



Gartner for Marketers

4 Steps for Building Greater Agility in Your Marketing Organization

Gartner for Marketers Research Team

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The modern marketing organization shoulders a broader, more complex set of performance expectations than ever. Marketing leaders must build a diverse, adaptable range of team capabilities to meet expanding responsibilities and keep their brands competitive amid rapid marketplace shifts.

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Overview

Key challenges

- Constantly changing customer expectations and frequent marketplace disruptions make it increasingly difficult for marketing leaders to act quickly and at scale. Marketing teams that lack critical skills in areas such as customer insight, marketing technology, data analytics and other disciplines will struggle to perform key marketing functions.
- Marketing organizations — already stretched thin — find themselves mired by issues of weak governance, duplicate efforts, confusing processes and the underutilization or misuse of key tools and technologies.
- Marketing team hiring practices — for specific skill sets like social marketing, analytics or search and the sourcing of external providers — are often siloed. This fragmentation of resources leads to inefficiency and an inability to scale for growth.

Recommendations

Marketing leaders responsible for organization and operations to drive agility into their teams must:

- Develop a plan to adopt an agile marketing approach, allocating skills and resources based on the work that needs to be done. Develop a project-centric ethos focused on delivering results, agnostic of where resources sit in the organizational structure.
- Build a flexible team with broad skills combined with multiple areas of deep expertise to support rapid changes and new opportunities.
- Tap the power of agency and external partners to fill skills gaps. Assess the most critical marketing skills needed to meet business goals and find external partners capable of providing them.
- Empower their team with the right tools and technology. Invest in a digital infrastructure that supports an agile and collaborative team, such as work management, virtual collaboration tools, asset management and performance management technology solutions.

Introduction

The modern marketing organization must quickly adapt to change, possess a wide array of skills and, above all else, deliver results. Many marketers are moving to more agile styles of working to meet those requirements. But, going agile requires changes across the culture and in the working style of the marketing organization, including:

- Building ownership and accountability in a more heavily matrixed and agile work environment
- Shifting from a rigid organization structure to collaborative, cross-functional project teams
- Empowering individual team members to take on a range of different roles aligned to project requirements

Shifting from linear, hierarchical, sequential approaches to projects to rapid delivery of work with frequent adjustments and recalibrations tracked and measured by operational key performance indicators (KPIs).

Going agile is much more than focusing on processes originated by software developers and borne from the Agile Manifesto. Yes, agile marketing needs to consider processes along with people, external resources and technology that help your organization take action more quickly. Use this research to enable marketing capabilities to flow seamlessly across disciplines and empower your team to adjust to ever-changing business needs.

Analysis

Step No. 1: Establish a Disciplined, Defined Work Style Using Agile Techniques

The agile model — a highly structured approach with prescribed terms and processes — originated the world of software development. The term “agile marketing” isn’t as dogmatic, but borrows many of the principles that make the agile methodology effective. These principles include:

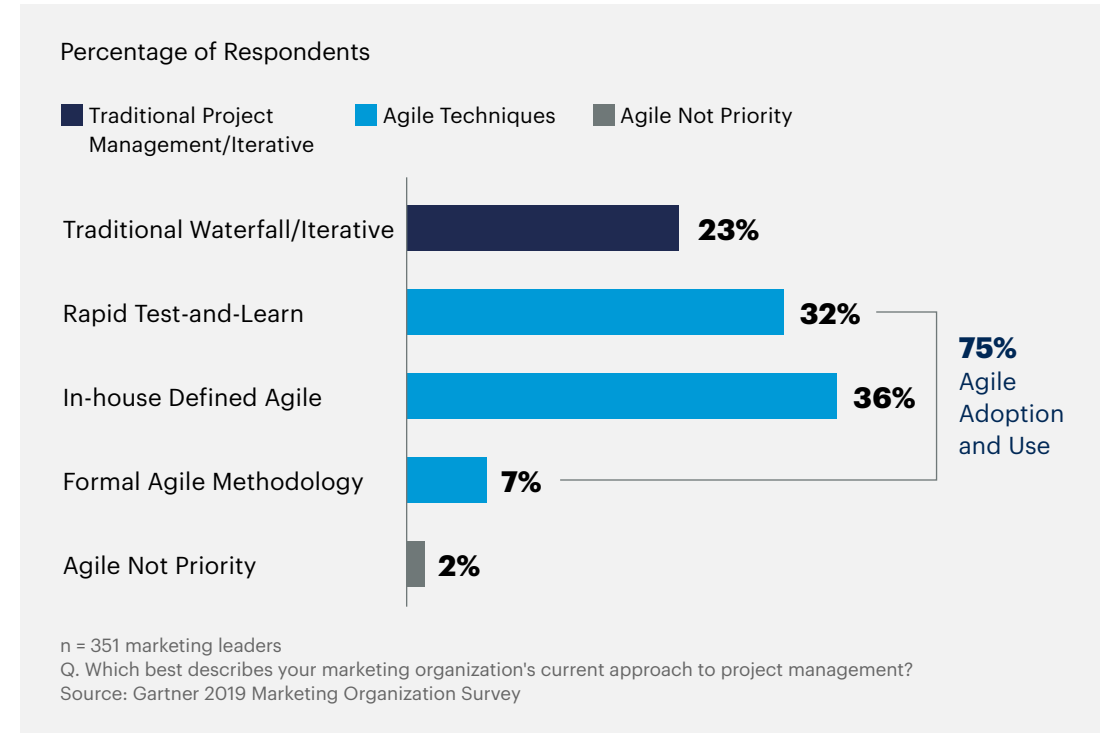
- **Discrete iterative work cycles** — Work is parsed into chunks that can be completed within “sprint” work cycles. Sprints are typically one to two weeks in duration, but can be longer. Sprints are essentially short-term projects with specific deliverables that a small, focused team completes within the allotted term.
- **Tangible goal orientation** — Sprints focus on the completion of a specifically defined objective. For longer-term objectives that can’t be completed within the scope of a single sprint, multiple sprints are deployed.
- **Frequent calibration** — Agile methodologies are well-known for daily stand-up and weekly sprint review meetings. They are typically very short, bringing the team together solely for the purpose of reviewing progress, identifying remaining tasks and risks, defining priorities and assignments, and sharing with stakeholders.
- **Capability-based contribution** — Agile teams are composed of individuals from across an organization with a variety of skills and experience levels. An individual’s agile team assignment isn’t based on seniority or organizational placement; rather, it is based on the alignment of capabilities with the work to be done.

In Gartner’s 2019 Marketing Organization Survey, 75% of respondents told us they are adopting agile styles of operation (see Figure 1 and “Marketing Organizational Survey 2019: Marketers Aspire for Agility and Control but Fight Operational Challenges”).¹ In the same study, respondents report that agile techniques improve the speed at which new ideas, campaigns and products are brought to market and 87% saw improved productivity among their teams following a transition to agile techniques.

However, the purest forms of agile management — for example, the specific methods and approaches established for software development, such as Scrum methodologies — aren’t the norm yet, as only 7% are using formal agile methods. However, marketing leaders are quickly integrating aspects of agile into marketing team operations.

Shifting to agile means moving to establish a more project-centric approach and working in more focused, sprint-style work cycles. You may also need to flatten your organization to better align with the agile approach, eliminating the highly siloed functional work allocation.

Figure 1: Marketer Adoption of Agile Operations



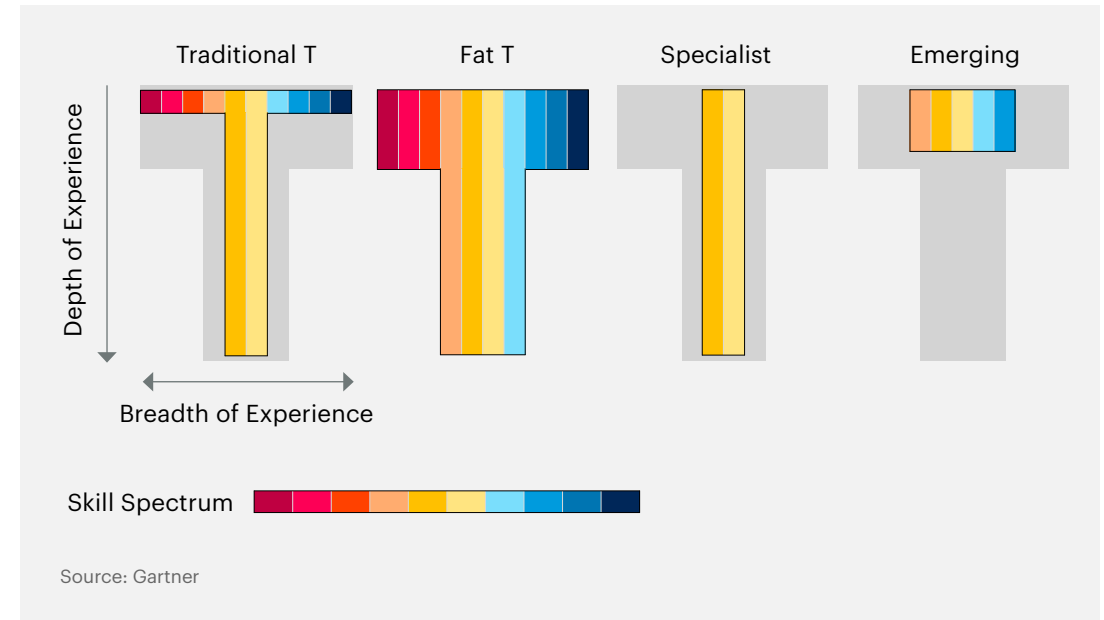
Step No. 2: Build a T-Shaped Team With Adaptable Skills

A dynamic, agile work style requires an equally dynamic and talented team capable of adapting to changing requirements and supporting a multitude of projects. At many organizations, the answer is to find and nurture T-shaped marketing talent — marketers who possess an extensive breadth of skills complemented by a significant depth of ability in a subset of those skills.

Modern marketers are already T-shaped — have a honed skill — but the shift to dynamic work styles is causing an evolution of T-shaped marketer proportions.² Traditional T-shaped marketers have broad but shallow experience across multiple areas together with a deep capability in one or two marketing capabilities. Today, however, a fat-T profile is taking hold. In contrast to traditional T-shaped marketers, fat-T marketers possess significant skills breadth and depth complemented by several areas of deeper, more specialized expertise (see Figure 2).

Gartner clients indicate that fat-T marketers in real-world marketing teams are proving to be diverse, flexible and able to contribute to a multitude of projects and adapt quickly. Ideally, a modern marketing team has a composite of multiple profile types. Specialists are critical in areas like analytics and consumer insights, while emerging profile types have the ability to identify and manage new martech and technologies. Within a dynamic team structure, marketers that can integrate into a variety of projects are a valuable asset when skills and resources are at a premium.

Figure 2: Marketer Profile Model



Nurture Marketing Expertise and Soft Skills

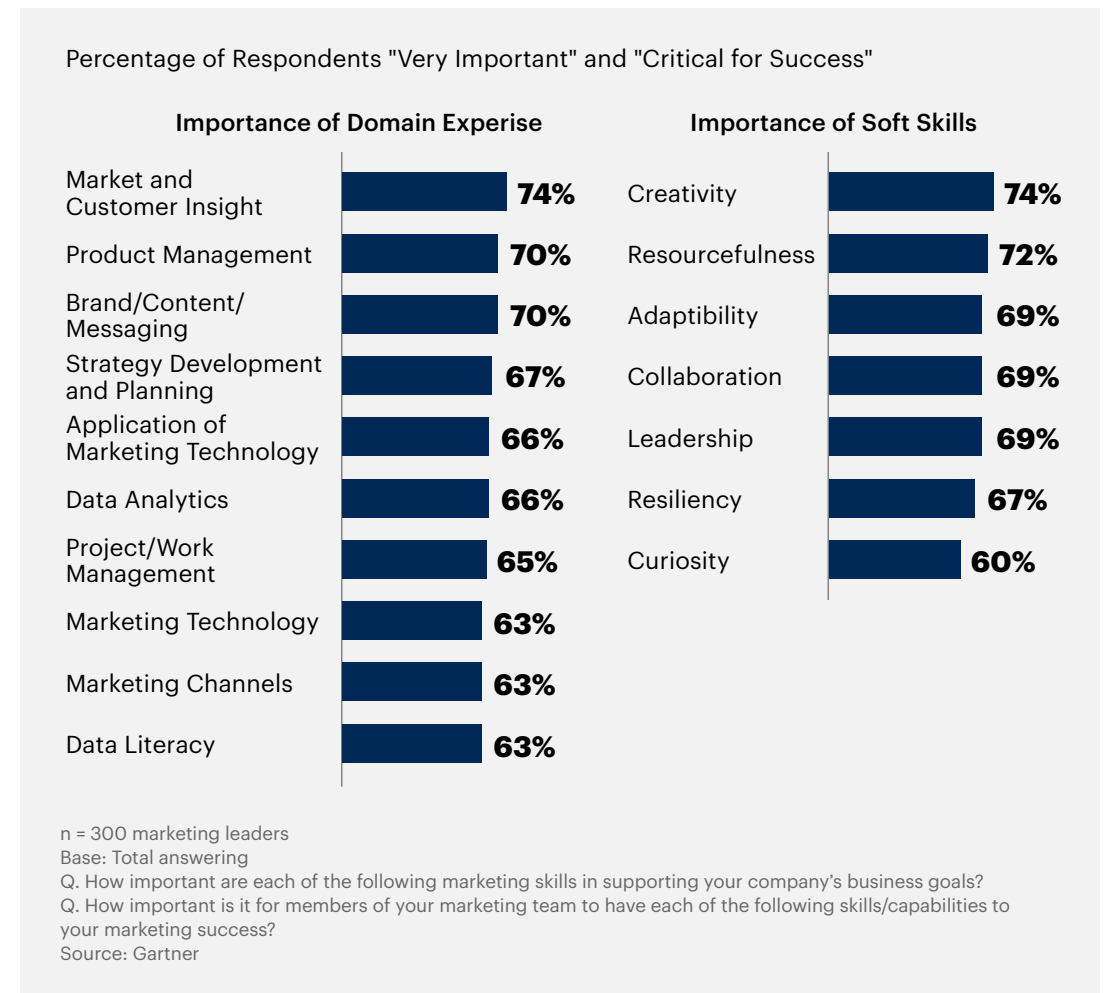
CMOs report that key capabilities essential for marketing success include market and customer insight; product management; and brand, content and messaging (see Figure 3). In addition, marketing operations is the No. 1 role being hired that stresses the importance of operations for an agile team.² The composition of your T-shaped marketers must include a cross-section of these skills, while specialists and emerging marketers should maintain a narrower set of these capabilities.

In addition to marketing domain expertise, another key ingredient to agile team success is critical soft skills as noted in Figure 3. Qualities such as creativity, resourcefulness and adaptability become the glue that binds skilled talent across teams, functions and partner organizations. These soft skills become valuable to support common requirements, such as:

- **Rapid feedback** — Communications that travel quickly from top to bottom
- **Iterative refinements** — Teams that quickly learn and adapt from experiences (see “Build a Test-and-Learn Culture to Improve Marketing Outcomes”)
- **Better outcomes** — Customer feedback that leads to final products that provide customer value (see “Integrate User Research and Testing Into Agile Processes to Improve Customer Experience and Products”)

Soft skills play a vital role in the success of a modern, agile marketing organization. This underpins the need for team members to be effective problem solvers and have the ability to adjust to internal and external business changes.

Figure 3: CMOs Value Domain Expertise and Soft Skills for Dynamic Marketing Teams



A T-shaped team is versatile, adaptable and competent across a broad range of marketing disciplines. Seek out this skill-based diversity when implementing a flexible team approach, staying especially focused on the key areas of domain expertise and critical soft skills.

Step No. 3: Tap the Power of Marketing Partners

When shifting your marketing organization to a project-based work style, the integration of agencies as an extension of your team's marketing capabilities can be a huge force multiplier. Marketing agencies have long used agile principles to align their own talent to a shifting portfolio of projects and changing client requirements. That experience can also make their integration into your marketing organization more intuitive and seamless. But remember to balance and manage your agency engagements — too many agencies or mismatched work styles can be ineffective and disruptive.

Even though CMOs report their most desired operating model is one that relies less on outsourced talent than on internal capabilities, agencies and other external marketing partners can quickly fill skills gaps when skills or expertise don't exist internally. In fact, nearly 70% of marketing leaders say they rely heavily on agencies today to develop strategy and execute marketing programs.²

The specific types of work and context for engaging agencies and other marketing partners vary widely, but marketers consistently value the quality and performance of agencies, the breadth of available capabilities and the flexibility they can provide. Agencies are seen as a high-quality, dynamic resource that can effectively complement existing marketing resources.

Step No. 4: Empower Your Team With Tools and Technology

An agile work style featuring a talented team and well-matched external partners can still fall short without the right tools and technology. Leading and succeeding with an agile organization requires tools that empower marketing operations. You need clear visibility into project progress and how resources are being utilized, and an ability to measure how efficiently the “work” of marketing is being performed.

The marketing technology universe flickers daily with new vendors flashing onto the scene — and others disappearing forever. Marketing leaders have no shortage of technology options promising to address their most vexing marketing challenges. Despite the overwhelming options available, focus your supporting technologies on those that enable more adaptable operations, such as:

- **Work management** — These tools help you manage overall day-to-day marketing work: how projects are initiated, resources are assigned, backlog queue timelines are managed, and reviews and approvals are handled. Work management technologies provide core capabilities for managing marketing operations, but many of these same features can also be found in other types of technology solutions (see “Modern MRM: The Evolution of Marketing Operations Management”).
- **Asset management** — Marketing teams create a large volume of images, ads, collateral, video and other content assets. Locating, re-creating or managing those marketing assets can waste vast amounts of team time. Agile marketing organizations recognize these inefficiencies and leverage asset management, also known as digital asset management (DAM) solutions, as a foundational marketing technology (see “Market Guide for Digital Asset Management”).

The ecosystem of marketing technologies is expansive (see “The Gartner Marketing Technology Vendor Guide”). Regardless of what you include in your martech stack, prioritize training your agile team on the martech investments you make. Provide adequate time within the scope of their roles to use the tools. Recognize the imperative that less can be more. Too many tools can increase the training burden, fragment marketing work as marketers toggle from technology to technology and offer diminishing value.

The nature of modern marketing is fast-moving and fluid. Leading a modern marketing organization, especially an agile one, requires an equally dynamic style. Agile management requires the same principles as agile work: a clear focus on objectives, frequent calibration of resources, flexibility and openness to playing multiple roles and a highly collaborative style. Above all, leading an agile organization requires being actively involved and appreciating the process itself — even when run well, agile can be messy. Done right, an agile marketing organization thrives on the variety of its talents, the changing nature of marketing and business and the unique characteristics of the team itself.

Acronym Key and Glossary Terms

Specialist	Narrow skill set, deep expertise
Traditional T (Generalist)	Wide skill set, shallow/varied expertise, single area of deep expertise
Fat T (Expert)	Wide skill set, extensive expertise in multiple areas, multiple areas of deep expertise
Emerging	Newly developing skills

Actionable insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for Marketing leaders:

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