NOVA NEXUS MARKETING | WHITE PAPER

# Right Strategy. Wrong Operations.

Why marketing operations efficiency and velocity decide what a strategy is worth, and how Insight, People, Results builds both.

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Ask a CEO what is wrong with marketing and the answer usually arrives as a strategy question. The positioning feels off. The message is stale. The brand needs a refresh. The agency should be replaced. So the company hires a new leader, buys a new strategy, launches a new campaign, and waits for the numbers to move.

I have sat on every side of that table: inside a global agency network running performance media and SEO for Fortune 500 brands including Google, Comcast, USAA, Adobe, Universal Parks, BET+, and Viacom; inside an in-house team as the marketing executive who owned the number; and now inside the marketing organizations that hire Nova Nexus to look underneath their work. In most of them, the strategy was sound. The people were talented. The budget was adequate. What was broken sat underneath all of it: how work moved from an idea to the market, how data moved from a click to a decision, and who owned the whole thing working together.

This paper is about that layer. It defines the two measures that tell you whether the layer is working, marketing operations efficiency and marketing operations velocity. It explains why brand and strategy get the attention while execution quietly decides the outcome. And it closes with the approach Nova Nexus uses to fix it, Insight, People, Results, in that order, because the order is the method.

If you have inherited a marketing organization, or you are about to hand one to someone new, read this before the next campaign, tool, reorganization, or AI mandate.

# Contents


Executive Summary 4

The Strategy Was Right. The Market Rewarded Someone Else. 5

The Operating System Underneath Marketing 7

Marketing Operations Efficiency, Defined 8

Marketing Operations Velocity, Defined 10

Why You Need Both, and Why They Compound 13

Insight, People, Results: The Sequence Is the Method 15

What Excellence Looks Like on a Monday Morning 17

Conclusion: An Invitation 19

Sources and Notes 20

About the Author 22

About Nova Nexus 22

# Executive Summary

**Core thesis:** Most marketing organizations have a strategy that is good enough to win and an operating system that is too slow and too wasteful to let it. The operating system underneath marketing (people, process, data, tools, and measurement) decides how fast a good idea becomes a measurable result and how much of the budget survives the trip. Strategy sets the direction. Operations set the speed and the cost. A strategy is worth exactly what its execution delivers.

**The Problem**

- Leadership reads execution failures as strategy failures, so the fix arrives as a new strategy, a new campaign, or a new leader, and the friction underneath stays where it was.
- Marketing teams are busy, which looks like efficiency and hides its absence. Full calendars and long hours are symptoms of friction, and the friction is invisible because it lives in the waiting between tasks.
- Three forces are raising the price of a slow, wasteful operation at once: AI landing on workflows that were never designed, marketing leadership turning over faster than the rest of the C-suite, and finance auditing marketing with new rigor.

**Two Measures**

- Marketing operations efficiency is the ratio of result to resource: measurable outcome per dollar, per hour, and per tool. It is a measure of waste.
- Marketing operations velocity is the rate at which strategic intent becomes market impact: how fast an approved idea reaches the market, how fast a signal reaches a decision, and how fast the organization learns. It is a measure of friction.
- Both are required. Efficiency without velocity is cheap and late. Velocity without efficiency is fast and unsustainable. Excellence is both, and when both are present they compound.

**The Shift:** From judging marketing by its artifacts (campaigns, decks, dashboards) to judging it by the yield of its operating system: cycle time, waiting time, cost per outcome, and numbers finance signs. Fast is a property of the system, and so is lean.

**The Approach:** Insight, People, Results. Start with insight: an honest read of the strategy, the data, and how work actually moves, then an insight layer built on clean data, shared definitions, documented workflows, a stack that talks to itself, and measurement fast enough to change outcomes. Then fix the people side on that evidence: the right roles, clear ownership, honest capacity, and one accountable owner for the whole system. Then the

results take care of themselves, because every dollar and every hour now has a path to a number the C-suite trusts. The sequence is the innovation.

**What to Trust:** The calendar, the ratio of working time to waiting time, and a marketing P&L that finance accepts. Those three tell the truth about an operation before any dashboard does.

**What to Do Next:** Trace one routine campaign from request to launch and mark every hour it spent waiting. Then answer the twelve questions in section 7 with numbers. That is your first operating review.

## The Strategy Was Right. The Market Rewarded Someone Else.

Two organizations I worked with in the same twelve months had the same problem, and neither could see it in the strategy deck.

Organization A was a $400 million B2B software company. Its marketing team of thirty-two people produced an average of six campaigns per quarter. Six individual campaigns: an email nurture, a webinar, a content syndication push, a paid media flight, a customer event, and a partner program. Each was well crafted. Each took, on average, forty-three business days from approved brief to live launch. By the time a campaign reached the market, the window it was designed for had often closed, the executive who requested it had moved on to the next priority, and the sales team had already improvised a workaround that made the campaign feel like an afterthought.

Organization B was a $180 million mid-market company. Its marketing team of nineteen people, roughly half the size, produced twenty-two campaigns per quarter. Same campaign types. Comparable complexity. Average brief-to-launch cycle of nine business days. Its campaigns arrived while the window was open. Sales treated marketing as a partner because marketing's output arrived when sales needed it. The CEO cited marketing in board presentations because the results were visible, timely, and connected to the revenue metrics the board tracked.

Both had strong leaders, talented teams, generous budgets, and enterprise-grade technology. Both had strategies that were sound on paper: differentiated positioning, clear audiences, well-conceived campaigns. Organization A was busy. Organization B was fast. The gap between busy and fast was explained by something far less glamorous than strategy and far more consequential: operational infrastructure. Organization A had a brilliant strategy executed through broken operations. Organization B had a good strategy executed through excellent operations. The market rewarded Organization B.

## Why strategy gets the attention

Strategy is visible. It is presented to the board, debated in offsites, and written into the CMO's first ninety-day plan. When results disappoint, the strategy is the artifact everyone can point at, so it becomes the diagnosis by default. The operating system underneath the strategy lives in intake forms, approval chains, CRM fields, tool contracts, and the unwritten knowledge of three senior people, and none of it appears on a slide. Its failures happen in the white space between tasks, in the queues and the handoffs, where nobody is looking and nobody is accountable.

That is why so many marketing organizations repeat the same cycle. A new leader arrives, spends six months finding out what is broken, ships a strategy, and leaves before the system underneath it gets rebuilt. The next leader inherits the same system and starts the same six months over.

## Three forces raising the price of a slow, wasteful operation

The cost of this pattern has always been real. Three forces are making it expensive right now.

AI is landing on workflows that were never designed. Gartner predicted in June 2025 that over 40 percent of agentic AI projects will be canceled by the end of 2027, citing escalating costs, unclear business value, and inadequate risk controls. S&P Global Market Intelligence found that 42 percent of companies abandoned most of their AI initiatives in 2025, up from 17 percent the year before, and that the average organization scrapped 46 percent of its AI proofs of concept before they reached production. In a Gartner survey of 413 marketing technology leaders published in October 2025, half said their technical and data stack was not ready for the AI agents they were piloting. AI amplifies the operating system it lands on. On a sound system it compounds speed. On a broken one it compounds cost.

Marketing leadership turns over faster than the C-suite as a whole. Spencer Stuart's January 2026 study of S&P 500 CMOs put average tenure at 4.1 years, against 5.0 years for the C-suite as a whole. Seventy-three percent of those CMOs are in the role for the first time, and 31 percent of S&P 500 companies have no dedicated C-level marketing officer at all. Every transition resets the work unless the system is documented, measured, and governed independently of the person running it.

Finance is auditing marketing. In The CMO Survey's spring 2025 edition, 63 percent of marketing leaders reported increased pressure from the CFO to prove marketing's value, up from 52 percent; 61 percent reported it from the CEO and 50 percent from the board. The March 2026 edition shows what that pressure does to budgets: marketing spending sits at 9.0 percent of company revenue and grew 1.7 percent over the prior year, 70.6 percent of leaders are shifting toward short-term impact, and 45.4 percent say marketing expenses are cut

when the company cuts costs. Teams that can show a CFO where the money went, in the CFO's own numbers, keep their budgets. Teams that cannot become the line item.

Each of these forces punishes the same weakness. A slow, wasteful operating system wastes the AI investment, dies with the departing leader, and fails the CFO's audit. A fast, efficient one survives all three.

## The Operating System Underneath Marketing

When I say operating system, I mean six layers that sit beneath every campaign and decide what the campaign is worth.

**People.** Roles, skills, capacity, and ownership. Who does what, where the overlaps are, where the gaps are, and whether the org chart was built for the work the business needs this year or for the work it needed in 2019.

**Process.** Intake, prioritization, approvals, handoffs, and the planning rhythm. How a request becomes a brief, how a brief becomes work, how work becomes a launch, and how many people can stop it along the way.

**Data.** Tracking, definitions, CRM hygiene, and one source of truth. Whether marketing, sales, and finance mean the same thing when they say "qualified lead," and whether the pipeline number in the marketing dashboard matches the one in the board deck.

**Tools.** The stack, the integrations between the tools, and the automation running on top of them. Most mid-market and enterprise teams I review run fifteen to forty tools, several of them paying for the same job.

**Measurement.** Attribution, dashboards, and the marketing P&L. Whether the numbers leadership sees are accurate, and whether they arrive fast enough to change a decision.

**Governance.** Who owns each of the layers above, the cadence at which they are reviewed, and what holds when the leader changes.

Most marketing departments grew by accident. Someone was hired to run paid ads three years ago, and now four people do overlapping work on paid media while nobody owns attribution. A content team of six produces assets that nobody measures. The marketing operations seat sits empty because leadership has never seen it as the most important hire in the department. Tools multiplied faster than anyone integrated them. And now, with AI changing which work needs a human, companies are cutting too aggressively or refusing to cut at all, because nobody has done the honest assessment of which roles are critical, which are redundant, and which need redesign.

A hospital improves patient outcomes by making sure the right specialists are in the right operating rooms, the instruments are calibrated and trusted, patient records flow accurately between departments, and someone is accountable for the whole system working together. More surgeons and more equipment come after that. When a new chief of medicine arrives, that information is documented, measured, and governed. Marketing works the same way. The people, the instruments, and the data flows all have to be right before any individual campaign or hire can make a real difference.

The symptoms are familiar to anyone who has led a marketing team. The numbers disagree. Roles fail to match the work. Spend fails to map to revenue. AI is being bolted onto a base that was never built to carry it. The failure sits underneath the work, between teams, where no single team owns it.

> **Leadership pays for outcomes it can trust and repeat. Campaigns, decks, and dashboards are the exhaust. The system that produces them is the asset.**

The rest of this paper measures that system on two dimensions, efficiency and velocity, and then describes how to rebuild it in the order that works.

## Marketing Operations Efficiency, Defined

In physics, the efficiency of a machine is the useful work it produces divided by the energy it consumes. The difference is lost as heat. Every machine loses some energy. The gap between a well-designed machine and a poorly designed one is enormous, and the heat is where the money goes.

Marketing operations efficiency is the same ratio applied to a marketing organization: measurable outcomes (pipeline, revenue, qualified demand, retained customers) divided by the resources consumed to produce them (budget, hours, tools, and attention). It is a measure of waste. An efficient operation converts a high share of every dollar and every hour into an outcome someone can count. An inefficient one loses most of the energy as heat, and the heat is invisible on the budget because it is spread across a hundred small leaks.

### Where the heat goes

Tools nobody uses. Gartner's 2023 marketing technology survey found that marketers use about 33 percent of their stack's capabilities, down from 42 percent in 2022 and 58 percent in 2020. That figure is a few years old, and I treat it as directional, but the pattern has held in

every stack I have reviewed since: the organization keeps paying for capability it stopped using, and the subscription price rises every year while usage falls. The CMO Survey's March 2026 edition makes the same point from the other direction. Across every marketing technology capability it measures, none scores above 5 on a 7-point scale.

Roles that overlap while critical seats sit empty. Four people on paid media, none on attribution. A senior marketer spending her week routing tickets because the operations role was never filled. Every one of these is a salary consumed with a fraction of its potential converted into outcome.

People working as integrations. When the CRM, the marketing automation platform, the ad platforms, and the analytics tools do not talk to each other, humans carry the data between them. Exports, imports, reformatting, reconciling. In one review, roughly a third of the operations team's week went to moving data that an integration should have moved in seconds.

Rework. A brief that was unclear at intake becomes a draft rewritten at review, a design redone after the stakeholder finally engages, and an approval chain that functions as quality control because quality was never built into the front of the process.

Spend that ships late and runs short. A campaign that launches three weeks late into a fixed quarter-end date runs for five weeks instead of eight. It produces roughly 60 percent of the planned impressions and leads and consumes 100 percent of the budget. The A/B test that was supposed to improve the creative never runs because the approval process consumed the testing window, so the team launches one variant and guesses. The budget was spent. The return that would have justified it was lost to friction. Duplicate paid search terms bought by two teams, or by an agency and an in-house team, belong in the same category: real dollars, zero incremental outcome.

## Busy is a counterfeit of efficiency

The most common misreading of efficiency is utilization. A team whose calendars are full, whose people work late, and whose resource report shows everyone at 100 percent looks efficient to the executive reading the report. It is the least efficient configuration a marketing operation can run.

The reason is mathematical, and it has been understood since John Kingman published the formula for waiting time in a single-server queue in 1961. As utilization approaches 100 percent, waiting time rises steeply rather than gradually, and it rises faster when the work arriving is variable, which marketing work always is. A designer booked at 95 percent produces a queue. Every campaign behind her waits, and every hour in that queue is an hour the company is paying for with nothing to show. That is why the fastest teams I know deliberately plan to about 80 percent of capacity. The slack is where the speed comes from.

Busy teams also resist the investments that would make them efficient: too busy to document the process, too busy to plan the sprint, too busy to fix the data. Each refusal is reasonable in the moment and expensive over time, because it preserves the friction that makes the team busy.

### The efficiency trap

The other misreading is cost-cutting without redesign. When the CFO demands efficiency, the reflex is a headcount number, chosen on gut and tenure. The wrong seats get cut, institutional knowledge walks out the door, survivors absorb the overload and then leave, and within a year the roles are reposted. The operation is smaller, just as inefficient, and now slower.

Efficiency is a design outcome. It comes from assessing every role against the work, modeling the future state before anyone is moved, sequencing the change so critical capability is protected, and stabilizing the result with documented workflows and, where the work has been scored for it, AI agents that take the repetitive load. Capacity redeployment comes first. Reduction, if it is needed, comes once and with evidence.

### How to measure it

The efficiency measures I use in an operating review are simple and they are all ratios:

- Cost per qualified opportunity, and marketing operating cost as a share of the pipeline or revenue it produced.
- Martech cost per active user, and the utilization of each tool against what it is paid to do.
- The share of the team's hours spent moving data between systems or rebuilding reports by hand.
- Rework rate: how often a brief, an asset, or a build goes back a step after review.
- Duplicate spend across channels, teams, and agencies.
- Planned capacity utilization, held near 80 percent rather than 100.
- The share of marketing spend that can be tied to a revenue outcome finance accepts.

A team that tracks these can answer the CFO's question with the CFO's numbers. A team that tracks activity instead can only answer with adjectives.

## Marketing Operations Velocity, Defined

In physics, velocity is speed with direction. A car doing eighty miles an hour in a circle has speed and no velocity. Strategy supplies the direction. Operations supply the speed.

Marketing operations velocity is the rate at which strategic intent becomes market impact: the time from an approved idea to a live campaign, from a lead to a routed conversation, from a signal to a decision, and from a decision to a reallocated dollar. Speed by itself is motion. Velocity is motion toward the objective, and only the combination produces results.

Velocity is a measure of friction. Every marketing organization I have assessed has a speed gap: the delta between how fast the work could move with zero friction and how fast it actually moves through approval bottlenecks, undefined processes, disconnected tools, fragmented data, unclear roles, and missing documentation. The gap varies in size. It is always present, and it is always larger than the leader expects, because the leader sees the work being produced and assumes the system is working. The system is working. It is working slowly, and the slowness hides in the white space between tasks.

## Start with the calendar

When I assess a marketing organization's velocity, I start with the calendar. I trace a campaign from the moment it was requested to the moment it went live, and I mark every hour spent producing work and every hour spent waiting. The ratio is almost always shocking.

I once timed a mid-funnel email nurture campaign this way: four emails, one landing page, one form, one campaign record in the CRM, and a small lead-scoring adjustment. A routine campaign the team had executed dozens of times. The total time people spent actually working on it, hands on keyboard, was twenty-six hours. Just over three business days of labor, which is efficient work for that scope. The total elapsed time from request to launch was thirty-one business days. The campaign spent roughly 90 percent of its life waiting: for the brief to be approved, for the content team to pick it up from the queue, for the designer to finish another project, for the legal team's biweekly review cycle, for the operations specialist to build the automation, for QA, and for a final sign-off from a vice president who was traveling and did not open her email for three days.

The people were fast. The system was slow. Every handoff included a queue, every queue included a wait, and every wait was invisible because nobody was measuring it. The same campaign, with the same people, after the process was redesigned, shipped in five days. That is a six-fold compression of cycle time with no new hire, no new tool, and no new budget.

## The arithmetic of waiting

Two results from queueing theory explain most of what I see, and both are sixty years old.

The first is Little's Law, published by John Little in 1961: the average number of items in a system equals the arrival rate multiplied by the average time each item spends inside. Rearranged for a marketing team, cycle time equals work in progress divided by throughput.

A team with forty projects in flight and a throughput of ten per month has an average cycle time of four months, regardless of how hard anyone works. The only levers are fewer things in flight or higher throughput, and fewer things in flight is the one available on Monday. Starting everything at once is how a busy team guarantees that everything ships late.

The second is Kingman's result from the previous section: waiting time explodes as utilization approaches 100 percent and as variability rises. Batching is variability. A legal team that reviews marketing assets every other Wednesday adds an average of a week to every campaign that needs it, and a maximum of two. A vice president who approves landing page copy adds her travel schedule to the critical path of every launch. Removing approvals that do not require the approver's judgment, and moving the ones that do to the brief stage, takes days out of the calendar without asking anyone to work faster.

## The three costs of friction

Missed market windows. A campaign that takes forty-three days to launch arrives in a market that has moved on. The competitor who launches the same concept in twelve days takes the first-mover attention, the coverage, and the pipeline. The team that launches at day forty-three takes the leftovers, and the company that is always first with the relevant offer is the one prospects remember when it is time to buy.

Wasted spend. Friction converts budget into nothing through the mechanisms described in the previous section: campaigns that run short, tests that never run, models that never get implemented because the integration they needed was deprioritized for urgent execution. Velocity and efficiency are different measures, and this is where they meet. Waiting is expensive.

Burnout. The cruelest cost is human. A team that is constantly busy and never fast works long hours, misses deadlines despite the effort, and feels the gap between how hard it works and how little impact it produces. The content strategist who spent forty hours on a brilliant campaign that launched three weeks late feels frustrated by the system that turned her best work into a footnote. Friction causes burnout, and speed relieves it. A fast team produces more in fewer hours and feels the satisfaction of shipping work that arrives when it matters.

## Measurement at velocity

Velocity applies to insight as much as to campaigns. Measurement at velocity is the practice of producing insight fast enough to change the outcome it describes, which means matching the speed of insight to the speed of the decision. Campaign decisions happen daily, so campaign measurement has to be close to real time. Program decisions happen weekly, so program measurement updates weekly. Business decisions happen monthly and quarterly, so business measurement is compiled with the accuracy those decisions require. An attribution

report that closes thirty days after the campaign ends is a history book. It explains the past and changes nothing.

The same logic applies to the smallest handoff in the operation. When a prospect fills out a form, the clock starts. If the record takes more than five minutes to reach a person who can act on it, the integration is broken, and every minute after that is pipeline decaying in a queue.

### How to measure it

The velocity measures I use in an operating review are all clocks and counts:

- Brief-to-launch cycle time, tracked by campaign type against a benchmark for that type.
- The ratio of working hours to waiting hours across that cycle.
- Approvals per asset. More than two signals a broken process.
- Lead-to-routing time, from form submission to a person who can act.
- Time from a data event to a dashboard, and from the dashboard to a decision.
- Time to reallocate budget across channels once the data says to.
- Learning cycles per quarter: tests designed, run, and concluded.
- The cycle-time trend across repetitions of the same campaign type, which is the measure of whether the system is learning.

## Why You Need Both, and Why They Compound

Efficiency and velocity are separate dimensions, and a marketing operation can score high on one and low on the other. Four states cover most of the organizations I meet.

**Busy.** High utilization, low velocity. This is Organization A: everyone is working, output arrives late, and the resource report looks fine. Busy is the most common state and the most dangerous, because it counterfeits efficiency well enough to survive a budget review.

**Heroic.** High velocity, low efficiency. Campaigns ship fast because three senior people carry the operation on tribal knowledge, long hours, and personal favors from legal and design. The cost is hidden in their salaries, their turnover risk, and the work they are too valuable to be doing. When one of them takes a vacation, the machine stops. When one of them resigns, the next person spends two months finding out what she built.

**Lean and late.** Low cost, low velocity. The CFO's headcount cut landed, the operation is smaller, and cycle time went up because the people who left were holding the queues

together. The campaigns are cheap and they miss the window, so the savings are consumed by the results they fail to produce.

**Excellent.** High efficiency and high velocity, and each reinforces the other. Efficiency without velocity is cheap and late. Velocity without efficiency is fast and unsustainable. Excellence is both, and it is a property of the system rather than of the people in it. Organization B's people were as fast as Organization A's. Its infrastructure was faster.

## The compounding

The two measures reinforce each other in a way that is easy to state and hard to overstate. When you remove waiting time, output per person rises without adding a person. A team whose brief-to-launch cycle drops from forty-three days to twenty-eight has increased its effective capacity by roughly 35 percent with the same headcount and the same budget. Velocity produced efficiency.

It runs the other way too. When the stack is rationalized and the integrations carry the data, the hours that were spent moving spreadsheets return to the calendar as capacity, and capacity below 100 percent is where waiting time falls. Efficiency produced velocity.

Then the system starts to remember. The twenty-six-hour nurture campaign I described earlier shipped in five days the first time the redesigned process ran. The second time, four and a half. By the sixth repetition the team was launching that campaign type in three and a half business days, an 89 percent reduction from the original thirty-one, with no further process redesign, no tool purchase, and no headcount change. Documented process, shared definitions, maintained integrations, and trained people are deposits. The operating system pays interest on them in faster cycle times, cleaner data, and a higher return on every subsequent dollar.

## Where AI fits, and where it fails

AI is the most powerful accelerant available to a marketing operation and the most expensive thing you can add to a broken one. Deployed as point solutions, AI tools produce efficiency gains: a draft written faster, a report assembled in minutes, metadata tagged automatically. Embedded as a layer of the operating model, connected to the processes that produce data, the integrations that move it, and the measurement that converts it into decisions, AI produces intelligence gains: predictive allocation, anticipated outcomes, optimization that runs continuously. Efficiency is valuable. Intelligence is what compounds.

The failure statistics from section 1 describe what happens when the sequence is reversed. Automation placed on top of an undefined workflow scales the workflow's defects. A model trained on fragmented data produces confident garbage. Architecture before automation is the rule, and it is the reason the operating review comes before the AI roadmap in every engagement Nova Nexus runs.

The practical method is to score the work rather than the people. Every role is mapped to the work it actually performs, and every task is scored for how much of it AI can run today. The repetitive, rules-based work (trafficking, QA, reporting, metadata, list hygiene) is automated. The judgment-heavy work with repeatable components (content, SEO, paid media, lifecycle) is augmented, with AI producing the first draft and a person owning the decision. The work that defines the company (brand, positioning, partner strategy) is protected. The human role shifts toward strategy, governance, and creative direction, and accountable human review stays in the loop at every step where the company's name is on the output. AI augments a well-designed team and magnifies the defects of a badly designed one.

## Insight, People, Results: The Sequence Is the Method

Every framework for marketing improvement I encountered in two decades started in one of two places: strategy or technology. Both are late places to start, because a strategy is executed by people through a system, and a technology is operated by people inside a process. Nova Nexus's methodology is Insight, People, Results, and that is the actual order of operations. The sequence is the innovation.

### Insight first

You start with insight because you cannot fix what you have not measured, and most marketing organizations have never measured their own operating system. A reorganization drawn from the org chart and the job descriptions, or a tool bought from a vendor demo, fixes the problems people can already see and misses the ones that cost the most. So the first job is an honest read. Test the strategy against the revenue target. Trace one routine campaign from request to launch and mark the waiting. Follow a lead from form fill to first human contact. Reconcile marketing's pipeline number with finance's. Inventory every tool, its owner, its cost, and what it is actually used for.

That read becomes the insight layer: the instruments that turn activity into signal fast enough to act on. Four pieces.

**Data.** One source of truth, with definitions shared across marketing, sales, and finance. A qualified lead means one thing in every system. Data quality is enforced at the point of entry, because cleaning data after the fact is a permanent job that nobody wants.

**Measurement.** Three tiers matched to three decision cadences: executive metrics for the board, operational metrics for the directors, and execution metrics for the teams running campaigns. Attribution built for speed. A marketing P&L that finance recognizes as its own.

**Process.** One intake. A campaign taxonomy where every type has a playbook, an approval tier, and a cycle-time benchmark. Approvals moved to the brief stage and capped at two for most work. Cycle time tracked for every campaign, so the process improves because the data shows where friction remains.

**Tools.** A rationalized stack where every tool has an owner, a purpose, and a measurable return, and where integrations move the data so people do not have to. An annual stack review, because vendors raise prices while usage drops.

These are the Process, Technology, and Data Engines of marketing velocity, and together they are the layer that converts noise into signal. When the insight layer works, leadership can trust the numbers, the team can see where the waiting is, and every decision that follows, including every decision about people, has evidence under it.

## People second

With the evidence in hand, you fix the organization, because the system is run and owned by people, and nothing you fix in the data or the tools survives if the ownership is wrong. Tools installed into undefined roles get used at a third of their capability. Data cleaned before anyone owns its quality is dirty again within a quarter. Processes documented without an accountable owner are shelfware by the second reorganization.

The people questions are concrete. Are the right people in the right roles, with the right skills and the right tools? Where do roles overlap, and which critical seat is empty? Who owns attribution, who owns the stack, who owns intake, and are those three people, one person, or nobody? Is there a marketing operations leader, and does she have the authority to say no? What does each role actually do all week, as opposed to what the job description says, and which of that work should AI take, augment, or leave alone? Is the team planned to 80 percent of its capacity or to 110?

The output is an organization designed around the work, with every layer of the operating system assigned to a named owner, every metric assigned to a name, and every process given a governance rhythm. Accountability is built into the structure so the system holds regardless of who is leading it. This is the Talent Engine. It comes second because the insight work shows what each role actually does all week, and the organization should be designed around that evidence rather than around the old chart. Most marketing organizations were never designed at all; they accumulated.

## Results third

Once the instruments and the people are right, the results take care of themselves, because there is now a strong foundation and a clear path from every dollar and every hour to a number the C-suite trusts. Results in this method means outcomes in the currency the business uses: pipeline contribution, cost of acquisition, cycle time, and revenue, reviewed on

a weekly performance cadence and reported to the executive team in a narrative that names what moved and why.

The Intelligence Engine sits on top of a system built this way. Predictive allocation, automated optimization, and AI-augmented decision-making produce compounding returns on a sound foundation and compounding costs on a broken one. That is why results come third in the method, and why they are the inevitable output of getting the first two right.

### How Nova Nexus applies it

The method runs in three phases, each with a defined exit.

**Diagnose.** A two-to-four-week Nexus Operating Review at a fixed fee: interviews by stakeholder type, a full audit of the six layers, systems mapping, a staffing assessment, and a maturity score across people, technology, data, process, and measurement. The output is a prioritized 90-day roadmap with an owner, an impact, and an effort estimate on every line, delivered in an executive readout.

**Fix.** A four-to-six-week sprint on the highest-impact findings: measurement and dashboard repair, CRM and lifecycle hygiene, lead routing, stack consolidation, role and operating-model redesign, workflow automation with governance, and the vendor operating model. Clients either hand the roadmap to their own team or hire Nova Nexus to run the sprint.

**Govern.** A retained operating engagement: a weekly performance cadence, a monthly executive narrative, a quarterly maturity reassessment, and ownership of the roadmap, so the system keeps improving and holds through the next leadership transition.

Nova Nexus architects the strategy and the operating system, and specialized execution partners run the campaigns, so clients get senior-level judgment without paying agency markup on every deliverable. We hold no media or creative inventory, which means the review has nothing to protect and nothing to sell you afterward except the fix.

## What Excellence Looks Like on a Monday Morning

Abstractions are easy to nod at and hard to run. Here is what the fastest and most efficient marketing operations I have worked inside actually look like on a Monday morning, so you know what you are building toward.

**One intake.** Every request enters through a single door, in a brief that forces stakeholders to align at the start rather than at the final review. The brief is the price of admission to the queue.

**A campaign taxonomy with benchmarks.** Every campaign type has a playbook, an approval tier, and a target cycle time. In the operations I run, an email nurture ships in five to seven

business days, a paid media campaign in ten to fourteen, a webinar in twenty-one to thirty, and a full product launch in forty-five to sixty. Those are working benchmarks from engagements, and yours will differ, but the point is that a number exists and the team knows it.

**Approvals sized to risk.** Low-risk work has one approver. Most work has two. Only work that carries legal or financial exposure has three, and legal review is scheduled into the workflow rather than batched every other Wednesday.

**Playbooks treated as a product.** The operations playbook has a version number and an owner, is updated when the process changes, and is read when a new person joins. Tribal knowledge is the enemy of scale.

**One source of truth.** Marketing, sales, and finance look at the same pipeline number. A qualified lead has one definition. Data quality is enforced at entry.

**Three-tier measurement and a weekly review.** The team looks at leading indicators every week and makes decisions in the meeting.

**A stack with owners.** Every tool answers to a name, a purpose, and a return, and the integrations carry the data.

**Teams built to finish.** Pods hold the skills needed to take a campaign from brief to launch, so the designer is in the room rather than in a queue, and centers of excellence hold the deep technical skills the pods draw on.

**AI on the scored work.** Repetitive work runs on agents. Judgment work runs on people with AI drafting. Brand work runs on people, full stop. A human is accountable for every output that carries the company's name.

**One accountable owner.** Someone owns the whole system working together, and it is written down.

## The operating review in twelve questions

This is the practical tool. Answer each question with a number or a name. If you cannot, that is the answer.

1. Take your most routine campaign type. How many business days does it take from approved brief to live? Do you know the number without asking anyone?
2. Of that time, how many hours were work and how many were waiting?
3. How many approvals does a standard asset require, and which of those approvers could be removed without adding risk?
4. When a prospect fills out a form, how many minutes pass before the record reaches a person who can act on it?

5. Do marketing, sales, and finance use the same definition of a qualified lead and the same pipeline number this quarter?
6. Who owns attribution, who owns the martech stack, and who owns campaign intake? Are those three people, one person, or nobody?
7. How many tools are in the stack, what do they cost in total, and which three have no owner?
8. What share of your team's week goes to moving data between systems or rebuilding reports by hand?
9. Which roles overlap, which critical seat is empty, and which work has been scored for what AI can run today?
10. If your marketing leader left tomorrow, what would the next person need six months to learn that should have been written down?
11. Can you show the CFO a marketing P&L this quarter that finance would sign?
12. What did the operation launch faster or cheaper this quarter than last quarter, and how do you know?

Fewer than six answers with a number in them means the operating system has never been measured, and a strategy sitting on top of it is running on hope. Six to nine means the foundation is partly there and the waiting is where the money is. Ten or more, and you are already running the system this paper describes; your work is to make it compound.

## Conclusion: An Invitation

If any of this lands, here is something worth doing this week. Take one routine campaign, the kind your team has shipped dozens of times, and trace it on a calendar from the day it was requested to the day it went live. Mark the hours of work. Mark the hours of waiting. Then hold the ratio next to the strategy deck and ask which of the two is costing you more.

I expect you will see what I see in nearly every marketing organization I review: talented people, a sound strategy, and a system underneath them that turns days of work into months of calendar and dollars of budget into heat. The strategy was right. The operations were wrong. And the operations are fixable, in a defined sequence, without replacing the team, tripling the budget, or launching a transformation program that the next leader cancels.

Start with an honest read. Fix the organization on that evidence. Let the results follow. Insight, People, Results.

There is a Kabye proverb I keep close: "A heavy load does not make the journey shorter." Most marketing organizations are carrying a heavier load than they need to, and they are calling the weight commitment. Put it down, and watch how fast the same people move.

If you want a second set of eyes on your operating system, Nova Nexus offers a thirty-minute conversation with no pitch attached. You will leave with a clearer picture of where your friction and your waste live, whether or not we ever work together.

The engagement examples in this paper are real. Identifying details have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

## Sources and Notes


- Spencer Stuart, "CMO Tenure 2026: Snapshot of an Expanding Role for Marketing Leaders" (January 2026). Analysis of 346 named S&P 500 CMOs as of June 30, 2025: average tenure of 4.1 years against 5.0 years for all C-suite roles; 73 percent are first-time CMOs; 31 percent of S&P 500 companies have no dedicated C-level CMO.
- The CMO Survey, 34th edition, Duke University Fuqua School of Business, directed by Christine Moorman (spring 2025, 281 marketing leaders): 63 percent report increased pressure from the CFO to prove marketing's value, up from 52 percent; 61 percent from the CEO, up from 51 percent; 50 percent from the board, up from 33 percent.
- The CMO Survey, 35th edition (March 2026, 308 marketing leaders): marketing spending at 9.0 percent of company revenue with 1.7 percent growth; 70.6 percent shifting toward short-term impact; 45.4 percent report marketing expenses are cut when the company cuts costs; no marketing technology activity scores above 5 on a 7-point scale; training budgets at 3.8 percent of marketing spend.
- Gartner press release, June 25, 2025: over 40 percent of agentic AI projects will be canceled by the end of 2027, citing escalating costs, unclear business value, and inadequate risk controls.
- Gartner press release, October 29, 2025, reporting a survey of 413 marketing technology leaders conducted June to August 2025: 45 percent say vendor-offered AI agent capabilities fail to meet expectations; 50 percent lack the required technical and data stack readiness; 50 percent report a shortage of technical talent.
- Gartner 2023 Marketing Technology Survey, as reported by MarTech: marketers use 33 percent of their stack's capabilities, down from 42 percent in 2022 and 58 percent in 2020. This is older data and is treated as directional in this paper.
- S&P Global Market Intelligence, March 2025 (more than 1,000 respondents in North America and Europe): 42 percent of companies abandoned most of their AI initiatives in 2025, up from 17 percent in 2024; the average organization scrapped 46 percent of AI proofs of concept before production.

- J. F. C. Kingman, "The single server queue in heavy traffic," Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society, vol. 57 (1961). Waiting time rises steeply as utilization approaches 100 percent and as the variability of arrivals and service rises.
- J. D. C. Little, "A Proof for the Queuing Formula: L = λW," Operations Research, vol. 9 (1961). The average number of items in a system equals the arrival rate times the average time in the system; rearranged, cycle time equals work in progress divided by throughput.
- The engagement figures in this paper (Organization A and Organization B, the twenty-six-hour nurture campaign, the compounding cycle times, and the campaign benchmarks by type) come from the author's engagements and from the manuscript of Efficiency and Velocity: The Marketing Operations Excellence Playbook, the third book in The Marketing Leadership Series. Identifying details have been changed.
- The 33 percent and 45 percent figures are quoted as published by their sources. Where a figure in this paper is rounded or drawn from the author's own engagements, it is stated as approximate or as a working benchmark.

## About the Author

Eryck Dzotsi is the founder and Managing Member of Nova Nexus Marketing, a marketing strategy and operations consultancy based in Puerto Rico. He has 22 years of marketing leadership, including senior roles at Merkle (part of Dentsu), where he served as VP of Performance Media and Head of SEO for Merkle Americas, and BOLD, where he was SVP of Marketing. He led cross-channel marketing operations for Fortune 500 brands including Google, Comcast, USAA, Adobe, Universal Parks, BET+, and Viacom, building the systems that connected marketing spend to measurable revenue and redesigning the teams that ran them. He is the author of The Marketing Leadership Series, including Efficiency and Velocity: The Marketing Operations Excellence Playbook, forthcoming. Learn more at novanexusmarketing.com.

## About Nova Nexus

Nova Nexus Marketing audits and rebuilds the operating system underneath marketing: the people, data, processes, and tools that decide whether leadership can trust the numbers and whether the team can move fast. Our methodology is Insight. People. Results. Engagements begin with the Nexus Operating Review, a two-to-four-week fixed-fee diagnostic that produces a maturity score, a staffing assessment, and a prioritized 90-day roadmap, and continue through a fix sprint and a governed operating rhythm. We work with B2B technology companies and multi-site healthcare groups, and with the investors who back them. The next step is a thirty-minute operating system conversation: eryck@novanexusmarketing.com or novanexusmarketing.com.