

The 2022 Trend Tracker

Each year, we ask client-side and agency-side marketers what they're focused on for the year ahead. The results indicate the areas that are set to dominate marketers' thinking, and those that are perhaps starting to lose share of attention.

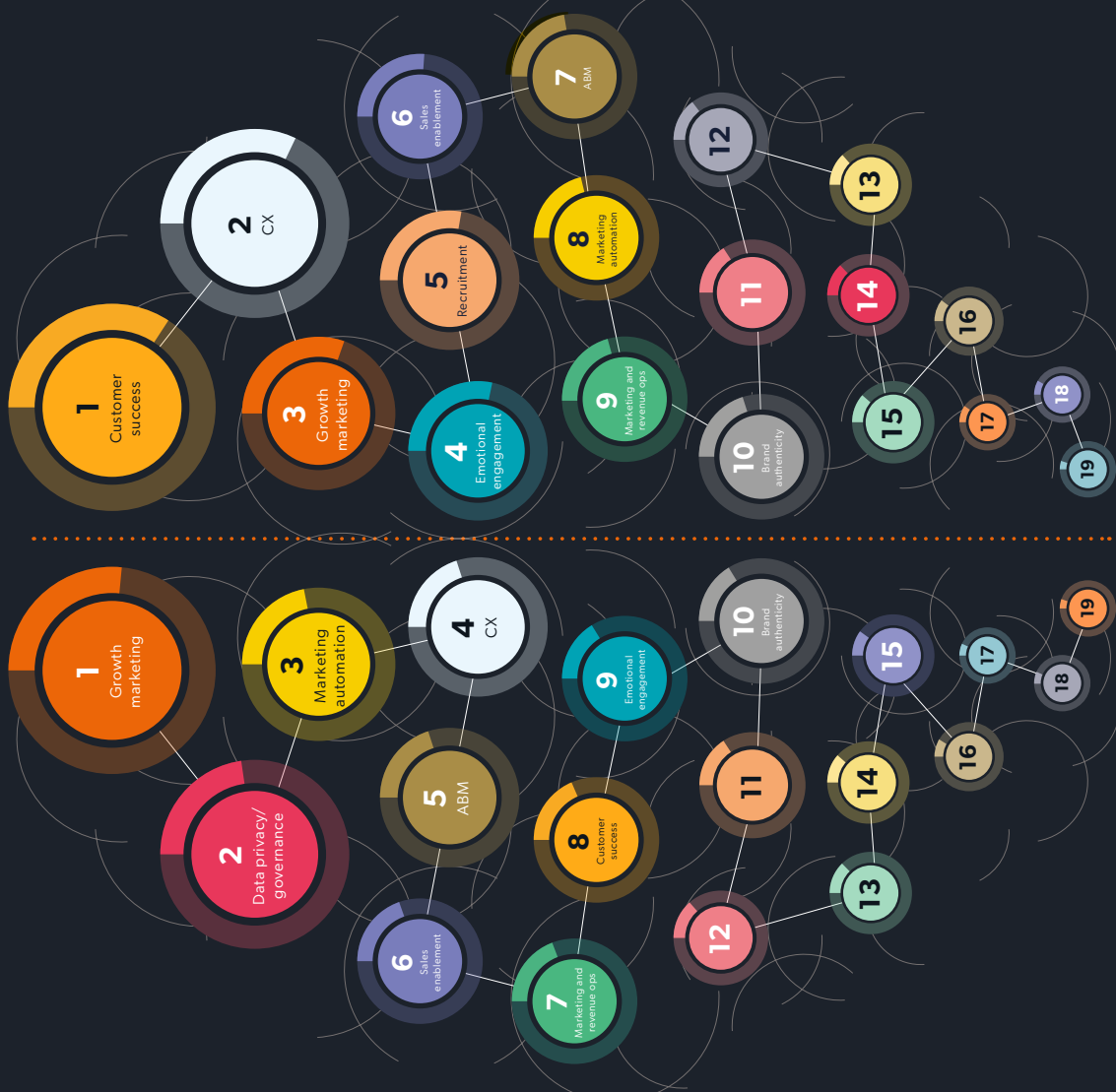
The 2021 B2B Marketing Trend Tracker: The B2B mind

CLIENT-SIDE

1. Growth marketing 26.5%
2. Data privacy/data governance 22.7%
3. Marketing automation 21.9%
4. Customer experience (CX) 20%
5. ABM 20%
6. Sales enablement 19.6%
7. Marketing and revenue operations 19.2%
8. Customer success 18.5%
9. Emotional engagement 16.2%
10. Brand authenticity and engagement .. 16.2%
11. Recruitment and retention of staff 15.8%
12. Personalisation 13.5%
13. The martech stack 12.7%
14. Hybrid events 11.5%
15. Channel marketing 10%
16. Ecommerce 8.8%
17. Digital events 6.9%
18. Transformation 6.9%
19. Agile marketing 5.4%

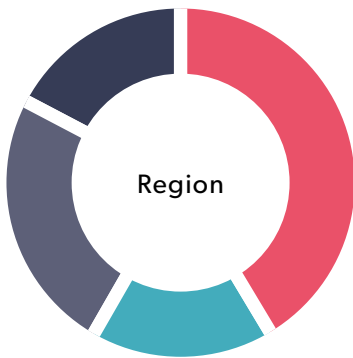
AGENCY-SIDE

1. Customer success 34.2%
2. Customer experience (CX) 32.1%
3. Growth marketing 30.4%
4. Emotional engagement 28.3%
5. Recruitment and retention of staff 27.7%
6. Sales enablement 26.1%
7. ABM 22.3%
8. Marketing automation 21.2%
9. Marketing and revenue operations 20.7%
10. Brand authenticity and engagement ... 20.1%
11. Personalisation 15.8%
12. Transformation 14.7%
13. Hybrid events 13.6%
14. Data privacy/data governance 13%
15. The martech stack 11.4%
16. Ecommerce 10.3%
17. Agile marketing 9.8%
18. Channel marketing 8.2%
19. Digital events 4.9%

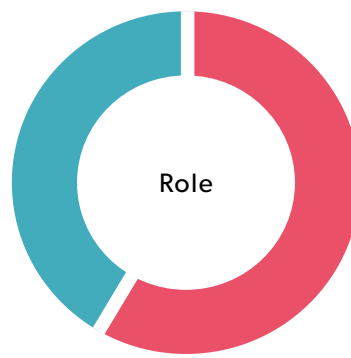


Marketers were asked how focused they are on the above trends. The percentages above show how many survey participants answered with 'very highly focused'.

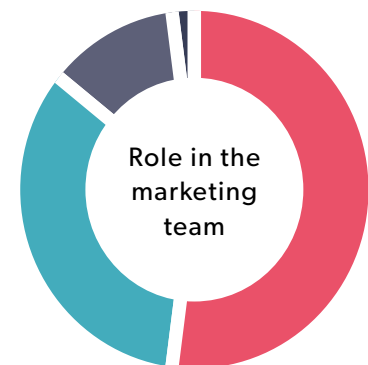
2022 demographics



- UK 41.4%
- Europe 16.9%
- US 24.3%
- Other 17.3%



- Client-side 58.6%
- Agency-side 41.4%



- I lead the whole marketing team 52%
- I'm in charge of, or lead on, a specific aspect of our marketing (e.g. social, content, etc) 34%
- I'm responsible for marketing delivery/execution, but not in a leadership role 12%
- I'm in a junior or marketing support role 2%

Around the turn of each year, B2B Marketing conducts a survey on hundreds of marketers, asking one simple question: how focused are you on X in 2022? We ask this same question a whopping 19 times around different aspects of B2B marketing, ranging from ABM, all the way through to hybrid events.

Survey participants can answer with one of the following replies: not at all focused; slightly focused; somewhat focused; highly focused; or very highly focused. The replies are fascinating no matter what way you slice them, but, for the purposes of this feature, we will focus on those who answered 'very highly focused'.

The 'B2B brain', which you can see on the page before, presents the trends that both client-side and agency-side marketers are focusing on in 2022. The trends are ranked by the percentage of those that selected 'very highly focused.'

So, that's the boring bit out of the way. Now let's look at the good stuff...

Growth marketing holds onto the crown

Last year, growth marketing came out number one, rising one place from the year before. As this term can sometimes be a little unclear, we defined it as: "strategies and positioning of marketing as the engine-room of business growth." At the time, I wrote that marketers were "continuing to assert themselves as a driver of real business goals, and totally distance themselves from the 'colouring in department' of yesteryear." As this year's Trend Tracker demonstrates, this is clearly still the case, as growth marketing has held onto the crown.

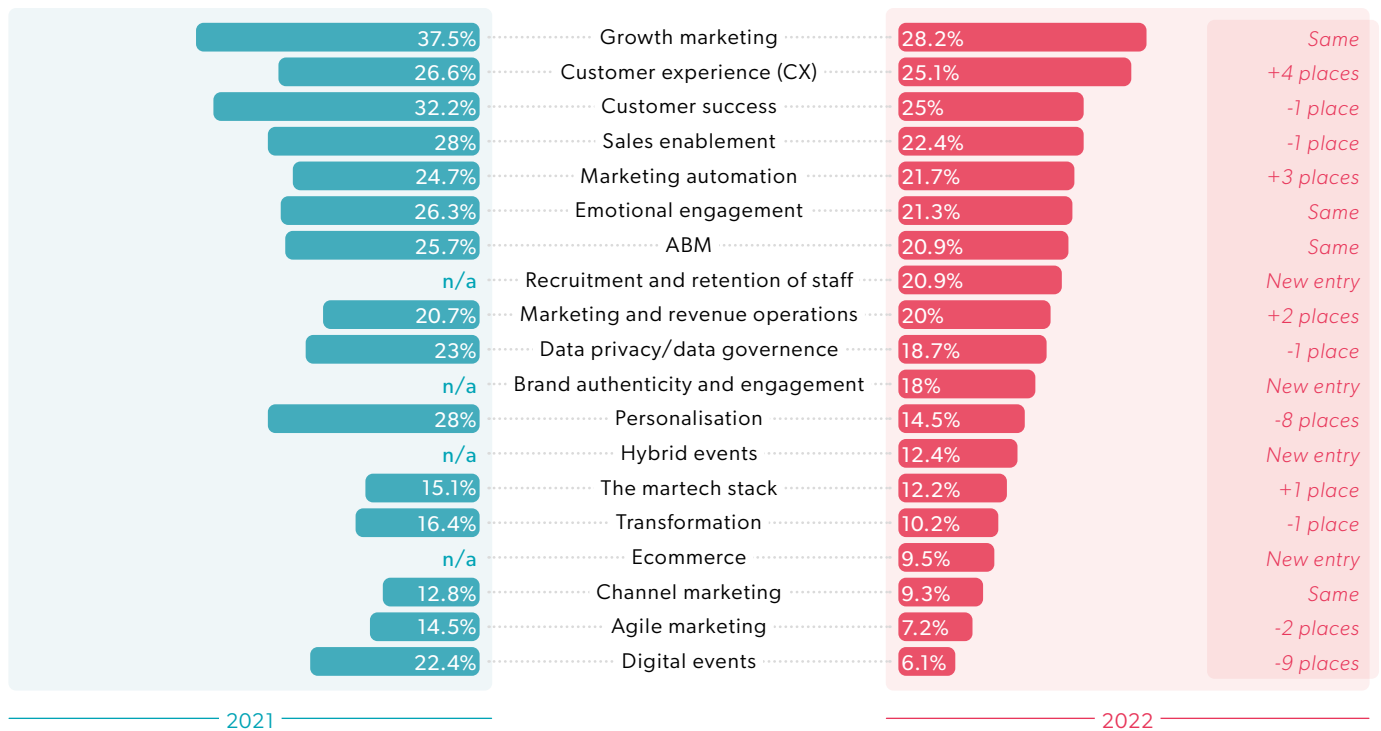
Robert Norum, Hive expert for Growth, however, claims: "I think 'growth marketing' is a bit of an illusion that is not well understood. When we ran a roundtable on this last year, we netted out that growth was actually the purpose of pretty much all marketing, and was

actually an outcome rather than a discipline. Clearly the term 'growth marketing' is out there, but there is not a lot of content on the subject, and it is typically linked to the concept of 'growth hacking,' which is based on the 'test and learn' and 'fail fast' schools of thought, and is typically more a conceptual approach than a discrete marketing discipline or methodology."

Regardless, it's clear that, despite marketers' varied understanding of exactly what growth marketing is, it's still playing a bit part of their thinking this year.

Moving on, we can see that four out of the top five trends are the same as last year: growth marketing; customer success; sales enablement and customer experience (CX). This suggests that a customer-centric approach will continue to be prevalent in 2022, as marketers focus on keeping existing customers happy

Topics in order of how many people selected 'very highly focused' for 2022 (agency and client-side combined)



(and paying), just as much as they look to win new business. Only marketing automation has jumped up three places into fifth place, replacing personalisation (more on personalisation below).

Every single trend receiving less focus

Interestingly, there was a year-on-year decrease in the number of participants who selected 'very highly focused' for every single trend we put forwards (except for the new trends we entered).

Take growth marketing, for instance. Despite the fact it still finished in first place, there was a 9.3% decrease in the number of survey participants who said they are very highly focused on it in 2022. This is true across the board, with transformation down from 16.4% to 10.2 %, ABM from 25.7% to 20.9%, and customer success down from 35.2% to 25%.

Of course, some trends are receiving less focus than

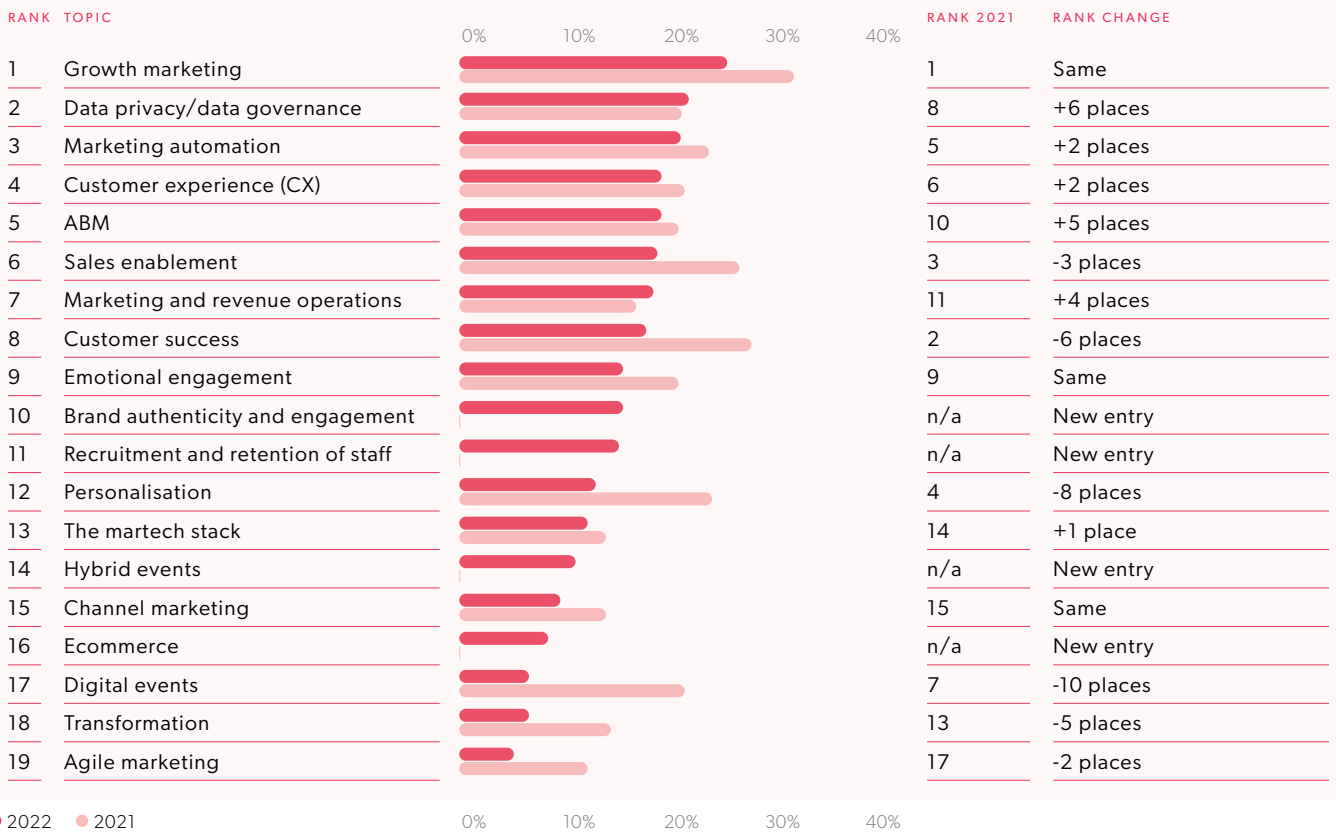
There was a year-on-year decrease in the number of participants who selected 'very highly focused' for every single trend

others. Marketing and revenue operations, for instance, is only down 0.7% in terms of people who are very highly focused on it in 2022, and so this probably doesn't tell us much. Even then, it has jumped up two places from last year's Trend Tracker.

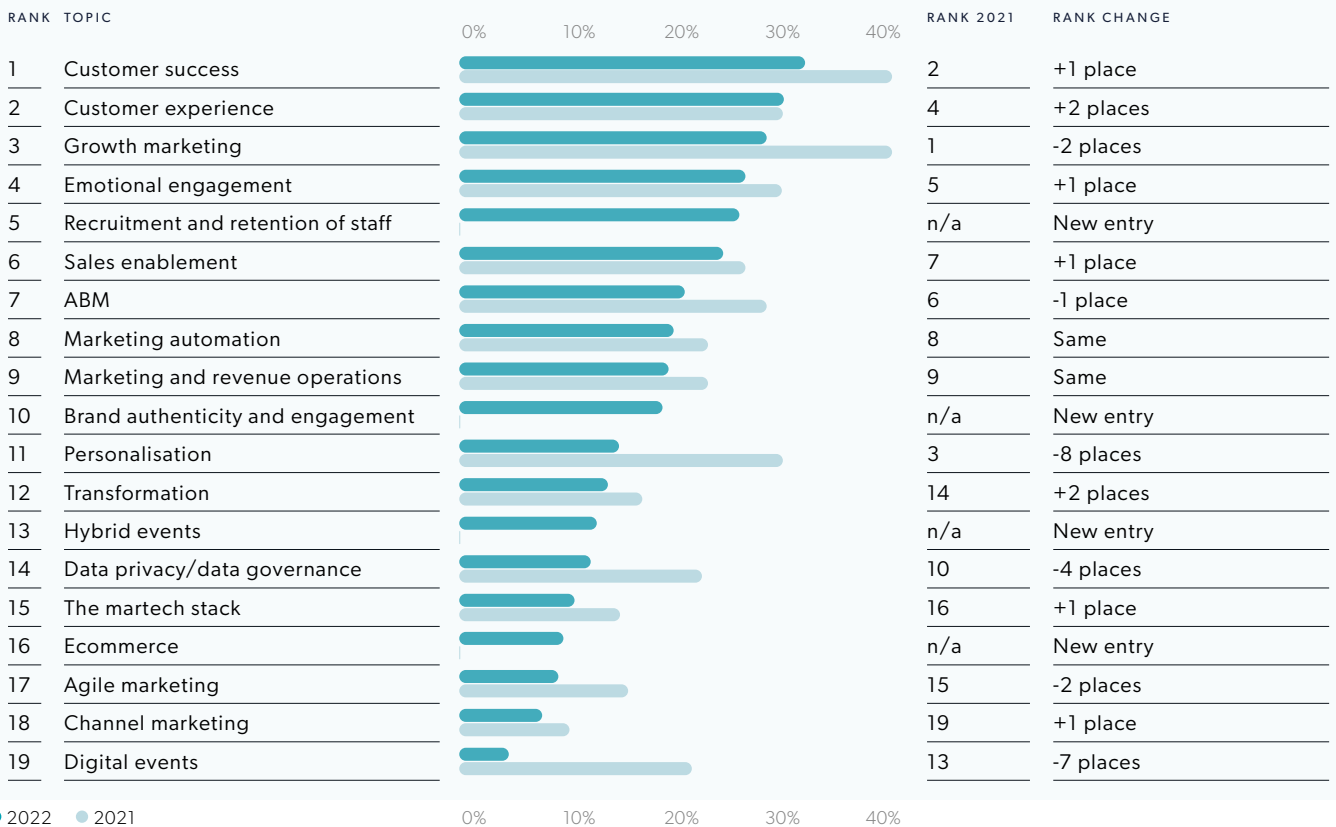
And the same is true is you look at only the agency-side marketers' responses, or even

only the client-side marketers' responses. Across the board, almost all topics are receiving less focus from marketers. The only exceptions are that client-side marketers are 0.7% more focused on data privacy/data governance, and agency-side marketers are 0.1% more focused on customer experience. Hardly worth noting.

Topics in order of how many people selected 'very highly focused' for 2022 (client-side only)



Topics in order of how many people selected 'very highly focused' for 2022 (agency-side only)



So why the decrease in focus?

It could be that marketers are now taking so many different things into account, that no one field is getting absolute focus to the same extent as it once did. With that in mind, I spoke to our Propolis Hive experts to hear what their initial reactions were to this – possibly alarming – statistic:



Karla Wentworth,
Hive expert for Marketing Operations & Process:

“Marketing is evolving at such a fast pace, I think that there are many businesses that have to narrow the field of what they are focused on.”



Jarmila Yu, Hive expert for Teams, Resourcing & D&I:
“Marketing has become such a

huge responsibility (rightly so!), and the savvy business leader is realising marketing needs to wade in and cut across every function, and not just stick to the marketing department. So, it can be overwhelming for the marketer as much of the work is equally a high priority (and a high volume of work) or everything is an equivalent priority – the role is now vast!”



Shane Redding,
Hive expert for Strategy & Evolution: “I think this is partly

timing, as the CMOs I am working with are currently very focused on restructuring their teams to fit/deliver their new strategic goals. This has perhaps led to a wider spread across all the areas that marketing has to deliver, and I suspect the narrowing down will come in Q2 and Q3.”



Barbara Stewart,
Hive expert for CX: “In the last two years, so many businesses

have had to squeeze a decade of innovation into two years to deal with Covid. This means companies are spreading themselves thinly to try and cover off some many approaches, and businesses don't have a real business growth strategy over five-plus years, so they are pivoting and reacting to the markets rather than shaping the market.”

“Then, the average marketing department can't identify its gold standard channels or techniques, so they are spread betting, hence the lower scores across the piece”



Steve Kemish,
Hive expert for Execution & Campaigns: “For me, I think it's a

reflection of the state of flux of the past two years, because there's been so much change – firstly towards digital, then back a little, then back again. An unending game of hokey cokey! Then, the average marketing department can't identify its gold standard channels or techniques, so they are spread betting, hence the lower scores across the piece.”



Darren Coleman,
Hive expert for Brand & Content Strategy: “I think the turmoil of

the last two years has resulted in marketers hedging their bets, especially global brands who are dealing with different stages of the pandemic.

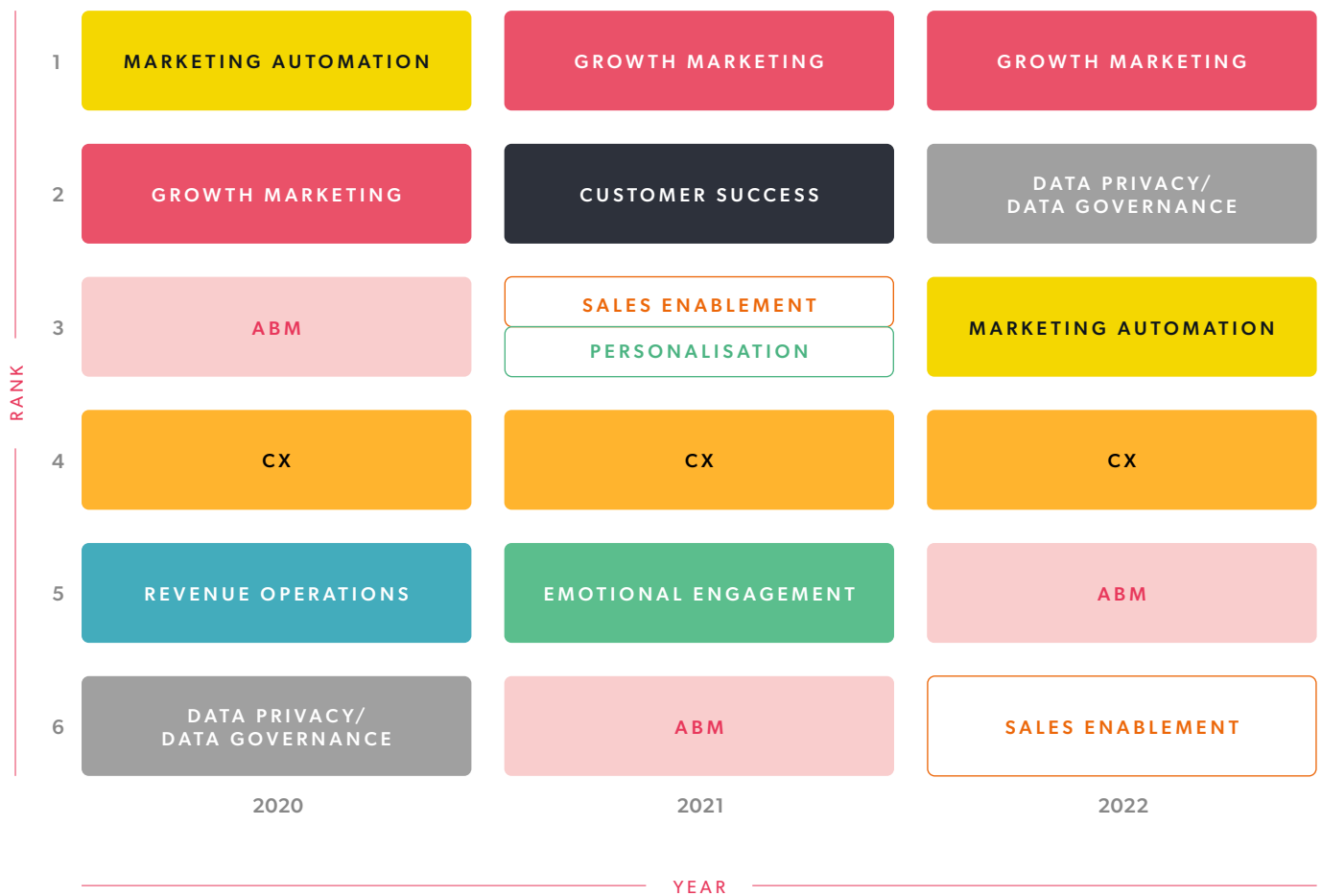


Robert Norum,
Hive expert for Growth: “I think the last two years have been

very challenging in general, and clearly no different for marketers. Some (tech) companies have been struggling to keep up with demand, and others have been downsizing and even struggling to survive. I'm sure most marketing leaders have been more focused on keeping their teams together and looking after the wellbeing of their people – not to mention handling 'the great resignation' and trying to recruit new staff.”

Robert continued by saying: “The age-old challenge for CMOs has probably been even more pronounced during the pandemic with companies wrestling with their brand values (read purpose) at the same time as trying to look after existing customers (read ABM) and find new ones (read demand gen) – all whilst living in a virtual world where digital marketing has assumed an even more crucial role for obvious reasons. [...] I think your prognosis on a general lessening of focus on discrete topics being down to having to deal with a lot more stuff in general during the pandemic is probably correct.”

Top ranking topics 2020–2022 (client-side only)



Personalisation and digital events plummet

So, we’ve discussed what’s on the up, but what’s heading downwards? ‘Digital events’ has fallen a whopping nine places, followed closely by personalisation, which fell by eight places. This can partly be explained by the fact that new and particularly relevant trends were added to this year’s survey, such as ‘recruitment and retention of staff’ and ‘hybrid events.’ However, the fact remains that, in last year’s Trend Tracker,

28% of marketers were ‘very highly focused’ on personalisation, while this year, just 14.5% are. Similarly, last year, 22.4% of marketers were ‘very highly focused’ on digital events, whereas now, this number is just 6.1%.

With account-based strategies and tailored marketing now becoming the norm, it could be that personalisation is a given – and not even seen as a ‘trend’ worth focusing on. After all, executing sales enablement, CX and customer success to a good level all require a significant degree

of personalisation, and they all finished in the five trends.

Regarding the fall of digital events, however, this is perhaps not a surprise. While last year digital events were seen as one of the main ways to engage B2B audiences, they very quickly became overdone and, quite frankly, boring. While webinars and the like may have been the way to handle the initial onslaught of the pandemic, digital fatigue soon kicked in, and so it's no surprise that digital events are now at the bottom of marketers' priorities.

However, it's not all doom and gloom for digital event technologies. After all, 'hybrid events' is a new entry in this year's Trend Tracker, with around one in 10 marketers saying they're very highly focused on them this year. Whilst purely digital events may be on the downwards slope, it's clear that digital will become a large part of the event mix going forwards, albeit perhaps not to the same extent as the boom in 2020 and 2021.

So, how do agency-side and client-side marketers compare?

In last year's Trend Tracker, client-side marketers' top five areas of focus were, in order: growth marketing; customer success; sales enablement; personalisation and marketing automation. This year, they read as follows: growth marketing; data privacy/data governance; marketing automation; CX and ABM.

Data privacy/data governance and ABM are of particular interest, rising six and five places up the table, respectively. Customer success, meanwhile dropped six places from second to eighth. The customer is clearly still important to client-side marketers, with CX rising two places into fourth position, but

it seems customer success in particular is not as 'hot' as it was last year.

When it comes to agencies, meanwhile, last year's Trend Tracker listed the following as the top five trends: growth marketing; customer success; personalisation; CX; and emotional engagement. This year, however, the top five read as follows: customer success; CX; growth marketing; emotional engagement; and – a new entry – recruitment and retention of staff.

ABM, despite remaining in the same position overall as last year, fell one place amongst agencies, but rose five amongst client-side marketers

So, whilst customer success appears to be lower on the agenda for client-side marketers, it has come out number one for agencies. The fact that recruitment and retention of staff has made it into the top five is perhaps not surprising, given the 'great resignation' (or 'great reshuffle', depending on how empty or full your glass is). Indeed with 27.7% of agency-side marketers 'very highly focused' on this area in 2022, this task is sure to take up a lot of marketers' time and energy.

When it comes to transformation, which we defined as 'fundamentally changing your business operations to align better with your organisation's overarching goals,' this climbed the ranks amongst both agency-side and client-side marketers. Clearly, the business transformation that has defined the

past two years is certainly not over yet, as marketers continue to focus on it this year.

Interestingly, ABM, despite remaining in the same position overall as last year, fell one place amongst agencies, but rose five amongst client-side marketers. Could it be that client-side marketers are begin to adopt this more targeted approach in their droves, but agencies are less interested in the discipline of ABM, and more interested in the key components that make it up (CX, sales enablement, growth marketing, etc)?

So, what are the main takeaways?

Looking at this year's results, it's clear that growth marketing and CX remain of huge importance to both agency and client-side marketers, ranking in the top five trends among both groups. Whilst the other three spots in the top five differ depending on whether you're speaking to agency-side or client-side marketers, it's clear that three things are really not taking up a great share of attention from marketers this year: digital events; agile marketing; and ecommerce. All three of these trends ranked in the bottom five for both agency-side and client-side marketers. Perhaps ecommerce will begin to rise the ranks over the years as it grows in popularity, but, for now, it remains fairly low on marketers' priorities list.

The most striking takeaway, however, remains the fact that marketers appear to be less focused on nearly all trends. But fear not. It's highly unlikely that marketers will be resting on their laurels this year. Quite the opposite. The data most likely suggests that marketers are now focusing on so many different areas that they can't afford to give any one area all of their attention.



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