Today's Marketplace Moves Fast – Is your Marketing Agile?

Last quarter your sales team hit quota and everything was hunky dory … **for about a day**. Then Q2 started and you were back to square one in terms of leads and sales … in some companies, that sales and marketing cycle happens monthly or even weekly. In the meantime, your competition launched a new product, there's been a regulatory change and your CEO decided to acquire a new product line via M&A. How on earth can today's modern marketer keep up?

One Word: Agile

Don't you mean agility? Not quite. Agility is one major benefit of implementing an 'Agile Methodology' to your marketing. Other benefits include focus, transparency, prioritization and predictability.

What is Agile?

'Agile' describes a certain type of planning and execution. The concept of [scrum as part of agile development](#) stems from the software development world where there was a need to move away from the 'waterfall method', a process known for long planning and coding before any new release, often resulting in stale or late-to-market products. Instead of building a huge, full-featured offer, agile relies on the completion of small chunks of 'shippable code' that can be defined, built, tested and shipped in the time span of a single sprint – usually 15-30 days.

Here's the beauty. **Agile doesn't have to be limited to development teams** – in fact, we've been using agile & sprint planning to execute our marketing plans here at HubSpot for a year and a half. Anyone can apply the concepts to their projects or work to improve effectiveness and increase your ability to 'turn on a dime'.

Here are a few definitions you'll want to know to understand the core idea:

- Sprint – defined period of time in which a team commits to complete certain work output
- Task / User Story – tightly defined chunk of work with specific outcomes
- Story Points –estimated level of effort a chunk of work will take
- Standup – daily standing (literally) meeting where team members share what they worked on yesterday, their plans for today and any 'blocking' items hindering their work progress
- Sprint Commitment - public meeting where teams commit to their stories for the coming sprint
- Sprint Review – public meeting where teams review accomplishments and lessons from the last sprint

Wait. I have a 2011 Marketing Plan to Hit!?

Fine. But really, how do you eat an elephant?

One bite at a time.

True, marketing departments are often measured on annual goals with some quarterly targets based on big initiatives that usually have 'fuzzy' definitions. That can make it super hard to be a marketer. How do you prove the return on marketing effort? How can you adapt to fast-changing market conditions when you already pre-paid a 6-month campaign? How can you respond to immediate sales needs without dropping other balls?

Our marketing team operates in monthly sprints where each sub-team drafts stories, estimates points and collaborates to prioritize and commit to a month of stories. That doesn't mean we don't have a 2011 plan. We do. But, we know that working on smaller monthly goals, be it a total leads number or a unique content piece, is much more manageable than chasing after a 12-month goal. In fact, by breaking down our big hairy 12-month goals, we are able to focus and deliver on the things that matter.

Why do I think agile in marketing is the way of the future?

Marketing is always being asked to do more with less. That's not going to change anytime soon – but using a process like agile drives a few amazing things for you:

1) Focus – when you create a user story and success metric you've given yourself a 'check & balance' system. If the success metric doesn't move the needle, then you might rethink doing that story. If it drops, does the business suffer?   If not, stop doing it.

2) Transparency –a lot of companies see marketing as magic. It's not. There are key activities that drive success - measuring them helps you figure out what they are. At HubSpot, we publish our plans to the company –getting feedback and buy-in along the way. We get more credibility, help and engagement in the process.

3) Predictability – using a points system and sharing status & blockers during daily standups status means there are rarely big surprises. If a team member has an issue, we typically know inside 24-48 hours – and as a team, we can decide if another member can chip in or if we need to influence another team to help remove the blocker. In almost all cases, you don't get to the end of the month and find that 'stuff didn't get done'. The personal ownership and team accountability that scrum and daily standup foster can't be replicated by a boss telling a team what to do – that's **hugely important** in today's flatter and faster organizations.

4) Prioritization – no one is good at saying no. We are humans, it's hard. But, we all know that the more you add, the lower the quality or likelihood that stuff gets done. Agile gives you a bit of a leg up here – you've got a list of what you are working on. It's public. Sure, you might take on a small favor here or there – but if someone asks for a big shift – it's a much easier conversation. Anyone on the team can say, based on priorities, I will need to NOT do this particular story instead. Prioritization becomes a very rational and productive conversation instead of a tug of war.

All these things add up to smart, fast and flexible marketing – a must in today's world of social media and [inbound marketing](.). In fact, our team needed to respond to a specific challenge that we noticed late last week. So yesterday, we met, brainstormed and each picked a story we could tackle to contribute to the bigger challenge and agreed which other stories would get pushed to next sprint. And … today, we've already seen some of the results in our lead numbers. Now that's agile!

How do you manage marketing efforts today? A daily checklist? A 6 month plan? How could your organization employ agile?

Get more ideas and tools on Modern Marketing Teams at http://www.hubspot.com/modern-marketing-team-kit