Director's Guide
The Making of a B2B Digital Leader

MODERN

> **"By 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationship with a business digitally."**

Gartner Summits
CRM Strategies and Technologies to Understand, Grow and Manage Customer Experience (2011)

About this guide

In today's environment, it is absolutely crucial that B2B marketers become digital leaders to make their function succeed.

This guide is intended for B2B marketers who are looking to understand how to make this shift, as well as how best to lead digital change within their teams.
We'll discuss:

> Why B2B marketers need to embrace the digital trend

> The challenges of getting to grips with both new methodologies and traditional silos

> What marketers need to consider in order to make change happen

Getting to the bottom of the issue
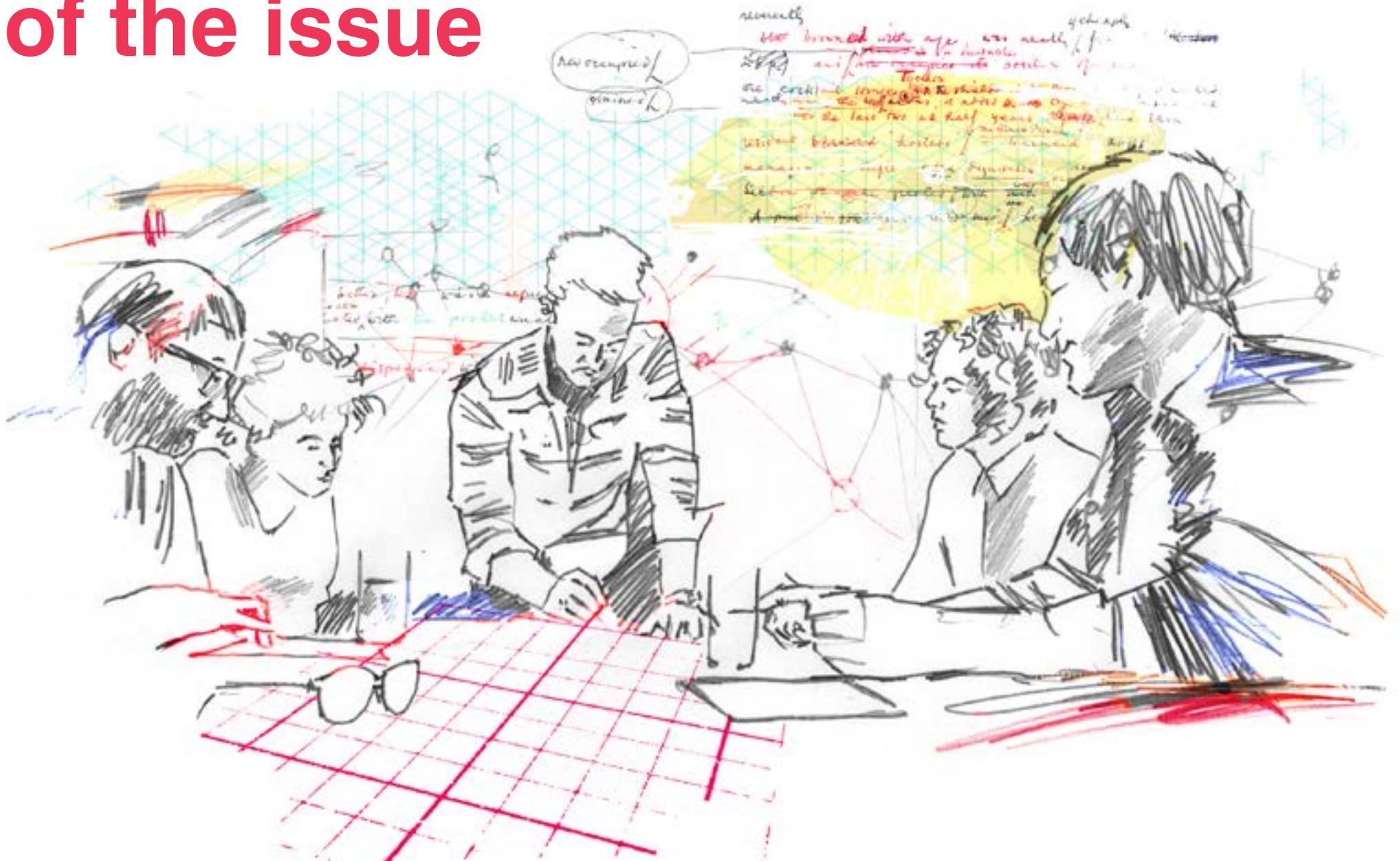
The problem with digital and B2B

Today, the majority of organisations understand both the power of digital and its inevitability. By 2020, Gartner estimates that customers will manage 85% of their relationship with a business without talking to a human being.

There is little doubt that in the long run this will apply to B2B marketing as much as it does to consumer marketing, customer service or any other part of a business's operations.

From marketing automation to artificial intelligence, all predictions point to a future for B2B marketing that's dominated by digital, data, the drive for innovative and fast-paced responses to market demands.

At the moment however, there are many B2B marketing functions that are not embracing the need to change in an adequate way or even take the most basic initial steps.

Digital strategic direction falls between the cracks

A big part of the problem comes down to marketing leadership, and is threefold:

1 **Digital natives at the bottom of hierarchies aren't equipped to influence change**

The fact there are digital natives entering the workplace is a positive. It brings people into organisations who are digital savvy, able to master social platforms and pick up marketing technology with ease. What these natives lack, however, is the experience or knowledge to think about digital from a holistic, strategic point of view.

2 **Those in the middle are getting on the with the 'doing' but are too reactive**

In middle management, you will often find competent digital marketers who have been 'pigeon-holed' as digital experts. There is little opportunity to do anything apart from respond reactively to requests and they lack the time and experience to deliver an overarching marketing strategy in the way that traditional marketers have done in the past.

3 **Senior marketers have the strategy, but not the knowledge to embed digital**

Traditional senior marketers, see the broader marketing picture and what it's trying to achieve to support business strategy. What they lack are the management skills specific to digital. They find it difficult to fully embed digital into the marketing function or strategy.

> **"The B2B companies that are mastering these areas are generating 8% more shareholder returns, and a revenue compound annual growth rate five times greater than the rest of the field."**

McKinsey & Company
How B2B Digital Leaders Drive Five Times More Revenue Growth Than Their Peers (2016)

Getting to the heart of the matter

What organisations need to recognise – and fast – is that the future for B2B marketing isn't just going to involve bringing in new digital skills to round out marketing activity.

The future will be built on marketing leaders' ability to increase their understanding of how to drive digital change – and in the process, delivering a holistic marketing strategy that embodies digital across marketing operations, demand generation, sales and right through to every customer touchpoint.

The purpose of this report is to highlight where the biggest changes in approach will be required – as well as the qualities that will be needed to deliver the change successfully.

Challenges with new methods and old silos

> **"Senior business leaders have realised that their companies cannot take full advantage of digital tools and technologies without having new, amped-up processes for managing them. The value of these processes is immense."**

New methods need to be learned

Digital is by no means just about technology. More than anything, digital is a refocusing of business thinking around the lifetime needs of customers.

For many organisations who have made progress, this has meant getting to grips with agile project management methodology. In fact agile, which originated as a way of managing software development, is now the project management methodology of choice for many organisations – helping them to focus on collaborative problem solving, customer-centred thinking, short-phase working, experimentation and a readiness to react quickly to changing circumstances.

For senior marketers, one of the big questions of the future is going to be:

"How well do I understand agile, and how it can be applied to marketing?"

> **"As silos are broken, a company team spirit will develop. In the end, you've simplified the process because sub-teams no longer crash against each other at meetings, instead talking about the 'common denominator.'"**

Content Marketing Institute
Are Organisational Silos Keeping Your Content Marketing Team From Success? (2015)

Marketing team structures don't support change

Another problem many businesses face is that their marketing function is siloed. They have a content team, field marketing teams, PR, a centralised marketing services function and so on – but often they don't work in an integrated way. The common complaint is that "the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing". One of the defining characteristics of digital savvy marketing is that organisations perform best when they work collaboratively, focus purely on the needs of the customer, and when digital is fully integrated into all teams and all areas of marketing operations. So, another key question marketers are going to need to ask themselves is:

"How can I get my teams working together effectively, with digital practice integrated naturally into the way they think and work?"

Overcoming the challenges

> "An influential digital leader will implement **internal communication processes** that **encourage cross-departmental** **sharing of information, insights and ideas.**"

Digital Marketing Institute
5 Traits of a Successful Digital Leader (2017)

The characteristics of an effective digital leader

Responding to the challenges we've identified, heads of marketing that want to become effective digital leaders need to focus on their ability to:

> Create an overall vision for digital that everyone can share

> Structure teams to bring them closer together

> Introduce new ways of working that promote better collaboration, more flexible thinking and experimentation

> Get backing from leadership to support this new approach and 'let's explore how' culture

Set the vision

Right now, marketing teams need a culture change that goes beyond the need for digital competence, digital literacy or new technology.

This can only happen if they start by creating a consistent vision of what the goals for digital marketing are. No matter how ambitious or low key the initial aims are, the mission and the message must be both clear and simple to understand.

Marketing leaders also need to demonstrate their ability to champion success. A critical element of change management is marking and measuring progress, showing what success looks like and celebrating when it's achieved.

FORBES RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS THE TOP 4 TRAITS OF SUCCESSFUL MARKETING LEADERS AS:

> **Revenue ownership and accountability**

> **Smart adaptability**

> **Customer centricity**

> **Team builders**

Forbes
4 Traits of Successful Marketing Leaders (2015)

> **"We make sure things stay on track by having short daily 'stand-ups'... make sure teams are talking to each other, and that any blocks to achieving those short-term objectives are acknowledged and tackled."**

The Chartered Institute of Marketing
How to Break Down Marketing Silos (2016)

Drive integration

The marketing leaders of today need to find ways to close gaps across the marketing function and weave digital seamlessly through it. Not as an afterthought, but through careful integration that harnesses the power of digital across marketing operations and technology, demand generation activity and all customer touchpoints.

To make this happen, the knowledge gaps and silos between different functions need to be closed; so execution of the strategy is integrated, seamless and progresses as intended.

> **"Taking an agile approach allows us to escalate issues where appropriate... people are better able to prioritise their workload and take responsibility. Everyone is empowered and it gives quantifiable results straight away."**

The Chartered Institute of Marketing
How to Break Down Marketing Silos (2016)

Embrace agile working

By its very nature, agile working helps organisations to evolve solutions through the collaborative effort of cross-functional teams. It also advocates the division of tasks into short phases of work, with frequent reassessment and adaptation of plans.

This is what marketers need to apply to digital campaigns, where speed of implementation and reactiveness to live data plus campaign results is key to success. As such, agile working should be strongly considered as a project management methodology for at least some digital campaigns, if not all (with the proviso that its always under the umbrella of a cohesive marketing strategy and end goal).

Get C-level support

Above all else, digital thinking requires a mindset of experimentation. You need to be prepared to take calculated risks, adapt when problems or new challenges arise and learn from mistakes quickly. Ultimately, this should encourage the organisation to be more entrepreneurial as a whole, not just within the marketing function.

However, it would be very unwise to action any of this without first getting backing from the board. Make sure that the senior leadership team both understand and support your approach before their opinion of digital becomes tainted.

This is an especially important aspect for any B2B marketing leader to get right. But once everyone is on board, it will make the effective change management that underpins the road to digital much easier to achieve.

So... are you ready to get started?

What's next?

Embrace change

The challenges that senior B2B marketers face when trying to progress with digital can seem daunting. Some will be put off by the perception that it means learning new technologies and systems; they shouldn't be.

As this guide shows, the majority of the task is actually about effective change management and bringing people together. If marketing leaders can embrace this mindset, more opportunities than challenges will come to the fore.

For more on the issues affecting senior marketing leaders and how to make your mark, we recommend these other Director's Guides in this series:

> [Getting buy in from the board](#)

> [The metrics that matter](#)

About Modern

Modern is a B2B marketing agency working with high growth technology businesses, both locally and internationally.

We're chosen by our clients for our grounded insight, metrics analysis and our ability to positively influence business performance.

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