



PERPETUAL EVOLUTION

The interplay of talent and technology in the future of marketing

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Perpetual evolution: The interplay of talent and technology in the future of marketing <https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/perpetual-evolution-economist>

FOREWORD

Ken Fitzpatrick, CEO, Digital Marketing Institute



Last year, the Digital Marketing Institute (DMI) established that marketing leaders were at a pivotal time, recognising the need to respond and plan ahead as the digital space evolves: Now, it is time to start acting before we get left behind. This new report offers some worrying evidence that we are already lagging in this respect—and that we need to become more agile in all aspects of our work as the role of marketing shows only signs of continuing change.

That's the bad news. The good news: The research, including observations from our Global Industry Advisory Champions, shows we collectively recognise this danger. There are clear indications that marketing leaders are already rising to the challenge, aware that change is a constant, and are actively recruiting in the areas seen as key drivers for the future. Leaders are also seeking to train and reskill within existing talent bases.

“We welcome this new research as a wake-up call.”

The other good news is that marketing is now at the top table and will only become more embedded in the C-suite—particularly as the old distinctions between “digital and traditional” or “marketing and business” have become irrelevant. Today, it's all simply marketing.

But the speed of change in our business in the 21st century affords us no time for complacency. Marketers need to equip themselves for these new

challenges, while also future-proofing their practices, to ensure we are readily able to adapt our structures and systems even as we implement them. We are also challenged to understand enough about our individual businesses to decide which changes are necessary and which ones are elective to ensure the success of our marketing organisations and our companies.

The conclusions of this report are bold and provocative. We are still doing well in many areas, and leaders should be congratulated for identifying the need to upskill—both to keep pace with changes in the digital landscape as well as to set the agenda for future growth. But we will achieve nothing by standing still and congratulating ourselves on a job half done.

Instead, we welcome this new research as a wake-up call, encouraging us not to rest on our laurels and ensure we are clearly focussing on how to recruit, train and upskill both the current and next generation of marketers.

Fortunately, we have the knowledge and the insights of some of the most respected global digital marketing experts to help us prepare for the future—our job is to accept that challenge.



FOREWORD

Mina Seetharaman, EVP, Chief strategy and creative officer, The Economist Group



When we at The Economist Group first undertook this research in association with the Digital Marketing Institute, we weren't sure where it would lead. We simply wanted to take the pulse of marketers and get a better understanding of the future of their discipline.

There is no shortage of speculation on what that future might look like, but much of that speculation focuses on tactics and technology. We are all familiar with headlines such as, "An AI powered future takes shape for marketers," or "In a smart-speaker future, voice search is king," or my personal favorite, "Marketers double down on [insert tech/trend/fad here]." The other main category of prognostication centers on business support: "Marketers must prove ROI to earn a seat at the table." Marketers are under pressure and, in turn, look to data and tech as a kind of panacea for their ills.

The truth is, there will always be a new technology, a new platform, a new idea (or an old idea with a new, trendy name) that forces marketers to recalibrate to remain relevant. But a new technology doesn't make a great marketer any more than Microsoft Word makes a great author. So, while looking at technology is important for any research about the future of the discipline, we decided it would be of greater value to look at the future of the marketing organization itself and what kinds of people would be needed to meet the challenges ahead.

Spoiler alert: there are some totally expected findings in this research. Do marketers feel data is important? Yes. Will AI be important to marketing? Of course. Will marketers still care about customer experience in 5 years? Sure. But more interesting, and in my view, most reassuring, is marketers also agree that tech alone is not the harbinger of the marketing future. The combination of tech *and* talent is key to future success, and that talent is not just specialists in specific technologies. People with skills like creativity, adaptability and flexibility—along with tech skills—will prove the most valuable. These are the people who will deliver marketing success in the face of a constantly changing landscape. And the data indicates that marketers agree an investment in recruitment and training, not just in tech, is important.

This all sounds great, but we also know that, in moments of fiscal pressure, training budgets are the first to be slashed. We all want to invest in our people, but how to do that in today's corporate culture?

To contain costs, companies look to fresh talent who require less immediate investment and can hit the ground running on new technology. But this runs the risk of creating a short-term culture of talent disposability, increasing recruitment costs and decreasing team loyalty. This short-termism is seen in the way some businesses are run. If companies favor a focus on quarterly earnings as a primary indicator of success, this is likely to have a trickle-down effect in how we measure

"Marketers agree that tech alone is not the harbinger of the marketing future. The combination of tech and talent is key to future success."

marketing success and how we manage talent. Forgoing investment in a company's current talent may meet short-term goals, but the revolving door of recruitment can create long-term financial and cultural costs.

So, yes, this research is a call for marketers to accept the notion of a discipline not in transition but in perpetual change. But it is also a call to marketers, and their companies, to take a longer-term view of corporate success in order to reap the benefits of investments in employees and the *invested* employee.

Survey design

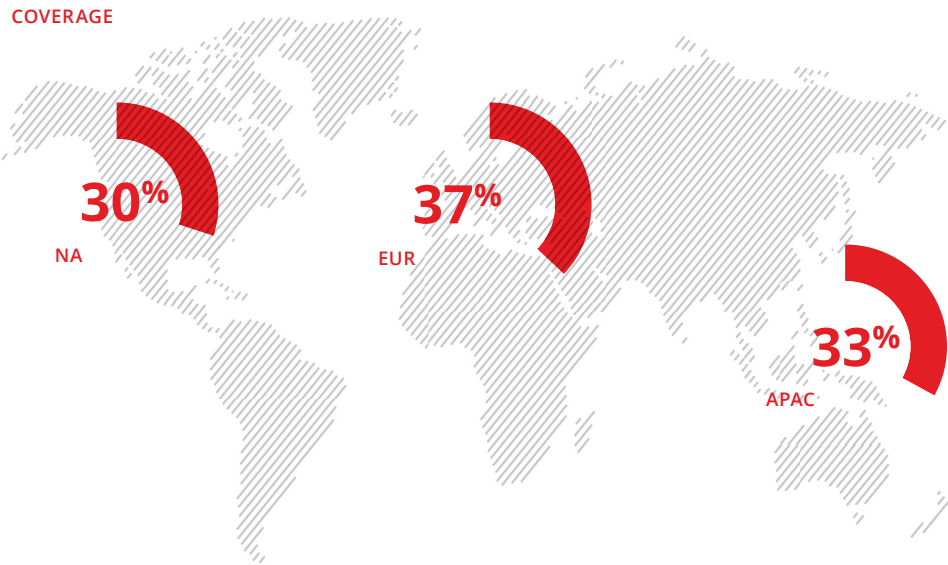
The Economist Group, in association with the Digital Marketing Institute, conducted a global survey among marketing and communications executives to gauge their sentiments and views.

The 15-minute survey was conducted online in April 2019 among 523 executives covering 9 countries across 10 targeted industries.

Country distribution included: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Singapore, UK, and the US.

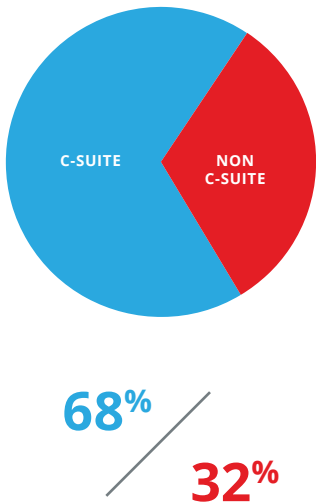
All survey respondents were required to be very or somewhat involved in the marketing strategy for their company.

The survey has a margin of error of 4.3 percentage points at 95% confidence level.

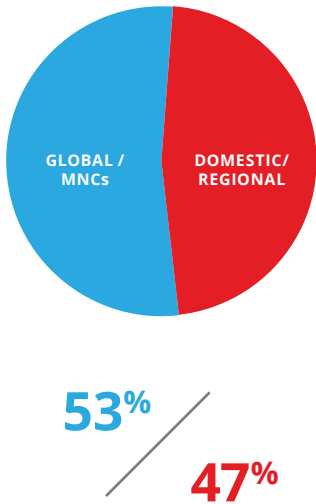


Respondent profile

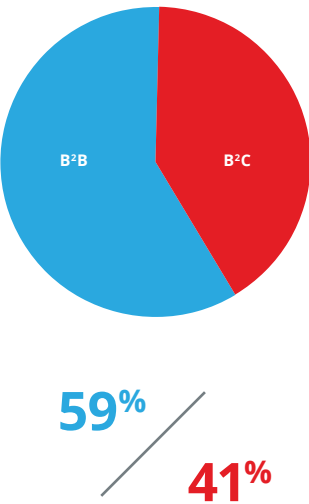
SENIORITY



BUSINESS FOOTPRINT



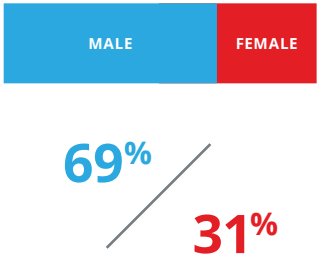
TYPE OF CUSTOMER



SIZE OF COMPANY



GENDER





Introduction

The concept of perpetual evolution is, perhaps, daunting. Marketers specifically and businesses more generally like the idea of measurable, achievable goals—actions with a specific start and a specific end. But virtually any marketer can attest to the mounting levels of change they have experienced in a few short decades, driven largely by the proliferation of digital technologies. It would be naïve to presume any deceleration in the pace of change.

We have now reached a point where it no longer makes sense to differentiate the digital aspects of marketing from other components of the marketing mix. Digital has become so pervasive in the

lives of most people; consumers are adopting technologies and platforms with impressive speed. But the evidence points worryingly towards the idea that our readiness to adapt for success in this changing marketing environment is often found wanting. We do need to be engaging digitally savvy teams more effectively to ensure the success of current and future marketing departments and firms.

This goal perhaps causes anxiety. But it should be taken as a rallying cry, challenging us to think differently and to accept—and prepare ourselves for—the exponential rate of change affecting all involved in business.

This report from The Economist Group, in association with the Digital Marketing Institute (DMI), employs data from a survey of more than 500 marketing executives from around the world, as well as offers insights from DMI's Global Industry Advisory Champions (GIAC), a distinguished

group of digital marketing and industry leaders.* In it, we look unflinchingly at the state of marketing today, specifically its evolving role in business, the level of organisational readiness amongst marketers and the biggest challenges facing marketers today.

While the data show that many marketers feel unprepared for the latest skill demands, the message is not all bleak; many are aware of this partial lack and are taking steps to address it. It's not too late to future-proof the organisational readiness of your company, but the path forward to get there may prove to lead through unfamiliar territory. It bears repeating: We all need to prepare for constant change.

As Ty Heath, global lead at the B2B Institute at LinkedIn, explains, "It's incumbent on all of us to understand how we're going to meet this change. This isn't a time to sit back and wait for events to unfold. To be prepared for the future, you have to understand it."

"To be prepared for the future, you have to understand it."

TY HEATH, GLOBAL LEAD AT THE B2B INSTITUTE AT LINKEDIN

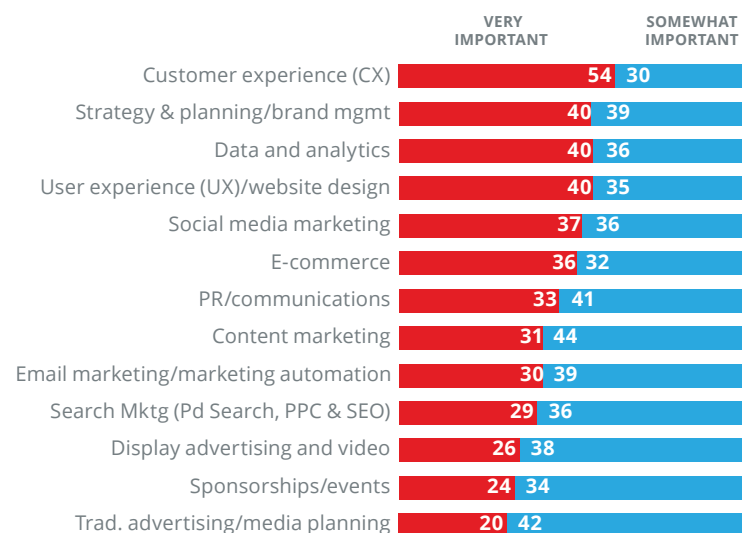
*The GIAC are independent industry advisers to DMI and are not compensated for their contributions. Their role is to provide insight to DMI on what they, as marketing leaders, are seeing in the industry currently and what trends or changes they believe may be on the horizon.

The state of marketing today

Consumers are engaging digitally with brands more than ever, a consequence of the “always-on” nature of our multi-device and multi-platform lifestyles. Indeed, the rate of change is such that our language on the subject often struggles to keep up. It has, for instance, already become antiquated to talk of “digital-first” strategies; we are now living in a digitally integrated world, with no divide between digital and non-digital.

Campaigns should instead be crafted as integrated, multi-channel offerings—to be consumed on whichever platforms or devices best suit the demands and preferences of consumers or other key audiences.

FIGURE 1: DRIVERS OF ORGANISATIONAL MARKETING SUCCESS (BY IMPORTANCE)



Looking at figure 1, which shows answers to the question, “To what extent are each of the following areas of marketing important to your organisation’s success and business performance today?” (and combining the “very important” and “somewhat important” responses)—*customer experience* (84%) and *user experience / website design* (75%) rate highly amongst these global executives. *Strategy and planning / brand management* (79%) and *Data and analytics* (76%) also had high scores.

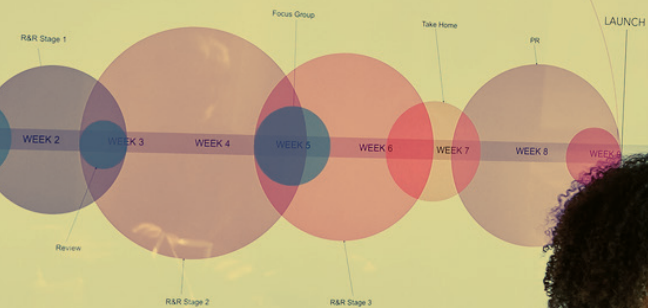
Significantly, while *social media marketing* scored a combined 73%, *traditional advertising/media planning* had the lowest total in the “very important” responses (20%) and the second lowest combined response (62%).

This shifting focus from traditional advertising towards an emphasis on CX, UX and data/analytics seems to have already been absorbed by the industry. Marketers are recognising that customers now expect companies to understand their needs and deliver experiences that address them.

“This transition of marketing to put more focus, or ‘drive’, on CX is one that I’m hearing among my peers,” says Christine Royston, vice president of marketing at Bitly.

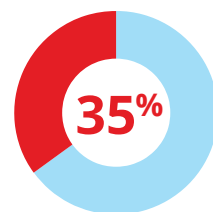
Also worth emphasising is that the data suggest a generally optimistic view: In response to the question “How successful do you believe your organisation was in delivering on its marketing goals for 2018?,” 68% were positive. If, in fact, marketers are recognising the importance of customer experience and starting to align their marketing goals to their customers’ expectations, then marketers do seem to be on a promising track.

PRODUCT LAUNCH

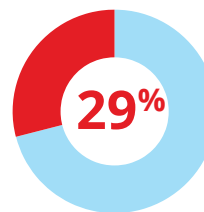


Greatest challenges

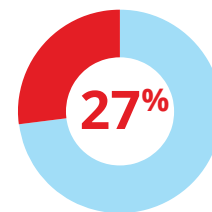
So, we know where we're heading and how we want to get there. Across the industry, the general consensus does seem to be that marketing goals are being met. What are the obstacles to that success? Ignoring *securing budget* (28%)—a perennial issue—the top responses to the question "What are the greatest challenges your marketing function faces today?" were:



Talent and skill set



Data security



Keeping pace with market demand/audience needs

Figure 2: The greatest challenges the marketing function faces today

Alarmingly—70% indicated a talent and skills deficit, while a combined 55% of the top two net responses agreed with the statement, “My company has not kept pace with the new technologies that everyday consumers are using today” (See figure 3).

Keeping pace with consumers’ use of tech seems likely to be a factor in a marketing organisation’s success. As Olivia Kearney, CMO Microsoft (IRE), states: “Digital transformation in marketing is key to empower and enable marketers to be more consumer- and customer-obsessed in a competitive landscape, where knowing your customer even more than knowing your competitors is key to sustainable growth.”

Coupled with the “Drivers of Success” responses, these results point towards the conclusion: Consumers are setting the agenda for marketers, who are, for various reasons, behind the curve. This position could be the result of an outdated approach, insufficient structure for future-proofing or the talent pool from which they are recruiting. And for both B2C and B2B marketers, not considering the talent and the technology that help to deliver against customer expectations can have a direct impact on the larger business.

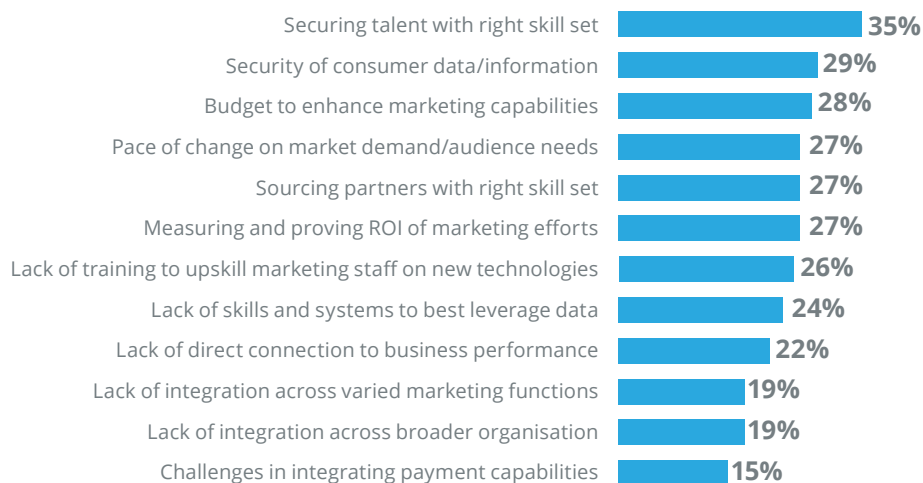
“The starting point for growth isn’t selling your product, but engaging with your customer. It’s about creating an experience that hooks

them and keeps them coming back,” says Sangram Varje, chief evangelist at and co-founder of Terminus. “Customer expectations have changed, especially in the B2B space, with more and more customers looking for B2C-type shopping and buying experiences. Because of this, the technological and human sides of a business have to work in tandem to give current and future customers the experiences they’ve come to expect.”

Clearly, talent and technology must converge if marketers are to deliver wanted customer experiences. Blind adoption of every single new technology, however, is not the way to go. Instead, we should have or acquire the knowledge about which technologies are best for a specific business and its audience—while remaining aware of the other options.

Consumers are setting the agenda for marketers, who are, for various reasons, behind the curve.

FIGURE 3: GREATEST CHALLENGES



*NB Respondents were asked to select all answers that applied, so the total percentages add up to greater than 100.



Planning for the future

Having identified a key area of concern, the next step is determining how to address it. The Current Talent Structure generally reflects the key drivers of success. Matching a larger industry trend, we see that our respondents are taking functions aligned to the key drivers of success in house in order to control the experience of their brand, its positioning and its marketing message.

Two areas where outstourcing still leads are *display advertising* (which is seen as a price-led commodity at this point) and *video* (which is a specialty production item that is used infrequently and, therefore, may not yield cost benefits if brought in house).

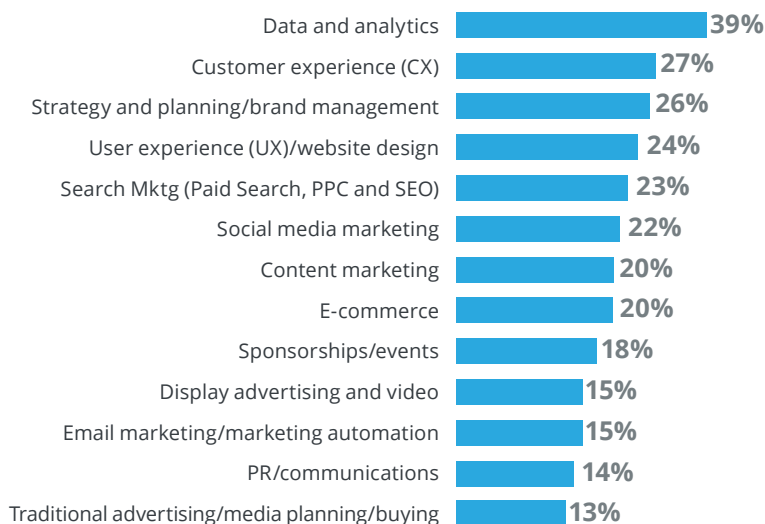
FIGURE 4: CURRENT TALENT STRUCTURE

	INTERNAL SPECIALIST	INTERNAL GENERALIST	EXTERNAL SPECIALIST	EXTERNAL GENERALIST
Strategy and planning/ brand management	58%	15%	19%	5%
Data and analytics	58%	12%	22%	5%
E-commerce	36%	30%	19%	8%
Customer experience (CX)	36%	34%	20%	7%
User experience (UX)/ website design	36%	29%	25%	7%
PR/communications	33%	35%	20%	8%
Email marketing/marketing automation	32%	39%	19%	8%
Content marketing	32%	35%	22%	9%
Social media marketing	32%	34%	24%	6%
Traditional advertising/ media planning/buying	30%	36%	24%	8%
Search Mktg (Paid Search, PPC and SEO)	28%	28%	28%	12%
Sponsorships/events	27%	29%	25%	13%
Display advertising and video	25%	28%	31%	11%

Figure 6.

But, given the premium they afford and the fact that many of them are newly developing areas of marketing, these key drivers of success are also identified as the hardest areas in which to recruit.

FIGURE 5: HARDEST AREAS IN WHICH TO RECRUIT



Perhaps part of this is related to a focus on CX not being just about tools and data but also about a shift in the way marketers approach their work. "You really cannot overestimate the importance of customer experience," says Tom Kendall, head of digital marketing for IBM Europe. "It's something that will require a mindset change for many businesses in both B2C and B2B industries."

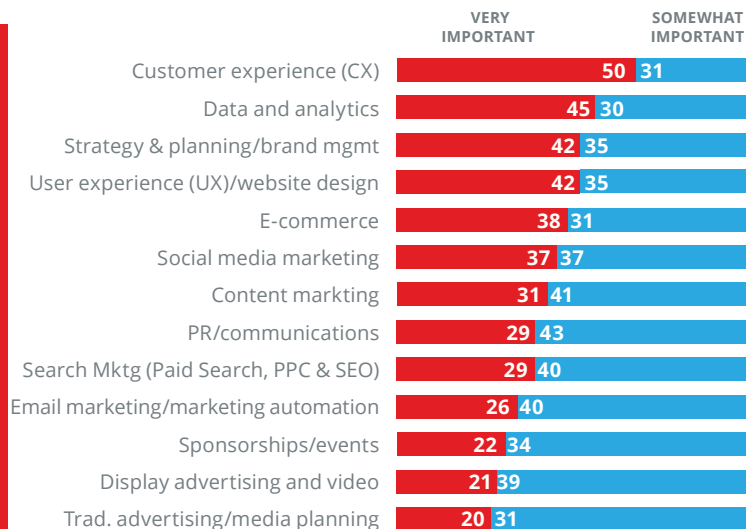
"You cannot overestimate the importance of customer experience."

TOM KENDALL
HEAD OF DIGITAL
MARKETING
IBM EUROPE

Drivers of future success: CX is here to stay

Looking at what our respondents tell us are the key drivers of success in the next five years, we find, unsurprisingly, a parallel not only with current drivers of success but also with the current areas in which it is hardest to recruit:

FIGURE 6: KEY DRIVERS OF SUCCESS



The continued importance of CX in marketing cannot be overstated. It appears not to be a fad or momentary buzzword, but a necessary refocusing of the marketing discipline.

“Customers today care about speed, experience and control,” says Mark Kilens, vice president of content and community at Drift. “Marketers need to be the leaders in creating experiences that customers desire and love.”

To put it another way, if you invest in your customers, their positive experience will start to show a return on investment further down the line. In the words of Chris LoDolce, director of HubSpot Academy, customers will “evangelise your products and services across the web.”

Inhibiting our ability to deliver such experiences, though, is a talent gap. A combined 74% believe that marketing faces a critical talent shortage due to a lack of needed digital skills.

As we have already established, talk of “digital-first” can be unhelpful—we should be thinking of digital as running through almost all experiences in today’s consumer-led marketplace. Therefore, a critical shortage in digital-first talent is a critical shortage in talent, period.

Nevertheless, many marketing organisations are still clearly in the midst of a transition, so we must ask, “What does the digitally savvy workforce that supports a successful marketing organisation look like?”

If we combine the top two results (“very important” and “somewhat important”), we find a familiar pattern:

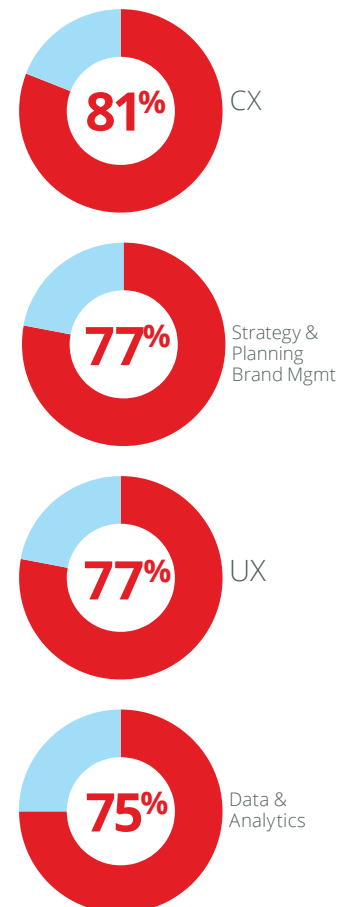


Figure 7: Key drivers of success in 5 years.



Building the digitally savvy workforce

A combined 86% state that digital transformation and globalisation are changing the way marketing functions need to operate to be relevant to consumers. In addition, a large majority of our respondents (87%) agree that companies need to invest in technology to facilitate customer experiences; 83% say the marketing function must evolve at the same pace as technology to remain viable; and 84% say data and analytics skills and technologies are key to the marketing function winning the personalisation battle.

All of these data points illustrate the concept that talent and technology are the foundation

of delivering an exceptional customer experience, but do we fully understand the implications of this?

Both the data from our respondents and insights from the DMI point to the idea that we need a sea change in the way we approach marketing within business—from recruitment to reskilling and, ultimately, to the culture within an organisation.

While 87% agree, somewhat agree or strongly agree that investment in talent is key, that is not the complete answer. Companies need to consider how they bring new, required skills into their

organisations.

It is, of course, tempting to simply cut loose existing or long-tenured talent in favour of bringing in new talent. While new talent can often serve as a catalyst for change by taking existing talent on a journey of transformation, it is often not practical to focus solely on recruitment; we must ensure business continuity as we foster change. Ideally, we want to keep those skills and capabilities that are still relevant while adding to our toolkit—not just swap for a new one with its own set of gaps.

While the research indicates that marketers will place a strong emphasis on recruitment (47% say they will focus “somewhat or much more” on recruitment), a sizeable number (40%) say they will focus equally on recruitment and reskilling of their existing

workforce.

When looking at the mechanisms for upskilling current marketing staff, leading responses were to focus on internal or external training on new skills or technologies (both at 46%). Immediately following, at 45% of respondents, was to focus on the development of soft skills such as adaptability, flexibility and critical thinking.

“I believe we will continue to see a rise in the theme of hiring for potential—individuals who score high on soft skills like critical thinking, adaptability, curiosity and ability to learn quickly,” says HubSpot’s Mr LoDolce. “It’s very clear that the skills and knowledge marketers have today won’t be the same skills and knowledge needed in five years to be equally, if not more, successful.”

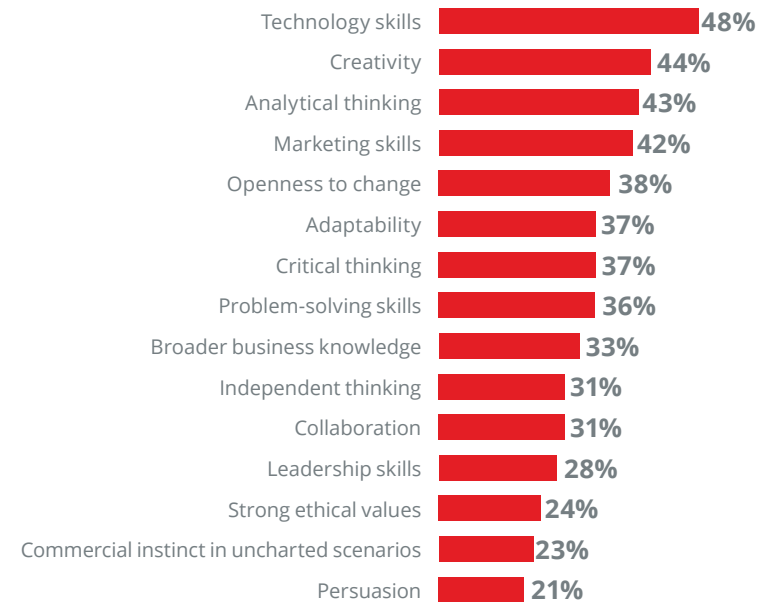
Mark Evans, managing director, marketing and digital at Direct Line Group believes that marketing innovation will be driven by the diversity of individual skill sets and that leaders need to create environments to support these contributions. “Neurodiversity might be the hardest area of diversity to tap into since it is arguably the most complex and the least visible,” says Mr Evans, “but for those businesses that want to thrive in the years to come, it could well be the most important, especially when AI could take over those tasks that require repeatable precision. Innovation from the edges will become even more critical.”



Future skills and competencies needed

Looking at the response to the question, “What skills and competencies will a future marketing workforce need to be successful in the next five years?”, while *marketing skills* understandably score relatively high (42%), the rest of the top ten responses notably identify skills not typically associated with traditional marketing. These include *technology skills* (48%), *openness to change* (38%), *adaptability* (37%) and *broader business knowledge* (33%).

FIGURE 8: FUTURE SKILLS NEEDED



This could reflect a need to fundamentally rethink what is required of a successful marketer in the coming environment. Marketers should be encouraged to both take a nuanced approach to training, as our data suggest, and think about more innovative approaches to recruitment, such as considering candidates from other industries and with less orthodox backgrounds, especially as competition for talent grows.

“It’s a case of the blind leading the blind—because management who don’t have the right skill set can’t train others,” explains Neal Schaffer, lecturer and author of works about social media. “Talent with the right skill set will migrate to those companies where management is already on board, not those where they have to internally fight to bring their company’s marketing into the 21st century.”

A young girl with dark hair and a pink backpack is looking towards a white robot in a crowded market. The robot has a screen on its chest and is holding a bouquet of pink flowers. The background is filled with blurred lights and people, suggesting a busy street scene.

The future: Not tech vs. human, but tech and human

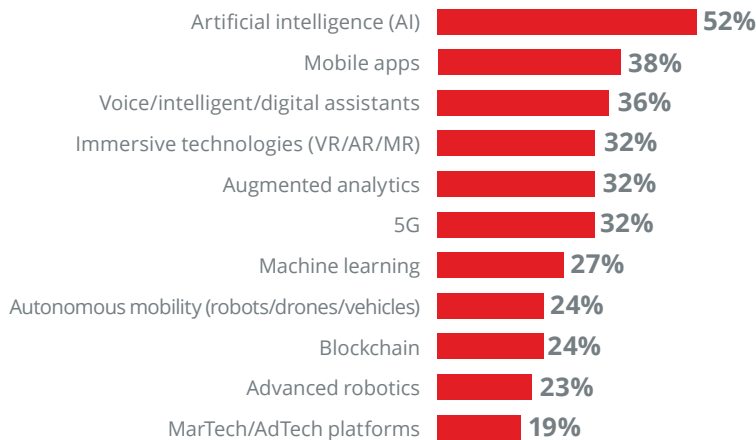
The perceived importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing is notable. Fifty-two percent identify AI as the technology that will most influence the marketing function in the next five years—notably higher than the next closest responses (*mobile apps* at 38%; *voice/intelligent/digital assistants* at 36%; and *immersive technologies* at 32%).

But, as LinkedIn's Ms Heath notes, "It will be hard for AI to displace jobs where effective soft skills are needed. When you sharpen inherently human attributes, you are making a long-term career investment."

Influential tech to future marketing

Since tech innovation and AI continue to grow in influence and are becoming more pervasive, these are areas where marketers cannot afford to lag behind. We need, in the words of one respondent, “to reskill to avoid disruption”. Clearly the disruption is already here—reskilling will make us ready to respond.

FIGURE 9: TECHNOLOGY CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE



Thinking of the future marketer reductively—as either a technologist or a creative—is the wrong road. Our research shows the discipline will not be a binary one. AI, data and analytics platforms, and other technologies can help automate a lot of our work, but creativity and strategic insight remain innately human tasks (at least for now).

Marketing fundamentals also remain an important part of the mix, according to former chief customer experience and marketing officer at Abra Julie Roehm. “In recent years, we’ve had so much splintering of marketing skill sets with people who are very good at specific technical things, such as SEO or programmatic—but this has created a real lack of marketing fundamentals. We need to recruit people who understand the foundation of good marketing, because that can be applied to any channel and any technology.”

Furthermore, creativity, critical thinking and adaptability are not just skills; they are hallmarks of company culture. “Should we be recruiting only for skills rather than attitude or behaviour?” asks Andrew Mortimer, director of client strategy at Sky Media. “You want people who have an attitude of curiosity, a desire to constantly keep developing or you end up in a cultural cul de sac, with teams just nodding at each other.”

Ultimately, technology and digital skills are important to be able to deliver an exemplary customer experience—the leading driver of success; the organisations that will be most successful in this arena will foster a culture and mindset where skills such as adaptability, creativity and critical thinking underpin the overall work approach.



Conclusion

We need to stop thinking about a “digital transformation” as something to tackle. The transformation has occurred, and the challenges facing us require an ongoing state of readiness for constant change. This process has no foreseeable end, therefore, our mindset and view of the future have to be far-reaching.

While more than 50% of executives see their organisation's digital transformation/marketing digital skills as “advanced”^{**}—this is simply not enough. Just 35-36% claim they are “Making good progress” in their digital transformation, with fewer than one in five seeing their progress as “very advanced”; this suggests that more work is to be done—and quickly.

Put simply, marketing initiatives need to be digitally integrated, implemented by teams who understand traditional, real-world and digital touchpoints if they are to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology and consumer

behaviours. Only in this way will the other areas most important today to an organisation's success—CX, Strategy & Planning, Data & Analytics and UX—be adequately addressed, while future-proofing the organisation for what lies ahead.

By its nature, a well-run, forward-looking marketing organisation considers its customers, the culture and the environment in which those customers live. Thus, organisational readiness within companies could do well to emanate from marketing. This will entail building a digitally savvy workforce that is adept both with current technologies and adaptable to new ones but also is creative and flexible, with an openness to inevitable change. Organisations will need to approach upskilling and reskilling in nuanced and thoughtful ways and potentially rethink traditional approaches to recruitment to cast the widest candidate net possible.

As Brian Chau, general manager, e-commerce for Coca-Cola in China, elucidates, this isn't simply a case of spelling out why we have to change, but rather why we can't not change. “There could still be some misperceptions that it can be a choice,” he says. “Instead, if I look at the case in China, where

excellent customer experiences, we would be remiss to suggest that this achievement represents an end-state in becoming an exemplary marketing organisation. Observing all of the change leading up to our current state, and the forward-looking focus on skills like adaptability, flexibility

skills up to date on a constant basis. It also demands a new mindset that rapid and ongoing change in the world outside our companies cannot simply be observed and chased; it needs to be mimicked to keep pace with the needs of the market and consumers.

We will need marketing teams who have the ability and curiosity to adapt to succeed, because a culture of change is not driven by technology; an organisation's culture is driven by its people. Those companies set up for readiness for, and openness to change, will increase their chances of being relevant to consumers and, in turn, their businesses.

We will need marketing teams who have the ability to adapt to succeed.

digitalisation goes to the extreme, it is an edge one must build well, not just to stay competitive, but to survive.”

While much of our research points to the coming together of talent and technology to deliver

and creativity, makes clear that marketing as a discipline will require ongoing adaptation to constant change.

In summary, this state of perpetual evolution is the new cultural norm for marketers. It requires keeping

^{**}Compared to your peers, where would you say your organisation is today in its digital transformation?—55% combined “Very advanced/Somewhat advanced”/“Compared to your peers, where would you say your marketing staff is today with its digital skills?”—53% combined “Very advanced/Somewhat advanced”

The Economist Group

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About the Digital Marketing Institute

DMI is the global digital marketing professional learning and certification body with over 47,000 alumni members and partners in over 150 countries. Founded in Ireland with a U.S. office in Dallas, it is backed by Spectrum Equity, a leading U.S. based growth equity firm. Customers include IBM, Black & Decker, Microsoft, PwC, Millipore, University of Utah and the University of Vermont. DMI's Global Industry Advisory Council, consisting of leaders from Coca-Cola, Facebook, Google, HubSpot, LinkedIn, IBM, IAB, WPP and more, provides input and oversight to DMI's certification programs and industry trends.

Learn more at:

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