
THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey

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Introduction

Enterprise marketers face nonstop budgetary, resource, and global collaboration pressures during the best of times. These stresses were further intensified in 2020, thanks to the worldwide pandemic coupled with tremendous political and economic turbulence. Now more than ever, CMOs are focused on ROI and business impact. To successfully meet the realities of marketing in 2021, CMOs are relying significantly more on their marketing operations team — a powerhouse group of professionals in charge of the technology, data, and processes that enable their organization to run effectively and optimize their marketing ROI.

But what are the realities of marketing ops endeavors in 2021? How do CMOs value the marketing operations function? How critical are marketing ops team members to their organization, and do they fit in? Is the martech stack delivering on the promise to improve marketing agility? And most important, what are the challenges holding companies back from continually improving their marketing return on investment?

The following report, sponsored by BrandMaker, is based on an online survey of more than one hundred CMOs and similar top marketing executives working in large retail, financial services, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies.

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A CMO Survey



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Key Findings

- **Marketing operations is a top CMO focus**
 - Marketing operations is the number two skill reported by top marketing executives; only marketing strategy rated more highly
 - And yet, 65% report that they struggle to simplify operational data into meaningful insights, and 41% report issues making sense of too many data sources
 - 62% want their team to spend more time on marketing operations, tied for first place with marketing strategy
- **The 2021 marketing operations team is evolving**
 - 70% have a dedicated marketing ops team
 - 73% report marketing ops is responsible for both martech and tracking campaign performance
 - 66% say marketing operations reports exclusively into the marketing organization
 - 95% state that marketing operations professionals are different than other marketing staff
- **The marketing operations tech stack is a priority for 2021**
 - The top desired market improvement 2021 is better integration of the technology stack
 - Only 10% are fully satisfied with their martech
 - 89% plan to spend more on marketing operations solutions in 2021

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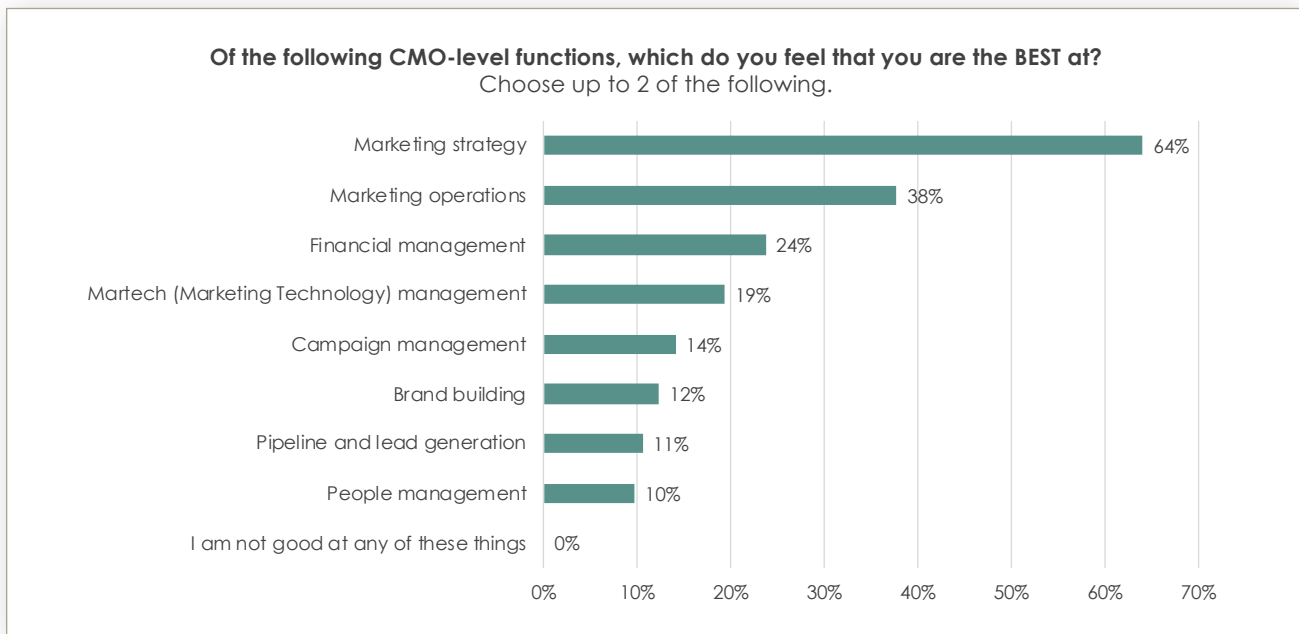


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Detailed Findings: Marketing operations is a top CMO focus CMOs are confident in their marketing operations skills

There is an outdated stereotype that paints the CMO as a bigger-than-life personality who wows the C-suite with emotional advertising ideas but is so incompetent with technology that they can't use email or read a spreadsheet. This stereotype could not be further from the reality of a CMO in 2021. Data and applications drive the modern marketing world, and today's CMO is a business builder who must demonstrate that their strategy is paying off.

When asked about the skills that they are most confident in this year, more than a third (38%) of top marketing executives say marketing operations, second only to marketing strategy (64%) and well above financial management (24%), campaign management (14%), brand building (12%), and other skills.



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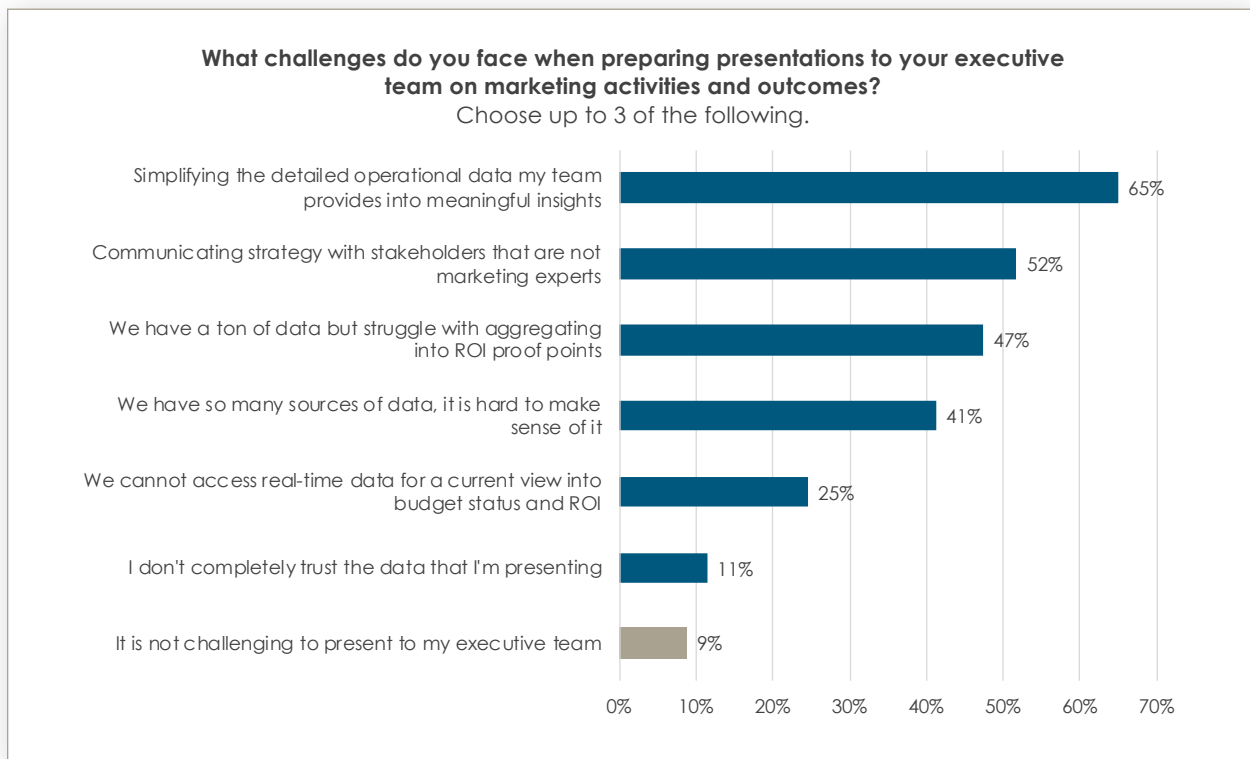
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And yet, simplifying data is a top challenge

While CMOs are confident in their marketing operations skills, this does not mean they don't experience obstacles. Almost all (91%) say they encounter challenges presenting data to their executive team, with nearly two-thirds (65%) of CMOs reporting that they struggle to simplify operational data into meaningful insights. Other data-related challenges cited include struggling to aggregate large amounts of data into ROI proof points (47%) and too many data sources to easily make sense of it (41%). Fortunately, only a few (11%) report that they don't trust their data, which is very good news.



After a year of constant uncertainty, CMOs witnessed firsthand how well their teams responded to changing market environments and where they struggled. Issues bringing together budget and campaign performance data frequently made it impossible to react to optimization opportunities in a timely way.

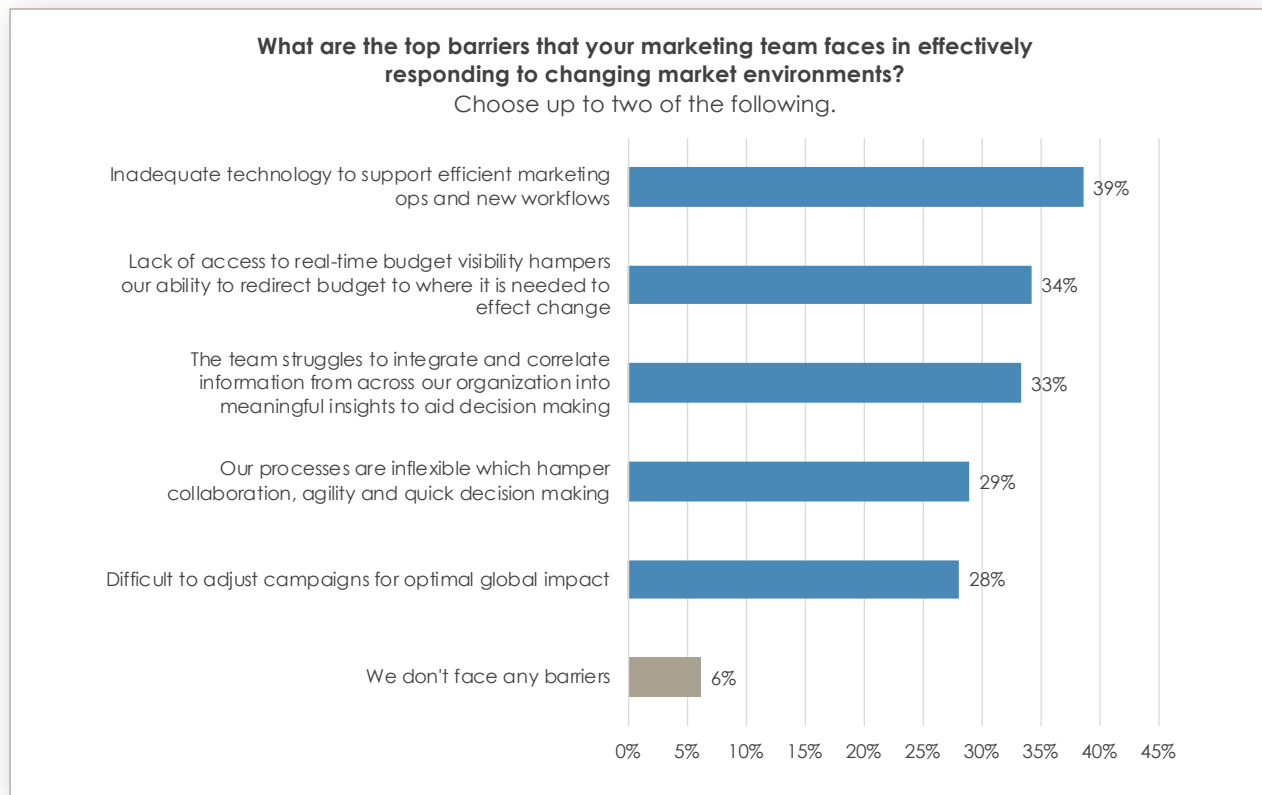
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A CMO Survey



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Not surprisingly, 94% of marketing organizations face barriers. These include inadequate technology to support marketing ops and new workflows (39%), lack of access to real-time budgets (34%), the inability to integrate and correlate information into meaningful insights (33%), inflexible processes hampering collaboration (29%), and difficulties in adjusting campaigns for optimal global impact (28%).



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey

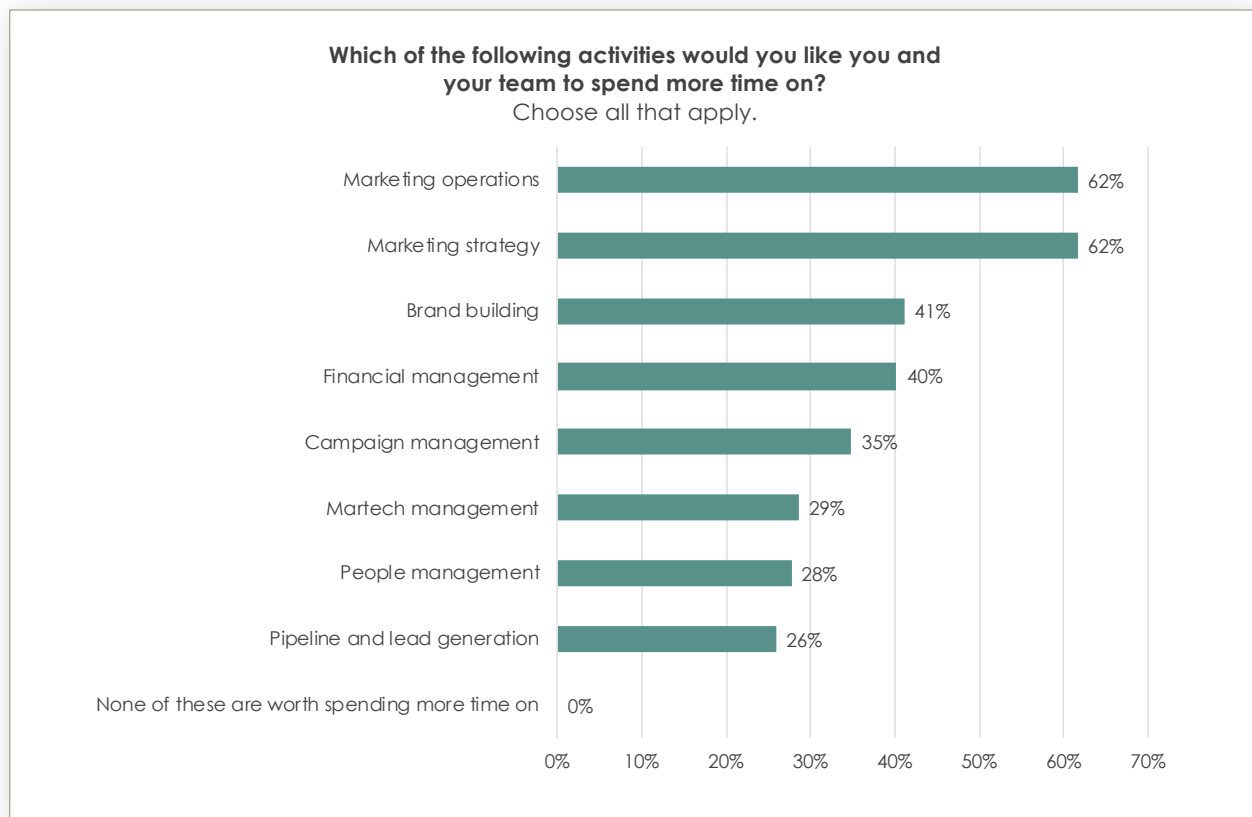


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Marketing strategy and marketing ops tie as the leading areas to dedicate more time

Effective marketing is vital if enterprises want to be successful, especially as market conditions continually change. Last year was a disrupter for most marketing organizations, and it taught global CMOs that they cannot always predict what's coming next. The challenges of 2020 encouraged many marketing organizations to become more agile by extending marketing operations skills across such core areas as financial planning, campaign execution, content creation and distribution, brand management, and performance measurement.

Marketing ops is central to the efficiency of marketing activities by helping teams collaborate across continents, languages, local laws — and even internal silos. CMOs couldn't agree more. Nearly two-thirds (62%) rank it a number one priority (tied with marketing strategy) where they want their teams to spend more time compared to other critical areas such as brand building and lead generation.



Conversely, when we asked top marketing executives what areas they preferred their teams to spend less time, they cited people management (26%), martech management (19%), financial management (17%), pipeline and lead generation (17%), campaign management (15%), brand building (10%), and marketing strategy (9%). Only a tiny number (6%) noted marketing operations.

THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

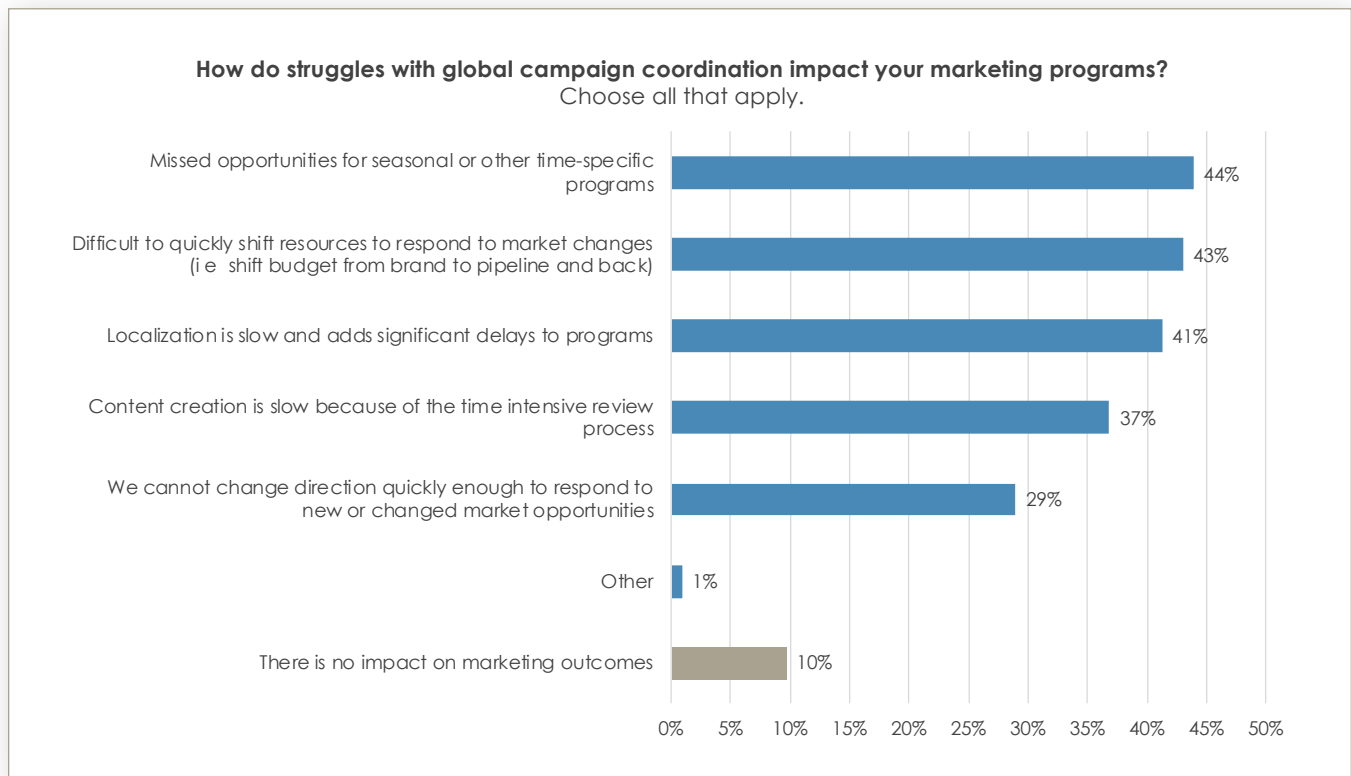
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Marketing teams struggle with global campaign coordination

Global marketers admit that they are at a crisis point where they simply don't have the budgets, the time, or the personnel to meet the full range of demands for worldwide campaign management in what has become the "new normal." In fact, 90% of marketing teams struggle with global campaign coordination. According to CMOs, the most frequent challenges with their campaigns are missed opportunities for time-specific programs (44%), difficulties in shifting resources to respond to market changes (43%), delayed localization (41%), tedious review cycles for content creation (37%), and the inability to change directions quickly to meet new market opportunities (29%). One CMO in our study was frustrated enough to take the time to write an "other" response, saying that no single region has enough budget to move the needle.



These campaign coordination struggles are magnified for those organizations operating across more countries where they need even more flexibility for the agile allocation of time, talent, and budgets to achieve optimal campaign impact. Well over half (57%) cite localization issues, and close to half (45%) report slow-downs in content creation when their company operates across four or more countries.

THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey

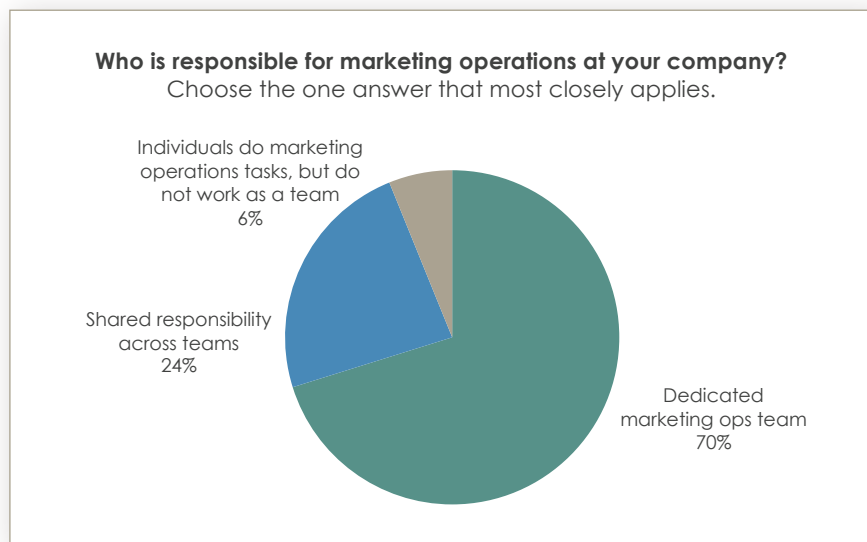


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Detailed Findings: The 2021 marketing ops team is evolving Marketing ops is typically a dedicated team that reports to marketing

In the past, marketing ops was an overshadowed marketing function that worked in the background to solve internal pains. But during the last decades, marketing ops has evolved from something “nice to have” to an integral part of the marketing organization. Today, marketing doesn’t produce anything that does not require a set of processes, data, technologies, and people to make it all happen.

The maturing of this core marketing function — through automation, digitalization, and integration of critical marketing systems — is transforming the marketing organization. This research shows that most companies (70%) have a dedicated marketing ops team to help minimize missed opportunities, maximize leads, and improve customer experience, and a further quarter (24%) have a shared responsibility. Only a small number (6%) still have individuals that work alone on marketing operations tasks.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey

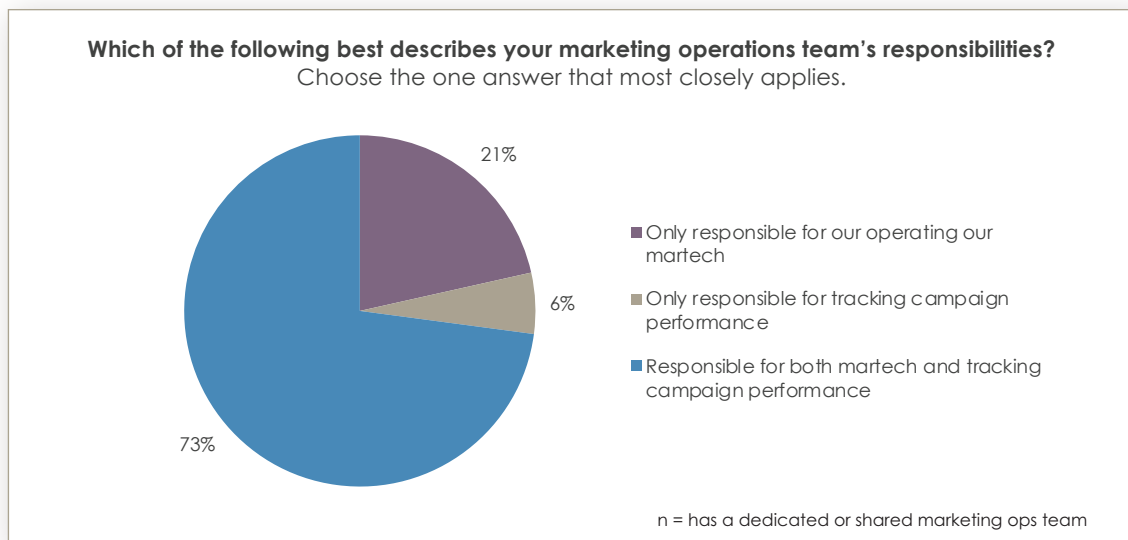


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Two of the primary goals of marketing operations are improving processes and promoting cross-department collaboration. Because of their more technical and analytical responsibilities required to get the job done, marketing ops teams often straddle the organizational lines between marketing and the technology savvy in corporate IT. However, most (66%) report directly to marketing, with only a handful of marketing operations teams (9%) reporting to IT.



Today's marketing ops team is incredibly strategic to the business. Not only does marketing ops create repeatable processes and programs, but they also enable the whole organization to plan wisely for the future. Modern CMOs lean on their marketing ops teams to fulfill their roles as business builders with demonstrable efficiency improvements and measurable ROI. When we further explore their specific areas of responsibilities, about three-quarters (73%) of marketing ops teams have ownership for managing both marketing technology (martech) and campaign performance.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



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CMOs acknowledge their marketing ops staff is different from their other employees

Effective executives know how to lean into the strengths of their team and find effective management styles for different types of employees. By their very nature, marketing operations professionals are not your typical marketers. Their expertise is in systems, processes, data management, and analytics. They tend to be very cross-functional in terms of roles, and it's not uncommon for these individuals to exhibit more left-brain skills.

When CMOs were asked to describe a typical marketing operations professional in their organization, 95% said they were different from their other staff. The most frequent differences cited are marketing operations professionals are more logical and less emotional (42%), prefer a structured management style (42%), and often struggle with loosely defined projects (35%). Fortunately, the stereotype of the marketing operations professional who works alone with their spreadsheets is not true. Only 13% of CMOs cite that their marketing ops team members are less likely to interact with their marketing ops staff, and 16% say they don't interact with their co-workers.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



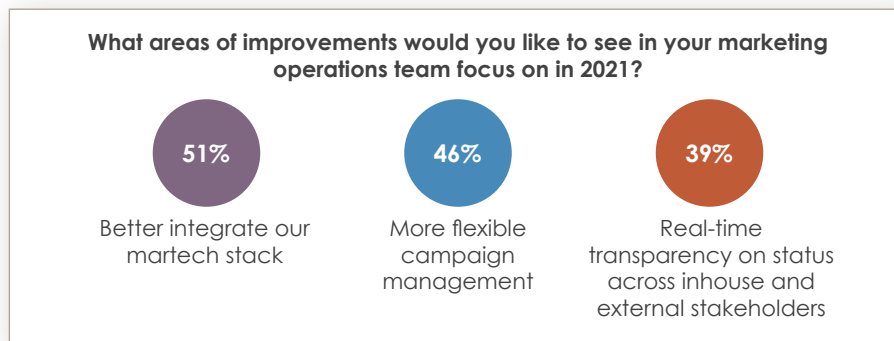
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Detailed Findings: The marketing operations tech stack is a priority for 2021

The martech stack is the top area for desired improvements in 2021

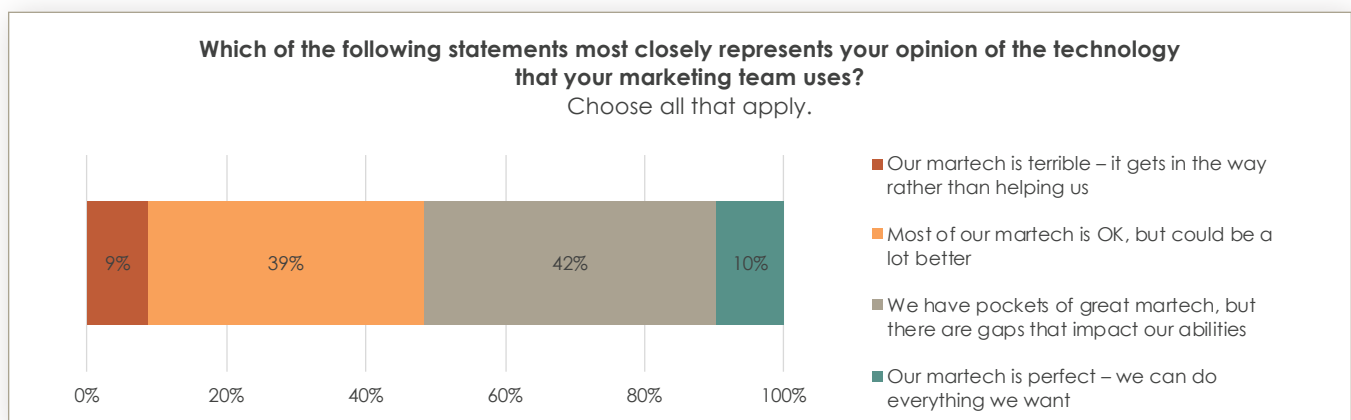
Sourcing, managing, and maintaining technology tools play a critical role in marketing operations. It's no simple task, though, as new tools are launched frequently, and the smallest of updates can affect the balance (and performance) of an enterprise martech stack. Often these tools are implemented independently, and the effort to integrate data and workflows is so overwhelming that they run in silos. Analyzing financial and performance data to understand if the team is delivering on their goals becomes a time-consuming manual process, and it is almost impossible to analyze information to deliver real-time optimization for reacting to different market situations.

When CMOs were asked about the areas of improvements they would like to see in their 2021 marketing operations, the top answer was better integration of their martech stack (51%).



Only a few companies are fully satisfied with their martech

One of the most worrisome aspects of this survey is the high dissatisfaction rate in the technology that is supposed to lift their marketing efforts and help them gain tangible results. Only one in 10 (10%) CMOs characterize themselves as completely satisfied with their martech stack, which leaves ample opportunities for marketing ops teams to seek out more relevant solutions to deliver the desired business outcomes and close the gaps in their existing technology.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

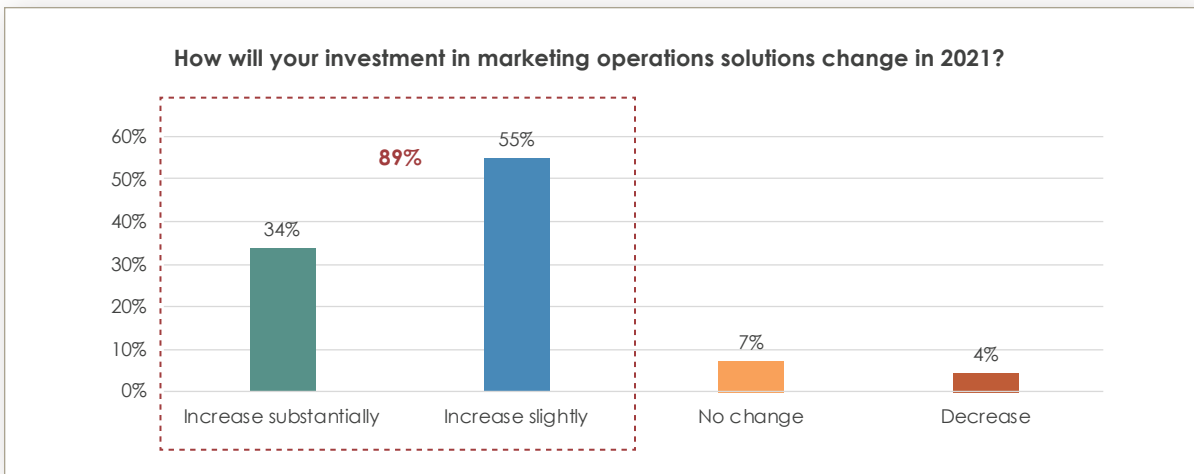
A CMO Survey



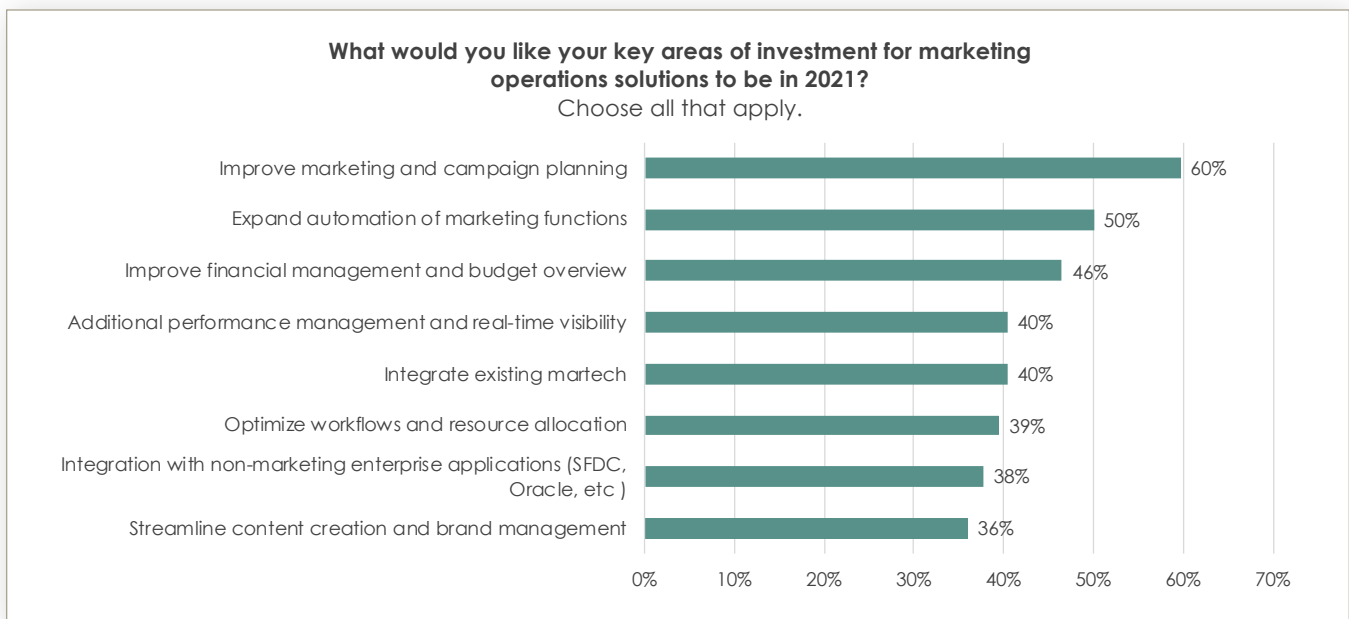
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Almost all companies plan to spend more on marketing operations solutions in 2021

Even after surviving a long year where customer spending was uneven and marketing budgets were frequently constrained, marketing executives are eager to invest in marketing operations solutions this year. In fact, most (89%) have plans to spend more in 2021. This number includes more than a third (34%) of CMOs who characterize their increased investment as “substantial.”



When asked about what marketing ops areas they would like to spend more on in 2021, the key investment areas jumping to the top of the CMOs’ lists are marketing and campaign planning (60%), automation of marketing functions (50%), and financial management (46%).



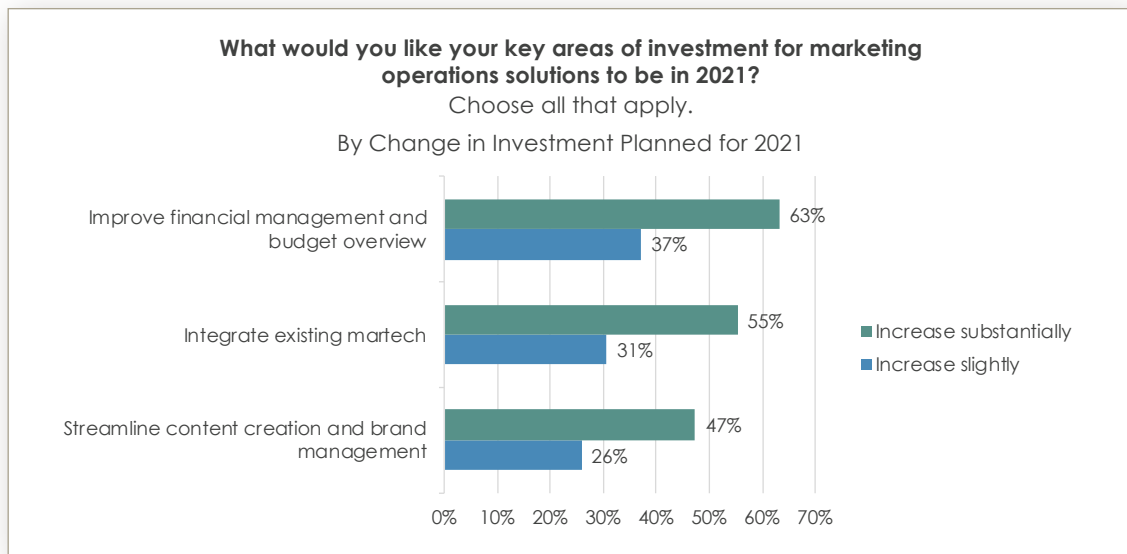
THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



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The greater the marketing investment, the more critical it is to get the most value possible. It is particularly interesting to note that the responses were considerably different among CMOs who report that marketing solution investments in 2021 will increase “substantially” than those that said the increase would be “slight.” Marketing executives who are planning to increase their spending the most in 2021 are much more likely to invest in financial management (63%), integration of existing martech (55%), and content (47%).



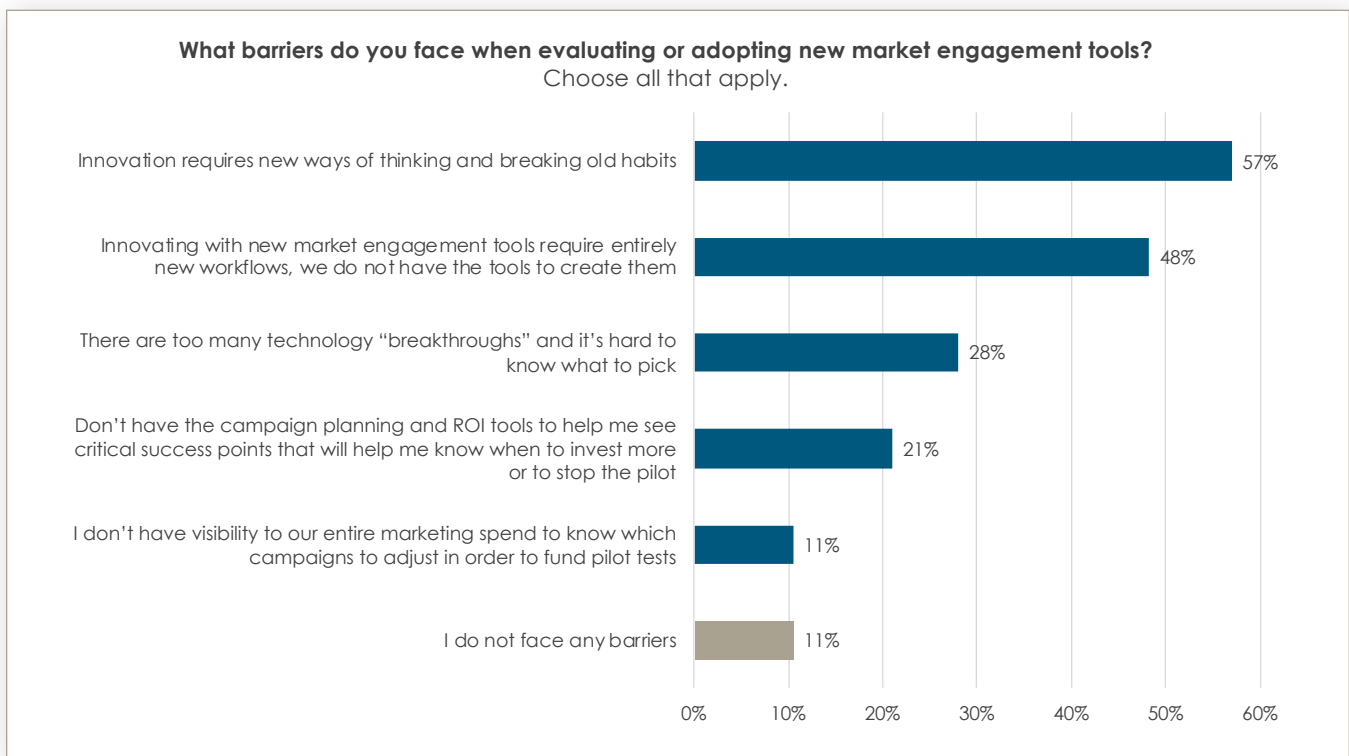
THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



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While they plan to spend more, top marketing executives are clear that a great martech stack is not about simply buying tools. Almost all (89%) CMOs say their teams experience challenges of adopting new technology. The issues reported are solutions that are so innovative it requires new ways of thinking and breaking old habits (57%), lacking the ability to create new workflows to take advantage of innovative technology (48%), and too many “breakthroughs” making it difficult to know which solutions to choose (28%). Modern CMOs must look beyond tool selection and determine how their teams will use this technology. It is important to identify the help they need to get up and running in order to demonstrate ROI.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



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Survey Methodology and Participant Demographics

An online survey was sent to an independent database of CMO and VP-level marketing executives. A total of 114 qualified individuals completed the survey. All participants worked in retail, financial services, or FMCG companies with more than 500 employees. Participants included a mix of company sizes, industries, countries of operations, marketing team sizes, and the number of agencies.



THE 2021 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

A CMO Survey



Dimensional Research | June 2021

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About BrandMaker

BrandMaker is the leading SaaS provider of effective and scalable marketing operations (marketing ops) management solutions. BrandMaker delivers the visibility, control, and agility that enterprise marketers require to optimize their marketing operations. BrandMaker tames the complexity of multinational marketing campaigns, budgets and team workflows, enabling companies to work across borders, cultures, and silos for efficiency and value. Independent research firms recognize BrandMaker as a leader in marketing ops. More than 300 leading enterprises, including Deutsche Bank, BestBuy, and Daimler, trust its solutions to increase collaboration, efficiency, and performance of their marketing planning and execution. For more information, please visit www.brandmaker.com.