The Blueprint for Marketing Planning

Connecting intent to impact

Uptempo

Every year marketers grapple with the same problem . . .

It's not the budget. It's not AI. It's not ROI.

It's planning. Strategic planning, scenario planning, campaign planning, media planning . . . all of it is a problem. Year after year, planning season barrels through marketing organizations, knocking marketers off their feet.

With surprise budget cuts and the black hole of ad spend, marketing budgets are the obvious thorn in marketers' sides. But a budget is not a plan. When CMOs can't prove their impact on the bottom line, marketing organizations fall under fire for failing to deliver on the plan. As the old saying goes, "failing to plan, is planning to fail."

Marketing leaders and their teams need a clear path forward. A better way to create, execute, and optimize campaign plans so that everyone from the CEO to the marketing automation specialist has a clear understanding of how the marketing plan impacts corporate strategy and revenue.

"

Failing to plan, is planning to fail.

WORK MANAGEMENT

This blueprint to marketing planning guides enterprise marketing teams through the annual planning and budgeting process with a focus on keeping the marketing strategy aligned to corporate goals. However, this isn't a one-size-fits-all marketing plan. It's a framework that provides guidance to help marketers manage issues that were never taught in school or don't get covered on a 20-minute podcast: How many campaigns are needed to meet quarterly targets? Does your marketing budget reflect your plans and goals? And so on . . .

This seven step planning process touches every level of the marketing organization and shows who needs to be doing what to help marketing teams eliminate that dreaded sprint to the finish line that happens every planning season.

The 7 steps

METRICS THAT MATTER

SOCIALIZING THE PLAN

STEP

1

Align to business goals

Supporting business goals with marketing goals

There's no marketing strategy without business goals. At least, not a good one.

The building blocks of an effective marketing plan are essentially the same across industries and verticals. The best marketing plans are anchored to the top three to five annual business goals. With those in hand, the real planning can begin.

For some companies, this might be three months before you're expected to have campaigns in the market, or it could be as long as three years. For example, **HubSpot's marketing team**[1] starts strategic planning six months in advance, whereas at Unilever **planning begins one year in advance**[2]**.** The timeline really depends on the size of your organization and your industry.

Oftentimes the financial plans and department budgets aren't gilded by the CFO until much closer to the start of the year. However, planning takes time and one quarter is not enough time for the entire marketing planning process. Using last year's total program dollars is a good place to start assigning a preliminary budget to headcount, campaigns, and functions based on the business goals.

KEY TAKEAWAY

It's more important to focus on *how* marketing's strategy will support business goals over the fine strokes of your budget at this stage.

There are two caveats you need to remember:

1. Use the budget as a reference, but focus more on what you're going to do next year as opposed to what you did last year. Keep in mind what worked, what could have been better and anticipate how things may change.

2. Budget and priorities change year over year. Budgets depend on the corporate goals, how aggressive they are, if there is new unchartered territory, or competitive moves to consider; even a new CMO is going to impact your budget. Be flexible and prepared to adapt.

There's not enough budget to boil the ocean

As marketing leaders think about priorities and budget allocation, a planning framework will prevent scope creep and keep their teams focused on key business goals.

Generally speaking, growth can only come from five key areas, or what Forrester calls "**pillars of growth**"[3]:

1 Productivity

Increasing the efficiency or effectiveness of the company.

2 Offers

Launching new products/services or enhancing your current ones.

3 Markets

Entering (or expanding into) new markets using existing and/or new offerings.

- **For B2B**, these are vertical, horizontal, and/or geographic segments.
- **For B2C**, these are demographic or geographic segments.

4 Buyers

Targeting new buying centers and buying personas using existing and/or new offerings. A buyer is a unique segment of a company's target market that shares common interests and characteristics.

5 Acquisitions

Purchasing the majority or all of another company's shares.

Marketing can have a direct impact on productivity, offers, markets, and buyers. While ambitious executives may want to see growth in all five areas, it isn't a realistic growth strategy.

Instead, marketing leaders should pick one pillar as the priority. Your other pillars are still part of marketing's strategy, but you think of them in the context of the primary pillar and strategic priorities.

Use these questions to help guide you:

Productivity

How can we be more productive across our buyers, markets, and offers?

Offers

How can we introduce new offers to the markets and buyers we target productively?

Markets

How can we open new markets with our offers and buyers while staying productive?

Buyers

How do we approach new buyers across markets productively with our offers?

Let's see how this plays out in two hypothetical scenarios.

BUYERS: B2C

McDonald's explores product market fit

Goal: Get health-conscious people to become customers.

Primary growth pillar: New buyer

Supporting pillars:

Markets: Are these new buyers in cities? Are they mostly on the West Coast?

Offers: Will McDonald's need vegan offerings? Should it focus on gluten-free products?

Productivity: How do these regions influence the offerings? Will this drag down productivity and margins if McDonald's releases too many new offerings for stores to maintain?

OFFERS: B2B

Microsoft enhances core product bundle

Goal: Add AI note taking capabilities to Teams Meetings.

Primary growth pillar: Offers

Supporting pillars:

Buyers: Are buyers already using another AI note taking app? Will this offer be available to all Microsoft Teams users, or only at a certain package/subscription?

Markets: Would some regions or industries not want this feature or require even greater security requirements?

Productivity: Is it more productive to focus on customers who *can't* use an outside AI vendor and would be more willing to upgrade their package for this offering?

The differences are subtle but critically important. Without focus, marketing planning gets complicated fast. You can't boil the ocean, and you certainly can't please everyone. Ensure you are strategic and intentional when deciding which corporate goals to support with your marketing plans. Forrester's five pillars of growth framework is a great place to start.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Aligning your marketing plan and budget around a key corporate strategic initiative will have more meaningful impact than spreading your teams thin.

STEP

2

Set marketing's goals & campaign architecture

KEY TAKEAWAY

Spreadsheets only tell part of the story. It's important to communicate the parameters of success and provide context for the metrics you're sharing. Don't assume the numbers speak for themselves.

What gets measured gets managed

Aligning marketing goals with broader business objectives involves clearly articulating the strategy and forecasting the impact of your plan and associated tactics.

Consider a scenario where your marketing team invests millions of dollars sponsoring the U.S. Open. You launched several impressive tactics, including a new video series and a digital ad campaign. They look great, but was that money well spent? Can you measure it? Did it have any impact? These are tough questions that CEOs will ask, regardless of your campaign's awards, anecdotal success, or vanity metrics.

Different industries measure different aspects of their marketing efforts. For example, a tech company may focus on metrics like user acquisition and engagement, while a CPG (Consumer Packaged Goods) enterprise might prioritize brand awareness and sales lift.

Even within the same organization, different seniority levels focus on different metrics. Executives care about high-level strategic objectives, while managers seek more granular, tactical measurements. Therefore, your campaign needs to demonstrate all these metrics and, most importantly, show the business impact.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Tactical goals are important to marketing, but overall business impact is what matters most. Tailor your metrics to different stakeholders within your organization and ensure alignment with both industry standards and overarching business goals.

Effective communication is a key part of how success (or failure) is perceived. Stakeholder engagement, understanding, and support require marketers to adopt the lexicon and metrics relevant to their industry. Presenting metrics in a way that resonates with each stakeholder ensures that the value of marketing efforts is understood and appreciated.

Here are two examples of how that hierarchy is created at a tech company and a CPG organization:

A technology company	KPI Hierarchy	A CPG company
Revenue Product sales EBITDA/profitability	Business Objectives	Sales Margin Market share
Pipeline growth MQLs Conversion rate	Marketing Strategy	Household penetration Wallet share Segment market share
Campaign ROI Campaign influence Channel engagement	Campaign Metrics	Campaign reach Social engagement ROAS
CTR Bounce rate Cost per lead	Program & Tactic Measurements	Website traffic Impressions Keyword ranking

The rising role of strategic operations and planning (StratOps)

Responsible for ensuring that strategic goals are effectively measured, the role of strategic operations and planning (StratOps) is becoming increasingly prominent on marketing teams.

In fact, every organization needs a dedicated StratOps person (or team); the duties shouldn't be managed as side-tasks because the success of a marketing team ultimately relies on their ability to measure and manage the impact of their campaigns. In enterprise organizations, someone on the marketing team must focus on the operational architecture.

While the responsibilities fall to different teams depending on your organization and industry, having a dedicated planning team (or person) ensures that these goals are achieved efficiently. In B2B organizations, this is typically filled by marketing operations or a marketing chief of staff. In B2C organizations, marketing operations may not be as common, and someone from IT or data analysts takes responsibility for strategic operations.

Although who is responsible may vary, how strategic operations and planning should operate remains essentially the same. While marketing operations typically provides tactical metrics that serve the needs of marketing managers and specialists, StratOps is an elevated role. They are perfectly positioned to measure the intent and impact of campaigns. Your StratOps team should be empowered to address the broader, more critical concerns and shift towards strategic measurements and insights.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Every marketing department needs a dedicated StratOps team (or person) to turn marketing goals into measurable success and report overall impact against business goals.

A campaign by any other name would be an operational clusterf*ck

Why does taxonomy matter?

Imagine you're the CMO of a global tech company, preparing for a board meeting. Your CEO wants an update on pipeline and opportunities created by a $25 million global campaign. But when you talk to StratOps it's a rat's nest of attribution, spreadsheets, and conflicting reports. There's one hour before your meeting with the CEO, and there's no clear way to communicate the ROI of this campaign.

This is where taxonomy comes in. By having a common naming convention (taxonomy) and relationship between campaign elements (hierarchy) across your global marketing organization, it enables you to report apples to apples reliably. That consistency encourages marketers to make comparisons, consolidate results, and consistently report on any campaign they are running, in any region.

Before diving into campaign plans and budgets, this foundational step ensures that the impact of marketing campaigns is clearly understood and measurable; providing a solid basis for more strategic decision-making. With that framework, marketers are equipped to assess both the intent and impact of campaigns.

TAXONOMY

The naming convention you use to identify the elements of a marketing campaign.

Example: Campaign, program, and tactic.

CAMPAIGN

A long-term thematic set of programs based on specific buyer's needs for a targeted audience. The programs are further organized into families that have quantifiable outcomes.

Example: Nike's "Just Do It" campaign.

PROGRAM

A collection of related tactics focused on the same objective and targeted to a specific point in the buyer's journey.

Example: User generated content, email newsletters, and paid ads that all promote the new iPhone.

TACTIC

A specific activity that supports your marketing campaign and goals.

Example: A referral program.

HIERARCHY

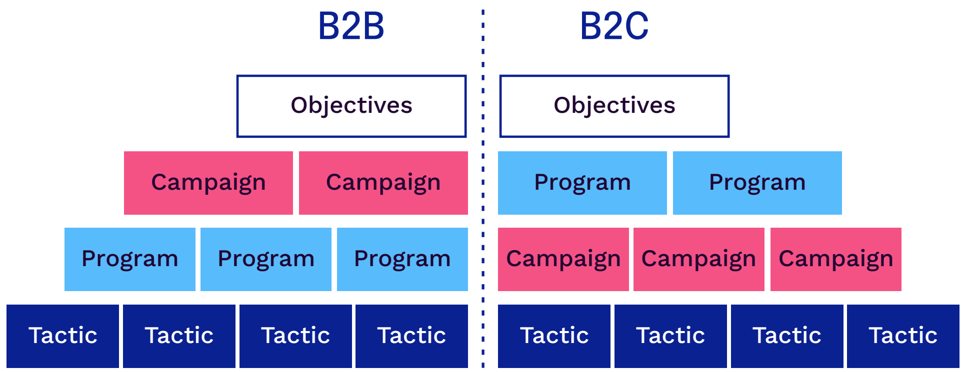
The ordered relationship between objects in the taxonomy.

Example: Campaign > Program > Tactic

Here’s an example of a taxonomy hierarchy where the tactics are nested under programs and campaigns that align to a marketing objective.

In B2B organizations, the best practice for hierarchies is **Campaign** > **Program** > **Tactic**.

However, in B2C organizations, the best practice is **Program** > **Campaign** > **Tactic**.



To establish your taxonomy, there are three key steps:

1. **Create** a comprehensive list of all the channels and marketing asset types you use.

2. **Organize** these into logical categories and subcategories such as themes, target audience, product lines, or campaign types.

   Example: Paid media is a category and the subcategories are Facebook ads, Influencer videos, display ads, etc.

3. **Determine and implement** a consistent naming system for your categories and subcategories.

Establishing your taxonomy is one part of campaign architecture. The other crucial part is defining the data associated with your campaigns. Do you want to view campaigns, programs, and tactics by audience? By geography? The CEO and finance will ask about how investments are performing across product lines, regions, or business units.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Consistency is key. Your taxonomy and hierarchy are the campaign architecture that enables global teams to talk about their programs in a clear and consistent way with stakeholders across the business.

StratOps must account for all the attributes that marketing or finance will want to use for different views of plans and budgets. This preparation ensures that all the necessary data is captured at the point of execution for comprehensive analysis and reporting.

STEP

3

Define marketing campaigns

Laying the foundation for your marketing plans

Before the marketing team and agencies dive into campaign planning, they need clear direction on the campaign's themes and goals.

These are five foundational questions for top-down campaign planning:

1. What business and marketing goals does this campaign support?
2. What are the campaign goals and targets?
3. What is the campaign theme, message, and target audience?
4. Which regions will this campaign run in? Are there variations based on geography, industry, or persona?
5. What is the rough budget estimate needed to hit the campaign targets?

Forrester recommends centering your **campaign themes**[4] around the customer's or buyer's needs instead of the product you are selling. In some companies, product marketing handles this, but most of the time, it's up to the marketing leaders to set the campaign themes. A popular way to document this is following **Forrester's plan-on-a-page**[5] framework. This information is often documented in a PowerPoint or spreadsheets, but ideally it's saved in marketing planning software to create a system of record.

After you've set your themes and goals, it's essential to allocate your budget wisely. This means making sure every dollar spent is aimed at achieving your goals. Yes, all marketers are "data-driven" but it's critical to count more than "clicks." To allocate budgets most effectively, marketing leaders can use impact models to predict how effective their campaigns will be.

Impact modeling: The math most marketers miss

Impact models are essential tools in a marketer's toolkit. At their core, impact models predict the effectiveness of different marketing strategies by mapping out how investments lead to desired outcomes. Think of them as detailed road maps that show the journey from the initial customer interaction to the final goal, whether that's a sale, a lead, or increased brand awareness.

KEY TAKEAWAY

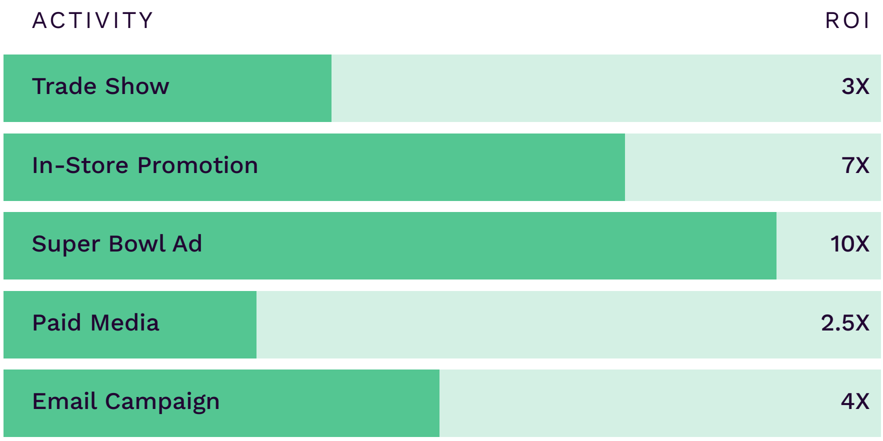
Clear campaign direction and thoughtful budget allocation are crucial for effective marketing planning.

The data for impact models comes from various sources, including historical campaign data, CRM systems, web analytics tools, marketing automation platforms, and sales data. Sometimes you won't have all the data at your fingertips, and need to fill in the gaps with instinct and assumptions. By integrating these data sources, marketers can build models to predict the impact of their efforts. This enables marketers to allocate their budgets more effectively, ensuring that resources are directed towards the most promising opportunities.

Real-world application: Trade shows vs. paid ads

Conversion rates for channels vary wildly, so take the time to customize your models instead of universally applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Let's compare two different marketing channels: trade shows and paid ads. The conversion rate from a trade show might be influenced by factors such as the quality of the event, the relevance of the audience, and the effectiveness of the follow-up strategy. On the other hand, paid ads will have different conversion dynamics based on the platform used, the targeting criteria, and the ad creative.

Planned ROI



By developing separate impact models for each channel, marketers can more accurately predict the number of sales or engagement generated from their investments.

For smaller marketing teams, using spreadsheets to build their impact models may be sufficient. However, enterprise marketing organizations need a more sophisticated solution like marketing planning software that can handle the complexity of building (and maintaining) multiple impact models based on the business line, program, channel, region or audience.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Build and use tailored impact models for each marketing channel, program, or persona to predict outcomes and invest in the best channel mix, maximizing ROI and overall marketing effectiveness.

Why marketers often get impact models wrong

Despite their benefits, marketers sometimes struggle with impact models. Here are a few common pitfalls:

1 Overgeneralization

A major mistake is assuming a single impact model can apply across all programs and channels. This oversimplification can lead to inaccurate predictions and suboptimal budget allocation.

2 Ignoring specifics

Different regions, target audiences, and product lines can all have unique conversion rates. Failing to account for these differences can skew the results of an impact model.

3 Lack of data

Impact models are only as good as the data that feeds them. Incomplete or poor-quality data can lead to misguided conclusions and ineffective marketing strategies.

Working vs. non working dollars and the 70-30 rule of budget allocation

Your marketing strategy and investment plan should be mirror images of each other—one cannot change without the other. They are simply different representations of the same plan: one in words and numbers, the other in money.

Therefore, how you allocate your budget needs to be tightly aligned with your marketing strategy. If your strategy evolves, your budget should reflect these changes. **Forrester's strategic budget allocation process**[6] can help you make the most of your resources.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Impact trumps function. Your metrics tell the story about impact. Your budget should be allocated in the same mindset. Tallying up the costs of all your tasks is one thing, allocating budget where it will have the most impact is quite another.

Your total marketing budget should be initially divided into headcount, systems/technology, non-program services, and marketing programs. This is where marketers often run into problems. Rather than thinking about the impact of those dollars, marketing budgets are instead divided across functions such as field marketing, brand, etc., leading marketers to focus on how to use their allocated dollars for specific tasks rather than considering the big picture.

The concept of working vs. non-working dollars helps marketers rethink how budgets can be allocated. Working dollars are funds spent on media, placements, and activities directly engaging with the target audience, while non-working dollars are spent on the creation, production, and support of those marketing activities. The distinction is critical for marketers to accurately measure the effectiveness of their campaigns, identify operational inefficiencies, and highlight how marketing investments contribute to business goals.

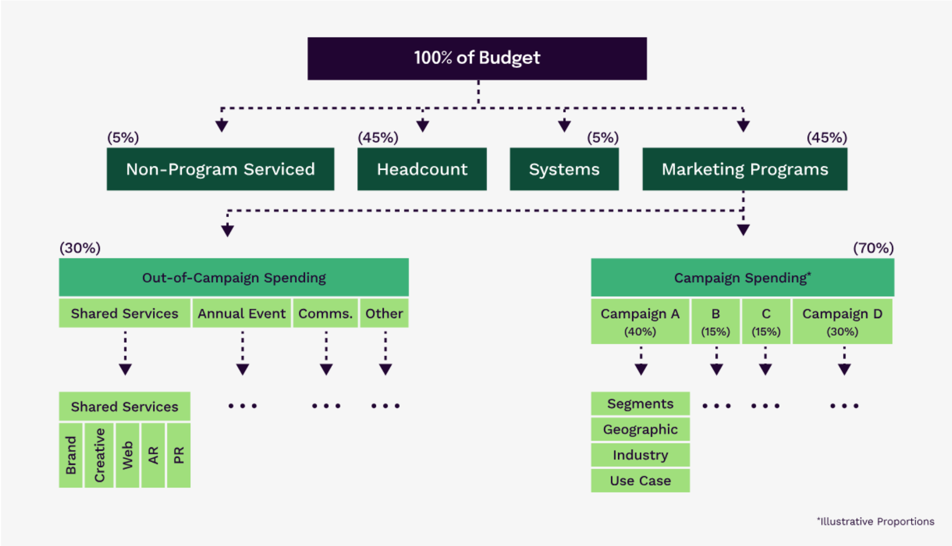
While it's necessary to maintain a functional view of your marketing plan and budget, Forrester recommends a more strategic, holistic approach: allocate your budget based on campaigns, with the goal of dedicating 70% of program dollars to campaigns. This strategy has two significant benefits:

1. **Alignment and collaboration**
   It keeps the entire marketing team focused on high-level objectives and fosters better collaboration.

2. **Executive insights**
   It gives the CMO a clear view to explain to the executive team how marketing spending helps achieve company objectives.

The remaining 30% of your program budget should go towards activities that don't fit neatly into a campaign, such as maintaining your website or services like market research and brand management. This balanced approach ensures that campaigns receive the bulk of the focus and funding, while essential ongoing activities and services are also adequately supported.

Forrester's Strategic Budget Allocation Process



Forrester's strategic budget allocation process is a best practice for strategically allocating 100% of marketing's spend.

Spreadsheets spread too thin.

Spreadsheets may be sufficient for managing the budgets of smaller marketing teams. However, for global organizations with hundreds of marketers and brands, relying on individual spreadsheets becomes impractical and error-prone. A multi-billion dollar enterprise cannot effectively manage a global budget on thirty separate spreadsheets no matter how many power users they have.

This is where **marketing planning software**[7] that supports budgeting and plan creation becomes crucial. Such tools can handle the complexity of large-scale operations, ensuring accuracy and cohesion across all inputs, significantly enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of enterprise marketing organizations.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Size matters. Marketing planning software is essential for managing complex budgets, ensuring accuracy, cohesion, and efficiency across large-scale operations. It reduces errors and enables marketers to focus on strategic goals rather than juggling multiple spreadsheets.

STEP

4

Plan your campaigns

Transitioning to bottom-up planning

Now that you've established the campaign framework and strategic budget allocation through top-down planning, it's time to shift gears. Enter the bottom-up planning phase, where campaign owners and agencies take the lead. This phase is crucial for translating high-level strategies into actionable plans. Campaign owners and agencies will create briefs for each campaign, detailing the programs, offers, content requirements, go-to-market activities, and media planning.

This is where organizing activities into **program families**[8] can help align campaign tactics with strategic goals and avoid over-indexing on a single type of program. While the term "program family" might sound very B2B, this concept is versatile and works for both B2B and B2C marketing planning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Going down? Both top-down and bottom-up planning are essential for effective campaign management. Top-down sets the strategic framework, while bottom-up planning translates it into actionable details. Neglecting either leads to misalignment, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities in campaign execution.

Keep it in the families

There are four main program families:

Brand awareness

Building awareness and shaping the perception, interest, and urgency around a campaign theme.

Demand generation

Activating, validating, and accelerating new and existing opportunities or engaging consumers.

Customer engagement

Developing customer-centric programs that drive adoption, advocacy, loyalty, and retention.

Education/ enablement

Helping execution, channel, or sales teams with campaign theme education and guidance.

Depending on your organization, you may choose to use more than the four main program families. For example, in B2C industries, you might want to distinguish between customer engagement and customer loyalty which have different goals and metrics to measure success.

When the rubber meets the road in campaign planning

Bottom-up planning is your reality check: Do you have enough money to bring these campaigns to life? Campaign owners need to strategically invest their campaign budgets across all the proposed programs and activities. The cost and effort to execute plans has to be weighed against the anticipated outcome.

Impact models can help prioritize activities based on the best conversion rates or the shortest sales cycles relative to the cost required to hit targets. However, it's not as simple as investing your entire budget on programs that drive pipeline or wallet share.

This is why program families are so important. Brand awareness and demand generation both play a critical role, but it's significantly harder to measure ROI on one of them. Campaign owners need to find the right balance and identify which activities must be funded, where to experiment, and what is a "nice-to-have" but not mission critical.

Keep in mind that the marketing budget isn't final yet. You're still using forecasted numbers based on last year's total program budget; tweaked for any known changes. As advised in Chapter 1, using last year's budget helps provide a realistic estimate of what you might receive this year and rapidly accelerates finalizing your plans when the marketing budget is approved.

In addition to budget alignment, campaign owners need to ensure resources are properly allocated. They need to work together to review the final bottom-up campaign plans to identify resource gaps or redundancies, particularly in content needs and potential resource conflicts that could impact timelines. This review process ensures that no department is overloaded and that there are no redundant efforts or unnecessary line items in the budget.

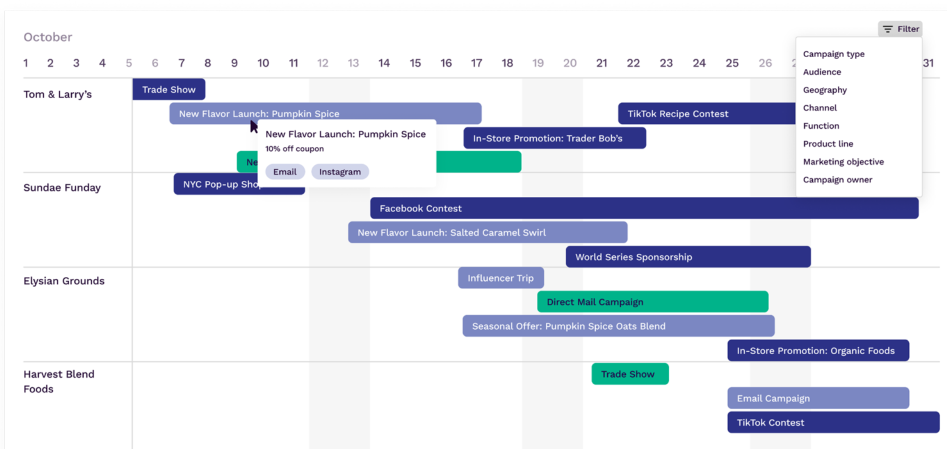
KEY TAKEAWAY

Using program families to organize all the bottom-up campaign plans helps marketers think critically about the mix of tactics supporting their campaign.

Timing is everything (or why calendars matter)

After campaign owners, functional teams, and agencies are aligned, the next step is to develop a cohesive marketing calendar. This calendar is essential as teams move into the execution phase; ensuring that plans are communicated effectively across departments such as the sales team. A comprehensive, up-to-date marketing calendar is vital for coordinating efforts and maintaining transparency. However, achieving this can be challenging.

Often, marketing calendars are scattered across project management tools, PowerPoint presentations, and SharePoint sites, each with their own gaps. This disorganization leaves marketers constantly scrambling to update plans in multiple places, trying to keep everyone informed month by month. By consolidating all activities into a single, unified calendar, sales and customer success teams can see upcoming in-market activities and so better position their conversations with prospects and customers.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Keep your team aligned and effectively communicate with stakeholders with a unified real-time calendar that is accessible to everyone

The ideal marketing calendar should offer multiple views to support different stakeholders. It should consolidate in-market dates for various campaigns, promotion schedules, and offer a comprehensive overview of all marketing programs and activities for the year while allowing users to drill down on specific timelines. This is where the campaign attributes that StratOps outlined in Chapter 2 can make or break your calendar. Your campaign owners can drill down and filter the calendar view to get granular details like timelines and schedules for specific tactics. Whereas filters like marketing objectives, working vs. non-working dollars, or geography give your CMO a high-level view of performance.

STEP

5

Finalize the marketing budget

Make every dollar count

As the fiscal year approaches, the CFO and finance team finalize the company's financial plan. Now, it's time to reconcile the final marketing budget with campaign plans and departmental needs. To ensure the most impactful programs remain funded, campaign owners should use zero-based budgeting practices to mark the high-value line items in their budgets.

Zero-based budgeting means starting each budget cycle from zero, which can be as often as every quarter or month. Every program is reviewed and justified based on current needs and priorities. For marketing campaigns, this involves evaluating and justifying every line item from scratch in terms of its expected impact and importance. This approach enables marketing leaders and campaign owners to make more strategic, data-driven decisions about resource allocation.

You also need to review the campaign budget allocation through the lens of global vs. regional needs, business unit requirements, and functional departments to make sure there is alignment. StratOps will revisit the impact models to ensure that marketing can still meet its targets with the revised budget and plan. Once the CMO and marketing leadership make the final decisions on this year's investment plan it gets communicated to the entire marketing organization.

Finance and marketing: Partners in ~~crime~~ profit

KEY TAKEAWAY

Finance focuses on predictability, while marketing prioritizes flexibility and impact. Understanding the difference—finance's macro view on budget targets and marketing's micro focus on campaign effectiveness—fosters better communication and more strategic budget decisions.

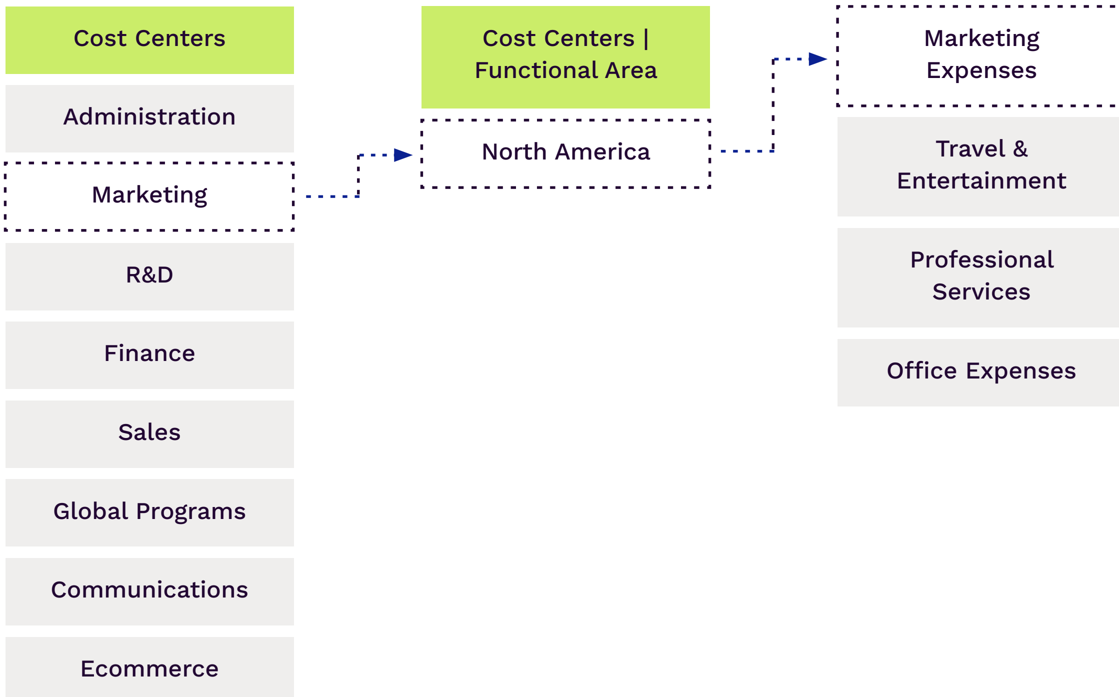
When executing marketing plans, it's essential to keep in mind that the finance team won't focus on the details of line item spending. The CFO and FP&A are concerned about the predictability of marketing spend and results.

They care about:

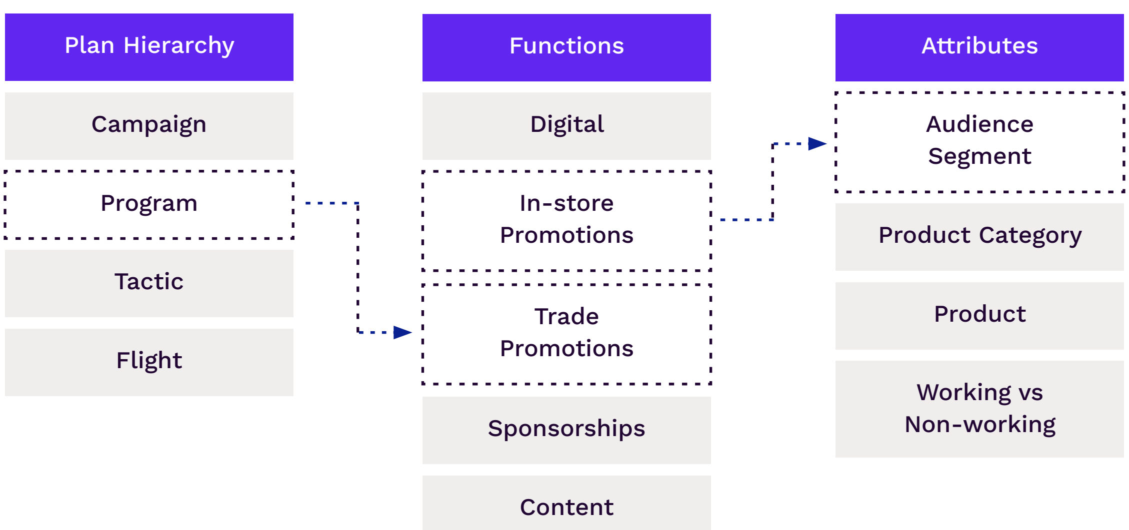
1. Marketing staying within the monthly or quarterly budget targets.
2. When marketing results start to fall below expectations that there is a plan to address it.

However, communicating results can be challenging. Finance and marketing teams need to see the budget through different lenses. Which often results in speaking entirely different languages when it comes to spending.

Finance spend tracking



Marketing spend tracking



Finance sees the world through the lens of general ledger codes and cost centers, while marketing likes to see their budgets by campaigns, audiences, or regions. Marketing budget owners also like to see investment plans by function or programs. However, marketers are often beholden to finance systems and reports that don't provide meaningful or actionable data about their investment plan.

This disconnect can lead to inaccurate forecasts and unspent dollars. Marketers need to learn how to speak finance's language and clearly show how their plans and investments support business objectives. Due to these different views, StratOps must ensure that even though the budgets are viewed through different lenses, marketing has the same numbers as finance. Bridging this gap is crucial for aligning both departments and ensuring everyone is on the same page.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The marketing budget needs to be viewed in real time according to the accounting standards finance follows and the campaign, program, or audience views that marketers need to make strategic decisions about their investment plan.

Finance isn't trying to be a blocker; they want to be a partner. At the end of the day, finance is focused on managing the organization's financial resources to ensure its stability, profitability, and growth. By understanding each other's perspectives and working together, marketing and finance can ensure that every dollar is used effectively to drive the business forward.

STEP

6

Execute campaigns

Separating the best from the rest

Having a marketing plan is table stakes.

Moving fast when plans need to change and executing *well* is what separates great marketing organizations from everyone else. Instead of rehashing every best practice on campaign execution, you want to focus on two key areas that are often overlooked:

1. **Communicating and socializing your marketing plan.**
2. **Teaming up with finance.**

These two areas play a crucial role in determining your marketing organization's agility and its reputation within the company.

Deliver on your promises

You've rolled out a comprehensive marketing plan to the business and questions start pouring in immediately.

"What are you doing right now to drive more traffic for my brand?"

"What campaigns are running in my territory this month?"

There's a sinking feeling in your stomach as you realize that stakeholders across the business have no way to know what is happening right now, or even in the near future. Socializing and communicating the marketing plan frequently is critical to keeping your stakeholders informed and inspiring confidence in your plans.

Stakeholders outside the marketing organization look very different in B2B vs. B2C:

1 **B2B**

Align with sales about expectations for lead and pipeline generation, and how to coordinate efforts for maximum impact.

2 **B2C**

Ensure downstream execution partners like brand managers, agencies, distributors, or affiliates are ready to roll out launches and promotions.

Agility won't happen unless everyone is following the same plan, at the same time. But different stakeholders need different views of the marketing calendar, all with real-time information. An enterprise can't solve this with PowerPoints or spreadsheets that always end up buried on some corporate drive. Teams struggle to figure out which version is the latest one, making it easy to go rogue. What's more, these files are completely separate from where marketers actually work on campaigns.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Tailor your marketing plan communication by providing stakeholders with real-time, role-specific updates. Effective, targeted communication ensures alignment and agility.

The shareable, single source of truth for marketing plans can only happen with a purpose-built **marketing calendar**[9]. A calendar that all stakeholders can reference ensures everyone has real-time visibility into what campaigns are live and coming soon. These insights keep global marketing teams aligned and reduce friction when plans need to pivot.

Along with a universal calendar, regular meetings and email updates should be a cornerstone of your socialization strategy. Hold weekly small group meetings and monthly leader briefings to share the updated marketing plan, review KPIs, and discuss any shifts in strategy. Sending out weekly email newsletters that share cross-functional success stories, upcoming goals, and any changes in priorities is another great way to keep everyone in the loop. Regular communication builds trust, streamlines efforts, and maintains the momentum needed to hit your targets.

KEY TAKEAWAY

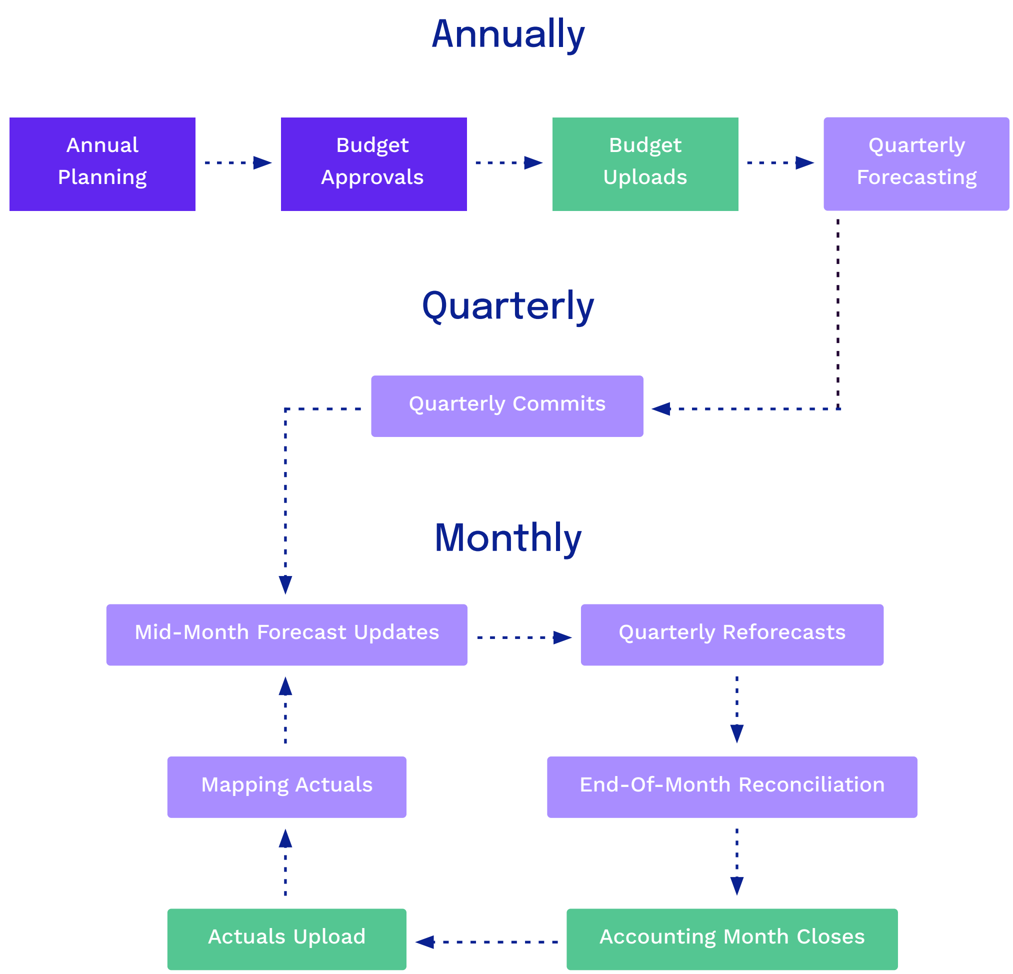
A universal calendar is critical to socialize and communicate your marketing plan with external and internal stakeholders. To supplement the calendar, you should have regular meetings with stakeholders and email updates.

Get finance invested in marketing plans

Marketing has an uphill fight for credibility in every organization. You need to be transparent about what your team is doing, why, and the results.

Finance is a critical stakeholder that needs to be aligned and bought into the marketing plan. Regularly socializing your plan and investment strategies with finance ensures that marketing efforts continue to support company objectives. However, creating a strong working relationship between marketing and finance is more than just fixing your processes for month-end close.
(Although, that's a good start.)

Here’s an example budget cycle for a global tech enterprise:



LEADERSHIP

FINANCE

MARKETERS

Budget owners and StratOps need to regularly track planned, forecasted, committed, and actual spending on a weekly basis. Having a standing mid-month budget sync between marketing and finance helps create alignment about how marketing is tracking against their goals and what changes need to happen. In the example budget cycle we’ve shared, you can see how forecasts are updated and projected spend is recalculated on a monthly basis. All of this needs to happen before accounting closes the books at month-end.

A smooth reconciliation process is essential for knowing exactly what is left in your budget, helping you distinguish between working vs. non-working spend and enable smarter, *faster* investment decisions.

Unfortunately, this is often where communication gets stuck in a battle between marketing numbers vs. finance numbers. When reconciliation happens in spreadsheets or departments use incompatible taxonomies, it can take weeks to get the final (sometimes contentious) result. This significantly impacts your opportunities to get the most from the marketing budget.

As you saw in the previous chapter, finance and marketing speak different languages when it comes to budgets. Obscure GL codes are not actionable for marketers and don't provide the granular details of campaign spend. However, the line item views by audience and program from marketing are far too granular for finance.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Marketing and finance have two fundamentally different views of the budget that need to be aligned and reconciled for marketing to effectively support company objectives.

Your taxonomies need to align so that information can flow between finance's ERP systems and marketing's budgeting software. This way, both departments can confidently look at the same numbers, in the view they need to see them.

There are a few key terms used to describe the state of your marketing spend:

Planned

The amount of money the company set aside for marketing activities over a specific period. It's sometimes referred to as budgeted spend.

Forecast

How much the marketer or campaign owner anticipates they will spend on a specific activity in this next month or quarter.

Committed

There is a signed contract where marketing has promised to pay a vendor a certain amount of money.

Actual

This money was spent, the vendor sent the invoice to accounting.

STEP

7

Measure campaign ROI & optimize

The metrics that matter to you

Your campaigns are in market, but your work has just begun.

Plans must adapt as marketers monitor performance and adjust to capture new opportunities, course correct campaigns, and maximize marketing investments. Your team's ability to pivot *quickly* is essential.

It's time to get back to the fundamentals of following the money. You need to know where your dollars are right now to react to campaign performance and pivot spend to stay on target.

Keeping up with the KPIs

The key is not to "set it and forget it."
Great marketing teams never stop planning.

StratOps and campaign owners have to be disciplined about checking campaign performance regularly. Letting underperforming campaigns run on autopilot hurts your results—and your budget.

It's easy to say "invest everything in the highest-performing channel," but it's not realistic. What works today might not work tomorrow. You can't assume that one channel will always be a top performer, which is why monitoring performance and experimenting need to be consistent habits for your team.

Everyone plays a different part optimizing marketing campaigns, so the metrics you look at vary by role:

1. **CMOs**
   Require macro metrics that summarize overall marketing performance, aiding in strategic decision-making without being bogged down by granular details.

2. **Marketing leaders and campaign owners**
   Need diagnostic metrics that reveal operational performance and guide course corrections.

3. **Marketing teams**
   Need tactical, granular metrics to optimize execution, as big-picture data is too broad for pinpointing specific improvement areas.

Most of the marketing team is focused on campaign metrics, but that's only one part of the bigger picture. To truly understand how your efforts impact the business, it's crucial to look at key performance indicators (KPIs). In a B2B context, KPIs might include engagement, lead conversions, pipeline, and bookings. In B2C, you'll see KPIs such as household penetration, unit retail sales, e-commerce sales, share of wallet, and average order value.

KEY TAKEAWAY

You need to regularly look at business-level KPIs as well as campaign-level metrics to see what's working and make timely pivots to keep overall business performance on track.

Optimize the plan, not just tactics

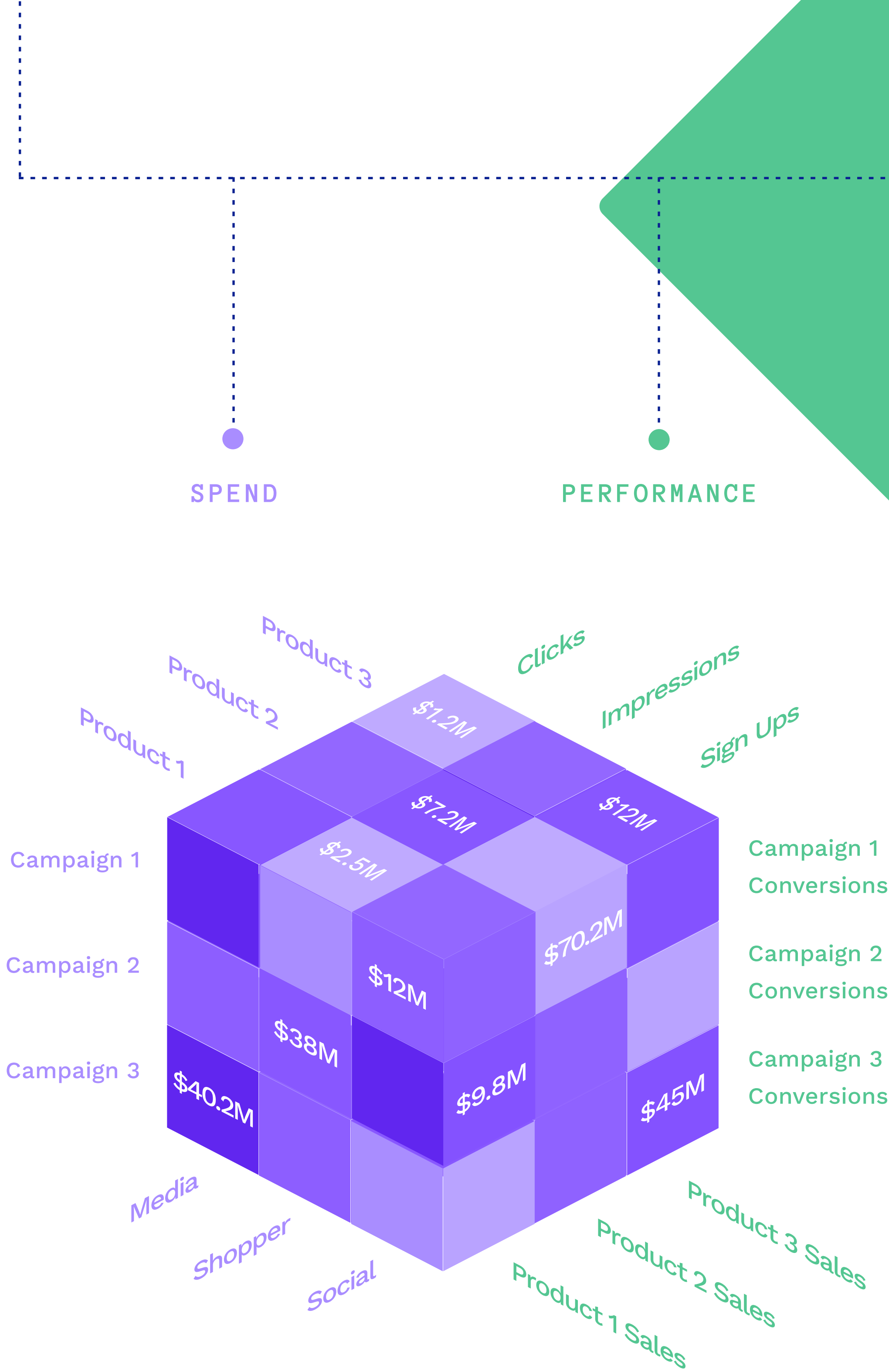
A common pitfall marketers make with optimization is focusing on how to improve tactics instead of the whole plan. It's the same thing that happens when you're overly focused on ROI or attribution.

There's no single optimization or tactic that will fix your whole plan. Just like there isn't one magic number that can capture the total value of marketing. The key is to focus on a series of measurements that help your team plan better and spend smarter.

ROI and attribution both lead to better decision-making, but they answer different questions. You need attribution to be able to see the full picture of marketing's influence. Attribution can help you understand which programs or channels have the biggest impact on ROI and see where to optimize your campaigns. However, attribution alone will never be able to answer questions about high-level KPIs.

ROI shows the business impact of marketing efforts and helps you optimize your strategy. Depending on your organization and the goals, ROI might be a traditional "return on investment" revenue metric. However, the return could be something other than revenue that represents a key indicator for you. It could be engagement, loyalty, pipeline, or retention to name a few.

In either case, you can't measure ROI without clean investment data. Measuring the cost of all your resources—time, money, people—is critical to get to a meaningful metric, but it's challenging when you have to account for how different agencies manage marketing spend. Holding your agencies to the same standards and procedures that you established between marketing and finance in chapter 6 will go a long way towards creating a clear picture of how and where marketing is investing—and the return.



KEY TAKEAWAY

ROI and attribution are tightly intertwined, don't make the mistake of focusing on one over the other. Both measurements are necessary parts of any marketer's toolkit to understand impact and where to optimize your plan.

CONCLUSION

Don’t copy and paste last year’s plan

As we’ve explored these seven steps, one thing is clear: you can’t truly succeed in marketing planning by just going through the motions. It’s easy to get lost in the complexities of marketing planning—managing deadlines, stakeholders, and dozens of business functions with millions of dollars at stake.

To stay agile and effective, marketing teams need to adopt a continuous planning approach with the right tools and processes. If your team doesn’t have these skills in-house, consider bringing in planning experts to help build a solid process based around the seven steps.

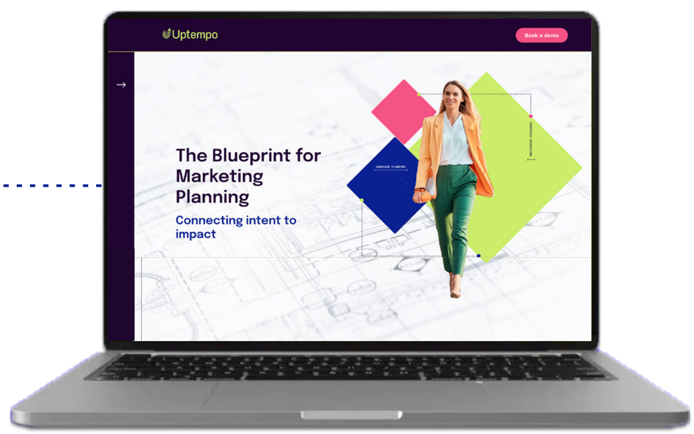
For enterprises with complex marketing organizations, choosing the right marketing planning software is just as important as setting up effective processes. Running your plans and budgets out of a few dozen spreadsheets isn’t sufficient. Your team needs a real-time solution that ensures visibility, velocity, and agility across global teams.

Think of planning as an ongoing, strategic muscle that powers your marketing success. Strong planning skills are crucial not only for making a significant impact on the business but also for advancing your career. With this mindset, your team will be better equipped to navigate the challenges of today’s ever-evolving environment. After all, good marketing planning is both an art and a science, just like marketing itself.

Additional Resources

Get a planning checklist
to keep you on track.

Always find the latest version
of the Blueprint online.



1. Align to business goals
2. Set marketing's goals & campaign architecture
3. Define marketing campaigns
4. Plan your campaigns
5. Finalize marketing budget
6. Execute campaigns
7. Measure campaign ROI & optimize