PROBLEMS IN AGILE MARKETING

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Agile marketing focuses on identifying and collaborating to complete high value projects, measuring their impact, and integrating process improvements to increase successful outcomes. For the rest of this lesson, we'll discuss the benefits and challenges of agile marketing.

The Benefits of Agile Marketing
Scrum aligns marketing, sales, and organizational goals to improve communication and responsiveness to marketing initiatives. Daphne then shares the seven benefits of agile marketing and creates seven groups to expound each benefit. Let's review their findings:

Productivity
Agile marketing suggests creating small groups to focus on one or more high value tasks. For example, the group in charge of increasing repeat customers to a site should see an uptick in their results due to small group collaboration and innovation.

Transparency
Transparency refers to the Marketing team working closely with customers on marketing initiatives and efforts that benefit consumers and/or address a concern. For example, if a company's product malfunctioned and/or harmed a small group of consumers, the Marketing department may work with a consumer focused group to identify a marketing strategy that promotes safety.

Prioritization
Reviewing marketing tasks holistically, then identifying and working on the most impactful outcome ensures consumer focused initiatives are foremost. Prioritization also helps with **iterative planning**, which is the processing of planning for the next marketing cycle or project implementation phase. While agile marketing focuses on responding to short term opportunities and threats, iterative planning is more long term in nature. Organizations should consider creating a separate team to focus on iterative planning.

Adaptability
In today's dynamic environment, an organization's ability to respond to change is paramount. The ability to quickly identify, collaborate, and produce results is the foundation of **agility**. Agile marketing encourages collaboration with sales and other departments to re-purpose marketing efforts every 4 - 6 weeks.

Measurability
One of the foundations of agile marketing is measurement and accountability. Small groups should frequently analyze the results of their initiatives and integrate changes for increased success.

Customer Satisfaction
Consumer satisfaction increases when organizations garner customers' feedback and quickly respond to their inquiries and needs. For example, let's say several customers have complained about the difficulty of accessing return and exchange information on the organization's website. A small group of marketers can work directly with the organization's technology team to restructure the site based on consumer feedback.

Competitiveness
While being the first to market still represents a strategic marketing initiative, the first to respond to consumers and make adjustments based on economic, market, and other factors has become just as important. Flexible organizations that quickly respond to marketing opportunities and threats increase their competitiveness and customer satisfaction.
Yet, Agile adoption is not without its challenges.
This year, in our quest to gather data about the hurdles that Agile marketers are facing, we asked hundreds of marketers about the challenges they've come up against as a result of using Agile inside their organizations.

We don't want to sugar coat the process of adopting Agile, so we're calling out the biggest flies in our Agile ointment. Here you'll find the top five challenges Agile marketers need to overcome, and how to make it happen with your team.

Managing Unplanned Work

Dealing with unplanned work is an inevitable part of any marketer's job.

Due to marketing's role as a linchpin business function, we're prone to ad hoc work requests from internal and external stakeholders all the time. As a consequence, we risk being derailed on the path to our strategic goals. Most of us have trouble focusing only on high-priority work.

As a result, it's not surprising that 44% of all Agile marketers queried in the 4th edition of the State of Agile Marketing Report cited "difficulties managing unplanned work" as their top process challenge as a result of using Agile.

The reality is that unplanned work isn't going away. To tackle it effectively, marketers need to create hybrid frameworks designed to deal with this unavoidable challenge.

By adapting practices from the Kanban framework, like limiting working in progress, or implementing the sprint timebox from Scrum, marketers can find ways to gain back control over (at least) some of their productive time.

For instance, reducing context switching and creating focus around finishing started work before starting something new (big deals in the Kanban world) will allow marketing teams to deliver value more frequently without getting distracted.

Other Agile practices, such as establishing service level agreements with our stakeholders, are proven ways to create boundaries and protect our team from distractions interruptions. These agreements frame the relationship between our team and internal stakeholders who rely on us to better define each group's expectations about taking on new, unplanned tasks.

For more on how to tackle the #1 challenge marketers experience as a result of using Agile, check out this guide to managing unplanned work.

People Reverting to Old (Non-Agile) Approaches

When we change our ways of working internally, there are some practices that we need to leave behind to fully implement our new frameworks.

In some cases, the practices we abandon are long-standing and entrenched in our organization's modus operandi. Open-minded marketers welcome the change,

while more traditional marketers might struggle to adapt to new norms. Rather than permanently change, they may revert to old approaches.

Based on this year's data, 36% of Agile marketers cited this kind of backsliding as an emerging challenge for their Agile adoptions.

There's no denying that breaking old habits is hard. It requires patience, shared understanding, and consistent endorsement.

Building shared understanding about Agile inside the organization works best through a multi-faceted approach. Through a combination of training, open socialization, office hours and team coaching, leaders can create a strong foundation for Agile to flourish inside their organizations.

While we still might see team members bounding back to familiar ways, the chances of reverting completely are diminished by the fact that every facet of the organization is aligned in their pursuit of Agile goals.

Guiding our teams through the transition period from traditional or ad hoc ways of working to Agile is also essential. In these cases, training leaders inside the organization as Agile champions can be a sustainable way to rely on a network of ambassadors that are able to support more marketers moving to Agile ways of working.

If your organization started with an Agile pilot before a full department-wide implementation of Agile, redistribute the members of the pilot team across the department once the pilot end.

This way, they'll be able to share their expertise and thwart any uncertainties by speaking from experience. They can address non-Agile behaviors before they become dangerous.

If you end up needing more Agile champions on deck, you can always call in Sherpas to coach your teams through the early stages of your implementation ;)

Interacting with Non-Agile Teams

While our marketing team or department might be moving to Agile, chances are other parts of the organization that we interact with aren't.

According to our findings, 31% of marketers cite challenges when Agile teams interact with non-Agile ones. Adjacent teams or departments subscribing to competing frameworks can lead to breakdowns in communication, friction between team members, and a general disconnect between the two or more units.

In some cases, the incompatibility of two working groups using different ways of working can tank entire campaigns.

While we may not be able to make everyone Agile immediately, there are ways to mitigate the negative consequences of working with a non-Agile group.

By doubling down on communication and placing an emphasis on transparency, we can loop non-Agile groups into our work process and encourage them to participate. More specifically, we can:

- Invite non-Agile stakeholders to our Agile meetings like standups and reviews
- Share our visual workflows with them so they can follow along
- Use our Kanban board as a negotiation tool to give non-Agile stakeholders a better idea of projects that are coming down the pipeline for the team

Plans Changing Too Often
One of the most common myths about Agile marketing is that it eliminates the need to plan.
In reality, Agile teams actually plan more iteratively and more often than traditional marketing teams. Marketers who are more comfortable with executing based on a clearly defined annual marketing plan are in for quite a shock.
But there's a fine line to walk here. Rigid up-front planning is anti-Agile, but constant change also prevents us from focusing on a goal long enough to achieve it.
Statistically, 28% of survey respondents stated that they struggle with plans that change too often as a result of their Agile adoption.

Leaders can make a case for iterative, short-term planning by highlighting the benefits of keeping up with changing customer demand. Encouraging the generation of hypotheses and MVPs, as well as tracking the results of these efforts, can help even the most traditional marketers move away from old school waterfall planning approaches.
Throughout the iterative planning process, teams as well as leaders need to keep each other accountable for making changes to the original plan **only when there is value to the business**. A marketing leader listening to a great podcast and flipping their team's entire backlog on its head is rarely (ok, probably never) the best approach.
Avoiding change for change's sake and taking direction from customer feedback will help teams seize new opportunities as they come up without introducing a brand new direction for the team every single day.

REFERENCES
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