Arcsec Digital

Collaboration in the age of digital cohesion

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Abstract

Digital cohesion is no small task for any company. It requires much thought and collaborative efforts between all business departments and more often than not, third-party agencies to make the entire process less bumpy. Why not smooth? This process requires a lot of trial and error before one can see tangible results. We will explore why collaboration is the key in the digital journey to success as well as benefits of ad-hoc agencies for high level expertise and insight.

Internal and External Collaboration

There is an increasing demand for digital content and distribution and only a fraction of market leaders knows what to do with it.

By definition "to collaborate" means to work together, as referenced in dictionary.com. Merriam Webster adds one more interpretation by saying it is "to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected". Cooperate with an agency is what we are here to discuss.

Companies today are focused on analyzing huge amounts of data, innovative digital marketing, agility in all areas of operations and, of course, speed. How quickly can we scale? How fast can we deliver the product?

How can we be first to market with our innovation? There is an increasing demand for digital content and distribution. At the same time, some experts are saying that only a fraction of market leaders knows what to do with digital content.

Many understand that there has to be a collaboration between departments, that IT should work closely with Marketing and Operations, and that data scientists should work with the marketing team, and the development team needs to follow tight deadlines set forth by IT and marketing.

Teams even have to relocate offices to meet the collaboration needs. After all this is done, something is still missing. HR starts looking for new blood, creates new job descriptions to meet the demand, and yet very few can fit the bill. Market does not wait, it keeps moving forward faster and faster. What could have waited and delivered within six months yesterday, has to be delivered within six weeks today, or sometimes six days.

The idea of bringing in a third-party provider sounds enticing, and makes it easier to scale and deliver products faster. The vetting process and trustworthiness become the main factors in hiring outside agencies. It sometimes takes more time to vet and contract than it is to work on the actual project.

On the other hand, once the agency is on board, it can bring a lot more value and better outcome than finding internal candidates with enough experience, expertise and drive for innovation.
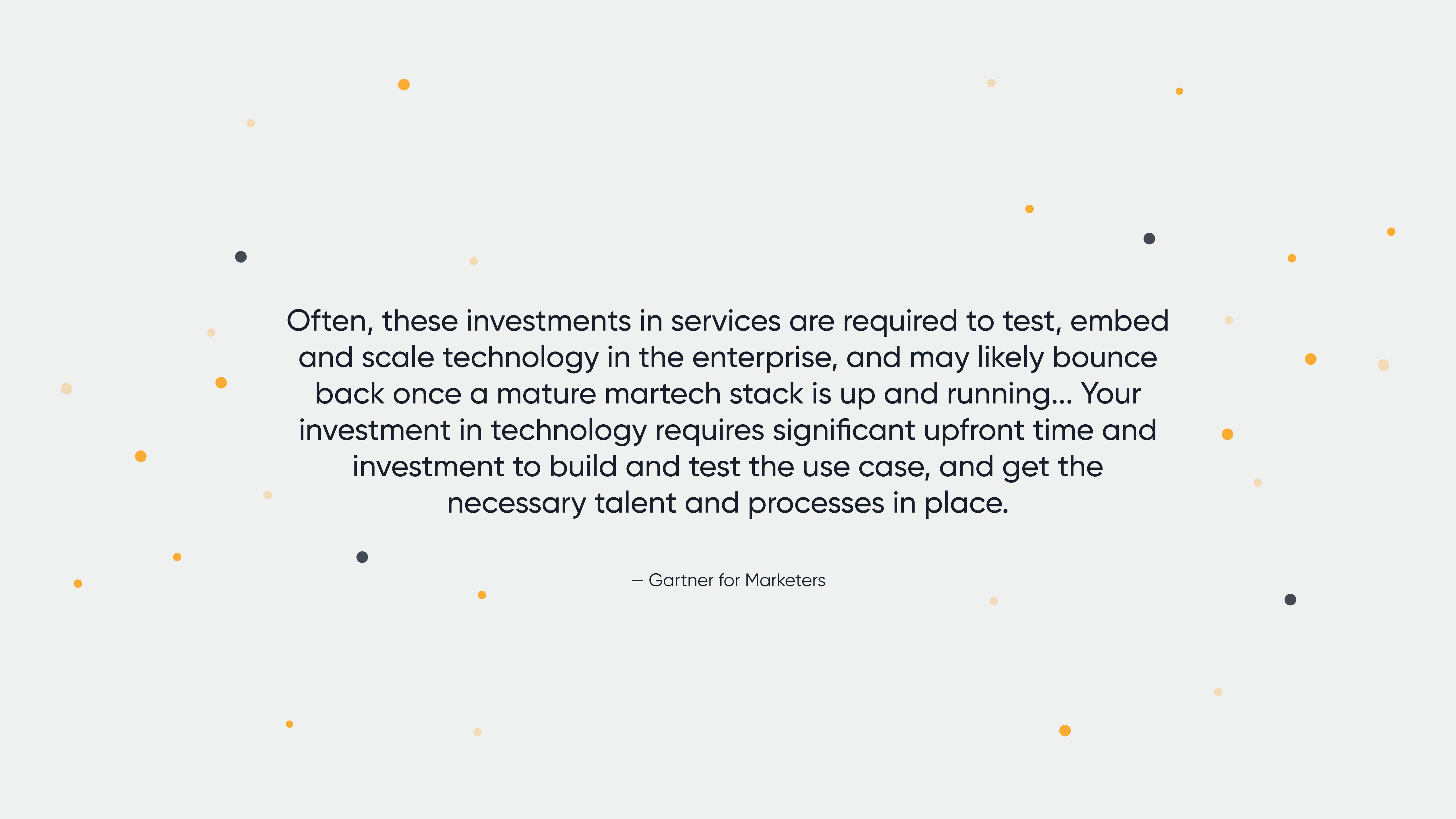
Creative agencies today are also finding ways to collaborate better with others. There are many moving parts in the creative process and with the plethora of media channels, it is only to the benefit of all to assure a successful marketing strategy implementation. Thus working with multiple agencies can serve a dual purpose: enhance the strategy and implement it as well. Although managing various sources of services and capabilities can be an organizational headache, quick turnaround, scale and experience outweigh the risk of missing an innovation cycle and delivery of a disruptive product.

Digital Cohesion Today
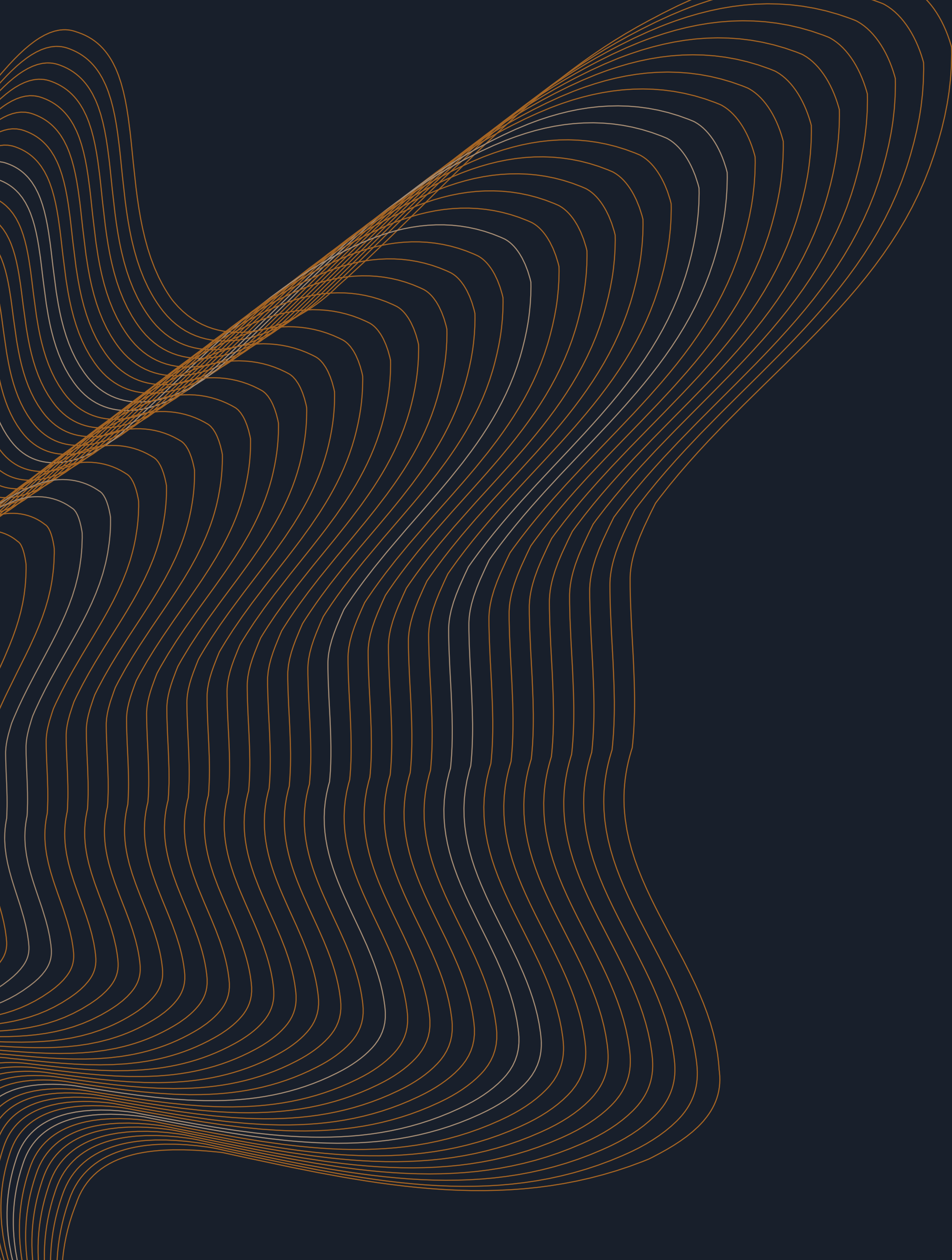
Martech accounts for 29% of the total marketing expense budget according to the Gartner's CMO Spend Survey 2018–2019. Much of the investment is going toward buying up products that deliver analytics, web content and lead management.

Often, these investments in services are required to test, embed and scale technology in the enterprise, and may likely bounce back once a mature martech stack is up and running... Your investment in technology requires significant upfront time and investment to build and test the use case, and get the necessary talent and processes in place.

— Gartner for Marketers

What many companies don't have is time to wait until experiments pan out. By the time something looks promising, new trends emerge, and current direction is no longer relevant. What outside agencies can and should offer to companies is expertise and experience with implementation of various platforms and tools. This type of knowledge will guide in making educated decisions regarding digital experiences instead of a lengthy trial and error internal process.

"...in 2019, two-thirds of U.S. consumers expect to be able to connect directly to the brands they buy from, shifting the channel mix and favoring brands that sell direct." (CMO Spend Survey 2018-2019, Gartner for Marketers)

In a recent WSJ interview, Mr. Verma, the CIO of Foot Locker, claims that "our consumer doesn't differentiate if specific transactions or engagement happens in a store or online.

They start searching online and they move to mobile phones, or they move to stores, or sometimes they are having conversations about our products and services on social media." (WSJ, February 25, 2019)

Digital cohesion happens as a result of a closely monitored user experience with the intention to modify products or services to respond to customers needs. Having assurance of analytical data, companies can change offerings with more confidence and focus on the end-consumer.

Design is one of the main drivers of digital cohesion. It can't be ignored and should play a major role in the marketing strategy. Branding alone is not enough to fulfill the desires of customers. Products or services need to be functional more so than ever before due to fierce competition and broad availability of innovation platforms. To support value of the brand companies use different approaches including personalization, cause-driven campaigns, influencers networks and more, yet after all the end-user determines what works and what doesn't.

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In mid-2017 Nike unveiled its plan for growth called the Triple Double Strategy (2X). Through it, the company promised to double its "cadence and impact of innovation," double its speed to market and double its "direct connections with consumers." The cornerstone of the Triple Double Strategy is the Nike Consumer Experience (NCX), which includes Nike's own direct-to-consumer network, as well as a vastly streamlined slate of wholesale distribution partners. It is through the NCX that the company is feeding its 2X Innovation and 2X Speed initiatives...

Nike credits its Nike Customer Experience (NCX) platform as driving virtually 100% of growth in 2018, according to a new study of Nike's distribution strategy by Euromonitor. The report provides a case study in how big global brands and retailers must navigate in the future. Such dramatic strategies are not for the faint of heart, but absolutely critical to manage disruption in established businesses caused by demographic, geographic and psychographic shifts in the market.

Empowered consumers won't wait for brands to catch up. Nor will product marketers wait for their retail partners either. Nike has decided to proactively get out in front of those changes and be there whenever and wherever the customer wants to engage with them.

— Forbes, December 18

Nike is striving to be ahead of the competition by connecting with the consumer directly and delivering innovative products faster, yet functional design behind digital experiences continues to fuel its impact on the industry. To assure functionality that will meet the needs of the end-user, companies have to be connected to their consumers, which can be achieved through digital cohesion.

"As industry giants such as IBM and GE realize that software is a fundamental part of their businesses, they are also recognizing the extraordinary levels of complexity they must manage. Design thinking is an essential tool for simplifying and humanizing. It can't be extra; it needs to be a core competence. "(Design Thinking Comes of Age by Jon Kolko, HBR, September 2015)

Companies that seem to miss the point of digital transformation again and again may realize it's not for the lack of expertise in internal management.

Top managers are usually very good at what they do but they may not be in tune with what changes are happening outside of their realm. Some experts refer to this situation as a "catch-22" as competence from the outside is often needed to be able to see what is happening and competence from the inside is needed in order to handle it. Hence, competence from both sides is crucial.

Looking at digital cohesion and the necessity of expertise in this area, it is safe to assume that many factors play important roles in achieving a successful implementation. Even though it is hard to put an actual ROI number on the overall digital marketing investment, it is worth to pursue and explore innovative approaches to move companies into the new era of digital infused industries.

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Takeaways

Effective collaboration leads to better digital marketing results. Competent agencies that are willing to work together and learn from each other will achieve coherent strategies and implementations. In today's world, when technology moves very fast, it is virtually impossible to develop high level expertise in something that has only been around for a short period of time. Digital agencies are forced to be agile and reliant on predictive data models to facilitate transitions for their clients. For this reason alone, it makes sense for agencies to work together on projects that would require knowledge of many new features and technical developments that one may be more fluent than the other and compliment each other on many fronts.

Digital cohesion is based on functional design which is developed as a result of collaborative efforts of all parties related to the product or service. Ideally, digital marketing strategies need to have leaders who are able and willing to take risks in using innovative tools that may or may not bring results. At the same time, these leaders can reap higher returns when a carefully structured digital strategy works.

Perspective

Collaboration goes beyond Slack and Trello Boards, and we love collaborating on those platforms! Every touchpoint of every user's journey must be accounted for. Furthermore, adoption of certain use or processes must work on their term whether it is a task platform or any CRM/ERP issue you must address your collaborators first. Internally, be on the look out for user apathy or a less than full buy in of the project/pieces.

Similar issues of Shadow IT I have discussed here: Edelberg, Michael https://www.cmswire.com/digital-workplace/the-role-it-and-business-leaders-play-in-digital-transformation-initiatives/ Externally, the need to be where users are at and will be is a mode of collaborating from Corporate (Brand) to User. We now work instantly on many dimensions in this user space; Targeted Agile Advertising via geo code or other data, Cloud Scaling for internal and external users, etc... Collaborating spreads intelligence through the stacks and silos that are usually a barrier for development and understanding.

...it is these needed components of strategic digital corporate architecture that form the culture of human plus company.

Digital Cohesion is as different for the C-Suite as it is for the end users. The idea is simple enough to do the tasks required by each. Yet, the biggest problem we solve for G5000 is Digital Cohesion. Oh, we're way beyond Digital Transformation and one must start this journey with the gems of authoritative knowledge like "Digital is Not the Answer, Transformation Is" so well put by George Westerman, MIT, https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/your-company-doesnt-need-a-digital-strategy/ and as he rightly asserts in an enumerated guide "#3-Don't ask your tech leaders to drive transformation alone".

At Arcsec we constantly bridge the C-Suite to Marketing to IT Operations, it is these needed components of strategic digital corporate architecture that form the culture of human plus company.

Pointedly, the teams must not just be focused on their tasks but those of their users and their journey together. Ask: "How can my teams Collaborate and be fluid enough to understand our end user as their needs are changing"? That's the product of your team. Don't let the data tell you you're 70% done, ask what task the user needs done. Cohesively, the Top Down consistency needs to show value by the Quarter, now we can act instantly-together.

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