STATE OF
AGILE
MARKETING
REPORT

AgileSherpas

Agility Brings Resilience to Marketing

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This time last year, as I sat down to draft the introduction to the 3rd Annual State of Agile Marketing report, I was on a return flight from Switzerland. It was the second of what was supposed to be many, many trips spent working with clients, attending industry events, and visiting friends and family in 2020.

As I reflect on the data for this year's report, I haven't boarded a plane in 13 months. To say that 2020 didn't go as planned would be a laughable understatement.

When considering a partner for this (most unprecedented) year's study, Forrester Research represented the perfect pairing. We've been both thankful and honored to work with their team of experts this year to better understand just how marketers are getting amazing work done in a climate that's been, ahem, interesting.

But despite the myriad challenges, as I review the insights from hundreds of fellow marketers, I see positivity and resilience.

A whopping 84% of the Agile marketers we surveyed said Agile was important in navigating 2020. They continue to be optimistic about their department's or organization's ability to handle the ever-increasing pace of digital marketing work. They believe they can act quickly when new opportunities arise. And, perhaps most importantly after a year of extreme imbalance, our Agile respondents remain happy with how their team handles work. Traditional marketers are *twice as likely* as Agile ones to be dissatisfied; ad hoc marketers, who forgo planning to work on whatever seems best at the moment, are more than *six times as likely* to rate themselves as dissatisfied.

This is the real reason I'm excited to learn that, **for the first time ever, over half of participating marketers labeled themselves as being Agile**. In a profession often marked by long hours, unrealistic expectations, and unsung heroism, the growing adoption of a framework that emphasizes sustainable pace and empowered teams is a beautiful thing.

Read on to learn how marketing departments are supporting the long-term adoption of Agile through training and coaching, project management tools, and changes in the way they plan and budget. Dig through the data to see the high majorities of marketers — focused on digital, demand, ABM, social media, and more — using Agile to manage their work. Revel in the continued prevalence of a hybrid approach, as marketers accelerate the evolution of Agile frameworks.

But I hope you'll join me in becoming emboldened and appreciative when you consider the collective tribe of individual marketers around the globe who, thanks to Agile, can truly "log off" to focus less on marketing, and more on living.

Executive Summary

Agile marketing has stepped resolutely out of buzzword territory and toward a best-in-class way of working. **Total adoption jumped 10 percentage points this year to land at** **51%.**

While 65% of marketers cite the need to manage shifting priorities as a key driver for Agile transformation, **44%** **continue to struggle with unplanned work after implementing it.**

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated adoption plans for 38% of our respondents. **84%** **of those already using Agile found it important or very important in handling the volatility of 2020.**

Compared to their Ad Hoc and Traditional counterparts, Agile marketers are far more optimistic about the team's ability to handle the pace of digital marketing, respond to emerging opportunities, and stay aligned with business objectives.

Agile ways of working are most prevalent in the following marketing functions:

76%
demand and ABM

72%
website

77%
creative services, content creation, and operations

66%
social media

62%
portfolio and product marketing

Agile marketers continue to favor the use of hybrid frameworks **rather than strict adherence to Scrum or Kanban**, and they most often use daily standup and sprint planning to manage their work.

Which of the following most accurately describes your marketing department's work management process?

- ▶ Agile adoption continues to accelerate. This year's report shows another jump of ten percentage points, the same increase we saw from 2019 to 2020.

- ▶ B2B marketing teams are the leaders in Agile adoption in 2021, with just over half (52%) reporting use of Agile ways of working. Only 12% of B2C teams, on the other hand, say they're Agile. A slightly higher number of teams that represent a blend of B2B and B2C are using Agile at 20%.

51% Agile
We use at least some parts of an Agile marketing approach to manage our work, such as daily standups, a backlog, Sprints, kanban board, etc. We have plans, but they're flexible and change often.

36% Traditional
We plan our work in advance using a lot of detail and try to stick as closely as possible to that plan.

13% Ad hoc
We don't make long-term plans. We work on what seems right from day to day and don't have a well-defined process for managing incoming work.

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

Within what specific activities in marketing is Agile being used? (Top 10)

Activity	Percentage
Creative services, content creation, and operations	77%
Demand and ABM	76%
Website	72%
Social media	66%
Portfolio and product marketing	62%
Channel marketing	56%
Advertising	54%
Customer engagement	54%
Events	52%
Brand management	44%
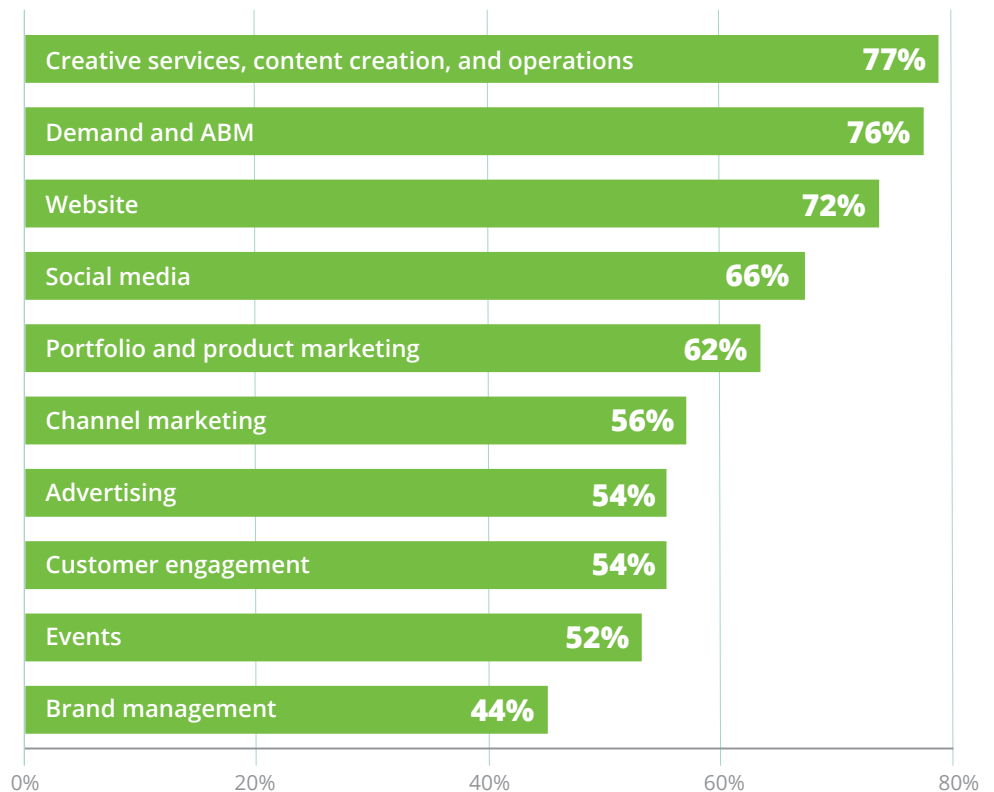
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Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How important is Agile to your company?

Response	Percentage
Agile is one of the most important initiatives across the company	21%
Agile is major initiative across the company, but not the most important	26%
Agile is a priority within one or more functional areas (e.g., IT, product development, marketing)	42%
Agile is not a priority	8%
I don't know	3%
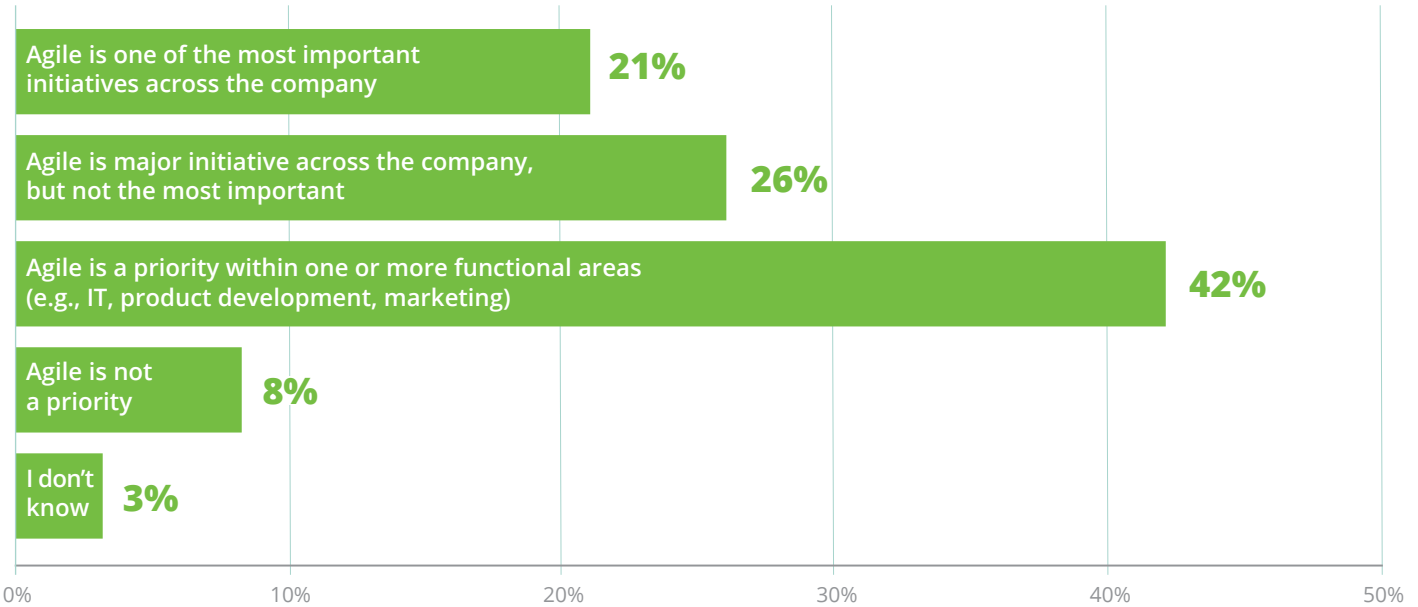
Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

Which other functions in your organization are using an Agile methodology?

Function	Percentage
Product development / management	53%
IT	44%
Sales	18%
I don't know	13%
Finance	10%
Human resources	10%
No other department	10%
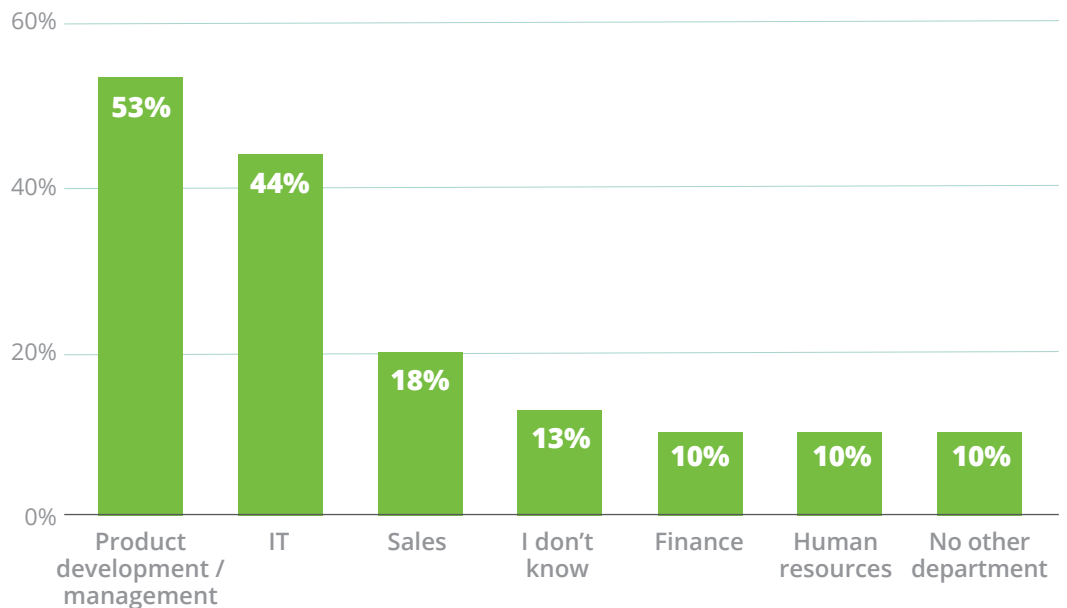
▶ Marketing, with its role as the conduit between the customer and the business, is an ideal Agile entry point. With 10% of Agile marketers indicating that no other departments are Agile yet, we can expect to see more business agility transformations that begin here.

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

Does your marketing department plan to implement Agile marketing?

47% Yes

17% No

35% I don't know
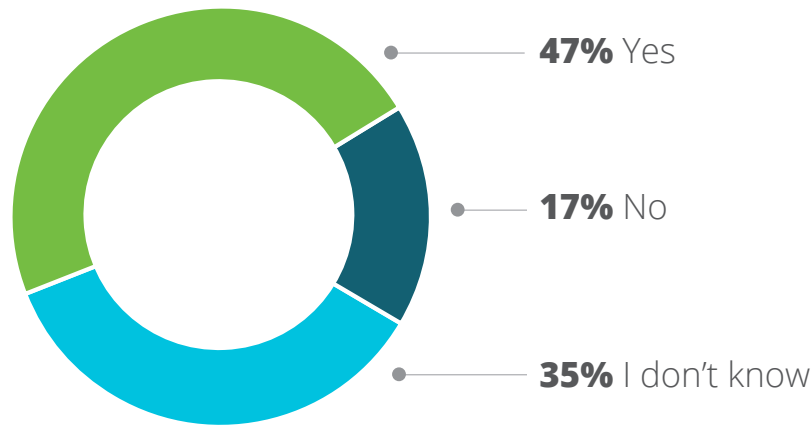
n=282   *Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester*

When does your marketing department plan to implement Agile marketing?

59% — Within the next 6 months

34% — Within the next year

5% — 2 to 4 years from now
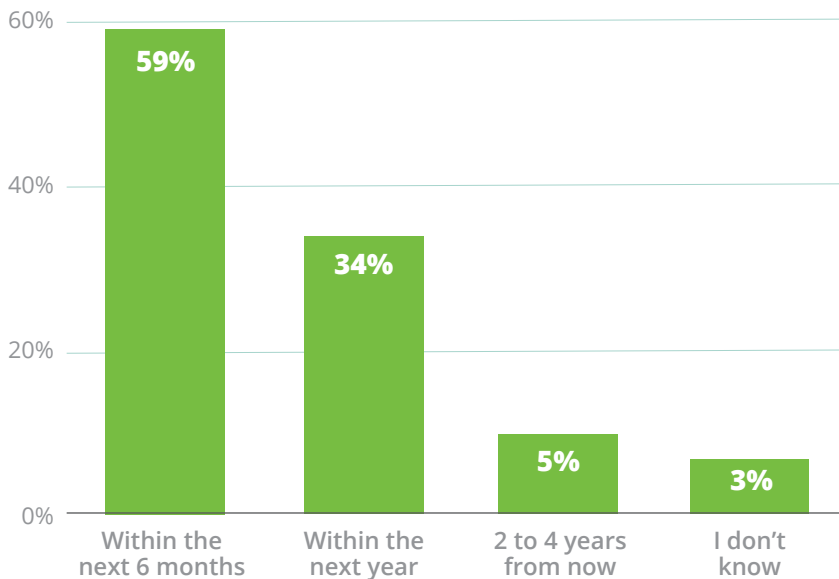
3% — I don't know

> ▶ You have to "love" how many marketers don't know if Agile is in the cards at their organization. We suspect many of them will encounter a transformation they weren't expecting in the very near future, as 93% of respondents who are planning to implement Agile would like to do so within the coming year.

n=298   *Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester*

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your plans for Agile marketing adoption?

17% It has greatly accelerated our plans

21% It has slightly accelerated our plans

14% It has slightly delayed our plans

3% It has greatly delayed our plans

45% No impact
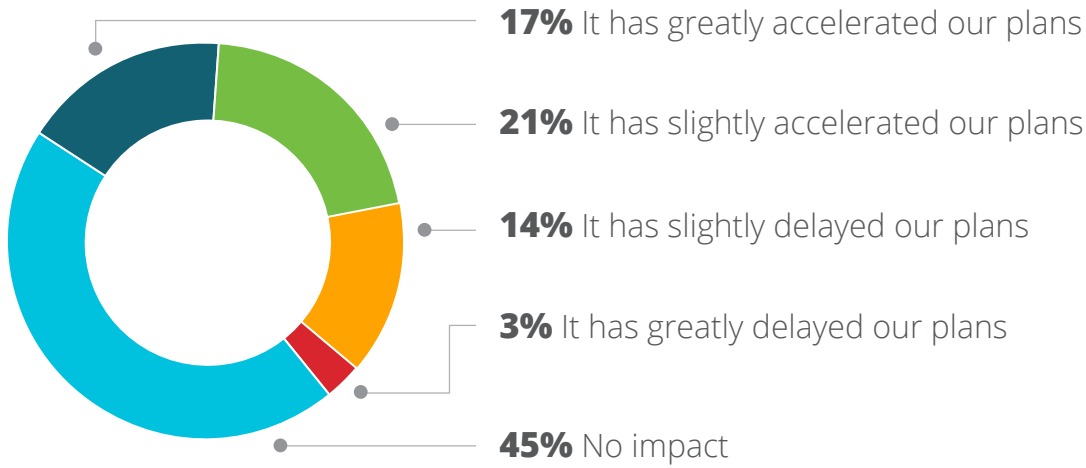
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Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

This data reflects what we've witnessed firsthand with clients at AgileSherpas. Many marketers who've long been eyeing agility have jumped on the unprecedented volatility of 2020 as their catalyst for change. The 17% who report delaying adoption due to COVID-19 are, unfortunately, likely to fall even further behind as their colleagues accelerate their use of Agile in the immediate future.

What were the most important reasons for adopting Agile within your marketing department?
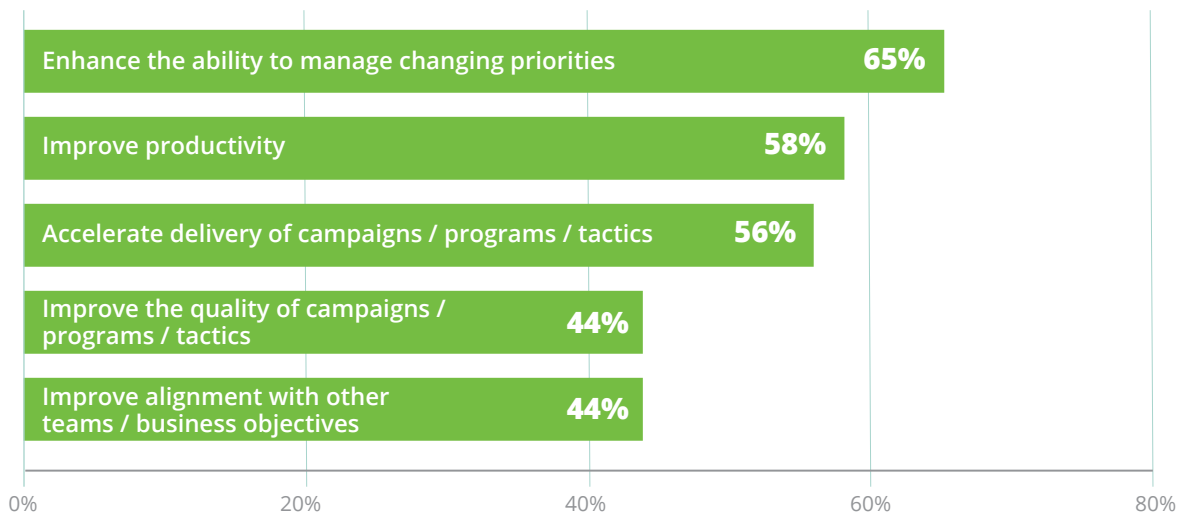
Enhance the ability to manage changing priorities **65%**

Improve productivity **58%**

Accelerate delivery of campaigns / programs / tactics **56%**

Improve the quality of campaigns / programs / tactics **44%**

Improve alignment with other teams / business objectives **44%**

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

AgileSherpas.com

Which of the following have been the most valuable during your adoption of Agile marketing?

> As remote work exploded in 2020, marketers were far more likely to cite the importance of project management tools this year (55% in 2020, compared to 39% in 2019). Of course, using a tool, no matter how awesome, doesn't make you instantly Agile. True adoption comes from changing mindsets and practices as well as using the right tools.

Category	Percentage
Implementing an Agile project management tool	55%
Consistent practices and processes across teams	43%
Executive sponsorship	32%
Online and/or in-person training	30%
External Agile coaches or trainers	23%
Articles or books about Agile marketing	20%
Conferences & webinars	13%
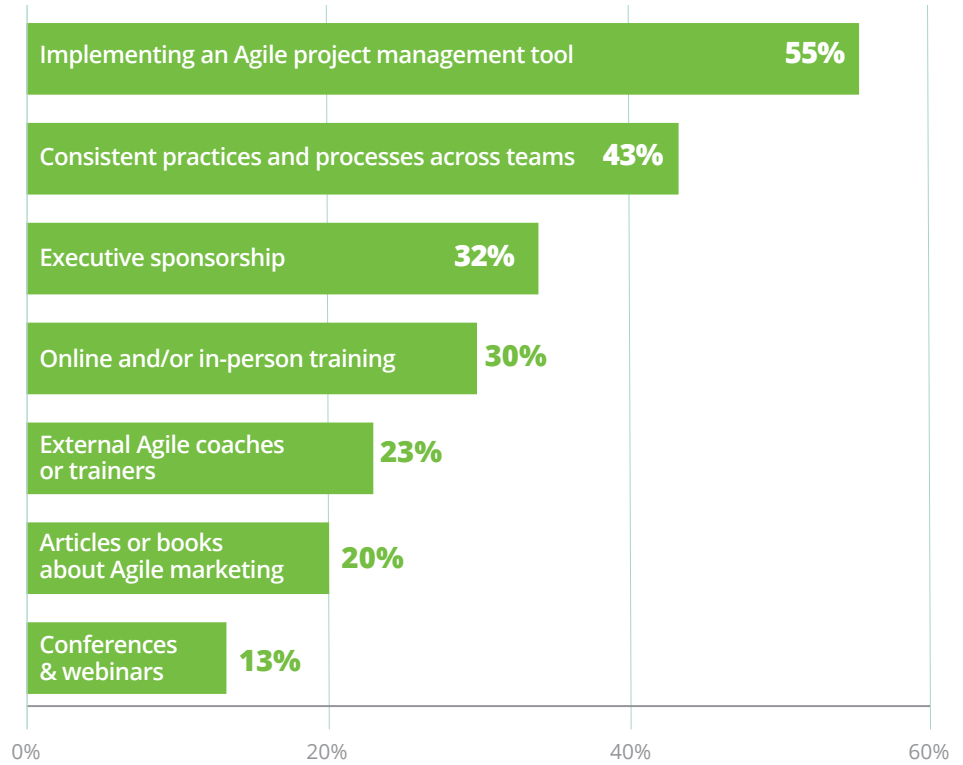
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Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

What educational steps are being taken in your organization to support the rollout of Agile marketing?

Category	Percentage
Agile marketing-specific courses (in person or online)	43%
"Train the trainer" programs for internal Agile leaders and coaches	40%
Other Agile courses (e.g., certified scrum master or product owner)	23%
Long-term coaching for Agile teams	21%
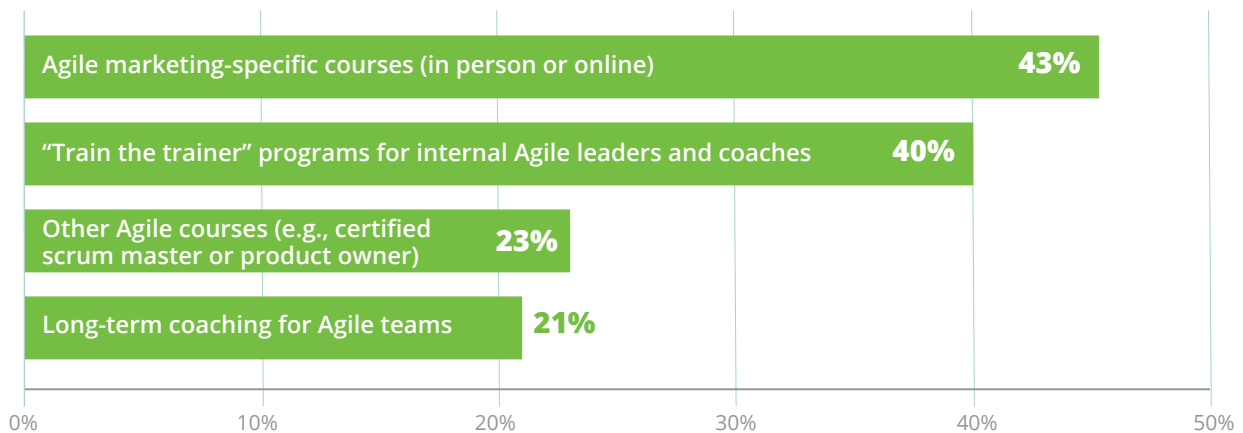
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Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How important have your Agile ways of working been in responding to the uncertain, volatile climate of 2020?

44% Extremely important

40% Somewhat important

9% Minimally important

6% Neutral / no difference

1% Not important at all
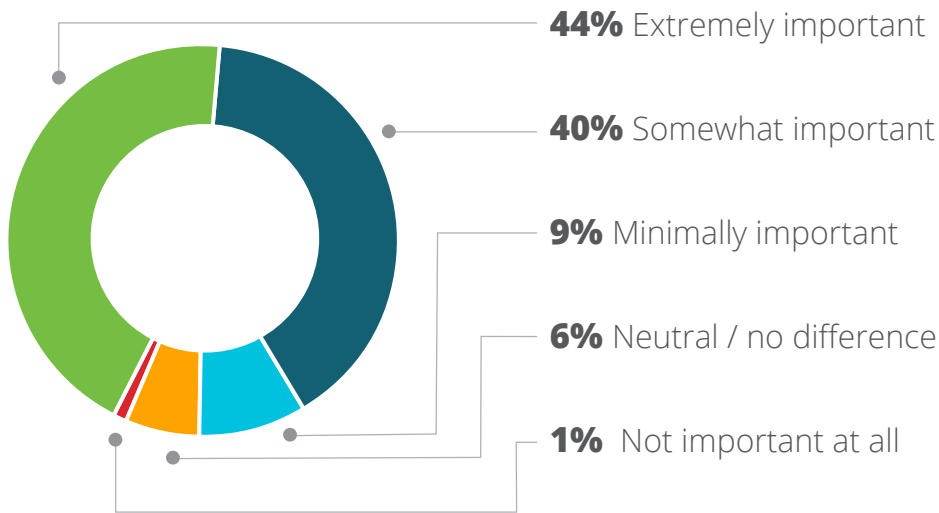
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Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How satisfied are you with the way your marketing department currently manages its work?

■ Very satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Neutral ■ Dissatisfied ■ Very dissatisfied

> Agile marketers are the most likely to label themselves as satisfied with their work at 67%. Traditional marketers are almost as satisfied: 63% of them say their ways of working are satisfactory. Our poor Ad hoc marketers, however, report satisfaction one third as often as Agile marketers at just 21%.
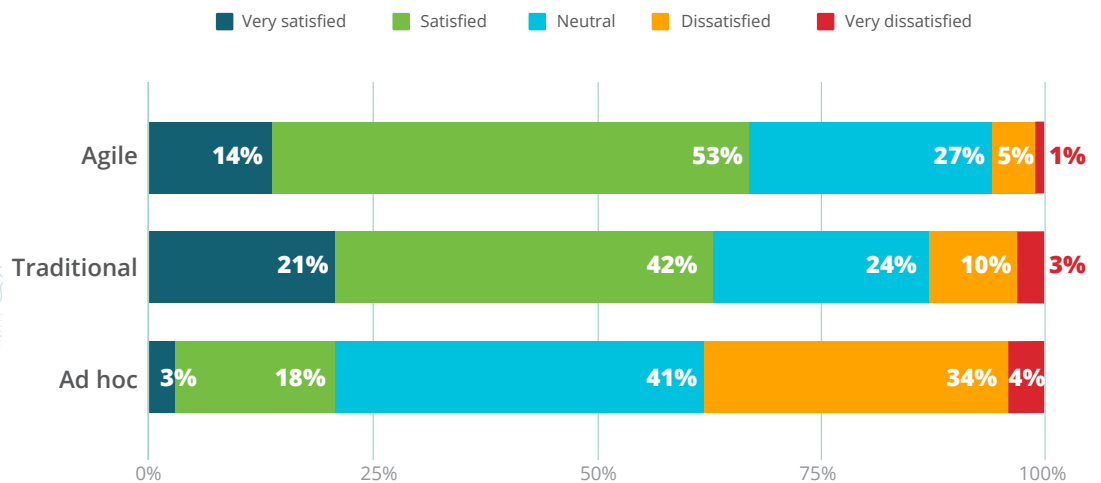
Agile: 14% | 53% | 27% | 5% | 1%

Traditional: 21% | 42% | 24% | 10% | 3%

Ad hoc: 3% | 18% | 41% | 34% | 4%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How do marketers feel about their work?
I have a clear plan for what I need to get done each day

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	35%	53%	7%	4%	1%
Traditional	37%	47%	9%	5%	2%
Ad hoc	19%	53%	10%	15%	3%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How do marketers feel about their work?
Too much of my team is spent communicating with others about marketing projects.

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	15%	38%	24%	17%	6%
Traditional	23%	36%	20%	15%	6%
Ad hoc	15%	47%	14%	22%	3%

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

AgileSherpas.com

How do marketers feel about their work?
Our work style causes team friction.

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	8%	22%	20%	30%	20%
Traditional	16%	21%	25%	21%	18%
Ad hoc	11%	34%	23%	15%	16%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
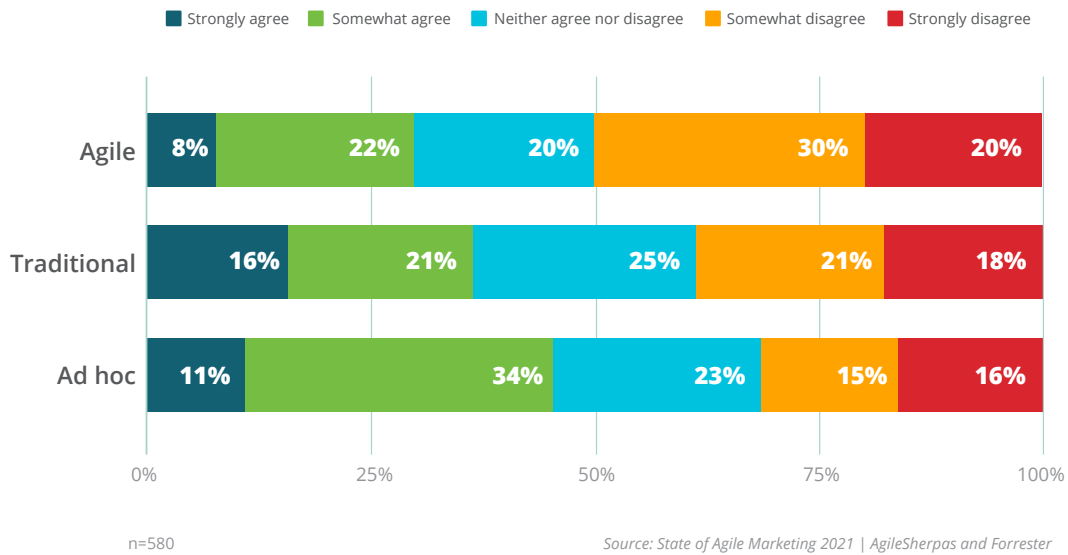
How do marketers feel about their work?
My marketing department can handle fast-paced digital marketing work.

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	35%	41%	12%	10%	2%
Traditional	20%	43%	16%	14%	7%
Ad hoc	15%	21%	16%	40%	8%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
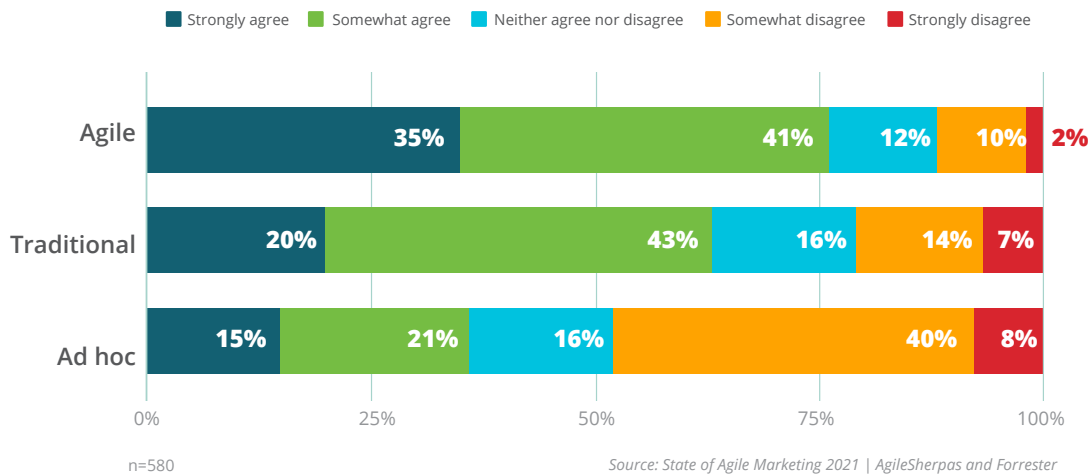
How do marketers feel about their work?
Our marketing department's strategy is aligned with our organization's vision.

■ Strongly agree　■ Somewhat agree　■ Neither agree nor disagree　■ Somewhat disagree　■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	52%	35%	8%	4%	
Traditional	44%	35%	11%	7%	2%
Ad hoc	15%	45%	16%	21%	3%

0%　25%　50%　75%　100%

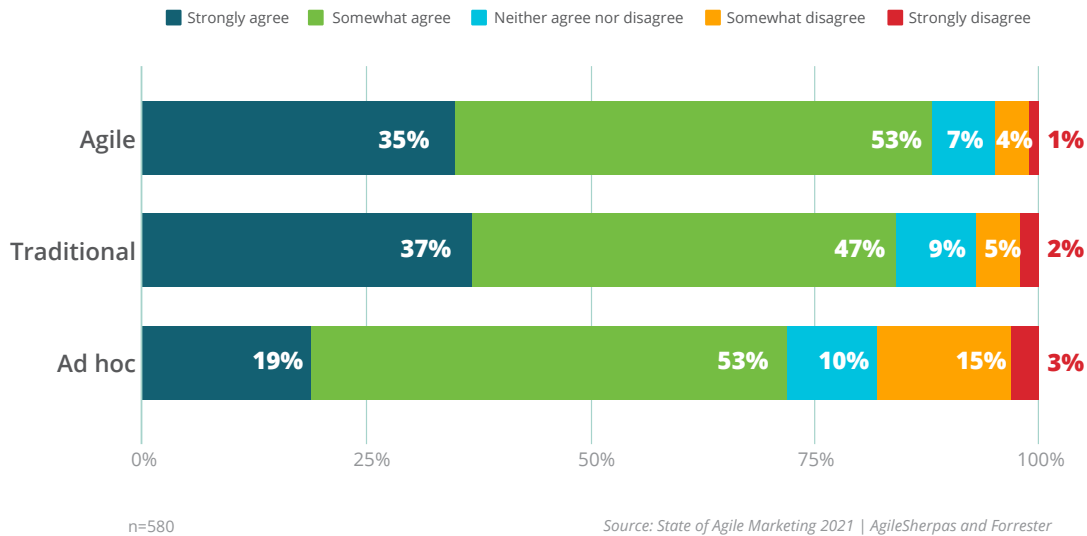n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
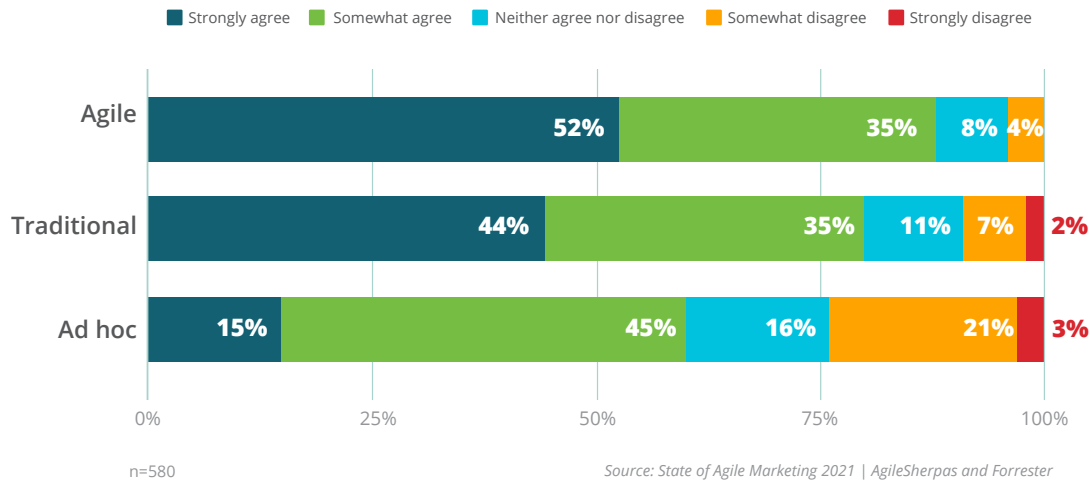
How do marketers feel about their work?
I am confident our marketing department can take advantage of emerging opportunities.

■ Strongly agree　■ Somewhat agree　■ Neither agree nor disagree　■ Somewhat disagree　■ Strongly disagree

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Agile	38%	44%	12%	6%	1%
Traditional	35%	37%	14%	9%	4%
Ad hoc	12%	32%	21%	30%	5%

0%　25%　50%　75%　100%

n=580

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
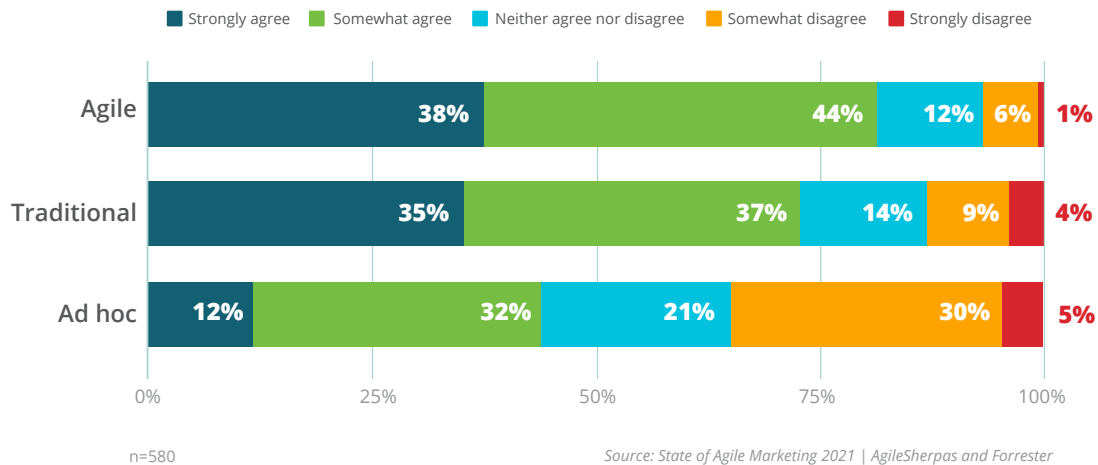
What are the biggest barriers preventing your marketing department from fully implementing an Agile approach?

Barrier	Percentage
Lack of training or knowledge about Agile approaches	43%
Our current process is working well enough	29%
We lack the right talent to transform the team to Agile	29%
Lack of support from management or executives	4%
We don't have the right tools to support an Agile approach	23%
We don't have time to try something new	21%

n=282

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

What challenges, if any, have been experienced as a result of using Agile? (Top 5)

> That pesky "unplanned work" is the biggest fly in our Agile ointment. Coming in at a close second are non-Agile teams. The reality is that unplanned work isn't going away, and marketers need to create (hybrid) frameworks designed to deal with this unavoidable challenge.

Challenge	Percentage
Difficulties managing unplanned work	44%
People reverting to old (non-agile) approaches	36%
Challenges with agile teams interacting with non-agile teams	31%
Plans changing too often	28%
Difficulties in estimating team capacity and velocity	27%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
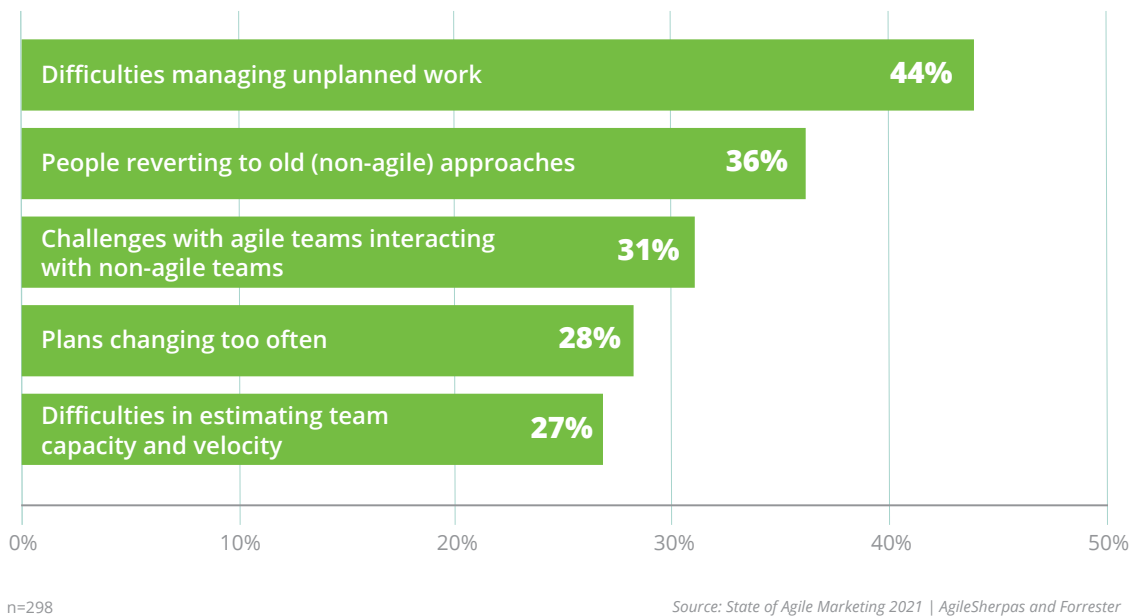
What are the benefits to your marketing department of using Agile? (Top 5)

Benefit	%
Ability to change direction quickly and effectively based on feedback	38%
More effective prioritization of work	36%
Better alignment on business objectives	30%
Better visibility into project status	26%
Optimize use of resources	24%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
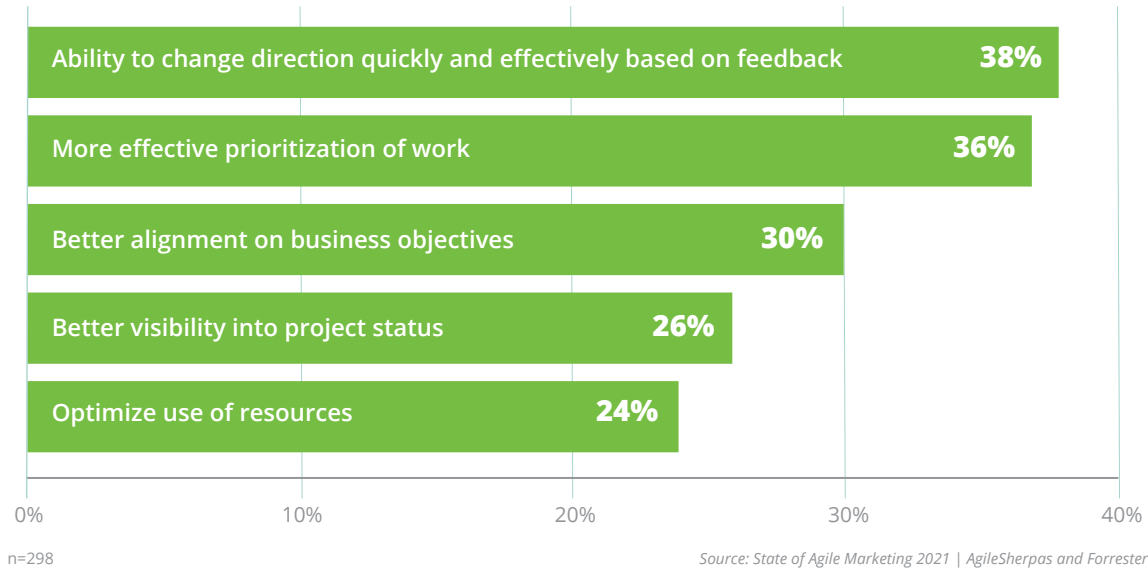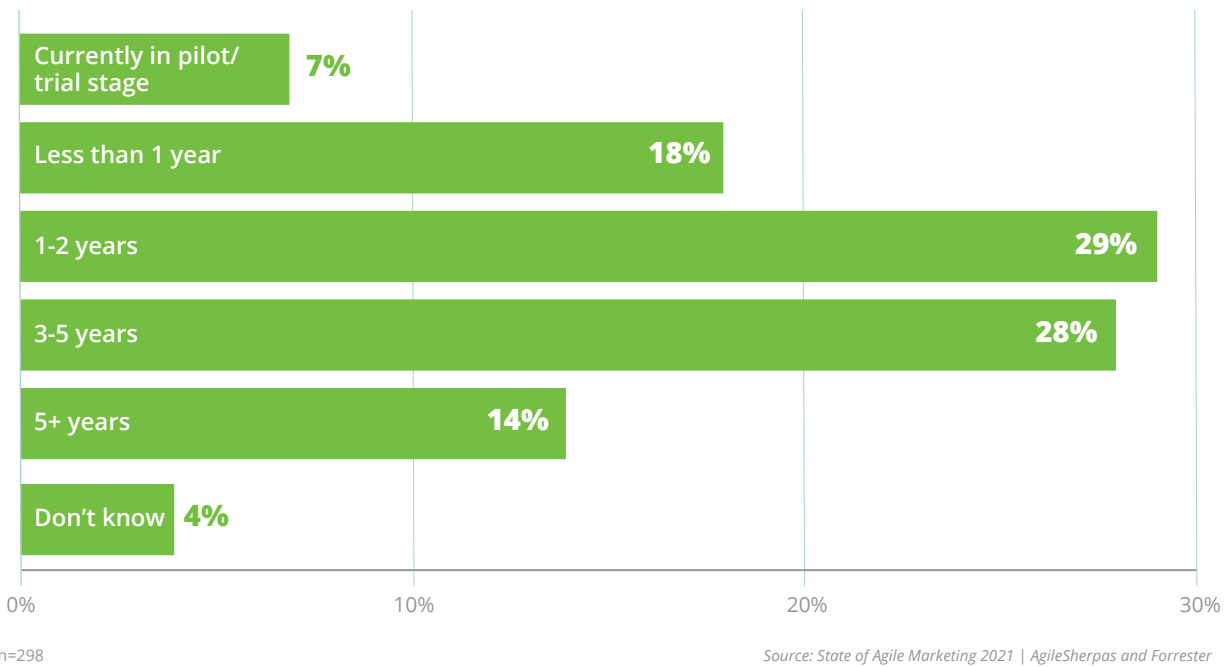
How are you measuring the results of adopting Agile marketing?

▶ This is our first year investigating Agile marketing measurement, and it's exciting to see most marketers looking at both efficiency and effectiveness. We should be changing our ways of working to do more work that makes a bigger impact, so looking at both sides of the coin is crucial for continuous improvement.

Measure	%
Effectiveness (e.g., increased engagement, greater pipeline/revenue contribution, etc.)	53%
Efficiency (e.g., faster cycle time, greater output per cycle, etc.)	50%
Management value (e.g., ability to meet goals, data-driven decision making, etc.)	44%
Team value (e.g., knowledge and application of Agile concepts, improved capacity, etc.)	36%
Stakeholder value (e.g., increased customer satisfaction, increased resource utilization, etc.)	29%
We do not measure Agile marketing results	14%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How long has your marketing department been practicing agile?

Currently in pilot/trial stage — **7%**

Less than 1 year — **18%**

1-2 years — **29%**

3-5 years — **28%**

5+ years — **14%**

Don't know — **4%**

0%   10%   20%   30%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester
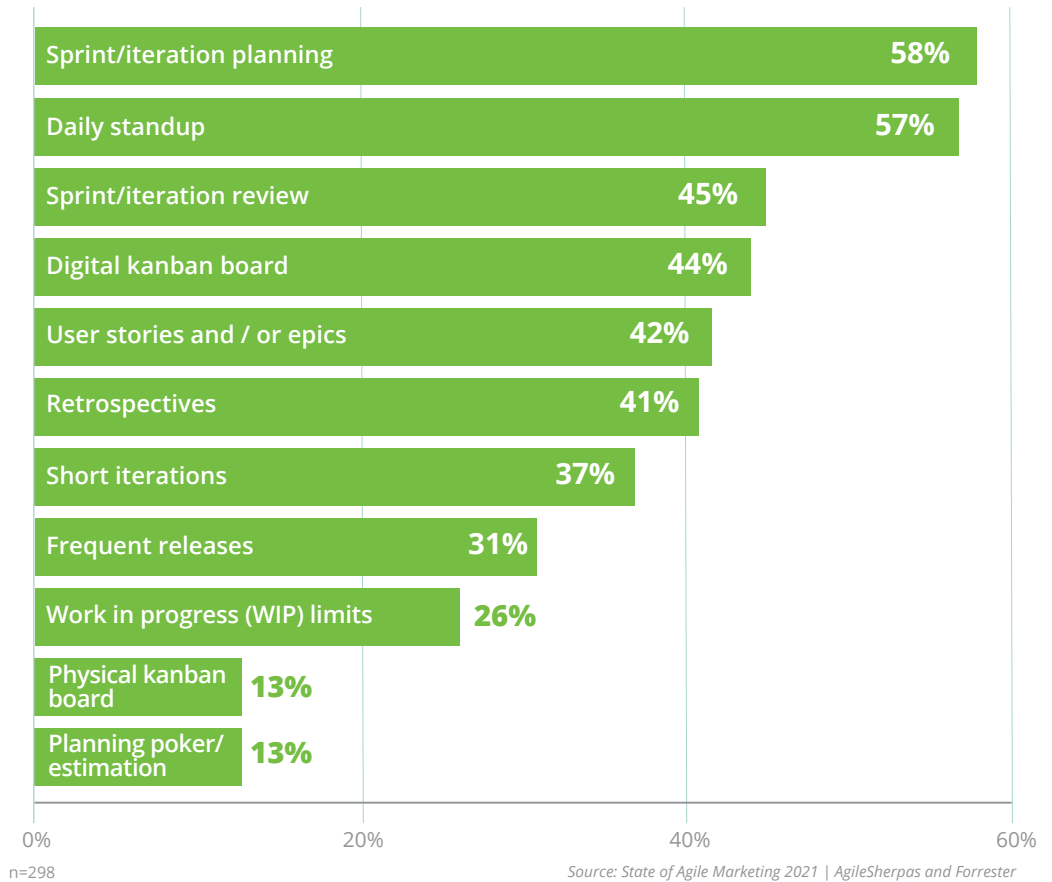
Which Agile methodology does your marketing department follow most closely?
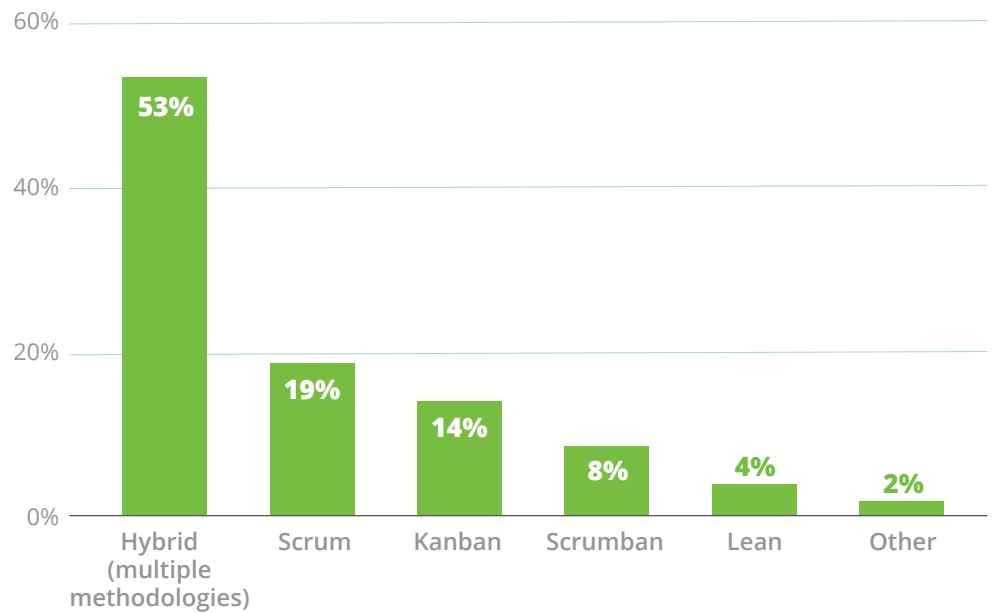
▶ Hybrid frameworks continue to be the preference of marketers, with an increase of 6 percentage points this year. Kanban and Scrum, however, both saw jumps in adoption as well, with 13% fewer marketers identifying as Lean practitioners.

60%

40%

20%

0%

Hybrid (multiple methodologies)	Scrum	Kanban	Scrumban	Lean	Other
53%	19%	14%	8%	4%	2%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

Which Agile techniques and practices does your marketing department use?

Technique	Percentage
Sprint/iteration planning	58%
Daily standup	57%
Sprint/iteration review	45%
Digital kanban board	44%
User stories and / or epics	42%
Retrospectives	41%
Short iterations	37%
Frequent releases	31%
Work in progress (WIP) limits	26%
Physical kanban board	13%
Planning poker/ estimation	13%

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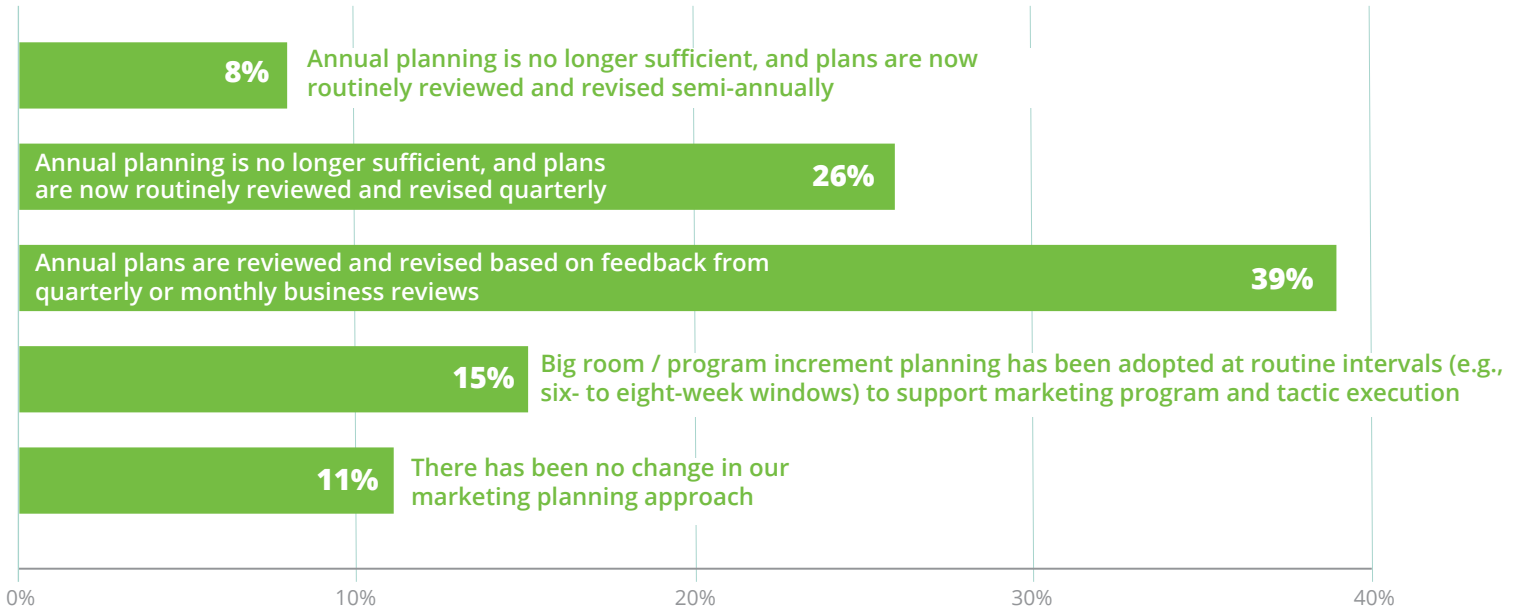Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

What changes has your marketing organization put in place to sustain the adoption of Agile?

> Agile marketing transformation isn't easy, so for the first time we asked marketers what they're doing to make sure their changes stick. There's no clear winner on this list, which seems to indicate that marketers are, happily, looking to shore up their Agile ways of working with multiple supplemental process improvements.

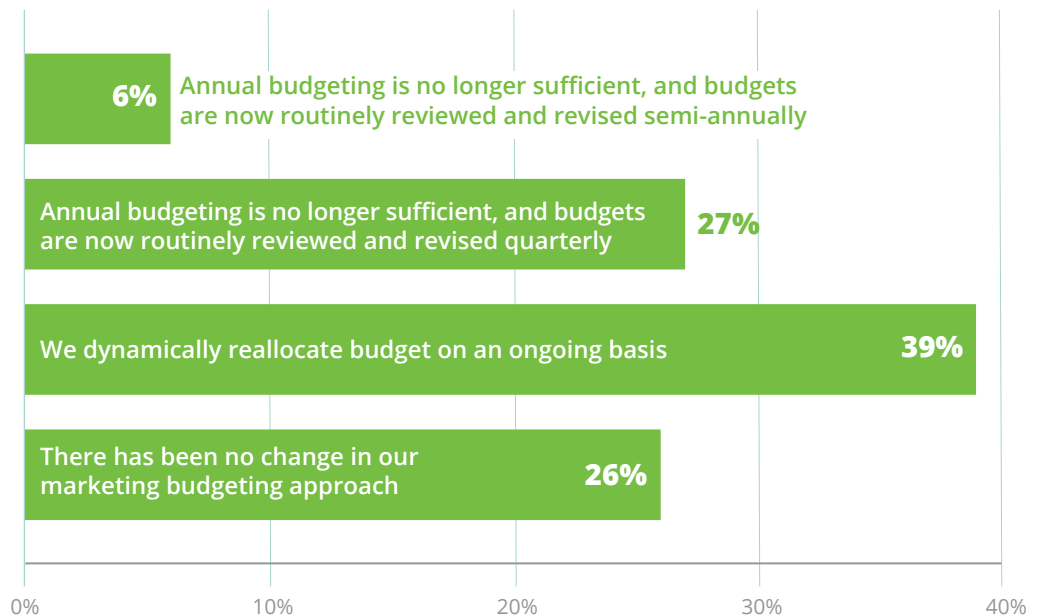| Change	Percentage
Implemented standardized project management tools	37%
Experimented with marketing planning cycles	37%
Established training and coaching for agile team managers	26%
Provided ongoing resources for agile marketing training and coaching	22%
Established training and coaching for agile team special roles (e.g., scrum master, product owner)	21%
Established a centralized project/program management office (PMO)	20%
Created agile onboarding for new hires	18%
Established standardized measurement of Agile results	17%
Established agile coaching for executive leadership	16%
No changes have been made to sustain Agile adoption	15%

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How has the adoption of Agile marketing changed marketing planning?

8% Annual planning is no longer sufficient, and plans are now routinely reviewed and revised semi-annually

Annual planning is no longer sufficient, and plans are now routinely reviewed and revised quarterly **26%**

Annual plans are reviewed and revised based on feedback from quarterly or monthly business reviews **39%**

15% Big room / program increment planning has been adopted at routine intervals (e.g., six- to eight-week windows) to support marketing program and tactic execution

11% There has been no change in our marketing planning approach

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% |

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

How has the adoption of Agile marketing changed marketing budgeting?

> The increased pace of agility is impacting not only daily execution, but also planning and budgeting cycles. Agile marketing organizations are setting aside traditional annual budgets and plans for more dynamic systems.

6% Annual budgeting is no longer sufficient, and budgets are now routinely reviewed and revised semi-annually

Annual budgeting is no longer sufficient, and budgets are now routinely reviewed and revised quarterly **27%**

We dynamically reallocate budget on an ongoing basis **39%**

There has been no change in our marketing budgeting approach **26%**

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% |

n=298

Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

If you're considering getting started with Agile marketing:

- **Don't pigeon-hole your pilot.** Agility isn't just for website development, as you can see from the high percentages of marketers reporting that they use it in creative work, product and portfolio marketing, and channel marketing (just to name a few). There are many options for how and where to apply marketing agility, so get creative in finding one that best fits your needs.

- **Remember that Agile isn't your *why*.** While Agile marketing nerds may get excited about Kanban boards for their own sakes, we need to take a step back and focus on what's in it for our stakeholders. Review the benefits you see in this report and compare them to your own pain points. How can agility help make your work better? Identify that shortcoming first, then position Agile as the solution.

- **Budget for the right support.** Successful change requires investment in tools, training, and talent. Figure out what knowledge your teams are missing (which has been the top challenge every year we've published this report, then determine how best to get it to them. That might be certification workshops, hands-on coaching, or self-paced learning. Ensure their tools are supportive of agility and not hindering it (but don't simply rely on a tool to make you Agile!). And make sure you have the right Agile champions standing by. Somebody needs to own a transformation for it to really take hold.

Believe in Agile but need some help getting started? Our 90-Day Jumpstart program will help you identify a project and team to pilot Agile marketing, provide the necessary training and coaching, measure its impact, and make a data-driven case for larger adoption.

If you're new to Agile ways of working:

- **Embrace the 70/20/10 learning model.** This theory points out that only 10% of our knowledge retention happens during structured learning time. Twenty percent takes place when we learn from others, and the remaining 70% happens when we're learning from experience. So while you'll see in the data above that training is key, you need to support ongoing practice outside of structured trainings to make things stick.

- **Plan for the unplanned.** Marketers won't ever be able to predict everything that's coming their way, which is why we see impromptu work showing up as a big challenge. Proactively plan for how to handle the unplanned work by teaching your partners and stakeholders how to engage with your Agile model. Focus on what's in it for them, rather than insist they blindly follow your new ways of working.

- **Hold retros religiously and apply what you learn.** Put retrospectives on your calendar and do not skip them. Talk about what's not working, then create cards in your backlog to address the issues. Hybridize your framework if you haven't already (strict Scrum and marketing just don't mix, as our respondents always tell us). And, last but not least, don't fall in love with any part of your process. Be willing to experiment on anything.

Want to equip yourself or your team for the most effective climb possible? Getting certified as an Agile Marketing Professional gives you a robust toolkit for identifying the right starting point and iterating from there.
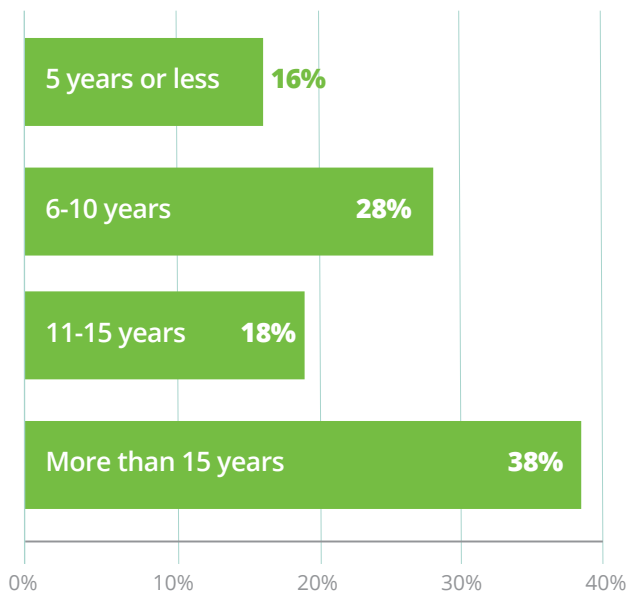
If you're an established agilist ready for the next summit:

- **Measure and iterate everywhere.** As you see in the report, it's ideal to track both effectiveness and efficiency. Don't just do *more* work; ensure you're doing more of the *right* work. You can also look at how much of your work is aligned to key goals or OKRs, and strive for the highest possible percentage.

- **Expand agility's influence outside of daily practices.** Go beyond standups and kanban boards, and begin introducing agility to planning and budgeting cycles. This creates greater flexibility and adaptability at the project and initiative levels, allowing Agile marketing to have a bigger impact across the marketing function.

- **Evangelize business agility to help deal with non-Agile teams.** Many marketing teams get frustrated when their internal partners aren't as Agile as they are. Help those partners along and make everyone's lives easier. Agility works for everyone; encourage them to get educated and adopt the pieces of Agile that work for them, just like marketers have done.
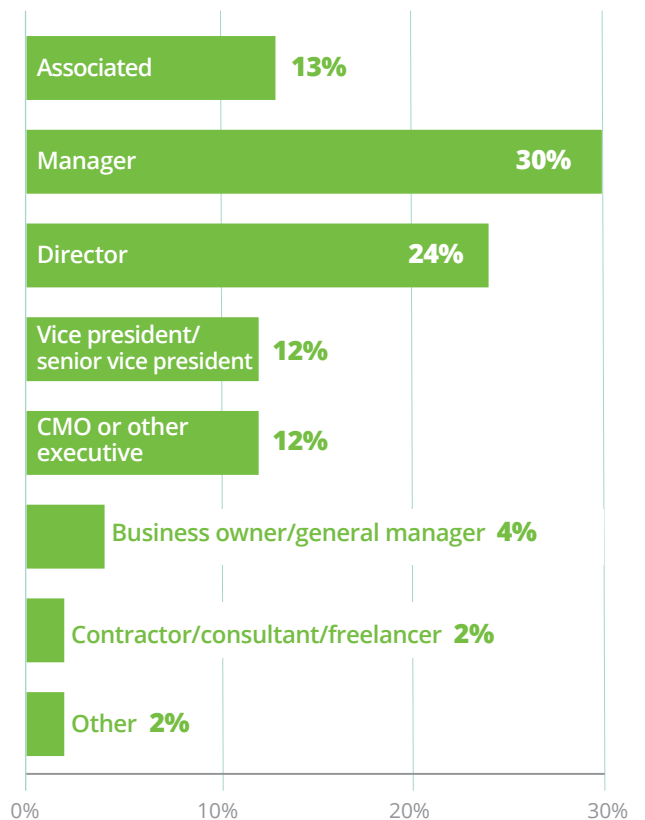
Hit an iteration plateau and can't figure out how to resume your climb? AgileSherpas coaches can observe your teams and provide specific optimization recommendations. Book time with a Sherpa to learn more.

The 4th Annual State of Agile Marketing survey was conducted from December 2020 to February 2021. It was produced by AgileSherpas in partnership with Forrester Research and Mantis Research. We collected responses from 580 marketers and business owners via online survey. The majority of respondents (79%) were based in North America. Responses from non-marketers were excluded from these published results. Respondents represent a wide range of organizations and were drawn primarily from senior marketing professionals, as outlined in the demographic data below.
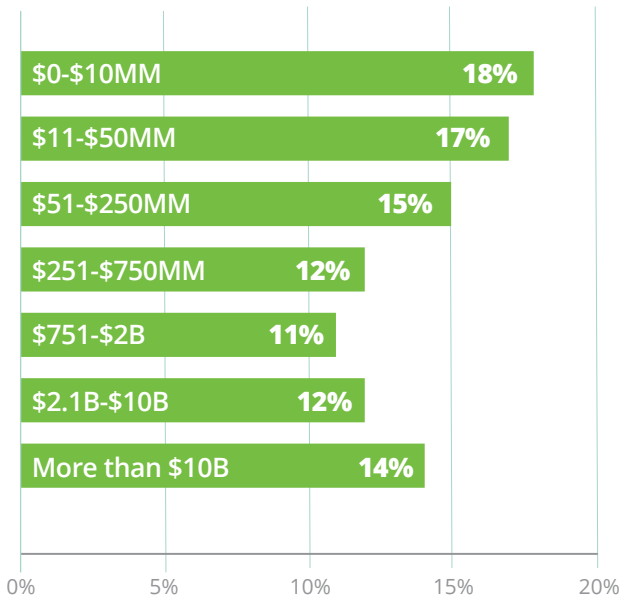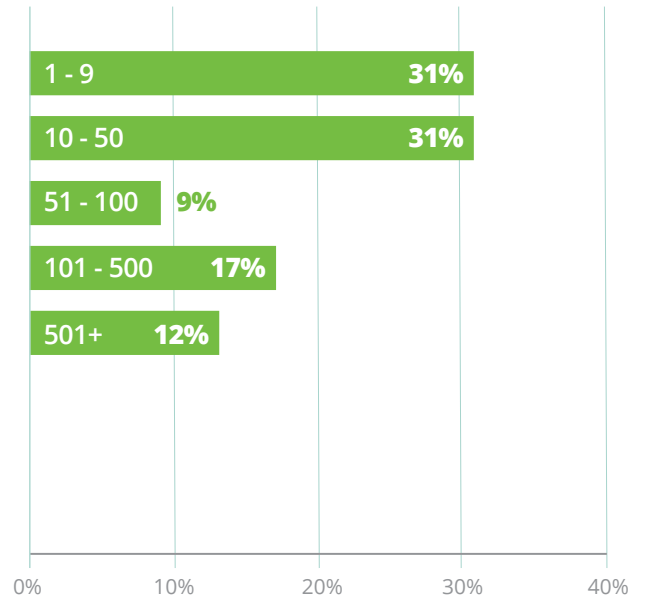
How many years have you worked in marketing?*

Years	Percentage
5 years or less	16%
6-10 years	28%
11-15 years	18%
More than 15 years	38%

Current Position*

Position	Percentage
Associated	13%
Manager	30%
Director	24%
Vice president/senior vice president	12%
CMO or other executive	12%
Business owner/general manager	4%
Contractor/consultant/freelancer	2%
Other	2%

*N=580, Source: State of Agile Marketing 2021 | AgileSherpas and Forrester

Company Revenue*
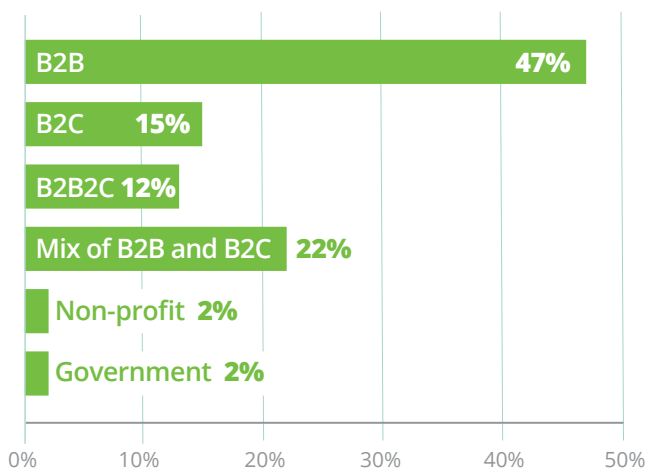
$0-$10MM	**18%**
$11-$50MM	**17%**
$51-$250MM	**15%**
$251-$750MM	**12%**
$751-$2B	**11%**
$2.1B-$10B	**12%**
More than $10B	**14%**

0%　5%　10%　15%　20%

Size of Marketing Team*

1 - 9	**31%**
10 - 50	**31%**
51 - 100	**9%**
101 - 500	**17%**
501+	**12%**

0%　10%　20%　30%　40%

Type of Organization*

B2B	**47%**
B2C	**15%**
B2B2C	**12%**
Mix of B2B and B2C	**22%**
Non-profit	**2%**
Government	**2%**

0%　10%　20%　30%　40%　50%

Industry*

Information technology	**33%**
Financial services	**18%**
Business services	**16%**
Healthcare & life sciences	**13%**
Consumer and retail	**5%**
Manufacturing	**5%**
Other	**9%**

0%　10%　20%　30%　40%
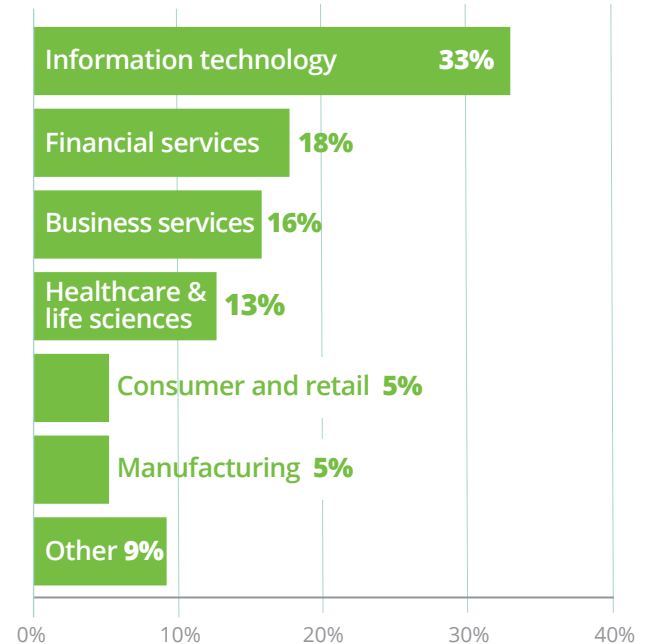
About AgileSherpas

AgileSherpas is the world's leading Agile marketing training, consulting, and coaching organization. We guide marketing departments toward high performance by translating successful Agile practices to work inside the marketing profession.

Our highly-trained coaches take enterprise marketing organizations from zero to Agile in less than 18 months using the Marketing Agility Ascension©, our proprietary transformation model proven with over three thousand marketers at dozens of enterprises.

This journey blends AgileSherpas' coaching and consulting expertise with world-class certifications from the International Consortium for Agile (ICAgile), so every member of the transforming organization receives opportunities for professional development while discovering more effective ways of working together.

Visit AgileSherpas.com to start your own ascent toward marketing agility.

AgileSherpas would like to thank the team at Forrester Research for their amazing partnership on the 4th Annual State of Agile Marketing report. Particular shoutouts to Marcia Trask, Principal Analyst, Marketing Operations Strategies, and Jessica Smith, Director, Primary Research. We're deeply grateful for your help on our quest to continuously improve this report, and the opportunity to work together to evolve the way that marketers work.