

Campaign Delivery - Six Ways to Ensure Operational Excellence

ANAND SAMBASIVAN & ADITYA RAGHAV

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Successful Campaign Delivery Management (CDM) involves the ability to manage marketing budgets, optimize delivery cycles, and improve production efficiency and processes. Marketers need to ensure brand ascendancy and superior delivery mechanisms, not withstanding spiraling budget cuts, and escalating costs. Schedule variance and “known limitations” are a strict no-no in CDM, considering the business sensitivities and timing of brand promotions.

The challenges become pronounced when the program involves customer lifecycle management that addresses multiple channels. Quality project management, innovative technology design and efficient outsourcing processes need to come together to manage drop dead schedules, fragmented customer bases, quick development turnarounds, seamless change management and scratch-proof quality

DOES CDM EFFICIENCY MATTER?

Marketing campaigns involve multiple agencies, processes and stake holders coming together to execute a cohesive corporate branding strategy. It is typical for the process to kick off from a consulting assignment that outlines the goals and the mechanics to achieve them.

This in turn dovetails into a series of business requirements - content, targeting nature, market segment, personalization, quality conformance, to name a few.

These business requirements are then translated into executable fragments of code – and delivered through a framework that puts together all the different pieces. Systemic levels of Campaign Management efficiency and ROI can be driven through a series of actions as shown below,

- System Analysis & Design
- Utilization Control
- Synchronized Testing
- Training
- Outsourcing
- Process Optimization and Templatzation

Optimizing these factors can help deliver tangible and intangible positive results. For example it can free up funds earmarked for development and aid in re-investing in strategic goals.

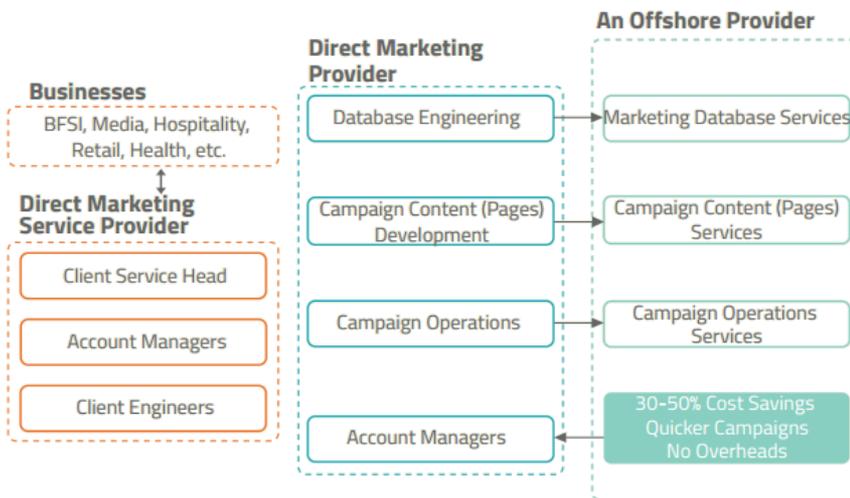
Efficient training and utilization control can help manage long development queues commensurate with the peak commerce season. Outsourcing can sharpen creative, consulting and administrative focus by reducing development slack, and helping to maintain a lean business-focused front end team.

The Digital Marketing industry has seasonal spikes and troughs corresponding to customer demand patterns. Therefore, organizations can take advantage of flexibility in offshore team sizes to convert long term fixed costs to variable costs.

OPTIMIZING CDM FOR EFFICIENCY & SUSTAINABLE RESULTS

Off Shoring at its extreme

The Internet has made access to high performance global teams seamless. Tapping into global talent from low cost destinations is a great way to deliver sustainable results at a significantly lower cost. An added advantage is the minimal employee liability that has to be maintained on site and the clear focus that can be brought into the onsite organization. Formalized development processes, estimation and SLAs improve the delivery predictability of the off shore vendor. As a result, outsourcing emerges as a serious alternative to further business returns

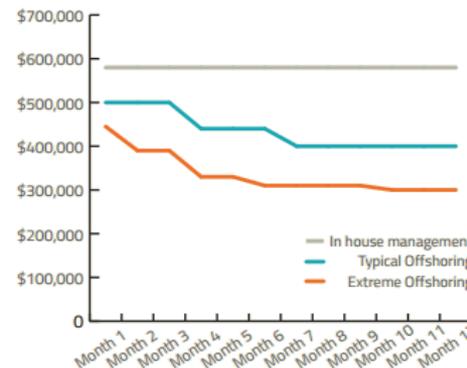


To ensure optimum resource utilization it is important to have a long term strategic goal of technical cross skilling inside the team so that utilization at any point in time is at a maximum

Extreme Off shoring

Off shore teams predominantly work on a 60-40 model; i.e. 60% of the team operate from off shore and 40% on site. This means that the customer effectively pays on site rates for 40% of the team and his savings come in from the lower operational costs of the 60%.

But as outsourcing models matured, vendors have perfected the art of off shoring close to 95% of the model with innovative processes and delivery methodologies that not only lend a great deal of predictability to the overall delivery process but also result in 30-40% compounded savings.

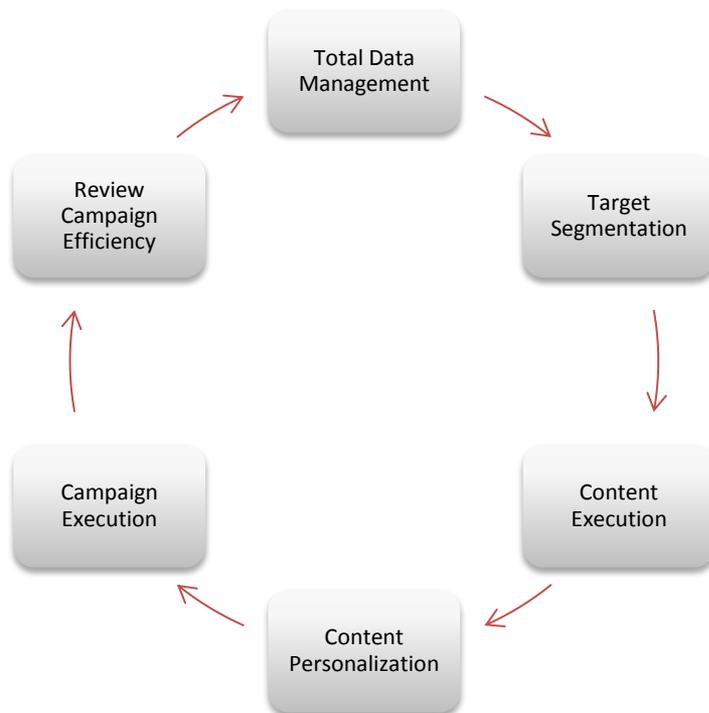


Another critical advantage of the extreme off shoring model is the on-demand ramp up/ down option. The E-Marketing industry has seasonal spikes and troughs corresponding to customer demand patterns. Therefore, organizations can take advantage of flexibility in offshore team sizes to convert long-term fixed costs to variable costs.

SYSTEM ANALYSIS & DESIGN

Business requirements for campaigns have a way of iterating to and fro between the business and the development teams for want of functional clarity, implicit assumptions and lack of non-functional specs that are essential for scalable, performance oriented design.

A campaign development agency that works on short tight sprints, drop dead schedules and frequent changes in strategy can ill-afford delays due to lack of clarity in scope. Time zone differences while working with global delivery teams can potentially add to the overall delays.



An off shore System Analyst team, who can analyze business specs from an implementation/QA perspective well ahead of the campaign kickoff, can add tremendous value by providing a “frozen” set of requirements to the engineering team. Their primary role would be to come out with a viable and scalable design after reviewing business specs, iterating with the business on non-functional needs like performance and concurrency and getting clarity on functionally grey areas.

They act as a bridge between the business and implementation teams and build domain knowledge that enables them to effectively act as a backup for the onsite business team when needed. Moving forward, they can further improve off shore productivity, lower operational costs and de-risk tight implementation timelines by creating business templates for routine requirements, managing change and reducing redundant iterations.

Training & Technical Cross Skilling

Campaign development can potentially cut across multiple technology stacks, requiring highly skilled technical teams for implementation and support. From a functional perspective, campaign automation consists of the workflow indicated in the diagram above. Mandatory technical skills needed to develop and implement campaigns include a combination of strong web development, design and database development skills. Additional skills include business intelligence with a strong accent on performance management, since potentially millions of customer records and transactions can be processed during a campaign’s data management phase.

Intelligent utilization of these core skills becomes crucial to the overall development efficiency. Mismanagement can quickly undermine returns and in all probability the marketer might be unaware of this intangible leakage.

The ability to be agile and turn around complex marketing campaigns at short notice is an important attribute that substantiates the marketer's claim to accelerate brand performance and be responsive to the ever changing demands of the customer."

To ensure optimum resource utilization, it is important to have a long term strategic goal of technical cross skilling inside the team so that utilization at any point in time is at a maximum. Cross skilling is an ongoing process and without proper processes, it can be a long grind to get a high performance multi-skilled team that can always operate at high utilization levels.

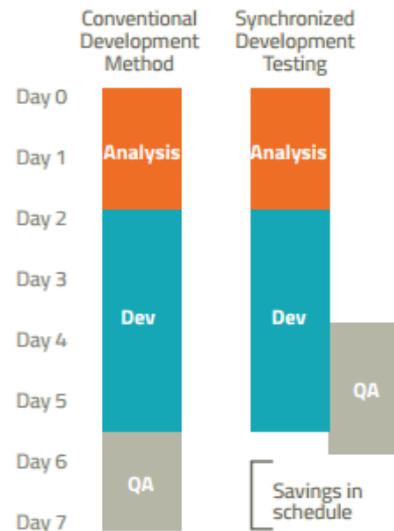
Some of the factors that need consideration in effective cross training exercise are:

- Buy in from the implementation teams.
- Client participation and encouragement.
- Periodic training programs by subject matter experts.
- Self paced learning – online learning portals.
- Close on-the-job mentoring and review by expert programmers.
- Graded assignment complexity

Synchronized Development Testing

Campaign related projects can seldom afford to follow the conventional waterfall model of software development. It is necessary to have an overlap of certain phases to meet stiff deadlines and yet stay inside the accepted quality parameters.

The importance of quality management cannot be overestimated considering the strict anti-spam and solicitation laws protecting customers against digital communication abuse. An efficient campaign automation project needs a more delivery focused approach as indicated in the diagram.



The fundamental differences are in the overlap of the development and testing phase. This process can help shave off as much as 20% on the overall development schedule.

Resource Utilization – The Rush Hour

Emergency projects are the norm for campaign delivery teams and such projects are often charged at anywhere between 30 – 60% over the normal rates. The ability to be agile and turn around complex marketing campaigns at short notice is an important attribute that substantiates the marketer’s claim to accelerate brand performance and to be responsive to the ever changing demands of the customer.

To accommodate “rush hour” demands, a SWAT team – a designated engineering mini team possessing the diverse skills needed to get the campaign out – should be maintained year- round on standby. This team needs to be carefully chosen – in terms of skill, ability and technical acumen – to be responsive to emergency projects and rush requests.

The daily utilization levels of this team should be carefully monitored so that the team can be assembled at extremely short notice to jump into the action. Trained and published backups to each SWAT member also helps in mitigating the risk of non- availability of a front line team member.

This team needs to be rotated periodically across diverse projects to ensure that they are in fighting trim to take on the most challenging of assignments.

Process Optimization

Tailoring development and quality processes to suit the campaign automation domain is another crucial factor in ensuring production stability and quality predictability.

For example, making a feature change to an existing scheduled campaign needs a clear roll back strategy prior to implementation. Some of the productivity accelerators that can lead to significant cost savings are:

- Templatization of routine campaigns
- Code abstraction and module reuse.
- Automated testing tools – E.g. Selenium
- Pre-built test strategies – for subscription, F2F, sweepstakes, etc.
- Centralized batch process control.
- Best practices guidelines for bulk processing and concurrency management
- System analysts check lists.
- Production deployment cookbooks.

SUMMARY

The fast paced movement of the digital marketing business makes it critical for organizations to deliver targeted brand messages to distributed audiences and prove tangible brand ascendancy across multiple channels. It is imperative that marketers engage “Best in Class” talent to deliver their campaigns in addition to optimizing heavily on execution costs so that re-investment on newer channels and disparate media is enabled.

Outsourcing is a business imperative and extreme off shoring can go one step further in providing high marketing ROI. In addition, a mature vendor who can rapidly acclimatize to industry dynamics will see incremental success in their digital marketing enterprise.