

SHIFTING
THE CONTENT GAME

BRIDGING THE GAP FOR COMMS & MARKETING

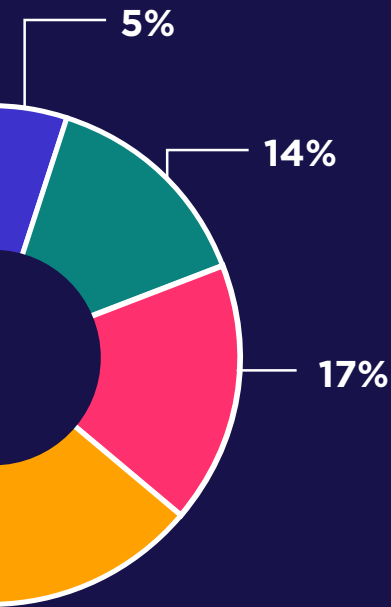
Building Cohesion in the Age of
Customer Disruption



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FULL REPORT SNAPSHOT



19 DETAILED CHARTS & GRAPHS featuring data results from 150+ marketing and comms leaders on the state of media alignment

TOP 5 TECHNOLOGIES driving cohesion

10 DEEP-DIVE EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE INTERVIEWS with thought leaders across marketing, communications and agencies on how to bridge the marketing-comms gap



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I'm trying to drive my organization around a more agile type of thinking, where we have work teams as opposed to hardline silos.

EVAN KENT
Schneider Electric
VP Integrated Marketing



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People don't care that a message came from marketing or communications. They don't even know the difference between paid, owned and earned media. But conflicting, inconsistent messages will confuse people.

SUNITA MENON
IBM
Former Executive Director, Data-Driven Communications

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this global pandemic and the social unrest following the death of George Floyd movement, brands have had to communicate in a thoughtful way and still be effective. PR professionals have been responsible for crafting everything from press releases to statements on social media, all while adapting their earned media strategies and campaigns. To that same end, marketing teams have had to churn out effective owned and paid media.

“There’s been a tremendous amount of backlash for companies that just post something with no meat behind it.”

—Melanie Huet, Executive Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer at Serta Simmons Bedding

Brands that didn’t seem authentic on social media were criticized for not proving to be genuine.

“The brands that weren’t prepared for certain statements, looked very misaligned and the whole company suffers the consequences,” says Melanie Huet, executive vice president and chief marketing officer at Serta Simmons Bedding. “There’s been a tremendous amount of backlash for companies that just post something with no meat behind it.”

According to a new CMO Council survey of brand leaders, 81% said the change in global business climate due to the pandemic has led to a definite rise in earned media efforts and importance. More than ever, marketing and comms teams need to be aligned to ensure messaging is consistent across paid, owned— and especially earned media.

With the majority of the world now spending significantly isolated at home and isolated, people are consuming and sharing massive amounts of digital media. In many cases, digital media singularly impacts buying decisions and how consumers feel about brands. Without proper marketing-comms alignment, owned media doesn’t get amplified, paid media efficiency falls, and conflicting earned media messages confuse and frustrate customers.

MARKETING LEADERS CAN’T AFFORD MISALIGNED DIGITAL MEDIA

“As a multi-channel retailer that saw the temporary closure of all our brick-and-mortar stores, we quickly reallocated our paid campaigns by scaling back top funnel and focusing on direct response campaigns to our e-commerce website,” says Angela Hsu, senior vice president of marketing and eCommerce at Lamps Plus.

To better understand the challenges of marketing-comms alignment, the CMO Council, in partnership with earned media leader Cision, surveyed over 150 brand leaders and conducted nearly a dozen in-depth interviews with executives from Schneider Electric, IBM, Nokia, Serta Simmons Bedding, StorCentric, Lamps Plus, Certified First, Center for Creative Leadership, R&R Partners and InnerWorkings.

Nearly every survey respondent agreed marketing and comms are moderately or strongly aligned as it relates to earned, owned and paid media output. In the survey, seven out of 10 brand leaders said leadership, marketing and comms are aligned in strategic media activities. And nearly two out of three felt they're effective at integrating and amplifying earned media to drive customer experience and engagement strategies.

For many brands, marketing and comms teams fall under a single leader, usually the CMO, who keeps a watchful eye on – and ensures consistent themes and messaging cut across – all media channels. This organizational structure is the surest way to keep marketing and comms aligned.

“The beauty of having both the marketing and comms teams under one roof is the ability to drive alignment and flow to the work,” says Eric Luftig, a marketing leader. “My teams understand the rules of engagement and how one plus one equals three.”

Does this mean there isn't an alignment problem? Not quite.

A deeper dive into the survey results shows cracks in the marketing-comms foundation. With earned media under the purview of comms, and owned and paid media controlled by marketing, it's no surprise they answered survey questions differently about goals, resources and media-channel effectiveness.

“If you have different objectives and priorities, then the messaging will be in conflict and you won't present a consistent story to your consumers and key external stakeholders,” Huet says.

Underscoring alignment troubles is a decades-old dysfunctional relationship. Comms and marketing teams are often adversaries battling for budget and respect. Earned media under comms wasn't deemed as important as paid and owned media under marketing, yet earned media has recently been able to prove otherwise.

“People have had the misconception that marketing is louder because it's more about lead generation for sales,” says Sunita Menon, former executive director of data-driven communications at IBM. “But communications has a broader view, a bigger mission to be the voice of the company for all stakeholders, not just sales.”

This report details the best practices and technologies for overcoming the challenges that brand leaders face when aligning marketing and comms teams. Brand leaders across industries also shared what the marketing-comms relationship might look like in the future.

Our findings are based on a survey from 150 marketing and comms executives and 10 in-depth interviews with executives from companies including IBM, Nokia, Schneider Electric, Lamps Plus, Certified First, Center for Creative Leadership, R&R Partners and InnerWorkings.

KEY FINDINGS

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

While success and opportunities of marketing and comms working well together are abundant in the CMO Council survey, nevertheless, real evidence of serious alignment problems still exists. The areas of disconnect include some usual suspects like strategic media activities, return on investment for different media types, and the performance of earned media, to less obvious and consistent areas including the very causes of misalignment itself.

Why the disparity? One of the themes that emerged from our study is that marketing and comms don't really understand each other's roles.

The one thing they do agree on? Earned media to date is not performing to its potential.

MARKETERS MAY NOT BE GRASPING THE CHALLENGE OF EARNED MEDIA

"Earned media is hard, hence the word 'earned'," former IBMer Menon says. "Unlike paid and owned, you can't control it. A customer can post a video on social media, and you'll see the stock price go down instantaneously."

"Earned media is hard, hence the word 'earned'."

—Sunita Menon, Former Executive Director,
Data-Driven Communications, IBM

On the flip side, a featured article or positive product review drives significant exposure.

As earned media emerged as a critical way to engage customers, marketing began to see it as more of a marketing channel than a comms channel. Nokia's marketing team, for example, believed its content could lead to earned media but felt the comms team was over-occupying the channel with not-so-newsworthy press releases and losing the attention of the press.

"The comms team didn't know exactly what campaigns marketing was working on, and marketing didn't fully understand the role comms plays in outreach," says Sandro Tavares, global head of mobile networks marketing at Nokia.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF ROLES AND MEDIA CHANNELS GOES BOTH WAYS

For instance, our study found disagreement over the efficiency of owned media, traditionally controlled by marketing. When asked which media channel generates the most return on investment, marketing leaders felt owned media had the highest return on investment. But comms leaders disagreed, pointing to paid media as having the highest return on investment.

Among executives interviewed for this report, the emphasis on owned, earned and paid media was decidedly mixed. The only certainty is that recent events have jumbled priorities and upended the marketing-comms relationship.

For instance, Samina Subedar, vice president of marketing at StorCentric, doubled her efforts in earned and owned media. She warns if earned and owned media aren't in alignment- say, a LinkedIn post is at odds with a corporate presentation- the result will be customer confusion.

"With earned media, we're utilizing PR strongly to gain more mindshare," Subedar says. "We're also not going to trade shows and face-to-face events anymore, so conferences become webinars and product demos become video content."

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO PAID MEDIA IN THE AGE OF COVID-19?

Kevin Briody, vice president of global marketing at the Center for Creative Leadership, put paid media mostly on ice. He says advertisements pushing products sounded tone deaf. Briody also nearly tripled owned media in the form of free webinars and virtual events.

"Our integrated marketing team had to shift gears, while our comms professionals just went into overdrive," Briody says. "The comms workload exploded, in terms of generating new content, adapting old content, placing experts and getting press hits."

Don't give up on paid media, counters Fletcher Whitwell, chief media and publishing officer at R&R Partners, an advertising, marketing, public relations and public affairs agency in Las Vegas.

As clients pulled back on paid media, Whitwell has had to make a compelling case. With one client, he was able to show that paid media contributed almost 20% of the client's objective, that is, the number of store visits. But earned media such as social posts only engaged one to five percent of followers, while owned media emails had a paltry 20% open rate.

"There's a role for paid media," Whitwell says. "That's why all media types have to align and understand what each contributes to the bottom line."

MAKING A CONNECTION

For marketing and comms to create better alignment, it would help if the teams agreed on the causes of misalignment — and our survey shows they don't.

When asked to identify the top three challenges in aligning marketing and comms, marketing leaders cited functional silos (55%), different KPIs and objectives (41%) and problematic reporting lines (41%). But among comms leaders, the top challenge was budget.

Disparity in budgets is a sticking point in the marketing-comms relationship. Marketing teams tend to be much bigger and get more budget due to their influence on revenue. This is reflected in the survey's question about what metrics are important in your job. Marketing's top metrics were sales leads and revenue contribution, whereas comms' top metric was awareness.

MARKETING LEADERS CAN STILL LEVERAGE BEST PRACTICES FOR BETTER MARKETING-COMMS ALIGNMENT

According to our survey, the top three internal processes for better aligning marketing and comms are cross-functional team meetings (77%), integrated campaigns (63%) and shared goals and metrics (57%). In fact, Briody runs a bi-weekly “editorial council” meeting with marketing and comms teams to cover content and themes across all channels, from social and email to virtual events.



Executives interviewed for this report say an umbrella organizational structure, whereby comms and marketing teams come under a single brand leader, is the best way to maintain alignment.

Consider the alternative: Prior to becoming partner of marketing at Verified First, Ben Cornett worked at a company where comms reported to the CEO, not marketing.

When the company donated \$100,000 to a non-profit, a major media brand reached out asking for an interview with the CEO. It was the chance to make national news. But the CEO was on vacation, and the outside PR agency didn't contact marketing for help. The earned media opportunity slipped away.

"They were always doing something that we, as a marketing team, didn't know what was going on and vice-versa," Cornett says.

Outside agencies, however, can sometimes help play a role in aligning a client's marketing and comms teams. Agencies are the first to see the warning signs. Michelle Ganz, vice president of client engagement at InnerWorkings, says her team often receives conflicting direction or feedback from multiple people on the client side.

"I'm trying to drive my organization around a more agile type of thinking, where we have work teams as opposed to hardline silos."

—Evan Kent, Vice President, Integrated Marketing,
Schneider Electric

"We become the team that pulls people together," Ganz says. "We show them what's been asked of us from this department and what's been asked from another department. Then we ask, 'How do we make sure that we're all on the same page going forward?'"

Marketing and comms teams can benefit from working together even though they have different missions, or at least different ways of executing on the same mission. The idea is to find areas of overlap and collaboration that will make both groups successful. For instance,

comms should give marketing an advanced look of a press release so that marketing can apply social strategy, pay-per-click, organic search, SEO, keywords and other best practices, Verified First's Cornett says.

"As a marketer, you want to influence the earned media piece," Menon says. "As a comms pro, you want to leverage paid and owned media because it augments and amplifies earned media."

Other executives have used the pandemic to highlight opportunities for better alignment between the two teams. Such a dramatic event can inspire comms and marketing to deconstruct functional silos and pursue a shared goal to help the business survive. "You give them a moonshot ultimatum, 'You have to quickly retool quickly retool and find new ways to help our sales team and customers,'" says Luftig, senior executive marketing leader.

ALIGNMENT ON THE FLY

The pandemic might even lead to new ways of aligning marketing and comms.

In order to ensure proper and consistent messaging during the chaotic days of the pandemic, Evan Kent, vice president of integrated marketing at Schneider Electric, quickly put together a seven-person team made up of specialists from marketing and comms, as well as other functions.

“We had our eyes and ears on everything: what’s currently in the market, what needs to be pulled, what’s our pivot messaging, what goes out on social, how to ramp up 180 digital events in three months,” Kent says. “We were empowered to make decisions.”

Now Kent envisions a future where this is the modus operandi. That is, a team is created on the fly for a marketing project or campaign, essentially doing away with hard lines between silos that can lead to misalignment.

Echoing this sentiment, the Center of Creative Leadership’s Briody says: “If what I’ve seen in the last few months is any indication of the future, strategies and resources can shift quickly and you can’t be locked in functional roles. There’s going to be a lot more blending of skills across the board.



CONCLUSION

What we have learned from the survey of brand leaders, as well as best practice interviews, is that there is room to create better marketing-comms alignment. Several key points quickly emerge as big takeaways from the study:

- ✓ **Encourage a better understanding of each other's functions.** Better alignment, collaboration and teamwork happen when everyone understands each other's functions, roles and value.
- ✓ **Watch for misalignment indicators.** Even if brand leaders think marketing and comms are aligned well, cracks can appear just below the surface. And the consequences of poor alignment are too grave to ignore. Check with outside agencies or neutral, unbiased third-parties to see if they're getting mixed direction and feedback. Look for signs of a turf war for earned media.
- ✓ **Re-evaluate organizational structure.** Marketing and comms teams should report to a single brand leader responsible for maintaining alignment. At the very least, comms should have a dotted line to the marketing leader in order to prevent silos. Consider creating a "liaison" role to ensure messages from both marketing and comms consistently serve specific users.
- ✓ **Adopt collaboration best practices.** Brand leaders should consider regular meetings between marketing and comms teams, shared calendars, integrated campaigns, common goals and metrics. Through collaboration, the two teams will learn about and appreciate each other's role.
- ✓ **Imagine new ways of working.** Shifting roles and resources may become the new normal. Brand leaders should consider ways to become more agile and adaptable. This may mean hiring people who are willing to pitch in outside of their comfort zones or standing up ad hoc teams for temporary projects.

With these recommendations, brand leaders can achieve **improved alignment between marketing and comms**. This will result in a more cohesive story across paid, owned and earned media — and a more engaged customer.



EXPERT COMMENTARY



CISION®

MAGGIE LOWER, CMO AT CISION

“ *In order for marketing and comms to achieve true integration we must first attain collaboration within the one constant both teams can agree upon: data. Both teams need to treat data as the single source of truth and have someone with the skills to interpret that data as it relates to specific KPIs in order to understand progress.* ”

When the topic of comms and marketing integration has been approached, it's been from a place of how we can use two separate strategies from two separate teams in order to prove KPI's for the organization. We've relied until this point on two sets of metric systems- one for marketing and one for comms- when in reality we are now able to use a single source of data in order to prove how the channels within the organization are producing. However, being able to interpret the data correctly in order to make it work effectively, is key.

INTEGRATION OF TWO STRATEGIES

One of the main roadblocks in integrating marketing and communications has been the different success metrics that each is determined by. Communicators have frequently relied on reputation and vanity metrics in order to assess their progress within the organization while marketers rely heavily on sales leads and revenue contribution.

We're all pointing towards the same goal- which is to increase revenue and, in some cases, brand awareness- in the organization, so why not combine the two programs in order to effectively achieve this?

USING DATA TO COMBINE ROLES

Organizational leaders need to encourage a better understanding of each other's functions within the organization, the KPI's marketing and comms should use to determine success, and what specific data a team has relied on in the past coupled with how it's been read.

Did the teams have the right data tracking in place, but interpret it incorrectly or inexpertly? Can things be tightened up as the teams work to integrate better? Are things being measured because they can be or because they should be? Regular reflections should be made to ensure measurement matches overall business goals.

Answering these questions helps marketing and comms function together as a cohesive team, which is especially important in difficult times, such as a crisis comms situation. A comprehensive measurement system built on top of a smooth internal communications system is vital to have in place before any crisis strikes.

READING THE DATA ACCURATELY

Having access to the data is one thing but having the skills to understand it is something separate. You need someone on your team that can effectively assess the data and communicate it in both marketing and communication lingo in order to carry out the strategy.

What the structure of this role (or roles) will look like depends on your team's resources; if you're lucky, you can have one or two dedicated "data scientists" to help your team stay on top of everything you're doing and interpret the results to keep you on the right track.

Smaller teams might need to invest in training certain members to incorporate elements of being a data scientist into their role—or simply invest in tools that do the heavy lifting for you.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted all teams, but good has come out of throwing everyone together-yet-separately at home since teams have been forced to take a hard look at how they are put together and how they work together, in order to communicate a united front internally and externally during the pandemic.

BEST-PRACTICE LEADERSHIP



KEVIN BRIODY

Center for Creative Leadership

Vice President,
Global Marketing



EVAN KENT

Schneider Electric

Vice President,
Integrated Marketing



SUNITA MENON

IBM

Former Executive Director,
Data-Driven Communications



MELANIE HUET

Serta Simmons Bedding

Executive Vice President
& Chief Marketing Officer



MICHELLE GANZ

InnerWorkings

Vice President,
Client Engagement



SAMINA SUBEDAR

StorCentric

Vice President,
Marketing



SANDRO TAVARES

Nokia

Global Head of Mobile
Networks Marketing



BEN CORNETT

Verified First

Vice President,
Partner Marketing



FLETCHER WHITWELL

R&R Partners

Chief Media &
Publishing Officer



ERIC LUFTIG

Victaulic

Senior Executive,
Marketing Leader

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVES



“ *We quickly understood that a lot of our traditional offers, promotions and lead-generation efforts would come across as unwelcome and tone deaf.* ”

KEVIN BRIODY | **Center for Creative Leadership**, Vice President, Global Marketing



“ *People don't care that a message came from marketing or communications. They don't even know the difference between paid, owned and earned media. But conflicting, inconsistent messages will confuse people.* ”

SUNITA MENON | **IBM**, Former Executive Director, Data-Driven Communications



“ *The power struggle between the various groups, the lack of communication, the disjointed departments are ultimately what we see as the biggest challenge.* ”

MICHELLE GANZ | **InnerWorkings**, Vice President, Client Engagement



“ *We solved our misalignment by getting marketing and comms to think more about the customer, how they're influenced, and what are the right ways of connecting with them.* ”

SANDRO TAVARES | **Nokia**, Global Head of Mobile Networks Marketing



“ *Consumers are making decisions and aligning with brands based on how they respond to the events of today. Therefore, brands must bring earned media into the mix to ensure their messaging is empathetic and consistent.* ”

FLETCHER WHITWELL | **R&R Partners**, Chief Media and Publishing Officer



“ *I’m trying to drive my organization around a more agile type of thinking, where we have work teams as opposed to hardline silos.* ”

EVAN KENT | **Schneider Electric**, Vice President, Integrated Marketing



“ *If you have different objectives and different priorities, then the messaging will be in conflict and you won’t present a good image to your consumers and key external stakeholders.* ”

MELANIE HUET | **Serta Simmons Bedding**,
Executive Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer



“ *With earned media, we’re utilizing PR strongly to gain more mindshare. There’s a lot going on in the market right now, especially in this era of COVID, so we’ve dialed it up.* ”

SAMINA SUBEDAR | **StorCentric**, Vice President, Marketing



“ *Agencies are brought onboard for a specific task and never told the bigger picture, the bigger strategy. It’s hidden from them, and I don’t think that’s fair to agencies.* ”

BEN CORNETT | **Verified First**, Vice President, Partner Marketing



“ *The beauty of having both marketing and comms teams under one roof is the ability to drive alignment and flow to the work. My teams understand the rules of engagement and how one plus one equals three.* ”

ERIC LUFTIG | **Victaulic**, Senior Executive, Marketing Leader



KEVIN BRIODY

Company: Center for Creative Leadership
Title: Vice President, Global Marketing
Industry: Professional Services



“ We quickly understood that a lot of our traditional offers, promotions and lead-generation efforts would come across as unwelcome and tone deaf. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#STRATEGYSHIFT

Kevin Briody, vice president of global marketing at the Center for Creative Leadership, recalls the fateful day — March 11, 2020 — when the National Basketball Association halted a game and, 37 minutes later, the actor Tom Hanks declared he had coronavirus.

“A lot of our clients started radically revisiting their spending pretty much overnight,” Briody says. “Their needs, interests and expectations from us changed several times over the last four months.

The shifts in marketing strategy also were sudden and dramatic for two of Briody’s teams: comms, which handles earned and most of the owned media, and integrated marketing, which controls paid media, demand generation and prospecting.

Briody put paid media mostly on ice, he says, because advertisements pushing products sounded tone deaf. Owned media nearly tripled with free webinars and virtual events. Traditional content about offers and promotions needed to be replaced quickly with empathetic messaging.

“Our integrated marketing team had to shift gears, while our comms professionals just went into overdrive,” Briody says. “The comms workload exploded, in terms of generating new content, adapting old content, placing experts and getting press hits.”

To keep the teams aligned, Briody’s team runs a bi-weekly “editorial council” meeting to cover content and themes across all channels: social, email, newsletters and virtual events.

Briody learned the value of having employees with growth mindsets — that is, people who want to learn and help. Time and again, marketing and comms had to get out of their comfort zones and pitch in across the business.

“If what I’ve seen in the last few months is any indication of the future, strategies and resources can shift quickly and you can’t be locked in functional roles,” Briody says. “There’s going to be a lot more blending of skills across the board.”



SUNITA MENON

Company: IBM
Title: Former Executive Director,
Data-Driven Communications
Industry: Technology



“ People don’t care that a message came from marketing or communications. They don’t even know the difference between paid, owned and earned media. But conflicting, inconsistent messages will confuse people. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#COMMUNICATIONS

When weighing marketing against comms, marketing activities often seem to be louder. Marketers hold the megaphone in both voice and stature, thanks largely to their role in lead generation and sales support. After all, money talks.

But this doesn’t mean marketing is more important than comms, says Sunita Menon, former executive director of data-driven communications at IBM. Comms has a broader mission to be the voice of the company for all stakeholders, from internal employees to external channel partners to the general public, not just sales.

“What communications does affects the broader narrative, the broader message, the broader purpose of the company,” Menon says. “It’s about what the company stands for and how it impacts business, clients and communities.”

Comms also handles earned media, with emphasis on the word “earned.” Menon says earned media is harder to produce than paid and owned media. There’s more at stake, too. Social networks amplify both good and bad earned media faster and wider than ever.

“You can have a customer take a video and post on social media, and you’ll see the stock price go down for that company instantaneously,” Menon says.

The problem is, audiences don’t differentiate between paid, owned and earned media. They’re bewildered when brand messages are inconsistent or conflict with each other.

It’s critical that marketing and comms get on the same page and tell the same company narrative, Menon says. Even though they have different missions, they can benefit from working together. The idea is to find areas of overlap and collaboration that will make both groups successful.

“As a marketer, you want to influence the earned media piece,” Menon says. “As a comms pro, you want to leverage paid and owned media because it augments and amplifies earned media.”



MICHELLE GANZ

Company: InnerWorkings
Title: Vice President, Client Engagement
Industry: Agency



“The power struggle between the various groups, the lack of communication, the disjointed departments are ultimately what we see as the biggest challenge.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#PEACEKEEPER

As an outsider looking in, Michelle Ganz, vice president of client engagement for beer, wine, spirits and tobacco verticals at InnerWorkings, an advertising and marketing agency, has seen a lot of dysfunctional marketing and comms relationships.

“It’s mainly a power struggle, as in, who owns what,” Ganz says. “There’s a lot of misalignment and lack of communication between the various departments within our client organizations.”

Too often, Ganz has been on the receiving end of this misalignment. Her team, for instance, will receive conflicting direction from multiple people. Or a group will give great feedback while another gives opposite feedback.

Such lack of clarity and consensus in planning results in a lot of wasted time, wasted work and wasted dollars, Ganz says. There’s a lot of money spent when brands have to scramble at the last minute to try and get a program or communication out the door. Messages that spring from different initiatives are rarely effective and often confuse customers.

However, external agencies can help a client’s internal turmoil.

“We become the team that pulls people together,” Ganz says. “We show them what’s been asked of us from this department and what’s been asked from another department. Then we ask, ‘How do we make sure that we’re all on the same page going forward?’”

This is the conversation starter that leads to better communication and alignment between marketing and comms. It’s something as simple as getting teams to attend regular meetings together and talk about their initiatives.

Down the road, brands can drive alignment by tweaking their organizational structure. Ganz says brands should seriously consider putting comms under the same umbrella as marketing.

“Ensuring that they both have the same or similar KPIs [key performance indicators] and initiatives would also be a critical component to help closing the gap,” Ganz says. “Companies can get past the power struggle by really looking to build meaningful relationships across functional teams.”



SANDRO TAVARES

Company: Nokia
Title: Global Head of Mobile Networks Marketing
Industry: Technology

“ We solved our misalignment by getting marketing and comms to think more about the customer, how they’re influenced, and what are the right ways of connecting with them. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#PROBLEMSOLVED

A year ago, Sandro Tavares, global head of mobile networks marketing at Nokia, faced misalignment between marketing and comms. To solve the problem, both organizations took steps to work together coordinating activities and sharing goals just in time before the pandemic caused mass market confusion.

Here is their story.

PROBLEM. As earned media grew to become a critical way to engage customers, marketing saw it as a potentially powerful marketing channel. Both marketing and comms felt they should focus on publishing relevant news that could lead to earned media, instead of over-occupying the channel with product-centric press releases that weren’t necessarily newsworthy.

However, it didn’t help that information and understanding trickled between marketing and comms.

“The comms team didn’t know exactly what campaigns marketing was working on, and marketing didn’t fully understand the role comms plays in outreach,” Tavares says.

SOLUTION. Comms and marketing leaders decided to rally around the customer. Instead of contending over ownership of earned media, the teams would deliver content based on the best interest of the customer — that is, the right content in the right channels.

Today, marketing and comms share a calendar of activities and coordinated actions, from press releases to bylines, that have the best chance of generating earned media. The comms lead and Tavares have weekly one-on-one calls.

“We’re always looking at, what is our pipeline on earned and on paid? What are the things we can do to optimize how we’re working?” Tavares says.

RESULTS. Alignment efforts have paid off. In outreach plans, there’s better balance between paid media, earned media and organic social. The brand has improved relationships with key journalists. And, most importantly, customers are engaging more with the content.

“It’s not about the media channel that we like, rather it’s about the channel we see our customers consuming content in,” Tavares says. “That’s what guides us.”



FLETCHER WHITWELL

Company: R&R Partners
 Title: Chief Media and Publishing Officer
 Industry: Agency



“Consumers are making decisions and aligning with brands based on how they respond to the events of today. Therefore, brands must bring earned media into the mix to ensure their messaging is empathetic and consistent.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#PAIDMEDIA

In these times of economic strife, companies are slashing and rethinking their marketing budgets and strategies. They're taking a hard look at partners and relationships, as well as returns on investment in paid, owned and earned media.

In this new paradigm, paid content often draws the short straw.

“With one client, we basically had to look over the last two years and really show the value of paid media,” says Fletcher Whitwell, a partner at R&R Partners, an advertising, marketing, public relations, and public affairs agency based in Las Vegas, and board chair of Worldwide Partners Inc., the largest global independent agency network.

Whitwell was able to show that paid media contributed almost 25% of the client's objective, that is, the number of store visits. In comparison, earned media in the form of social posts only engaged 1%-5% of followers, while owned-media emails had an industry-average 20% open rate.

“There's a role for paid media,” Whitwell says. “That's why all marketing elements have to align and brands need to understand how each contributes to the bottom line.”

Too often, though, alignment is lacking. Among his clients, Whitwell has seen comms handle PR and sometimes social, while paid and organic media fall under the vice president of marketing. A lot of times, these siloes are not even communicating, let alone collaborating, he says.

This leads to inconsistencies and missed opportunities in paid, earned and owned media messaging.

It's bad enough to have mixed messages about products and services, features and benefits, promotions and discounts. But today, media content covers something much more nebulous: the human experience.

With social distancing, people crave personal connections. Amid the deadly pandemic, people are concerned about their health. Protests for racial justice point to people wanting systemic change. All of which make up that experience.



EVAN KENT

Company: Schneider Electric
Title: Vice President, Integrated Marketing
Industry: Technology



“ I’m trying to drive my organization around a more agile type of thinking, where we have work teams as opposed to hardline silos. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#MISSIONIMPOSSIBLE

Brand messaging during the initial throes of the coronavirus crisis had to be on point. Conflicting, tone-deaf messaging would only add to the chaos, damaging the brand. Problem is, content silos — marketing, comms, global, local — don’t collaborate well, if at all.

Enter Evan Kent, who runs integrated marketing efforts for Schneider Electric’s U.S. arm. He took a page out of the mission-impossible playbook, thumbing through the company’s employee directory and putting together a seven-person team made up of specialists in different functional areas. The Schneider team prides itself on the global / local collaboration to decide what messages go out to the market.

“We had our eyes and ears on everything: what’s currently in the market, what needs to be pulled, what’s our pivot messaging, what goes out on social, how to ramp up 180 digital events in three months,” Kent says. “We broke down the firm, hard line reporting structures and were given the power to make decisions.”

The team accomplished its mission, and Schneider Electric’s messaging during one of the most tumultuous economic times in modern U.S. history was consistent and clear. Without a new pressing problem to solve, the team was recently disbanded with the agreement to reform at a moments notice to solve the next complex problem.

But the team’s success sparked an idea — why not do this regularly?

The company has myriad marketing projects and campaigns and a pool of employees with specific expertise in, say, email, public relations, marketing automation, events. It makes sense to cherry-pick a team.

Kent envisions a future where teams are created on the fly, assigning the right people to the right projects for a few weeks under the direction of a team leader, usually a visual marketer.

“The team needs to be responsive and have a sense of urgency,” Kent says. “Organizational models need to change and evolve. Program objectives drive the functional expertise required in the work team. The fact is, to be a visual marketer today, you need to know events, marketing, web, PR, digital influencers — the whole gamut — and specialists can fill those roles.”



MELANIE HUET

Company: Serta Simmons Bedding
Title: Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer
Industry: Retail



“If you have different objectives and different priorities, then the messaging will be in conflict and you won’t present a good image to your consumers and key external stakeholders.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#TEAMWORK

Without teamwork, the brand suffers. It’s especially true these days with consumers paying close attention to what brands say and do, says CMO Melanie Huet at Serta Simmons bedding.

Here’s a familiar scenario: The comms team feels compelled to get into the #BlackLivesMatter movement, so it issues a press release recognizing the inequity and committing to fairness. Too bad the rest of the company wasn’t aware of the message.

There are no connection points back to these statements, and so marketing didn’t plan any action items. The social media backlash is swift and unrelenting, criticizing the brand for merely giving lip service to a serious social movement.

“There’s been a tremendous amount of backlash for companies that just posted something with no meat behind it,” Huet says. “If you weren’t prepared for that statement, the whole company suffers the consequences. You look very misaligned. You’re not telling a complete story.”

Many reasons can contribute to a lack of teamwork on aligning messaging. Perhaps the most common is a clash of egos leading to information breakdowns. People are telling each other what to do and no one is listening.

“When it’s an inform, then you don’t have the opportunity to collaborate on timing or ways to better support,” Huet says.

At Serta, it’s not a problem. Huet gets along well with the person who manages earned media and collaborates regularly. It also helps to have all of marketing and brand comms reporting to her, as well as a dotted line to corporate PR. The latter means that whenever corporate PR is about to issue an external communication, Huet gets a chance to see it and weigh in.

“Too often, earned PR goes through HR or some other counterpart and up to the CEO, without having any interaction with the marketing team,” Huet says. “You need to move into a matrix-style structure or send the reporting up to the CMO. Earned, owned and paid media need to come to one leader to catch disconnects.”



SAMINA SUBEDAR

Company: StorCentric
Title: Vice President, Marketing
Industry: Technology

StorCentric

“With earned media, we’re utilizing PR strongly to gain more mindshare. There’s a lot going on in the market right now, especially in this era of COVID, so we’ve dialed it up.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#LIAISON

In the B2B tech world, earned and owned media play critical roles in engaging customers about complex products, and the present crisis has only increased their importance.

Potential customers unable to attend trade shows are conducting online research all day. They’re looking at earned media in the form of product review sites, analyst reports and technology trade publications, as well as owned media such as white papers, blog posts and videos.

“We’ve doubled our efforts in earned and owned media,” says Samina Subedar, Vice President of Marketing at StorCentric. “We’re not going to trade shows and face-to-face events anymore, so conferences become webinars and product demos become video content.”

If earned and owned media aren’t in alignment- say, a LinkedIn post is at odds with a corporate presentation- the result be customer confusion and lost sales. Add in different messaging for different personas, and the chances of mixed messages increases.

“An IT Director at a small company will receive messages that are very different from a Fortune 500 SVP of IT or a CIO, because you have to speak directly to the customer’s pain point,” Subedar says.

For StorCentric, a data storage management company with over 200 employees, alignment isn’t much of a problem. Both marketing and comms fall under Subedar, allowing her to keep a watchful eye on alignment and consistent messaging.

A larger organization might not be so lucky.

Subedar believes there needs to be a wholly new role to maintain alignment, which she calls “personalization managers.” Their main job would be to ensure messages from both marketing and comms consistently serve specific users.

She envisions personalization managers being part of the marketing team, in order to understand the overall messaging, while liaising with comms to keep both groups on the same page.

“We need new roles such as personalization managers as marketing and communications are constantly evolving in the digital age,” Subedar says. “If you think back 10 or 15 years ago, we didn’t have Social Media Managers, but now they play an important role in building brand awareness and customer acquisition.”



BEN CORNETT

Company: Verified First
Title: Vice President, Partner Marketing
Industry: Professional Services

verified First

“ Agencies are brought onboard for a specific task and never told the bigger picture, the bigger strategy. It’s hidden from them, and I don’t think that’s fair to agencies. ”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#LESSONLEARNED

Like many brand leaders, Ben Cornett at Verified First faced painful cutbacks amid the coronavirus crisis. More than half of the staff was let go. Now comms is outsourced to agencies. Cornett hopes things will get better, and he’ll be able to bring comms back in-house.

He’s already planning for it with lessons he’s learned in his decades of marketing experience. Prior to Verified First, Cornett worked at a company where marketing and comms weren’t aligned, which led to a big missed opportunity.

The problem stemmed from the reporting structure: Marketing reported to the vice president of marketing, and comms to the CEO. “They were always doing something that we, as a marketing team, didn’t know what was going on and vice-versa,” Cornett says.

When the company donated \$100,000 to a non-profit, the news wasn’t making it outside the state. A major media brand, however, reached out to the comms agency asking for an interview with the CEO. It was the chance to make national news.

The agency called the CEO in vain — he was on vacation — and decided not to reach out to anyone else. The media opportunity slipped away.

“For whatever reason, the PR rep didn’t pick up the phone and tell us,” Cornett says. “If nothing else, we would have engaged our operating officer or someone else, no question.”

Misalignment isn’t always about the big stuff, either. Comms would also give press releases to marketing only 24 hours before going live. That’s not enough time for marketing to apply social strategy, pay-per-click, organic search, SEO, keywords and other best practices, Cornett says.

As Cornett looks to build his comms team sometime next year, he’ll keep in mind lessons he learned about reporting structure from his previous employer.

“If a CEO wants a communications team reporting to someone other than the marketing leader, that’s not something I’d be ok with,” Cornett says.



ERIC LUFTIG

Company: Victaulic
 Title: Senior Executive, Marketing Leader
 Industry: Industrial



“The beauty of having both marketing and comms teams under one roof is the ability to drive alignment and flow to the work. My teams understand the rules of engagement and how one plus one equals three.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

#STRUCTURE

Marketing leader Eric Luftig leans on his engineering and process experience to create a well-defined, matrix structure that supports effective marketing and comms efforts. This structure not only keeps teams aligned but also allows Luftig to adapt to changes in the environment.

And it begins with a single leader calling the shots.

“I’ve always seen the benefits of having marketing and comms teams under one roof,” Luftig says. “They have distinct roles with intersection points. There are some places where you’ve got to referee, but for the most part everyone understands that no one is more important than the other.”

The marketing team is responsible for vertical messaging for products and markets, while the comms team oversees horizontal, employee and crisis communication. Where do they intersect? Marketing brings in proof points about the product and market — that is, the value proposition — and comms uses this to create high-level, broad-based messaging about the company.

“At the end of the day, all of these functions need to work harmoniously,” Luftig says. “Companies need to have consistent brand value messaging inside and outside the walls.”

A clear organizational structure, respect for each other’s contributions toward a mutual goal, and singular leadership all play a role when the unexpected happens and brands need to adjust quickly to shifts in the market.

Case-in-point: today’s global pandemic.

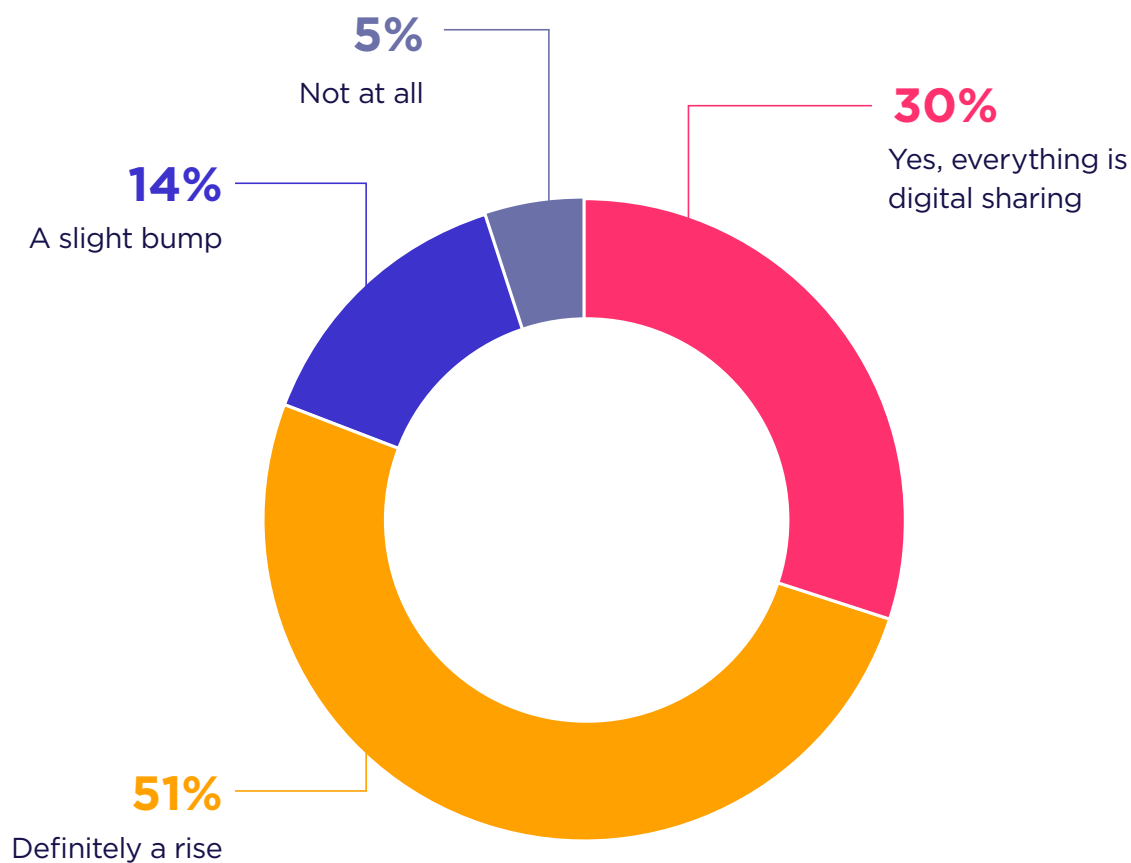
The pandemic shuttered big trade shows and in-class seminars, forcing Luftig to move to virtual events. It was important everyone knew who to look to for their new marching orders — that is, Luftig — thus preventing any existing turf wars from flaring up.

“You give them a moonshot ultimatum, “You have to quickly retool and find new ways to help our sales team and customers,” Luftig says. “We need to flow to the work.”

DETAILED FINDINGS

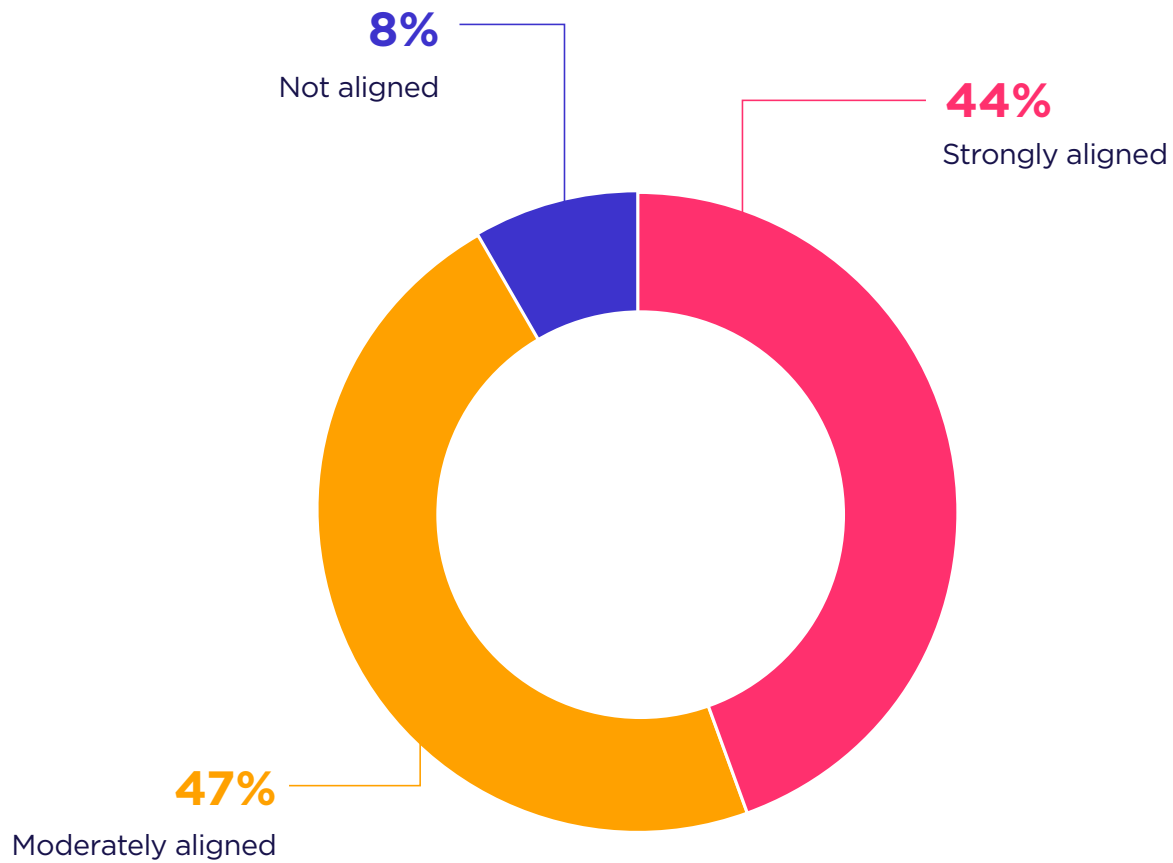
Q1

Has the change in global business climate, leading to a more digital lifestyle, impacted your media mix and efforts, particularly with earned media?



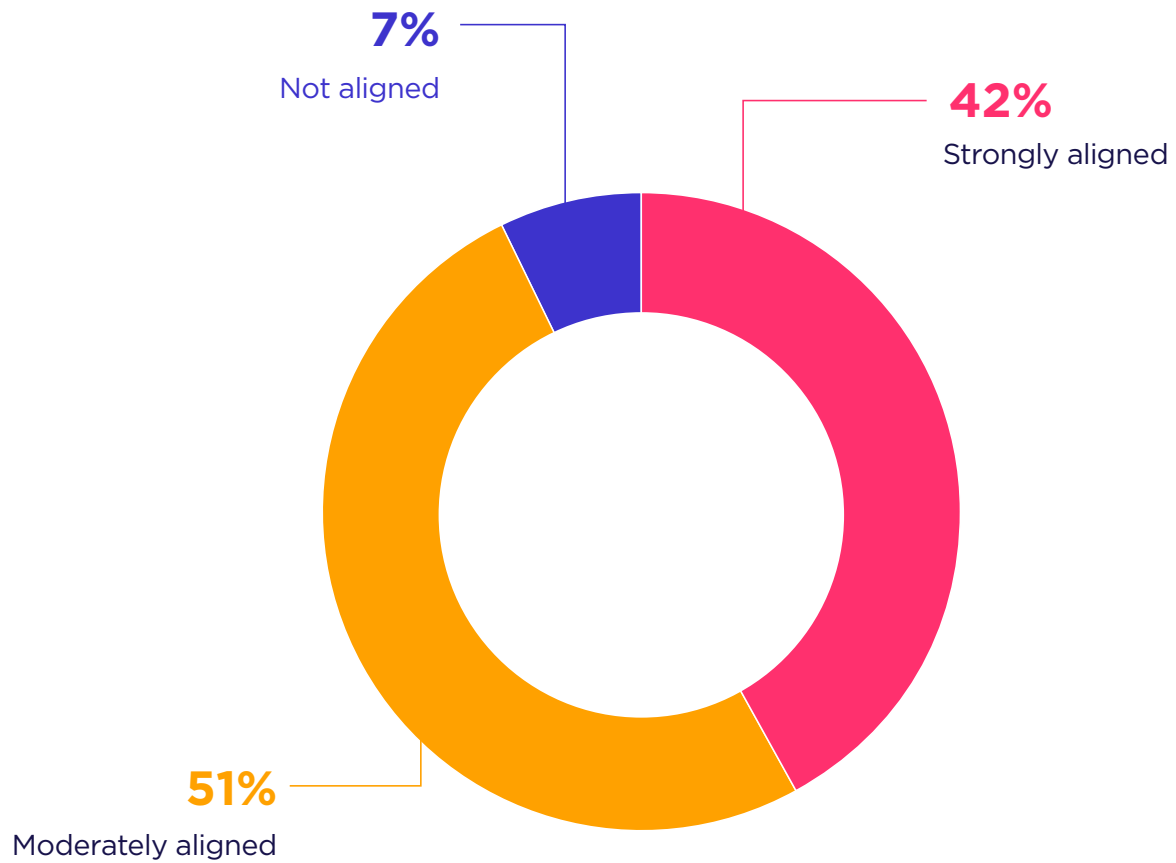
Q2

In your organization, how aligned are marketing and communications as it relates to earned media output?



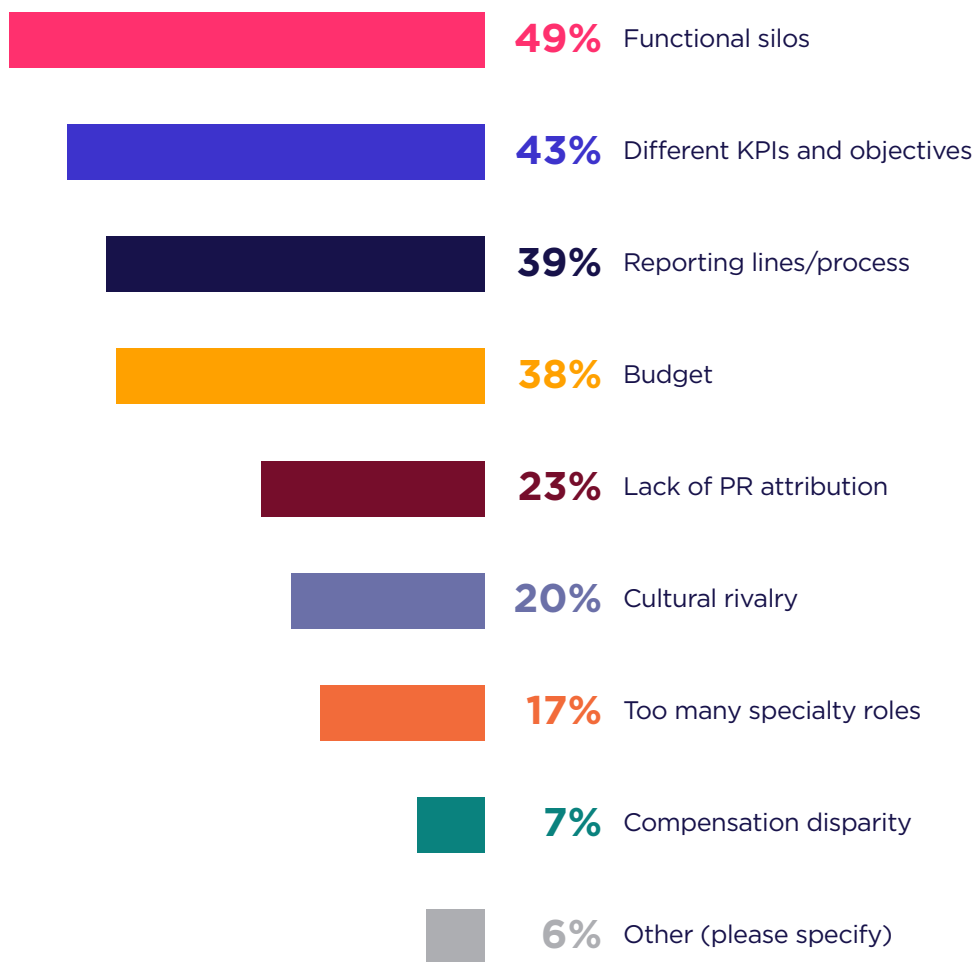
Q3

How aligned are marketing and communications as it relates to owned and paid media output?



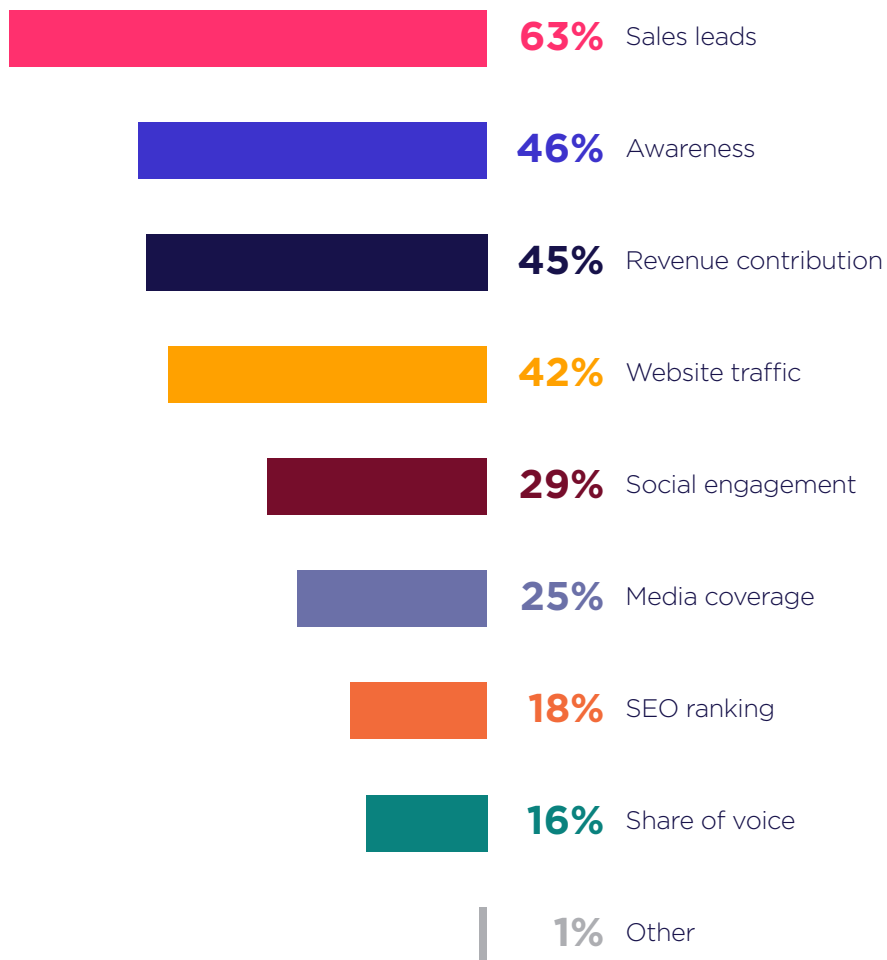
Q4

What challenges do you face aligning marketing and communications?
(Select top three)



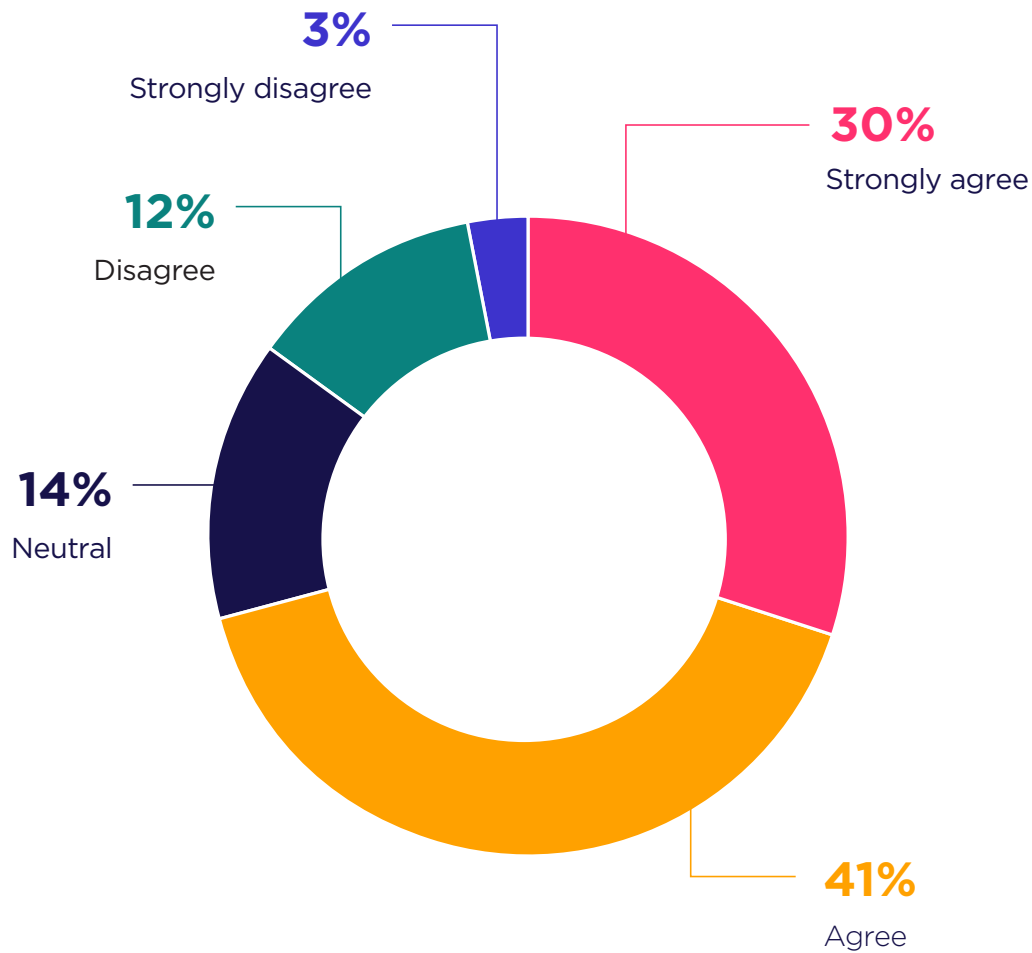
Q5

What metrics are important in your job? (Select top three)



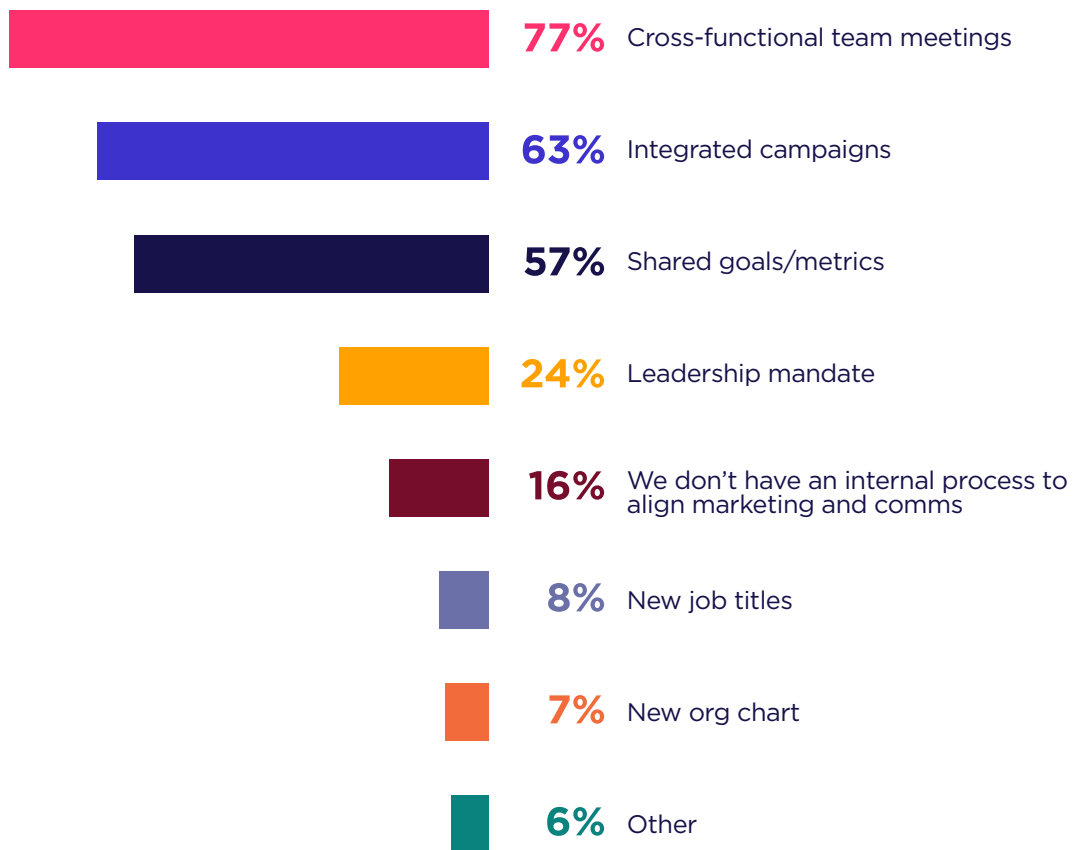
Q6

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Leadership, marketing and communications are aligned in strategic media activities.”



Q7

What internal processes are you implementing to drive marketing-comms alignment?
(Select all that apply)



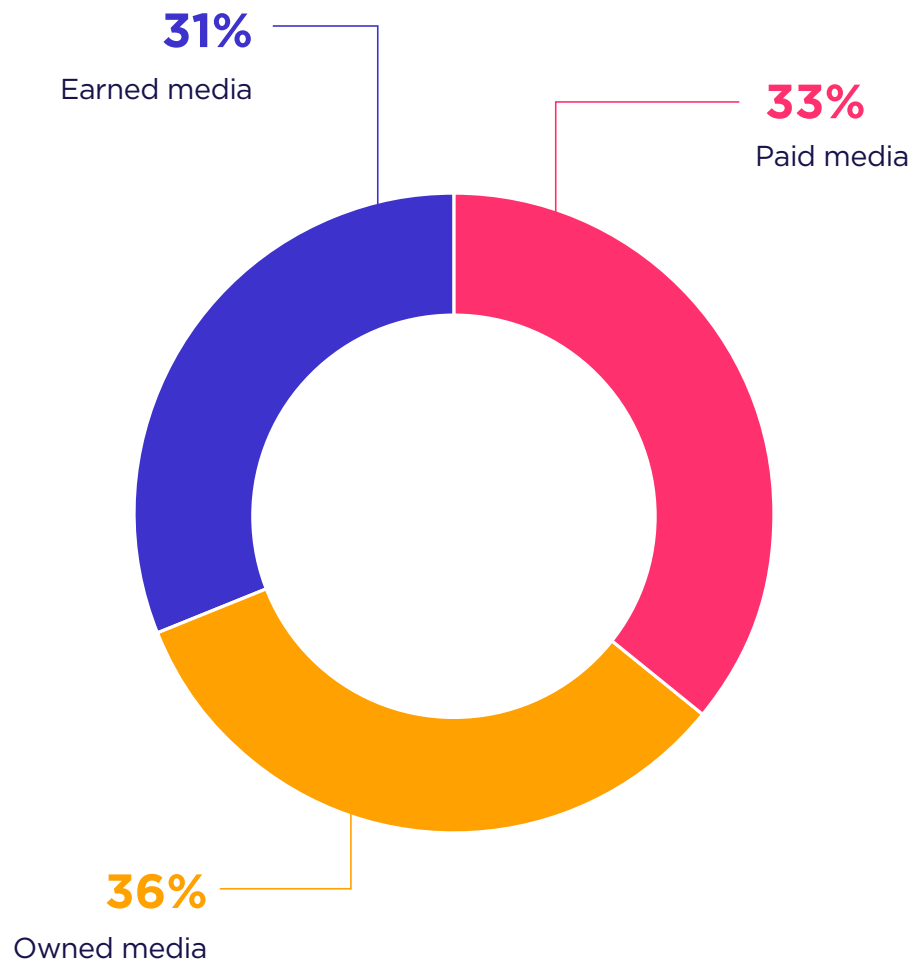
Q8

What technologies are you leveraging to further drive cohesion and alignment?
(Select all that apply)



Q9

Which media channel has the most return on investment?



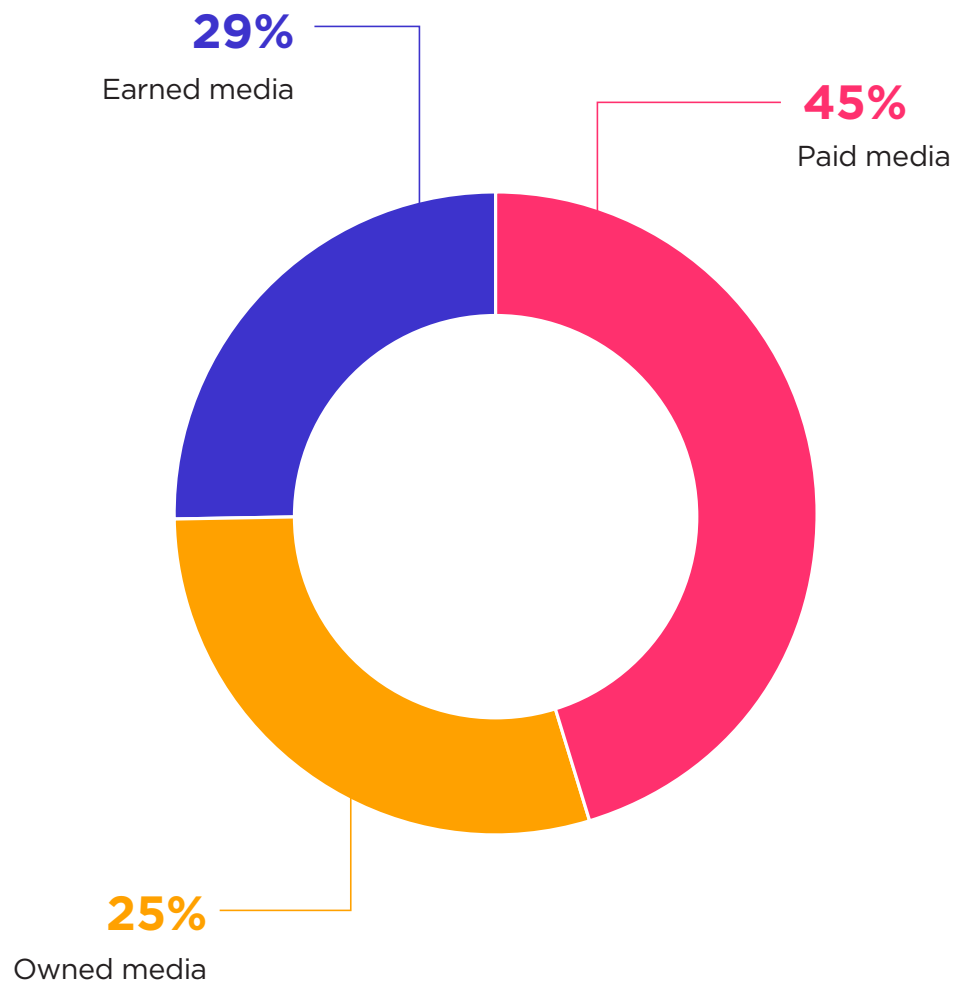
Q10

How would you rank your performance in each media channel?

Selected Choice	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Very Dissatisfied
Paid media	13%	42%	30%	12%	4%
Owned media	61%	35%	4%	0%	2%
Earned media	28%	65%	7%	0%	2%

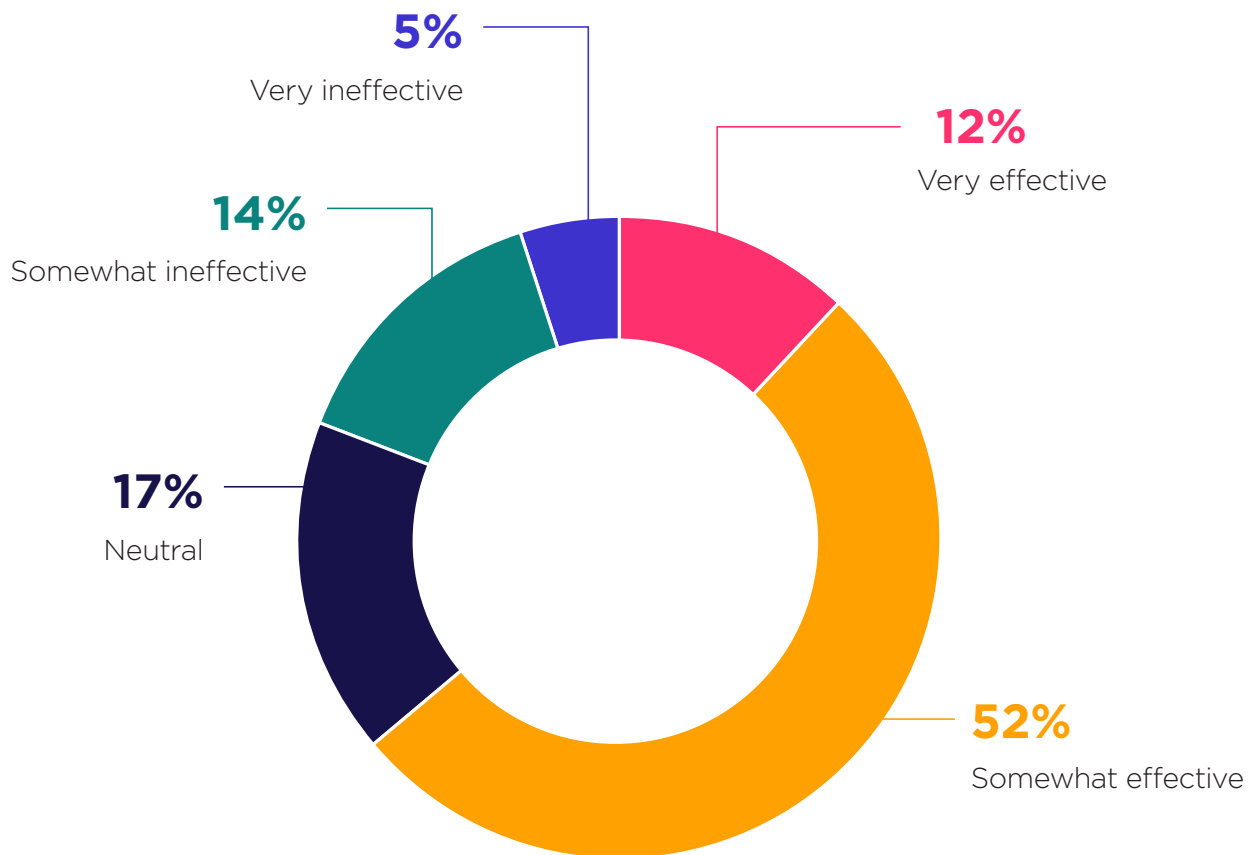
Q11

Which media channel requires the most resources?



Q12

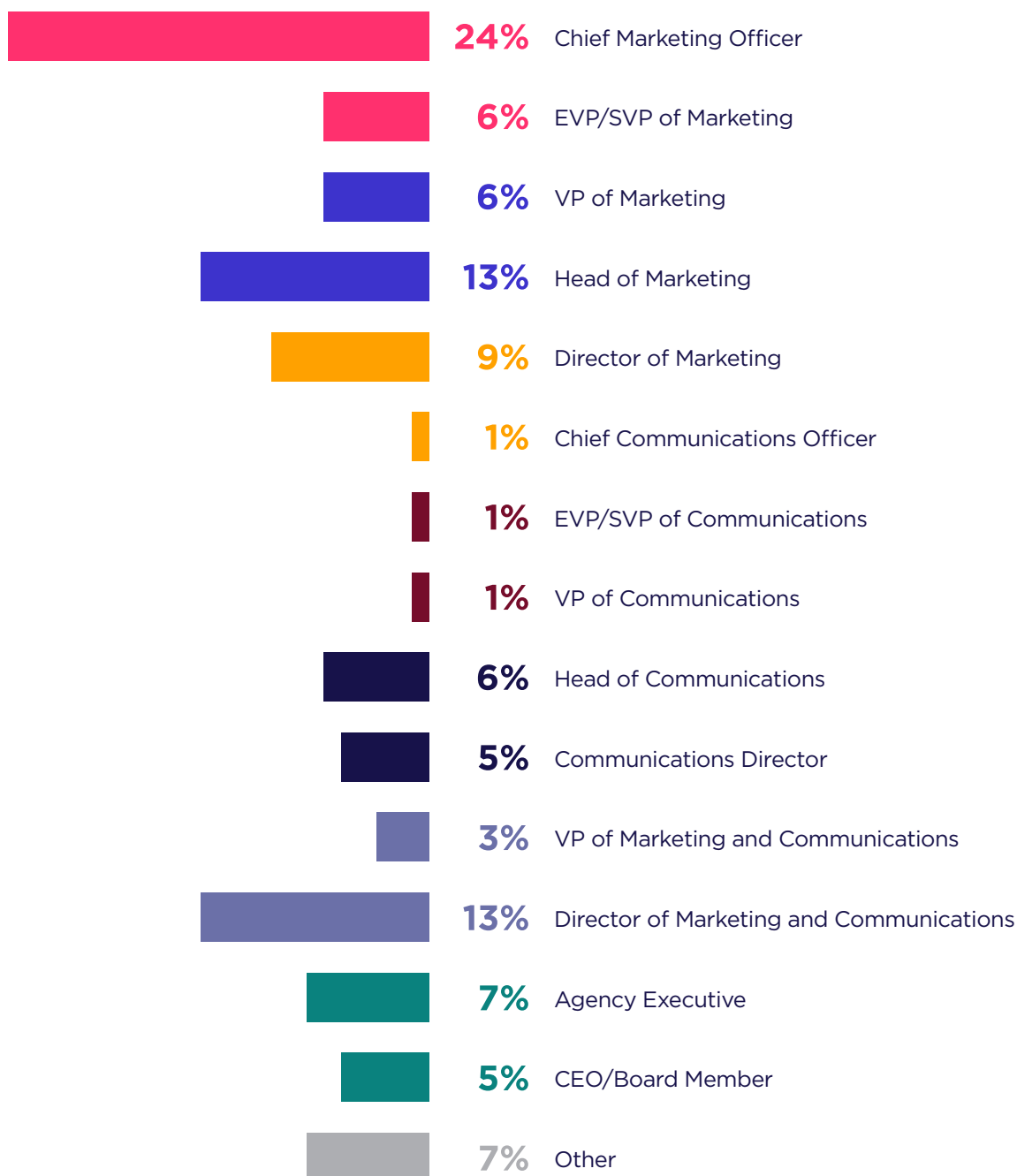
How effective are you at integrating and amplifying earned media to drive customer experience and engagement strategies?



DEMOGRAPHICS

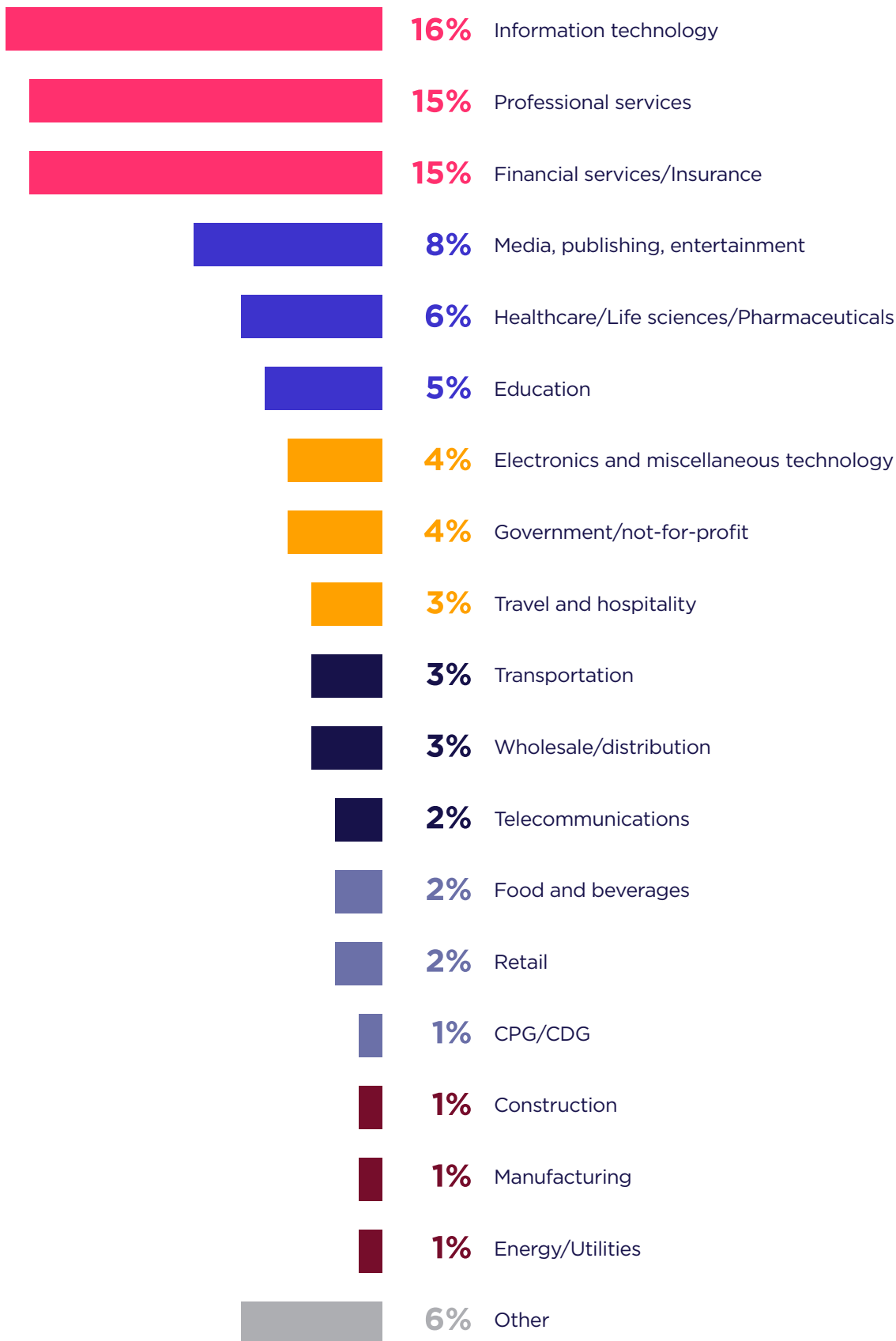
Q1

What is your title?



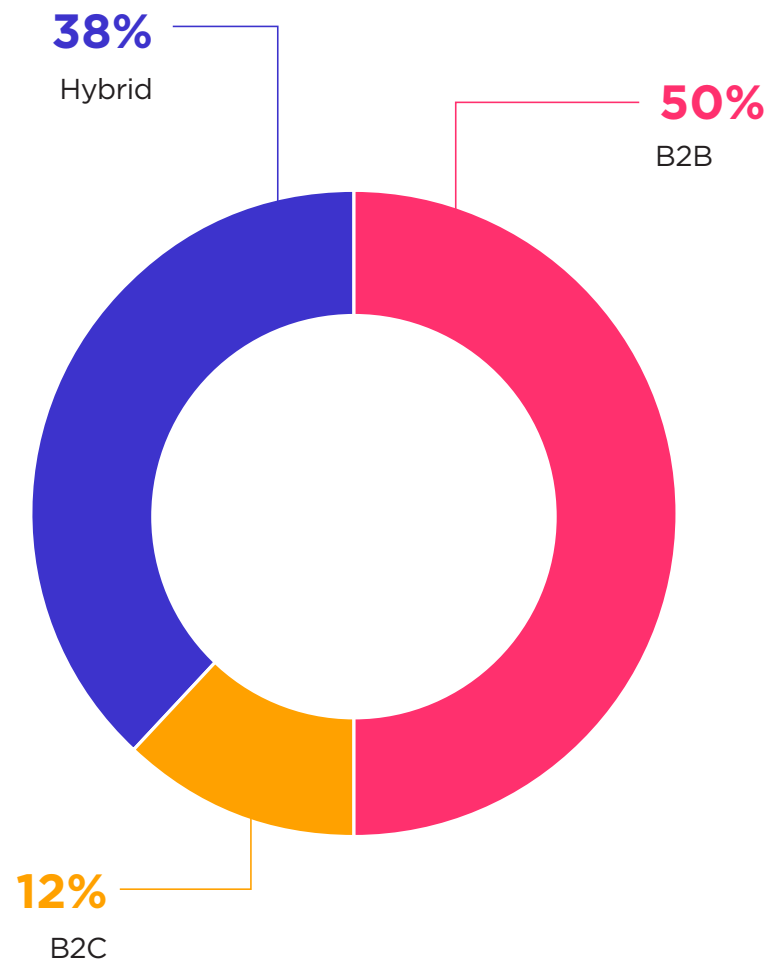
Q2

What best describes your company's industry sector?



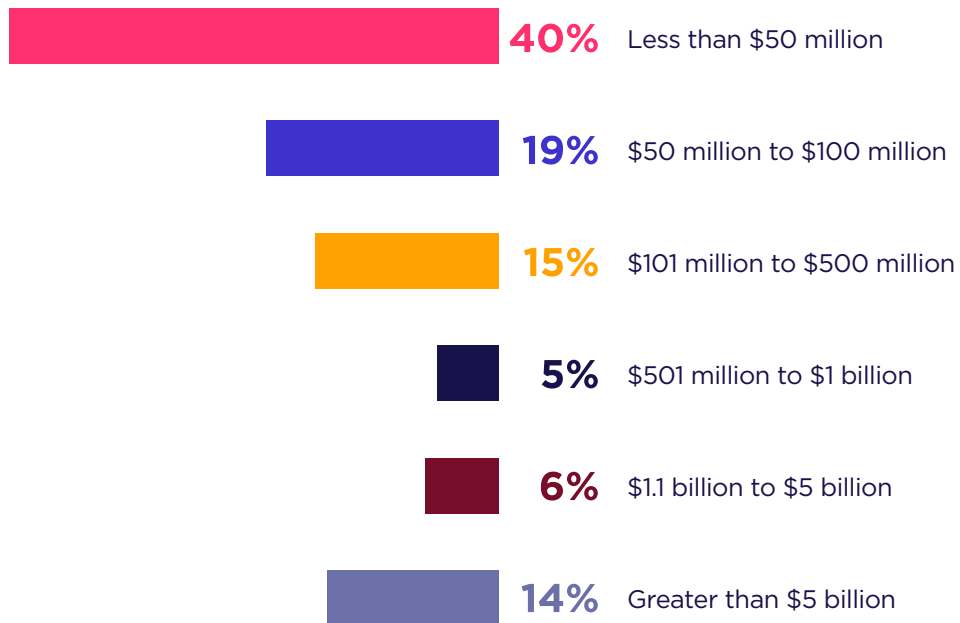
Q3

How would you describe your company's market focus?



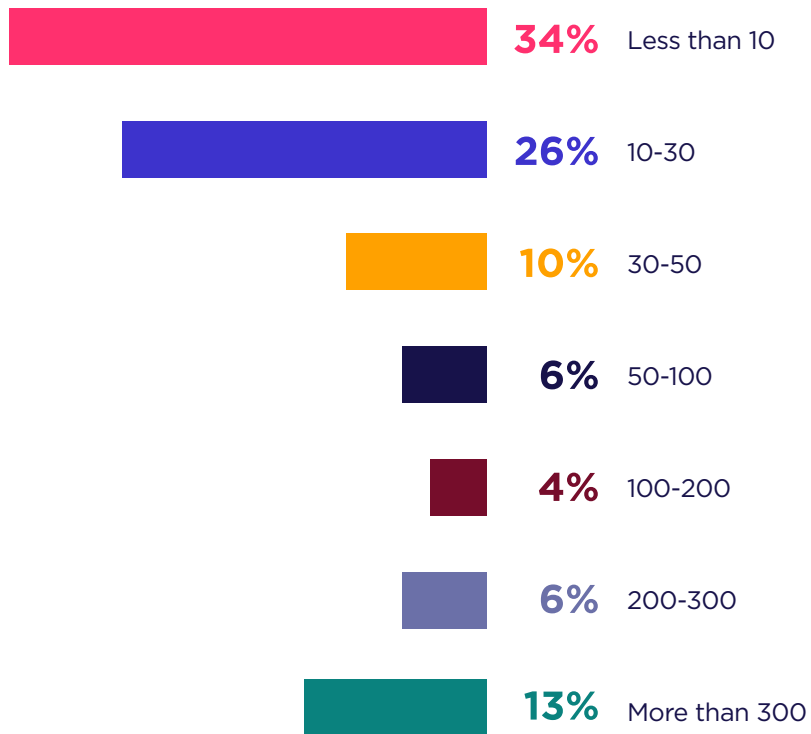
Q4

How large is your company in USD Revenue?



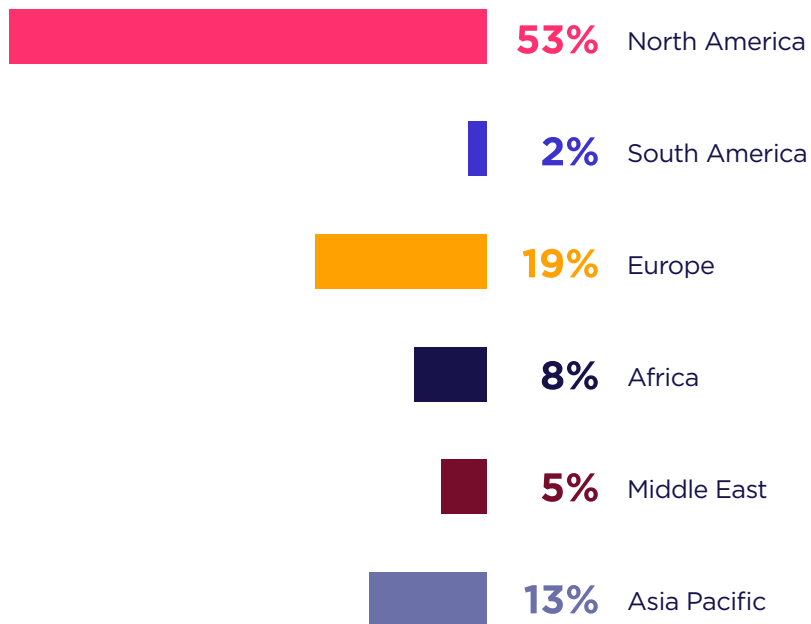
Q5

How large is your staff/team?



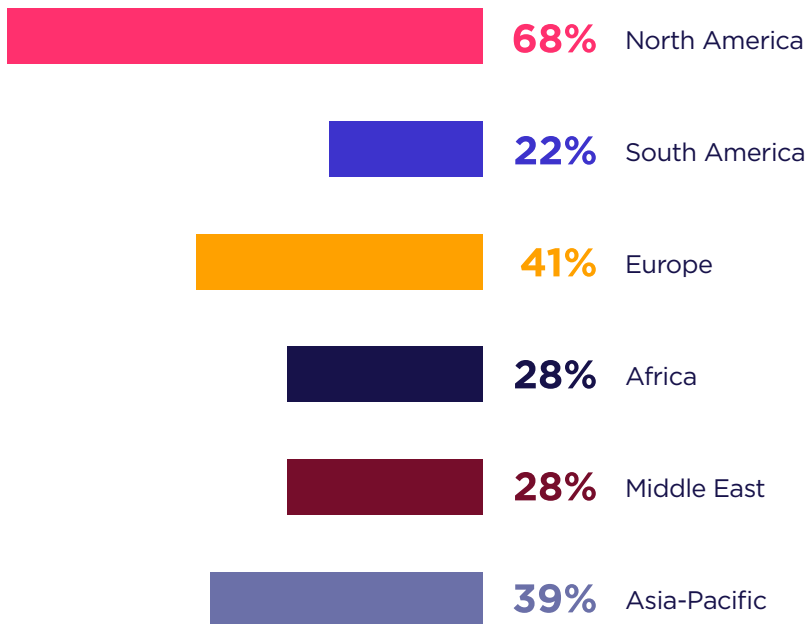
Q6

In which region is your company headquartered?



Q7

In which region(s) does your company operate?



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ABOUT THE CMO COUNCIL

Cision is a leading global provider of earned media software and wire distribution services to public relations and marketing communications professionals. Cision's software allows users to identify key influencers, craft and distribute strategic content, and measure meaningful impact. Cision has over 4,800 employees with offices in 24 countries throughout the Americas, EMEA, and APAC. For more information about Cision's award-winning products and services, including the Cision Communications Cloud®, visit www.cision.com and follow Cision on Twitter [@Cision](https://twitter.com/Cision).



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The Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council is the only global network of executives specifically dedicated to high-level knowledge exchange, thought leadership and personal relationship building among senior corporate marketing leaders and brand decision-makers across a wide range of global industries. The CMO Council's 16,000-plus members control approximately \$1 trillion in aggregated annual marketing expenditures and run complex, distributed marketing and sales operations worldwide. In total, the CMO Council and its strategic interest communities include more than 65,000 global executives in more than 110 countries covering multiple industries, segments and markets. For more information, visit www.cmocouncil.org.

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