



2011 Trends in Marketing:

# Flexible Workforce Strategies

Presented by



A Q U E N T

As the number of marketing channels and media outlets continue to proliferate, organizations are asking more of their marketing departments. With marketers communicating across more channels and platforms, many organizations find that it is unreasonable for their teams to complete all of the necessary work in-house and are leveraging an external flexible workforce to address this challenge. This may encompass working with ad agencies, staffing agencies, and bringing in freelance talent.

In this paper, we'll share the findings of a recent survey of more than 500 marketing professionals, who identified some of the pressing challenges they're facing and how they're using a flexible workforce to their strategic advantage.

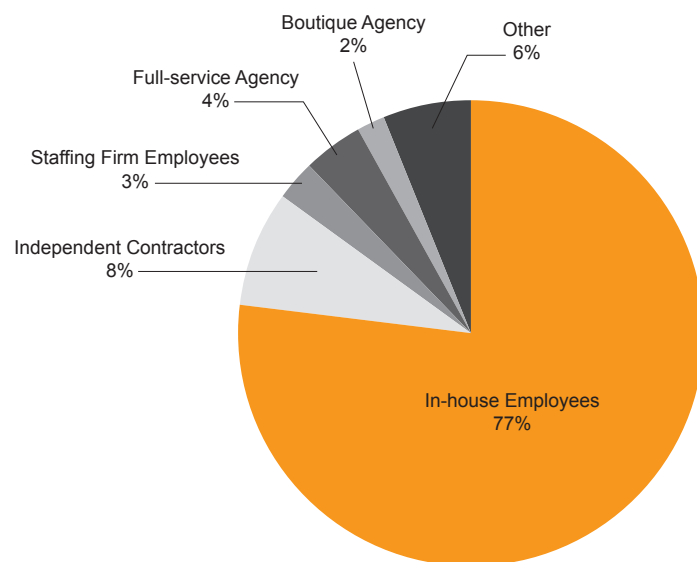
What follows is a thorough examination of key strategies you should consider as you work to maximize your flexible marketing resources.

### NEARLY A QUARTER OF MARKETING AND CREATIVE WORK OUTSOURCED

Nearly two-thirds of marketing and creative teams leverage some form of an external workforce to help meet their marketing objectives. The two primary reasons organizations hire additional resources are to fulfill a need for specific subject matter expertise or to add capacity.

The average organization uses external resources for nearly one quarter of the marketing and creative work they produce (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Average Organizational Allocation of Marketing and Creative Work**



Independent contractors made up the largest group of onsite freelancers, with approximately 8% of the average marketing/creative team's work produced using this type of flexible talent.

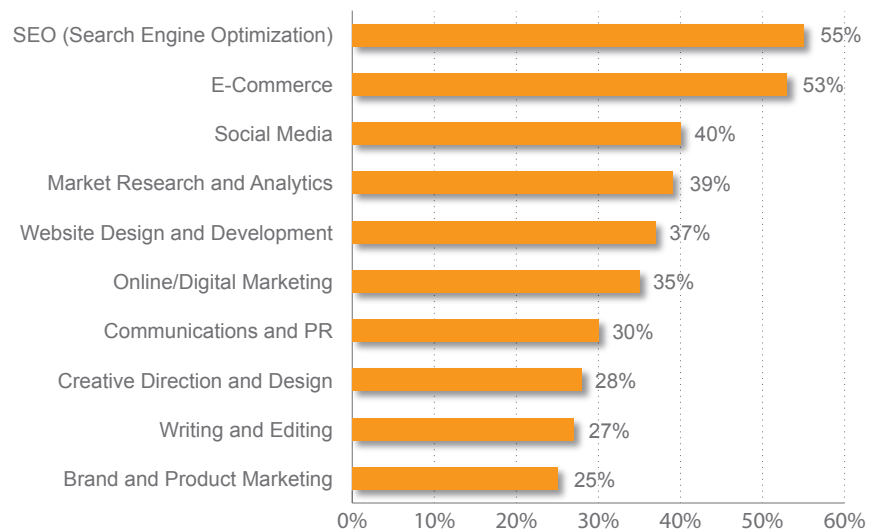
While only 3% of marketing and creative work is conducted with talent placed through staffing agencies, that number increases to 11% for those who already have close working relationships with a staffing or recruiting firm.

On average, about 6% of marketing and creative work is handled by full-service (4%) or boutique (2%) agencies. When looking at companies aligned with a staffing firm, this number doubles to 13% being handled by agencies (8% full service, 5% boutique agencies).

### HIRING FOR EXPERTISE DRIVES THE USE OF A FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

Marketing leaders who utilized a flexible workforce reported outsourcing search engine optimization (SEO) and e-commerce projects more than any other initiatives; these projects are developed externally more than half the time (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Percentage of Marketing Projects Completed by External Resources**



Independent contractors and full-service agencies were the most common resources used when projects of this nature were outsourced.

Writing and creative projects were more likely to be outsourced to staffing firms or independent contractors, while agencies were more often favored for brand and product marketing, external communications, and PR projects.

## MARKETING AND C-LEVEL RESPONDENTS VARY IN OUTLOOK

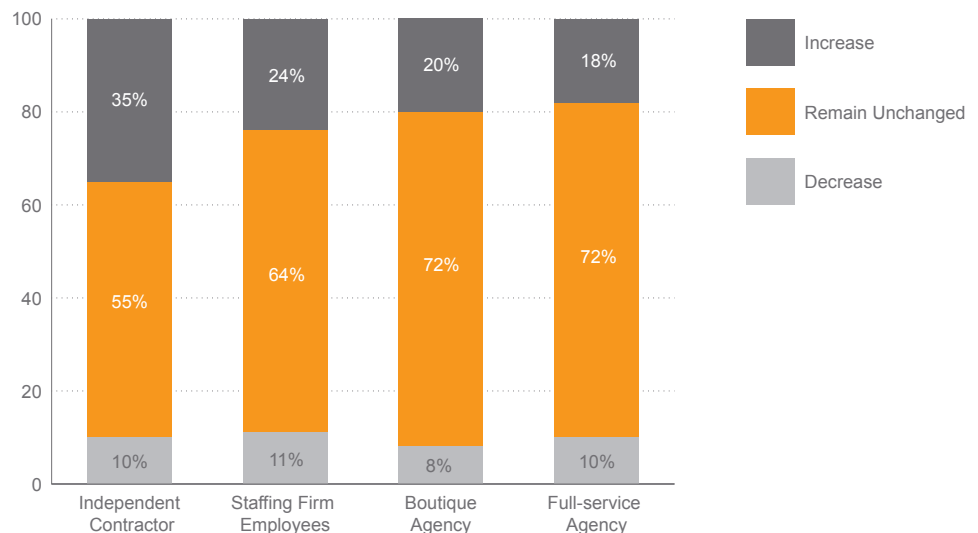
When asked whether their departments would grow in the coming year, marketing managers and C-level executives had markedly different responses.

Sixty-six percent (66%) of marketing and creative group managers report that they expect their in-house team to remain the same size or decrease over the course of the next 12 months, while a significantly larger percentage (82%) of C-level respondents indicated that their in-house team would remain the same size or decrease over the next 12 months.

Thirty-five percent (35%) of marketing and creative team leaders expect to increase use of independent contractors, and nearly 25% expect to increase use of marketing talent through a staffing agency in the coming year.

However, only 6% of C-level respondents indicated that their use of staffing and recruiting firms for marketing and creative talent would increase in the next 12 months (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Expected Change in Utilization Over Next 12 Months

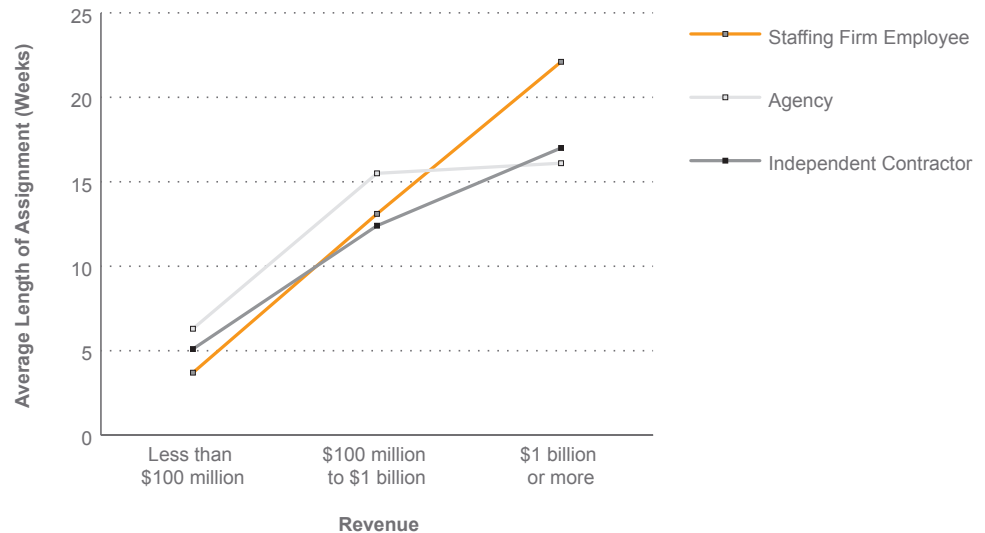


This disconnect indicates hiring limitations that marketing managers may not be anticipating, and could spur discontent among marketing teams.

## A CURE FOR MARKETING TEAM HEADCOUNT FREEZES?

With the pressure on to keep headcount to a minimum, 45% of marketing leaders reported using a flexible workforce to help offset headcount freezes on their team. These workers enable organizations to bring in specialized skills when hiring a full-time employee is not an option.

Most average assignments for onsite marketing and creative help last between 11 and 17 weeks, though the length of assignment differs significantly depending on the size of the organization (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Average Project Length Increases With Size of Organization**

## OTHER REASONS TO LOOK OUTWARD

Other common reasons that managers look externally to bolster a marketing team include spikes in seasonal work and filling positions that are open temporarily (maternity leave, departing employees, vacation time, etc.).

Nearly one-third of marketing leaders also looked to utilize a network of flexible talent as a testing ground for potential full-time team members. Staffing firms were the most often used resource to test the skill and fit of a potential marketing team member, though many leaders also turn to their pool of independent contractors to test drive potential full-time hires.

Interestingly, cost savings are much less likely to be listed as the primary reason to use a flexible workforce, contrary to popular belief. Fewer than 10% of all respondents indicated that cost savings was their primary reason for leveraging flexible talent.

## FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OFTEN TOO REACTIVE

The strategic use of flexible workforce resources can help marketing and creative teams meet key objectives without putting undue pressure on their existing team.

However, teams are less than half as likely to staff up prior to the start of a project as they are once the workload gets too excessive to complete the project in the allotted time. The survey revealed that this could have a detrimental effect on an internal team, as the extra hours can lead to job dissatisfaction.

*Two-thirds of marketing professionals who work 51 or more hours rate their work life as “extremely stressful.”*

When asked if their work life was extremely stressful, marketing professionals who reported working 51 or more hours in a week were twice as likely to “strongly agree” as those working 40 hours or less.

In addition, up to one third of marketers surveyed feel that they lack the resources to meet their organization’s objectives.

When looking at what drives satisfaction for marketing and creative professionals, having the resources to accomplish their goals and objectives outweighs other factors, such as work-related stress. When they think these objectives are not attainable, job satisfaction declines significantly.

Taking a proactive approach to utilizing a flexible workforce is an effective approach for meeting objectives and keeping up morale. Those who staffed up prior to the start of a project or busy time were nearly half as likely to report being dissatisfied in their jobs. However, the study results indicate that there is a strong positive impact even when resources are added once a project is underway.

### OPTIMIZING YOUR USE OF FLEXIBLE MARKETING TALENT

There are a host of sources for flexible marketing and creative talent, from building and nurturing a team of qualified independent contractors to establishing a relationship with a specialized staffing firm or boutique marketing agency. Organizations are increasingly leveraging these outside resources to assist in achieving their marketing objectives, with utilization of flexible talent highest among large, multinational marketing teams. The use of flexible talent increased dramatically among the nearly 60% of marketing leaders who work for global companies. Even within these groups, however, there were opportunities to improve the effectiveness of their flexible talent pool.

A well-designed flexible workforce strategy can not only improve the quality of output by tapping into specialized expertise, but can also have a significant positive impact on the satisfaction of the internal team. Below are some keys to ensuring your team can activate this flexible talent pool quickly and effectively.

- Determine what functions and skillsets are imperative to “own” in-house. Look to leverage outside expertise for much of the rest.
- Identify external resources that possess skills your current team lacks.
- Use your flexible talent as a training ground for future full-time staff. The copywriter you need sparingly today may be a core part of your team tomorrow.
- Maintain a pool of talent that can be brought up to speed quickly.
- Consider using external resources even when staff is in the middle of a project.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online by **Inavero** on behalf of Aquent, and included 523 responses from marketing professionals. It spans a variety of industries and organization sizes across the U.S., providing commentary from industry professionals on how their marketing, creative, and interactive teams manage their marketing, digital, and creative needs. More than half of all respondents worked for companies with a global reach, and one third reported leveraging marketing resources outside of the U.S.

The survey took place between July 19 and August 22, 2011. Respondents included marketing professionals on lists provided by Aquent as well as respondents from an independent online panel of marketing leaders. With a pure probability sample of 523, one could say with a 95% probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- 4.2% points. The sampling error for data from sub-samples is higher and varies.

## ABOUT AQUENT

**Aquent** is the only global staffing company dedicated to marketing and creative services exclusively for Fortune 1000 companies. The world's most renowned global brands come to Aquent for high-caliber freelance talent. Its division, Vitamin T, provides mid-sized and ad agency clients with faster, easier access to in-demand interactive talent. Aquent and Vitamin T have built an impressive network of more than 400,000 marketing and creative services professionals, including print and interactive designers, UX designers and developers, copywriters, content strategists, branders, managers, market researchers and more.

To learn more about Aquent, visit [aquent.com](http://aquent.com) or call 877.227.8368.

## MEDIA CONTACT

Gail Carrigan

617 535 4533

[gcarrigan@aquent.com](mailto:gcarrigan@aquent.com)