

Next Generation Marketing

Why Business Leaders are Turning
to Virtual Marketing Management

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Executive Summary

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that change isn't coming. It's already here. Small businesses, the engine room of the Australian economy, are being forced to think and do things differently. Changing consumer behaviour, digital marketing trends, technologies and the impact of COVID-19 have drastically contributed to refocusing and reshaping the needs of business leaders.

COVID-19 has had a bigger impact on marketing and advertising than the global financial crisis (GFC). Businesses' marketing functions have been scrutinised throughout the pandemic, but digital marketing, in particular, is now emerging as the most valuable channel to rebuild revenue streams and reap strong ROI given the restricted budgets.

Businesses are rapidly shifting their marketing models to suit. With the most important questions to do this being:

- 1.** How should the new marketing function be structured
- 2.** What are the capabilities, technologies and programs that are critical to the success of the marketing strategy
- 3.** How to ensure a results-focused strategy and gain competitive advantage with the new budget allocated

Until now, SME CEOs and business leaders have had to make the decision whether to hire an internal team, outsource their marketing function, or manage with a combination of both.

Regardless of the approach taken, effectiveness stems from a strong "link" between the C suite strategic leadership and the marketing team. However, without a corporate budget for marketing, SMEs often experience this "missing link".

Without effective leadership between the marketing team (in-house or outsourced) and the decision-makers, businesses often suffer from: the marketing function becoming siloed, challenges with resourcing, a lack of centralisation, strategy and leadership, business dependencies on outsourced solutions, lack of internal capabilities and a lack of genuine brand buy-in.

The purpose of this paper is not to sell a 'one-size-fits-all' marketing solution. This simply does not exist.

Rather, we introduce the new **hybrid** approach to marketing, delivering the strategy, direction and results for a fraction of the price tag of traditional approaches. We explore how it works and why more and more business leaders are embracing this new solution.

Abstract

Business is changing. The marketing function is evolving and for the first time, business leaders are starting to turn to Virtual Marketing Management as an alternative, cost-effective solution for their marketing requirements.

Thirty years on from Tim Berners-Lee's invention of the World Wide Web in 1990, we are more connected than ever. Marketing has become a major business function globally, and thanks to technological advancements, its significance knows no geographical or cultural bounds. Businesses large and small can now infiltrate and attract any market, through powerful, digital strategies.

To date, there have been three main marketing structures available to businesses globally; the in-house,

freelance or agency model, each with their own pros and cons, price tags and results.

In 2019, ask Marketing introduced Virtual Marketing Management (VMM) as a new hybrid working approach to solve businesses' marketing needs. With an efficient price tag and exceptional results, the VMM model is optimal for SMEs and start-ups who require senior-level marketing management and growth, without the high cost of an internal Marketing Manager.

The global pandemic of 2020 has accelerated the need for many businesses to rethink their activity, working arrangements, expenses, digital presence and bottom line. Thus, fast-tracking the uptake of the VMM approach - a viable new formula for SMEs globally.

Global Business State of Play 2020

2020 has been a tumultuous year across the globe, with every industry being impacted by the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. But it did not start out this way.

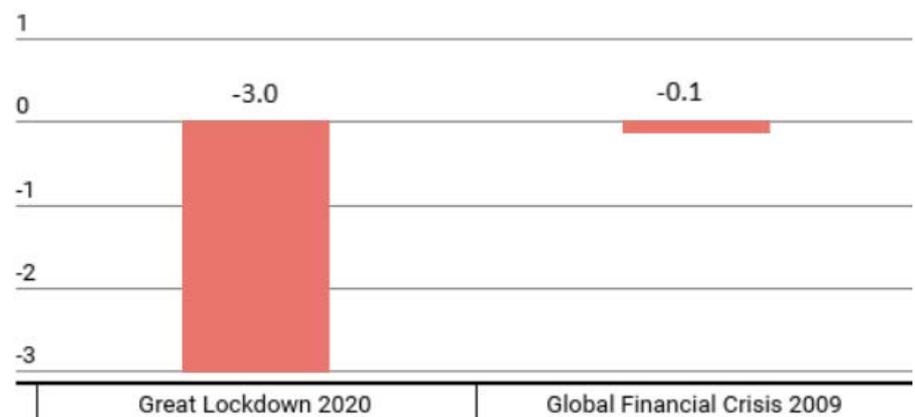
According to *Market Watch*, at the beginning of 2020, the global economy was looking strong, with positive predictions for the decade to come. No one could have predicted that three months later, the World Health Organisation would declare a global pandemic, leading to the closure of businesses worldwide. From an optimistic beginning to the cusp of a recession, unseen since the great depression of the 1930s (IMF), 2020 has taken a major turn.

Despite the pandemic, but even more so now, businesses worldwide are striving to operate in a lean and agile way. Whilst profit margins have always been the objective of any enterprise, networked technology has opened the door for increased efficiencies across every industry and lifestyle, enhancing the possibility of this. Other major business concerns and trends to kick off the new decade include: environmental sustainability, the rise of virtual work, the modern dynamic of 'co-working' office arrangements and how the world has succumbed to the digital landscape and threats of cybersecurity.

“**Despite the pandemic, but even more so now, businesses worldwide are striving to operate in a lean and agile way.**”

The Great Lockdown

The world economy will experience the worst recession since the Great Depression



Source: IMF, *World Economic Outlook*

Environmental sustainability

There is an increasing focus on being environmentally sustainable, both in our personal lives but more impactfully in the world of business. Pressure from both governments and the public is being placed on all levels of enterprises to do more to operate with strong environmental ethics. Thanks to the COVID-19 lockdown, environmental benefits of humanity 'slowing down' have been seen across the world, with drastic results. In a study by [The American Association of Advanced Sciences](#), satellite measurements

show a 48% drop in tropospheric nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere in 2020 compared to 2019. Smog rates globally are at their lowest in years, and according to the [United Nations](#), the world's oceans are benefitting from the reduced pollution, overfishing and the impacts of climate change. Lockdown has certainly highlighted the environmental benefit of working remotely and improvements driven by reduced commuting through our major towns and cities.

48%

drop in tropospheric nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere in 2020 compared to 2019.

Virtual work trends

Superfast broadband and the rollout of 5G, paired with video conferencing and organisational applications, makes it now possible to start, manage and grow businesses virtually. The past decade has seen a gradual shift in both the mindset and the enablement of this. According to [Tech Republic](#), remote work increased by 400% between 2010 and January 2020.

Come March 2020, businesses globally were forced into shutdown, further expediting virtual work arrangements.

In a global study by [Buffer](#) of over 3500 remote workers, 98% said they wish to continue working remotely, at least some of the time, for the rest of their career.

Similar global findings by [Gartner](#)

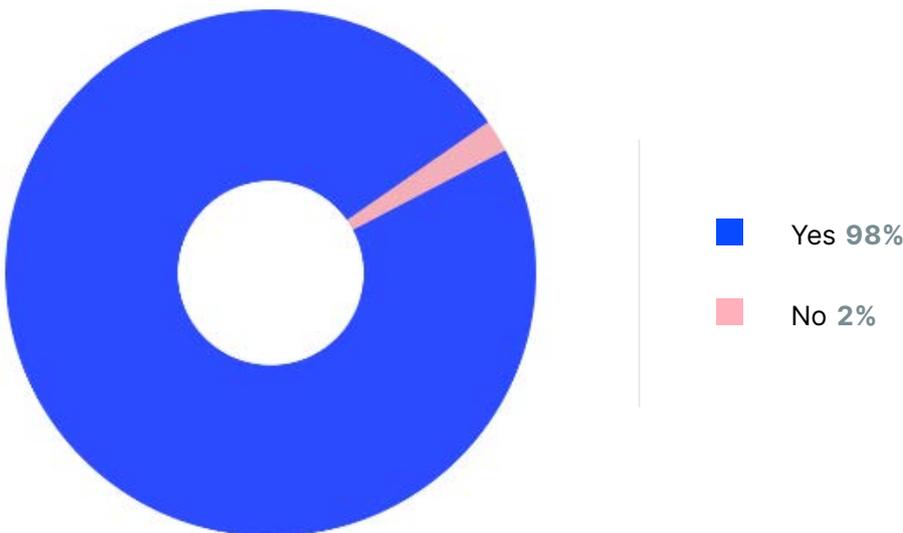
and [The Kung Group](#) have revealed 74% and 65% of CFOs respectively have already reported they intend to make the shift to remote work for some employees a permanent one.

Looking locally, in June 2020, ask Marketing conducted an intensive primary research survey. The survey was completed by 100 Australian SME CEOs and Business Leaders. The core objective was to understand the pre, during and post-pandemic changes to business operations.

The survey found that 62% of respondents worked from home or had flexible arrangements in their businesses before COVID-19. And further to this, 88% of respondents said they would continue to work from home, or have a combination of in-office and home-based working after COVID-19.

62%
of respondents worked from home or had flexible arrangements in their businesses before COVID-19.

Would you like to work remotely, at least some of the time, for the rest of your career?



Source: State of Remote Report 2020, buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020

In the same survey, 100% of respondents said they adapted well to the forced COVID-19 working arrangements.

With a growing emphasis on maintaining a positive work-life balance combined with saving the planet, working remotely is becoming more and more favourable for businesses. Lowering overhead costs, whilst delivering on employee's needs. By adding back the hours spent commuting to and from the office

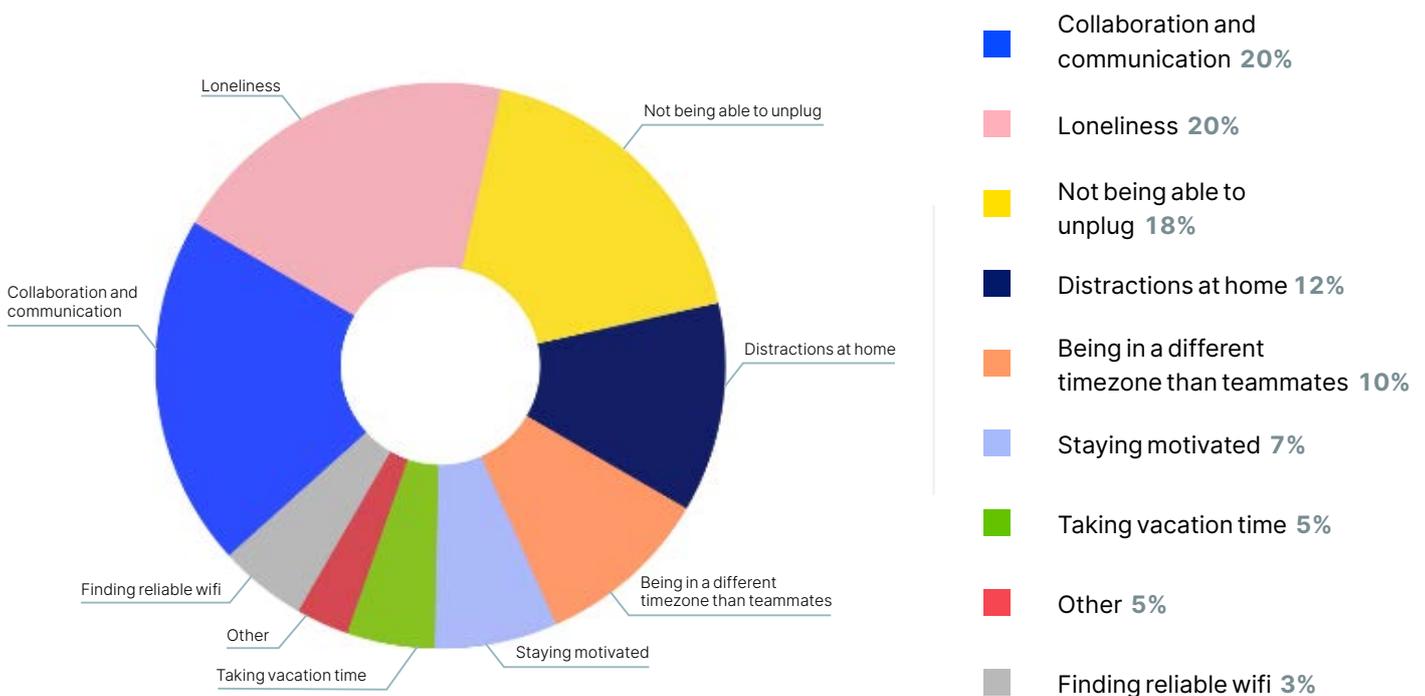
setting, means more businesses are going to be culling their 'in-office' numbers and allowing for flexible working arrangements.

It must also be noted however, that completely virtual-based work arrangements can have some major challenges.

These challenges are now brought to the forefront as businesses continue to optimise their new working conditions.

100%
of respondents said they adapted well to the forced COVID-19 working arrangements.

What is your biggest struggle with working remotely?



Source: State of Remote Report 2020, buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020

25,968

co-working spaces
are expected to open
globally by 2022.

The rise of co-working spaces

A solution to the lack of collaboration and loneliness outlined above, is the rise of 'co-working' spaces such as [Impact Hub](#). These facilities offer a sense of community and productivity without the price tag of a large office space. They allow teams and individuals to

hot desk or rent an office for a meeting, for a day, week or month if required. In a [study by Inc](#), in 2018, there were 2,188, co-working spaces located around the world and by 2022, there are to be an estimated 25,968 co-working spaces globally.

Outsourcing senior roles

Alongside remote working conditions, outsourcing business leadership functions is also increasing in popularity for many reasons. According to [Deloitte](#), the number one reason for outsourcing is cost saving.

Contrary to common belief that leaders must be in the corner office, it is now more plausible and viable for decision-makers to be outsourced. In a study by [Brookings](#), business leaders in the top quartile of earnings were outsourcing long before the COVID-19 lockdown. Businesses have been successfully outsourcing the roles of Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) and Chief Technology Officers (CTOs) for years now.

However, Senior Marketing leadership roles have been less commonly outsourced, but are now rapidly growing in popularity as a successful solution worldwide.

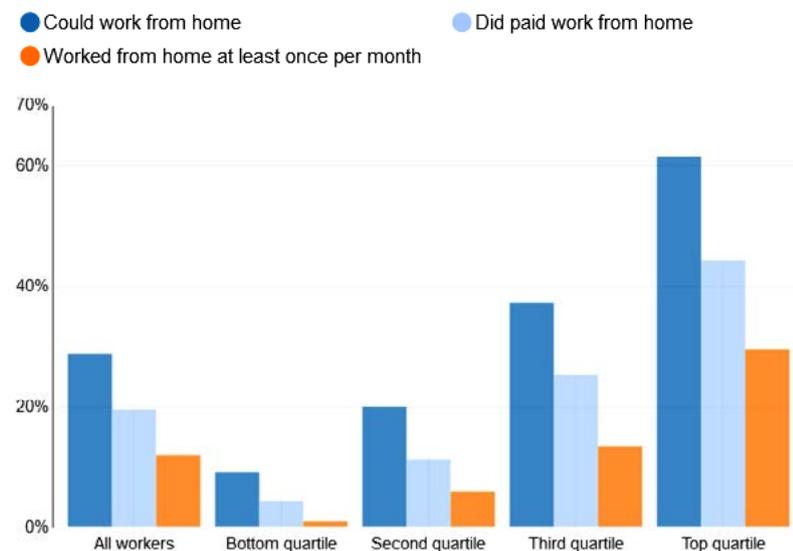
According to [Promethean Research](#), new entrants into the top quartile of virtual work have come from senior consultants. Firms which have outsourced CTO, CFO and COO roles are now also adding outsourced marketing consulting into their budgets. Not only is this method financially effective for both parties, but it allows the outsourced senior marketing manager to have better autonomy over their work, without getting caught up in the corporate bureaucracy.

“Outsourcing business leadership functions is also increasing in popularity for many reasons. According to Deloitte, the number one reason for outsourcing is cost saving.”

“Probably the most important trait [of a Virtual Marketing Leader] is to translate the CEO’s vision into an insightful, measurable, and actionable marketing plan.”
- Forbes Magazine

High earners work from home more

Prevalence of work from home in 2017-18, by earnings quartile



Source: Promethean, 2019

52.6%

of global website traffic comes from mobile devices.

Acceleration of digital

Adopting technology and the digitisation of business has been happening for decades. Changes were evolving long before COVID-19, but the pandemic significantly hyper-accelerated this. Businesses that have been considering digital solutions over the past few years, are now fully embracing them as the new normal, enabling a long-term digital future.

Further to this is the influence of digital mediums on individual users through the rise

of mobile usage, with 3.5 billion smartphone users globally. Mobile usage is changing the way businesses operate, how they market and how they spend. With 52.6% of global website traffic coming from mobile devices, the capability for collection of data has grown exponentially, and it is now ever possible for people to be connected at all times, no matter where they are. This stands as the biggest digital marketing opportunity, and at the forefront of business decisions globally.

Cybersecurity; a non-negotiable

With our lives and businesses rapidly moving online, the threat of cyber attacks, data infiltration and fraudulent behaviour is more prevalent than ever. In 2004,

global expenditure on cybersecurity was around \$3.5 billion. In 2017, annual expenditure was around 35 times that, at \$120 billion globally, and by 2021, it is expected to exceed \$1 trillion.

“
Expenditure on digital security will be the most dramatic expense increase between 2010-2030.”

Global Marketing Trends

The rise in marketing expenditure

Other than cybersecurity, digital and data management expenditure, businesses are also spending more on marketing.

In a study by [Web Strategies](#), they found the annual expenditure on marketing has been consistently growing by 4 - 9% year on year for the past decade, with rates from 2019 increasing at 8.7% on the previous year.

"Digital advertising spend surpasses spending on offline advertising: CMOs invest two-thirds of advertising budgets into digital channels."

- Gartner

Percentage change in marketing budgets expected in next 12 months



Source: Web Strategies, 2020

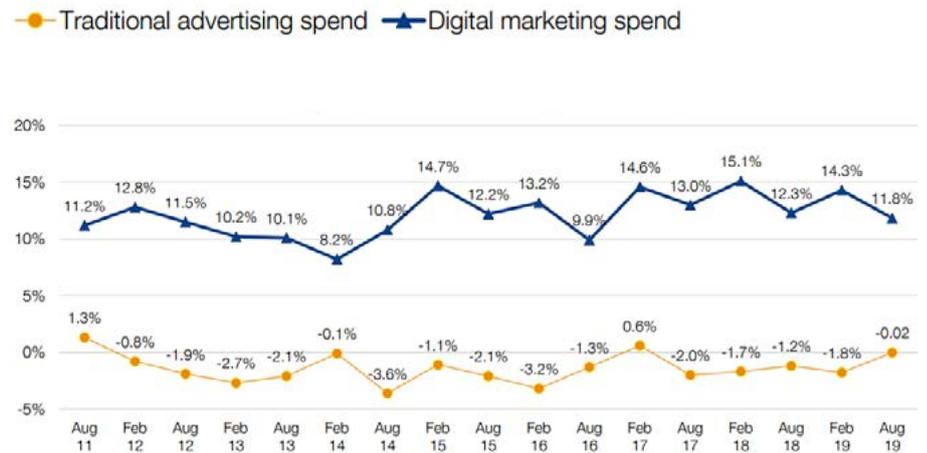
Digital at the forefront

The above study also found that the digital marketing spend in particular, by comparison, has consistently grown by double-digit increments year after year, whilst traditional marketing spend is decreasing on average. Print and radio advertising spend is now being put into email, social and video content. This shift in spend reflects global behavioural changes, such as increased use of mobile and desktop website traffic in an online world.

This should come as no surprise, as mobile marketing dominates the digital landscape. People are spending less hours watching TV with commercials and have reduced spending on printed mediums. Consumers are now reaching for digital streaming sources of entertainment including Spotify, Netflix and podcasts, as well as subscribing to digital editorials. Marketing has shifted with the times to have more of a digital focus than ever.

Whilst marketing is evolving, the needs of customers are still the same - to get products and services for the best quality at the lowest price possible. In order for businesses to compete in an ever-competitive digital landscape, digital spends are increasing continuously.

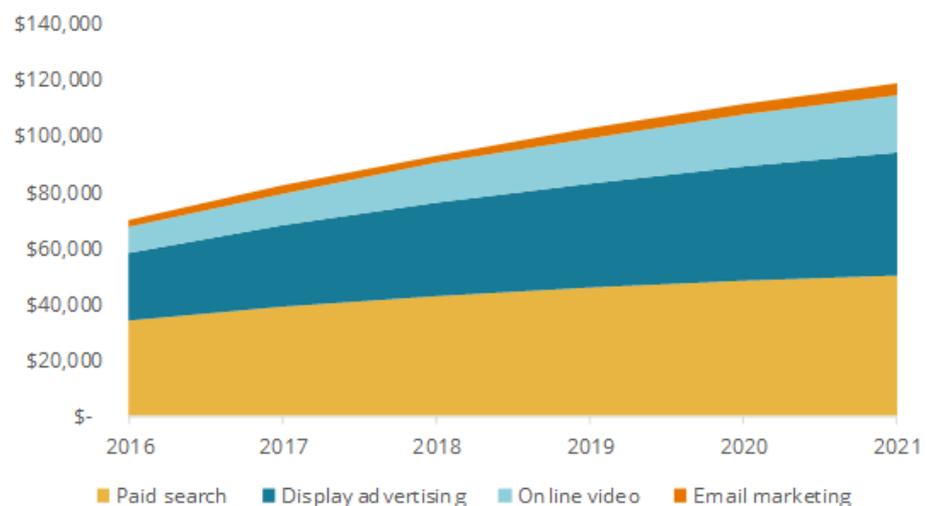
Percentage change in traditional advertising* vs. digital marketing spend in next 12 months



Source: Christine Moorman, Web Strategies, 2020
* Refers to media advertising not using the internet

Digital Marketing Spend Growth Forecast Through 2021

Expected growth in digital marketing in millions of dollars within total growing at an 11% CAGR



Source: Prometheus Research & Forrester, 2019

Marketing recruitment, development and training

Interestingly, a 2019 study by [Gartner](#), found that expenditure on marketing recruitment (training and development) has reached a 5 year high. An exceptional marketer is no longer a creative person who can think of a good jingle, or who knows where to place the product on the shelf. Marketers need to be creatives with an understanding of the digital landscape - knowing how to analyse and leverage data and technologies to obtain better results.

As marketing spend shifts more to digital, the needs of businesses requiring better digital marketing skills grows. Ask any marketer in the industry, and they will tell you that new technologies are appearing every single day to facilitate greater digital marketing success. It does not matter what a marketer knew 10 years ago. What matters is what they know today. And these necessary skills are best learnt 'on the job' or through ongoing training and development.

“Marketers need to be creatives with an understanding of the digital landscape - knowing how to analyse and leverage data and technologies to obtain better results.”

The structure of the marketing function

Large corporations often have both internal and external marketing functions. The Gartner CMO survey, found that 24-27% of marketing spend went to internal labour, whilst 23-25% of spend went to additional marketing agencies.

Businesses are looking for core teams with fewer people and better results. According to *Forbes*, clients are questioning why they would pay for large teams when they don't know what half the team members are doing. Many clients are bringing the work in-house into leaner teams, so they

can monitor how money is being spent. The problem is, that none of these solutions are both functionally and financially effective. Something's got to give.

Brands are now placing a greater emphasis on building their internal talent pools which is placing downward pressure on agency growth. Many businesses are now keeping some execution in-house, by establishing their own in-house agency, to complete skills such as social media (94%) and basic graphic or UX/UI design work (91%).

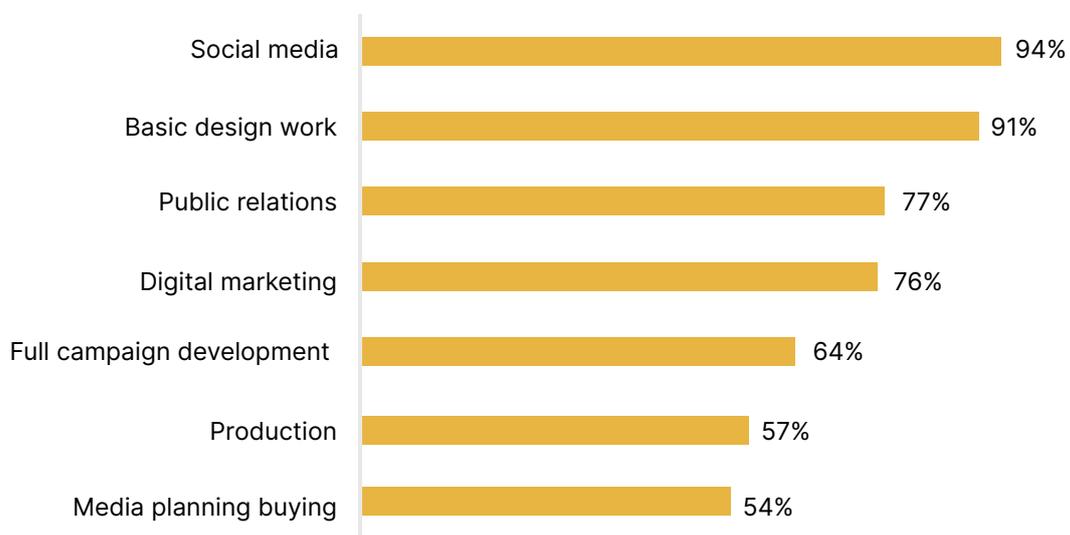
24-27%

of marketing spend went to internal labour.

23-25%

of spend went to additional marketing agencies.

In-house Capabilities
The type of work in-house marketing teams are performing



Source: Promethean Research & RSW, 2019

Increased expectation on marketing ROI

Another major shift is that brands are now demanding and expecting a greater ROI on their marketing activity, compounded by the pressures businesses are feeling since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe. This is regardless of how the marketing function is structured.

“After seeing rising budgets over the last few years, stakeholders are demanding quantifiable results from their [marketing] investments. Brands believe they are often more adept at building ROI tracking internally.”

- Promethean Research, 2019

According to [Web Strategies Inc](#), the revenue to marketing cost ratio represents how much money is generated for every dollar spent in marketing, and they suggest it should equate to around 5:1 ratio. For every dollar spent, the marketing function should generate \$5 in revenue.

“Let’s be clear. It’s going to be a tough few years. Marketing budgets are not just going to be smaller. They are also going to be far more important. They will become even more central to the success of a business, and getting the most out of them will be critical. And they will become endangered – subject to the ebbs and flows of the very company fortunes to which they are so vital.”

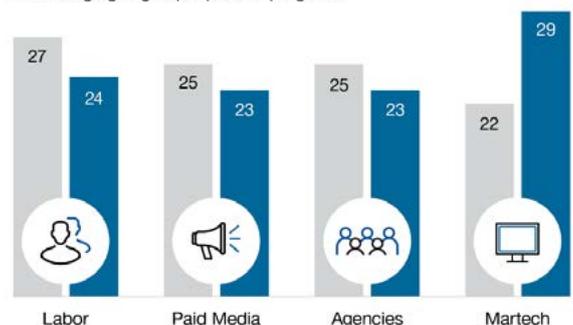
- **Nathan Hodges**, Managing Director Trinity P3, Global Marketing Management Consultants

Q. Tell us how your company’s fiscal year 2018 total marketing expense budget is being allocated to or spent on each of the following people and programs

■ 2017 ■ 2018

CMO Budget

Percentage going to people and programs



Source: Gartner, 2018

Australian SMEs State of Play 2020

Australian SMEs are paving the way for digital business globally, and as of the last Australian census, SMEs currently employ 4.8 million Australians, 43.8% of the country's total workforce.

As stated in the [Australian Government's budget](#), "Small business is the engine room of our economy". [NAB's recent SME White Paper](#) has uncovered that 1 in 5 Australian SMEs are owned by

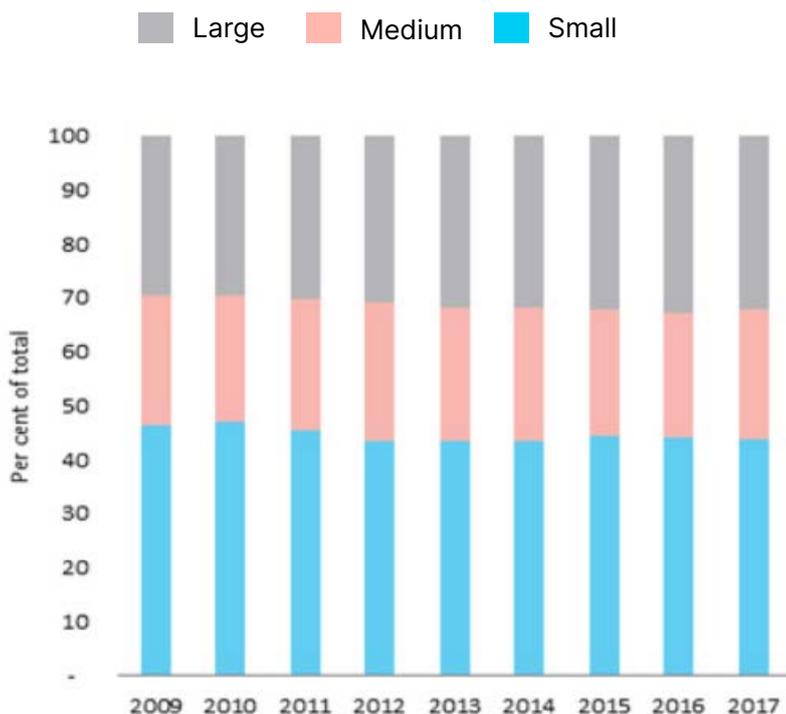
millennials (aged 18 - 35 years old), with a clean 50/50 gender split of these millennial-owned businesses.

These businesses would not exist without the internet, the owners intent to grow the digital side of their businesses, alongside their openness to optimise digital marketing practises such as automation.

1 in 5

Australian SMEs are owned by millennials.

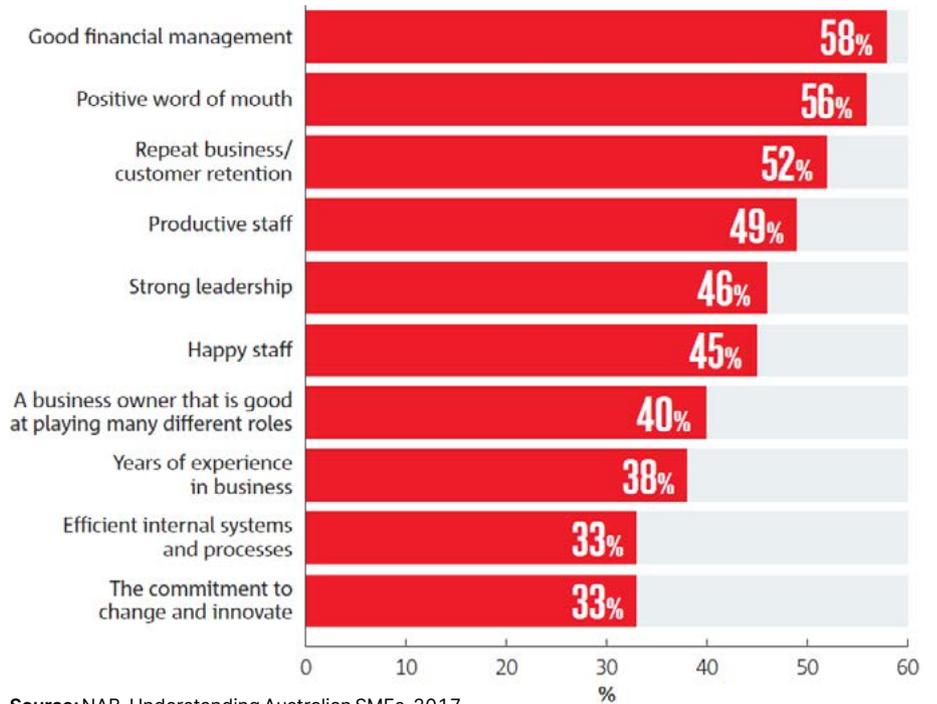
Composition of employment by business size



Source: ABS, *Australian Industry*, cat. no. 8155.0, 2019

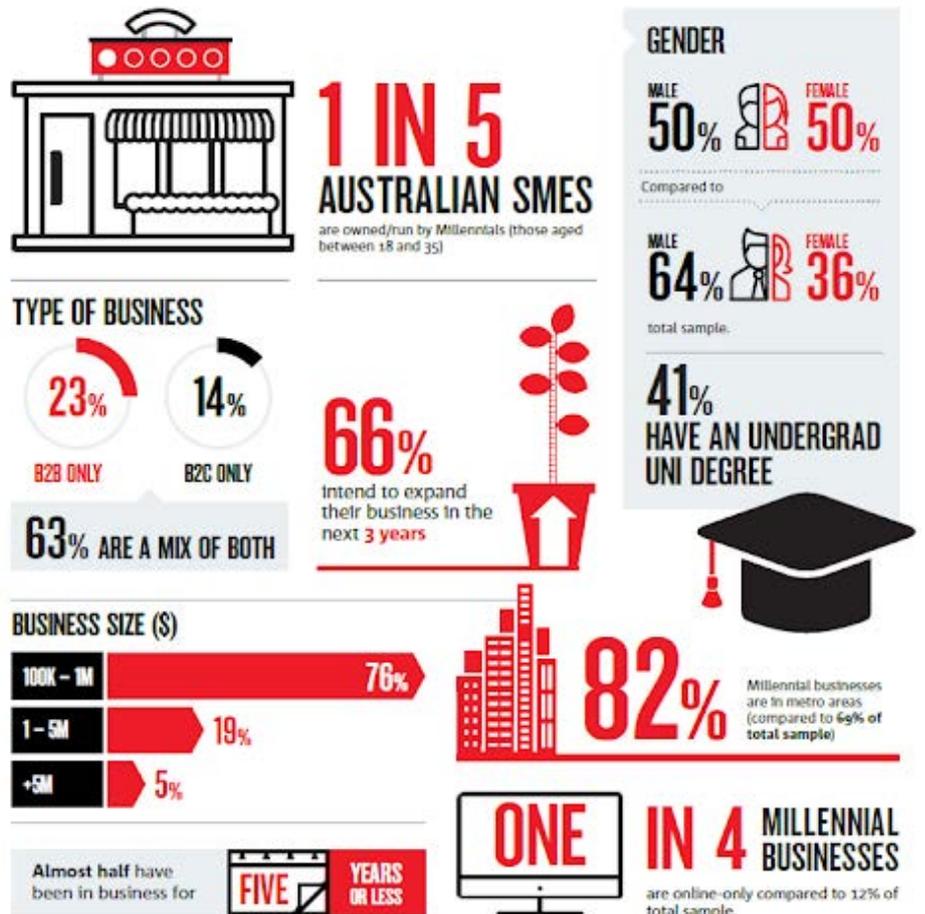
“NAB also found that factors such as strong leadership, happy and productive staff were considered major factors for business success.”

What makes a successful business?



Source: NAB, Understanding Australian SMEs, 2017

Who are our Millennial SMEs?



Source: NAB, Understanding Australian SMEs, 2017

The marketing spend of Australian SMEs

According to The Zenith Advertising Expenditure Forecast, digital ad spend is predicted to exceed 60% of the total ad spend in Australia by 2021. The growth in internet advertising is largely being driven by small businesses, and platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Google making it easier to start and manage a business online.

Further to this, Australian brands spent approximately \$9.45 billion on digital ads 2019, a 7.1% increase on 2018 with Facebook still remaining the

number 1 social platform for reaching users in Australia.

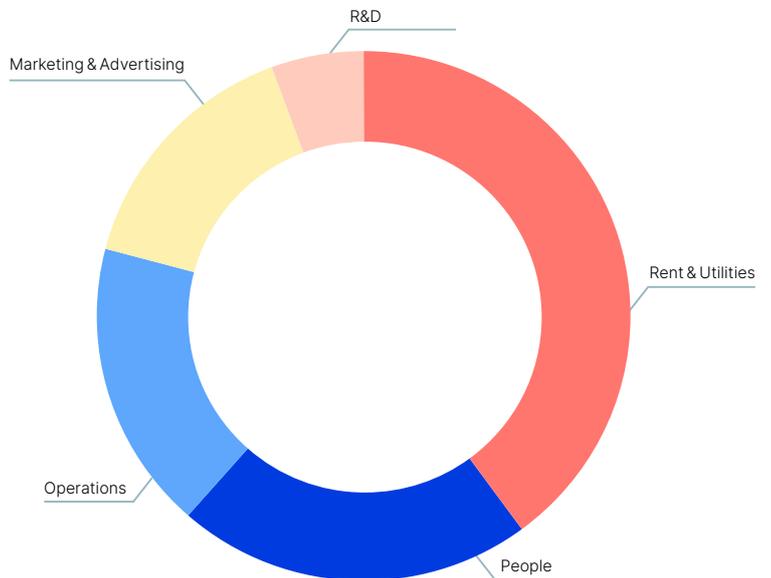
Interestingly, in the survey introduced above by ask Marketing, it found that after the COVID-19 lockdown, 30% of Australian SME CEOs and Business Leaders surveyed have had to shut down their marketing altogether, because they believe they couldn't afford it anymore. Marketing & advertising stand amongst some of the main functions where businesses have cut costs this year, alongside rent and utilities, people and operations.

30%

of Australian SME CEOs and Business Leaders surveyed have had to shut down their marketing altogether, because they believe they couldn't afford it anymore.

Areas of Business Cost Reduction Since March 2020

- Rent & Utilities **39.9%**
- People **21.7%**
- Operations **17.5%**
- Marketing & Advertising **15.4%**
- R&D **5.6%**



Source: ask Marketing Primary Research Survey of SME CEOs and Business Leaders - June 2020

Australian SME marketing structure

There are several ways to structure a marketing department to best suit a business. Here are some important factors businesses must consider.

All businesses need a marketing strategy first. This needs to be done by a senior marketing brain. Someone who:

- Has ideally managed marketing teams and marketing projects,
- Knows what to look for in people and partners.
- Has a strategic brain needed to advise a strategy across the necessary channels.

The experts to execute the tactics within the strategy comes second.

In today's complex digital marketing landscape, it takes a broad set of skills in multiple areas to successfully execute a campaign.

With over 41 specialty areas in Marketing (and that list is continually growing), being able to effectively execute all necessary marketing tactics can often require multiple expert parties or people. Currently, many organisations that budget for a marketing function take on one of three forms of structure:

- a)** In-house marketing team
- b)** Agency model
- c)** Freelance marketing

All businesses need a marketing strategy first.

The in-house marketing team

A fully in-house marketing function is generally for those organisations with bigger budgets and needs. Depending on the size of the organisation, this generally includes a team of individuals who specialise on a particular component of marketing.

If a senior marketing lead has completed a strategy first, and then hired a team of internal marketers based on their

ability and experience to execute the tactical components of the strategy, then this option is sound. In any case, it can be an expensive approach.

The table below highlights some of the fundamental internal marketing roles that are often hired to create a fully internal marketing team. Their average salaries outlined below.

“Interestingly, in the ask Marketing survey of 100 Australian SME CEOs and business leaders, 47% of businesses who were operating under this approach, said they are now looking for an outsourced option of marketing post COVID-19, wishing to operate a leaner business.”

Role	Salary Range	Average
Marketing Assistant	\$44,000 - \$68,000	\$60,000
Marketing Coordinator	\$60,000-\$80,000	\$70,000
Marketing Specialist	\$70,000-\$110,000	\$90,000
Marketing Manager	\$70,000- \$187,000	\$110,000
Digital Marketing Manager	\$70,000- \$187,000	\$110,000
Senior Marketing Manager	\$83,000 - \$158,000	\$121,000
VP Marketing and Sales	\$113,000 - \$309,000	\$191,000

Source: Pay Scale and Seek, 2019

The agency model

A third approach is the agency model, first introduced by advertising agencies back in the 1960s. This flowed into the marketing industry and now, globally, thousands of businesses utilise marketing agency services.

This model is particularly effective if the business strategy identifies a particular area of marketing which requires a highly specialised skill set. This approach is also the preference of businesses who do not have any internal scope to deliver on marketing objectives.

With an estimated 550,000 agencies worldwide, the model has clearly had some successes, and whilst there will always be a place

for this type of service, there is also an increasing fear that the agency model is now being challenged.

A study by [BedFord Group consulting](#) has highlighted some of the limitations of the agency model, including:

1. The skills and processes for day to day marketing functions remain with the agency and not within the business
2. No development or enhancement of the internal teams marketing capabilities
3. Risk of limited innovation, strategy and drive - resulting in the same thing, on repeat,

each month. I.e. Rinse and Repeat marketing strategies.

4. Bringing marketing functions in-house can be very difficult
5. Model can be costly & overhead-intensive
6. The business outgrows the agency
7. Frequent turnover of account management staff

These limitations, along with recent global and local business trends, mean that business leaders are now researching all options for the management of their marketing.

Freelance Marketing

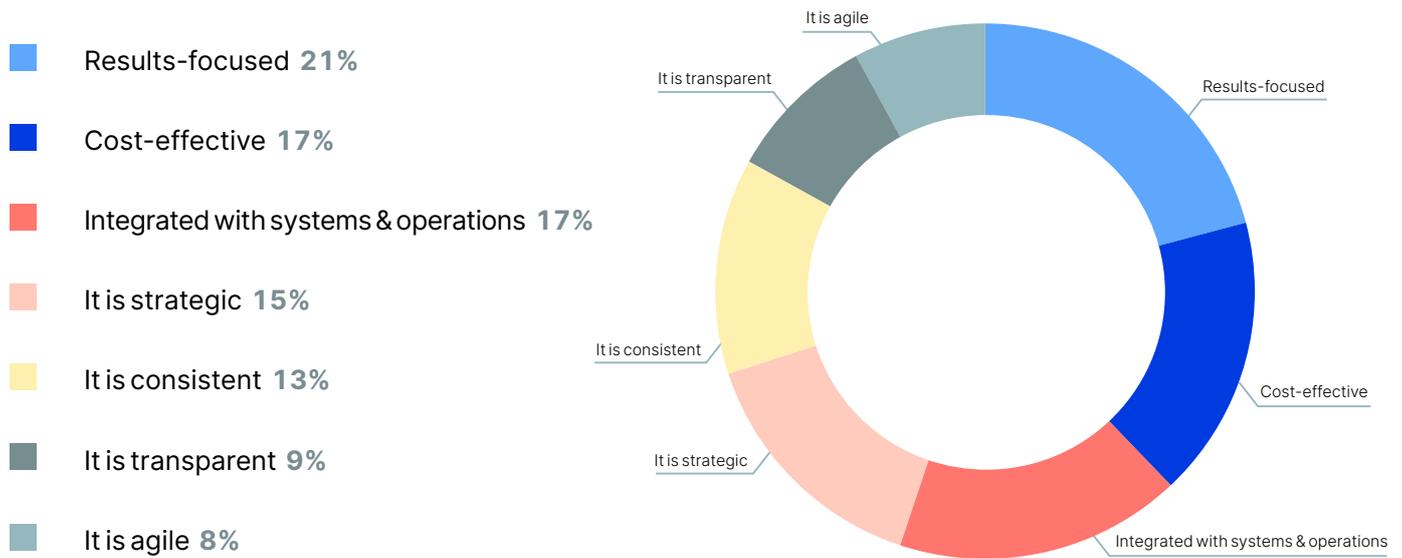
Due to technological advancements and the possibility of remote work, freelance marketing is becoming more common for seedlings, in the early stages of business development.

Thanks to online platforms such as Upwork, you can now find freelance

professionals for almost any task - from graphic design to copywriting to social media management.

This structure is favoured by early-stage business as it is often a financially viable solution, with all of the work remaining online and contract-based, with no employee obligations.

The most important component to your business marketing function



Source: ask Marketing Primary Research Survey of SME CEOs and Business Leaders - June 2020

13%

of CEOs and Business Leaders have decided to revert from the agency model, bringing their marketing in-house since the global pandemic began.

As uncovered in the June 2020 ask Marketing survey, CEOs and business leaders revealed that when deciding on how to best shape their marketing function, the most important factors were that it was results-focused, cost-effective and integrated with business systems & operations.

The research also found that 13% of CEOs and Business Leaders have decided to revert from the agency model, bringing

their marketing in-house since the global pandemic began. Their reasons for this were to save costs and have greater transparency & autonomy of their marketing spend. 55% plan to continue this leaner approach moving forward.

It is clear that from the above solutions, there is not a one size fits all marketing solution. All businesses will continue to have different needs and objectives for their marketing function.

There is not a one size fits all marketing solution.

Introducing: Virtual Marketing Management

There is no doubt that, now more so than ever, businesses need a cutting edge marketing function with strategic thinking, creativity, technical expertise and optimal execution.

The Virtual Marketing Management model, provides high-level and agile marketing strategies, guidance & technology, for a fraction of the cost of employing an in-house, full-time marketing resource of the same seniority.

Partnering with your own Senior Virtual Marketing Manager **could save you 70%** on hiring your own in-house Marketing Manager. Ultimately, the VMM approach is a smarter way to think and

act BIG, without the price tag.

VMMs are an extension of a business and are the perfect fit for any business who already has, or has scope to add an in-house junior marketing resource. (I.e. has already got, or has the scope to add one or several of the roles mentioned above within the internal marketing roles table).

It enables the business to have senior marketing management alongside someone internally, working on the day-to-day execution, right where the action happens. This helps to enhance and develop the skills of the internal team, continually and reliably guided by the VMM.

The in-house Marketing Managers of yesterday, the Virtual Marketing Managers of tomorrow.

110K

Average salary of a Digital Marketing Manager in Australia

(Source: Seek, 2020)

Save up to

70%

Have your own senior Virtual Marketing Manager, working alongside your internal marketing resource.

A hybrid approach

The new VMM approach sits between the 100% outsourced and 100% in house marketing models; a new hybrid model. The VMM structure is not about being completely outsourced, nor completely in-house.

A Virtual Marketing Manager will:

- 1.** Leverage the internal marketing capacity of the business, enabling significant cost savings and the development of the internal resources.
- 2.** Develop a role, recruit, train and support an internal marketing resource.
- 3.** Develop and provide ongoing support for the internal resource, who executes the day-to-day.
- 4.** Provide an ongoing partnership, allowing you to outsource the work, yet feel a sense of control over the service
- 5.** Ensure that if business needs to bring everything in-house in the future, all of the systems, processes and training have been put in place.
- 6.** Focus on both the overarching

bigger picture and the finer details of your business, creating dynamic and successful marketing strategies to suit your needs.

7. Be a well-resourced people in the industry, having previously worked as in-house Senior Marketing Managers within startups, SMEs and for some of the world's leading global brands

8. Ensure teamwork with the internal resource, with day-to-day communication a vital component of the partnership.

9. Provide constant communication and support for all agreed strategies, from content creation to budgetary requirements.

In the study by ask Marketing, 85% of respondents said they were going to operate a leaner business moving forward and that a VMM would help with this.

A lot of SMEs are not ready to invest in in-house teams, whether because of capital restraints, lack of understanding of the marketing function, or other reasons. VMM allows these businesses to dip their toes into marketing and build a function that is more agile and cost-effective than the in-house alternative.

Problems and Solutions

For all of the apparent challenges in today's business world, the VMM approach not only addresses them, but eliminates them. This is explained below.

Whether a business decides that the VMM approach is best suited to their marketing needs, will be left up to them.

“Marketing teams of the future will look very different than they do today.”

"Outsourcing work is sometimes the optimal solution for business. However, when the information, vision and messaging is siloed through numerous outsourced functions, it becomes ineffective and a logistical nightmare. There needs to be a link between the business and the outsourced function."

- **Gary Boddington**, Blockchain Entrepreneur,
CEO Sports Technology Group, Oly

Market Challenge 1

The marketing function is siloed

Marketing specialties and their respective components are often siloed. This effect may happen due to a lack of integration, collaboration and communication between a business, their freelance marketers and an agency.

In May 2020, a [Deloitte Digital and Salesforce Webinar](#) reported that “Customers are accessing multiple touchpoints during a purchase but there is a significant disconnect within companies.

75% of consumers expect consistent interactions across all departments.

However, 58% say that they feel like they’re communicating with separate departments and not one company.”

A siloed marketing function will often result in a lack of agility and missed business opportunities. Most importantly, as stated above, the customer will always know and can feel when communication is dis cohesive or if the brand is being disingenuous.

This is a common “missing link”, one that the VMM approach eliminates.

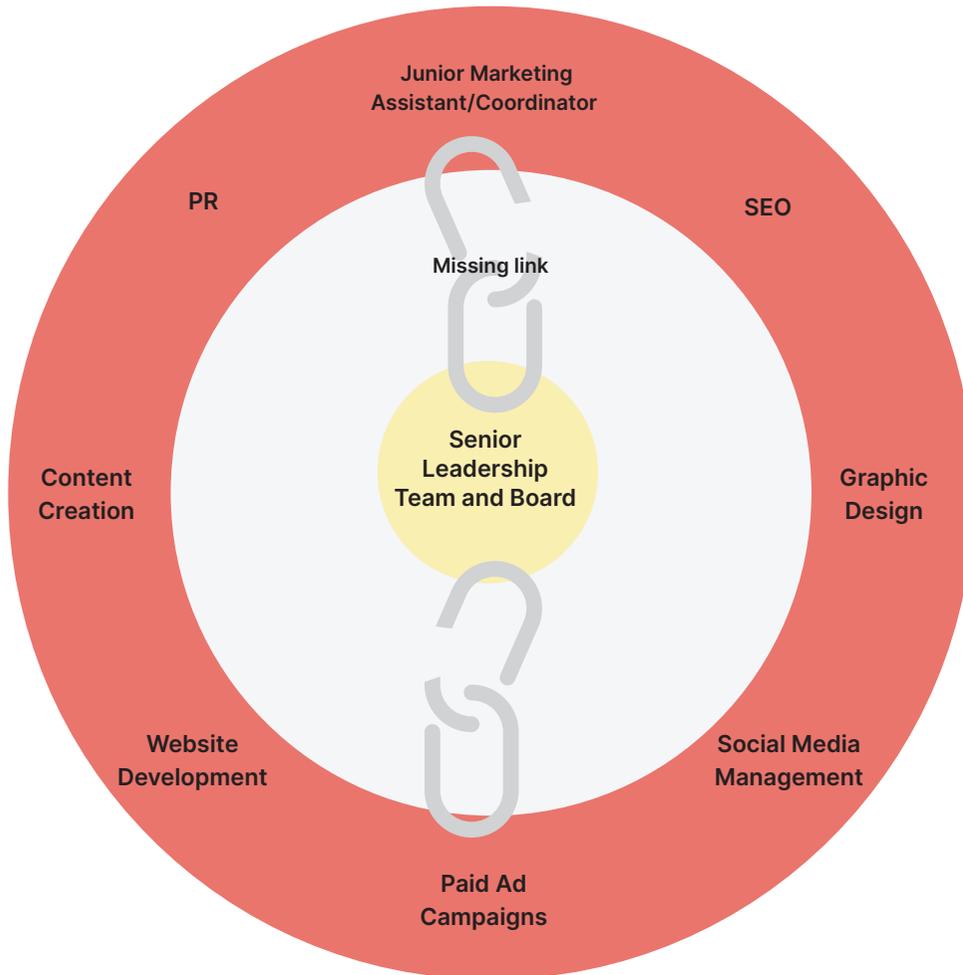
Not only will a business have their own VMM overseeing the bigger picture strategy, they will also have an in-house resource who is at the beating heart of the business, being trained and developed by the senior Virtual Marketing Manager.

Collaboration between the VMM and the internal resource is integrated and consistent for ongoing growth and success.

A siloed marketing function will often result in a lack of agility and missed business opportunities.

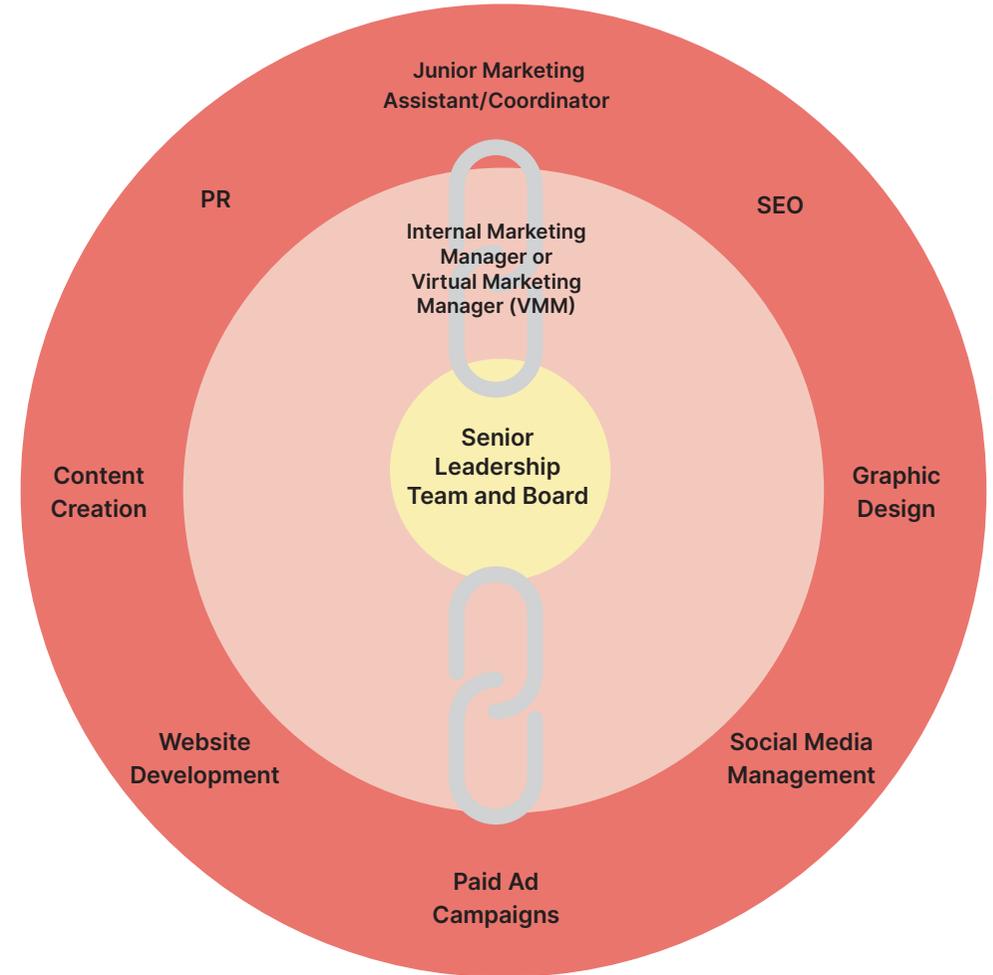
A broken marketing function with a “Missing Link”

A “missing link” occurs when a business does not have a senior marketing lead adjoining the leadership team with those executing the marketing day-to-day.



A cohesive marketing function with no missing links

A Virtual Marketing Manager (similarly to an Internal Marketing Manager) provides the critical link, enabling the translation of a CEO's vision and goals, into the day-to-day executional tactics.



Market Challenge 2

Resourcing is not easy

A major challenge for businesses all over the world is finding, training and retaining talent. Business owners often say, "We choose to outsource because it seems too hard to hire someone who is able to do the job autonomously with the highest quality" or "We don't have the time to hire and train new staff or up-skill and train existing staff". They are not wrong. According to [Majer Recruitment](#), hiring times for Australian businesses has nearly doubled since 2010, taking on average 68 days to fill a vacancy. Not only is this time consuming, but it is also expensive, with suggested costs on average being \$5000 to recruit a new employee.

With the VMM formula, the process of finding and training talent is not the responsibility of the business owner. The VMM will guide the entire process,

from developing and defining the position description, advertising the role, interviewing applicants and making recommendations, to the handover process and ongoing training and development. The business owner will always have the final sign off on the role and the successful applicant, however the VMM manages the end to end process with ease.

Spotting a brilliant junior marketer is one of the skills of a VMM. They have been internal marketing managers before, so they know what to look for. As Senior Marketing Managers with years of managerial experience, VMMs know the prerequisites, characteristics and skills needed to ensure the right internal marketing resource is selected, guaranteeing long term business success.

“**Spotting a brilliant junior marketer is one of the skills of a VMM.**”

Market Challenge 3

Internal team lacks strategy & leadership

Many business owners express that, "Our internal team is good. However, the overarching marketing strategy is missing."

In many SMEs, the junior marketer(s) reports to a non-marketing function. However, it is not the job or experience of the CEO, CTO and COO to strategise or oversee marketing.

A CEO requires a senior level commercially minded Marketing Manager who can analyse, guide, pivot and confidently

create the most effective marketing strategies based on the high level business goals.

Without this, forges a clear gap, another "missing link" between the CEO's vision and a tactical plan to deliver on the core objectives.

Many businesses face this challenge, whether internally or using a fully outsourced agency. A VMMs job is to develop marketing strategies to achieve a businesses goals. This is then integrated with the role of the junior marketer who

can execute on this. This connects the dots between the business leaders and the marketing function.

Interestingly, in the recent survey completed by ask Marketing, **60% of SME CEOs and leaders had heard of a Virtual CFO, yet only 40% had heard of a VMM. However, 70% of these respondents went on to state they would consider outsourcing a leadership role for their business, with 85% of these believing the VMM approach would benefit their business.**

Market Challenge 4

There is a limited marketing budget

“Many businesses cannot afford both senior and junior in-house marketers. By embracing the VMM approach, business leaders can have both, without the price tag.”

A common question amongst business leaders is “What is the best investment to get marketing results on a tight budget?” Often, businesses are unsure how to best set up their marketing function with a focus on cost efficiencies.

More often than not, the answer lies within your talent. If SME business owners are spending over \$100,000 per year on one marketer, it leaves either very little room for senior level strategy, or very little room for the day to day executional costs. As discussed above, many businesses cannot afford both senior and

junior in-house marketers.

By embracing the VMM approach, business leaders can have both, without the price tag.

Further to this, one of the key strengths of the VMM approach is the ability to enable marketing technologies (Martech). With marketing becoming more and more digital, and new solution-based technologies emerging, it's at the forefront of the VMM approach to utilise these tech tools to create cost efficiencies and performance optimisations throughout the funnel.

Market Challenge 5

Visibility and control are important

These are two common concerns of most business leaders: “*Outsourcing is not our preferred method because we want to have full control and transparency on the ROI and results*” and “*We would rather invest in our internal people to enhance our own skills and reap the long term value*”.

When the work is fully outsourced, business leaders often question value for money and the transparency of their investment as the marketing activity is developed, curated and executed externally.

The VMM model is built on transparency, independence and an ROI which is more than just marketing metrics - it is about the value being added back into the business, it's people.

With the VMM approach, the internal resource sits within the business, being trained and developed by the VMM. The day-to-day execution of marketing is done in-house by this resource, whilst being trained on the technical and tactical components by the VMM, adding long term value back into the business.

Market Challenge 6

There is outsourcing dependency

Many businesses have a fully outsourced marketing function and they rely solely on this service to execute all of their marketing activity. Many businesses choose to do this because they do not have the skills or the resources internally.

With the VMM approach, the business is fully independent, with the in-house skills and

capabilities developed to not only execute on the marketing strategy in an ongoing way, but do so with amazing results.

This means that, at any stage, if the business decides to bring the marketing function completely in-house, the processes and skills for day-to-day execution are already set up.

Market Challenge 7

Searching for a unicorn

Often SME business owners are looking for marketers that can 'do it all', often referred to as the 'unicorn'. However, with digitalisation comes an array of specialisations within digital marketing - there are now 41 specialty areas and that list continues to grow. **There's little wonder why a 'unicorn' marketer is no longer possible.**

Understanding this, the VMM approach stands to set up a businesses marketing function in the most cost-effective and results-focused way. How?

1. As discussed above, all businesses need a marketing strategy first, developed by a senior marketer.

This is the role of a VMM and brings the structure to a businesses marketing function.

2. The recruitment or training of a junior team member who can execute the fundamental day-to-day marketing activity comes next.

3. Additional experts to fit within the niche marketing areas required come third. For example, SEO & CRO are niche marketing areas that will always require experts to execute on.

The VMM stands to connect the dots between experts, ensuring the marketing function is firing optimally from all angles in a lean and cost-efficient way.

Hear from one of the internal marketing resources that a VMM recruited, trained and continues to partner with.

"Working alongside the ask Marketing VMM team has been a great learning experience. Their recruitment process was seamless and their training and support continues to be invaluable. It has allowed me to feel confident and capable to excel in this role. Their organisational skills, effective communication and their trust in my ability has been exciting and challenging, allowing me to grow significantly in new areas within the business and greater digital marketing landscape."

- **Indira Pandey**, Digital Marketing Executive,
Multi-Brand Internal Resource.

The internal resource works in the heart of the business, deeply understanding both the businesses' and consumer needs, whilst being led from a topographic & strategic level by the senior VMM.

Market Challenge 8

Lack of genuine brand buy-in

Marketing is all about growing a business with a strong brand voice, telling a story which allows consumers to feel a sense of connectedness with the brand. Fully outsourced marketing often limits the ability to deliver that sense of genuine, unequivocal brand voice across all touchpoints.

The reality is, the 'always on' marketing activities (for example, organic social media and ongoing content creation)

is best done by someone in the business day in & day out, who lives and breathes the brand.

The VMM approach supports this understanding and value of authenticity.

The internal resource works in the heart of the business, deeply understanding both the businesses' and consumer needs, whilst being led from a topographic & strategic level by the senior VMM.

"Working with ask Marketing is one of the best business decisions I have ever made. They have taken the time to understand the in's and out's of our organisation and it has allowed me to get more in touch with where we are and where we need to go. All I can say is, I wish I had commenced our partnership sooner."

- **Robert Dukes**, Founder & Creative Director RDVis Creative Studio

Virtual Marketing Management: How it works

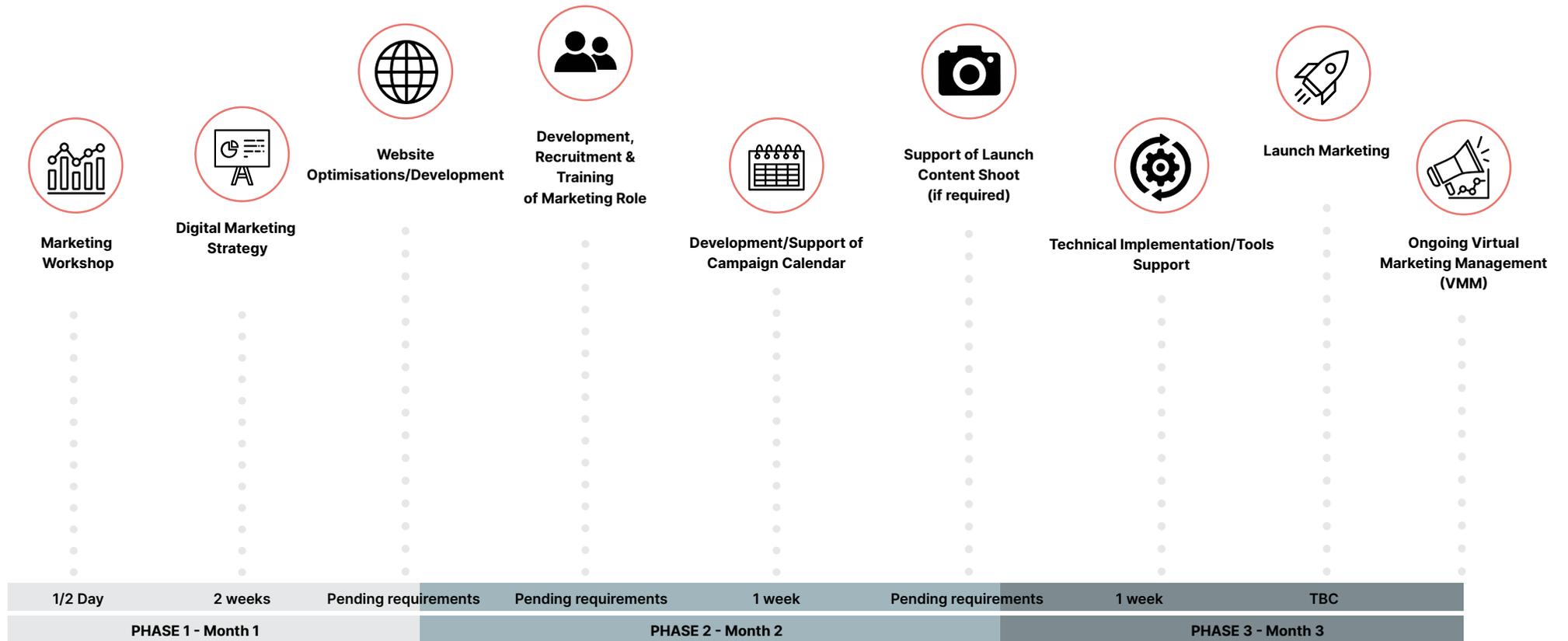
Breakdown of Key Responsibilities

Virtual Marketing Manager (VMM) Responsibilities

Internal Marketing Resource(s) Responsibilities

Develop the monthly/quarterly/yearly Digital Marketing Strategy. Present to Directors/Board for sign off.	Involved in the collaborative discovery and decision making during the Strategy development process
Monthly/quarterly/yearly executional campaign calendar	
Provide marketing sign off on all creative assets to be used across marketing execution	Day to day execution of the marketing calendar and campaigns based on the direction provided
Budgetary recommendations and analysis	Follow budgetary recommendations within paid media channels
Discovery, roadmap, implementation and management of Martech	Assist with implementation, testing and day-to-day running of Martech
Facilitate training and ongoing support of internal resource	Open communication with business leaders and VMM on professional growth areas
Performance analytics	Translate insights into action
VMM integrates within the businesses' senior leadership team, to facilitate the business leaders' long term vision and short term goals, translating this into agile marketing plans	
VMM bridges the gap and provides accountability and translation between the business leaders and any third parties and specialty agencies	

Laying The Foundations, A Phased Approach



"Our partnership with the ask VMM's, who work alongside our internal marketing executive has been seamless. Their proactive processes, excellent communication and training has ensured we are always on the front foot.

- Matt Wong, General Manager Kuro Sydney

Delivering ROI is the #1 priority

The ROI is achieved by laying the critical foundations required for long term marketing success.

The return achieved on the project phases includes:

- 1.** A clear digital strategy, uniting both the internal and extended ask marketing VMM team.
- 2.** A clear plan for execution, enabling forward planning as well as the visibility of the tactics/channels being used and their respective goals and objectives within the funnel .
- 3.** Investment into the internal marketing resource(s), by providing valuable training and upskilling for execution of all day-to-day digital activities required .
- 4.** Investment into the setup of marketing technology, systems

& tools to enable efficiencies and smarter marketing decision making.

From the point the VMM partnership commences:

- 5.** The VMM provides ROI recommendations on all activities proposed (within the strategy and calendar) and will remain accountable to the delivery of these
- 6.** With the technical implementation support phase (ref. phase 7 in diagram above), the VMM provides all of the relevant metrics and benchmarks associated with each channel. The VMM then works through these with the internal resource, training them on how to best identify performance and optimisations. The VMM also implements marketing KPI's for the internal marketing resource or team.

The ROI is achieved by laying the critical foundations required for long term marketing success.

"The ask VMM's have approached our marketing as a strategic business function, deeply understanding our various key service pillars and utilising powerful Martech efficiencies to optimise our sales funnel. Our VMM partnership is an integral part of our longer-term business strategy."

- Edwin Burwood, CEO and Director Energy & Carbon Solutions

Virtual Marketing Management is an integrated approach - as business growth happens, so does the relationship. It's a hybrid model, based on organisational efficiencies and effectiveness.

How the VMM approach supports business growth

Virtual Marketing Management is an integrated approach - as business growth happens, so does the relationship. It's a hybrid model, based on organisational efficiencies and effectiveness.

Similar to an internal Senior Marketing role, a Virtual Marketing Manager will be an integral part of the decision making process every step of the way. From forging new strategic partnerships, recommending additional internal roles to building new specialist relationships, a VMM is able to think critically about the pathways available to scale the business effectively.

"From the outset, the ask Marketing Virtual Marketing Managers integrated within our senior leadership team, providing insights and direction to enable significant operational decisions."

- Loren Mitchell, Founder & Director LMHR

Further to this, a Virtual Marketing Manager can scale with businesses. In the instance the business embraces an organisational change, a new direction, or needs to rapidly scale into new markets, the business can rely on the VMM to work dynamically and strategically to support this.

"Partnering with the ask VMMs across multiple brands within our portfolio has proven to be a highly efficient and effective way of working. Each business has grown within its respective market due to the dedication, drive and performance-focused methods that the ask team have implemented."

- Alan Wong - CEO, Clover Investments

Our vision is to provide SMEs with the same level of strategy and direction as their corporate counterparts, for a fraction of the price tag.

The ask Marketing vision

More than ever before, a cutting edge marketing function now requires strategic thinking, creativity, technical expertise and optimal execution. In this generation, businesses need to spend small, yet strategise BIG.

Our vision is to provide SMEs with the same level of strategy and direction as their corporate counterparts, for a fraction of the price tag.

This is Virtual Marketing Management.

We lay the foundations, define a clear strategic direction and path, develop and train the internal team, instilling the confidence within each business to successfully execute their ongoing marketing.

We believe in adding the value back into businesses. If the business decides to become fully independent and take their marketing 100% in-house, they will have the skills, functionality, processes and technologies to do so, without dropping the ball.

Virtual marketing management is different, and it works.

"It is almost impossible for me to explain the value the ask Marketing team have added to my business and to me personally. Our partnership has highlighted the significant agility that the VMM model brings.

Having had 3 businesses over the last 20 years and having dealt with many suppliers, I would place ask Marketing in the top 3. Their VMM model works incredibly well and I have already referred them onto many others whom I know have also been suitably blown away by their knowledge, the quality of work, and the care factor they have in their customer's success."

- Steve Grace, CEO & Founder The Nudge Group

Authors



Alexandra King

BBA

Ali has held Senior Marketing, eCommerce & Digital Manager roles within tech startups, through to ASX 100 and large global brands.

She brings commercially and analytically driven insights, creating end to end marketing strategies and presenting them to stakeholders with confidence. Ali has the unique ability to work across the big-picture strategy as well as finer technical details, remaining focused on delivering results to meet business goals.



Stephanie King

MBus (Marketing)
BAppSc(Ex&SpSc)

Working agnostically across product and service-based SMEs, both locally and globally, Stephanie specialises in multi-channel content strategy, email marketing and paid media advertising.

She holds the technical and tactical skills to execute large scale campaigns seamlessly, ensuring the coherent integration of all business leaders, executional team members and partners.



Lauren Ryan

MBA (Marketing)
BAppSc(Ex&SpSc)

Lauren holds valuable digital marketing and business development experience spanning from global startups to Australian engineering and property development firms.

Both creative and commercially minded, Lauren has experience in creative campaign concept development, copywriting, brand partnerships, marketing strategy and content production. She holds an unwavering commitment to ensuring her work always delivers on the required business outcomes.

The Network

All VMM clients have access to the ask Marketing trusted network of experts, including digital advertisers, website developers, SEO specialists, UX designers, photographers, graphic designers & content producers.



MEGANN EVANS
PHOTOGRAPHY

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