

Magic Quadrant for Global Marketing Agencies

Published 15 March 2021 - ID G00467664 - 55 min read

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As CMOs face increased pressure for business growth, they rely on global marketing agencies to support digital business initiatives and to develop and execute effective marketing strategies. Use this research to assess which agencies may be best suited to help accelerate short- and long-term goals.

Market Definition/Description

Gartner defines global marketing agencies as service providers dedicated to developing and executing marketing strategies for global brands. These agencies bundle their strategic marketing services with an array of complementary offerings to support their clients' needs. An agency's particular combination of offerings and competitive strengths typically correlates to its roots as a traditional advertising, direct marketing or digital agency, or as a business consultancy or system integrator.

We evaluate agencies for demonstrated success in the following core capabilities:

- Marketing strategy
- Creative and content
- Digital marketing execution including website, social media, email, mobile, paid search and digital advertising channels
- Marketing data, analytics and insights
- Marketing technology strategy and implementation
- Digital commerce and personalization

Providers in this market may also offer and be evaluated on the following additional capabilities:

- Business consulting and transformation services
- Industry vertical expertise
- Marketing organizational design

- Product and service innovation
- Branding and traditional/offline advertising
- Media planning and buying
- Programmatic media
- Market research
- Public relations, events and promotions

In addition to the above capabilities, agencies should exhibit a close alignment with the values and cultures of client organizations, especially issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and sustainability. This is particularly important in today's rapidly changing and uncertain business environment, with evolving customer expectations of brands' behaviors, combined with heightened expectations for personalized, contextual experiences (see [CMO Strategic Priorities Survey 2020-2021: Ambitions Threatened by Capacity, Capital and Capability](#)).

Marketing budgets are under pressure in many organizations. Therefore, global marketing agencies must remain responsive and flexible to changing client needs and aspirations to insource certain marketing activities, such as social marketing and creative production (see [2020 CMO Spend Survey, Part 2: CMOs Protect Digital Channels and Martech \(for Now\)](#)). ¹

Magic Quadrant

Figure 1: Magic Quadrant for Global Marketing Agencies





Source: Gartner (March 2021)

Vendor Strengths and Cautions

Accenture Interactive

Accenture Interactive is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. Accenture Interactive delivers transformative customer experiences beyond the scope of just marketing. It leverages marketing, consulting and technology capabilities across Accenture to help clients deliver new digital products, services and experiences. Accenture Interactive's focus on brand purpose addresses a growing CMO responsibility. Its clients are B2C and B2B marketers in large global enterprises across industries like healthcare, entertainment, retail, banking and others. Among other acquisitions, the agency acquired CreativeDrive in 2020 – a network of content production studios – to improve speed to market in delivering and distributing content for its clients.

Strengths

- **Scaling omnichannel experiences:** Accenture Interactive is adept at leveraging its consulting and technology strength to help clients scale transformative and innovative customer

experiences beyond the scope of marketing. For example, the agency expanded online ordering capabilities from just one location to thousands of locations in 20 days for one client, achieving orders in the multimillions within two months while increasing average order revenue. For another client, Accenture Interactive scaled curbside pickup to over 1,000 locations in less than 48 hours to sustain in-store sales and deliver a differentiated, safety-focused customer experience.

- **Creative leadership and global content delivery:** Accenture Interactive's 2019 acquisition of creative shop Droga5 bolstered its combined creative capabilities. With the late 2020 acquisition of production studio CreativeDrive, Accenture Interactive intends to further scale its creative and content production.
- **Commitment to internal DEI and social justice efforts:** Accenture Interactive was noted in the last iteration of this Magic Quadrant for its internal DEI efforts. The agency expanded on these efforts in 2020, with the establishment of its Black Founders Development Program, which provides black entrepreneurs with corporate mentorship opportunities and access to venture capital. It has also strengthened its purpose-driven efforts on behalf of its clients. For example, the agency helped one financial services company bring loan availability to underserved populations.

Cautions

- **Internal resourcing and readiness:** Some clients indicate that, due to Accenture Interactive's size and complexity, additional internal resources are sometimes needed to successfully manage the complex projects the agency delivers. More importantly, clients advise that prospective clients must be culturally ready to embrace change to get the most value from the agency.
- **Smaller-scale and marketing-only engagements:** Accenture Interactive's clients tend to be large, global enterprises with the resources and commitment to solving large business problems. Prospective clients in smaller organizations seeking marketing-only services may not find Accenture Interactive to be a suitable fit.

AKQA

AKQA is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. AKQA, a part of WPP, helps marketers envision and execute transformative customer experiences through a combination of story, design, product, technology and space. Known for its innovative solutions, AKQA actively focuses on helping clients define their future brand experience while encouraging them to take necessary risks to progress. Its clients tend to be global, forward-looking B2C brands across industries such as travel, technology and retail. In November 2020, WPP merged AKQA and Grey Group to form AKQA Group. The merger further strengthens AKQA's global scale and creative storytelling capabilities.

Strengths

- **Customer-centric approach:** AKQA grounds its approach in customer research and a vision of what a brand's experience could be, then creates a comprehensive experience strategy to achieve that vision. Implementation includes designing, prototyping and piloting experiences that align to real human needs and behavior.
- **Strategic leadership:** AKQA is known for its ability to clarify a brand's strategy and purpose, and to define and execute differentiating experiences across customer touchpoints in line with that strategy. Clients select AKQA for its strategic and creative services and report that, while AKQA can be expensive, they receive value in line with their investment.
- **Innovation as a service:** Demand from current clients for ongoing innovation initiatives has steadily increased. AKQA embeds UX design and innovation strategy experts within a client's organization to create new business model concepts and prototypes.

Cautions

- **Traditional engagements:** AKQA is future- and innovation-focused, and may not be a good fit for prospective clients seeking traditional agency engagements. The agency avoids procurement-led RFP processes, leaning instead on its own workshop-based approach to working with clients to identify and define opportunities.
- **Grey Group merger:** The AKQA and Grey Group merger nearly triples the employee headcount of AKQA. WPP has announced that the AKQA and Grey Group brands will remain separate for some time after the internal merger. However, that is likely to change as the two agencies further integrate, establish a new culture and combine staff. It is unknown how the merger may affect client or prospect relationships or contracts.

Deloitte Digital

Deloitte Digital is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. With a significant presence in North America, Europe and APAC, the agency focuses on providing marketers with robust strategic capabilities, established technology expertise and growing creative acumen. Clients are B2C and B2B large global enterprises across industries, including financial services, retail and high tech, with significant digital transformation needs. In recent years, Deloitte Digital has substantiated capabilities in two areas: customer-led business transformations and digital experiences infused with an improved understanding of human behavior.

Strengths

- **Cross-functional expertise:** Tapping into Deloitte's broader expertise, Deloitte Digital helps CMOs and the rest of the C-suite successfully undertake and deliver transformative strategies. For example, it helped one company apply financial rigor to its global marketing investments by tapping into Deloitte's extensive finance advisory expertise.
- **Deepening customer experiences:** Deloitte Digital moves beyond traditional agency approaches to CX to enable enterprisewide culture, process and technology changes underpinned by a deep understanding of human behavior. For example, its recent HX TrustID

research on how trust drives behavior identified four key filters through which clients can understand how brand attributes can impact customer and employee behavior. This research helps clients inform internal and external marketing efforts to enhance both CX and employee experience.

- **Creative innovation:** Through increasing investments in its creative agencies such as Heat and Acne, Deloitte Digital provides clients with expanding global creative capabilities that serve not just advertising and marketing efforts, but product and service innovation, too.

Cautions

- **Marketing-only engagements:** Engagements with Deloitte Digital are best suited to organizations that want to leverage the full depth of its capabilities in business transformation and digital experience, with advertising and marketing initiatives as an outgrowth of that work. Some prospective clients seeking purely marketing communications services may not be the right fit for Deloitte Digital.
- **Service complexity:** Gartner client inquiries and previous Gartner research indicate that the service lines between Deloitte Digital and other Deloitte practices can feel disjointed — especially in more complex projects. While having access to Deloitte's broader expertise serves as a benefit in many cases, prospective clients considering Deloitte Digital should emphasize and push for seamless communications across Deloitte's business practices when pursuing large, complex projects involving multiple service lines.

Digitas

Digitas is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. Digitas provides marketers with connected, end-to-end offerings, bringing together creative with strategy and innovation alongside data, media and technology. Digitas offers a discrete value proposition as a digital full-service agency for global brands and is able to leverage the breadth of strategy and transformation capabilities of other partners in the Publicis Groupe. Its clients tend to be B2C and B2B brands in the retail, financial services and CPG sectors. Digitas recently grew its global footprint, despite the significant challenges COVID-19 presented, and opened nine new offices in 2020. This expansion bolstered the agency's presence in Europe, APAC, Africa and Central America.

Strengths

- **Media buying muscle:** Through its partnerships with Publicis Media brands — which also include Starcom, Zenith, Spark Foundry and Performics — Digitas offers clients the scale and influence of a global digital-media-buying giant.
- **Connected planning system:** Digitas delivers consistent and integrated services to clients through its proprietary planning system called North. Solutions can be tailored to clients' needs while leveraging the scale and efficiency enabled by its robust planning process. Its process includes proprietary tools like Connect IQ, which evaluates a brand's end-to-end experience.

- **Global scale:** Digitas has 4,465 full-time employees across 54 offices worldwide, with more than half of employees based outside of North America and Western Europe. This geographic breadth allows the agency to support clients that require global and localized expertise.

Cautions

- **Transformation and consulting:** Marketing transformation capabilities are a growing part of Digitas' revenue, and are mainly supported through its partnership with Publicis Sapient. Prospective clients seeking support with dedicated transformation initiatives should ensure Digitas can leverage its partner agencies to offer a seamless and integrated service.
- **Smaller-scale engagements:** Although Digitas does take on project work, its integrated offering is well-suited to large, global entities as their agency of record (AOR).

Havas

Havas is a Challenger in this Magic Quadrant. Havas focuses on providing marketers with the ability to deliver meaningful connections and experiences with customers, powered by actionable data and customer insights. Clients include both B2B and B2C brands within the financial services, CPG, pharmaceutical and other industries. Havas recently expanded its customer data and insights capabilities, further enhancing its data-driven CX services for clients. The agency offers clients a range of proprietary tools and research to help them plan, execute and optimize their marketing strategies. Havas' late 2019 acquisition of a U.K. management consulting firm, Gate One, bolsters its ability to provide digital transformation consulting.

Strengths

- **Commitment to DEI:** Havas reports that more than 100 individual programs across its global organization are focused on ethnic and cultural representation, gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, disability and age. For example, roughly half of senior management roles in Havas U.K. are staffed by women. In 2020, Havas became the first global holding company to join the Conscious Advertising Network, a voluntary coalition focused on ethical advertising, including battling ad fraud, hate speech and fake news. Havas also launched its Social Equity Private Marketplace, made up of black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+-owned media businesses. Havas London achieved B Corporation Certification in 2018, with Havas Lemz in the Netherlands certified in late 2020, with other offices on track in 2021.
- **Advanced CX and media planning toolset:** Havas' Media Experience (Mx) offers clients an integrated and expanded CX and media planning toolset. This supports its strategy to move the network away from traditional media planning and buying. The agency provides clients with AI-powered online data and journey mapping capabilities through its Arcadia platform, as well as integrated audience planning, modeling and media activation through its CONVERGED platform.
- **Proprietary insights:** Havas' clients can access proprietary insights to inform brand decisions. Its Meaningful Brands study of over 1,800 global brands provides valuable brand benchmarks across industries and categories, while Havas' Prosumer Reports merge proprietary studies

with data and insights on key strategic issues, such as the future of retail and branding in an uncertain environment. Havas' new global study – the X Index report – is now conducted annually and tracks 150 leading brands across major markets, using multiple touchpoints to objectively measure and benchmark customer experience efficiency.

Cautions

- **System integration (SI):** Havas has strong technology capabilities, with an increasing focus on emerging technology. For example, its partnership with NYC Media Lab is focused on developing new media technology applications. The agency's typical scopes of work are less focused on system integration for martech, for example, acquiring and onboarding a multichannel marketing platform.
- **Enterprise focus:** Havas' clients are mostly larger enterprises with upward of 10,000 employees. It also works with smaller clients, but they make up a relatively small set of its client mix.

Huge

Huge is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. A part of Interpublic Group, Huge leverages its legacy in digital creativity and user-centered design to create transformative, customer-focused brand experiences. The agency's people-focused strategies are underpinned by its application of user experience design principles to clients' larger business needs – from business and brand strategy to product development and marketing strategy. Huge's clients are B2C and B2B large-enterprise brands within the technology, consumer goods and financial services industries. The agency recently invested in redesigning its global delivery process to increase speed and efficiency in meeting client demands.

Strengths

- **Unified brand experiences:** Huge is adept at helping clients transform their businesses and their brands through the design of meaningful, seamless brand experiences across digital, physical and communications touchpoints. The agency takes a user-centric, data-driven approach to both creative and technology, and provides clients with the change management and organizational strategy necessary to ensure operational success.
- **Connected commerce:** Huge applies the principles of its unified brand experience and tailors it to help digital commerce brands develop omnichannel shopping experiences. It offers services for both B2C and B2B organizations across commerce strategy and growth, experience and service design, platform strategy and implementation, and roadmapping.
- **Internal commitment to DEI:** Huge is committed to fostering a diverse workplace and inclusive employee experience, and to being transparent about its progress. In addition to appointing a DEI director to define and implement an overall DEI strategy, Huge has vowed to increase the share of women and BIPOC employees at the executive level by 25% within the next two years.

Cautions

- **Global limitations:** Huge has grown organically rather than through acquisitions and does not have the comprehensive global presence of other Leaders in this Magic Quadrant. Eight of its 13 offices are in North America. Huge has substantially increased investments in collaboration platforms, however, and has redesigned its global delivery process to enable cross-regional teams.
- **Agency size:** Huge maintains multiyear AOR relationships with leading brands; but, as one of the smaller agencies evaluated in this Magic Quadrant, it may not be a fit for prospective clients with specific requirements around agency size. Prospective clients considering Huge should ensure the agency has the necessary resources to sufficiently meet larger international marketing assignments.

iCrossing

iCrossing is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. iCrossing, a part of Hearst, positions its offerings as part of Hearst Solutions and Services, which are built on a foundation of data (Hearst Data Studio), marketing (iCrossing) and content (HearstMade). iCrossing leverages its relationship with Hearst to focus on bridging content and digital advertising to drive and optimize digital commerce. Its clients tend to be B2C brands within the beauty, food and beverage, and automotive industries. iCrossing has made recent investments in proprietary tools to help clients take advantage of the agency's customer interest data available through Hearst Data Studio to scale the client's own first-party data.

Strengths

- **Customer data:** Hearst Data Studio includes first-party data on millions of users who subscribe to Hearst publications focused on their interests, making it one of the top second-party data solutions in the world when combined with clients' own datasets. iCrossing's access to and analysis of this data provides clients with a unique understanding of their target audience, since they are often part of the Hearst subscriber database.
- **Content studio:** HearstMade gives clients access to Hearst's editors and content creators, who can apply their nuanced understanding of consumers across the verticals covered by Hearst publications to develop persuasive messaging that drives action.
- **Media and commerce optimization:** iCrossing's legacy in performance marketing and its mature approach to revenue optimization provide robust talent, tools and processes prospective clients can leverage to optimize conversions. Its expertise extends across digital media channels, including paid and organic search, programmatic, and other digital and social channels focused on driving digital commerce.

Cautions

- **APAC limitations:** iCrossing does the majority of its work in North America, Latin America and Europe. It does not have a strong presence in Asia compared to other agencies in this Magic Quadrant; only 5% of its revenue came from APAC in 2019.

- **Agency size:** With a total of 1,225 employees worldwide, iCrossing is one of the smaller agencies in this Magic Quadrant. Although it does draw on the broader resources of Hearst when needed, iCrossing may not be an appropriate fit for prospective clients with specific requirements around agency size.

Isobar

Isobar is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. A member of dentsu, Isobar helps clients drive brand and experience transformations by blending creative with technology. Its 22 global NowLab innovation hubs accelerate transformation for clients by facilitating innovative capabilities. Isobar's clients are global B2C and B2B brands within the automotive, CPG and luxury retail industries. The agency is evolving an "AOR on demand" relationship model that leverages proprietary platforms like Content Symphony, centers of excellence, and delivery and agile teaming to provide its clients flexible access to Isobar talent and capabilities.

Strengths

- **Experience technology:** Isobar was an early pioneer in emerging technologies and has made significant investments in voice, gesture, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) as differentiating skill sets. Isobar is known for its strong technical and system integration capabilities, often competing with Accenture Interactive and Deloitte Digital for large-platform implementations.
- **Integrated commerce:** Isobar helps brands build direct to consumer (DTC) and digital commerce capabilities from acquisition to postpurchase loyalty with its integrated commerce service, Total Commerce. Total Commerce expands its support beyond the technical implementation of commerce to help its clients develop capabilities in four areas: performance and media, creative, interactive, and data and ops.
- **Content services:** Isobar recently launched its Content Symphony solution, which assists clients with asset production, performance and distribution. Content Symphony combines a network of global studios with a technology platform that leverages automation and AI to produce and optimize content at scale. Content Symphony can complement Total Commerce by shortening the content production life cycle for retail and product merchandising applications.

Cautions

- **Media planning and buying:** Isobar is moving away from media planning and buying, although these services are still offered in a subset of countries in APAC. Prospective clients considering Isobar as a full-service partner may need to employ an additional media agency or work with another dentsu agency like Carat or iProspect to fulfill their media planning and buying needs.
- **Cost-effective planning:** While Isobar is actively working on creating platforms and solutions that promote cost-efficiencies, some clients report that controlling costs in their ongoing relationship with the agency proves challenging.

Merkle

Merkle is a Challenger in this Magic Quadrant. With its strong heritage in data-driven marketing, Merkle focuses on helping marketers deliver personalized CX, digital commerce and media engagements. The agency serves both B2C and B2B marketers in midmarket and global enterprises across various industries. Since joining dentsu in 2016, the agency has nearly doubled its annual revenue, and its data platforms have become the standard identity-based customer experience marketing solution for that network.

Strengths

- **Data-driven CX:** Merkle's strong data, personalization and identity graph capabilities make the agency a good fit for prospective clients desiring measurable customer experiences informed by data. It is one of only a few agencies pioneering data clean rooms – secure, isolated platforms that link private, anonymized advertising data from multiple parties in support of client-owned identity graphs, as third-party cookie data deprecates.
- **Digital commerce:** Merkle is making significant investments in its digital commerce capabilities. This focus – combined with its existing media and CX capabilities – positions the agency as a strong contender for prospective clients moving to digital commerce. For example, it helped one retailer quickly shift its media strategy, execution and measurement to increase digital commerce sales after its physical locations closed due to the pandemic. As a result, the retailer experienced increased traffic, revenue and return on ad spend (ROAS).
- **B2B and vertical industry expertise:** In late 2020, dentsu announced the formation of Merkle B2B, providing a value proposition for B2B marketers seeking a large, global agency to serve their unique needs. Merkle's longtime focus on industry vertical go-to-market strategies, particularly in financial services, retail and healthcare, provides marketers in diverse industries with specialized expertise in their respective markets.

Cautions

- **Client readiness:** With Merkle's competency in leveraging first-party customer data to prompt personalized experiences, prospective clients who aren't ready to embrace a data-first approach to marketing may not be ready to take advantage of the agency's full breadth of capabilities.
- **Brand strategy:** Because Merkle's core creative competency lies in delivering personalized and performance campaigns at scale, prospective clients seeking primarily brand strategy work may need to look at partnering the agency with one of dentsu's creative agencies.

MRM

MRM is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. Part of Interpublic Group, the agency's heritage in relationship marketing has evolved to offer marketers a full range of strategic consulting, marketing, technology, commerce, and data and analytics capabilities. It does so through an ongoing commitment to creative strategy and a dedication to its own internal communications

and talent development with a focus on DEI. Its clients tend to be global B2C marketers across various industries, but it has a more robust B2B capability than most large agencies evaluated in this research. MRM continues to invest in its internal talent, particularly around its MRM Consulting business transformation teams.

Strengths

- **Responsive partner:** Clients laud MRM's approach to partnership, noting senior leadership's hands-on role in helping them succeed. Clients state that the agency welcomes critical feedback and is quick to address their feedback. MRM's clients' willingness to recommend the agency to others has been a historic strength.
- **Digital commerce:** MRM continues to invest heavily in digital commerce capabilities from a process, staffing and technology perspective. MRM has developed a productized digital commerce offering that includes four categories: online marketplaces like Amazon, e-tailers such as Walmart, social commerce and direct to consumer. As a result, the agency was able to help one traditional CPG brand build out a DTC model, resulting in a strong increase in digital commerce revenue.
- **Commitment to DEI and agency sustainability:** MRM continues to make strides in its internal DEI efforts, including quantitative recruitment goals and adjustments to its HR practices. It also launched a new initiative to measure and improve the environmental sustainability of its offices. This devotion extends into the work it does for its clients. For example, it helped one global airline implement a system that helps hearing-impaired customers navigate the airport by using gestures.

Cautions

- **Project planning:** Although clients report that onboarding, delivery and execution is a strength of the agency, some clients noted that MRM was slower than they expected, specifically in project scoping and staffing. Prospective clients considering MRM should closely monitor the process to ensure project planning timeliness.
- **Smaller-scale engagements:** MRM's developing emphasis on business consulting, analytics and commerce executed at a global scale makes it less of a fit for prospective clients in midsize or regional organizations seeking help with smaller, one-off projects.

Ogilvy

Ogilvy is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. Ogilvy, a part of WPP, combines robust creative with speed and scale to provide clients an accelerated path to value and growth. The agency encourages clients to center their brand and transformation strategy on one ambitious "big idea" as a way to identify unknown needs and areas for innovation. Ogilvy has a strong worldwide footprint, with an especially strong presence in China. Its clients include both B2B and B2C global enterprises within the CPG, technology and retail industries. Ogilvy recently invested in Ogilvy Gaming. This cross-office offering guides brands through the multitude of marketing options now available through gaming, from in-game integrations to esports events.

Strengths

- **Creative:** Ogilvy maintains a global reputation for its award-winning creative. The agency leverages that heritage in an approach it calls Immersive Branding, which merges its brand and identity design process with data and technology. Ogilvy approaches technology as a foundation for providing differentiating and transformative creative strategies.
- **Digital commerce:** Ogilvy takes a more holistic approach to digital commerce by evaluating the entire prepurchase and postpurchase omnichannel customer experience, not simply transactions. The agency designs and builds DTC, social and brand commerce experiences, and has developed a marketplace commerce practice that helps its clients execute on third-party platforms like Amazon, Alibaba and Lazada.
- **Content development:** Ogilvy offers clients robust content development services that provide clients singular teams and processes specifically suited for the content type in question. The agency boasts three distinct content studios: Agile Content Studio for integrated content, editorial programs and animation; Custom Content Studio for major productions and television content; and its new ALKMY Dynamic Content Studio for quick-turn, always-on content (often built for social media).

Cautions

- **Smaller-scale engagements:** Ogilvy tends to partner with enterprise-level companies that take advantage of the agency's global capabilities and depth of services. As such, the agency may not be a good match for prospective clients in smaller companies or those working on small-scale projects.
- **Delivery speed:** Some clients report that Ogilvy's project turnaround time could improve. Prospective clients should establish a good working relationship with the agency's creative and account teams to set clear expectations for both sides ahead of project kickoffs.

RAPP

RAPP is a Challenger in this Magic Quadrant. As the keystone agency in holding company Omnicom's Precision Marketing Group, RAPP spearheads the group's data-driven marketing, technology and consulting capabilities. RAPP delivers transformative marketing through a process-driven approach to its clients, which span B2C and B2B organizations in automotive, healthcare, retail and other industries. In 2020, Omnicom folded Proximity, one of its direct and digital agencies, into RAPP, considerably growing its size and global reach.

Strengths

- **Data-driven multichannel orchestration:** RAPP has developed rigorous, data-driven processes and platforms, like its ADZU dynamic creative optimization tool, to help clients orchestrate complex multichannel marketing, commerce and CX programs. The agency's ability to help clients advance the data and technology required for such initiatives is differentiating, and clients laud its ability to execute highly complex, global campaigns.

- **Digital experience:** RAPP's approach to customer experience continues to move in new and innovative directions. For example, it developed a unique journey mapping process for one client, using an empathy-based framework to better understand rapidly evolving customer needs during the pandemic. It then aligned relevant marketing, sales and service communications to the various stages of customers coping with the impacts of the pandemic.
- **Marketing transformation:** RAPP is adept at helping marketing organizations and operations transform their structures and processes for greater efficiency and results. While its core RAPP consulting capability is generally focused on marketing, its Credera consulting arm extends that capability beyond marketing, helping one global QSR chain improve its speed at expanding into developing markets.

Cautions

- **Organizational complexity:** As part of Omnicom's Precision Marketing Group, RAPP brings together multiple data, technology and consulting components to effectively service clients. However, this complexity may take additional client resources to manage. Ongoing consolidation within the group – for example, the integration of Proximity – should continue to simplify client management.
- **Brand strategy:** Prospective clients seeking a big brand idea as their primary purpose in engaging a global marketing agency may not be a good fit for RAPP, as the agency's focus centers on scaling and personalizing complex performance marketing initiatives.

R/GA

R/GA is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. R/GA takes a design-led approach to brand strategy, communications and CX. With a heritage in design, consultancy and innovation, its services help brands deliver marketing programs that merge technology and creativity. Its clients tend to be B2C brands within the apparel, hospitality, financial services and technology industries. In 2020, R/GA invested in its accelerator practices – dedicated teams that bring clients new perspectives to brand design, innovation and organizational design. The agency also bolstered its suite of productized offerings including programmatic creative, scalable content creation and collaborative experience design.

Strengths

- **Digital innovation:** R/GA has proven itself as a pioneer in digital innovation. The agency supports progressive clients' in-house digital innovation capabilities with its innovation-as-a-service offering. For example, R/GA's Venture Studios builds connections between established enterprises and startups to identify emerging opportunities and tap into disruptive technologies.
- **Digital brand experiences:** R/GA offers highly evolved design and technology capabilities to clients. The agency specializes in designing programs that bring together major technology platforms, such as Google and TikTok, and leading brands to deliver unique, value-adding experiences.

- **Productized offerings:** To support clients' desires to optimize their in-house/agency hybrid model, R/GA has developed a suite of tools to strengthen clients' in-house capabilities for strategy and creative. For example, its Lean Experience Stack helps clients facilitate collaborative experience design and optimization on their own.

Cautions

- **APAC limitations:** The majority of R/GA's revenue comes from North America, Latin America and Western Europe, with limited revenue coming from APAC. This is reflected in its organization, with R/GA clustering resources around its current major markets. Prospective clients seeking a truly global reach may not find R/GA to be a suitable partner.
- **Leadership team changes:** High-profile departures among R/GA's leadership team may have negative repercussions on the agency's core strategy and transformation roles. Recent departures include the loss of R/GA's global chief innovation officer, global head of brand, global chief strategy officer, global head of operations, VP of business transformation and CMO.

VMLY&R

VMLY&R is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. VMLY&R, a part of WPP, applies a fusion of creativity, culture and technology to help solve clients' business challenges. The agency's creative strength was a leading driver of its business growth in 2020. VMLY&R pushes brand transformation by reimagining the entire customer experience. VMLY&R's clients tend to be global B2C brands within the CPG, automotive and healthcare industries. In November 2020, WPP merged its creative commerce agency Geometry with VMLY&R to create VMLY&R Commerce.

Strengths

- **Connected brands:** VMLY&R has garnered industry recognition for its creative and brand strategy, which it grounds in an experience design approach that connects brand experience (BX) and CX. Foundational brand design elements are integrated across communications at multiple levels, from websites and apps to packaging and events to broadcast, content and social channels.
- **Digital commerce:** Recognizing the potential digital commerce experiences hold in growing brand equity, VMLY&R launched VMLY&R Commerce in November 2020 with 3,500 employees across 40 countries. VMLY&R Commerce emphasizes the creative side of digital commerce design, and balances the technical side of implementation and conversions with innovative brand experiences.
- **Commitment to DEI:** VMLY&R has had an established steering committee for DEI since 2012. Responding to recent global events and mounting racial tensions, the agency renewed its commitment to DEI, promoting its DEI leaders to executive leadership roles. VMLY&R leverages its DEI practices to help clients likewise promote DEI in their own organizations. It has facilitated difficult organizational change conversations with some clients and shares its

employee experience methodology and approach with clients seeking to accelerate DEI practices.

Cautions

- **Geometry merger:** The integration of the Geometry and VMLY&R teams and assets will continue throughout the rest of 2021. This may result in some account management challenges for prospective clients considering the agency for digital commerce.
- **Smaller-scale engagements:** VMLY&R focuses on large-scale client work that impacts the entire customer journey and integrated marketing ecosystem. The agency may not be a good fit for prospective clients seeking support for small-scale or ad hoc projects.

Wipro Digital

Wipro Digital is a Niche Player in this Magic Quadrant. Wipro Digital provides marketers with data- and insight-driven solutions addressing brand and customer experience. Its background in consultancy and technology services for leaders across the enterprise offers marketing leaders credible, data-driven capabilities that support strategies at the intersection of marketing and cross-functional CX. Its clients are both B2B and B2C brands within financial services, energy, technology and other industries. In 2020, Wipro acquired 4C, a Salesforce Platinum partner, enhancing its ability to support clients' integrated martech strategy. It also expanded its CX offering through the acquisition of Rational Interaction, a U.S.-based digital CX company.

Strengths

- **Technology credentials:** Wipro Digital's heritage in supporting enterprise technology offers clients a scalable, credible partner that has experience working with leaders in IT and finance. This is particularly helpful for prospective clients who wish to collaborate across the enterprise to deliver cross-functional experience programs.
- **Digital transformation:** Wipro Digital has a proven track record in helping clients transform and upscale their digital capabilities. Prospective clients seeking to achieve a similar outcome with their marketing programs may find a suitable partner in Wipro Digital.
- **New business models:** Wipro Digital's cross-functional expertise makes the agency well suited to support new business ventures or routes to market.

Cautions

- **Media planning and buying:** Media planning and buying accounts for a relatively small proportion of Wipro Digital's overall activity. Prospective clients who are primarily seeking help with their media strategies should consider more traditional media agencies.
- **Global footprint:** While Wipro Digital supports global clients and has its company headquarters in New York City, 90% of the agency's delivery workforce is located in APAC, with fewer resources located in Western Europe, North America and Latin America. Clients requiring on-

the-ground support in those regions should ensure that the agency can deliver against those specific geographic needs.

Wunderman Thompson

Wunderman Thompson is a Leader in this Magic Quadrant. Wunderman Thompson provides marketers with differentiating creative capabilities and strategic consulting services. Its focus on data-driven experience design helps clients optimize customer interactions at scale. Its clients are both B2B and B2C brands within technology, retail and consumer packaged goods industries. In 2020, Wunderman Thompson launched WT Inspire, a global brand study of 33,000 brands across 183 categories and 45 markets. The study identifies opportunities to build growth strategies based on bridging gaps in customer perception.

Strengths

- **Global scale:** Wunderman Thompson's 17,000 employees are dispersed across the globe, with more than half the team based outside North America and Western Europe. With almost 4,000 employees based in APAC, and over 600 in China alone, Wunderman Thompson offers global brands broad reach and scale to deliver integrated campaigns.
- **Digital commerce:** Advanced digital commerce capabilities are a fundamental part of Wunderman Thompson's offering. The agency's significant focus on digital commerce is reflected in its revenue model.
- **Data-driven CX:** Wunderman Thompson continues to invest in and grow capabilities that bring together proprietary research with cognitive science and behavioral economics. This enables the agency to help clients create CX programs powered by research, data and insights that deliver financial results.

Cautions

- **Smaller-scale engagements:** Wunderman Thompson's clients are large global enterprises, with many benefiting from multiyear engagements. Prospective clients in smaller organizations looking for quick-hit projects should consider other agencies.
- **Organizational change:** Since its formation in 2018, the agency has been through a significant period of organizational and cultural transition as it scaled its capabilities.

Vendors Added and Dropped

We review and adjust our inclusion criteria for Magic Quadrants as markets change. As a result of these adjustments, the mix of vendors in any Magic Quadrant may change over time. A vendor's appearance in a Magic Quadrant one year and not the next does not necessarily indicate that we have changed our opinion of that vendor. It may be a reflection of a change in the market and, therefore, changed evaluation criteria, or of a change of focus by that vendor.

Added

- **Wipro Digital.** Wipro Digital meets the inclusion criteria for this Magic Quadrant after its continued investments in global marketing agency capabilities, including the acquisition of agency Rational Interaction in early 2020.

Dropped

- **Cognizant.** Cognizant has pivoted away from its global marketing agency aspirations to focus more specifically on digital experience design.
- **IBM iX.** IBM iX continues to provide design-led innovation and digital experience capabilities, but is not often seen in pitches for full-service global marketing agency services.
- **PwC Digital Services.** PwC Digital Services is typically brought into existing PwC relationships rather than competing for more traditional global marketing agency work as a stand-alone agency.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To qualify for inclusion in the 2021 Magic Quadrant for Global Marketing Agencies, vendors must meet the following criteria:

- **Core business:** Service providers in this evaluation include consultancies, traditional advertising, direct marketing, and digital agencies and system integrators. These agencies help companies strategize, create, distribute and measure customer-facing digital experiences across the customer journey. They create and manage experiences that drive awareness, consideration, conversion and advocacy across all digital channels. As such, providers serve as the primary strategic marketing partner, lead agency or digital agency of record for at least three enterprise clients.
- **Full-service provider.** Providers in this evaluation must offer the following enterprisewide:
 - Marketing strategy
 - Creative and content development
 - Digital marketing execution including website, social media, email, mobile, paid search and digital advertising channels
 - Marketing data and analytics
 - Marketing technology strategy and implementation
 - Digital commerce

To qualify for inclusion in this research, agencies must be able to provide the above marketing capabilities as a stand-alone agency offering that is not tied to an ongoing or project-based business consulting or technology engagement with clients' organizations:

- **Global reach:** Providers in this evaluation must have a global reach. They must have developed communications solutions to engage audiences in at least three global regions, with resources and staffing on the ground in those regions.
- **Revenue and growth:** Providers in this evaluation must have a global annual revenue of at least \$175 million for digital marketing services. They must also have acquired at least 10 new clients in the past 12 months (which may include new engagements within a different business unit of an existing client or significant new assignments within existing clients' business units).

Honorable Mention

The agencies listed below play a smaller, but growing, role in this market, and may have missed one or more of the inclusion criteria for this Magic Quadrant. In particular, they may have global reach limitations and may not have the depth of full-service capabilities as those agencies qualifying for inclusion. However, as they continue to expand their capabilities and global footprints, the following agencies should be on the radar of CMOs looking for global marketing agency solutions (see [Making Sense of the Marketing Service Provider Landscape – From Agencies to Freelancers](#)).

Bounteous – Focused on experience innovation, Bounteous' service breadth rivals the agency divisions of larger management consultancy and system integrator agency firms. The U.S.- based agency has a growing global presence, with offices in Germany, Mexico and Canada.

Dept – Headquartered in Amsterdam, Dept is a rapidly growing independent agency that delivers digital transformation and experiences for leading brands across the globe. Its U.S. presence is smaller than that of other agencies highlighted in this research, but growing.

Edelman Digital – Edelman Digital is the digital marketing agency arm of public relations powerhouse Edelman. With a particular strength in social media marketing, the agency is well-positioned to help clients navigate the increasingly polarized intersection of marketing and PR.

ICF Next – With its roots planted in the economic changes of the 1960s, ICF's digital experience agency, ICF Next, is well-positioned to help marketers across the globe with purpose-driven customer and employee experience initiatives focusing on driving active participation.

Kin + Carta – This global digital transformation business has grown digital marketing capabilities in its Kin + Carta Connect division. The agency has a large global footprint with demonstrated success in delivering digital experience initiatives for clients across industries.

Razorfish – In 2020, Publicis revived its once-retired Razorfish agency brand, with the intention of making it one of the keystone lead digital marketing agencies within Publicis Groupe. It currently has 1,400 employees in the U.S. and Canada, with plans for further global expansion.

TCS Interactive – Part of TCS, TCS Interactive's strength in technology consulting makes it an increasingly relevant player for CMOs. However, its presence in marketing-focused agency pitches is still relatively nascent compared to other agencies profiled in this Magic Quadrant.

Weber Shandwick – First established as a global PR firm, Weber Shandwick continues to grow its full-service marketing capabilities, building upon its established strength in content and influencer marketing. It also has unique capabilities to help client organizations tackle issues of DEI and employee experience through its United Minds consultancy.

Evaluation Criteria

Ability to Execute

Gartner analysts evaluate agencies on the quality and efficacy of the people, processes, methods and tools needed to deliver value to marketing leaders. Analysts also consider the ability of these processes and systems to positively impact revenue, retention and reputation within Gartner's view of the market.

Ability to Execute Criteria

- **Product/Service:** The core goods and services that compete in and/or serve the defined market. This includes current product and service capabilities, quality, feature sets, skills and more. This can be offered natively or through OEM agreements/partnerships as defined in the market definition and detailed in the subcriteria. We look at the strength of an agency's full-service and cross-discipline execution. We also look for seamless integration across a provider's core competencies, including strategic and creative services, customer experience, application development (with related system integration skills), data and analytics, and account and program management.
- **Sales Execution/Pricing:** The organization's capabilities in all presales activities and the structure that supports them. This includes deal management, pricing and negotiation, presales support and the overall effectiveness of the sales channel. We evaluate a provider's ability to demonstrate value for client investment overall and its ability to deliver flexible pricing and consistent financial management of a client's business with the agency.
- **Market Responsiveness/Record:** The ability to respond, change direction, be flexible, and achieve competitive success as opportunities develop, competitors act, customer needs evolve and market dynamics change. This criterion also considers the provider's history of responsiveness to changing market demands. We evaluate an agency's marketing service agility, and look at its recent history of acquisitions, alliances and new hires in emerging disciplines. As clients increasingly demand partners who reflect their core values, we examine an agency's diversity and inclusion initiatives, and track record, along with its commitment to corporate social responsibility and pro bono work. We also look at the provider's ability to leverage the rising demand for business strategy and digital business transformation services.
- **Marketing Execution:** The clarity, quality, creativity and efficacy of programs designed to effectively deliver the client organization's message to influence the market, promote the brand, increase awareness of products and establish a positive identification in the minds of

customers. This “mind share” can be driven by a combination of publicity, promotional activity, thought leadership, social media, referrals and sales activities. We look for evidence of the provider’s digital thought leadership as part of its marketing program execution. We investigate a provider’s ability to deftly integrate social, mobile and emerging technologies into the larger multichannel marketing and digital commerce strategies on behalf of its clients.

- **Customer Experience:** The products and services and/or programs that enable clients to achieve anticipated results with the products/services evaluated. Specifically, this includes quality supplier/buyer interactions, technical support, or account support. This may also include ancillary tools, customer support programs, availability of user groups or service-level agreements (SLAs). We look for evidence of sustained client relationships and any key client losses in the past two to three years. We corroborate this evidence with Gartner inquiries and other client-facing interactions, including at Gartner conferences and other industry events. We ask clients for their overall satisfaction with the agency and their willingness to recommend the agency to their peers.
- **Operations:** The ability of the organization to meet goals and commitments. Factors include quality of the organizational structure, skills, experiences, programs, systems and other vehicles that enable the organization to operate effectively and efficiently. We assess how an agency staffs projects from a global pool of resources, as well as evaluate agency flexibility and client accommodation related to managing talent. We also look at an agency’s willingness to invest in the tools and technology required to manage an agile and efficient team.

Table 1: Ability to Execute Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria ↓	Weighting ↓
Product or Service	High
Overall Viability	NotRated
Sales Execution/Pricing	Low
Market Responsiveness/Record	High
Marketing Execution	High
Customer Experience	High
Operations	High

Evaluation Criteria ↓

Weighting ↓

Source: Gartner (March 2021)

Completeness of Vision

Gartner analysts evaluate vendors on their vision of marketing strategy and execution. This includes current and future market direction, innovation, customer needs, and competitive forces, and how well they map to Gartner's view of the market.

Completeness of Vision Criteria

- **Market Understanding:** The ability to understand client needs and translate them into products and services. Providers that excel in this criterion show a clear vision of their market; they listen, understand client demands, and can shape or enhance market changes with their added vision. We evaluate an agency's strategic understanding of the market drivers shaping its clients' businesses as evidenced by the depth of thought leadership and strategic services across the customer journey. We also look at a provider's ability to think beyond marketing strategy and tactics to address digital transformation initiatives.
- **Marketing Strategy:** The ability to provide clear, differentiated messaging consistently communicated internally and externalized through social media, advertising, customer programs and positioning statements. The agency's go-to-market strategy should align with emerging trends and the overall direction of the market for digital agency services. We consider the agency's ability to create and distribute clear, differentiated messaging across digital channels – and its capacity to educate the market and provide thought leadership around emerging practices and technologies.
- **Sales Strategy:** An assessment of an agency's ability to sell its services using direct and indirect sales, marketing, corporate communications, and client referrals. This criterion examines an agency's ability to secure new clients within the past 12 months. This is not a volume business; profitability within this market depends on a vendor's ability to develop long-term relationships. Hence, we look at how well providers can sell and grow longer-term relationships versus one-off wins.
- **Offering (Product) Strategy:** An approach to product development and delivery that emphasizes market differentiation, functionality, methodology and features as they map to current and future requirements. This criterion evaluates an agency's capability mix. We specifically investigate how well this mix incorporates multidisciplinary services into an integrated offering, from strategic services to the underlying components that drive success.

These include creative and content services, technology expertise, data and analytics, and account and program management.

- **Business Model:** The design, logic and execution of the organization’s business proposition to achieve continued success. We assess the strength of an agency’s business model relative to its financial engagement with clients – from time, materials and fixed-price structures to performance-based agreements. Today, traditional advertising, direct and digital agencies compete side by side with technology-driven system integrators and management consultancies. By perfecting their approach to scope and pricing, these data-focused firms force less disciplined agencies to apply greater structure and rigor to their own client financial engagements.
- **Vertical/Industry Strategy:** The strategy to direct resources (i.e., sales, product, development), skills and products to meet the specific needs of individual market segments, including verticals. We examine the strength of an agency’s industry expertise as a means of differentiating its client’s brand. We also look at how a provider approaches a vertical market – with a mere point of view or with a customized offering infused with industry knowledge in its delivery. Finally, we examine the strength of the vendor’s B2C, B2B and B2B2C competency.
- **Innovation:** Direct, related, complementary, and synergistic layouts of resources, expertise or capital for investment, consolidation, defensive or preemptive purposes. We review an agency’s ability to push clients to take risks, couched by a methodology that can put boundaries on risk through techniques such as pilots or independent R&D efforts. We also look at how agencies fund a portion of their own R&D with partners, universities or their own research labs. Recently, investments in innovation at many agencies have been hampered by the need to pass those costs through to clients as billable work. This is no longer an acceptable limitation. Agencies must invest in these efforts to survive and thrive in the new agency landscape.
- **Geographic Strategy:** The provider’s strategy to direct resources, skills and offerings to meet the specific needs of geographies outside the “home” or native geography – either directly or through partners, channels and subsidiaries – as appropriate for that geography and market. We examine an agency’s operational investments beyond its headquarters location in parallel with an exploration of the firm’s capacity to execute globally. We are aware that providers in this market are global players; most have years of experience designing and implementing global campaigns. While many providers can point to North America and Europe as driving global efforts historically, here we look at a provider’s experience within regions such as APAC and LATAM.

Table 2: Completeness of Vision Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria ↓	Weighting ↓
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Evaluation Criteria ↓	Weighting ↓
Market Understanding	High
Marketing Strategy	Low
Sales Strategy	Low
Offering (Product) Strategy	High
Business Model	High
Vertical/Industry Strategy	Medium
Innovation	High
Geographic Strategy	Medium

Source: Gartner (March 2021)

Quadrant Descriptions

Leaders

Leaders possess deep, broad capabilities across all marketing competencies, most notably related to strategic services for marketing teams (which include business strategy and digital business transformation skills). Leaders also implement comprehensive, effective solutions at global scale. Leaders are the providers to watch in the ongoing evolution and transformation of marketing in a digital world.

The market for global marketing agencies is highly mature. Most agencies profiled in this Magic Quadrant have been in business for decades and possess robust staffing and technology depth across marketing disciplines, along with a breadth of enterprise clients across industries. Therefore, it should not be surprising to see the Leaders quadrant particularly crowded. However, marketers should note that, even among Leaders, there is significant differentiation in relevant experience, cultural fit and approach to solving global marketing challenges.

Challengers

Challengers have a proven ability to execute complex global marketing campaigns, including strategy, creative, data and analytics, and technology competencies. However, they may not possess the depth of business consulting and product and service innovation capabilities that

Leaders do. Potential clients seeking to advance their marketing capabilities at scale – while de-emphasizing or leveraging existing resources for digital transformation and business strategy – will find suitable partners with agencies in the Challengers quadrant.

Visionaries

Visionaries help drive the market for global marketing agencies' evolution, but may lack the staffing, technology or geographic footprint to execute at global scale. As Visionaries grow organically, acquire additional capabilities and geographic resources, they may improve their Ability to Execute and potentially move into the Leaders quadrant. Marketers with narrow geographic needs or seeking innovative approaches to marketing strategy with less of a focus on scaled execution may find suitable partners with agencies in the Visionaries quadrant.

Niche Players

Niche Players are typically agencies that may be evolving their marketing capabilities as an evolution of a focus on technology (as system integrators) or may be more historically focused on a specific marketing discipline, such as data-driven or direct marketing. As Niche Players expand their breadth and depth of marketing capabilities or adopt a more innovative view of marketing, they may advance into the Challengers or Visionaries quadrants.

Context

This Magic Quadrant analyzes marketing agencies, consultancies and system integrators that compete on the global stage. Agencies are evaluated on how well they execute their vision for marketing through primary and secondary research, including client feedback. It is an assessment of agency capabilities based on past execution in 2020 and future development plans; however, it may only be valid at a point in time, as agencies and the market continue to evolve.

Readers should be careful not to ascribe their own definitions of Completeness of Vision or Ability to Execute to this Magic Quadrant, which they often incorrectly map narrowly to agency vision and market share, respectively. The Magic Quadrant methodology factors in a range of criteria in determining position, as shown by the extensive Evaluation Criteria section.

Further, the market for global marketing agencies is highly mature. Most agencies profiled in this Magic Quadrant have been in business for decades and possess robust staffing and technology depth across marketing disciplines, along with a breadth of enterprise clients across industries. Therefore, it should not be surprising to see the Leaders quadrant particularly crowded. However, marketers should note that, even among Leaders, there is significant differentiation in relevant experience, cultural fit and approach to solving global marketing challenges.

Market Overview

A Tumultuous Year Reveals New Opportunities for Clients and Their Agencies

The global pandemic forced client organizations to rethink the way they rely on their agencies and other service providers. It revealed where agencies could become – and, in many cases, did become – more valuable to their client partners. Largely, agencies were able to adapt more

quickly to work from home (WFH) models than many of their clients, and, in that way, became the glue that kept business goals on track. While the pandemic quickly revealed weak links in some global agencies' networks, those that had truly cross-border capabilities were able to bring resources from multiple offices to bear on clients' business and flex staffing as lockdowns waxed and waned across geographies.

As customer behaviors changed nearly overnight, clients in industries that needed to pivot quickly (e.g., to new e-commerce models, media strategies and digital experiences) didn't have time to create these capabilities internally. As a result, they turned to agencies for support. Agencies played a leading role in helping retailers develop curbside pickup options, innovative car buying experiences and commerce platforms.

Agencies that had spent years investing in the expertise, technology and processes to deliver against these new business models — capabilities we've been emphasizing over the past few iterations of this Magic Quadrant research — became more strategically aligned to client organizations' C-suites. Conversely, agencies whose core business relied on big brand creative concepting and traditional media buys were more vulnerable.

Marketers' Cost Optimization Efforts Make Agencies Prime Targets for Cuts and Consolidation

While COVID-19 allowed client organizations to seek agencies in new and more strategic ways, it also forced many organizations to consolidate or cut some of their ties to optimize costs. In March 2020, agencies across the globe began shutting down their offices and moving employees to a WFH environment. At the same time, CMOs were faced with the dual challenge of implementing crisis communications to customers while making mandated budget cuts. In late March 2020, a Gartner survey reported that 36% of marketing leaders were making agency fees the system integration target of those budget cuts. New agency searches were put on hold, and agency layoffs accelerated. ²

Over that tumultuous summer, Gartner inquiries on agency cost optimization spiked as CMOs tried to cut spend on agency fees, taking a rigorous approach to mapping their agency rosters and identifying areas of perceived overspending and overstaffing. Rather than conduct a short-term exercise to address short-term budget challenges, it was clear that strategically minded client organizations were using the crisis as an opportunity to better structure their agency relationships going forward. As a result, client organizations looked to consolidate their agency roster and renegotiate fees and staffing plans.

Our 2020 CMO Spend Survey, conducted in the spring of 2020, showed marketers taking nearly a third of work in-house before the impacts of COVID-19 struck. ¹ Much of this insourcing hit directly at agencies' core capabilities — like social marketing, creative concepting and content production.

Agencies Focus Efforts on Brand Purpose and DEI

Of course, the events that unfolded in 2020 had multiple dimensions. The Black Lives Matter movement, which accelerated throughout the year, encouraged marketers and agencies to increase their focus on matters of brand purpose and DEI.

Marketers play a unique role in helping their organizations understand and respond to societal, cultural and political trends. Ninety-five percent of CMOs surveyed in our 2020-2021 CMO Strategic Priorities Survey agree that their business should play a role in effecting positive societal and environmental changes.³ However, just 54% of CMOs in the same survey report that they play a leading role in making those decisions on behalf of their organizations. 2020 reinforced organizations' need for agency partners who can help them make those decisions and whose agency teams share similar values. When those values collide, agencies will quickly get the axe or be dismissed from a search.⁴ To this end, we continue to evaluate an agency's DEI, sustainability and purpose-driven efforts as part of this research.

2021 Promises Continued Tumult, Customer Anxiety and Opportunity for Stronger Agency Partnerships for Marketers

Despite the budget-slashing realities of 2020, CMOs report they are bullish on their prospects in 2021. Fifty-six percent expect an increase to their marketing budgets for 2021,³ while the rest of the executive leadership holds a less optimistic sentiment. In fact, Gartner's 2021 View From the Board of Directors Survey identifies marketing as a function earmarked for budget cuts.⁵ But that hasn't hindered CMOs' aspirations, as many report a desire to quickly rescale and reinvent strategies they may have put on hold in 2020.³ CMOs will rely on agencies to help them deliver the business results they're expected to drive in the years ahead. Speed to value will be especially important, since marketing budgets could further tighten as the impacts of the pandemic continue well into 2021.

Agencies that have helped their clients pivot to new ways of working, new business models, and product and service innovation will be better positioned to adapt to continued change and disruption. Global marketing agencies that will thrive in 2021 will be those that:

- Adopt hybrid remote-work flexibility models, operating systems and collaboration methods.
- Develop ways to speed up response and delivery for clients and their in-market initiatives.
- Invest in and commit to purpose-driven initiatives that support corporate sustainability and DEI.
- Maximize client investments in existing and emerging technologies, media, and commerce across all channels.
- Optimize multiple data sources and analytics for actionable customer insights for effective and innovative marketing, content and communications.
- Commit to ethical and financial accountability in all client matters and recommendations.

The authors wish to recognize project management provided by Rashmi Kumari and the writing support services of Ryan Brady.

Evidence

¹ **Gartner's 2020 CMO Spend Survey:** The study was conducted to understand the marketing priorities and budget allocations of marketers that help clients benchmark, allocate spend and prioritize. The research was conducted online from March 2020 through May 2020 among 432 respondents in the United States (44%), Canada (8%), France (12%), Germany (11%) and the United Kingdom (25%). Respondents were required to have involvement in decisions pertaining to setting or influencing marketing strategy and planning, as well as have involvement in aligning marketing budget/resources. Eighty-four percent of the respondents came from organizations with \$1 billion or more in annual revenue. The respondents came from a variety of industries: financial services (55), high tech (49), manufacturing (68), consumer products (44), media (50), retail (55), healthcare providers (38), IT and business services (27), and travel and hospitality (46). The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts who follow marketing and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

² [Live Industry Updates: Droga5 Cuts 7% of Staff in United States; BuzzFeed Ends Salary Reductions](#), Ad Exchanger.

³ **Gartner's 2020-2021 CMO Strategic Priorities Survey:** This study was conducted to understand how CMOs are navigating the post-COVID-19 environment. This survey focuses on how they are reflecting on their position within the company, their role in strategic decision making, and how they are navigating through difficult times to best position their 2021 marketing strategy and budgets.

The research was conducted online from September 2020 through October 2020 among 381 respondents from the United States (47%), Canada (5%), the United Kingdom (26%), France (11%) and Germany (11%). Respondents were required to have involvement in decisions pertaining to setting or influencing marketing strategy and planning, as well as have involvement in aligning marketing budget/resources. Eighty-five percent of the respondents came from organizations with \$1 billion or more in annual revenue. The respondents came from a variety of industries: financial services (42), high tech (42), manufacturing (42), consumer products (39), media (44), retail (42), healthcare providers (41), IT and business services (47), and travel and hospitality (43). The survey was developed collaboratively by a team of Gartner analysts who follow marketing and was reviewed, tested and administered by Gartner's Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

⁴ [Home Depot Breaks With Richards Group Following Founder's Racist Remarks](#), AdAge.

⁵ **Gartner's 2021 View From Board of Directors Survey:** This study was conducted to understand how boards of directors (BoDs) view digital-business-driven business model evolution of their enterprises. It also helps us understand the expectations of BoDs from executive leaders and how BoDs translate their board focus to actual executive action and overall corporate performance.

The primary research was conducted online from May through June 2020 among 265 respondents from U.S., EMEA and APAC.

Companies were screened to be midsize, large or global enterprises. Respondents were required to be a "Board of Director" member or "Member of Corporate Board of Directors." If they served on multiple boards, respondents answered for the largest company, defined by its annual revenue, for which they were a board member. The study was developed collaboratively by Gartner analysts and the Research Data and Analytics team.

Evaluation Criteria Definitions

Ability to Execute

Product/Service: Core goods and services offered by the vendor for the defined market. This includes current product/service capabilities, quality, feature sets, skills and so on, whether offered natively or through OEM agreements/partnerships as defined in the market definition and detailed in the subcriteria.

Overall Viability: Viability includes an assessment of the overall organization's financial health, the financial and practical success of the business unit, and the likelihood that the individual business unit will continue investing in the product, will continue offering the product and will advance the state of the art within the organization's portfolio of products.

Sales Execution/Pricing: The vendor's capabilities in all presales activities and the structure that supports them. This includes deal management, pricing and negotiation, presales support, and the overall effectiveness of the sales channel.

Market Responsiveness/Record: Ability to respond, change direction, be flexible and achieve competitive success as opportunities develop, competitors act, customer needs evolve and market dynamics change. This criterion also considers the vendor's history of responsiveness.

Marketing Execution: The clarity, quality, creativity and efficacy of programs designed to deliver the organization's message to influence the market, promote the brand and business, increase awareness of the products, and establish a positive identification with the product/brand and organization in the minds of buyers. This "mind share" can be driven by a combination of publicity, promotional initiatives, thought leadership, word of mouth and sales activities.

Customer Experience: Relationships, products and services/programs that enable clients to be successful with the products evaluated. Specifically, this includes the ways customers receive technical support or account support. This can also include ancillary tools, customer support programs (and the quality thereof), availability of user groups, service-level agreements and so on.

Operations: The ability of the organization to meet its goals and commitments. Factors include the quality of the organizational structure, including skills, experiences, programs, systems and other vehicles that enable the organization to operate effectively and efficiently on an ongoing basis.

Completeness of Vision

Market Understanding: Ability of the vendor to understand buyers' wants and needs and to translate those into products and services. Vendors that show the highest degree of vision listen to and understand buyers' wants and needs, and can shape or enhance those with their added vision.

Marketing Strategy: A clear, differentiated set of messages consistently communicated throughout the organization and externalized through the website, advertising, customer programs and positioning statements.

Sales Strategy: The strategy for selling products that uses the appropriate network of direct and indirect sales, marketing, service, and communication affiliates that extend the scope and depth of market reach, skills, expertise, technologies, services and the customer base.

Offering (Product) Strategy: The vendor's approach to product development and delivery that emphasizes differentiation, functionality, methodology and feature sets as they map to current and future requirements.

Business Model: The soundness and logic of the vendor's underlying business proposition.

Vertical/Industry Strategy: The vendor's strategy to direct resources, skills and offerings to meet the specific needs of individual market segments, including vertical markets.

Innovation: Direct, related, complementary and synergistic layouts of resources, expertise or capital for investment, consolidation, defensive or pre-emptive purposes.

Geographic Strategy: The vendor's strategy to direct resources, skills and offerings to meet the specific needs of geographies outside the "home" or native geography, either directly or through partners, channels and subsidiaries as appropriate for that geography and market.

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