



2021 Global Marketing Trends

Find your focus

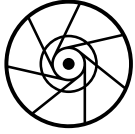
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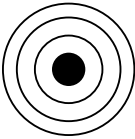
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Introduction

2021 Global Marketing Trends: Find your focus

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, MOMENTS of crisis and uncertainty have galvanized new innovations and shifted views on what matters most to people. The 1918 pandemic popularized the use of the telephone so much that the people-powered switch operators couldn't keep up.¹ In the Cold War era, the rise of televisions in households directly influenced how people perceived conflict at a time when the Vietnam War became the world's "First Televised War."² And, more recently, as issues of climate change and gender equality took centerstage, people began to demand more from businesses.³

Now, we are confronted with an amalgamation of uncertainty—and the world is collectively looking for answers. With an omnipresent pandemic, we had to find new ways to socialize in a world where social distancing quickly became the norm; work had to be redesigned so people could do their jobs

safely and productively; grocery shopping, dining out, education, and medical treatment fundamentally changed. And, almost in parallel, as a reckoning of systemic racism came to a head, we were forced to reassess and reflect on our values and what it means to be human.

From people and businesses to governments, everyone needed to find new ways to navigate this new world—and this trends report was no different. How do you uncover and discuss the implications of global marketing trends at a time when the world has seemingly turned on its axis and still continues to change in unpredictable ways?

To seek an answer to this question, we set out on an all-encompassing journey to better understand how people and brands responded to the pandemic—and, most importantly, why some brands were able to flourish even during these

THE 2021 GLOBAL MARKETING TRENDS STUDY

As our world went through rapid changes, we recognized a need to dig deeper into the evolving milieu to better understand how consumers and executives are responding to their new environments. With this in mind, we conducted two surveys to inform each of the 2021 Global Marketing Trends chapters.

The Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey polled 2,447 global consumers, ages 18 and above, in April 2020. This survey was launched in the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, China, South Africa, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey polled 405 US C-suite executives from global companies in May 2020. This survey asked CMOs, CFOs, COOs, and CHROs their thoughts on a variety of topics related to their response to COVID-19.

turbulent times. In our second annual report, we combine subject matter expertise, voices from the field, and two overarching surveys—one consumer-based and the other targeted toward executives—to separate the signals from the noise of change (see the sidebar, “The 2021 Global Marketing Trends study” to learn more).

Even among executives, our research found they’re feeling the pressure of an uncertain future. For instance, 18 months ago, we polled executives on their ability to influence their peers and make a strategic impact.⁴ When we asked 405 executives the same questions in May of 2020, we saw C-suite confidence has plummeted across the board (figure 1).

As often is the case when we are unsure of how to respond, our most basic instincts kick in and we prioritize survival over *human connection* and *growth*. When we asked these executives what outcomes they hoped to achieve in responding to

the pandemic, the majority prioritized improving efficiency and productivity over more human-centric initiatives such as strengthening customer engagement, retaining talent, and increasing the company’s impact on society. And in these moments of high stress and low certainty, almost no one was thinking about growing revenues or disrupting their industry.

Answering the call for help

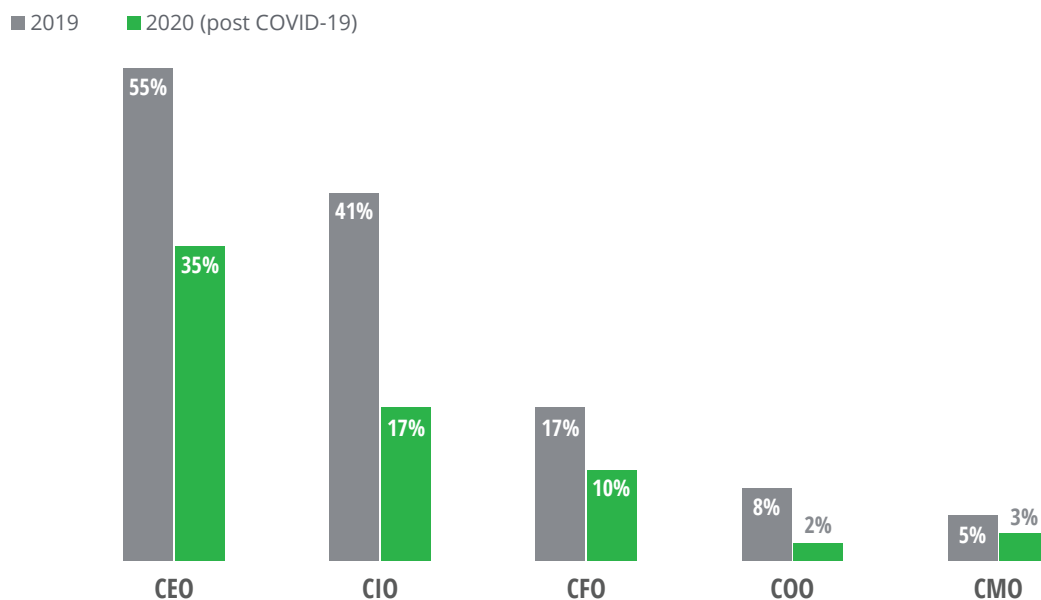
Of course, this isn’t unprecedented or unexpected behavior, but when we polled consumers, they showed us that as times get tougher, they expect more from the brands they frequent. Consider the following findings from our consumer survey:

- Almost four in five people could cite a time a brand responded positively to the pandemic and one in five strongly agreed it led to increased brand loyalty on their part.

FIGURE 1

C-suite executives have all seen a significant drop in confidence

Percentage of confident executives



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey.

- Conversely, more than 25% of those who noticed brands acting in their own self-interest walked away from those brands.
- More than 70% agreed they valued digital solutions that deepened their connection with other people, and 63% believe they will rely on digital technologies more than they did prior to the pandemic even well after it subsides.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents could recall at least one brand that quickly pivoted to better respond to their needs, and 82% said this led to them doing more business with the brand.

When we analyze these findings in tandem, we see a very clear message: In these wild times of uncertainty, people are looking to brands for *help*—and rewarding those that can meet their most pressing needs in the moment.

In this spirit, we developed seven trends to help executives break through this wall of uncertainty and take action. These trends can enable leaders to *respond* to customer needs as they unfold, *pivot* business models to better align to evolving needs, and *foster* the human connection we all crave.

Breaking through with seven trends

Each of our 2021 global marketing trends shares the common theme of breaking out of our often-defensive mindsets to more holistically—and authentically—meet human needs.

In our opening trend chapter on **Purpose**, we establish the foundation required to flourish in even the most turbulent of times. To do this,

organizations should be deeply attuned to why they exist and who they are built to serve.

Our second chapter, **Agility**, explores how organizations can best structure themselves to not only live out this purpose, but also to do so as stakeholder needs unfold.

The **Human Experience** chapter explores how organizations can break out of their efficiency-first mindsets to elevate the experiences of their customers, workforces, and business partners. In our fourth chapter, **Trust**, we provide a means to holding brands accountable and ensuring that the messages they convey are congruent with the experiences they deliver.

Our fifth trend chapter, **Participation**, makes use of an in-depth consumer study to highlight how some of the leading companies in the world are harnessing customer passion to bolster their engagement strategies through customer-led innovation and advocacy.

Our **Fusion** trend sheds light on how some of the most creative companies in the world were able to overcome their defensive mindsets to create entirely new solutions through the fusing of new partnerships, customer ideas, and digital ecosystems.

The final chapter, **Talent**, provides a line of sight into how marketing can elevate its talent model into a competitive differentiator—even in the toughest of times.

These trends do not purport to predict what the future holds, but they may offer something more pressing: a path forward to help your customers, workforces, and society when, collectively, we need it the most.

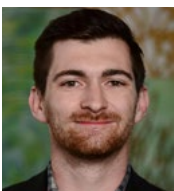
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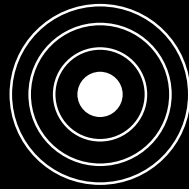
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Talent

As the marketing landscape undergoes rapid changes, talent models should evolve in-step to position marketing as a competitive differentiator.

Marketing disrupted

Four trends turning talent into a competitive differentiator

OVER THE LAST few years, the roles of marketing and talent within organizations have undergone a sea change. By now, it's apparent that the chief marketing officer (CMO) is evolving from a brand manager to an enterprisewide strategic thinker and revenue driver.¹ In parallel, talent discussions across industries—specifically, changing talent models—have seen some recurring themes. These themes may sound familiar: Artificial intelligence (AI) is making us faster and smarter workers; people are opting out of traditional 9-to-5 jobs in favor of the gig economy; and new paradigms for on-the-job training and continuous learning are altering how we grow our skill sets, to name a few.² But these aren't isolated shifts. To answer the call of the organization and elevate the role of marketing, marketers should evolve their talent models in-step with these evolving trends.

Marketers (and heads of other functions) were already incorporating many of these talent trends in their organizations in varying degrees. But then COVID-19 happened. Out of sheer necessity, organizations were forced to change how they accomplished work. When we surveyed 405 C-suite United States–based executives in May of this year, we saw some talent trends accelerate and others just starting to emerge. For instance, our survey shows that in this new environment, CMOs have

overwhelmingly turned to AI to automate work (77%). Alternately, only 6% have increased their reliance on the gig economy—a possible reflection of how gig workers can easily be scaled during economic downturns (figure 1).

Marketers need to push talent transformation to the forefront of their agenda to address this accelerated pace of change.

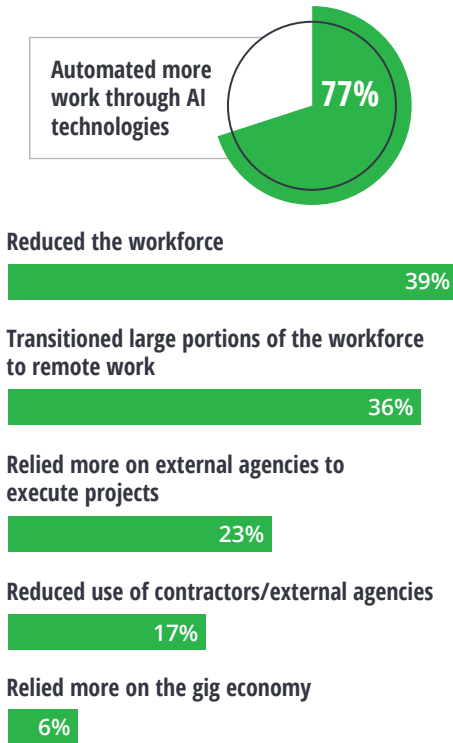
COVID-19 may be the catalyst that puts these evolving marketing and talent trends on a new trajectory. When we asked executives what are the most important functional areas over the next 12 months, they ranked marketing and sales second (61%), after digital and technology (68%). There is also evidence that the CMO's role may be gaining momentum. Just 20 months ago, 46% of CMOs had said they had a *significant* impact on C-suite conversations relating to marketing strategy.³ Now, this number has almost doubled to 81%.

To address this accelerated pace of change, marketers need to push talent transformation to the forefront of their agenda. In this article, we

FIGURE 1

More CMOs have turned to AI for automation during the pandemic

How CMOs changed their talent models during the pandemic



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey.

discuss four trends which, if woven into the marketing talent model, can elevate skill sets, create organizational flexibility for quickly responding to market needs, and consequently, make marketing talent a competitive differentiator.

How to elevate the marketing talent model

Let's look at how these talent-related trends can change the way in which marketing accomplishes work and how marketers can incorporate them to afford marketing talent a competitive advantage.

BRING YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN-HOUSE

Earlier this year, Deloitte and The CMO Club (a global network of more than 650 CMOs and marketing leaders) published a marketing benchmark study. Our analysis found that 64% of marketing organizations have an in-house agency.⁴ Historically, many marketing departments have relied on external agency partners to execute their creative campaigns and other activities. However, even in the benchmarking study, we saw that 59% of marketing leaders still outsource their creative function while 31% do so for insights and analytics.

There is a good reason why many brands are turning toward an in-house model. While outsourcing provides access to a wide pool of expertise and talent, it can impede marketing's ability to agilely respond to customer needs (see our trend [Agility](#) to learn more) for a couple of reasons:

- Growing workflow complexities:** The proliferation of customer touchpoints across myriad social platforms and media channels can create an inefficient hand-off between external agencies and brands. In the time it takes to analyze customer data, build a creative campaign, and execute it in the marketplace, the window to make a connection often closes.
- Diluting the competitive advantage:** As brands rely more on external agencies, they are essentially outsourcing their competitive advantage. First, they are expecting another organization to be as attuned to their customers' needs as their own brand. Second, as agencies serve multiple clients, they're likely to reapply fundamental strategies and methods to different brands. Over time, this can result in relatively generic campaigns that look similar across multiple brands.

It's important for marketers to keep in mind that agencies can't match their internal knowledge in terms of organizational process, data, and

customer needs. Building one's own insourcing strategy starts with pivoting from an ad campaign mindset to a more holistic editorial thought process. This requires the marketing team to assess its workflows, technology, and skill sets to determine the most efficient and effective means of delivering content.⁵

Based on these assessments, marketers can develop a core team comprising roles that best reflect their competitive advantage. Traditionally, these roles include those responsible for data insights, dynamic content creation, and owned and earned media. It's important to note that bringing key skills in-house does not mean a brand must bring *everything* inside. For example, Unilever created its own in-house digital content function called U-Studio to manage its day-to-day creative needs.⁶ However, when the company needs help with broader strategic or creative ideas, it looks to external agencies for help. In this case, Unilever was able to identify where an in-house agency provides the most advantages and where external assistance is most beneficial.

LEVERAGE THE GIG ECONOMY TO SCALE DOWNSTREAM ACTIVITIES

As marketing teams gravitate toward insourcing-required skill sets, they will likely need to bifurcate their talent strategy. One prong of this strategy includes the more strategic or analytical roles while the other represents narrower, more tactical downstream roles such as graphic design or copyediting. Given the fluctuations in organizational need, marketing is increasingly looking for flexible ways to scale downstream activities. The gig economy can be an excellent resource for marketers to tap into for specific skill sets as and when the need arises. Besides, in an increasingly volatile economic environment, the gig economy enables organizations to better manage uncertainty without getting locked into long-term financial commitments.

Creative and production talent are two areas that regularly see fluctuations in terms of organizational need, often requiring scaling up or down.

Encouragingly for marketers, there are multiple platforms that provide a marketplace for clients to directly contract individuals for projects, allowing them to scale according to need. Deloitte, for example, relies upon the gig economy to augment a variety of skills, such as copyediting.

The gig economy not only provides marketers a network of contractors, but also offers them a platform to source new ideas through crowdsourcing and innovation contests (see our trend on [Participation](#)). Such contests enable organizations to solicit new ideas and innovations which they can quickly embed into their products or experiences.

It's not just the marketers who benefit from the gig work model that offers them an efficient and highly scalable source of skill sets and ideas; employees too are highly satisfied with this new work environment. In our global consumer survey of 2,447 individuals, where we asked how work environments have changed since COVID-19, we found 14% have entered the gig economy for the first time. Figure 2 shows these respondents are by far the most satisfied with their new work environments (as compared to their previous environments). This is especially true of those who've entered the gig economy in their area of expertise. This may be encouraging news for marketers who're considering their first foray into the gig economy.

ELEVATE THE MARKETER, AUTOMATE THE REDUNDANT TASKS

Employing AI for automation is one of the fastest-growing trends in the talent space—and it's likely here to stay. When we asked executives how they perceive the longevity of each of these talent trends, AI-enabled automation led the lot, with 57%

FIGURE 2

Gig workers are most satisfied with their new work environments

I believe my new work environment is superior to how I previously worked

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



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends Consumer Pulse Survey.

suggesting they had found a superior way to work (figure 3). The knee-jerk reaction—as is often the case with AI—is to assume that increased reliance on the technology might reduce the need for employees. But we also found that executives do not see the pandemic-induced workforce reductions as a long-term solution. In fact, 59% said they should go back to their former workforce levels immediately after the pandemic subsides. This highlights an important fact about AI: It can be most effective when it bolsters what people are inherently good at (e.g., creativity and critical thinking) and replaces the tasks that are best left to a machine (e.g., redundant activities or computationally intensive calculations).

In both the long and short term, it makes sense for marketers to deploy AI to clear the more repetitive tasks off their plate and redesign their function's work to concentrate on more strategic endeavors. For one, AI can have a direct application in dynamic creative assembly where it can be used to analyze data and match the best content to consumers. Take the example of a large food and beverage company that employed AI to match appropriate imagery and messaging to relevant demographics and markets.⁷ Not only did this help it create a more refined process for assembling

creative materials, it also elevated the marketer's role to more strategic initiatives such as developing underlying rulesets. This may include dictating rules around which imagery is best suited for each AI-driven customer profile.

It's worth noting that while AI is certainly on the rise, a significant amount of work appears to be directed toward less-sophisticated use cases (e.g., robotic process automation to execute rulesets). However, marketers can also deploy AI to improve their overall strategies and decision-making process. For instance, Norwegian Air used machine learning algorithms to identify the customer attributes and activities that most often led to flight bookings.⁸ Doing so helped the company decrease its cost-per-booking by 170% while simultaneously matching the best advertisements to each customer. Going back to our discussion on insourcing, this heightens the need for more analytical skill sets within marketing, thereby forcing marketing to upskill talent.

UPSKILL THROUGH MARKETING UNIVERSITIES

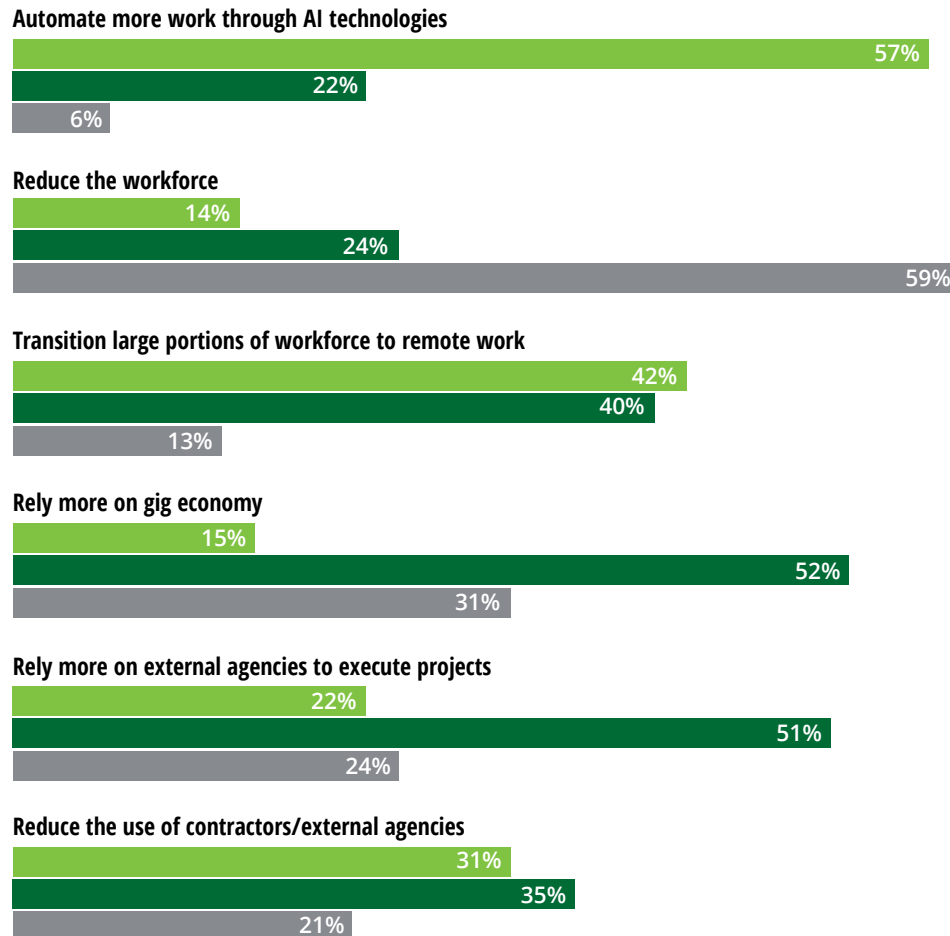
Between insourcing and automation, the role of marketing will inevitably change—and for the good. To help their teams prepare for these changes,

FIGURE 3

AI automation is here to stay, but not at the expense of the workforce

After the pandemic subsides, which option best describes your view on these talent models?

- New talent model offers a superior way to execute work
- Should retain some portion of this new talent model
- Should immediately go back to its former talent model



Source: Deloitte Global Marketing Trends C-suite Survey.

many organizations are designing in-house marketing universities that target key skills to help talent navigate the future of marketing.

In our work with clients from various industries, we've seen brands develop programs that combine online curricula with role-specific deep dives and in-person workshops. Like all forms of effective learning, these aren't "one-off" events either. To

keep pace with our ever-changing environments, marketers can create learning pathways (i.e., specialized tracks) and micro-hackathons to capture the best ideas the workforce has to offer (i.e., internal crowdsourcing). The goal is to provide multiple channels—both ongoing and event-based—to equip practitioners with the right skills, thereby optimizing marketing talent as a competitive differentiator.

The talent journey

Transforming your marketing talent organization isn't a static event. Instead, it's a journey that's unique to each marketing team's specific skill sets and structure. To best capitalize on these trends, consider the following steps:

- **Galvanize leadership commitment:** With marketing's position being currently elevated within the C-suite, there may be no better time than now to evolve talent models. However, it's hard to get started on this exercise if the leadership doesn't support upskilling of talent. Kick off your journey by enlisting support for standing up marketing universities as this will help prepare marketing talent for their elevated roles in the organization.
- **Place strategic bets:** For most organizations, there's no need to make wholesale changes to the existing talent model—marketers can simply tweak the current model by placing strategic bets on some new aspects. Start by

assessing where your strengths and weaknesses lie as a team. If your creative function is mostly outsourced, consider new models—such as the gig economy—to bring your competitive advantage back inside the four walls of your organization. If your content is fairly static, it may make sense to automate the more redundant work through AI.

- **Invest in culture:** Marketing can work best when it responds to customer needs in an agile manner. This can require a true shift in the cultural mindset—from a layered organization to one that empowers people to move quickly and adapt to changing customer needs as they arise. It also means embedding life-long learning as a key part of the company culture with a focus on evolving skill sets as needs change.

A new era of marketing requires a new outlook on talent. The organizations that do it right can elevate marketing's standing within the organization and even disrupt their industries along the way.

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