started as a Microsoft training partner with a focus on the financial industry. Training was a “wedge service” that allowed Infusion to understand the needs of its clients and build relationships. In time, the company built out its team, began developing software solutions, and moved into other verticals.

Kayla Spiess, Vice President, Partnerships at Infusion, describes the company approach to engagements as holistic and multidisciplinary. In addition to deploying project managers and developers on projects, Infusion includes members from its UX team to ensure quality user experiences on all projects. The agency discovered through previous engagements that effective UX was very important to solution adoption, reduced the need for customer service and support, and increased overall quality. Knowing this, nearly six years ago





Infusion began adding UX members to engagements. “Greg [Brill, Infusion co-founder and CEO] said, ‘Hey, at this point customers aren’t yet asking for [UX], but they will soon so we should get ahead of it. We have to consider experience in design of all the things we build. No longer can solutions just be enterprise-scale and robust. They also have to be user-friendly and set in strategy,’” Spiess recalled.

Brill recognized that the consumer experience was changing user expectations, and he felt that enterprises also needed to find ways to reinvigorate their internal systems. “We were able to take much from the consumer world and bring it to enterprise. Brill saw that and we began our transformation at that point six years ago or so, really pushing the envelope,” Spiess said. “It was important to consider the user experience and in some cases have your customers pay more to have something well -designed.”

Once Infusion’s leadership team made the commitment to emphasize UX in engagements, it needed to develop a strategy and approach to market the value that UX adds to engagements. To do this, Infusion hired Peter Rivera. While initially brought on as Vice President and Executive Creative Director, his role has grown to Chief Experience Officer. Rivera had previously been the Senior Vice President of AOL Media, and during his tenure, he led a team of over 200 designers, PMs, front-end developers, and teams responsible for SEO and content development. In addition, he was responsible for global design and digital brand standards across AOL’s web experiences and mobile products.

At Infusion, Rivera strengthened the firm’s creative muscle and got the engineering and creative teams working well together. “There’s a sort of difference between the creative mindset and the engineer, but we’ve been able to find that harmony in our business and we now deliver that sort of one-hand-to-shake partner that can take you from the beginning to the end of an engagement,” said Spiess. “We have engineers, exceptional creative leadership, and talent blended together working on engagements. There’s a sort of difference between the creative mindset and the engineer, but we’ve been able to find that harmony in our business and we now deliver [a positive user experience] from the beginning to the end of an engagement.”

Designing efficiencies

When asked about pushback from clients, Spiess says that it still happens, but the agency is transforming its clients’ mindsets over time. “Years ago, it was harder. There wasn’t a quality standard. Now you can actually drive efficiencies from UX. [By adding UX] we’ve actually been able to generate a lot of efficiencies. There’s a lot less that’s broken and from a quantification perspective, there’s a lot of efficiency in having a firm that can actually do it all.”

Spiess mentioned that the efficiencies Infusion found benefit more than just its clients. “We’ve created efficiencies and accelerators in our own business. One thing we’ve mastered, and have an accelerator for, is “out of the box” intranet. For several years everyone wanted an intranet. It’s funny because it kind of went away for a while, but that whole concept of internal collaboration is coming back into play. Infusion created IP and accelerators to get customers’ [intranets] up and live rapidly with everything they need so it felt like it was out of the box.”

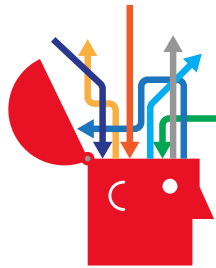
Advice on transformation

Transforming business requires effort and dedication. Spiess’ advice: Be open to it. “Partner demands are changing at such a rapid pace. To just stay stable and stay the way things used to be is just not a salient approach. You have to look and be open to new opportunities and be willing to change. Sometimes those [opportunities] are challenging and painful and cause ripples.”

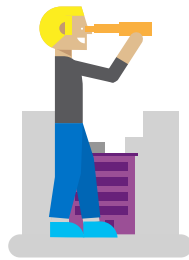
Spiess reiterates how important it is to be open to change, and while it might be difficult to stay on top of trends, it’s even more difficult to catch up if you fall behind. “Be open to change, open to looking at trends and finding ways to better morph your business to where things are going. And get moving! Being behind is tough. If you can get out and take a small step, look at your business, look at how you market, how you partner, how you train your sales team, and what you’re incenting your sellers on. Start rapid prototyping, start shaking that up, and find ways to create new opportunity in one or two lines of business or one or two opportunity areas, and more of that will shake out.”

What partners can do to distinguish themselves from their competition

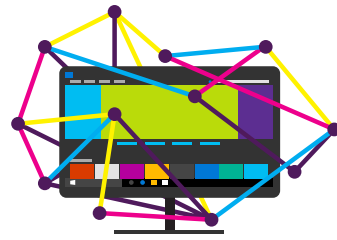
Considerations that helped Infusion stand apart



Be open to opportunities for change and transformation



Look for opportunities to commercialize the IP you create



Consider the entire solution: Design and UX are essential components of a software solution



Focus on building relationships with customers and partners: Relationship and reputation selling are important for long-term success



Get the most out of your marketing dollar: Know your audience and position key members of your team as thought leaders



Lean on the Microsoft Partner Network and keep Microsoft teams aware of the work you're doing

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