Hybrid Marketing Is Here to Stay: Preparing the Marketing Operation Environment

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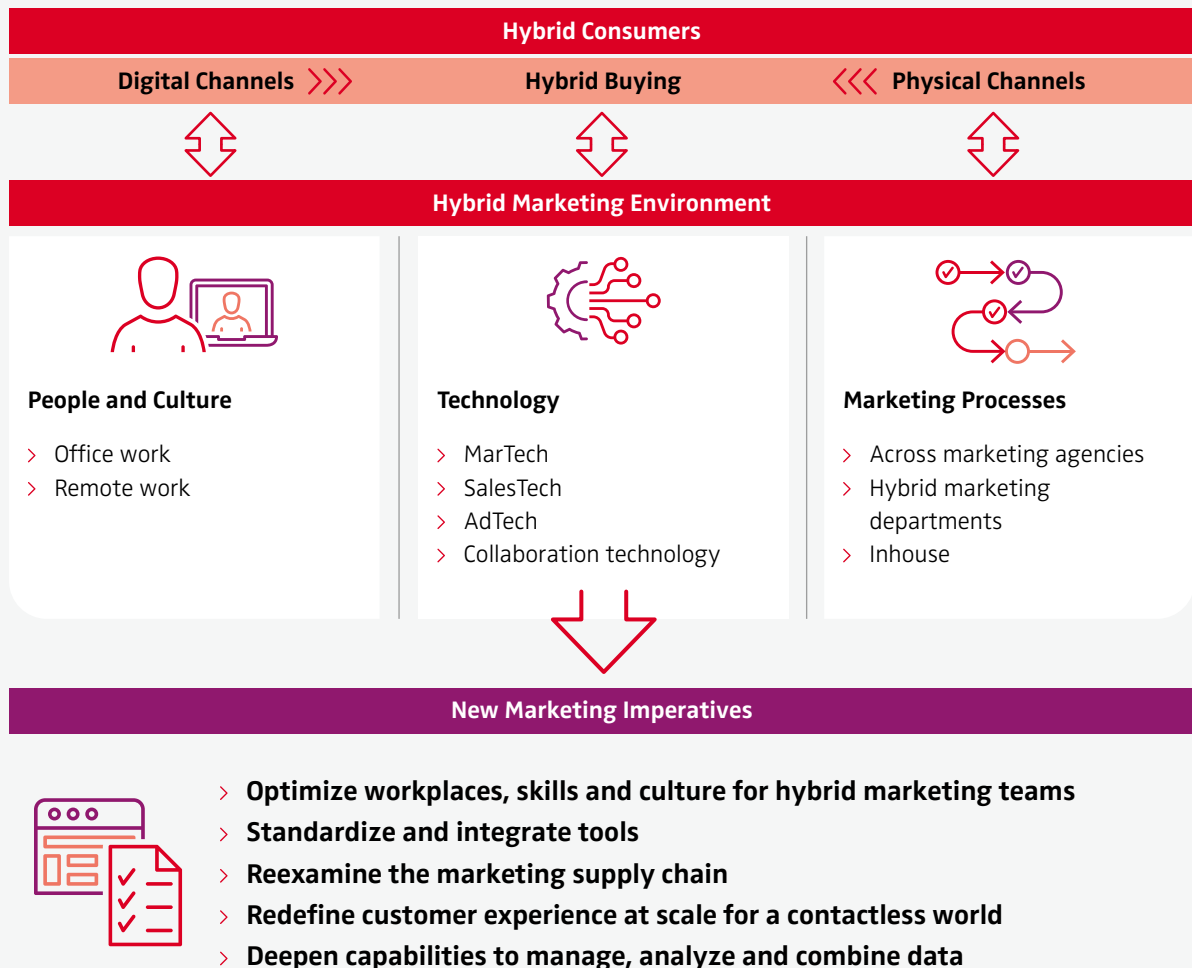andy.lark@dubber.net

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The post-pandemic marketing playground ╳ The pandemic's initial impact has changed where we work and how we collaborate and communicate, blurring the lines between home and workplace. Hybrid working has entered mainstream vernacular to describe workers moving fluidly between the traditional workplace, home and other venues. What was first a necessity has emerged as a preference for many. It has developed into a workforce policy, with marketing teams and stakeholders needing to collaborate and communicate remotely and often asynchronously. Communication platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams have shifted from being tools connecting remote workers to the workplace to becoming the new workplace itself.

But distance did not just change how we collaborate and communicate; it also set marketers, consumers and businesses on an entirely new path. Distance also shifted how customers buy and what they expect. Consumers are heading to digital-only experiences for interactions ranging from grocery shopping to telehealth, and they are not looking back. They have changed their purchasing behaviors and preferences – creating a need for a new set of customer experiences (CX) throughout the buying lifecycle. These developments will persist and require marketers to develop a broader strategy to address people and processes and use new technology to meet employee and customer needs.

Shaping the marketing organization for the new environment: new marketing imperatives ╳ Together, these factors are driving a redefinition of the marketing organization. We need to rethink how marketing operates, how it attracts

FIGURE 1 > New marketing imperatives for a hybrid marketing environment

Hybrid Consumers

Digital Channels >>>   Hybrid Buying   <<< Physical Channels

Hybrid Marketing Environment

People and Culture
> Office work
> Remote work

Technology
> MarTech
> SalesTech
> AdTech
> Collaboration technology

Marketing Processes
> Across marketing agencies
> Hybrid marketing departments
> Inhouse

New Marketing Imperatives

> **Optimize workplaces, skills and culture for hybrid marketing teams**
> **Standardize and integrate tools**
> **Reexamine the marketing supply chain**
> **Redefine customer experience at scale for a contactless world**
> **Deepen capabilities to manage, analyze and combine data**

and onboards talent and what type of technologies enable a hybrid-first organization. The following new internally and externally focused imperatives are reshaping the marketing agenda across people, technology and processes. The five imperatives listed in Figure 1 have the potential to create a new foundation for marketing.

> **Optimize workplaces, skills and culture for hybrid marketing teams** ╳ Marketers have been driven to new working patterns internally and externally with suppliers. However, while the place of work changed during and after the pandemic, many tools and techniques have not

changed substantially to enable and reflect hybrid working. Barriers to successful hybrid work include a lack of workplace innovation, inadequate oversight and cultural shifts. Examples abound: inefficient connectivity, which forces everyone to use VPN for access to work-related material; traditional IT and security, which focuses on command and control centrally rather than a distributed system that more adequately services remote workers; and traditional KPIs or monitoring of staff, which has presence count more than results and expects remote workers to continue to adhere to rigid work schedules rather than when and where it most suits them.

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Despite the hyper-connectedness experienced by many during the pandemic, culture and engagement have declined due to the lack of physical presence, resulting in isolation and difficulty in onboarding new workers remotely. Therefore, creating a clear definition of new workplace expectations and processes for marketers and equipping them to succeed will be central to retaining and attracting talent and nurturing a high-performance environment. When transitioning to a thriving hybrid-first work environment, businesses need to invest in strategy, build culture remotely and apply new technology – specifically artificial intelligence (AI) – in critical business use cases. While the pandemic has accelerated the digital skills of existing workers and new talent, a skills gap is prevailing because digital transformation has moved faster.

〉 **Standardize and integrate tools for hybrid marketing** ⨯ The proliferation of technology service providers, along with Software as a Service (SaaS) and cloud computing, has significantly increased marketing applications. Today's marketing functions typically draw on more than 25 tools, ranging from communications platforms to productivity, data and task-specific tools. The proliferation of these tools risks considerable duplication of functionality – for instance, chat and tasks occur across several tools like Zoom, MS Teams, Figma, Asana and more. As a result, hybrid marketing has become more costly and complex, imposing a productivity burden on marketers. Therefore, CMOs should attempt to standardize and integrate tools and impose discipline around critical systems of record.
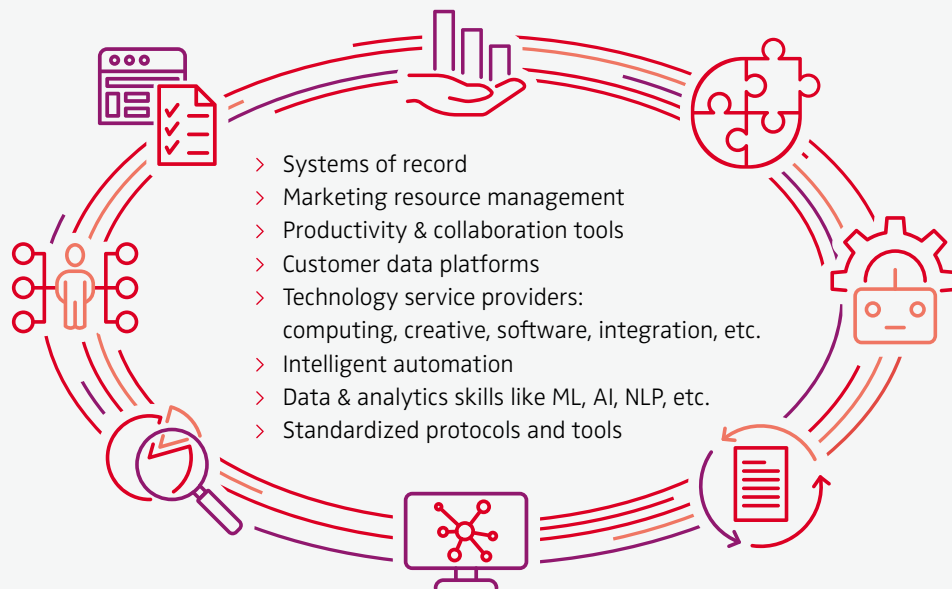
While much of the focus of the past decade shifted to marketing automation and data, effective Marketing Resource Management (MRM) platforms are central to operationalizing hybrid working – giving marketers the systems of record and tools to collaborate, create and manage projects remotely. Cloud collaboration platforms ranging from task and project management to modernized digital asset management can shift marketers to a more agile operating model that empowers teams to accelerate decision-making based on data and test-and-learn approaches.

〉 **Reexamine the marketing supply chain** ⨯ Marketing supply chains, which produce marketing materials required for implementing marketing activities ranging from display advertising to digital point of sale content or digital merchandising content, are poorly defined and instrumented. They span all vendors and suppliers – agencies, media providers, production, contractors, etc. While procurement teams are often heavily involved in pricing in larger organizations, few marketing organizations have access to mature supply chain management disciplines or standardized platforms on which the entire marketing supply chain can operate.

Instead, every supplier brings new tools and technology to the table, increasing cost, compliance risks and complexity, making it challenging to scale. Organizations have been able to bridge some of this complexity through direct human interaction, but handling the challenges becomes significantly more difficult in a hybrid workplace. Therefore, leading marketers are shifting their focus to standardized platforms on which their supply chains run. Integration applications or protocols, like API and iPaaS, enable data and work to move seamlessly into a single system of record.

Scaling is necessary across remote locations and an ever-increasing spectrum of rich media, like video, VR and others. As a result, a new class of vendors has emerged over the past two years, delivering Creative as a Service (CaaS) solutions – combining people, process and technology in a unified offering to marketers, agencies and third-party and in-house production studios. These modern CaaS solutions deliver a range of critical functions – including brief ingestion, workflow management and asset management – via the Cloud and within the framework of simple and easy-to-manage Software as a Service (SaaS) pricing models. These solutions focus predominantly on amplifying and optimizing existing creative assets. They simplify compliant scaling across multiple media formats and can significantly reduce marketing costs.

FIGURE 2 › MarTech tools, capabilities and protocols enhancing hybrid marketing

> Systems of record
> Marketing resource management
> Productivity & collaboration tools
> Customer data platforms
> Technology service providers:
  computing, creative, software, integration, etc.
> Intelligent automation
> Data & analytics skills like ML, AI, NLP, etc.
> Standardized protocols and tools

> **Redefine customer experience at scale for a contactless world** ╳ Consumers' rapid adoption of digital channels has cemented new buying behaviors and the importance of convenience. Online spending increased significantly in 2020, and most consumers who started online shopping during the pandemic have kept using online channels. Therefore, providing and scaling digital and contactless CX is becoming more important.

CX has traditionally been directed by business strategy first. Physical retailers focused on optimizing in-store experiences and augmenting those experiences with digital offerings. The rise in digital native companies with a high dependency on frictionless CX has reset customers' expectations and changed how they interact with companies. Hybrid marketing requires equipping marketing teams with superior data capabilities to create more personalized and responsive experiences in an increasingly impersonal world. Therefore, we are seeing a rapid shift from customer relationship management platforms as the primary record of customer interactions to Customer Data Platforms (CDPs). CDPs allow marketers to deliver a more comprehensive view of customers, enabling brands to meet customers in buying moments and to create moments that customers experience as timely, relevant and compelling.

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Similarly, where MarTech once primarily focused on utilizing centralized and third-party platforms, decentralized platform technologies like blockchain or crypto-marketing are reshaping how marketers and customers create, store and exchange value, promising to enhance loyalty through richer contact patterns and higher personalization. For example, blockchain-based ventures such as Australia's Liven enable restaurants, bars and hospitality venues to mint currency on the Liven platform and use it to incentivize customer behavior through rewards on purchases and forward purchasing of meals. Platform network effects fuel a greater frequency of visits for all Liven ecosystem venues to secure greater customer engagement.

〉 **Deepen capabilities to manage, analyze and create new data sources** ✕ Marketers' rapid adoption of CDPs reflects marketers' insatiable demand for data. Driven by the promise of AI, the demand for deeper marketing analytics and insights can be met by mining and transforming diverse types of data – from remote conversations and interactions – to building new models of operation for specific business functions.

The combination of AI, machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP) allows marketers to view real-time data to know both customers and employees. Conversations across video conferencing platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, mobile calls and chatbots now deliver real-time satisfaction, intent and buying signals as they convert the conversation automatically to data. Where marketers once depended on post-event surveys, they now potentially have minute-by-minute signs of intent and experience from which to enrich predictive analytics. Through the combination of AI, NLP and ML – specifically in speech-to-text and analysis – marketers can close the distance imposed by hybrid working and customer interactions. These tools enable marketers to analyze the sentiment in customer conversations in real-time, alerting managers to potential conflicts requiring assistance or suggesting a different script for the operator to follow.

Managers can gather the most important or impactful topics and themes raised in a meeting and turn them into meeting minutes and tasks. They can also gauge employee engagement in projects to either support less engaged staff or foster those who are most engaged. Marketers can determine interest levels in different brands, products or services during conversations with customers to gain additional market insight. These capabilities must be harnessed carefully with specific guardrails guiding consumer and employee privacy and rights.
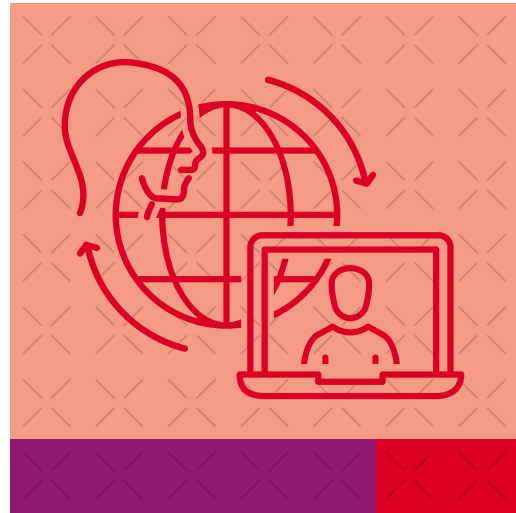
A new foundation for marketing is needed ✕ Hybrid work will be the default by 2024, with most CMOs believing hybrid work will be the dominant working model and more than half of work conducted off-site. Despite a rapid response to the challenges of COVID, three out of four businesses still lack a detailed hybrid working strategy and the right key performance indicators (KPIs) to support hybrid working models. Hybrid working necessitates a new lens on how marketing synchronizes people and processes, and MarTech will play a key role in setting up the new marketing operation environment. ✕

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FURTHER READING

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