

A Guide to the New Era of Agile Marketing Planning



This spring was a wake-up call to all marketers that the traditional planning process isn't working anymore. Planning programs and locking in spend a year in advance leaves no room to pivot when markets shift or company processes demand it. We're twisting ourselves into knots that we can't get out of.

Marketers are working harder, with less resources, and need to make a bigger impact to drive revenue and growth. To achieve this, we must be faster, flexible, and iterative.

We need to be agile.

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Adoption of adaptive marketing processes was boosted by the pandemic's shock. Everyone was ill-prepared. Everyone wishes they could be nimbler and more resilient. Unfortunately, you're only as fast as your slowest part. The expectation for both teams and executives should be that things will change in the direction of adaptivity. But not overnight.

— Kathleen Schaub, former IDC analyst

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Agile is a process marketers are tackling, but it's not an out-of-the-box solution for their needs. You're not going to overhaul your entire system of processes overnight, and you don't need to. Especially because Agile itself isn't done evolving. It's about introducing the right concepts to make your team more flexible.



of marketers implement a hybrid approach because neither Scrum or Kanban is a perfect fit.

Take the strengths of Agile and adopt it to fit your organization's needs.

Keep reading to move forward on the path to agility and a new era of marketing planning!



CHAPTER

1

Create a Strategic Blueprint for Your Marketing Plans



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(Aligning to corporate objectives) allows you to create a plan that is specific to certain business targets and that is scalable and repeatable, and at the end of the day, can show a return on corporate investments.

— Ken Evans, VP Demand Generation & Marketing Operations at Fuze

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Set Your Intentions

When you move away from the traditional, annual-only planning process, you need to replace your framework. The best structure to support marketing plans is a strategic one.

Strategic planning is a critical tool if you want to thrive in the new era of marketing. An agile mindset and tactics need to be grounded by goals that your team is working towards.

Here's How to Set It Up:

The whole organization needs to be in lockstep moving towards concerted targets and results.

Marketing's objectives, activity goals, and financial targets should all be created with the view of supporting and hitting corporate's targets. This is the key to aligning expectations and plans, coordinating team efforts, and holding everyone accountable for achieving results.

The next step is deciding on your mix of investments. Use relevant performance-based metrics to build a list of data-driven activities that best support your strategic goals.



You Need to Know:

- 1 What are the company's top priorities for the quarter? For the year?
- 2 What pipeline and revenue numbers is the company aiming for this quarter? For the fiscal year?
- 3 What adoption rates, or implementation goals are set for our product?

Two Principles to Help You Succeed:

- 1 You'll never know why plans worked or the best option to double-down on an investment unless you measure success. Use your strategic goals as a yardstick for measuring success. If markets have significantly shifted, don't be afraid to re-evaluate goals – but make sure any changes still reflect the company's targets.
- 2 Prioritize resources and limit your overall number of strategic goals. The purpose of agile is efficiency, so focus resources on projects with big impact that advance marketing's objectives.

Two Things to Remember:

- 1 Don't get caught up in historical data. If a traditionally-stable product line is tanking, look to other product lines that perform better now and are more relevant to the current market.
- 2 Accept that your market will influence your investment mix. If you're in an established market, you may spend more on competitive intelligence compared to marketers in growing markets where it's wise to invest more in brand awareness.

* SMART – Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Timely



How to Bend Your Strategy Without Breaking It

Alignment across the marketing team, and the business as a whole, results in stronger decision-making by every marketer because they can gauge plan and budget adjustments against current goals, plans, and business objectives.

There are two additional tactics marketers can deploy to help make their strategies extra flexible.

1 As you get into scenario planning, make sure to map each one back to your strategic targets. Will you still hit your targets? Does it draw resources away from other critical programs? Look at everything with a critical eye and game-plan possible implications for the rest of your marketing strategy.

2 High-growth organizations are [three times more likely](#) to have collaborative marketing and finance teams. Partner with finance to establish a common understanding of where marketing is investing, why, and how that compliments the company's investment portfolio. This will help with setting SMART strategic targets, scenario planning, and reporting marketing contributions so everyone understands the impact.

Best Practice

Marketing organizations often make the mistake of outsourcing scenario planning to junior team members. [McKinsey](#) research notes that when senior marketing leaders only engage with scenario planning in the final stages – or when it comes time to pull the trigger on an alternate plan – they are much less likely to act on them.

Marketing leadership can't afford to delegate scenario planning and must take an active role in the process for scenario planning to be an effective strategy.

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Planning should be based on data and alignment across functions to create a solid operating plan. The more you know about the business, the more precise you become, and the process starts to change.

— Doug Sechrist, VP of Demand Marketing, Zenefits

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CHAPTER **2**

Adopt Scenario Planning for Maximum Flexibility



Failing to Plan for the Need to Pivot is Failing to Plan

Your new expectation for marketing planning should be that things will shift. Marketing has always needed to be nimble and responsive to their environment, but like everything in 2020 this need is amplified.

Planning in the wake of a global pandemic and economic crisis can seem impossible. As can imagining a road to recovery, the new normal, or a return to how things were. Marketers need to embrace scenario planning as a way to make the impossible possible.

It also happens to be the most effective form of risk management and the smartest way to plan and budget your valuable marketing spend. You don't own your marketing budget – you rent it. Marketers are entrusted to make smart investments that help their business grow and generate revenue. And any investor will tell you it's a no-brainer that you should do everything in your power to make the best investments, protect yourself against loss, and respond quickly to a great opportunity.

Yes – scenario planning is an up-front investment. But it will pay back massive dividends when you need to quickly pivot.

Stop saying you want to be agile while changing nothing. Be agile by game-planning in advance and being prepared to take on any scenario. There's no situation where your marketing team or company wouldn't benefit from having an array of levers to pull that create business impact.

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A plan is just a plan without resources

– [Gartner](#)

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What Positions Are Available to You?

No plans are made possible without budget. Scenario planning begins by understanding your available marketing spend, and then thinking of the myriad ways to achieve the desired outcome with the resources available.

Checklist for Possible Budget Scenarios:

- What additional activities or campaigns would you do if you had 10% more budget? How about 20%?
- What if the reverse happens and your budget is cut by 10% or 20%? What would you do differently?
- Which planned activities can be scaled up or down as needed? How fast?
- Are any programs time-sensitive?

Ideally, your organization has a view into which programs can drive the necessary results. If you don't have the necessary performance metrics, focus on quick-test projects that will improve overall insights into impact.





Best Practice

To make it easier when you need to flip the switch and change to a new plan, make sure a portion of your marketing budget is bookmarked as a slush fund. Keep it between five to ten percent of your total budget.

Timing is Everything

As you start to map out possible scenarios, don't forget to think about when to use them. Remember: the perfect marketing plan is having the right activities **at the right time**.

You'll want to [identify tipping points](#) that trigger the execution of an alternative plan. These points are either:

1

The moment just before a scenario becomes critically necessary

2

The moment your current plan starts to become irrelevant

We know what you're thinking: *great...* but how do I know when I'm in that moment?

You'll need to think through the impact of opportunities that can't be missed and how the ROI of various scenarios relates back to marketing's overall investment. Do this by asking yourself the some of the same questions you would expect finance to ask about any marketing investment:

1. What is the time to revenue?
2. What is the impact on revenue and sales capacity?
3. What other opportunities will this impact?
4. What are the risks of investing early?
5. What are the implications of passing on the opportunity?



Best Practice

Finance is an underutilized resource for most marketers, and in worst-case situations is viewed as the enemy instead of an ally. But finance's expertise and perspective on revenue, ROI, and performance as it relates back to the company's goals shouldn't be ignored. And in this economy, it can't afford to be ignored. Do yourself and your company a huge favour by working with finance.

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Goals that we set at the beginning of the year don't change, however how we obtain those goals depends on the market. Things happen. You can plan as much as possible, but life happens and you'll have to pivot.

— Marina Antestenis, Director of Marketing, Comcast Business

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Avoid the #1 Scenario Planning Mistake

The purpose of scenario planning is to be prepared to face the unexpected – even if it's the worst-case scenario. Don't shy away from addressing anything that seems plausible.

McKinsey recommends preparing [at least four scenarios](#) to prevent the “Goldilocks scenario” from being the default choice. If you only prepare three scenarios, you're susceptible to automatically choosing the middle scenario. It's risky, but not too risky so it seems just right. Which is completely the wrong way to think about scenarios.

Depending on the context, a seemingly drastic plan might be the only way forward. You won't know until you're closer to the situation, so don't limit yourself when the goal of scenario planning is to give yourself options and flexibility.



CHAPTER **3**

The New Standard for Agile Marketing Plans



Achieve the Right Balance

After establishing your investment mix and culling through the list of potential programs based on performance, your ideal final marketing plan and budget will be:

No-regret Moves

A series of investments that will advance your strategic goals in any scenario. We never call anything a “sure bet” but these are as close as you can get.

Plausible Options

Investments that have a low up-front cost, but can be scaled up or down at the right time.

Striking the right balance of confident investments and flexible options leaves your CMO and marketing budget owners with a series of levers that can be pulled to create business impact as needed.

During an economic crisis, all plans need to be sorted into three categories:

HIGH RISK

activities and programs that are in direct conflict with the current market conditions

MEDIUM RISK

activities and programs that have an uncertain future due to various factors

LOW RISK

activities and programs that can still succeed

Your low risk activities are the no-regret moves, while medium risk plans will make up the plausible options. High risk programs should not be run during an economic crisis. This is when the stakes are highest, and you really need to make every dollar count. That being said, as markets stabilize some high risk plans may become plausible options. At that point, it's safe to explore them as an opportunity.



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Start-ups in general need to be agile and flexible... I think you should expect that you're going to have to change plans mid-year at a minimum. Very likely there will also be some shifts that happen at a quarterly level.

— Garth Bradley, VP Marketing, Workfront

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The Three Things You Truly Need to Be Agile

1

A Collaboration Tool

Your marketing team needs access to a space where everyone can collaborate and map out their plans. Traditionally a whiteboard gets used, but it's 2020 so find yourself a digital collaboration tool that marketers can access from anywhere.

Map out all marketing plans and flag their stages: is it still a to-do, in progress, or done? This helps marketers understand how much work has been completed for each project. Many marketing teams choose to use a Kanban board to help visualize workflow.

2

Defined Deliverables

One of the most popular aspects of Agile marketing is the sprint cycle where marketers plan and execute in two to four week periods. But working in shorter planning cycles might not be right for your team.

However, all marketers benefit from the practice of breaking big plans into manageable, actionable tasks that are assigned to specific team members. Defining deliverables helps the whole team work more efficiently because work isn't being doubled or falling through the cracks when tasks are documented and owned. Marketers can focus on the task at hand, execute well and finish quickly with less distractions.

3

Clarity Around Marketing Plans and Budgets

Agility thrives on clarity. A collaboration tool and sprint cycles will help bring clarity to the marketing planning process. Marketers can get visibility into their budgets by amortizations and frequent forecasts. Keep all planned investment info up-to-date and have it mapped to the right quarter or fiscal year.

Best Practice

Don't just align budgets within the rest of the marketing team. Nail down budget alignment with finance so you can easily pivot to a different scenario and execute on it without causing massive budget headaches and delays.

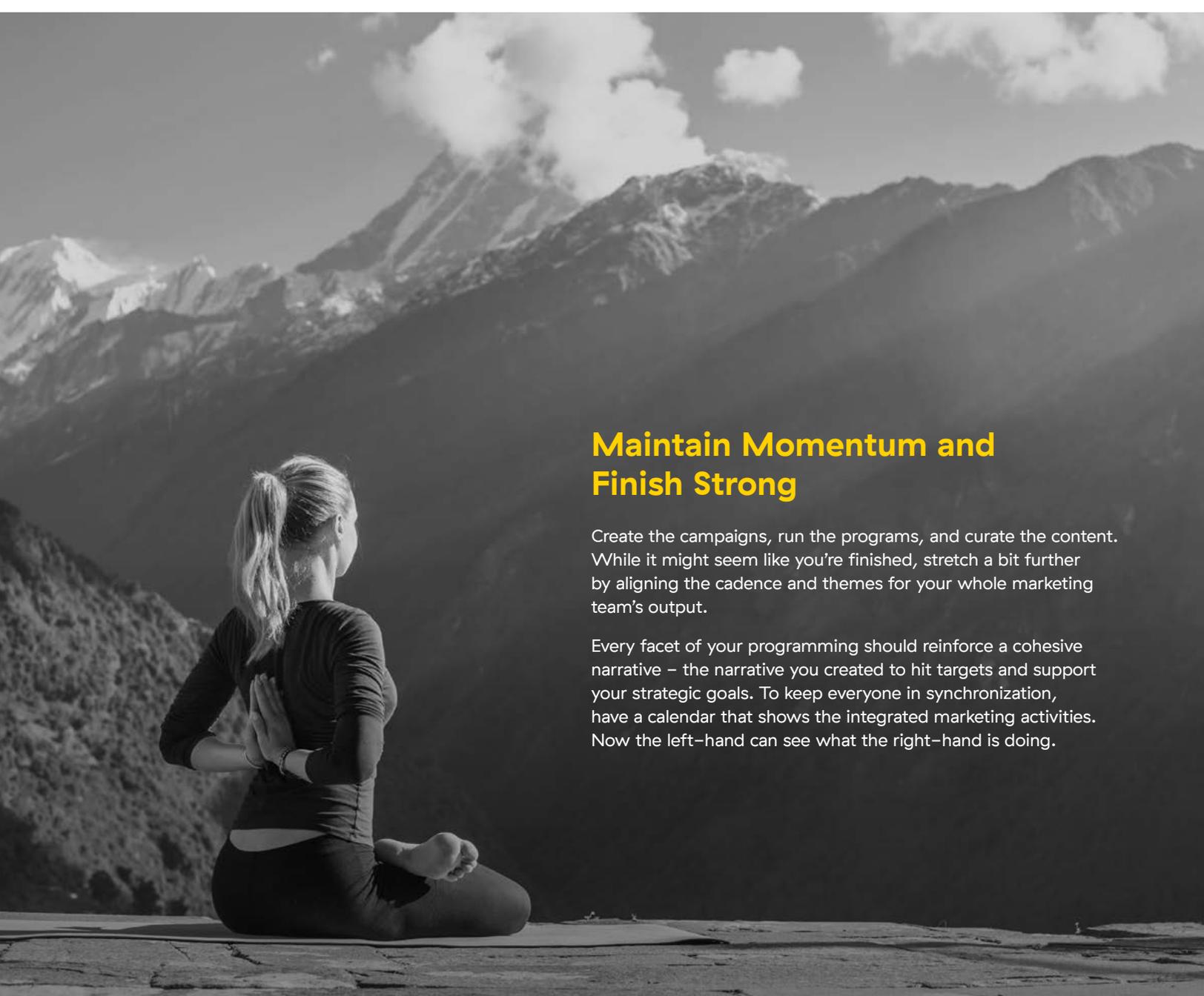


Make Time for Reflection

An important component of Agile marketing that all teams should incorporate is hosting retrospectives where the team talks about what went well with their last program and what could be improved for next time.

Time is a valuable resource. But not taking the time to reflect, learn, and iterate is choosing not to invest in the growth and future of your marketing team and the company as a whole. Regular retrospectives are a must to understand if programs are supporting strategic targets, if they need tweaks, and when they need to be culled from the program calendar.

Measuring success means nothing unless you're analyzing the results and looking for opportunities to optimize. Dig into which stages of the buyer's journey you're losing opportunities and focus efforts at improving programs directed at that stage.



Maintain Momentum and Finish Strong

Create the campaigns, run the programs, and curate the content. While it might seem like you're finished, stretch a bit further by aligning the cadence and themes for your whole marketing team's output.

Every facet of your programming should reinforce a cohesive narrative – the narrative you created to hit targets and support your strategic goals. To keep everyone in synchronization, have a calendar that shows the integrated marketing activities. Now the left-hand can see what the right-hand is doing.





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It's time to change habits. The CMO is no longer just the bullhorn for the brand; they are the lead conductor of the company's growth engine.

— Gartner

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Savasana

Marketing planning for today's world isn't about one perfect plan. It's being able to execute the right tactics and campaigns at the right times.

The world is different for everyone right now. It's only the summer, and already in 2020 we've faced a global pandemic and an economic crisis. The trickle down effects from these two massive events has irrevocably impacted marketing planning forever. Program options marketers relied on to hit targets are becoming distant memories or undergoing massive overhauls to fit with the times.

The new era of marketing planning demands that marketers keep pace with today's constantly fluctuating climate by becoming more agile. But marketers won't get far on agility alone. Strategy is needed to shape marketing plans and keep focus on a set of strategic targets that create impact for the business.

Once your strategy is set and you have a calendar of high-performing programs, move through your plans with agility by:

- 🔄 Breaking big projects into manageable pieces and giving ownership to specific team members
- 🔄 Mapping out marketing plans using a collaborative tool that everyone has access to, and clearly shows the status of each program
- 🔄 Creating a stable of plans for any scenario, that align to your strategic targets

Agile marketing is the way forward. Introduce flexibility and nimbleness to your marketing planning process and find your own flow.





Allocadia provides best-in-class money management capabilities for marketers and gives them the confidence to know where to invest their next dollar. It's award-winning marketing performance management platform enables marketers to plan strategically, invest with purpose, measure the performance of their activities, and ultimately maximize marketing's impact on the business.

Companies like GE Healthcare, Unilever, Informatica, and Charles Schwab manage more than \$25 billion marketing dollars within Allocadia, which enables them to save up to 40% of the time they spend on budgeting and planning as well as double their pipeline-to-spend ratio and ROI. Learn how to #RunMarketing at [Allocadia.com](https://www.allocadia.com)

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