17 Ways to Get Marketing Projects Done

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What keeps marketing teams from succeeding? Why do some marketing managers seem to accept mediocre efforts and results instead of shooting for the stars?

When you ask people these questions, they usually answer with a variation on "not enough time/budget/resources/people/IT support." These are all legitimate and typical challenges that marketers face but are symptoms of larger issues, such as a lack of strategic alignment with corporate priorities and management support and buy-in.

No formula can solve all the problems your team faces. However, this tip sheet will help you map out a plan to get started and move through the process to achieve your goals.

Regardless of your challenges, taking the first step is the most important thing to do. Every day that passes without action is another day you leave money on the table and make it harder for your marketing program to catch up later.

GETTING STARTED

1 Ask yourself the right questions.

The "right" questions are the ones that help you identify where you need to move ahead, where you fall short and what's working well.

Example: When open rates, app downloads, web traffic, conversion rates and other metrics begin to decline, marketing leaders often ask, "What can we do to improve things?" or "Why are rates declining?"

Asking why open rates declined to an average 18 percent from 20 percent in a year is legitimate but also beside the point. Instead, ask "How can we achieve 50 percent, 75 percent or 100 percent increases in our goals in the next 12 to 18 months?"

These 10 questions are good places to start if you don't know what you should be asking:

- What are our company's critical strategic business goals?

- How and where are we falling short?

- Do we have a strategy to defeat our competition and blow our customers' minds? If not, why not?

- Do we have the right people with the necessary skills and mindset to move us to the next level?

- Do we have the right marketing technologies, integrations and partnerships?

- Can we capture and use the necessary customer data (implicit and explicit) to deliver the right messages and content at the right time?

- Do we have the content we need to engage our customers, stand out in the inbox and differentiate our communications from our competitors?

- Do we have the right internal and external partnerships?

- What will we do in the coming year to turn our IT department into a true partner and hero instead of blaming it for holding us back?

- How will we change what we measure and report to management so we can make our case for more resources and budget for marketing?

2 Look for the fulcrum.

This is the key point in your customer's lifecycle or relationship that tends to drive future revenue, repeat purchases, engagement and loyalty. How can you use and optimize the various tools and tactics at your disposal to drive the biggest increase in your company's revenue or conversions?

Another way to figure this out is to ask questions such as:

- How can I make my mobile app more useful and valuable, both to my customers and to my company?

- Am I using email to show why our products or services are different from/better than our competitors?

- Does our website help solve customers' problems and convey the company's core values?

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Identifying the Fulcrum Point for Your Business

SECURING MANAGEMENT BUY-IN & SUPPORT

3 Make the business case for focusing on a major goal.

After you identify the fulcrum, explain to your team and executives why your fulcrum point is so crucial to your marketing program. Then, build a model that demonstrates how improving this one area increases success downstream.

Even if your executives know little about the channel or technology you're discussing, they'll understand achieving or exceeding goals and improving results.

Educate management on what's possible. Case studies, research and white papers can show them how other companies deploy specific digital marketing programs that produce killer results. Be choosy in what you select, and highlight the key points to conserve your boss's time and attention.

4 Figure out what approach will get a "yes" from each executive.

Almost every project must win approval from multiple stakeholders, each of whom could move it forward or quash it. Columns of empirical data justifying your request often aren't enough to win you the "yes" you need to proceed.

Figure out what motivates each of your stakeholders, and tailor your story to appeal to or satisfy those drives. You might need to prepare several versions of your plan or proposal, each customized to meet the needs and concerns of each group you address.

If, say, you have executives who are highly motivated by competitors' actions, your presentation could show what your competitors and peers have achieved already. Some executives are hyper-competitive, so having bragging rights is key.

Others are haunted by FOMO ("fear of missing out"). Show these executives what they stand to lose if they pass on your request.

5 Choose metrics that get your C-level executives' attention.

When building your case and communicating your department's value, you must focus on the metrics that matter to management, rather than basic channel-specific measures.

Focus on "output" metrics, which measure actual or anticipated performance against your company's strategic marketing or business goals, instead of "process" or operational metrics that measure individual tactics of your program or what the recipients did with your messages.

Don't base your case on tactics like improving email open rates. Your C-level executives likely won't care (and generally shouldn't). Show them the money instead.

Use external benchmarks to show where the company is missing chances to make or recover revenue or overlooking other improvements. These industry benchmarks can help you prove why you need the resources to turn a single confirmation email into a welcome series, launch a social retargeting program or add sophistication to your mobile app.

> Back in the early 2000s, a marketing executive at a major airline translated the revenue produced from the company's email marketing programs into the number of Boeing 757s the company could buy. This technique was fun and creative. Most important, it spoke in the language and culture of the airline and its executives.

6 Demonstrate how your marketing program contributes to company success.

Bad budget or strategy decisions often happen because the executives making those decisions know little about what the marketing channel in question can contribute beyond sales.

Show how digital marketing (or your specific channel or group) performs in your company. Use charts, graphs, entertaining infographics and any other techniques that point to your team's crucial role in achieving key goals, delivering high ROI and supporting and enhancing other marketing channels, such as search and direct mail.

Show how you can execute on key initiatives like these:

- Boosting key business results by "XX" percent or more in the next 18 months.

- Increasing the number of customers that purchase two or more times a year.

- Reducing the number of calls to your call center by "XX" percent.

- Improving customer retention and advocacy through education and content marketing.

- Helping other channels increase sales.

7 Build a powerful coalition.

Ally with the people in your company who have management's ear or who work in a respected department where money and energy are flowing. Tap people inside and outside of marketing who have track records for driving change and success. How can you work with them to launch a much-needed program and drive the desired change?

PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

8 Remove obstacles.

Identify the factors that impede progress. They generally involve some or all of the following:

- Lack of a clear plan/road map to improve your program
- Inability to get help from IT
- Not enough content or necessary data
- Insufficient budget for needed technology tools or external resources
- Not enough internal staff time or resources
- Outdated processes or expertise
- Poor internal perception or misunderstood role of marketing

Hire or request transfers of people who have a better understanding of digital marketing's new era, such as data analysts and process- or tech-savvy staff. What processes do you need to change to move forward?

9 Enlist help from other departments.

In today's omnichannel, data-driven world, each channel should play well with other company departments. If you can show how certain improvements or programs in your channel can reduce costs, improve efficiency and achieve certain goals, you might be able to persuade heads of other departments to share budget, people and resources such as third-party software, consultants and agencies.

10 Go outside the company to find extra help.

Beg, borrow or steal budget and resources. If you don't have the bandwidth to work on a specific goal or project, see if you can outsource it to a consultant with expertise and a track record on your challenge. Or, ask your marketing service provider or other third-party vendor for help in getting specific phases of your project done.

When you struggle to get through to management and stakeholders, bring in outsiders such as a consultant, industry expert or success manager from your marketing platform provider. They often can make the same or similar points and strategies as internal staff, but your executives might consider them more authoritative because of their outsider status or industry expertise.

11 Break a big project into manageable segments or phases.

Did anyone ever tell you "Don't boil the ocean?" It means don't take on too much at once. Otherwise, you'll suffer the paralysis that keeps marketing teams from making progress.

Create a vision of the "perfect" longer-term program (e.g., 18 months out). Then, identify discrete project steps and the data, budget, resources, content, etc., each phase will need. Set up a project calendar with the specific phases and milestones. This can help you prioritize the many day-to-day issues that threaten to pull your focus away.

This phased approach also can make your budget requests more palatable to upper management. Negotiate a plan where success with Phase One will free up funds to move on to Phase Two and so on. Design each phase, especially the initial one, so that it can show learnings and incremental improvements, which will help you secure resources for subsequent phases.

12 Create short-term wins.

As alluded to in No. 11, short-term wins build your credibility with management and help your team members achieve success more quickly. Stakeholders will be more likely to buy in to your changes and give you what you need to move to the next step because you don't have to wait until the project ends before showing progress and accomplishment.

Another big plus: More-frequent wins will keep your team members encouraged and motivated, especially as you celebrate your accomplishments and recognize those who contributed.

For example, let's say you're trying to build an integrated, three-part cart abandonment program with dynamic content, products presented in the email, the first email delivered in less than an hour after abandonment and incorporating product recommendations. Instead of attempting to launch all this at once, start with one basic email reminder and then add sophistication in phases as the program proves itself.

13 Carve out a specific time to focus on improvements.

This step is the hardest for many marketers who get pulled in multiple directions. However, your journey to a more successful digital marketing program starts with this single step.

Block out a few hours each week — lock it into your calendar — and use it to brainstorm, develop your plans and proposals, or work on that onboarding series you've wanted to do for years.

Use this time to listen to webinars, watch TED Talks videos, take your team for an offsite bonding and creative session, attend conferences, take other department members to lunch or read the latest business books. Make sure you carve out time for yourself – time to expand your thinking and get the ideas flowing.

ENSURING FUTURE WINS

14 Report your successes up the line to your superiors.

Once you launch your project, keep your higher-ups informed. You can tie reports to your project calendar or issue more frequent bulletins, whatever works for your team and your executives.

The most important thing is to let people know when you've succeeded. Success begets success. Once you prove your team can work together, get key projects done and meet your goals, the next ones you tackle will be that much easier to achieve.
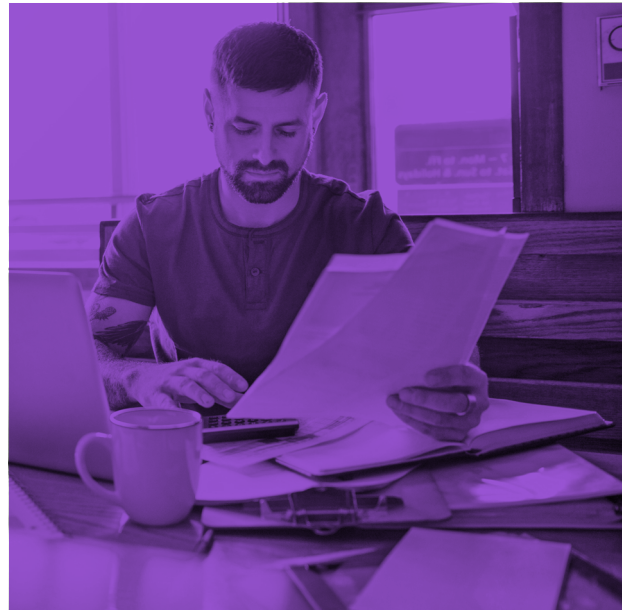
15 Anchor your innovations in your corporate culture.

Document your entire process. Quantify your success. Communicate it throughout your department and company. Build a strong support structure so that your new programs will survive and thrive even if key players move on. Keep the process going with continuous training and education.

TWEET THIS!
Reading Waton Marketing's "17 Ways to Get Marketing Projects Done"

16 Build on your success.

After you win one battle, don't rest on your laurels. Learn from what you accomplished, and see where you could go next. Bring in your technology providers, agencies and other professional services people as appropriate to help you plot the next course and understand what's possible.

17 Invest in your employees.

Ultimately, being able to bring change and success to your marketing program involves a wider issue: building "people smarts" such as developing better strategies and executing more quickly, learning and improving marketing programs, and achieving a higher ROI from a lower LOE (level of effort).

Investing in yourself and your team gives you that crucial advantage. These seven outlets help you and your team build these smarts, many at little or no cost beyond time:

- Conferences
- Webinars/Online events
- Training
- Resource library/Discussions
- Associations
- Online communities
- Brainstorming

The Final Word on Getting Stuff Done

Getting off the "hamster wheel of average" is a daunting task for most marketing departments. While you try to change processes and priorities, you must still get your core marketing programs out the door every day. These tips will help you plot a path to not just get more marketing programs done but also to accomplish the most important ones.

About Watson Marketing

Watson Marketing offers campaign automation, marketing insights and real-time personalization embedded with cognitive capabilities. With Watson Marketing, marketers can uncover new levels of actionable insights, deliver powerful and personalized experiences that customers want and value, and discover innovative ideas that provide a competitive edge.