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Evolution of the Marketing Operating Model

ISBA

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Introduction

Every conversation I've had with a marketing leader over the last 12 months has uncovered the same tension. The role of the CMO has never been broader and the pressure to deliver has never been greater.

The complexity within which CMOs are operating is mind-blowing. Data and technology have fundamentally transformed the way that marketing is delivered, and many marketing functions which were designed against a rhythm of campaigns and seasons are trying desperately to deliver against an always-on, personalised, ever-changing, multi-platform, high-speed content world. And, of course, juggling all these moving parts has to come hand in hand with the justification of every penny invested.

With all this pressure, marketers simply cannot afford situations where their strategy is hampered or undeliverable due to operational issues.

The importance of the marketing operating model, or as we refer to it at AAR, 'The How' of marketing, is now as important as a great marketing strategy. They are the yin and yang of a marketer's role. Ensuring seamless integration of your people, partners, process, and platforms is just as crucial as 'The What' (strategy, creative, media etc.) of marketing.

What I'm hearing repeatedly, however, is that most marketers don't have the skills, time and resources to focus on, develop, build and optimise effective models.

AAR commissioned this report as we hear loud and clear that marketers are hungry for support and guidance on how to navigate this challenge. Our ambition is partly to evidence the issues they're facing but, more importantly, to offer advice and a perspective from both our own AAR experts and a wonderful panel of CMOs from organisations that are deep in transformation of their models.

There is no silver bullet and none of them will tell you they've got all the answers or that they've reached any kind of finish line, but they have been generous enough to highlight the challenges they've come up against and learnings they have had on their journeys.

For us, this is gold dust.

The team at AAR is packed full of marketing specialists who get excited at the idea of getting under the bonnet of marketing operating models. Having all worked in either brands or agencies, our consultants understand the depths of these challenges and the importance of navigating them to achieve marketing's goals. We know clients need pragmatic advice that will crucially ensure efficiency whilst simultaneously improving effectiveness. Too often it is efficiencies alone that are the focus as they are easier to spot and deliver. The harder part is designing a model that unleashes the potential of a great marketing strategy at the same time. This ensures that any changes don't undermine the value marketing can bring to a business. This is the nirvana we aim for.

To try to achieve this, we have pulled examples from the work we have undertaken with our clients alongside the thoughts from CMOs, to demonstrate that there are potential solutions. Our hope is that we can help other marketers who are either already or about to embark on this journey to avoid rabbit holes and find ways to accelerate their plans.

We have partnered with ISBA on this project, who have a committee dedicated to the marketing operating model led by Nicki Brown from the BBC. When we discussed the idea for this report they agreed that marketers are hungry for advice and insight from others who are trying to figure this out.

Nick Louisson, Director of Agency Services at ISBA, said:

> *In an era marked by increasing complexity, fragmentation, and rapid technological advancements, our industry continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. The priorities set by our members for 2025 highlight that this rate of change is accelerating. Adapting to these trends to deliver effective marketing remains a top priority. As the landscape becomes more intricate, teams often find themselves working in silos, disconnected from other parts of their organisation. This is why initiatives like ISBA's Future Operating Model group are invaluable, offering a unique platform for members from various disciplines to explore these trends collectively. Reports like this one are essential, as they consolidate insights from advertisers across our industry, providing a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities ahead."*

This is a meaty topic that is impossible to distil too far as, in reality, the devil is in the detail. We have designed the report so that it can either be read from the beginning to the end, or if you have a question around one of the four Ps (people, partners, process, platforms) you can jump to the relevant chapter and its highlights.

If you have specific questions that aren't covered, want an AAR perspective or would like us to point you towards a client that is tackling a similar challenge, please get in touch. After all, it's in the best interests of our industry for marketers to succeed and to ensure marketing keeps its position at the top table. It's worrying to hear in our discussions with senior marketers and NEDs that marketing is losing its footing in the boardroom, often to the CFO or CTO. Operationalising marketing will help to ensure a marketing strategy delivers the outcomes it promises to the business and our profession retains the respect and status it deserves.

It's time for a new dawn in marketing.

Victoria Fox
Chief Executive Officer | AAR
vfox@aargroup.co.uk

Methodology

This report has drawn from both quantitative and qualitative research by AAR. The quantitative work, conducted by Yolo Communications during September 2024, involved a survey of over 100 CMOs, Marketing Directors and CEOs of medium to large sized B2B, B2C and B2B2C businesses and adhered to the UK Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct (2023). This was augmented by a comprehensive series of in-depth interviews along with extensive desk research into evolving marketing operating models.

AAR would like to thank the following interviewees for their invaluable insights:

Becky Brock
Customer & Digital Director
Tesco

Paul Stevenson
Former Customer Marketing Director
Virgin Media O2

Nicki Brown
Director of Media
BBC

Antonia Wade
Global CMO
PwC

Margaret Jobling
CMO
NatWest Group

Peter Wright
CMO
Specsavers

Kate Mackie
Global iGTM Lead
EY

Peter Zillig
Director of Marketing
Ford

Monica Pool
CMO
KFC UK & Ireland

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

In today's fast-evolving marketing landscape, a high-performing Marketing Operating Model (MOM) is essential to ensure agility, efficiency, and measurable business impact. Focusing on the 'HOW' of marketing as well as the traditional 'WHAT' (strategy, creative, media), and generating synergies across people, partners, process, and platforms will create genuine advantage for the future.

This report draws on insights from over 100 CMOs, Marketing Directors, and CEOs across diverse sectors to provide a roadmap for optimising MOMs and aligning them with business objectives.

A robust MOM enables organisations to ensure their **people** have the right capabilities, their **partners** are delivering effectively, their **processes** are clear and well-governed, and their **platforms** are seamlessly embedded.

The headline findings of this report are:

- Only **51%** of CMOs believe their MOM is high performing.

- **36%** of organisations introduced Marketing Operations teams in the past 12 months, but most marketing functions are lacking efficiencies and data-driven decision-making.

- CMOs are re-evaluating their agency and in-house models; **44%** are developing in-house media capabilities, yet another **41%** are planning to eliminate their in-house agency and re-outsource the work.

- Balancing traditional linear workflows with agile approaches for always-on content is vital to meeting dynamic marketing demands.

- **52%** of CMOs are trialling GenAI, which presents both opportunities and challenges for all four MOM pillars.

- Over half **(52%)** of CMOs foresee the ability for media and creative to work effectively together as one of the biggest challenges in the next year.

- **41%** believe their agency roster is not fit for purpose.

This report emphasises that a well-designed MOM is more than a response to change. It's evident from our research that efficiency and impact in resourcing and process will be critical areas of focus for CMOs over the next 12 months. And it's clear that an effective MOM is a vital strategic enabler of growth, customer engagement, and operational excellence. By aligning people, partners, process, and platforms, CMOs can ensure agility, efficiency, and measurable business impact, therefore positioning marketing as a driving force behind business success in an increasingly complex environment.

5 THINGS TO KEEP TOP OF MIND...

1 As we emphasise throughout this report, thinking and planning for an optimised marketing operating model should no longer be the afterthought to a well developed marketing strategy. It should occupy the same level of attention and resource. Without the right operating model, your marketing strategy will be hamstrung at best, and fail at worst.

2 In order for your marketing operating model to succeed, it must link closely to your marketing and business strategy. You cannot implement an effective model with a lack of strategic vision and alignment.

3 No matter where you start your marketing operating model transformation, remember to consider all four Ps - people, partners, process, and platforms. Each is interconnected and a change to one area will inevitably impact on the others.

4 People are the core of any transformation. Remember to bring them with you and don't underestimate the impact of change fatigue and the need to always maintain a space for divergent views and late adopters.

5 The most successful marketing operating model evolutions have a clear three year plan, dedicated resource, and an approved business case with board level buy-in. Marketing operating model transformation is not a "side of the desk" project!

What is a Marketing Operating Model (MOM)?
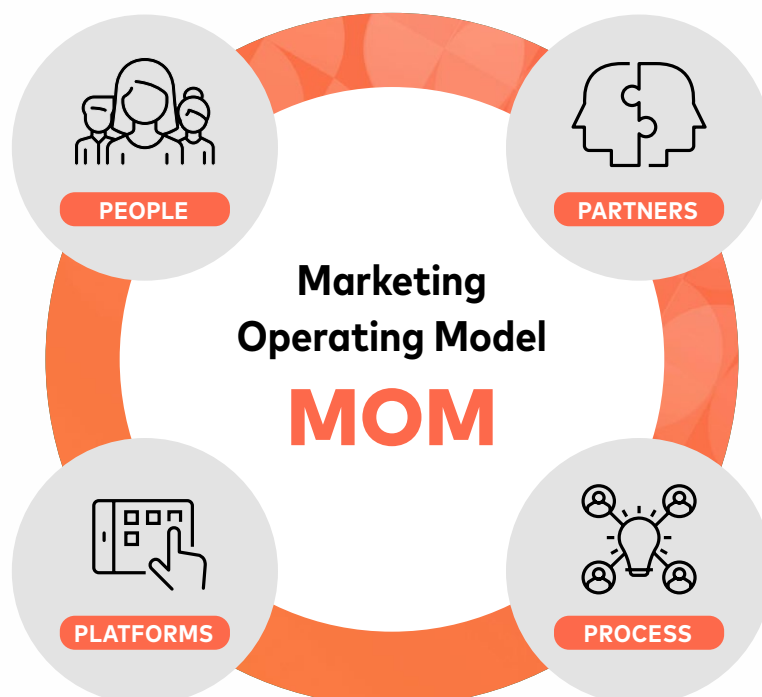
What is a 'marketing operating model' (MOM)?

A Marketing Operating Model (MOM) defines how a marketing organisation is structured, governed, and operates to achieve strategic goals. It is the sum total of HOW marketing gets delivered. At its core, a well-designed MOM bridges strategy and execution, bringing together four critical elements— people, partners, process, and platforms—to deliver marketing efficiently and effectively while staying aligned with business priorities, evolving customer needs, and market dynamics.

PEOPLE: Encompassing organisational design, skills, resourcing, and evolving roles. It includes structuring for success, balancing centralised and decentralised resources, building core competencies, and enabling cross-functional collaboration.

PARTNERS: Choosing the right partners, ensuring the model they operate within is clear, and optimising collaboration between them and any in-house agency resource. This includes building an agency model where roles and responsibilities are clear for each partner, balancing in-house and external expertise, driving performance accountability, and refining remuneration models.

PROCESS: Defining ways of working and governance to align strategy with outcomes. Focus areas include campaign planning and development, ways of working between agencies, in-house teams and marketing to drive efficient collaboration, streamlined operations, support automation, and robust measurement frameworks to drive impact.

PLATFORMS: Covering marketing technologies and tools that enable seamless workflows, data integration, and campaign optimisation. It includes investment in technology, integration across business areas, and leveraging AI and Generative AI to enhance outcomes.

Marketing
Operating Model
MOM

PEOPLE · PARTNERS · PLATFORMS · PROCESS

> *Increasing complexity has led to the need for CMOs to go beyond strategy and execution and more deliberately consider how they can establish the right operating model. Marketing is now a system with many interconnected parts which need to be organised carefully to deliver the best outcomes."*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

At its simplest level the marketing strategy flows from the business strategy but is enabled by the marketing operating model.

Figure 1: Business and marketing strategy feeding into the MOM

In this report, we'll explore how marketing operating models are evolving, providing practical guidance through the lens of these four key pillars to help teams deliver impact at scale and speed.

The context for change

The context for change

Marketing functions are operating in an environment that is changing rapidly, and likely to continue to do so, driven not least by the ever-expanding possibilities created by AI. Underpinning this rapid change are pressures for CMOs to do more with less, drive ever greater efficiencies, deliver short term wins and keep up with fundamental shifts in the technology landscape. Yet alongside these not insignificant challenges, new operating models, new ways of working, the shift to always-on, putting data at the heart of decision-making and new AI tools are creating new possibilities and the potential for marketing to increase the value it can bring to any business.

Key challenges

Marketing functions are operating in increasingly fast-moving, challenging and uncertain environments, leading to some notable challenges which frame the context for our look at MOMs.

Our quantitative survey asked respondents to rate how concerned they were about a broad range of issues.

#	On a scale of 0-10 (where 0 = "Not concerned at all" and 10 = "Extremely concerned"), please tell us how concerned you are about the following issues	Average
1	Proving marketing's value to the board	7.5
2	The drive to do more with less	7.4
2	The value and remit of my in-house agency	7.4
4	The evolution of my marketing operating model (people, partners, process, platforms)	7.3
5	The struggle for talent	7.2
5	The practical uses and impact of GenAI for marketing	7.2
5	The value of my agencies	7.2
8	Keeping up with the speed of change	7.1
9	Finding growth in an uncertain economic environment	6.9

Top of the list was the ability to prove the value of marketing to the board and the drive to do more with less. This reflects the growing pressure on CMOs to demonstrate clear value and accountability in relation to business and commercial outcomes, which is now greater than ever. There were also high scores for concerns around the value and remit of both in-house and external agencies (which will be covered in the Partners section of this report), the struggle for talent (People), and the practical uses and impact of GenAI (Platforms). Even though it is lower on the list, finding growth in an uncertain environment still scores relatively highly, indicating an ongoing challenge which has not become any easier for CMOs to manage.

What is notable is how close the scoring is on all these issues, indicating that CMOs feel that they are facing multiple simultaneous challenges. Concerns around the evolution of the marketing model is fourth on the list, showing just how critical getting the right MOM is to deal with the many disparate challenges.

> *There is more for marketing to do than ever before, and a plethora of different ways to connect with customers, which means a pressure to do more with less and a heightened focus on both effectiveness and efficiency."*
>
> **Victoria Fox, CEO, AAR**

Looking forwards, the need to derive increased value and efficiency from in-house and external agencies emerged as one of the key areas of focus. Over half **(52%)** of CMOs foresee that the ability for media and creative to work effectively together will be one of the biggest challenges in the next year, and a significant minority **(41%)** believe that their agency roster is not fit for purpose.

Response to challenges

The four pillars of a MOM are clearly represented in how CMOs are responding to these headwinds. When asked to identify what changes, if any, they have made in the last 12 months to address their organisation's marketing challenges, CMOs listed a combination of people, partners, process, and platforms responses.

#	What changes have you made in the last 12 months, if any, to address your organisation's marketing challenges? Tick all that apply.	Average
1	Implemented GenAI trials	52%
2	Introduced new ways of working and governance	46%
2	Restructured teams and/or reduced headcount	46%
4	Introduced a marketing operations function/team	36%
5	Reviewed our agency roster	33%
5	Reviewed our in-house agency	33%
7	Reviewed our marketing operating model	21%
8	Undertaken a marketing capability audit	6%

Top of the list is the implementation of GenAI trials **(52%)** which is clearly seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. This is followed by the introduction of new ways of working and new governance process, restructuring and resource changes, and reviews of agency partner rosters and in-house agency resources.

Partnerships will evidently be a key area of focus over the next year, notably striking the right balance between in-house and external creative and media resources. There will likely be some significant shifts in this area. Almost a half of CMOs are looking to develop in-house creative production **(46%)** or media **(44%)** capabilities, but it was also notable that a similar proportion **(41%)** are looking to eliminate the in-house agency and re-outsource the work.

We will look in greater detail at each of the four pillars in the MOM, but a consistent theme from our research is the need to align MOMs with business imperatives, and to design the MOM in a way that can demonstrate clear business and commercial benefit whilst also driving efficiencies.

> *The marketing operating model has to service the business operating model."*
> **Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY**

MOM transformation

Our survey revealed that only a half **(51%)** of CMOs would classify their MOM as 'high performing' whilst another **41%** say that they are 'getting there', demonstrating that there is still much work to be done. When CMOs were asked what might prevent changes to the MOM, some not insignificant barriers to change emerged. It was particularly notable that **12%** of CMOs said that a barrier to transformation was not knowing where to start.

#	What might prevent you undertaking changes to your marketing operating model? Select a maximum of your top 5 most important reasons	%
1	Access to robust and credible benchmark information	54%
2	Creating the business case for change	48%
3	Ability to keep the team motivated and performing during change cycles	47%
4	Knowledge of what other clients and categories are doing	46%
5	Risk to the business whilst the change is happening	34%
6	Lack of budget	30%
7	Time it will take to secure funding (budget/FTE)	16%
8	Lack of time	15%
9	Not knowing where to start	12%
10	Our marketing operating model is performing well already	1%

The objective of transforming the MOM is often a combination of a desire to drive greater efficiency, and also to be fit-for-purpose to drive marketing and business effectiveness. Taking these two facets, we can represent the ideal, high value MOM as bringing together both of these in a way that generates maximum impact.

Figure 2: The High-Value MOM
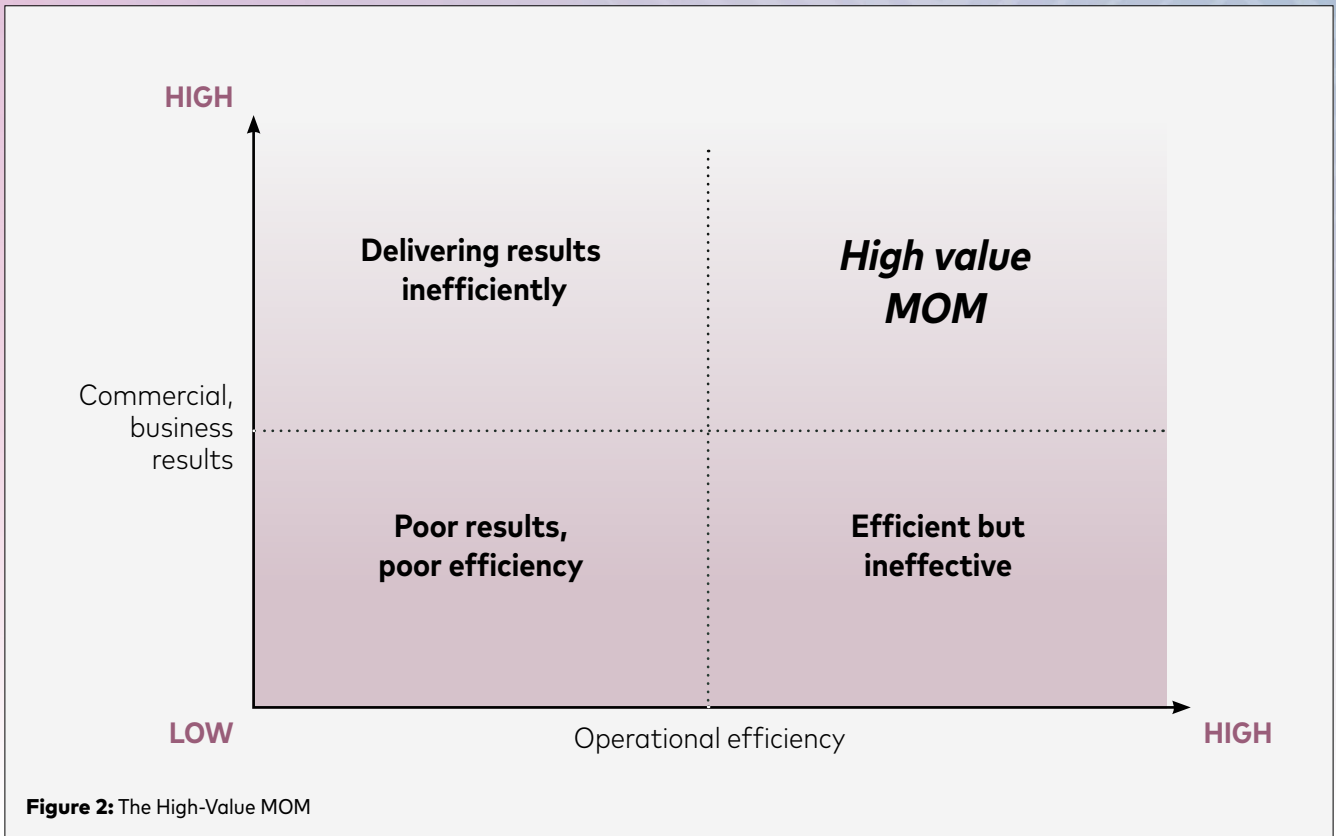
The growing complexity of marketing means that it is now a system of many moving parts, and the role of the CMO is increasingly as the conductor of a sophisticated marketing orchestra whose job it is to get all of the separate instruments to come together in one beautiful assembly.

> *The reality of aligning marketing closely to achieving business strategy means that CMOs are increasingly having to look hard at their MOM. It's not enough to have a clear marketing strategy, you need to also focus on the 'how' of delivering that strategy."*
>
> **Victoria Fox, CEO, AAR**

The evolving role of the CMO

The evolving role of the CMO

The role of the CMO is evolving rapidly, driven by the increasing importance of data and technology in shaping modern marketing strategies and the need to manage an increasingly complex set of challenges, opportunities, responsibilities and needs. Today's CMOs need to go beyond traditional brand stewardship to become orchestrators of complex, technology-enabled operating models that span data analytics, customer experience, digital channels, traditional marketing and AI-driven automation and personalisation.

The opportunity that CMOs have is to go beyond marcomms and bring a true customer focus to the business that can drive business growth."

Becky Brock, Customer and Digital Director, Tesco

They increasingly need to oversee and coordinate an ever more diverse set of resources and skillsets towards the achievement of marketing and commercial results. They need to ensure that working practices are integrated well across multiple areas and also aligned closely to the needs of the wider business. They must champion the value of marketing within the organisation, advocating for its impact on growth, customer loyalty, and competitive advantage. This role requires not only a visionary and strategic approach but also strong collaboration, coordination and communication skills to secure support and resources from stakeholders, and to prove marketing's essential role in business success. As the HOW of marketing becomes as important as the WHAT of marketing, CMOs need strong operational capabilities alongside more traditional functional and strategic skills.

To be truly effective, CMOs need to bring together brand and performance to deliver commercial impact. They need to be able to align marketing strategy closely to business objectives and translate marketing results using financial and commercial language."

Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY

Given the complexity of the modern CMO role, you could be forgiven for thinking that it has become an almost impossible job. In the results of our CMO survey there was both optimism and acknowledgement of specific challenges.

#	In terms of the role of the CMO, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree")	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1	The talent pathway for future marketing leaders/CMOs is clear	42%	39%
2	I am optimistic that the role of the CMO will continue to grow in relevance	54%	33%
3	CMOs have a greater opportunity to influence change at board level	51%	30%
4	We do not all have the right skillsets to meet current marketing/business demands	29%	39%
5	We are under too much pressure from the board to deliver quick results	38%	28%
6	The role of the CMO has become more challenging and complicated	42%	16%

66%

of CMOs believe that they are under too much pressure from the board to deliver quick results

58%

of CMOs agreed that the role of the CMO is becoming more challenging and complicated

The relationship between marketing and the rest of the business

CMOs and leadership

There was consistent feedback from our interviewees that great CMOs bring together both marketing excellence and exceptional leadership skills. This naturally involves a focus not only on the marketing team, but on the relationship that marketing has with the rest of the business, notably on collaboration, strategic alignment, and influence across the organisation.

Driven by the increasingly horizontal nature of customer experience, the need for the marketing agenda to be ever more closely aligned with business objectives and to demonstrate business-wide impact, it has become more important than ever for marketers to build strong, cross-functional relationships. This includes the ability to effectively influence the CFO and CEO and to lead both upwards and across functions to ensure success.

The CMO of the future will need to create an environment in which people can do their best work, to move away from rigidly hierarchical and rigid structures, to be clear on commercial realities and be able to hold their own in the boardroom, be able to challenge entrenched positions on what customers need, and act as the voice of the customer in the business."

Antonia Wade, Global CMO, PwC

It's clear that the environment for CMOs is potentially more challenging than ever, with multiple competing priorities to juggle, a continuous need to demonstrate the value of the function, and to invest in the long term rather than simply drive short term results. This has been brought into even sharper focus by the reality of low growth environments and markets, and a raft of other pressures which are vying for the CEO's attention.

> *We believe in the value of creating a positive tension between customer experience, commercial drivers and operational priorities – they should have equal weight, rather than one subsumed by another."*
>
> **Becky Brock, Customer and Digital Director, Tesco**

CMOs and the board

Over the long term, the proportion of CMOs that sit on the board has declined. A US-focused recent study by Spencer Stuart found that only 41 of the Fortune 1000 companies have a current sitting CMO on their board[1]. Yet the study also found that value which traditionally falls within marketing, such as brand and brand growth, customer focus, data mastery, and strategic vision are highly valued at the most senior levels. This is an opportunity for the marketing function, but also for CMOs, to have a more significant voice at the top table. Commercial and financial literacy and broader operational understanding, when combined with more traditional marketing strengths such as brand building and customer insights, can help smooth the path to the board for the CMO.

> *CMOs need to do a better job at marketing the value of the marketing function across both the board and the rest of the business."*
>
> **Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY**

A key dynamic – the CMO/CFO relationship

One of the most critical board level relationships for the CMO is that with the CFO. It will ultimately be the CEO and CFO that the CMO will need to influence to justify the value of marketing budgets or to secure investment for transforming the MOM. This can be especially challenging, says Victoria Fox at AAR, for investments which have a long-term pay back, particularly when there is significant change at the enterprise level (for example from shifts in supply chains). A study by the CMO Council found that almost **80%** of CMO-CFO relationships are not conducive to collaborating well on goals, measures, and investments[2].

[1] https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/cmos-and-the-latest-corporate-board-trends
[2] https://www.cmocouncil.org/about/media-center/press-releases/marketing-and-finance-leaders-seek-collaboration-to-make-smarter-investments-says-cmo-council-and-kpmg

There are several strategies that CMOs can implement to establish a constructive and advantageous relationship with the CFO. Transparency is key to unlocking a more productive relationship, and to building the trust necessary for long-term collaboration. CFOs will be looking for returns, and so the ability to demonstrate business impact will be key. If this is difficult to define, a collaborative approach to determining return on investment is useful. In addition, the more that CMOs understand the priorities of the CFO, how they judge value, speak their language, and focus on commercial benefits, the more likely it is that CFOs will see marketing as an engine for growth rather than simply a cost to the business. Focusing on metrics that are important to both marketing and finance, creating transparency around spending, and also balancing short- and long-term value creation will be key.

This also relates to how CFOs and businesses account for the more intangible assets such as brand value.

> *'It's hard to quantify the worth of the brand building work that marketing teams do but it has huge value for the business. Perhaps it is time that the value of brand was accounted for in a more robust way on the balance sheet. After all, when investors value a company, they often take into account the strength of the brand as a key value driver."*
>
> **Victoria Fox, CEO, AAR**
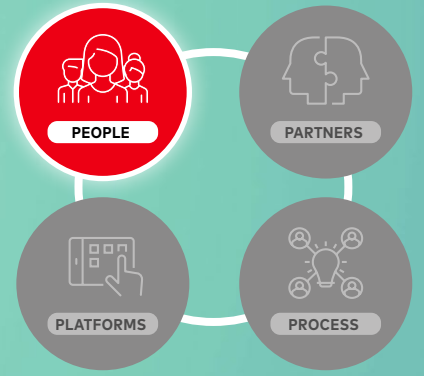
People

People

When discussing their MOM, a consistent theme from the interviewees is the 'right-sizing' and 'right-sourcing' of teams – getting the right resource (internal or external) with the right skills in the right place doing the right thing at the right cost base. The 'people' implications of this reach deeply into skills, capability, organisational design and culture. In this section we will look at all of these areas and what this means for the evolution of the MOM.

The capabilities conundrum

With rapidly changing environments, the evolution of working practices to be more data-driven and adaptive, and the ongoing impacts of new technologies, it's clear that skills and capabilities are consistent and necessary areas of focus for CMOs. Nonetheless, our CMO survey revealed some concerning gaps in investment.

Only **50%** of **CMOs** have dedicated marketing capability resource and budget

Considering that only a quarter **(25%)** of respondents said that they had a bespoke future fit skills strategy for the marketing function, and that a majority **(68%)** of CMOs in our survey believe that they do not all have the right skillsets to meet current marketing and business demands, this raises the spectre of a skills gap which is already significant but which could well get worse.

Over half **(60%)** of respondents said that they worked with external partners to deliver training, but this still leaves a sizeable minority that are reliant on internal resources or e-learning for upskilling. When capability needs are changing so fast and so extensively, are CMOs prioritising skills development enough? The data suggests significant room for improvement in this area.

Evolving working practices and mindsets

Evolving skills requirements are emerging alongside changing working practices related to the other MOM pillars. Changing technology for example, is leading to the need for marketers to become adept at utilising new tools, and evolving processes to incorporate AI and automation. As more capability comes in-house, many teams are moving from working closely with agencies to working more directly on producing, deploying and optimising campaigns. Margaret Jobling, CMO at NatWest Group, described this as moving from 'briefers' to 'do-ers', noting the shift from briefing, trafficking, commissioning and project managing third party agencies to doing the work themselves.

> *You've got to have a few natives who can show people the change, but we also need to recruit differently and focus on changing mindsets."*
>
> **Nicki Brown, Director of Media, BBC**

This shift brings challenges in terms of evolving skills and workflows but is also an opportunity for marketers to get closer to the work and closer to customers. Team members need to evolve not only skills but also mindsets to work more closely with data, to get better at continuous optimisation and testing, and to work back from the audience perspective.

> *I wanted them close to the conversation. I wanted them passionate about the content."*
>
> **Paul Stevenson, Former Customer Marketing Director, Virgin Media O2**

> *With all the focus on data-driven marketing, social platforms and personalisation, we should never forget the value of traditional marketing theory, practice and skills."*
>
> **Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY**

When asked about the most important training requirements for the marketing team, GenAI skills unsurprisingly topped the list with almost half of CMOs **(47%)** selecting this. This was followed by customer experience and customer marketing, showing the ongoing importance of customer focus. More worryingly, interviewees mentioned skills gaps relating to traditional marketing and leadership skills. Yet it was notable that just **24%** of survey participants recognised leadership as a training priority.

Organisational design in MOMs

There is no silver bullet for organisational design in the modern MOM. Every context is unique and requires a nuanced approach that can take account of multiple contexts including sector norms, customer needs and journeys, business objectives and requirements. Yet this is clearly a key lever to drive efficiency and effectiveness in the MOM. Almost half of CMOs have restructured their teams in 2024 and over a quarter intend to do so in the next 12 months.

Common org design approaches

There are a range of factors to take into account when determining the right organisation design.

Customer-centric structures

Teams are organised around customer personas, needs, or journeys (e.g., retention, first-time buyers), often supported by centres of excellence (CRM, insights).

➕ **Advantages:** promotes a customer-first approach, seamless experiences, and tailored marketing.

👁 **Watch Outs:** risks inefficiencies from duplicated efforts and challenges in sharing best practices.

⭐ **Best Use:** service-driven sectors with strong customer relationships (e.g., retail, finance).

Functional specialism structures

Teams focus on core disciplines like brand, content, or analytics, with functional leaders driving expertise.

➕ **Advantages:** builds deep skills and innovation within disciplines.

👁 **Watch Outs:** can create silos, slowing cross-functional collaboration and decision-making.

⭐ **Best Use:** industries needing specialised skills and less direct consumer interaction (e.g., consumer goods).

Product-centric structures

Marketers are embedded in product units, aligning closely with sales and product managers.

➕ **Advantages:** supports tailored strategies and deep product knowledge.

👁 **Watch Outs:** may cause inconsistent messaging and resource inefficiencies.

⭐ **Best Use:** organisations with diverse portfolios (e.g., B2B or consumer goods).

Hybrid structures

Combines customer, functional, and product elements, often in cross-functional teams or matrix reporting.

+ **Advantages:** encourages collaboration and adaptability.

👁 **Watch Outs:** complex decision-making and alignment challenges.

★ **Best Use:** complex, dynamic environments (e.g., financial services).

Key factors driving organisational design approaches

CMOs must consider several essential factors when shaping organisational design within a MOM:

1 **Business model and strategy**
Align the marketing structure with business goals and strategy to deliver maximum value. The choice of model—customer-centric for personalisation and experience, product-centric for diverse offerings, or functional for operational efficiency—should reflect how the organisation creates revenue and its critical channels.

2 **Size and maturity of the team**
Large teams may require hybrid or customer-focused models to manage complexity, often supported by functional centres of excellence. Smaller teams typically lean toward functional or product-centric structures to make the best use of limited resources while maintaining agility.

3 **Agility and collaboration**
In fast-paced markets, speed-to-market is crucial. Agile, cross-functional pods are increasingly common, especially in sectors like retail, finance, and tech, where adaptability drives success.

4 **Technology and data**
Advanced martech and analytics capabilities often favour customer-centric designs, enabling targeted campaigns and optimised workflows. Many organisations are centralising operations teams to streamline processes and leverage data effectively.

5 **Regional vs. global balance**
Global organisations must balance local-market autonomy with centralised standards. Centralised strategies, platforms, and best practices provide consistency and support, while local teams ensure agility and market-specific adaptability.

Marketing team structures are becoming increasingly fluid, blending elements from multiple models to drive collaboration, scalability, and customer impact. CMOs must evaluate these factors to design a model that aligns with their unique goals and operating context.

> ❝ *We wanted to break down silos and combine that with more end-to-end accountability. Handovers create inefficiencies, and it was important to simplify and unify the process.*"
>
> **Monica Pool, CMO, KFC UK & Ireland**

Key dynamics to consider

There are also some important other dynamics which can layer over the factors set out above.

The balance between specialist and foundational marketing skills

Across the marketing function it can be useful to consider the balance between specialist resource and the generalists in your team. Both are needed. The former are hugely valuable in bringing deep discipline expertise to the team, but those with the traditional foundational marketing skills are needed to bring strategic insights, customer understanding and expertise in brand strategy. Some areas will require deep expertise (for example paid media, data and analytics) whilst others will more naturally lend themselves to core expertise.

> ❝ *The balance between specialism and generalism is shifting. Marketing has been focused on the value of specialism for some time, but we're now seeing an increasing role for generalists who can benefit from more strategic, joined-up thinking.*"
>
> **Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY**

The concept of the 'T-shaped' and 'M-shaped' marketers has arguably never been more important. T-shaped marketers are typically mid-level staff that have a deep functional expertise but are also looking to broaden their expertise. Being more task focused, T-shaped skills can provide a good foundation for career growth. M-shaped marketers may be mid-senior level practitioners that have expertise in multiple areas. They can integrate this knowledge in ways that can ensure joined-up strategies but can also switch between different areas of expertise and bring unique perspectives to complex problems.

> ❝ *As the need for specialist channel expertise has increased, many CMOs are concerned that there are emerging skills gaps around the fundamentals of marketing practice and expertise.*'
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

The balance between centralisation and federalism

Centralised capabilities (CoE) often include teams with broad remits, such as brand and insights, serving multiple functions or providing global and regional support for local teams. Narrower centralised teams, like marketing operations or data analytics, can drive efficiency and enable best practices through Centres of Excellence.

Federated capabilities, on the other hand, focus on specific disciplines, product areas, or local markets, offering agility and specialised expertise. The key is achieving the right balance: leveraging centralisation for scale, consistency, and innovation, while using federation to maintain flexibility and local adaptability.

The balance between business and customer

A third key dynamic is that between the needs of the business and the needs of the customer. The Chartered Institute of Marketing once defined marketing as 'the act or process of satisfying customer needs profitably'. This definition demonstrates the need for marketing to serve the business (through driving profit) and to also serve customer needs. Too much business and not enough customer in this dynamic will result in poor customer experience and engagement. Too much customer and not enough business will result in the business value of marketing not being clear or a misalignment with business objectives and strategy.

Effective organisation design should incorporate the need to define clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities across the team, mechanisms for seamless collaboration, a holistic set of capabilities to deliver the strategy, and a structure and environment that encourages experimentation and agility.

The final point to note is that the balance of all these dynamics will change over time in response to technology, market and customer shifts, so with any design it is important that CMOs maintain a high level of flexibility to ensure that designs remain focused on business and customer needs and optimal outcomes. To be future fit, solutions need to be scalable and efficient but also adaptable to change.

The two-speed operating model

Modern marketing has evolved to create a uniquely challenging dynamic. There is still the need to run large scale branding and campaign activity where the end-to-end process is by necessity longer and involves strategy formulation, briefing, creative development, approval, and media execution. Then there is the relatively newer requirement for always-on content marketing which needs greater agility, iterative improvement and far shorter lead times and execution. The former is driven by an established and lengthier linear process which involves key hand-offs. The latter is driven by a faster-moving, continuously iterative loop.

> ❞ *Continual optimisation is a very different way of working."*
>
> **Peter Wright, CMO, Specsavers**

BRAND AND CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

MAJOR CAMPAIGN WORK

Insight, audience definition and objective setting → Campaign briefing → Creative development & sign-off → Media planning and deployment → Measurement and evaluation

ALWAYS ON CONTENT

Insight, audience, objective and tactics → Content creation and testing → Deployment → Measurement and evaluation → Learning and optimisation
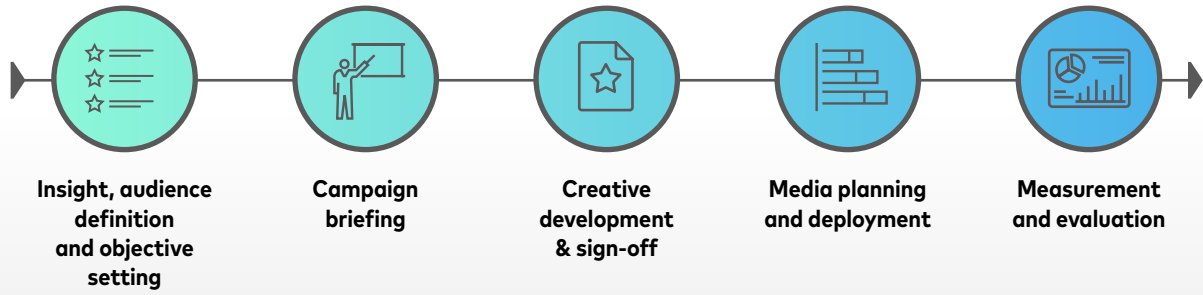
Figure 3: Dual-speed requirements in the MOM

This dual-speed approach requires CMOs to consider how they can establish organisational structures, processes and collaboration to support both of these approaches simultaneously. This has implications on all four of the MOM pillars:

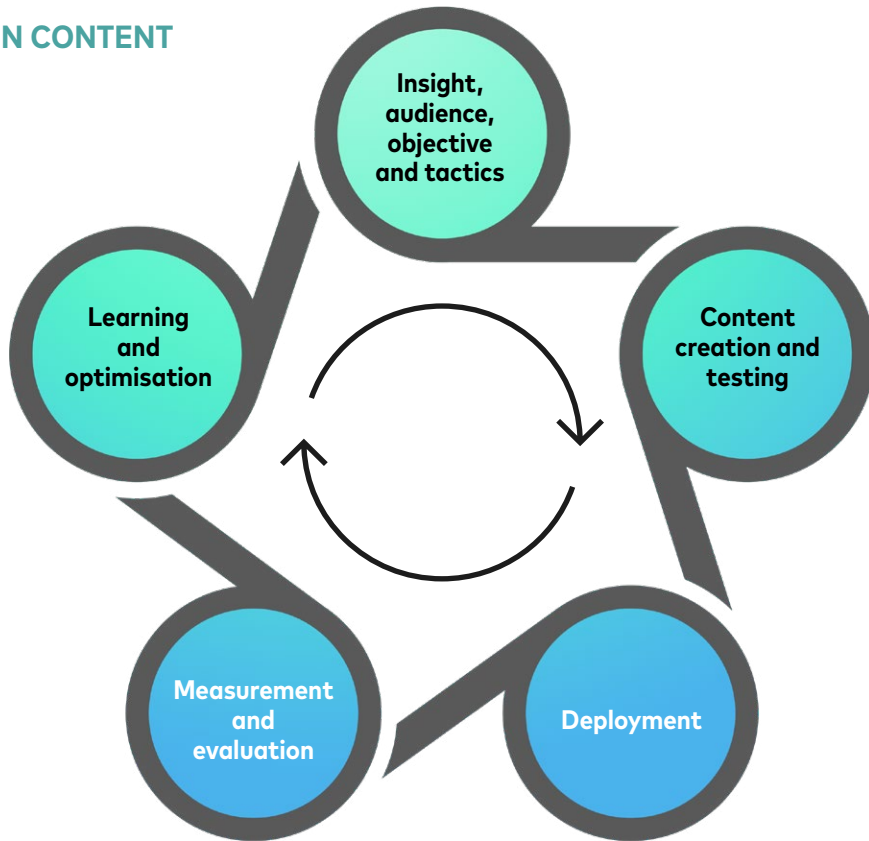**PEOPLE:** Organisational design needs to reflect the need for both traditional linear approaches and smaller, empowered cross-functional teams that can be highly adaptive and can act and move quickly.

PARTNERS: Big, traditional brand campaigns are still critical and require a working relationship that can empower agency partners to bring their best creativity to bear onto marketing or business challenges or objectives. The dynamics of always-on content at scale and iterative marketing, however, require much closer daily working with partners, bringing resource in-house and the understanding of where GenAI will fit.

PROCESS: Marketing leaders need to establish systems that can reduce dependencies between areas that work to different cadences and apply suitable levels of governance that can mitigate risk without stifling agility.

PLATFORMS: Systems and tools need to respect the commonalities across the entire team to ensure common understanding and standards whilst also reflecting the differing workflow needs of different types of working.

We will be looking at each of these in turn in the relevant chapters relating to the four pillars.

Marketing operations

Marketing operations teams have become a far more common and essential part of MOMs. In our survey, all respondents said that they had some form of marketing operations function, with around a third of these **(36%)** being introduced in the last 12 months.

Responsibilities of the discipline have evolved over time, becoming increasingly focused on how marketing gets done, and enabling efficiency, scalability, and data-driven decision-making. Core responsibilities typically include:

1. **Campaign execution and workflow management:** streamlining processes to ensure campaigns are executed smoothly and on time.

2. **Technology and tools management:** overseeing the marketing technology stack, ensuring tools are integrated, optimised, and aligned with team needs.

3. **Data and analytics:** managing data quality, tracking performance metrics, and providing actionable insights to inform strategy.

4. **Budget and resource allocation:** ensuring optimal use of marketing resources, including budgets, talent, and time.

5. **Process governance:** establishing clear processes, documentation, and best practices to maintain consistency and compliance across campaigns.

Marketing Operations teams can add real value to the MOM in a number of key ways including automating and optimising workflows, improving data-driven decision-making, ensuring consistent execution, and helping to leverage maximum value from the technology stack.

Setting marketing operations up for success

There are a number of considerations that CMOs should focus on to optimise the potential of their marketing operations team:

1. **Define clear objectives:** align the team's focus with strategic business and marketing goals, such as improving campaign efficiency, enhancing data-driven decisions, or increasing ROI.

2. **Hire the right skill sets:** build a team with diverse expertise in project management, data analysis, and marketing technology.

3. **Invest in the right tools:** provide access to a well-integrated technology stack for automation, data visualisation, and campaign management.

4. **Encourage collaboration:** position the marketing operations team as a hub that works closely with creative, strategy, and analytics teams to ensure smooth workflows and alignment.

5. **Establish metrics for success:** track operational KPIs like campaign turnaround times, data accuracy, and tool adoption rates to measure the team's impact.

A well-structured marketing operations team transforms marketing efforts from reactive and disjointed to strategic, efficient, and high-impact.

A focus on culture and psychological safety

All the interviewees for this report spoke of the need to establish a culture in the marketing team that could support continuous change and improvement, experimentation and innovation. Several highlighted their focus on improving levels of psychological safety in the team.

Amy Edmondson, the Harvard professor that originated the term, defined psychological safety as 'A shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking'[3]. Her work showed that teams where every team member felt able to contribute ideas, to debate issues openly, and not be afraid to try new things were the highest performing teams in her studies.

Kate Mackie from EY spoke in her interview about the need for marketers to get more comfortable with uncertainty and 'working in the grey' as she puts it. In fast-changing environments many contexts can no longer rely on simple, binary, black or white answers, but instead teams will need to work with the optimal information and outcomes that they have at that time. Victoria Fox, CEO at AAR, notes how culture and mindset can complement good organisational design and process, particularly in encouraging more experimentation, testing and innovation.

Psychological safety will be key in enabling teams to deal with this uncertainty and adopt the right mindset.

> " *We're working hard to get the right culture that can enable high levels of psychological safety and agility. If you don't get this in place nothing else will work"*
>
> **Peter Wright, CMO, Specsavers**

> " *Psychological safety is important because in today's world the answers are less clear. So we need the culture and values that can bring teams together and ensure that they are selfless in their pursuit of the goal."*
>
> **Becky Brock, Customer and Digital Director, Tesco**

[3] https://hbr.org/2023/02/what-is-psychological-safety

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS ON PEOPLE IN MARKETING OPERATING MODELS

1 Address the skills gap proactively

A significant majority of CMOs acknowledge gaps in current marketing skills and a lack of future-focused skills strategies. Investing in continuous training, especially in high-demand areas like Generative AI, customer experience, and leadership, is critical for staying competitive.

2 Organisational design must fit context

There's no universal solution for marketing team structures. Whether adopting customer-centric, functional, product-centric, or hybrid models, CMOs must align design choices with their business strategy, customer needs, and team maturity.

3 Balance specialist and generalist talent

A blend of specialist expertise (e.g., data analytics, paid media) and foundational marketing skills (e.g., brand strategy) is essential. T-shaped and M-shaped marketers, who combine deep expertise with broader adaptability, can drive collaboration and strategic innovation.

4 Support dual-speed marketing needs

Modern marketing demands structures that support both traditional, large-scale campaigns and agile, always-on content. CMOs need to balance governance with flexibility to enable teams to operate effectively across different cadences.

5 Foster a culture of psychological safety

High-performing teams thrive on innovation, experimentation, and adaptability. CMOs must cultivate a culture where team members feel safe to share ideas, take risks, and embrace uncertainty, enabling them to navigate dynamic environments confidently.
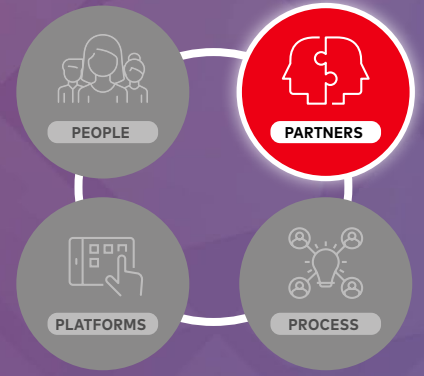
Partners

Partners

Working with partners clearly continues to bring huge value to many marketing organisations but it's also clear that CMOs are under heightened pressure to demonstrate greater efficiencies and returns, which means that resourcing in this area is in a state of constant change. In our survey, **33%** of respondents said that they had reviewed their agency roster and/ or their in-house agency in the last 12 months and another **24%** are planning to do so in the next year. Add to this the ever-evolving dynamics around in-house vs external resourcing, the need to constantly improve processes (**43%** of CMOs are looking to automate processes to improve agility) and the picture is of a continually changing and nuanced space.

Looking forward, whilst **41%** of CMOs say that they are planning to eliminate their in-house agency and to re-outsource the work in the next year, another **46%** and **44%** say that they are looking to develop in-house creative and media resource respectively.

#	To drive greater efficiencies, what are the most important aspects of your marketing operating model that you are looking to change in the next 12 months? Tick all that apply.	%
1	Develop in-house creative production capabilities	46%
2	Develop in-house media capabilities	44%
3	Automate our processes to improve speed and agility	43%
4	Eliminate the in-house agency and re-outsource the work	41%
5	Reduce spend with agencies	29%
6	Restructure teams	26%
7	Review, consolidate or change our agency model	24%
8	Set up an in-house agency	14%
9	Upskill people	7%

What's more, many CMOs, driven by evolving demands for content at scale, are starting to think about their partner ecosystem as an operating model in and of itself. Looking at how the partners are organised within the model, the processes that fuel internal, external and FTE ways of working and the platforms that underpin the delivery and measurement of the work produced.

In-housing vs external resourcing dynamic

The dynamic around in-house and external capability continues to evolve in interesting ways and, like organisational design, there is no silver bullet. Decisions around what to bring in-house and what responsibilities to place with external partners continue to be heavily influenced by nuances around sector, pace, customer relationships, and the mix of content that each marketing organisation requires. There are, however, some notably common themes around motivations and approaches.

As an example, Margaret Jobling, CMO NatWest Group, and Peter Zillig, Director of Marketing at Ford both spoke of using a tiered approach to campaigns and their agencies which can be broadly summarised as:

Tier One: set piece, large scale brand or creative campaigns. This is still largely handled by external partner agencies.

Tier Two: smaller scale campaigns that still require a creative platform. A hybrid approach utilising both in-house and external agency resource may be taken here. For example, mainstay brand and campaign concepts and assets may be created by an external agency which are then scaled at the volume end of content in-house for social media, web and CRM.

Tier Three: high volume, quick-turnaround or high churn content that often feeds content hungry channels. This area is the most likely to be covered by an in-house production agency or content resource, and the area which is also seeing most early trials of GenAI application.

> *We've invested in more in-house media and digital expertise to gain more direct control and speed over decision-making and execution but also to support the transition to digital media investment. This in-house expertise works closely with our agency partners."*
>
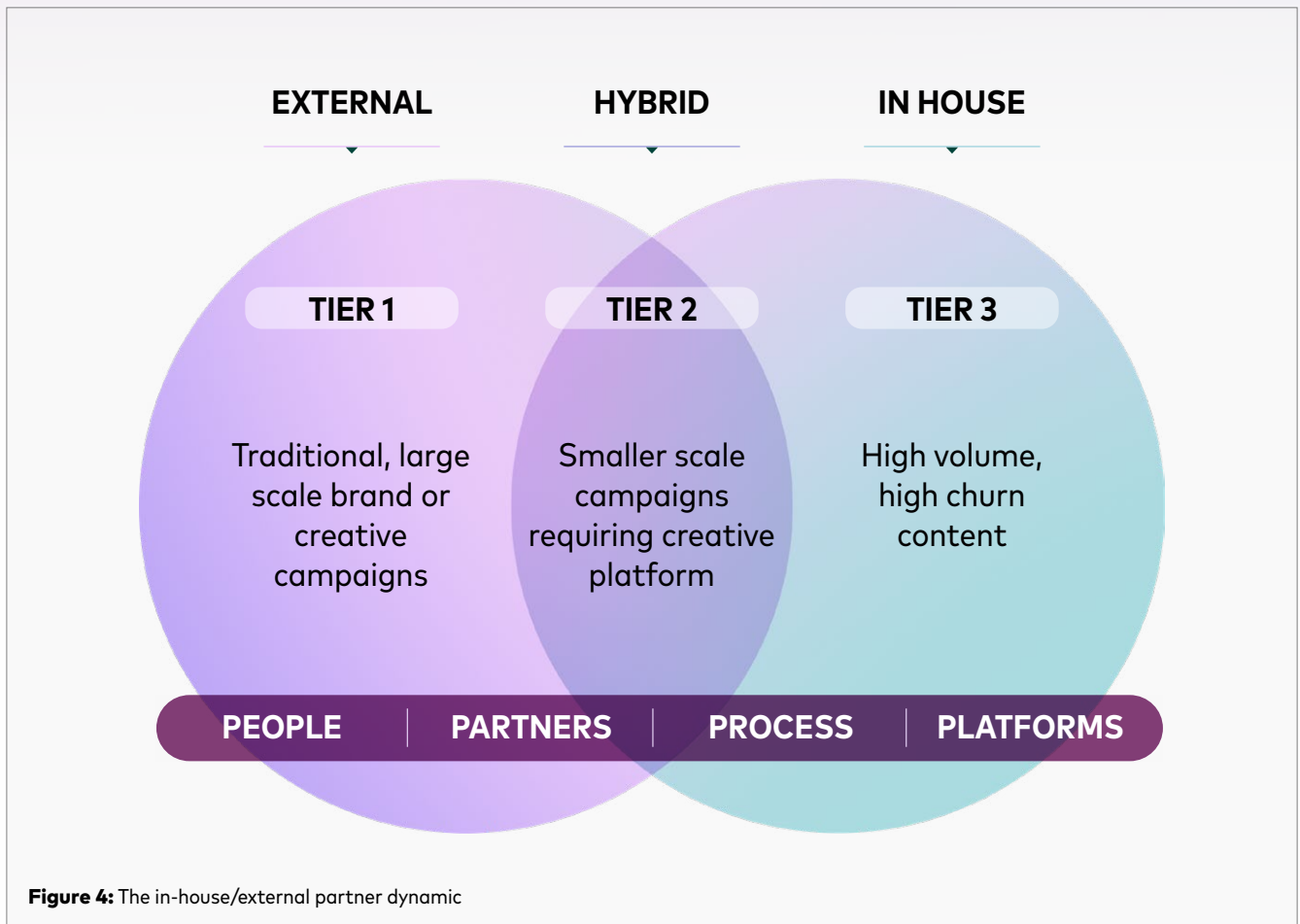> **Peter Zillig, Director of Marketing, Ford**

Figure 4: The in-house/external partner dynamic

> " *The shifting dynamics around the need for content at scale is driving a re-evaluation of partnership models. In particular, the decoupling of volume production from large scale brand and creative comms means that many CMOs are needing to create a content operating model within a wider marketing operating model as they look at delivering their content strategy.'*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

In a fast-moving marketing environment CMOs are having to take a balanced but also flexible approach to designing the right model for what sits internally and the role of external resourcing, inputs and support. As an example, Peter Wright, CMO at Specsavers talked about how they had long had an in-house creative team but had also needed to take a flexible approach and work with external agencies in some regions where more specialist expertise or resourcing was required.

Margaret Jobling at NatWest Group spoke of needing to be adaptable as capabilities and requirements evolve to ensure that they can leverage external partner capability and integrate this efficiently into what they are doing. The key decisions are around what they need to take complete ownership of, what can benefit from external inputs, and where they need to be far more collaborative in their approach with internal and external resourcing working alongside each other concurrently. This has implications on process and ways of working. Areas with complete ownership require a focus on driving efficiencies through automation and removing blockers, and areas of internal/ external collaboration require clarity of responsibility and accountability, greater coordination and communication, and a clear process playbook.

Motivations, benefits and challenges around in-housing

It was clear from our survey that the trend towards taking capability in-house is still pertinent. When CMOs were asked to define the most important aspects of the MOM that they are looking to change in the next 12 months, developing in-house creative production and in-house media capabilities came top of the list.

When interviewees were asked to identify the motivations for bringing creative and other capability in-house the reasons given were overwhelmingly focused on control, agility and efficiency.

- **Control:** the ability to bring capability closer to the rest of the marketing organisation and have more direct control and oversight over process, resourcing and assets. This can also make it easier to maintain brand integrity and build improved institutional knowledge over time. It also can enable more budget control and predictability. It's easier for internal teams to work more closely with the rest of the business, and to be deeply immersed in the brand's products, business strategy, culture, values, and tone of voice, which can lead to more cohesive and authentic content creation.

- **Agility:** the ability to be responsive, streamline workflows and enable faster turnarounds on creative projects, to adapt quicker to changing business requirements, to increase the level of testing and to iteratively improve.

- **Efficiency:** alongside efficiency in process, a desire to drive cost efficiencies and reduce the reliance on agency retainers or project fees, especially for ongoing or high-volume content (for example through ease of content amends, cost of asset generation and repurposing).

Each of these three different aspects are strongly linked. Speed to market was a key concern, driven by the need for continual iterative improvement, a more responsive and agile approach to content, and the desire to gain more direct control over content production. Here, work was often needed to reduce unnecessary inefficiencies and sign-offs.

> **"**
> *We should be able to move more at the speed of life rather than at the speed of our internal processes.'*
>
> **Margaret Jobling, CMO, NatWest Group**

In our survey, when CMOs were asked to define the biggest challenges that they face with their in-house agency or team, issues ranged across several aspects relating to managing the capability area:

#	Challenge	%
1	Demand management	51%
2	Keeping the in-house resource fresh	44%
3	Having the right capabilities	34%
4	Managing the team	32%
5	Cost control	31%
6	Lack of process	30%
7	Talent recruitment and retention	14%

Having clarity of remit, and a proven way to demonstrate the value of in-house creative or media functions (either in cost efficiencies or impact of the work done) has clearly never been more important.

Margaret Jobling. CMO at NatWest Group, described how their content production processes had been simply too slow to enable any kind of agility (for example slow sign-off procedures for simple communications that may previously take weeks) and how they had deliberately focused on embedding greater process efficiency in content to improve the throughput of work, and therefore their responsiveness and ability to react in a timely way to opportunities. They were, they said, solving for agility, oversight and control, but doing so through data and greater transparency rather than through risk aversion.

> **"**
> *CMOs are now looking closely at their content operating model and actively assessing it across people, partners, process and platforms."*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

Paul Stevenson, formerly of VirginMedia O2 and Margaret Jobling of NatWest Group both referred to the need to build in-house 'content creation machines' in reference to the step change in volume of content production that modern marketing increasingly requires. Channels including social and CRM, in particular, are extremely content hungry, requiring a level of production that could well prove to be not cost efficient when put through external partners.

Robin Charney, Partner at AAR, notes how important the role of first party data is in decision-making around resourcing. Service-driven businesses that are driven by customer data (such as banks, telcos, utilities) can more easily make content personalisation at scale work which, in itself, is a motivation for establishing an in-house content resource.

Generative AI is also seen as a significant opportunity to improve operational efficiency around content production. NatWest's Margaret Jobling spoke of how they were seeing GenAI as an opportunity to divert more money into activation rather than fixed costs.

A word of caution was struck in our survey around in-house capability, however. **41%** of those that had in-house agency functions said that they were planning to remove these functions in the future, driven by concerns around their value and remit. This seemingly contradicts with the apparent enthusiasm to establish in-house capability seen elsewhere in the survey and demonstrates how having a clear vision and strategy for the in-house capability is absolutely essential.

Our qualitative feedback showed that CMOs are actively looking at their content operating model with implications and considerations across people, partners, process, and platforms.

> "
> *What we are seeing in our consulting work is not simply about whether CMOs should re-outsource the work to agencies but rather that CMOs are at a fork in the road where they have to either scale or retreat in their in-housing ambitions. This is what is driving the work around the resetting of strategic direction for some brands."*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

Motivations, benefits and challenges around external partners

Large scale brand campaign and creative work still sits outside the client organisation in the main. Here the benefits of an external perspective are perceived to be higher creativity, better ideas, and the ability to draw on external perspective and learnings.

Kate Mackie from EY, Paul Stevenson formerly of VirginMedia O2, Monica Pool at KFC UK&I all spoke of how it was a real benefit that their agencies worked across many different clients and sectors, meaning that they could draw on latest thinking and best-in-class examples.

Media buying was another area that was cited as often remaining with external partners, driven largely by buying efficiencies, but also through the value of external perspectives on the changing media environment. This external perspective was also valued by those that had kept media planning and strategy with partners.

> *We have in-house and offshore capability to support with the volume end of content, but have now put the majority of creative concepting back out to agencies so that we can benefit from wider inputs and research."*
>
> **Kate Mackie, Global iGTM Lead, EY**

A word of caution here, though. In our survey, when CMOs were asked to identify the main challenges that they anticipate within their MOM over the coming year, media and creative not working well enough together topped the list. AAR has seen a marked increase in pitch briefs relating to this area. There are several key concerns for CMOs here including the need for:

- **Greater simplification** combined with a desire to derive greater value from external agencies. A simpler agency model is often perceived to lead to better cost efficiencies.
- **Media and creative to combine seamlessly** to deliver impact greater than the sum of their parts.
- **Upper-funnel brand marketing** to integrate smoothly with lower-funnel performance marketing.
- **Assets to be created and re-used efficiently** through the funnel, particularly as AI automates delivery at scale.
- **External media and creative to work together flawlessly** to amplify effectiveness (right creative, right place, right time).

> *CMOs are increasingly concerned with how they can ensure that they not only get the most out of their agencies, but also how they can establish optimal, consistent and controllable ways of working with external partners. This is one of the reasons why we are seeing more and more agency playbooks. The tighter the guidelines laid out in the playbook, the more freedom you have to do exceptional work."*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

Our survey also indicated that a desire to take content production and/or performance media in-house was also a key motivation behind undertaking an agency model review. Of the research participants, only **5%** would review their models with the objective of reducing the number of agencies primarily, and only **2%** would do so solely to save costs.

Design your content operating model

AAR is now seeing the development of models within models. CMOs need to consider how their agency operating models and content operating model can be an integrated part of their wider MOM, and also that all facets are aligned to drive maximum impact and efficiency.

Here's how CMOs should think about their content operating model:

1. PEOPLE

a. **Design with flexibility in mind:** the model will need to account for variations in content demands and flex up and down easily according to needs. This will involve the right combination of fixed costs, flex costs, and external partner costs that can deliver required outcomes whilst still retaining flexibility.

b. **Design for scalability and efficiency:** as technology and AI rapidly evolve the way that content is produced, versioned, deployed and optimised, there will be the opportunity to drive efficiencies whilst retaining scalability.

c. **Design for evolving skills:** as the need for volume content plays alongside the ongoing need for large-scale creative and brand content, skillsets will need to evolve and a careful balance between specialism and generalism will need to be struck. The key balance is what and where capability and skills need to sit across fixed, flex and partner resourcing. Conduct a skills audit and focus on hiring or upskilling team members to fill gaps strategically.

2. PARTNERS

a. **Design for seamless collaboration**: establishing relationships built on high levels of trust, processes that ensure alignment and consistency, and transparent communication characterised by high levels of psychological safety. Periodically engage external partners for strategic input or creative audits to maintain objectivity and inspiration.

b. **Design for agility:** continuous improvement should run alongside responsiveness and adaptability. The content operating model should be designed with scalability and flexibility in mind, to deal with variances in demand.

c. **Design for the win-win:** a productive agency/ client relationship should be founded on a strong commercial model that mutually benefits both sides.

d. **Design for cultural fit:** integrating creative talent into a non-creative business can create cultural challenges. Consider how to create an environment that can celebrate and capitalise on exceptional talent whether it sits as fixed, flex or partner resourcing.

3. PROCESS

a. Design to reduce process friction and dependencies: different ways of working within external partners, the in-house content resource and the marketing team can generate unnecessary conflict or barriers to agility. Common understanding, practices, objectives and tools can help mitigate dependencies when combined with carefully designed processes. Foster a collaborative, creative-friendly environment by educating other teams on the unique needs of the creative process.

b. Design to be data-driven: with the increased need for content personalisation that works back from consumer signals and context processes, mindsets need to shift to be driven by data.

4. PLATFORMS

a. Design for a fit-for-purpose technology stack: a robust technology backbone can support content capability but also common practices and consistent delivery.

b. Design for measurement: the volume, variety and velocity of content needs to be planned for and measured to ensure the model remains high functioning.

c. Design for Generative AI: this holds the potential to dramatically impact on content resourcing in the future. CMOs will need to not only use AI to optimise efficiencies but also to flex resourcing across man and machine. Take an ongoing, adaptive approach to right-sizing resource based on the integration of GenAI capability. Upskill content teams to get maximum benefit from GenAI tools.

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS ON PARTNERS IN MARKETING OPERATING MODELS

1

Strike the right balance between in-house and external resources

Adopt a flexible, tiered model: consider reserving external agencies for high-quality, high-impact brand campaigns, use in-house teams for scalable, quick-turnaround content, and collaborate for mid-tier campaigns. Align decisions with business goals and sector-specific needs.

2

Prioritise agility, control, and efficiency in resourcing

In-house capabilities enhance speed, cost efficiency, and brand alignment, particularly for high-volume content channels like social and CRM. Streamline processes, reduce inefficiencies, and clarify remits to maximise returns on internal resources.

3

Foster seamless media-creative collaboration

Consider integrating media and creative strategy—internal and external—for consistent messaging and optimised impact. Simplify agency models, ensure shared goals, and invest in clear processes to enhance campaign effectiveness across the funnel. The answer isn't always to have media and creative under one roof but to find the ways to ensure seamless integration across teams.

4

Leverage Generative AI to scale content capability and reduce costs

Use GenAI to automate high-volume content production while reallocating budgets toward activation. Upskill teams to fully harness AI's potential, enabling scalable, data-driven personalisation without sacrificing creative quality.

5

Design the partner ecosystem as a future-ready operating model

Build a resourcing framework that adapts to fluctuating demands, blends internal, flexible, and partner expertise, and incorporates robust technology for efficiency and measurement. Ensure cultural alignment and mutual value to sustain long-term partnerships.

Process

ISBA
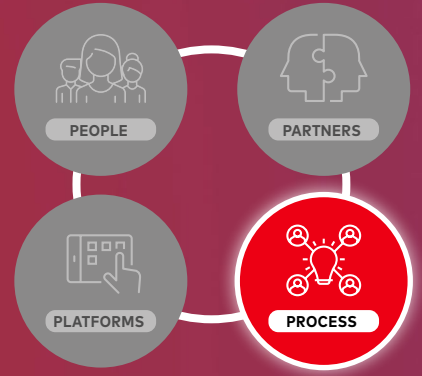
Process

Since the HOW of marketing is now as important as the WHAT of marketing, process plays an ever more critical role in the MOM and is coming under increasing scrutiny as CMOs look to drive efficiency, agility and governance. This impetus has led to a focus on new ways of working, increasing automation, new tools and initiatives to improve speed to market. In particular, the shift to always-on content production and deployment has led to the introduction of new processes or significant redesign of existing ones.

"

We've brought in new workflow tools to manage efficient content production and delivery at scale, and to support automation within end-to-end process management. The team are producing more content, but we want that content to be driven by data and customer-focused triggers. This requires both different processes but also a more data-driven mindset."

Paul Stevenson, Former Customer Marketing Director, Virgin Media O2

CMOs are now required to consider how to align and adapt processes to account for potentially different contexts and needs. This may include the varying needs of diverse business units, the cultural aspects of disparate brands, different ways of working across the marketing team, in-house and external agencies. Clear, shared objectives, explicit roles and accountabilities across teams and partners, collaborative planning processes and transparent communication can help mitigate misalignment. There are several aspects that are essential to take account of when designing processes that can work to optimise outcomes:

- **Priorities and needs:** understanding the nuanced requirements and priorities of players, partners and stakeholders.

- **Dependencies:** mitigating unnecessary interdependence which can hamper effective collaboration.

- **Maturity of people, process and governance:** teams or processes that are less well established will need greater adaptability than those with established operating methods using mature systems and platforms.

"

Differing ways of working between marketing teams, and their external and/or in-house agencies can be a major source of friction and conflict. CMOs should give careful consideration to designing ways of working that are flexible enough to align with different needs, whilst being consistent and coherent enough to ensure good governance."

Robin Charney, Partner, AAR

Outcomes over outputs

One of the consistent pieces of feedback in the CMO interviews related to the desire to focus more on outcomes-based strategies and tactics. In a fast-changing environment this was seen as a more adaptive way to improve campaign impact and results, and a shift away from relatively rigid planning processes. Staying focused on outcomes rather than specific strategies allowed teams greater flexibility to adapt tactics on the fly and become more agile in delivery and process.

There are some key differences between outputs and outcomes. Outputs relate to specific tactics or elements of execution. In fast-changing environments these are likely to need to evolve as the strategy is deployed to optimise results. Outputs may be typically measured in terms of completion of individual tasks. Outcomes, on the other hand, are the end goal of the work, measured in terms of value created, and unlikely to change throughout the process. The risk is that if teams become wedded to specified outputs which have been identified in advance, they will significantly reduce their flexibility and end up working on tactics which are not the most valuable required at that point in time.

Reducing dependencies

A key challenge with the two-speed approaches discussed in the People section is reducing dependencies in faster-moving areas of the marketing function. Dependencies in campaign processes such as misalignment caused by poor briefing, a lack of clarity on sign-off responsibility, lengthy approval processes or multiple rounds of amends, can all hinder teams needing to respond quickly to changing scenarios or opportunities.

CMOs should adapt or establish ways of working to minimise dependencies in the campaign process using approaches tailored to specific challenges.

Understanding dependency types

Dependencies beyond a team's direct control can limit agility. Identifying the type of dependency helps determine the appropriate mitigation action:

1   **Process or activity dependencies:** these arise from external activities or misaligned business processes. For example, a campaign team requiring inputs from legal or compliance may face delays if those functions operate on slower timelines.

2   **Expertise or input dependencies:** external expertise or approvals can become bottlenecks. Teams may be slowed when domain experts or decision-makers are unavailable to provide timely inputs.

3   **Technical dependencies:** teams often rely on technical changes or support from other teams, which can cause delays if those tasks aren't prioritised effectively.

Workflow mapping

There are some useful approaches to effective process or workflow mapping:

1. Ensure that maps are comprehensive, including all the elements that are required to get the work done, but avoid over-complicating them.

2. Focus on the system or process elements rather than individual people.

3. Ensure clarity on the scope by defining a start and end point to the process.

4. Make process mapping a collaborative exercise, involving the people in the process, and ensure that all the required information is to hand before you start.

5. Use commonly understood symbols to visualise the process and help reduce confusion or misalignment. For example, different symbols may indicate the start and end of a process, key actions or instructions, key decisions, and the direction of progress along the process.

Once a process has been mapped out, opportunities to mitigate blockers and improve workflow can be identified. This can support process optimisation. For a more transformational approach to process reinvention, teams can work back from outcomes to define the key steps needed to achieve end results and how they can be designed from scratch in a way to ensure productive and smooth workflows. It's also key, as Robin Charney from AAR noted, to map processes across teams as well as within teams.

Avoiding process bottlenecks

The earlier section in this report where we defined what a Marketing Operating Model is also set out why the HOW of marketing is now as important as the WHAT of marketing. Process bottlenecks can significantly hinder the smooth operation and efficiency of a MOM. The concept of 'shockwave' traffic jams illustrates how small, often unnoticed disruptions can ripple through a system, creating major delays.

A shockwave traffic jam begins with a minor slowdown, such as a brake tap, causing a chain reaction of other cars slowing down. Over time, this minor action magnifies, eventually bringing traffic to a halt. In a 2008 experiment, Japanese researchers demonstrated this phenomenon by placing 22 vehicles on a single-lane circuit and asking drivers to maintain a constant speed. Despite initial smooth movement, varying distances between cars caused clumping, with the jam spreading backward at 20 km/h[4].

The same dynamics occur in campaign workflows. Small issues, such as slow approvals, a poorly articulated brief or unclear roles and responsibilities, can snowball, stalling progress across teams. When multiple disciplines collaborate, a bottleneck in one area can leave dependent teams waiting, halting overall progress. Miscommunication and vague handoffs further exacerbate these issues. Good process design is crucial, but additional strategies can help mitigate bottlenecks.

Identifying bottlenecks early

Regular retrospectives, process reviews, and clear escalation procedures help pinpoint delays before they grow. For example, if campaigns frequently stall due to poor communication between agencies and client teams, addressing this friction early prevents larger disruptions.

Clear ownership and accountability

The way in which campaign work gets planned and delivered is fundamental to the successful execution of a marketing strategy, and HOW marketing is done. Without good process design, marketing strategies are hamstrung at best and undeliverable at worst.

Bottlenecks often stem from a lack of clarity around task ownership. Uncertainty about who is responsible for decisions can lead to hesitation and delays. As an example, tools like Bain & Company's RAPID model—Recommend, Agree, Perform, Input, and Decide—clarify decision-making roles. Defining inputs, agreeing on requirements, and assigning clear decision-making responsibilities can eliminate confusion and drive progress.

In a MOM, ensuring clear ownership of roles and responsibilities prevents inaction and streamlines workflows. Antonia Wade, Global CMO at PwC, described how the democratisation of access to data and measurement required everyone to take greater ownership of the outcomes they were responsible for.

Streamlining decision-making

Much like a single brake tap can halt traffic, a delayed approval can stall an entire campaign. Decision-making often becomes a bottleneck in large organisations with multi-layered approval processes. To combat this, reduce touchpoints, streamline approvals, and empower teams to make decisions within predefined guardrails.

Jeff Bezos's distinction between 'one-way door' and 'two-way door' decisions provides a useful framework. One-way decisions, which are irreversible and carry high risk, require extensive input. Two-way decisions, however, are reversible and require less information, enabling faster action. Recognising this distinction helps teams balance speed with risk management.

Fostering cross-functional collaboration

Breakdowns in communication between teams or functions can unnecessarily delay workflows. Greater transparency, through regular stand-ups, collaborative tools, or co-locating cross-functional teams, ensures smooth handoffs and eliminates miscommunication. Just as traffic flow improves when drivers are aware of the conditions ahead, marketing teams benefit from visibility into each other's priorities and progress.

Workflow bottlenecks rarely arise from isolated incidents but rather from systemic inefficiencies. By addressing root causes (early identification, clear ownership, streamlined decision-making, and improved collaboration) marketing teams can avoid ripple effects that turn minor delays into major disruptions. Smooth workflows are essential to achieving marketing goals efficiently and effectively.

In the modern MOM, the subtlety of how processes can be set up with appropriate governance is about striking a critical balance between top-down oversight and free-flowing work.

Process automation in the MOM

It's clear that CMOs see automation as an opportunity to drive greater efficiencies and a key area of prioritisation. When asked to define the most important aspects of the marketing operating model that they are looking to change in the next 12 months, **43%** of CMOs in our survey said that they were looking to automate processes to improve speed and agility (scoring third on the list).

One of the key areas of consideration is selecting where automation can most benefit the marketing function, and here it's useful to consider both task and process automation. The former relates to automating repetitive, individual tasks but the latter can describe automating entire end-to-end business process, perhaps even spanning multiple functions beyond marketing. Examples of task automation may include brief writing, social media scheduling, lead capture forms, content repurposing. Examples of end-to-end process automation may include lead nurturing, customer onboarding, campaign approvals and reporting.

Smart automation decisions require CMOs to be cognisant of potential risks that may arise, and to carefully assess which processes will benefit most from automation and where a human touch remains essential. At a high-level, the following areas can help determine what to automate and what not to automate.

> **"**
> *The less close to the IP of the business you get, the greater the role for automation gets"*
>
> **Antonia Wade, Global CMO, PwC**

What to automate

There are some specific criteria which can be used to define candidates for automation in the MOM:

- **Repetitive, high-volume tasks:** automation of time-consuming tasks like email distribution, ad variations with multiple copy and visuals, content optimisation, social media posting, and data entry can improve efficiency and free up resources for higher-level work.

- **Data collection and analysis:** using automation to gather and process campaign performance and customer data, enabling real-time insights that support personalisation and decision-making.

- **Lead scoring and nurturing:** in a B2B context, automating lead scoring based on behavioural and demographic data to prioritise the most promising prospects, while automated nurturing campaigns can keep leads engaged.

- **Personalised content delivery:** automation tools can dynamically segment audiences and deliver tailored content based on customer behaviour, increasing relevance without additional manual effort.

- **Performance reporting:** setting up automated reports for key metrics, enabling faster performance insights and freeing up the analytics team to focus on more complex analyses.

What not to automate

There are also some areas of capability where automation is likely to undermine quality of outcomes or may result in unnecessary risk:

- **Strategic planning and creative ideation:** tasks requiring strategic thinking, brand vision, and creativity (including campaign planning, creative development, and messaging strategy) are best left to skilled professionals who can tailor solutions to nuanced goals.

- **Complex customer interactions:** high-stakes or emotionally sensitive customer interactions should remain human-led to ensure empathy and flexibility, particularly in areas like customer support for complaints or complex inquiries.

- **Brand and reputation management:** reputation-sensitive activities, such as public relations and crisis management, require a human understanding of tone, context, and response timing that automation cannot replicate.

- **Data quality and integrity checks:** automated systems can gather data, but human oversight is crucial to maintain data accuracy, especially for high-stakes decisions where small errors can have large impacts.

- **High-value client relationships:** in a B2B context, key account management and other high-value relationships benefit from personal interactions, which help build trust and loyalty that automation cannot achieve.

By distinguishing between routine, scalable tasks and those requiring human insight, CMOs can implement automation where it drives efficiency and focus human effort on more strategic and creatively led activities.

Good decision-making about the application of automation and AI should take into account both risk and complexity. Low risk, low complexity scenarios are suitable for simple, rules-based automation. As the risk and complexity increases AI powered automation, recommendations and decision-support are more suitable.

Finally, it's also important to prepare for automation. This means ensuring that processes are fit-for-purpose and standardised before they are automated (a bad process automated is still a bad process). As an example, Peter Wright, CMO at Specsavers described how they are going through a whole process to standardise approaches to generating creative assets to ensure that there is a common basis for automation. He noted how people doing things in different ways can be an obstacle to effective automation and so a process to establish the optimal process which can then be automated is necessary.

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS ON PROCESS IN MARKETING OPERATING MODELS

1

Shift focus from outputs to outcomes

Align processes with outcomes rather than rigid outputs to enable greater flexibility and agility. Teams can adapt tactics dynamically while staying focused on overarching goals, driving higher impact and value creation.

2

Streamline dependencies to boost agility

Minimise process bottlenecks by reducing unnecessary dependencies, clarifying roles, and streamlining decision-making. Approaches like workflow mapping and clear ownership models, such as RAPID, prevent delays and ensure smoother execution.

3

Leverage automation strategically

Automate repetitive, high-volume tasks like reporting and content distribution while reserving human effort for strategic and creative work. Ensure processes are standardised before automation to maximise efficiency and maintain quality.

4

Design processes for collaboration and scalability

Build processes that foster cross-functional collaboration and accommodate diverse needs across business units and geographies. Ensure they are scalable to support always-on marketing while maintaining flexibility for varying demands.

5

Prepare for a data-driven, AI-powered future

Embed data-driven decision-making into processes and integrate AI thoughtfully to enhance personalisation, efficiency, and speed. Focus on areas where automation supports scale without compromising creativity or human oversight.
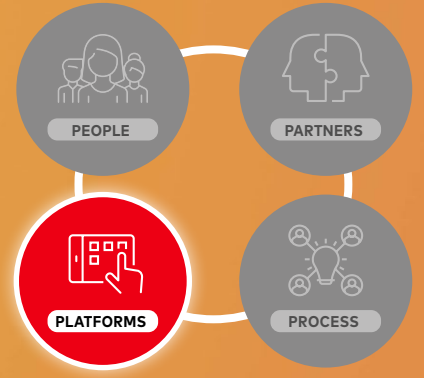
Platforms

Platforms

It goes without saying that technology is fundamentally transforming marketing by reshaping how brands engage with consumers, optimise operations, and drive growth. Artificial intelligence is at the forefront of this transformation, enabling personalised customer experiences at scale, radically transformed content production processes and efficient campaign management. This reflects a broader shift towards data-driven decision-making and automation.

Whilst the number of martech solutions is still rising, the willingness to increase levels of investment seems to be plateauing or even going in the other direction, perhaps reflecting the growing maturity in this area and the drive for efficiencies. Our survey revealed that a majority of CMOs **(86%)** are looking to streamline investments, yet gaps remain in the ability to derive value from data:

Thinking about data and martech, on a scale of 1 - 5 (where 1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree"), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
We have all the right martech in place and understand how to use it well	45%	46%
We are streamlining our martech investments for operational efficiency	39%	47%
A lack of the right skillsets limits us from deriving valuable insights	38%	34%
We have lots of data, but we do not know what to do with it	28%	40%
We struggle to get value from our martech investments	38%	30%
Onboarding new martech is too time-consuming, making it inefficient	41%	26%
We do not have the right tools in place to manage our data efficiently	35%	25%
It is becoming increasingly hard to find and retain people in data roles	46%	16%

All of this indicates that the focus of investment in time and resource is shifting from major platform investments towards getting the most out of the tools that they already have.

68% of CMOs agreed that they struggle to get value from their martech investments

72% of CMOs said that a lack of skillsets is limiting them from deriving valuable insights

62% of CMOs agreed that it's increasingly hard to find and retain people in data roles

Choice of technology is fundamental to marketing effectiveness and efficiency, and integrated approaches are seen as essential to get the most out of the tech platforms, deliver optimal outcomes and customer experience. As an example, Margaret Jobling from NatWest Group spoke of how all customer-facing functions (marketing and beyond) were moving to a common technology backbone to drive efficiencies but also joined-up working. Common access to assets (DAM), ease of sign-off and process efficiency and transparency, common workflows, and a clear audit trail were cited as particular benefits.

Generative AI

Relatively recent McKinsey research shows, unsurprisingly, that there has been a dramatic uplift in the proportion of companies applying Generative AI in at least one business function and, interestingly, that marketing and sales are leading the way in terms of regularly using it (followed by product and service development and IT)[5]. The research also shows that within these leading-edge functions, the deployment is currently still quite executional, with many organisations doing a lot of experimentation and piloting. In marketing and sales, for example, it is mostly being used for content support and personalisation, with some lead identification and prioritisation happening as well.

"

There's currently a combination of nervousness and excitement around GenAI. Most teams are running pilots to establish how they optimise application, particularly around content, but there is also going to be a concurrent need to upskill teams.''

Robin Charney, Partner, AAR

These findings were echoed by the qualitative research, with interviewees noting that their organisation was at a learning and experimentation stage, often undertaking analysis to identify potential value and use cases. The initial focus for GenAI is on use cases relating primarily to content production and deployment, content versioning and testing, predictive modelling, media buying and targeting, customer service optimisation, and productivity. Synthetic research or data, or the ability to simulate human responses using AI in research, is also garnering some notable attention.
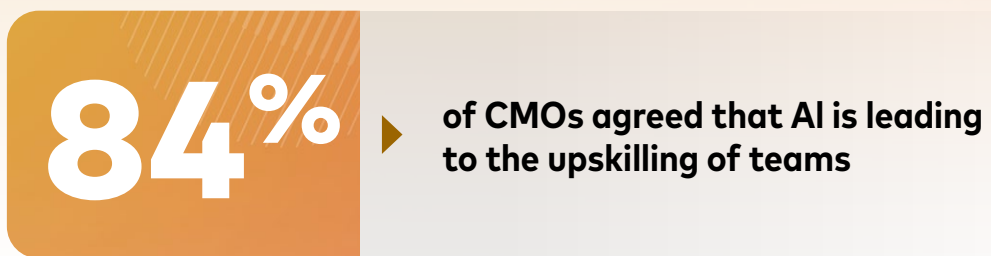
As an example, Nicki Brown, BBC Media Director has established three AI champions in her team with a responsibility to understand how the value could be leveraged and capability catalysed. Becky Brock from Tesco spoke of how they were focusing initially on data modelling and content personalisation. Kate Mackie from EY described how the business had created its own LLM model, with training for AI ring-fenced on their data, and how they were now focused on layering in new skills and developing new tools such as AI brand checking tools (to check that assets complied with brand guidelines) and versioning tools. Antonia Wade from PwC mentioned that there were high levels of interest from the team in getting involved in experiments. They had conducted a survey of the team to identify the tasks that they least liked doing and those that were most inefficient, and then used this to inform approaches to drive efficiency. Margaret Jobling at NatWest Group noted how marketing will be the function in their business which will be most impacted by GenAI in the short to medium term, but the key question they were concerned with was how they can stop it becoming a race to the middle with their competitors when every team is using the same tools.

There was also consistent feedback around the need to share learnings more widely across the business and also about the huge impact that Generative AI will have on marketing practice. When asked in our quantitative survey, no less than **97%** of respondents agreed with the statement "GenAI is going to radically reshape marketing teams".

97%

of CMOs agree that GenAI is going to radically reshape marketing teams

It's clear that there is some way to go to establish the true value of GenAI tools, and also that there are multiple trials and tests currently underway. **52%** of the CMOs in our survey said that they had implemented GenAI trials. Whilst the consensus seems to be that GenAI will have even more radical impacts for the MOM in the future, the survey showed that CMOs are already foreseeing a need to make preparations for the near-term changes. This is particularly evident in the need to upskill teams.
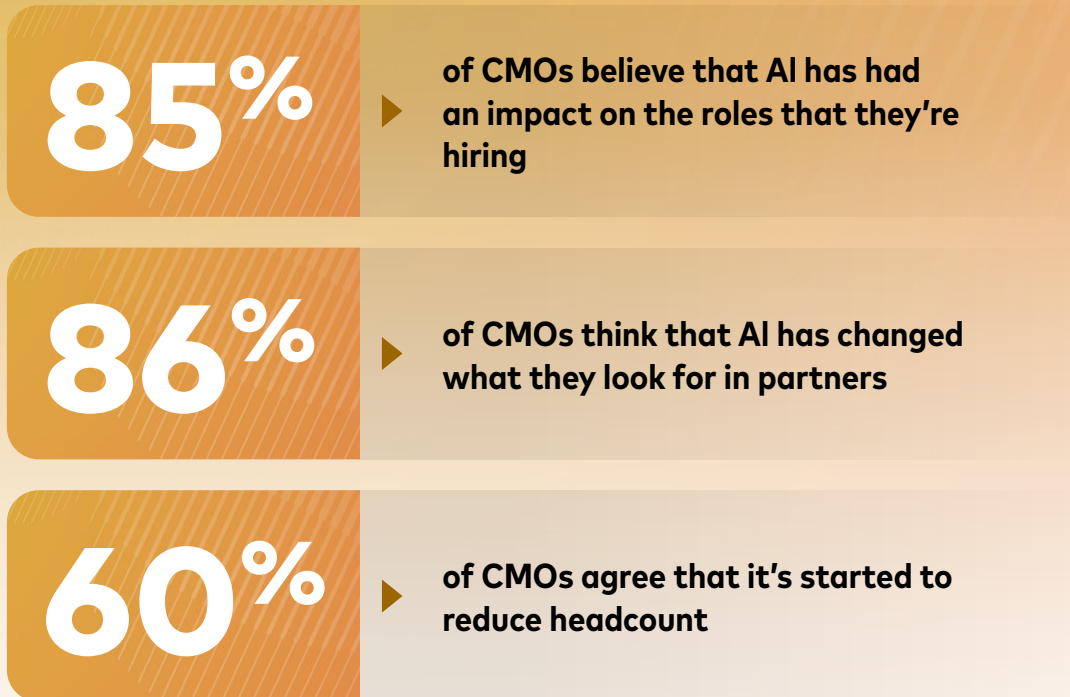
84%

of CMOs agreed that AI is leading to the upskilling of teams

47%

of CMOs listed GenAI skills as a top requirement for training in their marketing team

A large majority again **(88%)** believed that GenAI had already had a positive impact on processes and efficiencies but **76%** also said that, in the short term at least, it had increased their workload. This is likely to reflect the need to spend time in the first phase of GenAI implementation focusing on working out how to establish a solid foundation for application and capability.

> *AI is a good opportunity to do a full process review. We've taken a task-based approach to identify opportunity for AI both for full processes and specific parts of processes.''*
>
> **Antonia Wade, Global CMO, PwC**

It's also worth noting from the survey the impact of AI on resourcing and partnerships:

85% ▶ of CMOs believe that AI has had an impact on the roles that they're hiring

86% ▶ of CMOs think that AI has changed what they look for in partners

60% ▶ of CMOs agree that it's started to reduce headcount

With CMOs under increasing pressure to drive efficiencies, AI and GenAI will likely play an increasingly significant and varied role within the MOM to make this happen. From personalisation at scale, to customer intelligence, to much greater efficiencies in content production, to predictive modelling that can make budgets work harder, to improving speed-to-market through automation, to the ability to more easily spin up bespoke apps that can sit on top of existing systems, every avenue for greater efficiency will be explored.

AI also has the potential to make marketing easier in a couple of fundamental ways. Conversational and natural language interfaces will make it far easier to generate new content, query data and execute actions without the need for complex code or sophisticated design input. Testing at scale will be a lot simpler and more effortless, meaning that new approaches, segments, ideas, and messages can be more habitually tested before wider deployment. Experimentation can be continuous and always-on rather than episodic. GenAI can also support customer, competitor and market analysis processes, and has the potential to improve the quality and efficiency of brief writing.

It's clear that the impact of GenAI on the MOM will be as deep as it will be broad.

The state of martech

Marketing is in the midst of a period of huge potential technological transformation, not least because of AI. Scott Brinker and Frans Riesmersma's latest research into the martech landscape found that the number of technical solutions available to marketers increased to an unprecedented high of 14,106 in 2024, an increase of almost **28%** year-on-year, driven by a raft of AI-powered startups[6].

Yet despite the not insignificant forces of consolidation, there has remained a relatively consistent balance in the composition of marketing technology stacks, which can be represented as a 'longtail'. In the head of the longtail sit the large platforms (such as Adobe, Google, HubSpot, Microsoft, Oracle, Salesforce) which are able to maintain and grow their significant market share through development and acquisition. In the middle of the longtail there are hundreds of companies and services that can grow to hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue by leading in their particular vertical, category or region. Then there are many thousands of much smaller startups and service providers which serve more specialist needs and comprise the longtail.

Martech efficiency and consolidation

Feedback from our quantitative survey of CMOs indicates a desire for greater efficiency in how tech stacks are developed and utilised. Alongside the desire to streamline investments mentioned earlier, there is a real desire to derive more value from systems and data.

67%

▶ **of CMOs agreed that onboarding new tech is too time consuming**
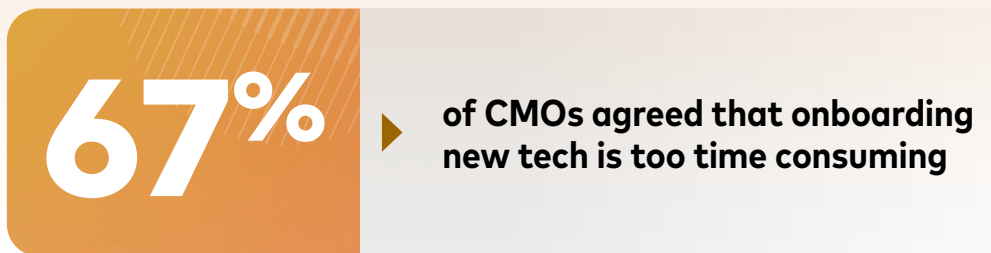
> *" To drive efficiency in our use of platforms, our maxim is migrating to build once globally, and then run regionally or locally".*
>
> **Peter Zillig, Director of Marketing, Ford**

Investing in martech – the 'Goldilocks zone'

Our survey indicates that CMOs are prioritising extracting more value from their existing martech stack over significant new investments. However, with rapidly emerging AI capabilities and the increasing value of data, these areas are likely to see continued resource allocation.

A key challenge in developing new capabilities is the pace at which technology, particularly AI, evolves. So, how can CMOs invest wisely while demonstrating value and return?

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[6] https://chiefmartec.com/2023/12/major-trends-in-martech-for-2024-the-real-changes-underway-in-a-99-platitude-free-report/

Brinker and Riesmersma's 'Goldilocks zone' concept offers a useful framework, inspired by Gartner's Hype Cycle. The Hype Cycle charts the lifecycle of new technologies through stages: the peak of inflated expectations, trough of disillusionment, slope of enlightenment, and plateau of productivity. This trajectory reflects initial hype, the subsequent struggle to identify value, and finally, the emergence of practical applications.

While insightful, the Hype Cycle's predictions can falter due to biases, misjudged timing, or generalisations. This makes it challenging for CMOs to navigate investment decisions, especially as technology adoption accelerates. Over-investing early in unproven use cases wastes resources, while under-investing risks falling behind competitors or creating capability gaps. Generative AI exemplifies this compressed cycle, where value emerges faster than expected.

The 'Goldilocks zone' ensures balanced investment—neither too much nor too little. By avoiding excessive spending during the hype phase and ensuring timely capability development, marketing teams can maintain competitiveness while minimising risks. This measured approach also allows time for experimentation, stakeholder buy-in and identifying high-value use cases.

Investing in martech: a guidance model

AAR has developed a simple summary model to help CMOs assess the key elements that can inform technology investment. These elements should all be assessed against the expected benefits and return that the investment will bring and are framed around the acronym **R.O.I—Resources, Objectives, Infrastructure**:

R - RESOURCING

Evaluate the resource demands of any new technology, including budget and cost, team capacity and capability, training and technical support. Ensure that your team has the ability to effectively implement and manage the technology without overwhelming current operations.

O - OBJECTIVES

Align technology investments closely with business and marketing objectives. Only invest in solutions that directly support key goals, such as customer engagement, personalisation, or operational efficiency, to avoid misalignment and maximise ROI.

I - INFRASTRUCTURE

Assess whether your foundational infrastructure—like data quality, data architecture, and existing technology—is fully leveraged and ready for additional capabilities. A strong infrastructure ensures new tech adds value rather than redundancy, enabling scalability and efficient integration.
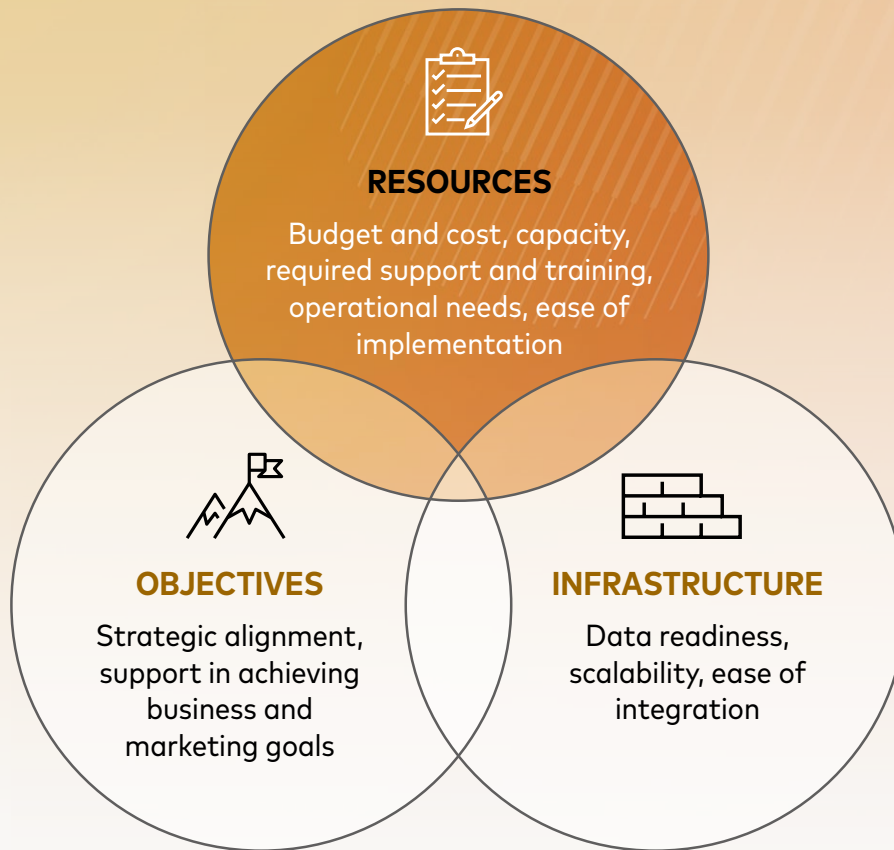
Figure 5: The R.O.I model for technology investment

Using the R.O.I model helps marketing directors assess the true investment costs for technology against projected benefits in achieving balanced, effective growth aligned with strategic goals.

Building on this there are some key questions which CMOs can ask to assess whether they are moving outside of the 'Goldilocks zone' of technology investment:

1. **How well does this new technology align with our current business and marketing objectives?**
    Consider whether the technology will directly support key goals, such as improving customer engagement, streamlining operations, or personalising experiences. Are there clear use cases or potential use cases that will align well with objectives? Technologies that align closely with strategic priorities are more likely to yield immediate, measurable benefits, whereas loosely aligned investments may indicate over-investment or misalignment.

2. **Are we maximising the value of our existing data and infrastructure before adding new capabilities?**
    Assess if you're fully utilising existing tools and data quality efforts before investing in new tech. It's essential to have a solid foundation, particularly in areas like data quality and first-party data usage, before layering on new solutions. This will ensure that new technology doesn't overcomplicate workflows or create redundant capabilities.

3. **What are the resource requirements for this technology, and do we have the capacity to support it?** Evaluate the demands on budget, team capacity, and technical support that a new technology will require. Are you in a position to manage this internally, or would you need additional external support? If a new tool requires significant resources and extensive training or restructuring, it may indicate an over-investment if it's too early for your team to fully support it.

4. **What metrics will we use to measure early and ongoing success, and do we have the data needed for these metrics?** Determine whether you have clear KPIs that can show incremental progress and eventual ROI. How are early experiments being assessed for value? How easy is it to assess better customer or marketing outcomes, or operational efficiency improvements? A lack of measurable impact or potential for impact can lead to over-investment.

5. **How does this investment position us for scalability and flexibility as the technology and industry evolve?** Consider whether the technology offers flexibility, allowing for adjustments as your needs grow or change. A technology that supports scalability will keep you nimble and avoid sunk costs in overly specific or limited tools. Under-investing in flexibility can prevent your team from staying competitive as marketing needs and customer expectations shift.

Data integration

The push for seamless data integration across marketing and the wider business is a critical trend, with CMOs increasingly aiming for all teams to work from a single source of truth. Unified data systems drive efficiency, accuracy, and consistent customer insights, creating a strong foundation for Generative AI applications.

Research shows that **81%** of Marketing Operations Professionals prioritise integration[7], with upcoming investments focused on data enrichment, intent tools, and AI readiness. The shift toward first-party data reflects the need for greater control, enhanced personalisation, and compliance with privacy regulations. Key dynamics shaping this shift include:

- **Reliability and ownership:** first-party data is now critical due to restrictions on third-party cookies and stricter privacy laws. Organisations are investing in richer, more reliable data sources to ensure compliance and support AI-driven personalisation.

- **Data enrichment:** adding contextual information to customer data creates a fuller, more actionable profile, boosting the effectiveness of AI applications.

- **Feedback loops:** Generative AI benefits from continuous feedback, using customer interactions to refine its outputs and improve personalisation. This iterative process relies on high-quality, adaptable data systems.

- **AI-ready architectures:** marketers are building systems capable of handling real-time, structured, and unstructured data from diverse sources. Centralised first-party data prepares organisations to meet the demands of AI, enabling real-time insights and dynamic content generation.

A robust, integrated data strategy is essential for leveraging AI effectively, empowering marketing teams to enhance personalisation, efficiency, and impact.

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[7] https://marketingops.com/state-of-the-marketing-ops-professional-research-2024/

FIVE KEY TAKEAWAYS ON PLATFORMS IN MARKETING OPERATING MODELS

1 Focus on extracting value from existing martech

With **86%** of CMOs streamlining investments, the priority has shifted to maximising ROI from current platforms rather than acquiring new tools. CMOs should align their martech stack with strategic goals, invest in upskilling teams, and optimise existing systems to drive efficiencies.

2 Adopt the R.O.I framework for smarter technology investments

Use the R.O.I model—Resourcing, Objectives, Infrastructure—to evaluate martech decisions. This ensures balanced investment, aligns technology with strategic priorities, and avoids underutilised tools or unnecessary costs.

3 Leverage Generative AI for competitive advantage

Generative AI is reshaping marketing, enabling scalable personalisation, content production, and efficiency gains. Early adopters like NatWest are exploring ways to move beyond generic applications to differentiate themselves, emphasising the need for targeted use cases and experimentation.

4 Embrace data integration for AI readiness

A unified data strategy is essential for leveraging AI effectively. Prioritise first-party data, enrichment, and AI-ready systems to create a single source of truth, enabling real-time insights, enhanced personalisation, and compliance with privacy regulations.

5 Balance innovation with efficiency in martech strategies

Avoid over-investing in unproven technologies or falling behind competitors by navigating the "Goldilocks zone" of martech adoption. Use metrics and KPIs to measure progress and focus on scalable, flexible solutions that adapt to evolving industry needs.

Conclusion

Conclusion

As marketing grows more complex and dynamic, a robust Marketing Operating Model (MOM) is no longer a luxury—it is a strategic necessity. This report demonstrates that CMOs who master the alignment of people, partners, process, and platforms position their organisations to drive growth, deliver measurable outcomes, and adapt to constant change.

> "
> *'It's not about considering each of the four Ps separately but rather as a holistic, interlinked system that becomes an engine for achieving exceptional outcomes."*
>
> **Robin Charney, Partner, AAR**

It's evident from the research that both efficiency and impact in resourcing and process will clearly be a critical area of focus for CMOs over the next 12 months. The findings highlight that success lies in balancing strategic ambition with operational excellence. The HOW of marketing is now as important as the WHAT of marketing.

Over the next few years high-performing MOMs will be defined by skilled and organised teams, forward-thinking partnerships, efficient processes, and seamlessly integrated platforms. Together, these elements can ensure agility, efficiency, and measurable business impact.
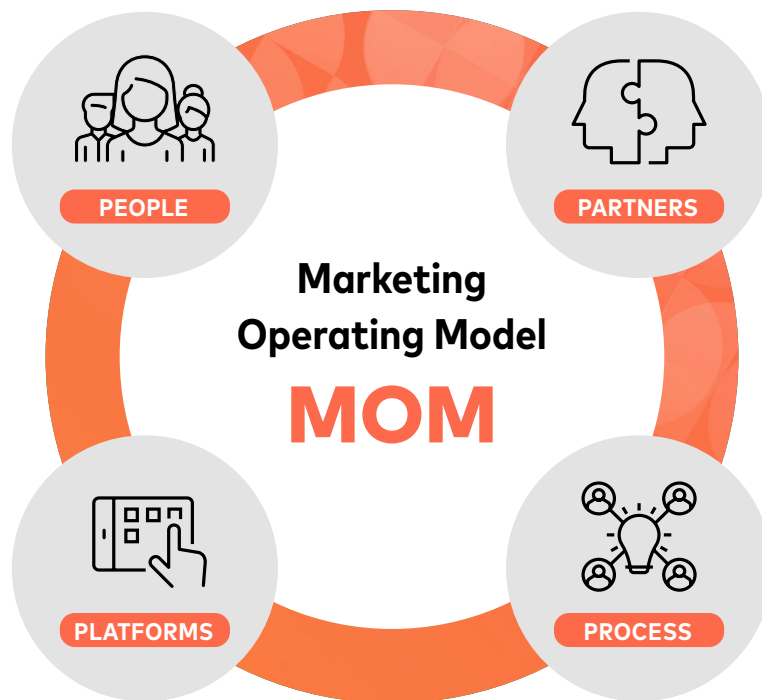
KEY TAKEAWAYS

PEOPLE

Empower people with the right capabilities and structure

Build teams with the right skills and sit them in a well organised team designed to meet business objectives. Balance specialisation with generalisation, ensure team structures encourage collaboration and agility supported with high levels of psychological safety, and consider how a two-speed operating model can support greater agility alongside robust governance.

PARTNERS

Optimise partnerships for value and flexibility

Align in-house and external resources to do the right work at the right cost, align with two-speed requirements, and maximise seamless collaboration between creative and media. Hybrid models offer adaptability while leveraging agency creativity and expertise alongside in-house efficiencies. Align your marketing and content operating model to deliver effectively against both big creative campaigns and high-volume content.

PROCESS

Focus on clear, agile processes

Streamline workflows, reduce dependencies, and ensure governance aligns with speed-to-market goals. Move from rigid outputs to measurable outcomes, balance control and flexibility to enable consistent and effective outcomes. Consider how process mapping, reducing dependencies and automation can support more efficient workflows.

PLATFORMS

Leverage platforms for efficiency and insight

Focus on optimising the value you are getting from your existing technology stack, and invest in technology that integrates seamlessly into workflows and measurement frameworks. When investing, stay in the 'Goldilocks zone' of technology investment. Ensure martech is not just up to date but also fully embedded to maximise impact and data-driven decision-making. Take a structured approach to piloting GenAI technologies.

By addressing these four areas, CMOs can transform their MOMs into engines of efficiency, adaptability, and growth, ensuring marketing remains a pivotal driver of business success in an increasingly challenging environment.

5 CLOSING THOUGHTS...

1 As we've emphasised throughout this report, thinking and planning for an optimised marketing operating model should no longer be the afterthought to a well developed marketing strategy. It should occupy the same level of attention and resource. Without the right operating model, your marketing strategy will be hamstrung at best, and fail at worst.

2 In order for your marketing operating model to succeed, it must link closely to your marketing and business strategy. You cannot implement an effective model with a lack of strategic vision and alignment.

3 No matter where you start your marketing operating model transformation, remember to consider all four Ps - people, partners, process, and platforms. Each is interconnected and a change to one area will inevitably impact on the others.

4 People are the core of any transformation. Remember to bring them with you and don't underestimate the impact of change fatigue and the need to always maintain a space for divergent views and late adopters.

5 The most successful marketing operating model evolutions have a clear three year plan, dedicated resource, and an approved business case with board level buy-in. Marketing operating model transformation is not a "side of the desk" project!

About AAR

AAR has been part of the fabric of the marketing industry for the last five decades. A safety net beneath brands and agencies. But this is just the beginning.

Data and technology has fundamentally transformed the way marketing is delivered. Getting all the stuff that happens under the bonnet working brilliantly has become more important than ever. In other words, the **how** of marketing is just as important as the **what**.

That's why we've made it our mission to bring together an extraordinary group of experts. A team who can supercharge your potential by ensuring your operating model - your people, partners, process, and platforms - are firing on all cylinders.

Be part of our evolution and let us fuel your success.

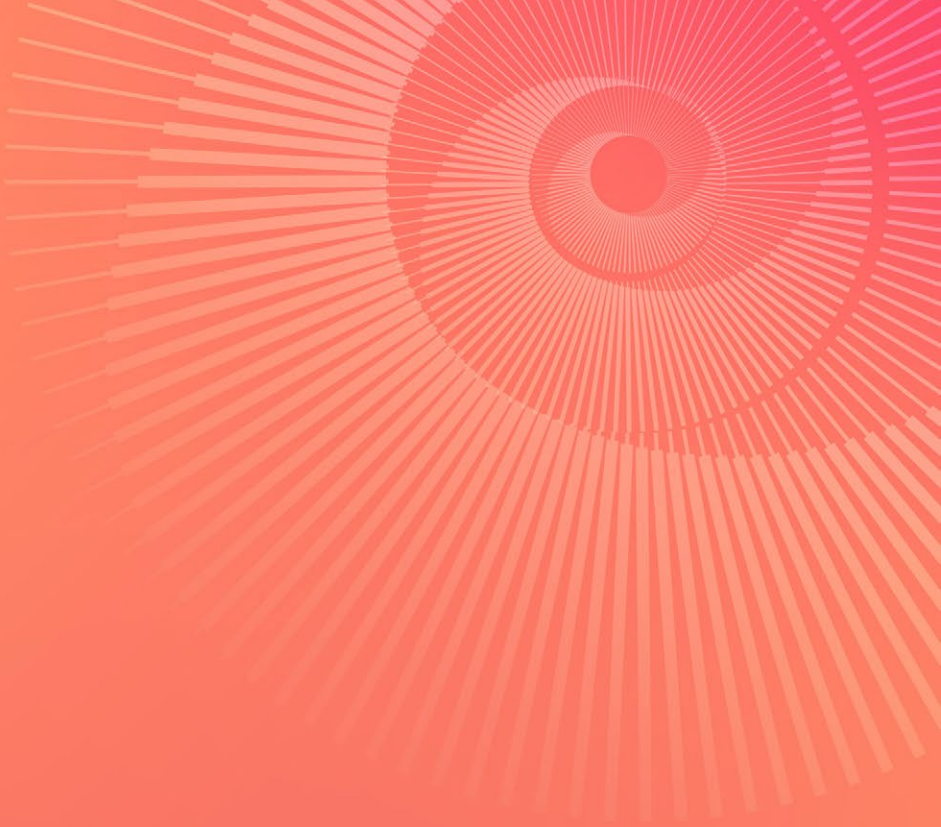Together let's work towards a new dawn in marketing.

About ISBA

ISBA is the only body that represents brand owners advertising in the UK. We empower them to understand the industry and shape its future because we bring together a powerful community of marketers with common interests; lead decision-making with knowledge and insight; and give a single voice to advocacy for the improvement of the industry.

Our purpose is to create an advertising environment that is transparent, responsible and accountable; one that can be trusted by the public, by advertisers and by legislators.

About the author

Neil Perkin is the founder of digital and transformation consultancy Only Dead Fish, and the author of three bestselling books on marketing and organisational agility including 'Agile Marketing: Unlock Adaptive and Data-driven Marketing for Long-term Success'. He has run global marketing and leadership capability programmes and consulted on transformation with a broad range of large, multinational businesses including AstraZeneca, the UK Government, Lloyds Banking Group, Shiseido, NBC Universal and Legal & General. He moderates the renowned Google Firestarters podcast series and has been named by BIMA (British Interactive Media Association) as one of the most influential people in the UK digital industry.