

CASE STUDY

Scaling agile: How Pret went from high street icon to online innovator

Focusing on agile development at
scale to grow high street business
during pandemic lockdowns

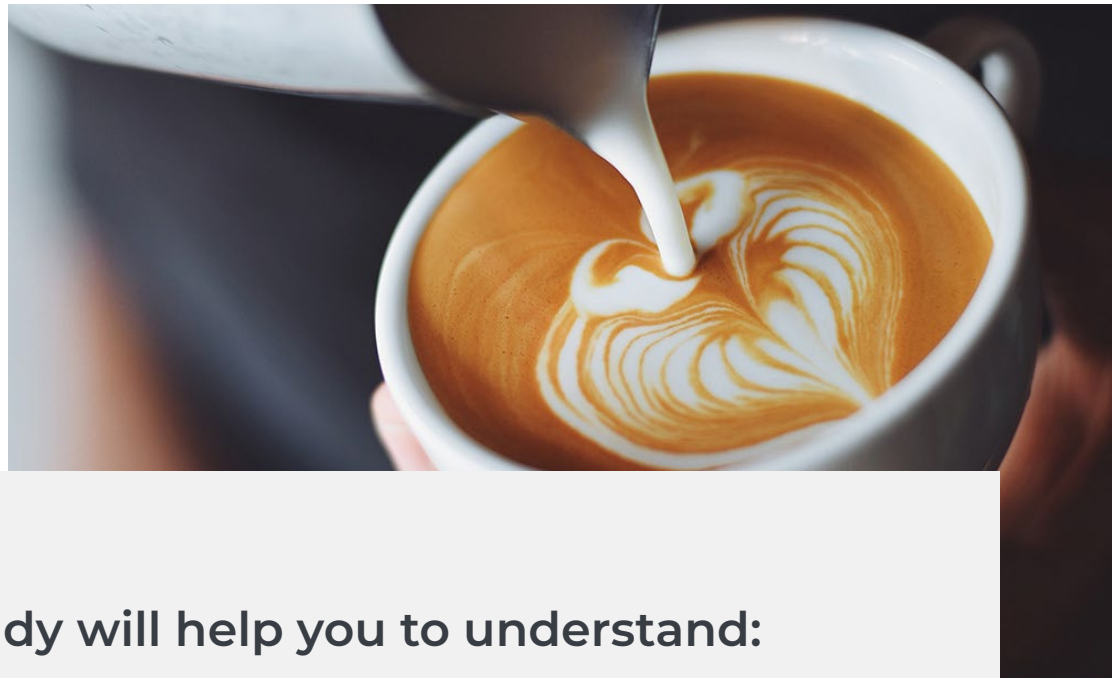
In 2019, before the pandemic, Pret A Manger had ambitious plans for growth. With a strong brand identity, but little digital capability to interact with customers, or to understand their needs, Pret knew it was time not just to play catch up, but to **leapfrog the competition.**

Pret needed to implement a digital strategy which allowed for both a deeper understanding of their customers, and the ability to build a loyal customer base through ongoing engagement. This required a step change in their approach to innovation, **with a focus on scaling agile to grow the business.**

Equal Experts' long history of enabling large organisations to innovate at scale allowed Pret to quickly develop a new and responsive digital capability that was up and running within a few short months. This user-centred approach and investment in a custom platform as a service laid the foundations for sustaining digital innovation for the long term.

By engaging with Equal Experts Pret have been able to achieve these outcomes:

	Before (2019)	After (2021)
Digital propositions	0	3 (Pret coffee subscription, marketplaces and Pret pick up)
Number of releases	1 a year	6000 per year
Lead time	Unknown	90th percentile of all change within a week
Mean time to recovery	Unknown	90 minute average



This case study will help you to understand:



How investing in a digital platform early can accelerate an organisational step change



The importance of design thinking and service design in determining the most valuable initiatives.



How adopting a test and learn mindset can build trust to empower teams and grow a culture of innovation

HOW PRET KICKED OFF THEIR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITH A QUICK WIN.

Taking the first step and laying the foundations for further innovation.

In 2019 Pret only knew who their customers were through staff recognising regulars and knowing their order. At the same time, their website had been outsourced, limiting the information about customers for Pret.

When Equal Experts were engaged in early 2020, the brief was to replace the existing website, starting with an MVP consisting of Marketing content and a Content Management System. This would be the foundation on which further digital propositions could be built.

Rethinking the Pret website from the ground up was a fascinating challenge. Above all else, the strategic aim was to create a valuable, engaging web experience for customers as a foundation for future propositions. The principles underpinning the plan included being API-first and Cloud-native. This meant engaging with new partners to drive a great ecommerce experience.

Five months after kicking off the project, the Pret team launched their new site to great fanfare. Redesigned, rebranded and full of powerful functionality, the site attracted more visits and drove greater engagement. The timing could not have been better, as barely eight weeks before the new site launched, COVID had hit, and everything had changed.

A STEP CHANGE TO SUSTAIN INNOVATION.

Investing in a digital platform to power the flywheel of innovation.

In the start of 2020 Pret A Manger began implementing wide-ranging changes to their digital presence, to accompany their extensive network of high street shops. The digital team engaged in a comprehensive transformation which included new ways of working, as well as adding major capabilities – such as ecommerce – to the main Pret site.

Originally the plans encompassed a sequence of discoveries and inceptions – but then Covid hit, and priorities changed. Now, with the traditional business model under unprecedented pressure, Pret's new digital products had to reach the markets as quickly as possible. To add to the pressure, all this innovation had to take place in people's spare bedrooms!

Out of the significant challenges the pandemic posed, Pret has proven time and again their ability to innovate, adapt, optimise digital offerings, and demonstrate their customer-led values.

Read more about Equal Experts' thinking on [digital platforms](#).

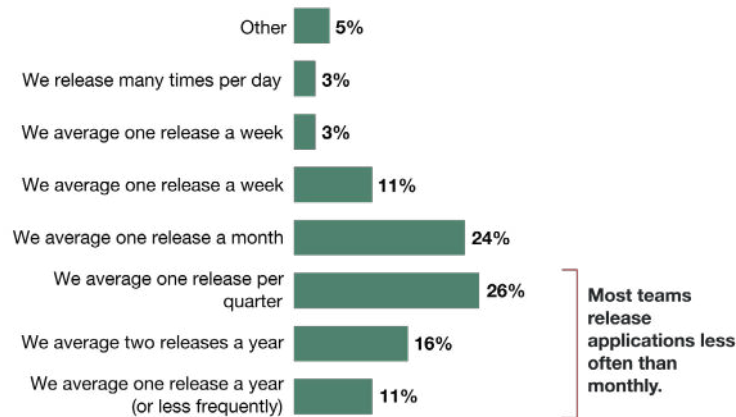
Taking lessons learned from building digital platforms at other organisations, we devised a platform strategy that would accelerate Pret's existing digital strategy to deliver across multiple digital products at scale. An Equal Experts platform team leveraged native cloud capabilities such as GCP Cloud Run, GCP Cloud Monitoring, and Github Actions to build a bespoke PaaS service for Pret. This approach reduced duplication of effort, baked in continuous delivery and lightened the cognitive load needed for teams to build and run a digital product.

I've found that investing in a digital platform when building Pret's digital capability reduced duplication of effort, baked in continuous delivery and operability principles, and lightened the cognitive load needed for teams to build and run a digital service. It has enabled Pret to continuously deliver high-quality services right from the start.

Sarah Venning, Chief Digital Officer, Pret A Manger

During the early stages of the pandemic, the number of deployments ramped up quickly. In 2020, with the launch of the new website and three new digital propositions (Click & Collect, Coffee Subscription, Marketplace), there were between 3-4,000 deployments. By the end of 2021, after rolling out propositions to multiple markets, the total number of deployments since 2020 was in excess of 10,000.

The survey data below from Forrester shows release frequency for software across the industry. Through the course of 2020, our digital platform approach and dedicated digital platform team were able **to take Pret from on average one release a year to the highest category of many times per day** to match their strategic digital growth plans and wider business transformation needs.

“How often does your team(s) release applications?”

Note: Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

Base: 2,073 global developers

Source: Forrester Analytics Business Technographics® Developer Survey, 2020

“Digital Transformation Requires Development Transformation”, Forrester, December 29, 2020

These numbers have been achieved in large part by radically reducing the lead time to Production. This represents a step change in capability as before Equal Experts, Pret’s outsourced website had one major deployment in 2019, which later had to be rolled back. Now Pret is sustaining lead times of under a week and often the same working day.

Pret Digital sustains short lead times and high deployment frequency, without sacrificing reliability (measured by MTTR). To enable this the teams run regular chaos sessions, use templated monitoring dashboards, rehearse the incident response process, and practice secure delivery.

In terms of future directions, there are plans to move the balance of the web estate to the Cloud, as well as rolling out more digital services for shops. In parallel, the current digital propositions will continue to be improved and launched in other territories across the globe.

A FOUNDATION FOR ENGAGING CUSTOMERS: THE PRET COFFEE SUBSCRIPTION.

Setting the scene to resonate with remote customers.

When the UK went into lockdown in March 2020, Pret's core business model of following skyscrapers shifted to working from home. The closure of shops had an unprecedented impact, and was compounded by the abrupt, enforced move to fully remote working for colleagues, partners and customers.

When restrictions eased, Pret was able to open some shops; however, social distancing, reduced hours, and smaller teams impacted the way they could serve customers.

Pret knew they needed a proposition that would both excite customers and stand out from the crowd. It had to be commercially viable, technically feasible, and easy for customers to adopt quickly which is how the internal Pret Leadership Team came up with The Pret Coffee Subscription, the first for the UK high street.

The service required a digital and an operational solution to make it work – this was, after all, about giving customers the confidence to come back to shops. Along with the digital team, Equal Experts ran a pilot in Pret shops across Manchester, trialling the subscription and gathering customer feedback on the concept. We took input from shop staff as we introduced scanners and QR codes for the first time. As the trial progressed, we constantly refined and experimented, until we'd achieved a great customer experience that was operationally viable. Getting this feedback from users early allowed us to de-risk the proposition and feel confident to proceed.

In September 2020, Pret launched their **Pret Coffee Subscription service nationwide, just 8 weeks after agreeing on the concept.** Originally called 'YourPret Barista', The Pret Coffee Subscription offered customers up to five Barista-made drinks a day, from Pret's extensive menu, for £25 per month.

***This is just the first step** in our plan to bring Pret to more people. We now have the building blocks to establish Pret as a multichannel, digitally-led business, and the Pret Coffee Subscription is the first big launch we're able to deliver through our new technology platform.*

Pano Christou, CEO, Pret A Manger

PUTTING DIGITAL CAPABILITY AND INNOVATION AT THE HEART OF PRET.

How design thinking transforms an organisation's relationship with its customers.

Design thinking methodology is fundamentally about understanding your users and their needs, motivations and behaviour, in order to solve a problem creatively. By leveraging a range of both novel and known ideas, and working collaboratively to develop and evaluate them, problem solving becomes a team sport. Its lean process and fast paced approach make it ideal for innovation in a time of crisis or growth.

As Pret moved into a digital omni-channel world during the pandemic, it quickly became clear that there was an opportunity to create services that would appeal to new customers as well as existing clientèle. Pret were already experimenting with an innovation shop, installing digital tools and equipment to test, but they hadn't formally recorded the results. The Equal Experts team were now able to capitalise on this aspiration to explore new ways of operating.

Our service designers are mature practitioners who work in highly collaborative and transparent ways, combining a creative, yet pragmatic approach to problem solving. We were able to bring together people from all over Pret, running workshops and creating space for everyone to contribute in their own way.

Powered by user insights, sketches and experience maps, Equal Experts helped everyone visualise the new Click and Collect trial service. As part of Pret's ongoing exploration into trialling new methods the team knew it would need the involvement of operations, food retail, property, marketing, finance, legal and digital teams. Everyone needed to be aligned.

Taking a test and learn approach, we encouraged the idea of running trials in a handful of shops to prototype the fulfilment process. This allowed us to quickly see what worked operationally and what didn't. We were able to explore whether the service should be a hosted VIP experience, an express lane or simple self-service.

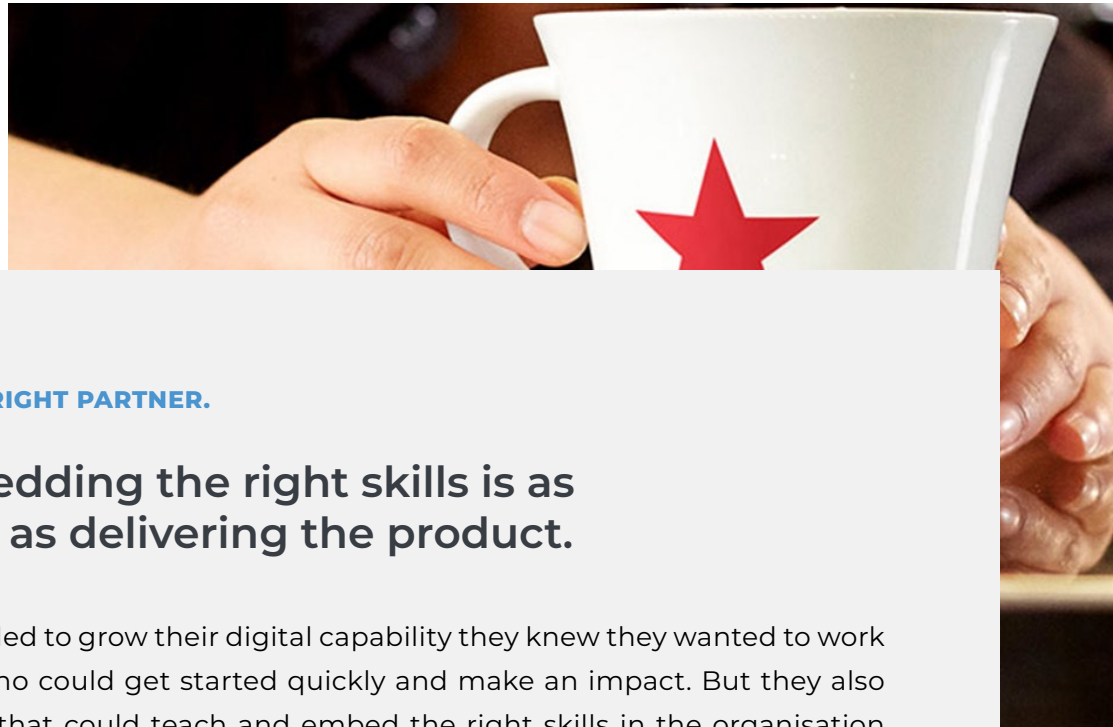
It was also crucial to agree our measures of success upfront. With mystery shoppers ready to test the service, and shop staff poised to receive Click and Collect orders, we had the trials up and running within 2 weeks.

Embedding this trial approach has given Pret a way to make business decisions informed by customer needs, and based on evidence, for the first time. Bringing real world shops and digital experiences together has **attracted new customers and expanded Pret's business model for the future**, giving them confidence to continue to test and learn .

We have always had a focus on innovation at Pret, but now we have the tools and culture to sustain that innovation as we scale in different markets. This test and learn approach has guided our investment decisions to improve return on investment in innovation.

Anne-Sophie de Weck, Global Director of Digital Product, Pret A Manger

The move from being purely operationally led, to an omni-channel business, has been a big cultural shift for Pret. Seeing services as products that can be developed, refined and maintained beyond 'launch' is a step change. Putting customers at the heart of Pret is what has always made Pret, Pret but now with customer data and insights they can make informed product decisions, adapt fulfilment processes and better communicate with new demographics. Ultimately this helps Pret meet their customers' needs and expectations, leading to a more meaningful relationship.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT PARTNER.

Why embedding the right skills is as important as delivering the product.

When Pret decided to grow their digital capability they knew they wanted to work with partners who could get started quickly and make an impact. But they also needed a team that could teach and embed the right skills in the organisation while delivering a number of new digital products. This made Equal Experts the perfect partner for Pret.

Pret needed more than an outsourcing solution. The business was looking to make a fundamental shift in ways of working and delivering change that would support its ability to sustain long term innovation. Making the step change that is needed for a large organisation to embrace digital innovation requires visionary leadership and Pret perfectly understands that software development is more than a capability; it requires the entire organisation to be reviewed, and new ways of working in order to be sustainable.

Equal Experts is a software development consultancy with an outstanding track record of working with large organisations to build this capability. Designed to solve exactly this type of problem, Equal Experts has the highest concentration of senior talent in the industry; all our consultants have extensive and diversified experience in bespoke software delivery. Our expertise sets us apart, but we respect our customers and their context. This means we don't offer cookie cutter solutions. Instead, we understand our customers' end goal and look for the first concrete step we can take together towards that goal.

The partnership between Pret and Equal Experts has successfully laid the foundations for sustained innovation. Through this partnership Pret has launched three new digital propositions in new markets and has developed the ability to release at pace.