Gartner for Marketers

2020 Marketing Operations Survey

A Successful Function That Requires Change to Sustain
While marketing operations is a loosely defined term, Gartner data demonstrates the role’s positive impact on marketing efficiency, effectiveness and work methods. However, marketing operations leaders must frame the scope of their role, form operational KPIs and fix impediments to execution.

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Overview

Key Findings

• Marketing operations leaders are becoming increasingly common. Forty-nine percent of marketers surveyed had a marketing operations leader in at least one team.

• Fifty-two percent of marketing organizations primarily driven by effectiveness cited the presence of a marketing operations leader, versus 45% of marketing organizations driven by efficiency.

• Marketing operations leaders help their organizations balance the trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness. Seventy-six percent of marketers surveyed felt they could not fully maximize the impact of initiatives when also striving for efficiency.

• Marketing leaders cited four to five functions under the marketing operations mandate from a list of 12. A handful narrowly rose above the fray, such as financials, research, collaboration and campaign performance.

• The existing marketing operations leader job will expand in the next 12 to 24 months to include martech management, research and insights, and vendor management.

• Work efficiency and impact measurement were cited as top key performance indicators (KPIs).

• Approximately 43% of marketers surveyed still do not use any kind of modern martech to manage key marketing activities, hindering the marketing team’s ability to meet objectives.

Recommendations

• As a marketing operations leader, you must follow these four simple steps:

• Frame marketing operations around the marketing organization’s priority weighting of efficiency and effectiveness.

• Focus on a well-defined primary operations mandate of specific functions to protect against becoming a haphazard accumulation of responsibilities.

• Identify and then fix the biggest operational weaknesses, such as lack of communication and collaboration. Measure the success and progress of work efficiency, impact, output, and alignment to goals and strategies.

• Fit marketing work management and operational martech to your organization’s needs, replacing outdated and manual processes with integrated and automated systems and platforms.
Survey Objective

As the complexity of marketing increases and budgets tighten, marketing leaders are placing a greater emphasis on marketing operations. The objective of this survey of marketing leaders was to delve into the nuances of the role and the value of the function more broadly in service to the CMO and the entire marketing organization. The survey uncovered best practices for the role's current scope and future mandate, and provided insight into the most important KPIs, development priorities for its leaders and operational marketing technologies.

Data Insights

2020 has proven to be a difficult and grueling year for many companies amid a pandemic, economic strain and passionate calls for social justice. The organizational reins have tightened due to unforeseen factors affecting sales, supply chains, shopping habits, consumer priorities, work habits, travel plans and more. Many marketing leaders have been forced to cut staff, agencies, media and technology.

The ups and downs of the economy drove this plight of extremes. For some companies, the demands on product and supply chains were at extended record highs. For others, demand for everything from basic services and elective surgeries to live entertainment came to an immediate and abrupt halt.

Yet, marketers are resilient, optimistic and confident creatures. Our 2020 CMO Spend Survey indicates that 73% of CMOs expect COVID-19’s negative impacts to be short-lived; they are defying economic pessimism and attempting to move on as best they can (see “2020 CMO Spend Survey, Part 1: CMOs Gamble on Swift Recovery, but Strategic Priorities Reveal Hedging”).

Undoubtedly, that's the human innovative nature shining through, because we tend to have a passion for solving problems creatively. And while many marketing-led innovations have garnered headlines for their responsive nimbleness, what has gone less-examined is how marketing functions are actually operating better in the midst of mass acclimation to Zoom, professionals working from home while homeschooling, and a series of tests and retests to find success in a new normal. These behind-the-headlines operational initiatives are indeed what Gartner sought to explore with the 2020 Marketing Operations Survey.
The findings of this study suggest different potential actions for different levels of maturity or previous investment in marketing operations. In order to best take action on each finding, it’s important for marketing operations leaders to use a common framework to identify and solve the challenges they may specifically face rather than reacting to any one data point (see Table 1).

Table 1: Introduction of the Four Forward Strategies of Marketing Operations Leaders

1. Frame marketing operations against the organization’s priority weighting of efficiency and effectiveness.
2. Focus your various efforts into creating a clear and digestible mandate.
3. Fix the biggest operational weaknesses within your marketing organization.
4. Appropriately fit and optimize your marketing work management platform and operational martech to match the needs of your marketing organization.

Source: Gartner (August 2020)
**Marketing Operations Leaders Attempt to Break Through Efficiency and Effectiveness Trade-Offs**

Overall, less than half of marketers surveyed cite that at least one marketing team in their organization includes a dedicated marketing operations leader (see Figure 1). Yet marketing organizations that are focused on effectiveness have a 7-percentage-points higher rate of having a marketing operations (ops) leader (52%) compared to those organizations focused on efficiency (45%). This signifies that marketing organizations committed to effectiveness have committed to a marketing operations leader to help them increase ROI and be more productive and competent.

Figure 1: Prevalence of Marketing Operations Leader Below 50%

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**Presence of a Dedicated Marketing Operations Leader**

- **All Respondents**: 51%
- **Respondents Focused on Effectiveness**: 52%
- **Respondents Focused on Efficiency**: 45%

n = 421 Marketing Leaders
Q: Does your company currently have a dedicated marketing operations leader?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey
ID: 730209
A marketing operations leader helps your entire marketing organization become more effective and efficient. Our research reveals that a marketing operations leader can alleviate trade-offs between efficiency and effectiveness, especially in more mature (as self-assessed) marketing organizations.

A whopping 76% of marketing leaders surveyed felt they could not fully maximize the impact of initiatives when also striving for efficiency. Yet orgs with a marketing ops leader disagreed at a higher rate (7 percentage points) over those without a marketing ops leader — meaning, if they had a marketing ops leader they felt it was more achievable to accomplish. Level of disagreement also increased in more mature (self-reported) organizations, suggesting that an indicator of maturity includes the presence of a marketing operations leader.

The opposite was also true: Marketing orgs without a marketing operations leader agreed at a higher rate (10 percentage points). In other words, if they didn’t have a marketing ops leader, they felt even more strongly that they could not fully maximize the impact of initiatives when focusing on efficiency.

Therefore, the presence of a marketing operations leader helps those organizations strive for both effectiveness and efficiency without overt sacrifice of one for the other — in particular, without sacrificing effectiveness for efficiency. With a marketing operations leader, a marketing organization can achieve both. This finding alone can make a profound difference in a CMO or marketing leader’s ability to prove the value of marketing to the business (see Figure 2).

Efficiency isn’t a barrier. It’s an enabler.
Figure 2: Marketers Struggle in Balancing Effectiveness With Efficiency

Our Marketing Organization Cannot Fully Maximize the Impact of Our Initiatives While Also Being Efficient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree/Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Respondents</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a Dedicated Marketing Ops Leader</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Not Have a Marketing Ops Leader</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 421 Marketing Leaders

Q. Level of Agreement: Our marketing organization cannot fully maximize the impact of our initiatives while also being efficient

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding. Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey

5 pt. scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree

ID: 730209
Recommended Actions

• Establish a dedicated marketing operations role if it doesn’t exist in your marketing organization.

• Do not frame the role as imposing efficiency in favor of effectiveness: Understand that the role is about achieving the higher order of operational excellence for the marketing organization that includes both efficiency and effectiveness.

• Leverage the tools and practices of the 24% who feel they can maximize the impact of initiatives while being efficient. For example, time and cost-efficiency gained by using workflow automation can allow for investment in a growth area (i.e., increased digital media budget for a new product launch). If you have to make a trade-off, make it a beneficial one.
Table 2: Framework for Marketing Operations Leaders, Forward Strategy No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Fix</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame marketing operations against the organization's priority weighting of efficiency and effectiveness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (August 2020)

Marketing Operations Proves Valuable Yet Lacks Consistent Definition of Scope and Responsibility

Out of the most vital marketing capabilities in 2020, Gartner’s 2020 CMO Spend Survey revealed that marketing operations is ranked third by CMOs behind brand strategy and marketing analytics, and above digital commerce (see “2020 CMO Spend Survey, Part 1: CMOs Gamble on Swift Recovery, but Strategic Priorities Reveal Hedging”). Even though the capability is still emerging, marketing operations is perceived as critical to the marketing organization and worthy of investment.

No matter which core mandates exist in marketing operations today, it is expanding beyond a variable set of four. When marketing leaders were asked what functions were currently under the marketing operations mandate, on average, they cited four to five from a list of 12. But the answers were a mixture with no clear role definition. Marketing operations leaders seem to inherit a random assortment of responsibilities that don’t fall elsewhere or that multiple people work on and no one person owns. One look at the functions, and it might seem absurd to expect a leader to handle such a wide range of responsibilities such as talent, tech and financial management while also building a culture of collaboration.

It appears that the role is created in increasingly complex marketing organizations to increase strategic alignment and effectiveness of the most-pressing operational issues du jour. In this way, the role resembles that of a chief of staff in that it is a service role to the CMO or chief marketing executive and the entire marketing organization. Or, the marketing operations leader’s role to the CMO could be viewed as the COO is to the CEO. Either way, it is a more vital, critical and strategic role than its name conveys.

By a slim margin, the most common primary responsibilities of the marketing operations function currently include financials, research, team collaboration and lead management (see Figure 3).
Figure 3: Marketing Activities Included in Current Marketing Operations Mandate

Our Marketing Organization Cannot Fully Maximize the Impact of Our Initiatives While Also Being Efficient

- Financial planning and budget management: 41%
- Customer/market/competitive intelligence research and insights: 40%
- Eliciting a culture of collaboration: 40%
- Campaign and lead management: 39%
- Performance measurement, benchmarking and analytics: 38%
- Marketing technology management: 38%
- Vendor/agency/supplier management: 38%
- Driving marketing innovation: 37%
- Strategic planning, alignment and execution oversight: 36%
- Workflow process governance and optimization: 35%
- Maintaining talent audits and capacity needs: 35%
- Data sourcing, consolidation and management: 34%

n = 429 Marketing Leaders
Q. Which function within your organization has primary responsibility for each of the following marketing activities?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey
ID: 730209
While the marketing operations role is gaining ground in some organizations across a wide swath of capabilities, marketing operations responsibilities in other organizations are primarily managed by others. Perhaps the latter is intentional, due to lack of bandwidth or because “it’s always been done that way.” Or it may be unintentional for the simple reason that it has never been discussed and appropriated. The responsibility of those operations functions that are either distributed across multiple groups within marketing or are performed outside of marketing altogether are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Marketing Activities Included in Current Marketing Operations Mandate

Our Marketing Organization Cannot Fully Maximize the Impact of Our Initiatives While Also Being Efficient

- Financial planning and budget management: 41% (Dedicated), 37% (Distributed), 23% (Function outside of marketing)
- Customer/market/competitive intelligence research/insights: 40% (Dedicated), 38% (Distributed), 22% (Function outside of marketing)
- Eliciting a culture of collaboration: 40% (Dedicated), 39% (Distributed), 21% (Function outside of marketing)
- Campaign and lead management: 39% (Dedicated), 41% (Distributed), 19% (Function outside of marketing)
- Performance measurement, benchmarking and analytics: 38% (Dedicated), 40% (Distributed), 22% (Function outside of marketing)
- Marketing technology management: 38% (Dedicated), 41% (Distributed), 20% (Function outside of marketing)
- Vendor/agency/supplier management: 38% (Dedicated), 38% (Distributed), 24% (Function outside of marketing)
- Driving marketing innovation: 37% (Dedicated), 40% (Distributed), 24% (Function outside of marketing)
- Strategic planning, alignment and execution oversight: 36% (Dedicated), 42% (Distributed), 22% (Function outside of marketing)
- Workflow process governance and optimization: 35% (Dedicated), 44% (Distributed), 21% (Function outside of marketing)
- Maintaining talent audits and capacity needs: 35% (Dedicated), 44% (Distributed), 21% (Function outside of marketing)
- Data sourcing, consolidation and management: 34% (Dedicated), 39% (Distributed), 27% (Function outside of marketing)

n = 429 Marketing Leaders
Q: Which function within your organization has primary responsibility for each of the following marketing activities? Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding. Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey
ID: 730209
For each of these marketing activities, surveyed marketing leaders told us that, on average:

- 38% were primarily managed by marketing operations
- 40% had distributed responsibility across multiple groups within marketing
- 22% were handled by a function outside of marketing.

It’s the 62% not managed by marketing operations that can be most worrisome to a CMO. Specifically, the distributed and decentralized responsibility may be a cause for concern and certainly a justification for the marketing operations function to be established. CMOs have less control and oversight if there is not a single organization or individual for oversight. This doesn’t mean the marketing operations leader should take over primary management of them all. It means it should be negotiated to ensure these responsibilities are managed in the best interest of the marketing organization.

Why? Marketers have deprioritized decentralization, with 66% having fully or primarily centralized organizational structures and another 23% as hybrid. This leaves only 11% using a fully or primarily decentralized organizational structure model. The survey also revealed that a marketing operations leader is more present in fully centralized structures as compared to those without, with a difference of 12 percentage points between the two.

This finding would be consistent with what Gartner experts are hearing from clients on inquiry calls. Even if marketing operations leaders are gravitating to a centralized structure, remote work and work-from-home arrangements have added an additional and unexpected decentralized layer to an already complex marketing organization.
The potential for marketing operations to drive both efficiency and effectiveness even against recent headwinds facing even centralized marketing organizations suggests that marketing operations should have more authority to reduce cost and drive operations decisions. Lack of standardization and mismanagement of resources can cause ineffective marketing operations or campaign management, which in turn can lead to missed opportunities and poor cost optimization. Marketers want more control and accountability within a flexible and adaptive environment, especially as they continue to shift more work like social and content marketing to in-house teams (see “2020 CMO Spend Survey, Part 2: CMOs Protect Digital Channels and Martech (for Now)”).

The imperative to clearly define marketing operations’ mandate is critical as marketing leaders plan to capitalize on the role’s early success by expanding it within the next 12 to 24 months. To wit, whatever marketing activities weren’t already included in the role are being emphasized as important to add. For example, data sourcing/consolidation/management was at the bottom of the list of current marketing operations activities, but at the top of the future mandate along with performance measurement.

Yet no part of the marketing operations role’s remit is deemphasized to any large degree. Management or at least oversight of many marketing activities is deemed a priority across the board. Everything within the function is valuable to perform, but without careful planning it may end up as unfunded mandates for rising marketing operations leaders. The result is that the marketing operations leader and the function as a whole is spread too thin to be effective overall. And that’s worth guarding against.

In sum, the entry point or what activities initially drive the creation of the marketing operations function matters less than the ability to shape the role effectively for each organization in the future. It may be that as the leader, the marketing operations function masters or optimizes some aspects like campaign management, then moves on to tackle more pressing issues like performance measurement (see Figure 5).
Figure 5: Marketing Operations Role Expands See Preview

Marketing Activities That Will Be Part Of Marketing Operations Mandate Within The Next 12 To 24 Months
Multiple Responses Allowed

- Data sourcing, consolidation and management: 29%
- Performance measurement, benchmarking and analytics: 29%
- Strategic planning, alignment and execution oversight: 28%
- Marketing technology management: 27%
- Maintaining talent audits and capacity needs: 26%
- Driving marketing innovation: 23%
- Customer/market/competitive intelligence research and insights: 23%
- Financial planning and budget management: 22%
- Workflow process governance and optimization: 22%
- Eliciting a culture of collaboration: 21%
- Campaign and lead management: 21%
- Vendor/agency/supplier management: 19%
- None of the above: 1%

n = 424 marketing teams where a dedicated marketing operations function has responsibility for at least one activity.

Q. Which of the following marketing activities do you believe will become part of the marketing operations team’s mandate within the next 12 to 24 months?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey; ID: 730209
ID: 730209
Notable in the future mandate survey data is a difference between organizations that already have a marketing operations leader and those that do not. The ones that do tend to be focused on effectiveness or at least prefer a balance between effectiveness and efficiency.

And the organizations with a marketing operations leader ranked the following higher than those without:

- Martech management (31% versus 23%, or a difference of 8 percentage points)
- Customer, market and competitive intelligence research and insights (28% versus 18%, or 10 percentage points)
- Vendor, agency and supplier management (24% versus 14%, or 10 percentage points)

These differences indicate the types of risks related to inefficiency or ineffectiveness that organizations with marketing operations leaders may perceive as most urgent. Perhaps there's higher spend or increased dependency of revenue or other results to be achieved that would cause these organizations to prioritize better operational management in these areas.

Interestingly, the activity of data sourcing, consolidation and management was a key area to add under the marketing operations purview for those organizations focused on efficiency. They may be witnessing too many problems or inefficiencies in this area to warrant a heavier level of oversight and coordination. Or they may desire more data-driven communications, personalization or automation.

**But no matter if the role currently exists or how it was originally created, the marketing operations function serves a critical purpose and delivers a tighter yet more adaptable marketing organization to the CMO.**
**Recommended Actions**

- **Rightsize the marketing operations function and role.** Align appropriately for your organization's efficiency and effectiveness leanings. Focus on three to five areas most critical to fix, and optimize those first. Continue to add responsibilities without overloading. Tacking on too much, too fast is typically a recipe for disaster. Most importantly, eliminate any responsibilities from your scope that ought to reside elsewhere.

- **Determine scope of authority.** Emphasize which marketing activities the marketing operations leader will own and lead versus share. For some activities, the leader may facilitate or oversee, but in collaboration within the marketing team or cross-functionally with other departments or functional areas. For example, a martech integration may involve multiple teams and require dependency of resources from procurement and IT, but marketing operations may lead.

- **Communicate your purpose.** Communicate a clear vision to the marketing organization and key stakeholders exactly what your role and mandate are and are not. Explain that you will strive for balance between efficiency and effectiveness without sacrificing one for the other. Clarify which operational initiatives align to key goals and how you will measure. Share that your ultimate goal is to run and optimize an effective marketing organization and to achieve marketing operational excellence.
The Most Valuable Operational KPIs Are Work Efficiency, Impact and Output

We’ve established that marketing operations entails a wide range of responsibilities depending on the organization’s needs. But how does the marketing operations leader calculate success? Our research demonstrates that the following actions are necessary to achieve overall success in the role:

1. Establish KPIs for measuring operational improvements.
2. Understand and address the top challenges for the role’s development.
3. Fix the underlying and fundamental weaknesses that negatively impact the marketing organization’s ability to execute and deliver against its marketing objectives.

To establish appropriate KPIs, survey respondents cited work efficiency, impact and output measurement, and alignment to business goals and strategic plans as paramount. Other key performance indicators mentioned were internal stakeholder satisfaction and martech utilization (see Figure 6).

Table 3 summarizes the best practices to complete Forward Strategy No. 2 for Marketing Operations Leaders.

Table 3: Framework for Marketing Operations Leaders, Forward Strategy No. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Fix</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame marketing operations against the organization’s priority weighting of efficiency and effectiveness.</td>
<td>Focus your various efforts into creating a clear and digestible mandate.</td>
<td>Fix underlying and fundamental weaknesses that negatively impact the marketing organization’s ability to execute and deliver against its marketing objectives.</td>
<td>Fix completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (August 2020)
In further evolving and developing yourself for the role, the marketing operations leader must demonstrate the connection of marketing strategy and objectives to specific operational improvements. In effect, every single improvement initiative is required to directly align to the overall strategy and objectives set forth by the CMO. Forty percent of marketing leaders surveyed reported this as their top challenge, with enhancing data analysis skills being a close second (see Figure 7).
No matter the role’s duties, marketing operations leaders must focus on fixing the marketing organization’s biggest weaknesses. Indeed, those weaknesses are likely to be the justification for any marketing operations leader’s presence and should be the primary focus before any expansion in the scope of the role.

The top marketing operations impediments are:

- Lack of team communication and collaboration
- Inability to use martech
- Execution not linked to strategy
- Poorly designed processes (see Figure 8)
**Figure 8: Marketing Operations Leaders Must Fix Organizational and Operational Weaknesses**

### Weaknesses Impacting Marketing Team’s Ability to Execute and Deliver

- **Lack of team communication and collaboration**: 35% (Sum of Top 3), 10% (1st choice)
- **Inability to fully utilize existing marketing technologies**: 34%, 12%
- **Marketing strategy and execution not effectively linked**: 33%, 13%
- **Poorly designed or missing business processes (operational, data management and measurement)**: 32%, 12%
- **Lack of team agility and flexibility**: 31%, 11%
- **Lack of staffing capacity**: 30%, 9%
- **Existing staff lack necessary skills and capabilities**: 29%, 11%
- **Poor organizational alignment, transparency and accountability**: 28%, 10%
- **Insufficient budget**: 28%, 10%

*n = 429 Marketing Leaders
Q. What are the main weaknesses impacting your marketing team’s ability to execute and deliver against its marketing objectives?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey
ID: 730209
These weaknesses are accentuated in decentralized marketing organizations — quite significantly in some cases (see Figure 9):

- 46% of marketing leaders with decentralized structures said that “ineffective linking between marketing strategy and execution” is their largest weakness. Compare that to 30% of those with centralized structures; a 16 percentage-point difference.

- 39% of marketing leaders with decentralized structures said that their “existing staff lacks necessary skills and capabilities” is their primary weakness. Compare this to only 26% of those with centralized structures; a 13 percentage-point difference.

Figure 9: Top Weaknesses Impacting Marketing Teams by Team Structure

Top Weaknesses Impacting Marketing Team’s Ability to Deliver Against Marketing Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Orgs with Decentralized Structure</th>
<th>Orgs with Centralized Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing strategy and execution not effectively linked</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to fully utilize existing marketing technologies</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing staff lack necessary skills and capabilities</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor organizational alignment, transparency and accountability</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorly designed or missing business processes</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient budget</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of team communication and collaboration</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of staffing capacity</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of team agility and flexibility</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 429 Marketing Leaders. Base sizes vary by segment.
Q. What are the main weaknesses impacting your marketing team’s ability to execute and deliver against its marketing objectives?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey; ID: 730209
On the flip side, our research shows that “lack of team agility and flexibility” is accentuated within central and hybrid marketing organizational structures: 31% in centralized and 38% in hybrid, compared to 22% in decentralized structures.

This combined data explains that, while decentralized structures may be more flexible and agile, they can prove to be challenging to manage operationally because other weaknesses substantially emerge. It also would explain why marketing leaders are putting the brakes on decentralization and keeping centralized or hybrid models. The conclusion? The marketing operations function is required within complex marketing org structures, including when various models are used such as in-house agencies and centers of excellence (COEs) or centers of competency (COCs), as often seen in global marketing organizations.

**Recommended Actions**

- Prioritize your top 5 operational KPIs. Set up tracking mechanisms and get agreement with senior leaders.

- Develop a comprehensive but targeted training plan for the marketing operations leader. For CMOs, this could be for newly created operations leader positions or those created by the operations leaders themselves. Be aware that there may be nuances in required skills. For example, marketing organizations that lean toward efficiency (which may be an initial goal until somewhat mastered) may need the marketing operations leader (or team members) to possess data analysis skills.

- Solve for operational weaknesses. Add each organizational weakness to the marketing operations project roadmap. Work toward strengthening operations with strategies and tactics to address each one. Be aware of how the range of complexity in your organization’s structure may contribute to or change the weaknesses that are most evident.
Surprisingly, an Average of 43% of Marketers Still Use Spreadsheets (at Best) to Manage Key Activities

Surprisingly, on average, 43% of marketers surveyed still do not use any kind of modern martech to manage key marketing activities — hindering the marketing team’s ability to meet objectives. It leaves a big gaping hole in their martech stack, causing their organization to fly blindly while trying to execute. They’ve checked all the other boxes but forgot the operational martech to help their teams — often hundreds of people spread across the world and now working remotely — get work done.

On average, 8% of respondents cited that they do not manage marketing activities through any type of software tool. And an average of about 35% said that they use traditional office software such as spreadsheets, email and document management systems (see Figure 10).
Figure 10: How Key Marketing Operational Activities Are Managed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Through a MWM platform</th>
<th>Through CWM, DAM or PPM</th>
<th>Through spreadsheets, etc.</th>
<th>Not managed with any system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request intake and management</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource allocation/capacity management</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational performance management</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Asset Management</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand management and localization</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign planning and execution</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content marketing</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget planning and measurement</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 424 Marketers with at least one function in the organization that has a dedicated marketing operations function
Q. How is your marketing organization currently managing the workflow of each of the following marketing activities?
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding. Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey
ID: 730209
Yet, about 57% are using some type of modern martech to manage work. They either use a marketing work management (MWM) platform, a collaborative work management (CWM) platform, a project and portfolio management (PPM) platform or a digital asset management (DAM) platform. While our research didn’t specify, they may also use a content marketing platform (CMP). Therefore, most marketers are, in fact, using modern tools with features that help improve and automate the management of marketing work and projects.

The main platform used by marketing operations leaders is a marketing work management platform (see “Market Guide for Marketing Work Management Platforms”).

Despite potential underinvestments in technology, Gartner continues to see changes in actual work processes. When it comes to specific project management methods, we — not surprisingly — learned two things from survey respondents: They use both traditional and agile methods, and agile methods deliver on effectiveness (see Figure 11).

Given all we have covered about marketing operations, it is dumbfounding that only a little more than half of respondents are using operational technology.
Figure 11: Agile Edges Out Traditional Project Management Methods for Effectiveness

Marketing Task Effectiveness by Project Management Approach
Percentage Citing Very/Extremely Effective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>Traditional Project Management</th>
<th>Agile Project Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensing and responding to changes in the business context as they happen</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing, prioritizing, and aligning marketing projects</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executing projects at or under the projected time frame</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting content and messaging to reflect shifts in customer sentiment</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executing projects at or under the expected budget</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 429 Marketing Leaders, base varies by statement; excluding not sure
Q. Please rate how effective your marketing organization is at each of the following. 5 pt. scale where 1 = Not at all effective and 5 = Extremely effective
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey; ID: 730209
Ideally, the selected marketing work management platform should provide the ability for marketers to work in increasingly agile ways. In this way, it is easy to allocate a dedicated resource team to a design sprint, and view and change project data on a team Kanban board. Remote teams can effortlessly collaborate with contractors or agency talent, and take on various hybrid forms beyond the norm.

Moving projects from traditional methods to agile methods can be infused into the way teams work and the tools they use, rather than making “agile” such a drastic change management effort that serves more as an impediment than a gateway to success. A marketing work management platform should provide various ways of working because not all projects are the same. Nor are the needs of the users.

But even beyond methodology, to fulfill many of the current and potentially increasing marketing operations responsibilities, you must invest in and adequately utilize a marketing work management platform or preferably a combination of operational martech.

It’s a true and valid concern that lack of utilization of all martech features can be costly or prevent a marketing operations leader from meeting their objectives and goals in streamlining and simplifying operations. However, 100% utilization of all features is not the goal. In fact, in Gartner’s 2019 Marketing Technology Survey, respondents cited that those who perceived their overall martech stack as effective used an average of 59% capacity (see “Marketing Technology Survey 2019: Marketers Boost Martech Efficacy Through Disciplined Planning and Collaboration With IT”).

As we compare that finding to this survey, marketers are citing usage of 56% of the capabilities of their marketing work management platforms. That’s a solid number, yet offers room for improvement (see Figure 12).
Figure 12: Why Marketing Leaders Underutilize Marketing Work Management Platforms

Percentage of Capabilities of MWM Platform Being Utilized

- % of capabilities utilized 56%
- % of capabilities not utilized 44%

Primary Reason Not Utilizing MWM Platform to Full Capacity

- Current utilization is meeting most of our needs: 22%
- Lack the necessary resources to support the technology: 22%
- Current system lacks necessary capabilities to support our complex environment: 21%
- Current system is too complex, causing low adoption: 19%
- Do not have the right dashboards, data feeds or integrations: 14%
- None of the above: 2%

n = 388 Marketers currently managing the workflow through a marketing work management platform; excluding not sure.
Q. Thinking about the full set of capabilities currently available to you in your marketing work management platform, what percentage of those capabilities do you believe your marketing organization is utilizing today?
Source: 2020 Gartner Marketing Operations and Organization Survey; ID: 730209
For the most part, marketers who use a marketing work management platform are using a good percentage of the tool’s capabilities, and 22% believe that the current utilization is meeting most of their needs. However, another 22% lack the necessary resources to support the technology, and about the same, 21%, feel their current system can’t support their complex environment. Conversely, 19% say the system is too complex from a user standpoint, causing low adoption. And 14% think the system is not configured properly with the right dashboards, data feeds or integrations.

Therefore, marketing operations leaders must assess or reassess their use case of a marketing work management tool and ensure it aligns to their needs. Using the “Market Guide to Marketing Work Management Platforms,” the marketing operations leader can take the following actions:

- Document the MWM use case with requirements and specifications. Understand that the use case for marketing can be more complex than is required for a more standard collaboration and project management tool.

- Map out the necessary integrations with other tools in the martech stack.

- Ensure the marketing work management platform and the users are fully supported with system administration, ongoing optimization, system design, training and onboarding.

- Design dashboards that meet the needs of the various user types doing the work, from project managers to executives at the C-suite level. Each requires different needs, data and analytics.

- Improve the overall utilization rate of the capabilities within your current MWM platform. If you’re at 50% now, what would it take for you to get to 75%, which would be a terrific number based on peer benchmarks of martech stacks in general?

**Recommended Actions**

- Propose an MWM platform to your manager or the CMO, with specifications and requirements. Draft an RFP if needed. Include the appropriate level of staffing to manage the tool — at minimum, you will require one point person. Larger and more complex marketing organizations may require a small team.

- Explore and experiment with agile marketing methods. This can be supported by the adoption of an MWM platform and through other business processes and operational adaptations.

- Optimize the MWM platform for your organization’s needs with proper system design, including intake forms and data fields, training, dashboards, integrations and workflow automation.
Table 5 summarizes the best practices to complete Forward Strategy No. 4 for Marketing Operations Leaders. Use this now final and simple framework to construct, protect, optimize and promote the marketing operations role and function within your organization.

Table 5: Framework for Marketing Operations Leaders, Forward Strategy No. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Fix</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame marketing operations against the organization’s priority weighting of efficiency and effectiveness.</td>
<td>Focus your various efforts into creating a clear and digestible mandate.</td>
<td>Fix the biggest operational weaknesses within your marketing organization.</td>
<td>Appropriately fit and optimize your marketing work management platform and operational martech to match the needs of your marketing organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gartner (August 2020)
Methodology
Gartner 2020 Marketing Operations and Organization Survey: The purpose of this survey was to validate organizational and operational challenges that most impact marketing organizational and operational effectiveness today. The research was conducted online from May 2020 through June 2020 among 429 respondents in the United States (41%), Canada (5%), France (12%), Germany (12%) and the United Kingdom (30%). Respondents were required to have involvement in decisions related to aligning marketing budget, resources and processes and/or marketing operations. Ninety-one percent of the respondents came from organizations with $1 billion or more in annual revenue. The respondents came from a variety of industries: financial services (53 respondents), high tech (49 respondents), manufacturing (59 respondents), consumer products (51 respondents), media (48 respondents), retail (60 respondents), healthcare providers (46 respondents), IT and business services (22 respondents), and travel and hospitality (41 respondents). The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts who follow marketing and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner’s Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Additional research contribution and review
Additional research contribution and review was provided by Karen Carter of Gartner’s Primary Research Management Business team.

Acronym Key and Glossary Terms
MarketingWork Management (MWM) Platform
Tools and technologies to support the ideation, creation, production and management of marketing materials and related projects. This category includes multipurpose project management platforms, enterprise work management solutions and purpose-built marketing and creative operations tools.
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- Maturity Model for Managing Marketing Resources
- Marketing Operations Primer for 2020
- How to Prioritize and Manage Marketing Project Requests and Optimize the Intake Process

**Recommended for you**
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- Marketing Operations Primer for 2020
- Maturity Model for Marketing Operations
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