People, process, then technology

The pressure on marketing departments to execute more programs and campaigns in a broad range of media types is intense. To meet the challenge, many companies turn to complex marketing resource management (MRM) software, hoping that it will help improve marketing performance. While useful, the value of such software depends on the environment in which it is deployed. If your department is plagued by inefficient processes and hobbled by misaligned resources, introducing automation will be burdensome at best and disastrous at worst.

The fact of the matter is this: you can quickly increase capacity, improve quality, and reduce costs by beginning any campaign for operational improvement with a focus on people and processes. By doing so, you not only lay the groundwork for a rapid adoption of any technical solution you choose, you can actually create the financial savings needed to pay for it.

A large pharmaceutical company we work with grew their two-person creative services department until it was too large to manage with informal processes and systems. They knew things had to change, and they started by analyzing their mix of staff and formally restructuring their processes. It wasn't long before they saw the benefits of their efforts.

First, they reduced the cost per hour charged to do the work. Careful analysis revealed that most of their marketing deliverables could be produced effectively in-house by production artists and junior designers. Adding these junior resources not only reduced the cost per hour of individual pieces, it actually improved the quality of the department's work by allowing senior designers and art directors to focus on the most critical strategic projects.

Second, they reduced the number of hours spent on each marketing project. Since an inordinate amount of time was lost on rework or wasted on jobs that got canceled, they redesigned their intake and approval processes. A more thorough intake process meant that work could be completed without numerous clarifications of concept and intent.

Streamlined approval processes meant fewer total approvals, with senior team members approving only original designs, not versions from templates. By getting things right the first time and avoiding multiple revision cycles, the hours required for any given piece shrank.

Combine lower cost per hour with fewer hours and you'll see some remarkable results. By rethinking their mix of talent and bringing more work in-house, the organization reduced the cost per hour from $150–$250 to $65 for many projects. With process improvements reducing the number of hours required, they realized per-project of savings up to 90 percent and total savings of $15 million per year! And they grew their department to 100 people and increased the overall system capacity (in-house plus agency) by 67 percent.

What's more, when they finally did implement an automated work flow system, they reinforced best practices and ensured compliance by institutionalizing tailored processes. This approach lowered many barriers to adoption while providing the metrics and oversight required for effective management and continuous improvement.

Technology will undoubtedly be a part of any program aimed at optimizing marketing operations. However, to create the perfect framework for customizing the solution you implement and to ensure that it actually helps you do more, focus on your people and processes first.

About Aquent Consulting

Aquent Consulting, a division of Aquent, provides companies with the expertise, data, and tools necessary to optimize the execution of marketing plans and programs. Aquent Consulting has transformed marketing operations of Fortune 500 companies around the world through aligning organizations, streamlining processes, automating delivery, and measuring results. Aquent has 70 offices across 17 countries, with 11,000 talent working at more than 3,000 companies. To learn more, please visit aquentconsulting.com.

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