The State of Marketing Training in 2019

A survey of 462 marketing leaders
The State of Marketing Training

How much are marketing departments spending—and what do they get out of it?

U.S. companies spend billions on training each year. In marketing departments, training accounts for almost 4% of the total budget.

We surveyed 462 marketing leaders—CMOs, VPs of Marketing, Marketing Directors—to learn about the impact of that investment.

Respondents completed a 10-question survey that covered:

- The perceived skill level of marketing teams.
- Processes and accountability for training marketers.
- Budgets for marketing training.
- Primary challenges when upskilling marketing teams.
"The best thing you can possibly do for your career is also one of the easiest things [. . .] which is spend the time to learn something. If you spend an hour every single day—or 30 minutes or maybe even 25 minutes—you're going to be leaps and bounds ahead of your competition in two years."

Chad Sanderson, Microsoft
7 things we learned

The big takeaways
1. Bigger companies feel better about their skills.

Do larger organizations have greater in-house marketing skills? They certainly think so.

**Companies with 1,000–5,000 employees have the highest average estimate of marketing team skills.**

Overall, the larger the organization, the higher the perceived skill. It’s easy to speculate why this may be the case:

- Larger organizations are more likely to have employees with specialized training and experience compared to smaller organizations, which may feel the lack of deep expertise acutely for some marketing challenges.
- Larger companies have deeper pockets to afford top talent.
2. Training budgets aren’t big, but they’re getting bigger.

Each year, the average company spends $994 per employee on training. More than half, however, spend significantly less, if anything:

- 61.9% spend $500 or less.
- Nearly 1 in 5 spends nothing at all.

Larger organizations tend to spend more—62.5% more than small businesses and 16.1% more than medium-sized companies.

Note: We asked respondents for the training budget on a per-employee basis; some responses clearly provided a total training budget (e.g. $1 million). We omitted responses we believed did not reflect a per-employee budget.
"Our current career development budget for our 60-person agency is $1,000/person/year. We find this is the right budget to get them to a solid conference in the area, or do an online course if they prefer that."

Ross Hudgens, Founder and CEO of Siege Media
For almost half of all respondents, budgets are getting bigger. **Only 1 in 16 companies is reducing its upskilling budget in 2019.**

Most of the added investment is coming from large enterprises. Nearly two-thirds (66%) of enterprise organizations plan to spend more on training in 2019 than they did last year.

Does more money translate into a higher perception of skill? Not really. There was only a weak correlation (0.20) between the amount spent on training and the perceived skill of the marketing team. Why?

- Small companies may have urgent needs that siphon off resources from long-term investments in training. Individual practitioners at those organizations may spend more time learning through experience.
- Teams that overestimate their skills—those, perhaps, that are convinced every member is a “10”—may think there’s nothing left to learn.

So what does correlate with strong marketing skills? The amount of business you do online.
3. Companies that live online have better marketing skills.

SaaS, B2B, and ecommerce companies had the highest perceived marketing skills. Earning more resources for training often requires demonstrating ROI, an easier task for online businesses that have full-funnel analytics data.

The three industries with the highest skill levels were also near the top for having a “clear, structured process” for training.

Still, roughly...

- 3 of every 5 agencies;
- 1 of every 3 B2B, SaaS, or travel companies;
- And half of all ecommerce, media, non-profits, and governmental organizations

...are struggling to create a structured training program. So who’s responsible for making it happen?
"It's easy and common for even the most experienced marketers to gloss over the basics and lose touch with the fundamentals of good marketing. A good training course is rooted in these principles, even if the topic is more tactical or execution in nature."

Hana Abaza, Director of Marketing at Shopify Plus
4. Direct managers own marketing training.

In 2 of every 5 companies surveyed, direct managers are accountable for training their teams.

In nearly three-quarters (74.7%) of all businesses, either the direct manager or a marketing leader—who, in some instances, is also the direct manager—is accountable for the skills of their team.

Only 5% of organizations reported having no accountability, although an additional 14.3% reported autonomy (anarchy?) when it came to training.

Accountability was especially lacking in small organizations.

Who's accountable for skill development in your organization?

- Direct managers: 40.9%
- CMO / VP Marketing / Head of Marketing: 33.8%
- Everyone looks after themselves: 14.3%
- HR: 6.1%
- 5.0%
- Nobody: 5.0%
5. Autonomy at small companies applies to training, too.

Of the 89 respondents who stated that there was no formal oversight of training, a disproportionately large share came from small businesses.

Still, about two-thirds of small-business respondents (67.8%) had some oversight of skill development programs.

Management challenges, however, extend beyond top-level accountability.
6. A structured process doesn’t guarantee training success.

Having a “structured process” for training programs isn’t the only organizational challenge, as marketing leaders made clear in their open-ended responses:

- By the time everyone gets trained, the knowledge may be outdated. Marketing leaders noted the challenge of identifying what their teams needed to learn next, or how to future-proof their department.
- CMOs and VPs of marketing also struggled to measure whether training knowledge translated into more profitable marketing strategies—or to test retention months down the road.

The other major challenge? Finding the best employees and getting them to stick around.
"We have our own internal academy with our own execution recipes run by our Director of Training. The most important part of their job isn’t to add new content [ . . . ] but to actually audit the students and make sure they know everything we teach as second nature. You’d be shocked at the lack of knowledge retention unless you make sure you audit, and audit repeatedly—we do every three months."

Johnathan Dane, Founder and CEO of KlientBoost
7. Finding talent that wants to learn—and keeping them—is hard.

See if these scenarios sound familiar:

You struggle to find capable employees who are willing to learn new skills. Highly trained employees are out of your price range, and undertrained employees need a structured, well-funded program to progress.

You worry that highly trained employees will jump ship after you invest in their development. Training makes your employees more productive—and more attractive to companies trying to lure them away.

Other HR challenges, many respondents told us, ranged from long-tenured employees unwilling to adapt to fresh college grads without technical skills.
"When you invest in your teams, you don’t just build loyalty and engagement—you build a force that grows with your business, stays ahead of the market, and seizes opportunities that keep you ahead of your competition."

Ryan Engley, VP of Product Marketing at Unbounce
Everything else they told us

The full results
Who we surveyed

Organization size
Some 39% of respondents worked in small businesses, while more than half (61%) came from organizations with no more than 250 employees.

Marketing department size
Most marketing departments in our survey were small: Nearly 40% had fewer than 5 employees, and most had fewer than 10. Not surprisingly, larger organizations had larger marketing departments.
Who we surveyed

Industry type
Most respondents had operations that centered on online activity—agencies, ecommerce companies, and SaaS businesses.

In each industry, respondents came from marketing departments of various sizes.
Starting point: Where is your team now?

Perceived skill levels
As it turns out, most marketing teams—like most drivers—believe they’re above average. In fact, 83% of respondents rated their teams a 6 or higher on a 10-point scale, with a majority (51%) rating their teams as a 7 or 8.

Average skill levels by company size
As noted earlier, larger companies tended to perceive a higher level of skill on their marketing teams.
Starting point: Where is your team now?

How mature are training programs?
A slim majority (53.1%) of all companies had "a clear, structured process" for implementing training programs.
How much are companies spending on marketing training?

Marketing training budget by company size
Larger companies tend to spend more. Few small or medium-sized businesses spent more than $500 per employee.
How much are companies spending on marketing training?

**Marketing training budget by industry**
The companies that depend on online leads and sales appeared more willing to invest in marketing training.

**Planned budget changes by industry**
The travel industry is planning the fewest budget expansions—and the most contractions—of any industry.
What are the biggest challenges when it comes to upskilling marketing teams?

The Biggest Challenges Upskilling Marketing Teams (by Company Size)

- Hiring and retaining talent
- Finding time for training
- Management pushback
- Employee reluctance
- Limited training budget
- Internal communication and process management
- Marketing department performance
- Finding the right training programs
- Keeping up with industry and marketing trends

Percentage of Respondents
## The top marketing training challenges by industry

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Top Challenges</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SaaS / Software</strong></td>
<td>Internal communication and process management</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding the right training programs</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited training budget</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring and retaining talent</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B2B / Lead Generation</strong></td>
<td>Hiring and retaining talent</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employee reluctance</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal communication and process management</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding the right training programs</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecommerce</strong></td>
<td>Keeping up with industry and marketing trends</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding the right training programs</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding time for training</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency / Consulting</td>
<td>Finding time for training</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring and retaining talent</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal communication and process management</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publishing / Media</td>
<td>Hiring and retaining talent</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employee reluctance</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping up with industry and marketing trends</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Profit /</td>
<td>Limited training budget</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Keeping up with industry and marketing trends</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal communication and process management</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<th>Top Challenges</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>Internal communication and process management</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring and retaining talent</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding time for training</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<td>Employee reluctance</td>
<td>13%</td>
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Sample responses

**Internal communication and process management**
“I don’t believe the structure is there. It seems very chaotic at times. There are managers but no clear ones for specific people and/or projects.”
“Coordinating large groups of training.”
“Getting everyone on the same page.”
“Skill development has to be part of the annual performance review process.”

**Hiring and retaining talent**
“Finding people who are willing to learn and grow within our company.”
“Retaining our most skilled employees. Oftentimes, there is high demand for them.”
“Acquiring new employees with the right skill set.”
“Keeping employees who gain new skills as they often want to explore other options shortly after we invest in them.”

**Keeping up with industry and marketing trends**
“Keeping everyone up to date with the latest advancements.”
“Benchmarking skill levels against an industry ‘average’ to ascertain whether we need to be doing more training.”
“Inability to discover or create modern trends.”
“Ever-changing technology!”

“I don’t believe the structure is there. It seems very chaotic at times. There are managers but no clear ones for specific people and/or projects.”
Sample responses

Finding time for training
“Learning hands-on without damaging infrastructure or messing up a bid.”
“Finding convenient enough trainings for our employees.”
“Adequate time to complete due to workloads.”
“Time to specifically set aside for training.”

Employee reluctance
“Willingness to try things a different way.”
“Some of my workers are older, and are slower to catch on quickly to new technology.”
“Not enough motivation to develop skills outside of normal work hours.”
“The people who think they don’t need any development.”

Finding the right training programs
“We have certain niche specialists that needed to be trained outside the company - complicated evaluation process.”
“Finding the right balance of costs and benefits.”
“The biggest challenge my organization has with skill development is finding quality trainings/masterclasses that are well within budget.”
“Finding training that is post-intermediate and not enterprise only.”

“Some of my workers are older, and are slower to catch on quickly to new technology.”
Sample responses

Limited training budget
“Biggest challenge in our organization with skill development is maintaining budget and proving ROI.”
“Trying to get approval for additional resources to use for training and get the proper tools.”
“It’s all about the cost and efficiency of financials when addressing this situation.”
“The biggest challenge is budgeting and distributing training funds where they are needed the most.”

Marketing department performance
“Constantly trying to create new and more innovative ways to reach customers over the competition.”
“Trying to reinvent the wheel when it comes to marketing the same things to a pie that hasn’t increased in size.”
“Scaling with the company’s growth.”
“The unpredictability of sales from year to year.”

Management pushback
“Successful onboarding of employees with senior management resistance to the digital trend.”
“They don’t prioritize it and they don’t prioritize marketing in general. We have such a tight profit margin that all money goes toward product development and operational support.”
“My CEO doesn’t give any importance to this issue. I’d asked for more budget, but it was denied.”
“Not seen as necessary by management - they hired you with the skills you had at the time, use them.”
Study conducted by CXL Institute, an online training provider for data-driven marketers.

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Progress