Establishing an In-House Creative Agency: Achieving High-Quality Output with Cost Efficiency and Optimised Operations

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Abstract:

Brands transform commodities into valued assets by adding identity, meaning, and emotional resonance, thereby differentiating products in competitive markets. This study examines the strategic advantages of establishing in-house creative agencies within businesses, focusing on their cost-effectiveness, operational efficiency, and enhanced creative ownership. The research highlights how in-house agencies align closely with corporate goals, ensuring brand consistency and deeper integration within the organizational framework.

A comprehensive methodology is outlined for developing and managing an in-house creative agency, detailing key elements such as organizational structures, resource allocation, and proactive execution strategies. By embedding creative functions within the company's operational framework, in-house agencies streamline workflows, enhance cross-departmental collaboration, and deliver cohesive, brand-aligned campaigns.

Through case studies and industry analysis, this thesis demonstrates that in-house creative agencies serve not only as a cost-effective alternative to external agencies but also as a strategic asset that strengthens brand equity, fosters consumer engagement, and drives long-term business growth. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on corporate brand management and offer a practical roadmap for businesses considering the transition to an in-house creative model.

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Chapter No. 1: Introduction and Aim of Study

1.1 Background of the Study

The establishment of an in-house creative agency is a strategic decision that enhances operational efficiency and brand cohesion within a company. Organizations seeking to optimize cost structures while simultaneously strengthening brand integrity increasingly turn to internal creative teams. This case study aims to demonstrate why an in-house creative agency is not only a cost-effective solution but also a fundamental driver of brand value and relevance.

The in-house creative agency is more than an ancillary department; it is a fully integrated component of the business, working in close collaboration with the marketing team. While marketing departments traditionally manage brand strategy, positioning, and overall messaging, the creative team is responsible for translating these strategies into compelling visual and narrative elements that engage consumers. Unlike external agencies, whose role is often limited to executing predefined marketing directives, in-house creative teams operate within the corporate ecosystem. They possess an intrinsic understanding of the brand's identity, mission, and market dynamics, allowing for more consistent, impactful, and responsive creative execution.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Historically, companies have relied on external creative agencies to execute marketing campaigns and brand initiatives. While external agencies offer expertise and fresh perspectives, they often lack a deep understanding of a company's brand culture, internal workflows, and long-term objectives. The lack of integration between external creatives and internal marketing teams can lead to inefficiencies, misaligned brand messaging, and higher costs. This study seeks to explore how establishing an in-house creative agency addresses these challenges and optimizes brand management. The study also addresses cultural relevance to advertising in a small country where an external agency may not be able to integrate cultural nuances into their work.

1.3 Research Objective/Aim

The specific objectives of this study are multifaceted, addressing key areas in the transition to and management of an in-house creative agency. First, this research aims to assess the cost-effectiveness of in-house creative agencies compared to external agencies. By conducting a financial analysis, the study will determine whether internalizing creative functions leads to significant cost savings while maintaining or enhancing creative output. This includes evaluating budget allocations, long-term return on investment, and the impact of reduced outsourcing expenditures on overall business profitability.

Additionally, this study seeks to analyse the impact of in-house creative teams on brand consistency and corporate identity. A strong and cohesive brand identity is a crucial factor in market differentiation, and this research will explore how in-house teams, with their deeper integration into the company culture and strategic vision, contribute to a more unified and authentic brand representation across all communication channels. The study will also examine how internal teams maintain long-term brand consistency compared to external agencies that may work with multiple clients and lack deep brand immersion.

Another objective is to evaluate the operational efficiencies gained by internalizing creative functions. By bringing creative capabilities in-house, organizations may experience faster turnaround times, streamlined collaboration between departments, and greater agility in responding to market trends. This study will assess how internal creative teams contribute to improved workflow efficiency, reduced revision cycles, and enhanced cross-functional communication within the organization.

Furthermore, this research will identify potential challenges and propose solutions for companies transitioning to an in-house creative model. The shift from outsourcing to internalization comes with its own set of obstacles, including talent acquisition, resource allocation, and structural integration. The study will explore common hurdles businesses face, such as resistance to change, limited initial expertise, and scalability concerns, while providing best practices and strategies to mitigate these challenges effectively.

Finally, this study will offer a structured roadmap for building, managing, and measuring the success of an in-house creative agency. By outlining key considerations such as team composition, workflow processes, performance metrics, and technology integration, the research aims to equip organizations with a comprehensive guide to establishing and sustaining a high-performing internal creative function. This roadmap will serve as a practical reference for companies looking to transition their creative work in-house while ensuring optimal efficiency, brand alignment, and long-term business success.

1.4 Research Questions

The financial implications of transitioning from an external agency model to an in-house creative team are a critical factor for organizations considering this shift. Establishing an in-house creative team often involves significant initial investment in talent acquisition, infrastructure, and technology. However, over time, businesses can experience substantial cost savings by eliminating high agency fees, reducing project outsourcing, and increasing efficiency in creative production. Additionally, internal teams can prioritize projects based on business needs rather than agency-client contracts, leading to better budget control and allocation. This study will explore how companies can strategically manage the financial transition, optimize resource utilization, and measure the return on investment (ROI) of an in-house creative function compared to external agency partnerships.

An in-house creative agency also plays a crucial role in maintaining brand consistency, corporate identity, and cultural nuances. Since in-house creatives are embedded within the organization, they develop a deeper understanding of the company's mission, values, and brand voice. Unlike external agencies that work with multiple clients and may lack long-term brand familiarity, in-house teams ensure that messaging, design, and campaigns remain aligned across all communication channels. Additionally, cultural nuances—both at a corporate and consumer level—are better integrated into creative strategies when handled internally. This research will examine how companies with in-house creative teams maintain stronger brand identity, avoid dilution of their messaging, and adapt marketing efforts to regional and industry-specific cultural influences.

Operational efficiencies are another major advantage of integrating creative functions within a company. External agencies often require extensive briefing, multiple rounds of feedback, and extended approval processes, leading to delays in campaign execution. In contrast, in-house creative teams work closely with marketing, sales, and product development departments, fostering real-time collaboration and reducing bottlenecks. This results in faster turnaround times, more responsive content production, and increased agility in adapting to market changes. The study will analyse how companies that internalize creative functions experience improved workflow management, reduced revision cycles, and seamless coordination between creative and strategic teams. Furthermore, it will explore how technology, project management tools, and automation contribute to enhancing operational efficiency within an in-house creative framework.

Despite its benefits, establishing an in-house creative agency comes with challenges that companies must navigate strategically. One of the primary obstacles is talent acquisition, as organizations need to attract and retain skilled creative professionals who can meet the demands of a diverse range of projects. Additionally, transitioning from an external agency model requires internal restructuring, leadership buy-in, and the development of new processes for managing creative work effectively. Budget constraints, resistance to change, and scalability concerns can further complicate the transition. This research will identify common pitfalls organizations face when building an in-house creative team and present best practices for overcoming these challenges, including phased implementation strategies, upskilling existing employees, and leveraging hybrid models where external agencies complement internal teams.

To measure the success of an in-house creative agency, organizations must establish clear key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with business objectives. Metrics such as project turnaround time, cost savings, brand consistency, employee engagement, and creative impact on revenue growth will be explored in this study. Additionally, qualitative assessments, such as internal stakeholder satisfaction and audience engagement with brand messaging, are essential in evaluating the effectiveness of in-house creative teams. This research will provide a framework for businesses to develop KPI-driven performance evaluations, ensuring that their in-house creative function delivers measurable value and contributes to the organization's overall success.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for companies looking to optimize their marketing and branding strategies. By shifting from an external agency model to an in-house creative agency, organizations can gain better control over their brand identity, streamline processes, and reduce costs. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on corporate brand management and organizational efficiency, providing a valuable resource for industry leaders, marketing professionals, and corporate strategists.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study will focus on organizations that have successfully transitioned to an in-house creative agency model. It will analyse case studies from companies across various industries, including technology, consumer goods, and retail. While the research will primarily explore corporate entities with established marketing departments, insights will also be drawn from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) looking to implement similar strategies.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

This study is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Aim of Study – Provides an overview of the research, including background, objectives, research questions, and significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Examines existing research on in-house creative agencies, comparing internal and external agency models, and highlighting best practices.

Chapter 3: Data and Methodology – Outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework.

Chapter 4: Content and Results – Presents real-world examples of companies that have implemented in-house creative teams, analysing key success factors and challenges.

Chapter 5: Discussion – Interprets the findings, discussing their implications and providing actionable recommendations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – Summarizes key insights and suggests areas for further research.

Chapter No. 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: The Rise of In-House Creative Agencies

For this research, an "in-house agency" is defined as a department, group, or individual responsible for creative and marketing functions traditionally performed by an external agency. The Association of National Advertisers (ANA) defines an in-house agency as "a department, group, or person that has responsibilities that typically are performed by an external advertising or other MarCom agency."[1]

The establishment of in-house creative agencies is not a recent phenomenon. As early as the 1920s, corporations such as Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola, and Ford Motor Company created internal advertising teams to maintain control over brand messaging and advertising strategies.[2] However, by the mid-20th century, external agencies dominated the industry, offering specialized expertise in print, radio, and television advertising. Firms such as J. Walter Thompson and Ogilvy & Mather became industry powerhouses, setting new standards for advertising excellence.[3]

The rise of digital marketing in the early 2000s marked a major turning point. The demand for real-time, data-driven marketing and a constant flow of digital content prompted companies to reassess the efficiency of external agencies. While traditional agencies provided expertise, they often had longer turnaround times, higher costs, and weaker brand alignment. According to the ANA's 2023 study, 82% of its member organizations now operate in-house creative teams, up from 42% in 2008.[4]

This increased reliance of in-house creative agencies reflects broader industry trends prioritizing cost savings, brand consistency, and operational control. Historically, companies outsourced advertising campaigns and marketing collateral to external creative agencies. However, as organizations recognize the strategic benefits of cultivating internal creative functions, they are reshaping the traditional agency model.

2.2 Comparing Internal and External Agency Models

2.2.1 Cost Implications

[1] Duggan, Bill. (2023). The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency: 2023 Edition. Association of National Advertisers, Inc. p.4.
[2] Schultz, D. E. (2016). Integrated Marketing Communications: Bringing Marketing and Creative Together. Northwestern University Press.
[3] Ogilvy, D. (1983). Ogilvy on Advertising. Vintage Books.
[4] Duggan, Bill. (2023). The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency: 2023 Edition. Association of National Advertisers, Inc. p.6.

Cost efficiency remains a key driver of the shift toward in-house agencies. The ANA (2023) reports that 87% of companies cite cost efficiencies as the primary advantage of in-house teams.[5] External agencies, which operate on fee-based structures with high retainers and additional costs for revisions, have become increasingly expensive.[6]

A study by Ester Cohen (2024) indicates that transitioning to an in-house model can reduce creative expenditures by up to 30%. However, these savings must be weighed against the initial investment required for talent acquisition, infrastructure development, and workflow management.[7] Despite these upfront costs, long-term financial benefits are evident. Verizon Communications, for example, reduced its external agency spend by over $50 million annually through in-house expansion. Similarly, Procter & Gamble P&G has already cut the number of agencies it works with by 60%, from 6,000 to 2,500, a move it says has saved it $750m in agency and production costs. It now wants to cut agencies by another 50% and is targeting another $400m in savings.[8]

2.2.2 Brand Consistency and Strategic Alignment

In-house creative agencies offer significant advantages in maintaining brand consistency. Unlike external agencies that serve multiple clients and may lack an in-depth understanding of a company's brand identity, in-house teams operate with direct knowledge of corporate messaging and values. The ANA (2023) reports that 84% of companies view better brand knowledge as a primary benefit of in-house agencies.[9]

TriGr Online (2023) highlights that organizations with in-house agencies experience stronger alignment between creative output and brand strategy. This synergy minimizes the risk of brand dilution and ensures consistent marketing communications across digital, social media, and traditional channels.[10]

2.2.3 Creative Innovation and Objectivity

A common critique of in-house agencies is the potential for creative stagnation due to limited exposure to external perspectives. External agencies, which work across various industries, introduce fresh ideas and innovative approaches to problem-solving. In contrast, in-house teams may become overly immersed in corporate culture, leading to repetitive work.

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[5] Duggan, Bill. (2023). The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency: 2023 Edition. Association of National Advertisers, Inc. p.14.
[6] Ibid. p.7.
[7] Cohen, Ester. (2024). "The Complete Guide to Building an In-House Agency." Workamajig. p. 5.
[8] Vizar, Sarah. (2018) P&G to cut agency roster by another 50% as it looks to "reinvent" relationships. Centaur Media. p. 1.
[9] Duggan, Bill. (2023). The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency: 2023 Edition. Association of National Advertisers, Inc.p.14.
[10] TriGr Online. (2023). "The Rise of the In-House Agency." TriGr Technologies Ltd. p.3.

However, the ANA (2023)[11] findings indicate that in-house agencies are evolving beyond cost-saving functions and are increasingly recognized as strategic partners. Companies mitigate creative stagnation by fostering cross-industry collaborations, investing in professional development, and consulting with external experts.[12]

2.2.4 Scalability and Resource Management

Scalability is a critical consideration when comparing in-house and external agency models. While external agencies provide flexible resource allocation, allowing companies to scale efforts up or down as needed, in-house teams often face challenges in managing fluctuating workloads. The ANA (2023) reports that 88% of companies experienced increased workloads for their in-house teams, with 67% noting a significant rise.[13]

To address these challenges, leading in-house agencies adopt hybrid models that combine internal expertise with external partnerships. Aquent Studios (2024) finds that companies with high creative demands retain a core in-house team for strategic brand work while outsourcing specialized projects, such as high-production video content, to external agencies.[14]

2.3 Best Practices for Establishing an In-House Creative Agency

2.3.1 Defining the Agency's Role and Structure

Clearly defining the role of an in-house agency is essential for its success. The ANA (2023) emphasizes the importance of establishing a distinct identity for the in-house team, ensuring it is viewed as a strategic partner rather than a service provider.[15]

2.3.2 Implementing Efficient Workflows and Collaboration Tools

Optimizing workflows is critical for in-house creative teams. Organizations that implement project management tools such as Workamajig and Asana improve task allocation, track project timelines, and enhance collaboration. The ANA (2023) highlights that workflow management remains a major challenge for 70% of in-house agencies.[16]

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[11] Wolf, John. 2023. *The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency, 2023 Edition*. May. Association of National Advertisers. New York.
[12] Ibid. p.27.
[13] Ibid. p.15.
[14] Hall, Susie. (2024). "Avoiding the Biggest In-House Agency Mistakes." Aquent Studios LLC. p.15.
[15] Wolf, John. 2023. *The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency, 2023 Edition*. May. Association of National Advertisers. p.16.
[16] Ibid. p.23.

2.3.3 Cultivating a Culture of Creativity and Continuous Learning

Encouraging innovation and professional development is crucial for sustaining creative excellence. The ANA (2023) notes that in-house agencies are now being held to the same performance standards as external agencies, making talent development a key priority.[17]

2.3.4 Measuring Success and Demonstrating Value

To justify long-term investment, in-house agencies must assess their impact through key performance indicators (KPIs). Cost savings remain the top KPI, but its importance has declined from 69% in 2018 to 62% in 2023. Conversely, "business performance" has risen from 45% to 59%, reflecting a growing emphasis on strategic contributions.[18]

2.4 Conclusion

The transition to an in-house creative agency model presents organizations with opportunities to enhance branding, cost efficiency, and operational agility. While external agencies offer scalability and diverse perspectives, in-house teams provide stronger brand alignment and faster execution.

The success of an in-house agency depends on clearly defining its role, optimizing workflows, fostering a creative culture, and measuring performance effectively. A hybrid approach that strategically integrates both internal and external resources can maximize efficiency and innovation. As companies continue to navigate an evolving marketing landscape, in-house agencies are positioned to play a pivotal role in shaping brand narratives and driving long-term business success.

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[17] Wolf, John. 2023. *The Continued Rise of the In-House Agency, 2023 Edition*. May. Association of National Advertisers.. p.38.
[18] Ibid. p.37.

Chapter No. 3: Methodology: Developing an Effective Framework for In-housing a Creative Agency

3.1 Why Brands Are Essential To Companies?

Brands are the most valuable assets a company owns. Why? Because without brands, products are merely commodities, valued only for their direct purpose. A running shoe is just a running shoe, and a bottle of water is simply a container of water. However, when a commodity is combined with a story, an image, a promise, and a deeper meaning, it becomes something greater - it gains additional value. It resonates with the buyer and the broader world of consumers.

Consider the Nike brand. By adding the iconic Nike Swoosh to a running shoe and pairing it with the memorable tagline "Just Do It," the consumer’s experience is transformed. They are no longer merely putting on running shoes for a jog; they are wearing Nikes. Similarly, a thirsty consumer is not just drinking a generic bottle of water but choosing SMART water, a brand that signals discerning taste for what might otherwise seem ordinary. This is the power of branding - it transforms commodities into valued items, enabling businesses to position their products in ways that compel their target market to purchase them.

Brands play a pivotal role in creating value and differentiating products from competitors. Marketing and advertising efforts are critical to building brands. They give commodities an identity, foster consumer loyalty, and reduce attrition. Brands are intangible marketing constructs that imbue products with meaning. The marketing department nurtures these brands, while the advertising department spreads their influence. Renowned advertising copywriter and agency founder David Ogilvy defined a brand as “the intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging, and price; its history; its reputation; and the way it's advertised.”

To achieve this, the marketing department conducts thorough research to understand the brand's needs and devise an effective strategy. This process often involves employing the 7Ps of marketing: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. These elements, which constitute the marketing mix, are used to craft a comprehensive strategy for the product and to define the brand.

Through meticulous research, the marketing department identifies the optimal approach to brand positioning and develops a detailed blueprint for effectively reaching target consumers. This strategy helps determine the best channels for promoting and selling the product to the intended audience. Once the marketing team establishes a clear strategy for the brand’s market positioning, they assess its place on the value scale to ensure alignment with the overarching business objectives for the product.

After the marketing department establishes the brand and its strategy, the task of conveying the brand's essence to consumers with advertising is entrusted to the creative agency. Like children, brands require care and nurturing, and this is where the creative agency assumes responsibility for crafting innovative creative marketing efforts. Selecting a reliable partner to manage these invaluable assets – brands - is a pivotal decision for any company.

In smaller countries in Central America and the Caribbean, companies often face limited options for accessing advertising expertise and resources. The challenge lies in finding an agency that fits within budget, understands the company's brand and culture, and delivers effectively. As a result, many businesses in the region are recognising that developing internal resources is a more viable way to achieve their advertising objectives. Establishing in-house capabilities, such as an in-house advertising or creative agency, offers not only a solution but also the most efficient and cost-effective approach.

Globally the trend of in-housing creative agencies is gaining momentum, initially due to their advantages in cost and time savings, however, companies are discovering multiple other advantages. However, in Central America and the Caribbean, this approach may be driven more by necessity than by financial considerations alone.

This section aims to provide a comprehensive methodology for companies or holding companies interested in creating their own in-house advertising agencies. It will outline a clear blueprint, highlighting the necessary steps and emphasising the advantages, including cost savings and improved communication efficiency. By the conclusion, the effectiveness of this approach will be demonstrated from multiple perspectives.

As stated in the ANA study done in 2023 there are compelling reasons to establish an in-house advertising agency, and one common reason is that independent agencies lack a sense of ownership. This can lead to delays and inflated costs, with external agencies often operating at a slower pace and charging high fees. In contrast, internal agencies are intrinsically tied to the brands they serve and operate with fixed costs rather than variable ones.

3.1.2 Building an In-House Capability

A well-developed and effectively managed in-house creative agency can save significant time and money for both holding companies with multiple brands and single businesses managing fewer brands. By employing dedicated experts in visual management who focus solely on the company's brands, the agency can ensure streamlined and efficient execution at optimal costs. Companies no longer need to compete for the attention of external agencies.

To ensure consistent and timely delivery for year-round activations, engaging social media content, and short-form video production across all business units, the company must determine the appropriate creative team size. This ensures resources are not wasted while adequately meeting the needs of each brand.

This chapter will present a methodology and framework to achieve these objectives, particularly in regions where advertising agencies and outsourcing options are limited. Ideally, business units operate with an 18-month lead time for business plans and a four-month lead time for activations and events. Each initiative begins with a detailed Creative Brief. With advance planning, an in-house agency can manage substantial workloads without requiring additional staff to address poorly planned campaigns.

3.1.3 Key Steps in Establishing an In-House Agency

The process begins by collaborating with each business unit to define individual strategies for their departments and more specifically for the brands they represent. This involves creating a comprehensive business plan that outlines brand objectives, projected earnings, and allocated marketing budgets for campaigns, activations, and events.

The marketing budget, dedicated marketing investment or expense, (DME) determines the capacity for advertising, media selected, marketing events, design requests for point-of-sale materials temporary or permanent, and the level of investments in social media. Based on these allocations, the agency can estimate the volume of work each brand requires and plan resources accordingly. Smaller brands with limited budgets will need fewer services, while larger brands will demand greater time and effort from the agency.

Each strategy should be accompanied by a yearly schedule, enabling the agency to plan and distribute workloads efficiently. Establishing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for each brand or department creates a contractual understanding between the in-house agency and brand managers. This ensures alignment, fosters anticipation and planning, and allows for the clear measurement of progress against sales and performance expectations. These plans are put into a comprehensive calendar of events for all accounts to use for planning ahead for each project, and to meet deadlines. This project management is essential to meet deadlines, operate efficiently, and advertise with optimal timeframes to ensure success.

3.1.4 Proactive Planning and Efficient Execution

To maintain efficiency, the agency adopts a proactive approach by conducting preparatory work during slower periods to anticipate busier times. This foresight ensures productions are ready for timely delivery, even during peak activity. Managing resources effectively in this way allows the agency to maintain a stable workforce, avoiding the need for excessive staffing during high-demand periods. It is inefficient to staff for peak, but rather a better practice to maintain a workforce that meets a steady demand. When extra work needs to be done, the agency can reprioritise assignments.

In the event of a backlog, the agency may enlist freelancers or external agencies for support. However, this is not the preferred option due to its higher costs and potential budget challenges. Proper planning and scheduling remain the priority to minimise reliance on temporary solutions.

To address the corporation's needs effectively, the agency adheres to a meticulously planned schedule. Last-minute requests are discouraged, as they can be costly. A contingency budget is established to accommodate unavoidable rush requests, while penalties for negligent planning encourage responsible time management across all departments.

Being embedded with the brands and the business units allows for the internal agency to anticipate needs and proactively produce what is scheduled. This advantage saves the company both money and time across the board.

3.2 The Marketing Structure: How Process Is Determined.

This chapter explores the methodology for the creation of an in-house creative agency within a beverage-focused company that produces beverages for both global and local brands. Companies organize their structures in various ways, but building an in-house agency starts with a thorough analysis of organizational charts and job descriptions for team members directly involved in marketing. The next step is to identify individuals with secondary and tertiary links to the marketing framework. Collectively, these individuals form a network that fuels the flow of strategy, information, and planning.

The structure of the marketing department typically consists of three key areas: the commercial marketing team, the sales team, and the brands team — each playing a critical role in developing brand strategies.

The commercial marketing team serves as the direct link to customers, managing customer service and maintaining strong customer relationships. This team is divided into two segments: on-premise and off-premise consumption.

The sales team handles sales forecasting for production and employs pre-sellers who take customer orders for products. Once the orders are placed, they are delivered to the respective establishments.

The brands team oversees the development of marketing plans and manages the budgets for marketing strategies. They establish the marketing schedule and decide which campaigns and activations will be executed for each brand. After finalizing their plans, the brands team shares the information with the in-house creative agency, where the advertising process begins.

A brand's marketing strategy and annual investment are rooted in its sales performance. A percentage of each brand’s sales is allocated to marketing and advertising, forming the Dedicated Marketing Expense (DME) - the funding source for campaigns, activations, events, and other initiatives aimed at driving sales. This figure is calculated using a combination of the previous year’s sales, the average of the past three years, and the projected investment needed for the upcoming year.

Larger, more established brands naturally have greater resources to invest, while smaller brands operate with leaner budgets. New brands follow a distinct investment approach, with an initial budget focused on market entry costs, point-of-sale materials, and consumer-facing assets designed to establish a market presence. This investment is typically tiered over a three-year period to build brand equity. After this phase, new brands transition to the standard investment percentage model used for established brands.

Once the Dedicated Marketing Investment is set, brand managers within the marketing department divide the year into quarters and begin charting each brand’s trajectory. The planning process starts with defining the brand's core intention - its business strategy, target audience, and the best methods to engage that audience.

Target audiences are identified through key demographic data, such as age, gender, income, preferences, shopping habits, and product usage. Using this information, the team selects the most effective marketing channels to reach consumers, whether through traditional advertising, digital media, or other platforms.

Ongoing research and data collection are essential, even for well-established brands, as consumer preferences evolve over time. To maintain relevance and customer loyalty, the marketing team must stay agile, ready to adjust messaging and strategy as market dynamics shift.

Understanding the consumer is essential for effective marketing. Once the target audience is identified, the brand team selects the most appropriate channels to engage them, categorized as on-premise or off-premise.

On-premise channels include locations where products are consumed on-site, such as bars and restaurants. Marketing in these spaces requires tailored strategies, as the consumer experience is immediate and immersive. For instance, high-end bars call for premium advertising that reflects the sophistication of the clientele, while sports bars benefit from a more relaxed, relatable approach, often highlighting beer and casual mixed drinks that align with the laid-back atmosphere.

Off-premise channels include supermarkets, convenience stores, superettes, and traditional grocery stores, where products are purchased for consumption elsewhere, typically at home. These channels require a different marketing approach focused on visibility, product packaging, and promotions that influence purchasing decisions at the point of sale.

Each channel requires a custom strategy to ensure messaging resonates with its specific customer base. Activation planning takes these nuances into account, ensuring that advertising is relevant, relatable, and engaging. Brand managers, who have deep knowledge of their brand's goals and identity, work closely with creative developers within the in-house agency. This collaboration transforms insights into compelling campaigns designed to capture the attention of the target audience.

The depth of consumer understanding is built over years of research using diverse methodologies that generate institutional knowledge for each brand. These insights inform the brand's annual strategy and ensure every campaign or activation has measurable success metrics. This consumer knowledge, combined with the brand's intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, brand pillars, and style guides, forms the foundation for messaging that speaks directly to the consumer. This bespoke approach strengthens consumer loyalty and fosters long-term brand affinity.

3.2.1 Consumer Research Information

The primary methodology used by the marketing department to gather consumer insights begins with commissioning an annual Gallup Research study. This study collects detailed demographic and behavioural data on consumers, including their socioeconomics, education level, consumption habits, purchasing behaviour, media usage, and opinions on competing brands. The results are analysed year over year to identify patterns, track changes, and better understand consumer attitudes and behaviours. While this research occasionally extends to new products, the primary focus remains on local beverage brands, particularly beer. Global beverage partners typically have a well-defined strategy for how their brands should be positioned in the market, so this local research is primarily directed toward proprietary brands.

The secondary stage of consumer research involves direct, on-the-ground engagement with consumers. This process is led by the commercial marketing team, which regularly interacts with customers and consumers in locations where beverages are purchased. By observing preferences, patterns, and purchasing habits, as well as gathering direct feedback, the team collects valuable qualitative insights. While this approach is less data-driven than the formal Gallup Research study, it provides real-time, practical observations that often align with the more structured research findings.

The marketing department cross-references data from the Gallup Research study with the qualitative insights gathered by the commercial marketing team. Similarities between the two data sets reinforce the accuracy of the findings, while discrepancies are examined further to uncover new opportunities or areas that require deeper exploration. This dual-method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the consumer, allowing for more informed marketing strategies and campaign development.

Pre-sellers in the sales division play a critical role in both order fulfilment and customer intelligence. Their primary responsibility is to visit customers on a set schedule to take orders and introduce new products. Once orders are placed, the regional sales depots dispatch products through the distribution team, which is managed by the logistics division. However, pre-sellers do far more than take orders — they serve as a vital link between the company and its customers.

Through their daily interactions, pre-sellers gather valuable insights into customer preferences, pain points, and product requests. This direct feedback allows the company to better understand what each channel needs to maintain strong relationships and keep the company's products in the prized "first position" on store shelves. This information not only guides sales strategies but also shapes the demands that brand managers will later communicate to the in-house creative agency.

The flow of information throughout the company - from pre-sellers to brand managers, creative teams, and back to customers - creates a continuous feedback loop. This network of data serves as the foundation for marketing campaigns and activations. It ensures that decisions are driven by customer needs and preferences, allowing the company to stay agile and responsive. This customer-first approach isn't just a strategy - it's the ethos of the entire business. Every aspect of the company's architecture is built to prioritize the customer, from the logistics and sales process to the design of marketing campaigns.

An in-house creative agency is a natural extension of this system, seamlessly integrating creative work into the company's operational fabric. Unlike an external agency, which would require weeks or even months to grasp the complexities of customer preferences, cultural nuances, and market dynamics, an in-house agency is deeply embedded in this ongoing process. The learning curve for an external partner is steep, requiring significant onboarding time for them to understand the customer base, category dynamics, and cultural biases.

By contrast, an in-house agency functions as a true "family member" within the company. While external agencies may be "adopted" or "married" into the organization, full integration takes years. The in-house model eliminates this learning period, allowing for faster turnaround, deeper alignment, and creative campaigns that feel authentic to the brand and its customers. This seamless integration makes the creative process more efficient and responsive, ultimately supporting the company's overarching mission to provide the best possible customer service.

3.3 Writing The Annual Business Plan: A Focus On Promotion And Place

3.3.1 Marketing: Writing the Annual Business Plan with a Focus on Promotion and Place

A successful annual business plan relies on strategic allocation of the Dedicated Marketing Expenditure (DME). With the DME established, brand managers can allocate funds for campaigns, promotions, and events across the year. This process begins with a comprehensive review of sales data, trade resource needs, and the annual events in which the brand traditionally participates. From this analysis, the brand events calendar is created, serving as the foundation for the brand's Integrated Marketing Campaigns (IMC).

3.3.2 Prioritizing Marketing Activities and Budget Allocation

Once the event calendar is set, brand managers identify key marketing priorities and allocate budgets for each campaign, promotion, activation, and event. The plan outlines the brand's promotional strategy for the next 12 to 18 months. This process typically begins in early October and is finalized by mid-November. By early December, the marketing strategies are shared with the in-house creative agency, ensuring all teams are aligned for the year ahead.

The in-house creative agency provides a distinct advantage in this process. Unlike external agencies, which must wait for formal directives before creative development, the in-house team has early visibility into marketing priorities. This early access allows the creative agency to begin working on materials for Q1 (January, February, and March) well in advance. If the marketing department relied on an external agency, planning for Q1 would need to begin in Q3, a timeline that is rarely feasible due to competing priorities. The in-house agency model eliminates this bottleneck, enabling the marketing department to finalize plans in Q4 while the creative team simultaneously begins production.

3.3.3 The Role of the Creative Agency in the Business Plan

Once the marketing strategies are shared, the creative agency takes the lead in transforming these strategies into creative campaigns. The process follows a clear structure, prioritizing the Beverages division first, followed by other business units. The creative agency is responsible for converting marketing strategies into actionable creative deliverables that align with the brand's goals.

At the heart of this process are creative developers, also known as account managers, who act as the primary link between the Marketing Department and the Creative Agency. They play a pivotal role in understanding and translating the brand's needs into creative briefs. Their responsibilities include:

1. Liaising with Brand Managers to review the brand calendar, campaign budgets, and promotional priorities.
2. Developing detailed campaign outlines for each brand, covering:
    a. Campaigns – Large-scale brand initiatives aimed at driving brand awareness and engagement.
    b. Promotions – Short-term offers or deals to drive sales and increase consumer interaction.
    c. Activations – On-ground and experiential marketing tactics designed to engage customers in person.
    d. Events – Public and private events that showcase the brand to a specific audience.

The brand plan also outlines media placement strategies, detailing where and how the advertising will appear. Early alignment on media strategy allows the creative agency to conceptualize advertising for print, radio, television, social media, and digital platforms. By preparing media plans, the agency ensures seamless execution across channels.

3.4 Social Media Planning

As part of the business plan, the creative agency works closely with brand teams to define the brand's Social Media Strategy. The objective is to ensure the brand remains visible, relevant, and engaging across social platforms. During this stage, discussions focus on the following key elements:

1. Platform Presence – Identifying where the brand will maintain a presence, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Each platform has unique content requirements, so this step ensures tailored content for each channel.

2. Posting Frequency – Determining how often the brand will post to maintain visibility, engagement, and relevance. The frequency of posts is a crucial aspect of brand growth and engagement.
3. Audience Targeting – Defining the brand's target audience in terms of demographics (age, gender, location) and psychographics (interests, lifestyle, behaviour) to ensure the messaging resonates with the intended audience.
4. Brand Message – Establishing a consistent message for the brand to maintain a unified voice across all content. This ensures that all posts reflect the brand's ethos, values, and positioning.

During this phase, brand managers provide clear guidance on their vision for the brand, specifying the goals for each type of content, including:

1. Brand-building content to establish trust, authority, and relevance.
2. Promotional content to drive sales, highlight offers and increase conversions.
3. Event-driven content to showcase the brand's presence at events and engage the community in real time.

This clarity allows the agency to structure its creative output, accordingly, ensuring the brand's voice, tone, and visual identity remain consistent across platforms. As a result, every creative output, from social posts to video content, supports the brand's overarching strategy, driving awareness, engagement, and sales.

3.4.1 Agility and Speed as a Partnership

An in-house creative agency offers a streamlined, agile, and cost-effective approach to executing marketing strategies. Early access to marketing plans allows for better preparation, faster production, and more efficient resource utilization. The collaboration between brand managers and the creative agency ensures alignment on goals, content, and execution timelines. By integrating business planning, creative development, and social media strategy, the brand can operate with greater precision and achieve a stronger, more unified market presence. We are also reminded by (Hall 2024) "in today's interconnected world, no in-house agency is an island. Forming strategic partnerships with external support can significantly enhance your agency's capacity, scalability, and capabilities."[19]

3.5 Definitions of Key Marketing Concepts

3.5.1 Campaign

[19] Hall, Susie. *Avoiding on of the biggest in-house agency mistakes*. Aquent. p. 12.

A campaign represents a strategic, multi-channel initiative designed to achieve specific objectives, such as increasing brand awareness, driving sales, or launching a new product. Campaigns are characterized by their large scope, cohesive messaging, and implementation over a defined period. They utilise various media platforms, including television, social media, radio, email, and print, to maximise impact and reach.

Key characteristics of campaigns include their objective-driven nature, which focuses on achieving a defined goal such as sales growth or product awareness. Campaigns are inherently multi-channel, leveraging diverse platforms for maximum visibility. They are time-bound, with clear start and end dates, and they maintain message consistency across all channels to reinforce brand identity and messaging.

For example, a beverage company might launch a “Summer Refresh” campaign to promote a new sparkling water flavour. This campaign could include television advertisements, social media content, in-store displays, influencer collaborations, and limited-edition packaging. Each touchpoint would emphasise the theme of “refreshing summer moments,” ensuring consistent messaging across platforms.

Campaigns are significant because they encompass broader scopes than other marketing efforts. They frequently integrate promotions, activations, and events within their strategies, all contributing to a unified central message.

3.5.2 Promotion

A promotion is a short-term, sales-oriented marketing effort designed to prompt immediate consumer action, such as making a purchase or engaging with a brand. Promotions create urgency by offering compelling incentives, encouraging consumers to act quickly. While promotions are often part of larger campaigns, their focus is more immediate and short-term.

Promotions are defined by their short-term focus, typically lasting only a few days or weeks. They feature a clear call-to-action, urging consumers to respond promptly. These efforts are directly sales-driven and centred around specific offers, such as discounts, gifts, or contests.

Common types of promotions include price discounts, such as “buy-one-get-one-free” (BOGO) deals or percentage reductions; redeemable coupons and vouchers; bonus offers, such as “buy two, get one free”; and contests or sweepstakes that incentivise participation through prizes.

For example, during the World Cup, a beer company might run a “Buy 2, Get 1 Free” promotion to encourage bulk purchases. This offer could be advertised on packaging, in-store signage, and social media ads, leveraging the heightened consumer interest during the tournament.

Promotions are vital for driving quick sales and encouraging product trials. Although short-lived, they can effectively support ongoing marketing strategies and contribute to the success of larger campaigns.

3.5.3 Brand Activation

Brand activation involves interactive, experience-driven marketing efforts aimed at forging lasting emotional connections with consumers. Unlike campaigns, which are broad in scope, or promotions, which prioritise sales, brand activations focus on engagement and immersive experiences. These activations can occur in physical or virtual spaces, depending on the target audience and objectives.

The defining characteristics of brand activations include their interactive and immersive nature, prioritising direct consumer engagement. They aim to create memorable experiences that foster a personal connection with the brand, often prioritising emotional resonance over immediate sales impact.

Brand activations take various forms, such as live events like product sampling and pop-up shops, experiential marketing initiatives such as branded art installations, social media challenges involving user-generated content, or digital activations using augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies.

For instance, a beer brand might host an interactive beer-tasting activation at a major music festival. Attendees could sample different beer flavours, take branded selfies, and participate in live games to win merchandise. Such activities engage customers personally and leave positive, memorable impressions of the brand.

Brand activations are essential for humanising brands and cultivating emotional bonds with consumers. While they may not drive immediate sales, they significantly enhance brand equity and encourage word-of-mouth promotion.

3.5.4 Event

An event refers to a time-specific gathering - whether in-person or digital - designed to foster direct interaction between a brand and its audience. Unlike activations, which focus on creating immersive experiences, events are scheduled, time-bound, and aimed at showcasing the brand to a targeted group. Events often serve purposes such as announcing new products, building community, or generating buzz.

Key characteristics of events include their time-specific nature, with defined start and end times. They focus on engaging a specific audience, such as media representatives, influencers, or customers. Events also provide high-touch experiences, where personal interactions are prioritised.

Additionally, events utilise branding elements, such as logos, giveaways, and signage, to enhance visibility.

Types of events range from brand-hosted activities, such as product launches and grand openings, to sponsorships at third-party gatherings like concerts or festivals. Virtual events, such as webinars and live-streamed product demonstrations, and trade shows targeting business-to-business (B2B) audiences, are also common.

For example, a soft drink brand might sponsor a music festival and set up a branded lounge where attendees can sample new products, take branded photos, and participate in giveaways. This event would increase brand visibility and drive social media buzz as participants share their experiences online.

Events are valuable for creating direct consumer engagement and fostering a sense of connection with the brand. They support public relations efforts, encourage social sharing, and strengthen brand affinity through high-touch interactions.

3.5.5 How Campaigns, Promotions, Activations, and Events Work Together

The four marketing concepts - campaigns, promotions, activations, and events - intersect to create a cohesive, multi-channel approach known as an Integrated Marketing Campaign (IMC). Each concept contributes a distinct function within the marketing mix, yet together they deliver a unified brand experience that drives attention, action, and loyalty.

3.5.6 Campaign: The Strategic Foundation

Campaigns serve as the strategic framework that unites all other marketing activities. They establish the central "big idea" and theme that guide promotions, activations, and events. By defining key objectives, messages, and timelines, campaigns ensure that every effort aligns with a shared goal.

Role and Purpose:

1. Role: Campaigns provide the guiding framework for other marketing concepts.
2. Goal: To increase brand awareness, launch a product, or achieve specific objectives.
3. Tools: TV advertisements, social media content, print materials, and other multi-channel media.

Example: A beverage company might launch a “Summer Refresh” campaign to introduce a new sparkling water line. The central message, "Refreshing Summer Moments," is communicated across TV ads, social media, email newsletters, and billboards. All subsequent promotions, activations, and events reinforce this campaign message.

Integration with Other Concepts:

1. Promotions: Serve as short-term incentives within the broader campaign.
2. Activations: Offer hands-on experiences that bring the campaign to life.
3. Events: Generate excitement and support the overarching campaign goals.

3.5.7 Promotion: The Sales Driver

Promotions are short-term marketing activities that encourage immediate consumer action. These initiatives create urgency and exclusivity to stimulate purchases, effectively providing a compelling "reason to buy now" within the larger campaign context.

Role and Purpose:

1. Role: To support campaigns by offering consumers immediate incentives.
2. Goal: To boost sales, increased volume, or drive traffic.
3. Tools: Discounts, flash sales, BOGO offers, giveaways, and promo codes.

Example: As part of the "Summer Refresh" campaign, the beverage company could implement a "Buy 1, Get 1 Free" promotion on sparkling water for a limited time. This offer promoted through in-store displays, product packaging, and social media ads, encourages heightened consumer engagement during the campaign period.

Integration with Other Concepts:

1. Campaigns: Provide the overarching message that promotions amplify.
2. Activations: Help raise awareness of promotional offers.
3. Events: Showcase promotions in high-visibility settings.

3.5.8 Activation: The Experience Builder

Activations create immersive, interactive experiences that forge emotional connections with consumers. Unlike campaigns, which deliver messages, or promotions, which drive sales, activations focus on fostering meaningful engagement through memorable experiences.

Role and Purpose:

1. Role: To deepen consumers' emotional connection with the brand.
2. Goal: To build brand loyalty, foster positive associations, and encourage social sharing.
3. Tools: Pop-up shops, tasting booths, virtual experiences, and AR/VR interactions.

Example: Within the "Summer Refresh" campaign, the beverage company might organise a "Taste Test Experience" in urban areas and beach resorts. Consumers sample the sparkling water, vote for their favourite flavours, and take branded selfies. These activations generate social buzz, strengthen brand recognition, and foster positive engagement.

Integration with Other Concepts:
1. Campaigns: Provide the strategic message for activations to embody.
2. Promotions: Attract participants to activation sites.
3. Events: Serve as venues for integrating activations.

3.5.9 Event: The Buzz Generator

Events are live, time-specific experiences designed to engage audiences and showcase a brand. While activations focus on interactions, events highlight the brand's offerings in a public or virtual forum. Events generate buzz, attract media coverage, and enhance brand visibility.

Role and Purpose:
1. Role: To showcase the brand and drive audience engagement.
2. Goal: To increase visibility, foster PR coverage, and create memorable moments.
3. Tools: Product launches, trade shows, pop-up stores, and live-streamed events.

Example: The beverage company could host a rooftop launch event for its sparkling water, inviting influencers, media representatives, and VIP customers. Attendees would sample the drinks, engage in curated experiences, and share the event on social media. Broadcasting the event live maximises reach and engagement.

Integration with Other Concepts:
1. Campaigns: Provide the message that events bring to life.
2. Promotions: Drive post-event sales.
3. Activations: Enhance the event experience with interactive elements.3.5.10 How They Work Together: An Integrated Approach

An example scenario illustrates the synergy between these concepts in an IMC. A beverage company’s "Summer Refresh" campaign sets the tone, delivering the central message, "Refreshing Summer Moments." Promotions, such as "Buy 1, Get 1 Free," incentivise immediate purchases. Activations, like "Taste Test Experiences," create immersive consumer engagement. Finally, a launch event generates excitement, PR, and social media buzz.

Key Takeaway:
1. Campaigns define the strategic vision and overarching message.
2. Promotions offer short-term incentives to drive immediate action.
3. Activations foster consumer engagement and long-term brand loyalty.

4. Events create buzz, generate PR, and amplify visibility.

By synchronising these components, brands can deliver an impactful, seamless experience that captures attention, drives sales, and builds lasting consumer relationships. This holistic approach ensures that every marketing effort contributes to a unified brand narrative.

3.6 Assessing The Marketing Business Plans

The marketing business plans are presented to the in-house creative agency with the aim of handing over the blueprints for the year. While brand managers act as custodians of these plans, it is the creative agency's responsibility to bring every aspect to life. This handover provides the agency with a clear, strategic framework for each brand's goals, allowing for a seamless transition from strategy to execution.

Once the blueprints are in hand, the next step is for each brand manager to prepare two critical documents for each main initiative: Creative brief and Production Request.

3.6.1 The Creative Brief

The creative brief is a vital document that serves as a bridge between the brand's business objectives and the creative team's execution. It takes the high-level concepts from the overarching blueprint and provides more specific guidance for each execution. The creative brief ensures that all stakeholders - from brand managers to designers - are aligned in their approach, focus, and end goals.[20]

A well-crafted creative brief includes the following key components:

3.6.2 Business/Brand Issue or Opportunity

This section outlines why the project is being done and what problem or opportunity it seeks to solve. It identifies the larger business context, such as a new product launch, brand repositioning, seasonal promotions, or the need to outmanoeuvre a competitor. Clarity in this section ensures that every team member understands the "why" behind the creative work.

Example: "The brand is launching a new ready-to-drink coffee product aimed at millennial professionals. The business opportunity is to capture market share from competitors and establish our brand as the go-to option for convenience and taste."

3.6.3 Target Consumer or Shopper Definition

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[20] (See Appendix D – Creative Brief template)

This section defines the primary target audience with as much detail as possible, creating a clear image of the individual being targeted. The description goes beyond basic demographics (age, gender, income) to include psychographics, such as lifestyle, habits, motivations, and pain points. A well-defined audience allows the creative team to craft messaging that speaks directly to the consumer.

Example Target: Consumer: 25-35-year-old, urban-dwelling, health-conscious professionals who seek convenience and quality. They consume content on Instagram and TikTok, prioritize eco-friendly brands, and are open to trying new products in the beverage space.

3.6.4 Key Facts & Insights

This section provides data-driven insights that inform creative development. It reveals what the target audience thinks, feels, and does, allowing the creative team to tailor messaging that resonates with them. This data comes from the company's internal research, such as the Gallup Research and feedback from the pre-sellers discussed earlier.

Example Insight: "Research shows that 70% of consumers in this segment prefer plant-based ingredients in beverages, and 60% are willing to pay a premium for natural and organic products."

3.6.5 Objective

The objective clearly states the goal of the campaign and defines what success looks like. Everyone involved should know exactly what they are working toward.

Example Objective: "Increase brand awareness for the new product by 15% in the first 6 months and drive a 10% increase in purchase intent."

3.6.6 Competitive Reality

This section highlights the competitive landscape and outlines what the brand is up against. This analysis ensures the creative team knows how to differentiate the brand from its rivals and push boundaries to create something more compelling than the competition.

Example: "Our main competitor, Brand X, launched a similar product last year with a focus on sustainability. Our campaign needs to highlight our unique taste, quality, and superior convenience to stand out in the market."

3.6.7 Mandatories

This section identifies the non-negotiable elements that must be included in the final creative output. These elements could be logos, disclaimer language, trademark notices, legal compliance statements, and any other requirements dictated by internal or partner brand standards.

Example: “Must include the tagline ‘Fuel Your Day, Naturally.’ Must comply with sustainability guidelines and display the ‘100% Plant-Based’ mark.”

3.6.8 Deliverables

This section lists the specific creative assets the team must produce. This may include social media graphics, TV scripts, packaging design, point-of-sale materials, or digital ads. This list allows the creative team to gauge the workload, allocate resources, and plan deadlines.

Example Deliverables:
1. 10 social media posts (video and static)
2. 1 digital ad (15-second pre-roll)
3. Point-of-sale display design for in-store placement

3.6.9 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

This section identifies the metrics of success. It defines how the creative team’s work will be measured, ensuring alignment on the project’s overall objectives.

Example KPIs:
1. Brand Awareness: 10% increase in social media reach.
2. Sales: 20% growth in unit sales for the product launch.
3. Engagement: 5,000 social media interactions (likes, shares, comments) within the first 60 days.

3.6.10 Timing

This section defines the project timeline and when specific deliverables are due. It prevents delays and allows the agency to prioritize workloads effectively.

Example Timing:
1. Creative concepts due: January 15
2. Final assets for social media due: February 1
3. In-store displays installed by: February 10

3.6.11 Budget

The budget for the campaign is clearly outlined, ensuring the creative team knows the financial constraints they must work within. The in-house agency is incentivized to stay within or below budget, as the company's objective is to reduce costs rather than increase billable hours. Unlike external agencies, the in-house team is not paid by project volume but rather on the quality of work.

3.6.12 Stakeholders

The creative team is provided with a list of all stakeholders connected to the project. This could include brand managers, marketing directors, legal teams, and any relevant partners. Knowing who to contact ensures smooth communication throughout the project lifecycle.

3.7 The Production Request

Once the creative brief is finalized, the Production request outlines the exact requirements for specific executions of the campaign.[21] While the creative brief defines the strategy, tone, and overall direction, the production request focuses on logistics and technical specifications.

A Production request should include:

1. Summary of Creative Brief
2. File specifications with the correct FNC (File Naming Convention), dimensions, file formats, and resolution needed
3. Media plans that define where and how assets will be distributed.
4. Printing requirements which include paper type, colour codes, etc.
5. Language versions and if translations are required
6. Text required on the material

This request document ensures the creative development and production team have everything they need to execute without ambiguity. Secondly, the production request allows for the agency to track executions and bill according to the tiers that each execution requires. This billing process will be covered in a later chapter.

3.7.1 Why this process matters?

The process of creating a creative brief and a production request ensures that the creative agency has a crystal-clear understanding of what is expected. Unlike an external agency, an in-house agency already has deep familiarity with the brand, its ethos, and its overall goals. This enables the agency to work faster, reduce learning curves, and deliver higher-quality work at a lower cost.

If the company were working with an external agency, brand managers would need to spend weeks (or even months) explaining the brand's category, market nuances, and consumer preferences. By contrast, the in-house agency can hit the ground running. Integration is seamless since the creative team is already embedded in the company's daily operations.

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[21] (See Appendix A – Production Request Form)

3.7.2 The Role of Robert Solomon's Approach to Creative briefs

This process aligns with the best practices outlined in Robert Solomon's book on the importance of a strong creative brief. Solomon emphasizes that a creative brief must be more than a list of instructions - it must inspire the creative team and focus their thinking. A well-constructed creative brief defines the "what" and "why" of the project, while leaving space for creative interpretation.

When the creative brief is clear, concise, and motivating, the entire process flows smoothly. Creative teams can do their best work when they know exactly what is expected of them, have clear guidance on timing and budget, and understand how their work will be evaluated.

By following this process, the company maximizes its in-house creative resources, improves operational efficiency, and produces higher-quality advertising that aligns with the brand's business goals.

In essence, the creative brief is the "North Star" of the entire process, guiding every decision and ensuring that campaigns deliver measurable impact.[22]

3.8 A Creative Approach to Annual Business Strategies

The in-house creative agency should mirror the structure of the marketing department, with a corresponding number of creative developers and producers aligned to the brands that require ongoing support. Creative developers serve as the agency's front line and act as the primary intake point for creative production. They handle creative briefs and production requests, processing and evaluating them before passing them to the creative producers. As creative developers, they are the lead drivers of creative production and are assigned a portfolio of brands.

Creative developers are tasked with becoming deeply familiar with their assigned brands. This includes staying up to date on brand research and insights, while internally referencing brand pillars, historical data, and style guides that shape the brand's personality and ethos. With access to annual business plans and marketing strategies - and through close collaboration with brand managers - account managers facilitate the creation of high-quality, on-brand creative content.

Their role extends beyond creative production. Creative developers forecast needs, estimate costs, and provide brand managers with a comprehensive view of the annual creative plan, outlining timelines, budgets, and production requirements. This process establishes a solid foundation for the year's creative activities. However, it is important to recognize that this structure represents a best-case scenario. The agency must be ready to pivot in response to market disruptions or competitive threats. As German General Helmuth von Moltke once stated, "No plan of operations

[22] Robert Solomon, On Client Services.

reaches with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main force.” In the same way, flexibility and adaptability are essential to maintaining a competitive edge in an ever-changing market landscape.

With a strategic plan and production schedule in place, the next step for creative developers is to negotiate a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with brand managers for social media management. The SLA defines content expectations, including brand-building posts, advertising initiatives, page stories, short-form videos, and the frequency of posting. The posting schedule is influenced by several factors, including the brand’s available investment for media curation, management, and paid boosting. The agency maintains a detailed costing structure for each post, factoring in the time and effort required for production and management. The monthly fee for management is agreed on, and then the content building budget is transferred to the agency for them to manage to produce the content independently. Weekly conversations cover the content development, but this is typically handled by the account manager and all images are posted for the brand manager to check weeks in advance.

Monthly data analysis also plays a critical role in social media strategy. Performance data is used to optimize content and refine management tactics. Another essential aspect of social platform management is moderation. Timely and thoughtful engagement with followers - such as responding to comments, answering questions, and addressing inquiries - is crucial for brand perception. To ensure efficiency, the agency takes on moderation during working hours, while the brand manager assumes responsibility outside these hours. This arrangement ensures that responses are tailored and aligned with the brand’s voice and activities. Since brand managers have the most up-to-date knowledge of brand initiatives, they are best positioned to provide timely, accurate, and personalized responses.

By adopting a well-defined structure, the in-house creative agency establishes a process-driven approach to managing brand creative needs. This model balances strategic planning, agility, and brand-specific knowledge, enabling brands to remain nimble and responsive in a dynamic market environment.

Once the Service Level Agreement is finalized, the agency can begin creating content for the brand. This process starts with the development of a clearly defined workflow. A 52-week checklist is started for the content calendar, detailing the specific posting days, national holiday posts, campaign initiatives, and country events. This calendar serves as a blueprint for content creation, outlining key deliverables such as graphic designs, reels, and motion graphics. It allows the account manager to visualize the brand’s creative needs for the entire year and proactively schedule production activities.

Effective scheduling is essential for efficient content production. The agency must maintain a high level of organization and precision, especially when managing multiple brands. This approach becomes even more critical when travel is involved. To maximize productivity during field shoots, the agency combines production for several brands during a single trip. The creative producer - often a photographer - works with the account manager or a creative specialist to plan the shoot, secure necessary products, props, and models, and ensure that the schedule is followed efficiently. This method optimizes travel expenses, reduces production costs, and increases the overall efficiency of the team.

The optimal approach to planning and content creation is to stay one quarter (four months) ahead of the posting schedule. This timeline provides the creative team with sufficient breathing room to produce high-quality work without the constant pressure of last-minute deadlines. It also allows for contingency planning in the event of delays caused by factors like bad weather, model cancellations, or other unforeseen issues. This proactive approach fosters a creative environment where ideas can be explored and developed thoughtfully, rather than rushed under pressure.

Creativity thrives in an environment that promotes thoughtful planning and measured execution. A team operating under constant pressure is more likely to experience burnout, inefficiency, and diminished creativity. When working with a small team, it is critical to maintain a steady, sustainable pace that supports both productivity and well-being. This is why precise planning and clear operating procedures are essential. They provide a foundation for effective scheduling, allowing for revisions when necessary and ensuring that production remains on track.

Unlike large agencies with multiple layers of staffing, smaller teams do not have the luxury of redundancies. Large agencies may be able to manage last-minute requests by calling on backup staff, but this flexibility comes at a financial cost. Last-minute production often incurs rush fees, overtime fees, and penalties from suppliers who must expedite production under shorter timeframes. For smaller in-house teams, working under constant duress leads to costly errors and inefficiencies. These mistakes not only delay project timelines but also increase operational expenses, which can ultimately impact profitability.

The most effective way to avoid these pitfalls is through advanced planning. Backdating supply orders, coordinating production schedules, and accounting for potential disruptions ensure that all variables are accounted for. This approach reduces costs and allows the creative team to operate at peak efficiency. Proper planning enables teams to focus on high-quality output while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to new challenges. Ultimately, this results in superior creative work, cost savings, and a sustainable pace of production that benefits both the agency and its clients.

3.9 Content Planning: The Starting Point for Social Media Success

Content planning marks the first step in developing an annual social media calendar. However, it's far from the finish line. Once the content is mapped out and the brand story is visualized, this serves as the foundation for brand building and audience connection. This planning stage establishes the "what" and "why" of the content, but the "how" is just as critical.

The next step is to create interactive content that allows followers to learn, play, compete, and engage with the brand. Engagement is key to keeping the audience entertained and connected. This can be achieved by leveraging trends, launching contests, and encouraging discussions. People love the chance to win prizes that represent the brand, and these contests tap into that enthusiasm. Additionally, content that encourages users to click through to other areas - like landing pages, blogs, or product pages - increases engagement, brand visibility, and website traffic.

3.9.1 Captions and Hashtags: The Glue that Holds Content Together

Once content ideas are in place, the next focus is on creating captivating captions. A well-written caption should be entertaining, succinct, and engaging, encouraging the audience to stop scrolling and act. The tone should reflect the brand's personality, while the message should be clear, concise, and action driven.

Hashtags play an essential role in content discovery. They act as digital signposts that lead new audiences to the brand's content. Effective hashtag strategy requires a balance. Hashtags should be focused enough to attract a niche, engaged audience but broad enough to capture larger audience segments. This balance ensures that the brand's reach extends beyond its immediate followers, drawing in users who might not have found the content otherwise.

3.9.2 Data Collection: The Compass for Content Strategy

Data collection is the most powerful tool in the social media management process. It provides content creators with a clear, real-time snapshot of performance, enabling them to adjust content strategies as needed. Psychographic data - including audience interests, behaviours, and online habits - plays a vital role in shaping future content decisions. The social media landscape is constantly shifting, and what works one week may fail the next. Agility is essential to keep pace with changing trends and platform algorithm updates.

Algorithms are a moving target, often changing without warning or explanation. Staying ahead of these shifts requires careful observation and swift adaptation. Data collection serves as a real-time feedback loop, allowing the creative team to track changes in audience behaviour and platform dynamics. Account managers use these insights to modify strategies, ensuring that content stays visible and relevant.

3.9.3 Monthly Reviews: Fine-Tuning Content Strategy

The creative agency relies on monthly data reviews call a Social Media Report (SMR) to refine content strategy and improve performance. These reviews give account managers the opportunity to assess the success of posts, captions, and overall content themes. Data-driven decisions guide the future direction of content creation, allowing the team to build on past successes and avoid repeating mistakes.

When a post is well-received and resonates with followers, the account manager identifies what made it successful. This insight guides the creation of similar content to replicate that success. If, on the other hand, a post underperforms or goes unnoticed, the account manager analyses the reason for its poor reception. This evaluation could reveal issues with timing, relevance, content type, or messaging. If a contest, game, or digital activation performs well, the agency will repeat or scale it. If it flops, the team investigates the cause and makes the necessary adjustments.

This process of continuous improvement is crucial for building a content strategy that stays relevant and effective. It fosters a "test, learn, and iterate" mindset that allows the team to react quickly to changing audience preferences and platform requirements.

3.9.4 How It All Comes Together

1. Content Planning: Establish the brand's key messages, content calendar, and content mix.
2. Content Creation: Develop visually appealing, engaging content, including graphics, videos, and interactive elements.
3. Captions & Hashtags: Craft concise, compelling captions and use hashtags to increase discoverability.
4. Data Collection & Analysis: Monitor performance metrics and audience insights in real-time.
5. Monthly Reviews: Use data to refine content strategy, identify best-performing content, and eliminate underperforming posts.

By following this structured approach, the in-house creative agency can maintain agility, improve efficiency, and continuously optimize content strategies. This system ensures that the creative process remains fluid and responsive, while also being data-driven and performance-focused.

There are as many theories as there are platforms and content developers. Influencers make a living on these digital channels. Some are hugely successful; others are working on their success. As the creative agency we try to keep updated on this area by following, reading, attending workshops, and doing constant analysis. It is challenging, but very exciting and constantly changing. Complacency or routine are not words that fit into this media.

3.10 Building Local Creative Capabilities

3.10.1 Capabilities: Graphic Design and Photography

Developing strong in-house capabilities for graphic design and photography is fundamental to building local brands. These two disciplines form the foundation for authentic, relatable content that resonates with local audiences. While graphic design supports brand visual identity, photography captures moments and tells stories that connect with the audience on a deeper level. Together, they enable the creation of original, culturally relevant content that cannot be achieved with generic, stock imagery.

3.10.2 The Photography Journey: Building Skills Step-by-Step

Our approach to in-house photography development followed a phased strategy. We began by assessing our immediate needs and addressing the most pressing gaps. Initially, the primary objective was to secure competent coverage of local events, enabling us to create timely, relevant content for social media and design projects. Local, occasion-based images have a stronger emotional impact on the audience than generic, purchased images that often lack the cultural nuances unique to the community.

The first photographer we hired was a young, promising individual with a willingness to learn. Since Belize is a small Caribbean country, it does not have modelling agencies, we had to rely on friends, acquaintances, and everyday people who were open to being photographed. To facilitate this process, we sought permission from individuals, often presenting them with a model release form and offering branded merchandise in exchange for their participation. Our community's openness and trust proved invaluable, allowing us to capture authentic, relatable imagery. Over time, we developed a reputation for portraying our subjects respectfully and positively, which further solidified community trust. As a result, most of the people featured in our images remain real, everyday individuals, which strengthens our brand's authenticity and fosters a deeper connection with our viewers.

3.10.3 Advancing Photography Skills for Commercial Quality

Once our team mastered occasion-based photography, we shifted focus to more advanced commercial photography. This phase required a new set of technical and creative skills to produce images suitable for larger marketing applications, such as light pole banners, large-format prints, and billboards. The emphasis was on incorporating brand colours, crafting brand-appropriate scenarios, and producing high-quality, polished images that met industry standards.

To achieve this, our photographer had to learn how to work with brighter lenses capable of capturing images in low-light environments. Additionally, they had to master the use of artificial lighting to create balanced, well-lit environments without overpowering the subject. These skills allowed us to produce more professional-grade images for diverse applications. The team also learned how to pose subjects naturally, ensuring they appeared confident and at ease. This was essential for creating content that felt authentic while maintaining the high production quality required for large-scale marketing materials.

3.10.3 The Importance of Planning, Execution, and Feedback

Every stage of this process required careful planning, clear communication, and continuous learning. Each photoshoot involved pre-planned objectives, shot lists, and mood boards to ensure alignment with the brand's creative vision. The process didn't end after the shoot. Post-production editing was equally critical, with feedback sessions after each photoshoot. This step provided the opportunity for review, reflection, and improvement. Photographers and creative directors would discuss what worked, what didn't, and how to improve on future shoots. (See Appendix No. 3)

By taking a structured, step-by-step approach to in-house photography development, we established a process that supports both technical growth and creative excellence. The resulting images are not only authentic and culturally relevant but also versatile enough for a range of brand needs. As a result, our brand's visual storytelling capability has grown exponentially, enabling us to create powerful, audience-driven content that strengthens the emotional connection with our community and builds trust in our local brands.

The next phase of development for our photography team involved mastering multiple styles of portraiture, product photography, and, finally, food photography. Each of these styles was integral to the agency's operational efficiency and creative independence. Portraiture was prioritized due to its broad range of applications, including headshots, full-body shots, and expressive images for identification cards, websites, press articles, and other publications. Unlike candid photography, studio portraits require a controlled environment featuring backdrops, multiple lighting setups, and an atmosphere that can be naturally intimidating for subjects. Establishing rapport with subjects is essential to putting them at ease and encouraging cooperation. This rapport is primarily fostered by the photographer or assistant, often through the strategic use of music, snacks, and refreshments. Subjects must also understand that the poses and movements they are asked to perform may feel unnatural but are necessary for optimal photographic results. While professional models can achieve a range of dynamic poses quickly, non-professionals often require extended sessions, which can be exhausting for both the subject and the photographer. Given the limited time availability and general reluctance of many executives to participate in lengthy photo sessions, our team's ability to efficiently capture high-quality portraits has become a critical competency.

Following the mastery of portraiture, the next significant milestone was the development of in-house product photography skills. Previously, product photography was outsourced to a photographer based in Latvia and later in Austria, as U.S.-based photographers proved cost-prohibitive. The logistics of shipping bottles, labels, and crowns overseas were less expensive than hiring United States photographers. However, this reliance on external resources created delays and additional costs. To build this capacity in-house, the team engaged in several online photography courses, invested in essential equipment - including specialized lighting, lenses, backdrop frames, and a translucent product table for underlighting - and embarked on a process of trial and error. The objective was to achieve flawless bottle shots with pristine labels, with some bottles featuring crowns and others without. We captured both "ambient" images, representing room-temperature conditions, and "cold" images, showcasing bottles with condensation. Initial attempts to create the cold effect through Photoshop and AI proved unsatisfactory. Instead, authentic studio-based techniques, such as the manual application of water droplets, were found to produce superior results. Detailed documentation of each successful process step, including droplet application, lighting, and reflection control, was essential for replication and for enabling other team members to replicate the results.

Building on the success of product photography, the agency pursued two additional capabilities: on-location portraiture for the annual swimsuit calendar and food photography. The swimsuit calendar is a critical component of an integrated marketing campaign for a local beer brand, appealing to consumers' appreciation of beautiful local women. The calendar's production process demands a meticulous approach, as it must balance elegance with an empowered, yet alluring, aesthetic. The models featured are local amateurs, who are coached before and during the shoot to achieve the desired outcomes. Our in-house team's proficiency extends to hair, makeup, wardrobe, and set construction, with additional support from local specialists as required. Whenever feasible, pre-shoots are conducted to align the model's understanding with the creative vision. This disciplined preparation reduces on-set revisions and maximizes efficiency. Previously, international photographers were hired for this project, but with sustained practice and skill development, our team now executes these shoots entirely in-house.

Food photography required a distinct and highly specialized approach. Unlike other photography styles, food photography demands precision in food styling, prop selection, and lighting to accentuate textures, colours, and freshness. Each shoot begins with a detailed creative brief to ensure alignment on goals and aesthetics. To build internal expertise, team members completed specialized courses and invested in high-quality cameras, food styling kits, and additional lighting equipment. Collaborations with international food styling experts further enhanced our capabilities. The ability to produce authentic food photography was deemed essential for our restaurant clients, as stock images often fail to accurately reflect the actual menu items. Authenticity was a non-negotiable component of our brand's promise to consumers. While the images may be enhanced for aesthetic appeal, the food depicted is always identical to the meals served in the restaurant. This integrity strengthens consumer trust. By developing in-house food photography expertise, the agency avoided the impracticality of hiring international photographers for frequent updates to menus, promotional specials, and cocktail features. This capacity also proved beneficial for a bespoke whiskey bar client that lacked the resources to commission specialist food photographers.

In addition to the cost and time savings realized through in-house photography, our agency also benefits from enhanced copyright control. When photography is produced internally, we retain full copyright ownership of the images, eliminating the need to negotiate reuse rights with external photographers. Securing exclusive usage rights from third-party photographers can be costly and time-consuming, as many artists are unwilling to grant broad usage rights without significant financial compensation. Furthermore, when external images feature our brand’s intellectual property, such as logos or product designs, questions of ownership and usage rights become legally complex. By producing all photography in-house, we retain complete control over these assets, simplifying licensing considerations and reducing overall project costs. This strategic approach has significantly enhanced our agency’s operational efficiency, cost management, and creative independence. Our ability to quantify and demonstrate these cost savings contributes directly to the agency’s bottom line. A more comprehensive discussion of billing practices related to these in-house capabilities will be presented in a later chapter.

With a competent photography base and a solid graphic design team established, our agency expanded its social media management capabilities to support multiple brand platforms. Data from Galop research guided platform selection, revealing that Facebook and Instagram were the most effective for our target audience, with a stronger emphasis on Facebook. Content for these platforms is often synchronized, with only slight adjustments for platform-specific contests or audience engagement. TikTok is used sparingly to target younger demographics, as research indicates that users in their 20s and 30s within our market engage minimally with TikTok. As outlined in previous chapters, the social media planning process begins with a detailed Service Level Agreement (SLA) established with Brand Coordinators.[23] This agreement identifies key annual holidays, events, campaigns, and activations, serving as a foundation for content development and weekly posting schedules. Team members collaborate to define required content, assign production responsibilities, and set production schedules, ensuring a smooth workflow.

An essential aspect of our content strategy is the commitment to inclusivity. Belize, with its six districts, islands, and diverse cultural communities, requires representation in all advertising materials. Our ethos, rooted in the company's mission statement, "Pursuing excellence for a stronger Belize," guides this approach. This commitment is reflected naturally in our work as an in-house agency that embodies the corporate culture. External agencies would face greater challenges in understanding Belize’s cultural nuances and producing content that resonates with

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[23] (See Appendix B – Service Level Agreement)

local audiences. Our experience working with neighbouring agencies in Mexico and Guatemala revealed persistent issues with language, expression, and wardrobe accuracy. Even Coca-Cola Latin America's materials require localization for the Belizean market. These challenges underscore the importance of our in-house agency, where brand alignment and cultural authenticity are seamlessly maintained. Fellow bottlers and breweries in the Caribbean - such as those in Barbados, the Bahamas, and the West Indies echo this sentiment.

With a strategic blueprint in hand, the creative team develops a 52-week content calendar divided into quarters. This proactive scheduling approach allows the team to work one quarter ahead, creating a content library that supports ongoing campaigns. During slower production periods, the team focuses on holiday-themed content, such as seasonal imagery, and captures images of products like lobster before the fishing season ends. Lobster imagery is crucial for promoting the opening of the subsequent lobster season, often linked with campaigns featuring cold beer and seafood on the islands. Due to Belize's fishing regulations, cooking lobster during the off-season is illegal. Without proper planning, we would be forced to rely on illustrations or stock images, which are less desirable for brand authenticity. This level of foresight ensures that high-quality content is available in alignment with business plans and marketing campaigns.

Managing multiple brands with diverse needs requires an integrated planning approach. This allows for content production to be maximized during planned trips around the country. When traveling to southern Belize, the team prepares for opportunistic content capture, planning stops in villages and towns where events, celebrations, and other brand-relevant activities might occur. Travel times are coordinated to align with optimal lighting conditions for photography. This strategy enhances the efficiency of production, as the team can simultaneously collect content for multiple brands. Relying on external agencies for individual brands would create redundancies in travel, increase production costs, and result in overlapping visual styles. Although the risk of content duplication exists, weekly monitoring by the Creative Developers mitigates this issue and allows for timely corrections.

After completing photo and video shoots, the focus shifts to editing. The creative developer actively participates in this process, ensuring all content meets brand standards. Once finalized, the content is scheduled on the 52-week calendar. Captions are written, hashtags assigned, and the Brand Coordinators review the calendar to ensure alignment with brand messaging. The final step is to upload the content to our digital scheduling program, which automates posting on the designated platforms. Posting times are determined either by platform-recommended engagement windows or by internal data analysis from previous monthly reports. By prioritizing engagement, our agency seeks to build brand loyalty, increase consumer interaction, and promote upcoming events.

Content creation and social media posting remain ongoing tasks throughout the year. Creative Developers meet weekly to ensure they have adequate content for each brand. Some brands require advanced production techniques, such as short-form video, which necessitate additional planning and travel. When planning lapses, production becomes stressful and deadlines difficult to meet. During these rare occasions, freelancers are hired to bridge content gaps. However, managing external talent demands substantial time for coaching, mood board creation, and logistics support - efforts that are resource-intensive. Internal production is far more efficient, as team members already understand the brand's visual language and expectations.

To maintain content flow and ensure consistency, we track key social media metrics using tools such as Meta and Sprout. Data is analysed monthly to identify trends and assess content performance. This process includes evaluating the most engaging posts, the least effective content, and potential opportunities for experimentation. Each creative developer compiles a summary for their assigned brands, outlining key insights and adjustments for future content. These reports are reviewed collectively, and Brand Coordinators are consulted to incorporate their perspectives. This ongoing analysis keeps the agency responsive to social media's shifting landscape and helps maintain high levels of engagement. Trends are actively monitored, and where relevant, the agency responds quickly to capitalize on viral content, driving engagement and expanding brand visibility.

One area for future development involves linking social media performance to sales trends. While this connection would provide valuable insights, the agency's marketing department is still in the early stages of building business intelligence capabilities. Achieving this level of data tracking will require significant investment in systems and processes. Until then, the agency relies on available tools and metrics to inform decision-making. This limitation highlights the potential for further integration of marketing analytics, an endeavour that could enhance the effectiveness of content strategy and further solidify the agency's role as a vital contributor to brand success.

3.11 Capabilities: Video Production

Maintaining a dedicated video production team is prohibitively expensive; therefore, we adopted a more agile approach by assembling an external team of freelance videographers to meet our diverse production needs. This strategic model enables us to produce high-quality videos at varying levels of complexity while ensuring cost efficiency. For simpler, tactical projects, such as 30-second commercials for local television - we employ a small production team comprising a two-camera setup, a lighting assistant who also manages set design, and a Creative developer responsible for cast coordination. These productions, which rarely require acting or dialogue, are effectively executed by local freelancers working under our detailed storyboards and creative direction.

For larger, high-investment projects, such as brand-building advertisements that convey the brand's core message or reinforce its positioning, we adopt a more intensive approach. These projects require meticulous planning, multiple layers of approval, and substantial budgets. Our in-house team develops Creative Proposals, crafts detailed storyboards, and secures concept approval from the President/CEO. Once the concept is approved, we identify and engage freelancers with the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the production. To strengthen the skills of our freelance partners, we use smaller projects as training opportunities, allowing them to refine their craft and demonstrate their potential. Simultaneously, our in-house team enhances its own capabilities by learning from these smaller productions, identifying equipment and training investments that will give us a competitive edge in visual and creative differentiation.

Recognizing the limitations of local external agencies and the prohibitive costs of international talent, we embraced a hybrid model that optimizes local resources to deliver premium-quality productions at a fraction of the cost. Our team has mastered the art of scriptwriting and creating comprehensive storyboards that define story arcs, camera angles, and audio layers. This clarity of vision is essential for ensuring cohesive storytelling. Additionally, we collaborate with local musicians to produce background music, sonic logos, and layered soundscapes tailored to each production, further enriching the audiovisual experience.

Professionalism is a cornerstone of our production process. We employ industry-standard tools such as call sheets, checklists, and detailed budgets to ensure consistency and accountability. Open communication among team members is prioritized to facilitate seamless coordination. Through observation and iterative improvement, we have honed our ability to direct large, diverse teams toward the achievement of exceptional results. Our comprehensive production support extends to managing logistics, including location scouting, talent sourcing, wardrobe coordination, transportation, talent coaching, and meal planning - all aimed at ensuring seamless execution from pre-production to final delivery.

When assembling the external production team, we assess each role - determining which roles can be fulfilled in-house and which require external hiring. For larger productions, we may assign the director to oversee editing as well. Our experience indicates that when the director is also responsible for editing, they are more intentional about capturing the necessary footage and sufficient B-roll for flexible post-production editing. The director also plays a pivotal role in team selection, helping to ensure that skill sets and personalities align. This deliberate matchmaking process fosters team chemistry and enhances collaborative storytelling.

Once the team is assembled, we initiate the process of idea and story development. The director is the first to review and provide feedback on the feasibility and potential improvements to the plan. With the director’s input secured, we move to the second stage - convening the entire production team to discuss the project. During this exploratory session, team members offer suggestions on locations, casting, and creative approaches based on their prior experiences. These collaborative discussions allow for the refinement of creative strategies, fostering a sense of collective ownership of the project. Following these sessions, the in-house team finalizes schedules, addresses special needs, and plans logistics. Checklists are created, reviewed, and shared as call sheets with the entire team before production begins. At this point, the production shifts from planning to execution, with the external team taking primary responsibility for delivering the final product.

Our in-house team remains integral to the success of the video production process. Team members are present throughout the shoot to ensure operations run smoothly and to address any changes required by the director. Given the dynamic nature of video production, flexibility and adaptability are paramount. Shifts in the plan are expected, and our team's directive is to ensure the production stays on track and achieves the highest possible quality. The financial investment in these productions necessitates a shared commitment to excellence, and camaraderie among team members often leads to the most creative solutions, as well as a more enjoyable work experience.

During the shoot, designated team members are tasked with collecting, downloading, and backing up video footage and audio files. Redundancy is essential to protect against catastrophic loss of content, such as a dropped camera or a lost drone -both of which are industry nightmare scenarios. We recommend the use of a dedicated, high-performance computer and dual backup drives for video and static shoots that reach a certain threshold of importance or replication cost.

Following the shoot, the video production process enters its most transformative phase: editing. This stage serves as the culmination of weeks, months, or even years of planning. Our in-house team provides as much - or as little - support as the director/editor requires. Support may include assistance with sound design and cinematic composition, or the creation of sonic signatures for intros and outros. No request is too small. Once the first edit, or Stage 1, is complete, it is reviewed internally before being presented to stakeholders for feedback. Stakeholder input is then consolidated and shared with the editing team to inform Stage 2 revisions. The goal is to achieve a final product by Stage 3, though additional revisions may be required to meet stakeholder expectations. Ultimately, our measure of success is a satisfied client and a polished final product.

3.12 Capabilities: Short Form Video

Our in-house creative team excels at producing short-form video content for social media with rapid turnaround times. These videos are meticulously crafted to maintain brand consistency and are optimized for digital platforms. The growing demand for short-form video content has become a significant trend in recent years, driven by the increasing popularity of platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. This shift in viewer preference aligns with research suggesting that modern attention spans have decreased to 8.25 seconds, down from 12 seconds in 2000. Additionally, audiences now prioritize instant gratification, further driving the demand for engaging, fast-paced content.

Initially, our short-form video content was created for Facebook Stories and Instagram Reels. However, as more platforms adopted short-form video formats, our strategy evolved to meet this demand. Videos under 30 seconds have become the industry standard, with 15 seconds or less identified as the optimal length for capturing audience attention. TikTok has been a key driver of this trend, entertaining approximately 1.5 billion users each month. YouTube's introduction of Shorts further underscores the growing preference for concise, engaging video content.

Recognizing the need for a more efficient production process, we transitioned from relying on freelancers to building an in-house production capability. Freelancers, while skilled, proved costly in terms of both time and financial resources. By hiring a dedicated content creator, we significantly increased our production capacity, enabling us to produce multiple short-form videos weekly. This shift allowed us to enhance our social media engagement and expand our audience reach. Our streamlined production process ensures fast turnaround times, with one team member focused on storyboarding and location setup while another handles filming based on production requests.

To further support our production needs, we have established a robust internship program. Ambitious junior college students, eager to gain real-world experience, contribute by producing reels for smaller, less demanding brands. This approach satisfies client needs while providing valuable training opportunities for interns. For larger brands with more complex content requirements, we rely on our full-time staff and, when necessary, collaborate with external video teams. To maximize the return on these investments, we schedule multiple reels or stories within a single shoot, thereby optimizing our production efficiency and reducing costs.

In addition to short-form videos, our in-house team produces documentaries and training videos. This capability is supported by streamlined workflows, internal knowledge sharing, and comprehensive staff training. By leveraging in-house expertise, we minimize dependence on external production resources, ensuring timely delivery of high-quality content.

Through strategic investments in technology, local talent development, and in-house production capabilities, we have established a scalable and cost-effective video production model. This approach enables us to consistently deliver high-quality content while maintaining the agility required to respond to shifting market demands. Our model not only reduces production costs but also strengthens our creative capacity, empowering our organization to remain competitive in the ever-evolving digital content landscape.

3.13 Billing: Internal Billing Concepts, External Translation

When we established the in-house agency, we faced significant challenges in determining how to bill for our time and deliverables. The complexity of this task stemmed from the non-linear nature of creative work, where no two projects require the same amount of time. Creative ideation and graphic design are inherently unpredictable, making it difficult to forecast project timelines. Our CEO's primary concern was not with the billing process, but we argued that accounting for all associated costs was equally important. While our primary objective was to produce high-quality advertising for the brands, our department's responsibilities extended far beyond this. We were also tasked with internal projects for other departments, such as Human Resources, as well as plant signage and decorative layouts. These additional responsibilities consumed time and resources, underscoring the necessity of tracking all hours and establishing a billing structure to cover both our time and departmental costs.

To create a viable billing model, we began by calculating our base costs. This included salaries, benefits, bonuses, and the cost of essential equipment, applications, and subscriptions - many of which, like Adobe Creative Suite, come with significant expenses. We factored in the depreciation of photography and video equipment, office furniture, and other necessary assets. Our operational costs also included maintenance, office cleaning, and repairs. Additionally, the company charged us rent for the office space we occupied. Once all these costs were compiled, we calculated the total number of hours each team member works annually, deducting vacation, sick days, and holidays. This process provided us with an hourly rate that served as the foundation for our billing structure. We then faced the challenge of determining how to allocate these costs across various business units and brands.

Our initial approach was to research industry standards by examining the rates charged by other local agencies and comparing them with costs from neighbouring countries. We observed significant variation in fees and work quality. Moreover, we noticed that external agencies often submitted low initial bids to secure our business, only to increase fees later, citing "job creep" as the justification. We believed these discrepancies were a result of inaccurate project scoping by the agencies. This approach to benchmarking did not yield a sustainable solution.

After extensive research, we decided to establish a tiered billing system based on different levels of execution. We conducted time and motion studies for each task within the production process. This analysis began with the initial stages, such as when the Creative developer discusses the campaign with the Brand Coordinator, reviews the Creative Brief, and refines the Production Request. We tracked each step, from storyboarding to scheduling and launching the project. Graphic design tasks were similarly dissected, with precise tracking of each activity, from logging onto design software to reviewing and submitting the final product. The goal was to create a fair billing structure that accounted for the time of every creative team member involved. We assigned cost levels to different types of graphic design work, and these variable rates were allocated to the relevant business units and brands. Our billing methodology was underpinned by the hourly rate we established from our earlier calculations.

For other creative outputs, such as photography, we implemented a distinct set of billing metrics. Given that multiple photos could be captured in a single day, we calculated costs based on a per-image rate rather than a per-hour basis. For video and radio production, we added voice talent fees and audio engineer costs to our billing structure. Video production proved to be the most complex, as it required accounting for both in-house production costs and external freelance fees. Travel expenses, cast fees, wardrobe, and catering were additional costs unique to video projects. While our detailed budget reports provided transparency and satisfied internal stakeholders, it remained challenging to recover the total investment of agency hours due to concurrent project demands. To address this, we introduced a monthly cost analysis, which broke down expenses by business unit, department, and brand. Despite this effort, the costs were often "invisible" to those submitting Production Requests, creating the perception that agency work was free. This led to an overabundance of unnecessary project requests. To mitigate this issue, we gained authority to decline superfluous requests, shifting the responsibility of regulation from the agency to the marketing department. While we aim to fulfil reasonable requests submitted within a proper timeframe, the onus is now on requesters to adhere to better planning practices. This does not mitigate continued attempts from other departments due to poor oversight of department heads, but with continued conversations we are making headway.

Timing is another crucial aspect of our deliverables that was not addressed in our initial billing framework. One of the advantages of having an in-house agency is our awareness of campaign and activation schedules and our knowledge of all events that will take place throughout the year, allowing us to begin work proactively. This foresight enables us to be prepared in advance and to respond to last-minute requests from the marketing team, but it does not resolve all issues related to tight deadlines. After negotiating with the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), we established a three-week deadline for delivering basic creative work, while more complex requests are allocated longer timelines. To discourage late submissions, we instituted a RUSH fee for expedited requests. Our research revealed that advertising efforts launched three weeks before an event generate the strongest consumer response. Therefore, we expect the marketing team to provide requests for materials at least six weeks in advance. Unfortunately, poor planning by the marketing team often results in late requests, leading to late advertising, and poorly attended activations. Despite attempts to rectify this through better planning, the problem persists. To address this, we encouraged the CMO to implement a “communication start date” policy, holding marketing team members accountable for missed deadlines via performance reviews. The objective is to improve adherence to the six-week deadline and reduce unnecessary resource expenditures.

Our multi-tier billing system introduced new challenges within the agency. Initially, multiple individuals were responsible for assigning billing levels, leading to inconsistencies due to differing interpretations of project costs. This decentralized approach created gaps in cost tracking and billing accuracy. While the system was designed to be meticulous and defensible - ideal for an agency billing external clients - it proved too complex for our in-house agency. Since billing was a secondary task for team members already managing other responsibilities, it was difficult to maintain consistency. To address this, we opted to simplify our billing approach. While our original billing structure offers valuable insights for agencies with external clients, our revised model is tailored to our unique context, where the brands and business units are well-defined and our creative team's time is more predictably allocated.

Our revised streamlined billing structure remains grounded in the time and motion studies we conducted for executions. We have introduced execution tiers based on project complexity with each tier representing a range of costs allowing us to bill according to the complexity of the execution. Each creative category has tiers dependent on the number of executions or the number of hours needed to achieve the final product. Each tier has a range and the persons working on the Production request will be tasked with assigning the tier to the Production Request. This allows for both accuracy and transparency with requests. Because we are in-house, and only billing on cost plus less than 3% the accounts can be assured that the bills will reflect the work required.

Additionally, we have implemented a new system for tracking the work of our video Creative Specialist. They now log their time weekly by hour and by brand. The hourly rate is applied directly to the project, ensuring that the billing reflects actual effort rather than estimated time. This approach allows for greater billing accuracy and transparency.

Our social media coordinator's time is managed through a different mechanism. We average their time across all platforms based on the Service Level Agreement (SLA) established for each brand. Billing is then calculated on a per-post basis. While this system may appear complex, it significantly reduces variability and is far easier to explain to Brand Coordinators. Since these coordinators are responsible for managing their brand's advertising expenses, this clarity is essential for fostering accountability and understanding within the organization. This rate also includes several other imperative services, caption review, hashtags SEO, and monthly performance analysis.

3.14 Establishing Operating Procedures for the In-House Creative Agency

The initial step in building the agency's operational framework was recording each step of the creative process in detail. Following the principles of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), particularly ISO 9000, each procedure was documented comprehensively to ensure consistency and quality. Operating procedures, often accompanied by more simplified work instructions, were developed to define a uniform methodology for executing tasks. These documents outlined the process inputs, enabling predictable and desirable outputs. They included the rationale behind each procedure, along with detailed instructions on execution, roles involved, required tools, and relevant terminology. This foundational work required close collaboration with the quality department, which provided essential training to the core team, who then disseminated this knowledge across the agency.[24]

Each creative area was tasked with recording their processes, rigorously testing them, and committing to their consistent application. Revisions to these procedures are made promptly to ensure they remained accurate and effective. These documented processes are essential not only for streamlining operations and onboarding new team members but also for clearly communicating the agency's workflows to other departments. Given the non-linear nature of creative work, the structured processes were critical in maintaining efficiency and clarity.

Following the establishment of operating procedures, the agency developed work instructions to complement the OPs. While no longer mandatory under ISO 9001, work instructions were deemed invaluable for onboarding new personnel. They provided a simplified guide to executing the detailed steps outlined in the OPs, fostering better understanding and adherence.

Once the procedural framework was established, the agency created visual flowcharts to represent these processes. These flowcharts offered an intuitive way to understand and communicate workflows both within the agency and with external stakeholders. This visual representation proved essential for cross-departmental collaboration, as many processes required active participation from multiple teams. This transparency not only facilitated smoother workflows but also enhanced the broader organisation's appreciation of the agency's efforts. A two-way communication channel emerged, improving efficiency in delivering materials for production lines and other operations.

During this developmental phase, the agency identified a significant gap in the organisation's management of creative assets. Past creative files, including brand assets, designs, photographs, and videos, lacked systematic storage. Addressing this issue became a priority. A centralised storage hub was established to consolidate these assets, with all files backed up to the cloud to ensure redundancy and security.

The FNC system was institutionalised as part of the agency's onboarding process, ensuring new team members were trained in its use from the outset. A shared reference document, regularly updated to include new brands and campaigns, became the central resource for all teams. Securing executive support was critical to the success of this initiative. By presenting the system's long-term benefits to the CEO, the agency gained organisational buy-in, enabling the consistent application and evolution of the FNC.

This systematic approach to file management provided the agency with a distinct advantage. By maintaining control over creative assets and ensuring compatibility with external agency outputs,

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[24] (See Appendix C – Operating Procedure Form)

the organisation safeguarded its institutional memory. All external work was integrated into the FNC structure, ensuring it remained accessible and usable for future reference. This ownership and continuity strengthened the agency's position as an integral part of the organisation’s operations.

Operating Procedure (OP) also establish lines of communication and having an organizational chart, each person working with the agency knows how tasks are approached and completed. Knowing the working process allows for all team members to anticipate the work needed in the creative of advertising and contributes to better project management. Knowing what needs to be done to produce a graphic design, studio product shot, or radio script gives the account a sense of timing and planning needed for production. This level of transparency takes away the mystery behind what is needed to execute and forces proper planning to have elements delivered on time. A clear understanding of what a team needs to do to complete work, also allows for good planning.

The in-house agency also helps the accounts keep track of what is needed with a Weekly Status Report (WSR) on all requests. This meeting between the brand coordinator and creative developer allows both members to review what is presently on the work schedule and to also review all upcoming initiatives. This open conversation helps with timing, needs, ideation, and alignment of deliverables. This keeps both sides on track and up to date on deliverables. This open communication is optimal and efficient.

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Once the procedural framework was established, visual flowcharts were created to represent workflows. These flowcharts offered an intuitive means of understanding and communicating processes both within the agency and with external stakeholders. This transparency facilitated smoother cross-departmental collaboration, as many workflows required active participation from multiple teams. By fostering clearer communication, the agency improved efficiency in delivering materials for production lines and other operations, enhancing the organisation’s appreciation of the agency’s contributions.

During this phase, the agency identified a critical gap in the organisation’s management of creative assets. Historical creative files, including brand assets, designs, photographs, and videos, lacked systematic storage. Addressing this issue became a priority. A centralised storage hub was established to consolidate these assets, with all files backed up to the cloud for redundancy and security.

3.15 Annual Master Calendar

The Marketing Department’s annual business plan originates from Sales forecasts, which inform the marketing strategy designed to support these projections. This strategy is subsequently shared with the in-house creative agency. The creative team leverages established strategic frameworks to execute these plans, focusing on tasks that can be managed internally while coordinating with external teams to meet the defined brand objectives.

To operationalise the business plan, the agency reviews the provided directives and negotiates Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with each account. These SLAs detail the specific social media and marketing needs of the brands or departments. Based on this information, the agency develops a 52-week social media calendar and a comprehensive events calendar. These are consolidated into a master calendar that includes all initiatives, associated brands, timelines for planning, Creative Brief delivery dates, execution deadlines, and communication start dates. When adhered to, this calendar ensures timely and efficient marketing execution.

The complexity of the master calendar necessitates meticulous back-planning, experience, and strategic foresight. Each initiative's required tasks are scheduled to align with the predetermined communication start dates. This calendar is an indispensable tool for guiding accounts through effective project management, holding them accountable for meeting deadlines while safeguarding the agency from mismanagement by external departments. Simultaneously, it ensures the agency delivers work promptly, enabling it to achieve its objectives.

Previously, the Marketing (Brands) department attempted to oversee the master calendar but lacked the requisite access to company-wide initiatives. The in-house agency, however, collaborates not only with the Brands department but also with Enterprise companies and other internal teams. This unique position allows the agency to integrate marketing and communication efforts across the entire organisation. An external agency would struggle to replicate this efficiency due to limited involvement in internal meetings and daily communications. Moreover, external teams would lack the authority to enforce adherence, making the in-house model significantly more effective.

Each event on the master calendar begins with a detailed record of its name, scope, and requirements. Drawing on historical data, the agency estimates the time and resources necessary for execution, including media production, graphic design, and photography. These estimates are reviewed collaboratively by the creative developer, brand coordinator, and account stakeholders before being finalised on the calendar. The document also identifies key stakeholders and potential resource needs. By starting initiatives and preliminary designs early, the agency maintains flexibility to accommodate unforeseen requests without compromising on planned deliverables. While the calendar serves as a blueprint, its success relies on institutional memory and adaptability to evolving circumstances.

Creative Developers play a pivotal role in guiding accounts, reminding them of upcoming deadlines and required deliverables. The Chief Creative Officer (CCO) further reinforces accountability by liaising with the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) to ensure departmental alignment. This structured communication empowers the internal agency to remain agile and deliver projects on time.

Although the agency relies on accounts to provide comprehensive creative briefs, the overarching calendar offers a clear framework, ensuring smooth collaboration. Persistent delays or missed deadlines by accounts are escalated to department heads to mitigate workflow disruptions, as poorly advertised activations risk failure.

The master calendar also functions as a performance tracking tool, recording the successes and shortcomings of each activation. This data informs future business plans, ensuring continuous improvement. As an embedded entity, the in-house agency consolidates this information seamlessly, a task an external agency might avoid due to potential conflicts of interest. Annual evaluations of the calendar drive refinements, enhancing its effectiveness and fostering accountability. Rush fees are imposed for significant lapses caused by poor planning, reinforcing the importance of adherence to timelines. This mutual accountability thrives under the internal agency model, ensuring sustained efficiency and collaboration.

3.15.1 The Role of the Master Calendar in Organisational Alignment

The Master Calendar, compiled by Creative Developers, is a critical tool for ensuring the seamless execution of marketing initiatives. Each creative developer is responsible for integrating the initiatives outlined in the annual Business Plans. This integration process requires Brand Coordinators and Brand Managers to review and verify all event listings thoroughly. A key responsibility during this review is ensuring the accurate completion of the "Communication Start Date" column. This column functions as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to measure the effectiveness of campaigns, activations, and events. To optimise the impact of marketing events, advertising must commence no less than three weeks before the event date. This timeline is supported by extensive research and practical experience, which identify three weeks as the optimal lead time. Achieving this timeline demands meticulous planning, effective back scheduling, and close collaboration among all team members.

3.15.2 Integrating Business Plans into the Master Calendar

The Business Plans provide the strategic foundation for the year's activities. Creative Developers extract relevant initiatives from these plans and incorporate them into the Master Calendar. The DME is defines the allocating budgets for each initiative, a step that is crucial for ensuring the successful execution of planned activities. The creative brief serves as a guiding document that outlines the objectives and direction of each initiative. This brief aligns team efforts and streamlines the creative process. Complementing the Creative brief are Production Requests, which detail the creative elements required for initiative execution. To ensure timely delivery, these requests must be submitted at least three weeks in advance, with additional time allocated for more complex projects and executions.

3.15.3 Key Components of Production and Advertising

Proper execution of initiatives relies on allocating sufficient time for the design, production, and delivery of creative assets. Key components include:

1. Creative productions for POS
2. POS Fabrication: Designing and producing point-of-sale materials.
3. POS Installation: Coordinating and managing on-site installations.
4. Advertising: Initiating three weeks of promotional activity before each event.

Advertising serves as a cornerstone of successful campaigns and activations. To ensure its effectiveness, all advertising efforts must commence at least three weeks before the event start date. Proper planning and seamless execution are crucial to meeting this requirement. Insufficient lead times can result in missed deadlines, compromised initiatives, and wasted resources. Proactive planning and strict adherence to timelines are essential to mitigate these risks.

3.15.4 Strategic Implications and Success Metrics

The overarching objective of these processes extends beyond procedural compliance. Each step is designed to enhance brand equity, drive sales, and foster brand loyalty. Achieving these goals hinges on the full participation of all team members, clear communication, and disciplined project management. By adhering to these principles, organisations can maximise the effectiveness of their marketing efforts and strengthen their competitive position.

The master calendar is a vital strategic tool for ensuring organisational alignment. Effective planning requires realistic back scheduling that accounts for every stage of the process. Advertising must commence at least three weeks prior to any event—without exception. Failure to adhere to these principles jeopardises the success of initiatives and wastes valuable resources. A commitment to rigorous planning and execution is essential for achieving sustained success.

3.16 Teaching Accounts How To Work With A Creative Agency

Effective collaboration between Accounts and a creative agency demands clear communication and a mutual understanding of creative processes. Many individuals, particularly those without formal training in design or marketing, struggle to articulate their specific needs when engaging with creative teams. The ability to describe essential elements such as tone, colours, mood, voice, and the intended impact of a project is critical but often underdeveloped. This communication gap arises partly because creative professionals focus on specialised aspects of their work: graphic designers prioritise fonts and grids, photographers emphasise lighting, videographers concentrate on timing and sound, and radio scriptwriters refine specific tones and messages. These differing priorities can create a disconnect between accounts and creative teams.

The Creative developer plays a pivotal role in bridging this gap. Acting as a translator, the Creative developer interprets the client's requirements and ensures the creative agency understands these needs. This process becomes more efficient when clients provide well-constructed creative briefs and actively participate in ideation sessions. Clear and concise briefs reduce the likelihood of miscommunication, while collaborative ideation fosters a shared understanding of project objectives. Such engagement ensures alignment between the agency and its stakeholders.

Internal creative agencies offer distinct advantages in fostering collaboration. Their accessibility to internal stakeholders allows for seamless communication and iterative ideation sessions. These agencies create an inclusive environment where all voices are heard, enhancing both the creative process and the final product. By aligning project outcomes closely with organisational objectives, internal agencies ensure that creative output not only meets but often exceeds expectations.

Additionally, internal agencies facilitate stronger stakeholder engagement by encouraging active collaboration during the planning and execution of marketing initiatives. This collaborative approach aligns creative activations with the practical realities faced by teams responsible for implementation. When all teams work towards a unified goal, the energy and focus generated become contagious, leading to successful outcomes. Internal agencies' involvement in the development of realistic, actionable platforms ensures that their creative proposals are grounded in achievable goals. While external agencies often present ambitious ideas designed to impress senior leadership, these can be unfeasible within existing constraints, leaving marketing teams to settle for less impactful alternatives. In contrast, internal agencies balance practicality with ambition by including "stretch" goals explicitly identified within budgetary limits.

Another key advantage of internal agencies is their deep understanding of the organisation's customers and markets. This familiarity allows them to produce creative work that resonates with customer preferences and builds on past feedback. By visiting local stores, restaurants, and other points of sale, internal teams gain insights that external agencies cannot replicate. This hands-on approach enables the creation of tailored visuals and ideas that strengthen brand loyalty and customer engagement. The relationships cultivated through these efforts translate into increased sales and offer a competitive edge by making it difficult for rivals to encroach on key customer bases. Internal agencies also excel in efficiency, with faster turnaround times for design, production, and delivery, further enhancing their value to both customers and the organisation.

Building a productive relationship between accounts and a creative agency begins with a shared understanding of the organisation's business plan and goals. This foundational knowledge serves as the playbook for all subsequent activities. Following this, adherence to a master calendar and timely submission of production requests and creative briefs are critical for ensuring smooth operations. A clear vision of project goals empowers teams to stay two steps ahead in their planning and execution.

To deepen mutual understanding, members of other teams should accompany Creative Developers in the field during production. This hands-on exposure helps stakeholders appreciate the intricacies of creative work and improves their ability to request what they need effectively. Conversely, creative teams benefit from observing the challenges faced by accounts in the trade. By seeing how their work is implemented, they can refine their processes and deliver more impactful solutions. Understanding the nuances of advertising needs and execution ultimately elevates the quality of the final product. As the adage goes, "To truly understand someone, you need to walk a mile in their shoes," highlighting the value of empathy and perspective-sharing in fostering collaboration.

3.17 Nurturing Brands and Founder's Mentality

3.17.1 The Role of Brands as Assets

Brands constitute the most valuable assets a company possesses, in contrast to human capital, which, while invaluable, cannot be owned by the company in the same way. While human capital holds immense value, it is not owned by the company in the same way. An in-house creative agency serves to protect and strengthen brands, ensuring their enduring relevance and appeal by crafting cohesive messaging, maintaining consistent visual identities, and adapting to market trends efficiently. These agencies leverage their proximity to the organisation to align brand strategies with broader business goals, fostering a seamless integration of creativity and corporate vision. Regardless of the specific strategies employed in marketing and advertising, the craft ultimately revolves around storytelling. Humans are inherently drawn to stories; they remember them because stories evoke emotions, create connections, and provide context that resonates on a personal level. In marketing, storytelling builds brand identity by weaving compelling narratives that highlight the brand's purpose, values, and benefits. This emotional engagement not only fosters trust but also ensures that the brand remains memorable in a competitive marketplace. Consequently, proficiency in storytelling is a prerequisite for effective marketing and advertising.

A well-constructed story aims to shape the consumer's perception, fostering familiarity and loyalty toward the brand. Successful brands integrate into the fabric of their consumers' lives, becoming the go-to choice. Brands are not merely commodities; they are promises that address various consumer needs and aspirations.

3.17.2 The Foundation of Brand Pillars

A brand's story is rooted in its pillars, which define every facet of its personality. These pillars begin with "Product Truths," which articulate the core of the brand - its origin, composition, manufacturing process, and purpose.[25] Additionally, the brand's "Truths" typically encompass attributes such as flavours, offerings, and intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, providing a comprehensive understanding of what the brand delivers to its audience. Next are the brand's "Truths," a compilation of its attributes, such as capabilities, features, offerings, and intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. The brand's essence is encapsulated in a singular "Word," which serves as a succinct descriptor or, occasionally, a symbolic colour.

"Target" specifies the audience for whom the brand is designed and marketed. "Brand Ambition" outlines the ways the brand intends to fulfil consumer needs, and the reasons consumers are expected to choose it. The "Brand Vision" enumerates the brand's market objectives, while "Business Ambition" describes its role within the company's portfolio and its contributions to organisational goals. The subsequent section will deconstruct these pillars to illustrate their construction and application.

3.17.3 Developing Style Guides for Brands

Once Brand Pillars are established, the in-house agency creates a style guide to visually articulate the brand. In-house agencies typically produce concise style guides, leveraging their intimate understanding of the brand to allow for interpretation within the team. In contrast, global brands require comprehensive style guides to ensure consistency across diverse teams and scenarios.

Style guides begin with the brand story, product truths, and brand truths derived from the Brand Pillars. They then detail the brand's primary and secondary logos, defining areas of isolation, minimum size, and acceptable usage. The guide also specifies brand colours, typefaces, visual assets, and the overall brand identity. These elements collectively ensure a cohesive representation of the brand.

Logos, as primary brand symbols, must adhere to strict guidelines. For instance, a multicoloured logo must match specified colour codes but also remain adaptable for single-colour or black-and-white formats when required by the medium. The style guide prohibits improper usages such as compression, stretching, or placing the logo on clashing backgrounds. These safeguards ensure that the logo maintains its integrity, legibility, and impact across all applications. For example,

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[25] (See Appendix E – Brand Pillar template)

multicoloured logos must match specified colour codes and be adaptable for single-colour or black-and-white formats. The style guide outlines permissible logo orientations, required colours, and isolation areas to maintain prominence. It also specifies minimum sizes to ensure legibility and prohibits improper usage, such as distortion or placement on incompatible backgrounds.

Colours play a critical role in brand identity and are precisely defined using systems like Pantone Matching System (PMS). Typefaces, akin to a brand's fingerprint, reinforce its identity. Visual assets, such as backgrounds, watermarks, and complementary design elements, further enhance brand representation. Style guides also demonstrate the application of these elements across various formats, including storefronts, signage, apparel, and promotional materials.

3.18 Creative Ideation and Proposal Development

The creative ideation process begins with a review of the Creative Brief, ensuring the Creative developer fully understands the account's requirements. The brief is then discussed in a weekly planning meeting, where team members with relevant experience or interest volunteer to participate in ideation sessions. These sessions, often informal and collaborative, encourage unrestricted brainstorming. Ideas are documented using various methods, fostering an environment where innovation thrives.

When promising ideas emerge, the team refines them by visualising their execution. Elements such as campaign components, visual representations, and integration strategies are considered. The scope of planning depends on the campaign's duration and investment level. Long-term campaigns, spanning multiple years, require comprehensive playbooks, detailed timelines, and extensive project management. In contrast, short-term campaigns demand streamlined planning and resource allocation.

For instance, a three-year integrated marketing campaign involving television advertisements, short-form videos, and static imagery necessitates meticulous coordination to maximise resources. Each component supports broader marketing efforts, from social media content to point-of-sale materials. Conversely, a three-month campaign with temporary materials prioritises cost-efficiency, avoiding unnecessary investment in high-quality assets.

The ideation culminates in a Creative Proposal, typically presented as a comprehensive PowerPoint summarising the Creative Brief, insights, and proposed concepts. The proposal outlines campaign touchpoints, visual concepts, and execution strategies, enabling the account team to envision the campaign's market presence. Detailed elements, such as above-the-line and below-the-line designs, merchandise, social media strategies, and storyboards, are included.

During proposal presentations, feedback is solicited to refine the concepts. If time allows, revisions can enhance the proposal; tight deadlines, however, may necessitate compromises. An in-house agency's alignment with organisational timelines and pressures provides a distinct advantage, enabling seamless integration and responsiveness.

3.18.1 Balancing Internal and External Resources

Despite the strengths of an in-house agency, engaging external agencies can inject fresh perspectives into creative processes. For instance, external agencies can bring innovative ideas to the table for designing new product packaging, initiating business ventures, or refreshing existing brand identities. These agencies often specialise in specific categories, enabling them to contribute unique insights and approaches. Once their concepts are approved, the in-house agency takes the lead in adapting and implementing these ideas across various organisational touchpoints, ensuring they align with the company's overall strategy and operational goals. External agencies, particularly those with niche expertise, offer valuable contributions to new product designs, business initiatives, and brand redesigns. Once external concepts are approved, the in-house agency adapts them for implementation, ensuring alignment with organisational goals. This collaborative approach leverages external creativity while utilising internal talent for efficient execution.

3.19 How to Hire?

3.19.1 Recruitment Challenges in a Small Country

Recruiting for a creative agency in a small country presents unique challenges due to limited educational opportunities and the high cost of higher education programs. Many young individuals aim to attain their degrees swiftly and enter the workforce, making the talent pool for creative roles particularly constrained. Creativity, an essential quality for agency roles, is not a skill that can be easily taught; it is often an innate trait cultivated by environments that encourage innovative thinking and challenge conventional norms. While skills like project management, which involve planning and scheduling, can be taught in schools, creative thinking requires a different mindset and personality. Design Thinking, a process of empathizing with others and imagining their needs from a brand, can be imparted through training, but true creative thinking remains an intrinsic quality.

3.19.2 Establishing Recruitment Standards

Our recruitment process begins with a baseline educational requirement of an associate degree. In Belize, this qualification signifies an individual's respect for learning and commitment to self-improvement. Candidates with a bachelor's degree demonstrate an additional level of resourcefulness, ambition, and the ability to engage in higher-level reasoning. Exceptional candidates are those who have studied abroad on scholarships, as this highlights their determination, exposure to diverse perspectives, and adaptability—traits invaluable to any creative team. These educational and experiential benchmarks form the foundation of our recruitment strategy.

3.19.3 The Interview and Evaluation Process

The interview process is designed to assess both the candidate's qualifications and compatibility with the team. The initial interview focuses on evaluating their reasoning abilities and ambition, coupled with a detailed discussion of the job description and scenarios they might encounter. Successful candidates are then invited for a second interview, which involves spending a day or half-day at the agency. During this time, they interact with team members, observe workflows, and ask questions. This stage is as much an opportunity for the candidate to evaluate the agency as it is for the agency to assess the candidate. Following this interaction, the team convenes to discuss the applicant's suitability, ensuring that any concerns are addressed. If uncertainties persist, additional interviews may be conducted to guarantee alignment.

3.19.4 Onboarding and Training

The onboarding process is comprehensive, reflecting the complexity and dynamic nature of agency roles. New hires are informed that mastering their responsibilities may take up to 12 months, as they navigate a full cycle of campaigns, activations, and events. This approach alleviates pressure and fosters a supportive learning environment. Teamwork is emphasised, and strategic integration into the team's operations is prioritised. New members spend time with each team member to understand their roles and responsibilities, followed by an immersion into the commercial marketing department to grasp on-trade and off-trade dynamics. This exposure provides valuable insights into the commercial team's objectives and introduces the new hire to key customers. Back at the agency, the onboarding continues with reviews of operating procedures, work instructions, time and motion studies, and billing systems, offering a holistic understanding of the agency's operational architecture. Additionally, new hires study the company handbook to familiarise themselves with local labour laws and company compliance practices.

3.19.5 Continuous Learning and Development

Recognising that every new team member arrives with varying capabilities, our agency prioritises continuous learning to bridge skill gaps. Initial self-directed learning is supplemented by online courses, workshops, collaborations with external experts, or partnerships with international teams. In some cases, employees are encouraged to pursue degrees in specialised areas, supported by the company through partial payments or loans. This culture of ongoing education ensures that team members remain proficient and adaptable, fostering both personal and professional growth.

3.19.6 Leadership and Growth

Effective leadership underpins the success of this process by promoting a culture of constant growth and learning. While all jobs can be learned, the depth of understanding and the quality of teaching and support significantly influence outcomes. Strong leadership encourages individuals to strive for excellence, equipping them with the tools and opportunities needed to develop their skills and contribute meaningfully to the agency’s success.

Chapter No. 4: Contents and Results

This chapter presents a series of case studies that examine the operational advantages and strategic outcomes of building in-house creative agencies. Organizations such as Microsoft, Apple, Google, and Disney, alongside a Belizean example, demonstrate how internal creative capabilities drive brand coherence, reduce costs, enhance agility, and deepen alignment with corporate culture and values. While motivations and execution models vary, each case illustrates how in-housing strengthens brand identity and accelerates innovation through embedded storytelling.

4.1 Case Study: Microsoft Story Labs – Strategic In-Housing of Creative Capability

Microsoft's establishment of Story Labs as an in-house storytelling unit represents a strategic response to the company's evolving brand needs. As Microsoft transitioned from a product-driven software company to a mission-oriented, cloud-first enterprise, leadership identified a growing need for narrative cohesion and emotional resonance across its brand communications. The formation of Story Labs served not merely as a functional reorganization, but as a broader redefinition of how Microsoft communicates its values, vision, and impact to internal and external audiences.[26]

Functioning as an internal creative agency, Story Labs is embedded within Microsoft's brand, marketing, and communications ecosystem. The unit comprises a multidisciplinary team of writers, visual designers, video producers, editors, and strategists. These professionals work collaboratively with departments across the organization, including product marketing, HR, CSR, and executive communications, to shape narratives that reflect Microsoft's human and technological identity. Because the team operates from within, it possesses a deep understanding of Microsoft's organizational culture, enabling it to deliver content that is strategically aligned and emotionally authentic.[27]

A key outcome of this in-housed approach has been the establishment of a consistent and empathetic brand voice. Before the inception of Story Labs, Microsoft's public-facing content was often viewed as technical and impersonal. By contrast, the work produced by Story Labs centres on human impact, innovation, and real-world application. Notable examples include "88 Acres," a narrative on Microsoft's internal digital transformation, and "Room to Dream," a feature on The

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[26] Steve Clayton, 2019. "Microsoft's Digital Storytelling Handbook," *LinkedIn*, June 19. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/microsofts-digital-storytelling-handbook-steve-clayton/

[27] "How Microsoft Learned to Tell Compelling Stories: Tech Giant Shares Its Secrets in New Handbook," *GeekWire*, June 21, 2019, https://www.geekwire.com/2019/microsoft-learned-tell-compelling-stories-tech-giant-shares-secrets-new-handbook/

Microsoft Garage, the company's grassroots innovation incubator.[28] These stories not only illustrate the company's technological capabilities but also deepen emotional engagement with its audiences.

In-housing has also yielded measurable operational benefits. With an internal creative team, Microsoft can respond rapidly to shifting communication needs, whether launching a product, addressing a public issue, or supporting executive positioning. This agility is especially critical in the fast-moving technology sector. Unlike the traditional agency model, where external partners must be onboarded and briefed, Story Labs functions as an extension of Microsoft's business units. This arrangement minimizes friction in project workflows and fosters a culture of co-creation.

Moreover, Story Labs fosters cross-functional alignment within the organization. Because it engages with multiple departments, it operates as a storytelling integrator, weaving together messages from disparate parts of the company into a unified brand narrative. This ensures that core themes, such as empowerment, accessibility, and inclusion, resonate throughout the company's communication efforts, both internally and externally.[29]

Microsoft's investment in in-house creative infrastructure also supports long-term strategic goals. Over time, the internal team reduces dependence on external agencies, yielding cost efficiencies while allowing for deeper brand stewardship. It also supports talent development and retention by creating meaningful roles for creative professionals within the organization. However, this model requires sustained investment in talent acquisition, leadership, and internal processes that prioritize creative work as a strategic asset.

In conclusion, Microsoft Story Labs exemplifies the strategic benefits of in-housing creative functions. The unit's effectiveness in producing timely, aligned, and emotionally compelling content demonstrates the value of embedding storytelling within the organizational core. For other organizations seeking to build or scale in-house creative capabilities, Microsoft provides a model of how such an approach can amplify brand coherence, accelerate production, and support enterprise-wide alignment.

Another example comes from our own internal agency. When an external agency was hired to launch a new crunchy snack, they failed twice because they were unfamiliar with Belize. Our internal agency then took over, successfully positioning the snack for the local market. Their deep

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[28] Microsoft Story Labs, "Room to Dream: The Microsoft Garage," *Microsoft News Centre*, 2017, https://news.microsoft.com/stories/microsoft-garage/.

[29] Clayton, "Microsoft's Digital Storytelling Handbook."

understanding of consumer needs and communication preferences made the task much easier. Attached is an example demonstrating why an internal agency outperformed an external one.

4.2 Case Study: Snackers! and the Strategic Value of In-House Creative Agencies

The case of Snackers!, a Belizean snack brand launched by a local beverage company, underscores the risks of excluding in-house creative teams during brand development. While the decision to diversify into savoury snacks aligned with the company's broader strategic vision, its reliance on external partners unfamiliar with the Belizean market significantly compromised execution.

At the project's outset, the company engaged a Guatemalan marketing agency and an American graphic designer. Despite their credentials, neither possessed adequate knowledge of Belizean consumer culture. This disconnect led to key missteps. For example, bilingual English Spanish packaging, adopted on the recommendation of a Costa Rican Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), contradicted local consumer preferences. Belize's official language is English, although most Belizeans are bilingual, English holds cultural primacy and is a source of pride. The inclusion of Spanish nutritional data undermined both cultural pride and the product's "Made Right, Made Here" positioning, diminishing its local appeal.

Further issues emerged with packaging material. The thin, low-durability bags recommended by the external team proved ill-suited to Belize's distribution environment, leading to damaged goods on shelves. An in-house team, well-acquainted with local logistics, would have advised sturdier packaging to preserve product quality.

Flavour development also lacked cultural sensitivity. Flavours were selected by a Honduran chip consultant, the CMO, and the CEO, none of whom engaged in meaningful consumer research. As a result, the initial flavour offerings failed to resonate with local consumers. Excluding the in-house agency from this process resulted in missed opportunities to align the product with local taste preferences and consumer expectations.

The initial launch was unsuccessful. Advertising materials, produced in Guatemala, featured foreign actors and concepts that failed to connect with Belizean audiences. A subsequent partnership with a local video agency similarly faltered due to inadequate oversight and weak cultural alignment. The marketing team, lacking strong leadership and clear creative direction, struggled to reposition the brand. Meanwhile, the in-house agency remained on the periphery.

As the brand prepared for a relaunch, the challenges intensified. A new marketing manager was tasked with coordinating the development of multiple SKUs, including Veggie Chips, Ringz, Stixz, Baconz, and KAAN corn chips. Once again, the external agency submitted proposals disconnected from market realities, while the CMO remained disengaged. Despite a directive from the Chief

Creative Officer (CEO) to prioritise the relaunch, indecision over packaging and campaign strategy caused months of delay. By mid-September, with no viable plan in place and the November launch date approaching, the CMO finally requested input from the in-house agency.

The internal team responded immediately. Within days, they developed a comprehensive campaign rooted in cultural relevance and market insight, which was quickly approved. However, lingering issues with packaging materials and a lack of cohesive project oversight delayed the launch until January. In November, the marketing manager was dismissed, and the in-house agency was given full control of the project.

The turnaround was swift and decisive. Within one week, the internal team audited existing materials, identified gaps, and realigned the campaign. They corrected errors in nutritional labelling, finalized packaging approvals, and coordinated with stakeholders to prepare for launch. The relaunch proceeded in mid-January, and additional SKUs were introduced successfully in the months that followed. This intervention not only salvaged the Snackers! brand but also re-established the internal agency's central role in the company's branding efforts.

One notable barrier emerged when the external agency initially refused to share high-resolution packaging files, citing concerns about job security. The in-house agency overcame this resistance through collaboration and transparency. In reviewing the files, the team discovered outdated and inaccurate nutritional data. Their response was systematic: they submitted a Process Improvement Note (PIN) to the quality department and initiated audits to improve the brand's documentation practices.

This case demonstrates the essential role of internal creative teams in ensuring brand integrity, operational efficiency, and cultural alignment. The internal agency possessed the institutional knowledge, market familiarity, and cross-functional relationships necessary to manage the brand effectively. Their intervention highlighted the dangers of marginalising local expertise and relying exclusively on external partners unfamiliar with the operating context.

Maintaining brand consistency is a critical function of in-house creative agencies. While external agencies may bring technical expertise and fresh perspectives, they often lack the embedded understanding of a company's brand ethos and audience. Internal teams, by contrast, are positioned to deliver cohesive messaging across platforms and ensure alignment with the organisation's strategic vision.

The Snackers! case also underscores the risk of disengaged leadership. The CMO's reluctance to oversee the external agency contract led to unnecessary expenditures and delays. By failing to provide direction or hold vendors accountable, the marketing leadership created structural inefficiencies that undermined the brand. When the in-house agency finally assumed control, they implemented effective workflows, clarified vendor expectations, and delivered tangible results within days.

Ultimately, this case affirms the strategic value of in-house creative agencies in brand development and management. Their contributions extend beyond design execution to include risk mitigation, institutional learning, and brand stewardship. In contrast to external agencies constrained by project scopes and timelines, internal teams offer continuity, accountability, and a deeper commitment to the brand's long-term success.

Apple's decision to establish an in-house agency stemmed largely from Steve Jobs' insistence on secrecy and creative excellence. He believed that keeping product launches confidential was crucial to maintaining Apple's signature element of surprise. An internal agency ensured tight control over branding and execution.

4.3 Case Study: Apple – Safeguarding Secrecy and Driving Innovation Through In-House Creative

Apple Inc. is widely recognized not only for its technological innovations but also for its iconic branding and marketing. Central to Apple's communication strategy is its investment in internal creative capabilities. Driven by the late Steve Jobs' insistence on secrecy and excellence, Apple's in-house agency model enables tight control over brand messaging, enhances operational security, and accelerates innovation.

Secrecy has long been a defining feature of Apple's product strategy. Leaks can diminish the excitement of product launches, give competitors undue advantage, or dilute Apple's marketing impact. By handling creative development internally, from product photography to advertising campaigns, Apple limits the number of external stakeholders and thus reduces the risk of premature disclosures. This internal approach also facilitates alignment with stringent security protocols and product development timelines.[30]

Although Apple maintains an exclusive relationship with the external agency TBWA\Media Arts Lab (MAL), this partnership functions more like an internal extension than a traditional agency-client model. Created in 2006 specifically for Apple, MAL is responsible for hallmark campaigns

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[30] Strategic Sourceror, "Think Different: Building Apple's In-House Marketing Capabilities," July 24, 2014, https://www.strategicsourceror.com/2014/07/think-different-building-apples-in.html?m=0&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

such as "Mac vs. PC" and "Shot on iPhone."[31] The agency's exclusivity allows Apple to retain creative control while benefiting from world-class talent and global scalability.

In recent years, Apple has significantly expanded its in-house marketing capabilities. Beginning around 2017, the company shifted toward developing region-specific campaigns and localized messaging.[32] This strategic move empowered internal teams to generate campaign ideas, collaborate with MAL, and test messaging across various digital platforms. It also reinforced Apple's brand voice while increasing speed and efficiency.

The hybrid model Apple employs balancing in-house control with external partnership, has proven effective. Internal teams contribute speed, institutional knowledge, and security, while MAL provides global reach and creative differentiation. Together, they allow Apple to maintain brand cohesion while remaining responsive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

This case illustrates how in-house creative functions can be aligned with broader business imperatives, including secrecy, brand consistency, and innovation. Apple's model reflects the potential for hybrid structures to deliver both operational agility and creative excellence.

This hybrid model has become a core part of Apple's business strategy, allowing the company to safeguard its product pipeline, cultivate authentic storytelling, and maintain a strong brand identity across global markets.

Google also relies on an in-house agency to stay innovative and responsive. With a dedicated team, they can quickly adapt to trends and execute campaigns seamlessly without delays.

4.4 Case Study: Google Creative Lab – Creativity at the Core of Business Strategy

Google Creative Lab, the in-house creative agency of Google, has evolved into a pivotal force within the company's broader business strategy. Founded to bridge the gap between brand storytelling, design innovation, and product development, the Lab operates at the nexus of creativity and technology. Today, it functions not only as a marketing engine but as a strategic partner that supports Google's ambition to deliver relevant, data-driven, and emotionally resonant messaging across global audiences.

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31 Extraordinary Engagement, "What Creative Agency Does Apple Use?" accessed March 27, 2025, https://extraordinaryengagement.co.uk/what-creative-agency-does-apple-use/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

32 Portada, "Apple Restructures Relationship with Ad Agency TBWA\Media Arts Lab," January 11, 2017, https://www.portada-online.com/more-features/apple-restructures-realtionship-with-ad-agency-tbwamedia-arts-lab/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

As Fast Company reported, Google Creative Lab has grown from an experimental division into "one of the most powerful forces in the creative industry," helping Google shape its brand identity and public presence in an increasingly complex media environment.[33]

Unlike traditional external agencies that enter the process after products are built, Google Creative Lab is deeply integrated within the product development cycle. The Lab works side-by-side with engineers, researchers, and product managers, allowing creative ideas to be tested and iterated in real time.

This early involvement ensures that campaigns align seamlessly with a product's function and purpose. Whether launching new AI tools or promoting digital literacy, the Lab ensures marketing isn't an afterthought, it's embedded from the beginning. This structure has helped Google articulate not just what its technology does, but why it matters in people's lives.

In-housing has also provided Google with faster feedback loops and better cost efficiency. The Lab reduces reliance on external vendors and shortens production timelines, enabling the team to quickly respond to shifting market dynamics and user data.

As described by Fast Company, this structure gives Google "a speed advantage," allowing the company to "churn out high-quality, bold creative work at the speed of the internet."[34] This model helps Google stay culturally relevant while ensuring that messaging can be fine-tuned based on real-time performance metrics.

With a portfolio spanning products like Search, Maps, Android, YouTube, and emerging AI platforms, Google faces the complex challenge of maintaining a consistent brand identity across many verticals. Creative Lab solves this by centralizing storytelling and brand expression.

By handling creative internally, the Lab ensures a coherent voice across campaigns, regardless of channel or geography. This consistency reinforces trust, reinforces the company's mission to "organize the world's information," and helps users navigate a wide-ranging product ecosystem with a unified brand experience.

The Lab's proximity to engineering teams fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration rarely found in traditional creative environments. Creative technologists, designers, writers, and developers collaborate closely, bringing together art and code to create experiences that are both emotionally compelling and technically sophisticated.

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[33] Jeff Beer, "How the Founder of Google Creative Lab Turned It into a Juggernaut," Fast Company, May 6, 2019, https://www.fastcompany.com/90345911/how-the-founder-of-google-creative-lab-turned-it-into-a-juggernaut.

[34] Ibid.

This synergy has produced signature campaigns like Year in Search, which marries search trends with cultural commentary, and initiatives like Made with Code, aimed at encouraging young girls to explore programming. These projects not only tell stories, but they also advance Google's strategic goals and social mission.

In summary, Google Creative Lab exemplifies how in-house creative can move beyond a support function to become strategic infrastructure. By embedding creativity into core business processes, GCL accelerates innovation, strengthens brand coherence, and enhances cultural agility.

As Fast Company concluded, Google Creative Lab has played a vital role in ensuring that "creative execution remains nimble, cohesive, and directly aligned with the company's broader business objectives."[35] It's not just an agency, it's a strategic advantage.

4.5 Case Study: How Disney's In-House Creative Agencies Strengthen Brand Storytelling and Drive Business Strategy

As one of the most iconic and expansive entertainment brands in the world, The Walt Disney Company has always centred its strategy on storytelling. But in recent years, Disney has gone beyond relying on external agencies to deliver that story. Instead, the company has strategically built and expanded its in-house creative capabilities, notably through teams like Yellow Shoes Creative Group and Disney CreativeWorks. This evolution allows Disney to maintain tighter control over its brand voice, increase creative agility, enhance collaboration across divisions, and drive cost-efficiency, all while creating more meaningful connections with its audience.

Disney's in-house agencies are uniquely positioned to channel the company's century-long storytelling legacy. Teams like Yellow Shoes, which focuses on Disney Parks, Resorts, and Experiences, are embedded within the brand's day-to-day operations and culture. This proximity gives them an unmatched understanding of Disney's voice, visual style, and audience expectations.

According to Disney Careers, Yellow Shoes thrives on crafting "crave-worthy content that resonates, inspires, and ignites magical possibilities".[36] With its deep institutional knowledge and creative discipline, the team ensures that every campaign, from TV spots to TikTok videos, stays on-brand and emotionally resonant.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Jr. Art Director, Yellow Shoes Florida," *Disney Careers*, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.disneycareers.com/en/job/celebration/jr-art-director-yellow-shoes-florida/391/78910455552

Disney's Chief Marketing Officer, Anna Hill, explained in Marketing Week that the shift toward in-housing was partly a response to the evolving nature of external agencies, which had become less disciplined and less aligned with Disney's brand rigor.[37]

By keeping more creative responsibilities internal, Disney can better align messaging with brand values and ensure consistent quality across touchpoints. For example, when launching campaigns like "Ralph Breaks the Internet" or "Mary Poppins Returns", the in-house team was able to craft content quickly and cohesively across digital and traditional channels, while keeping the messaging emotionally grounded in Disney's core storytelling ethos.

Disney CreativeWorks, another in-house powerhouse, plays a central role in delivering integrated campaigns across Disney's massive entertainment and sports platforms, including ABC, ESPN, Hulu, Freeform, National Geographic, and Disney Channel. This team handles branded content, advertising sales, and cross-platform storytelling at a global scale.

As Disney Advertising states, CreativeWorks leverages "proprietary insights and creative strategy to help brands tell their stories within Disney's content ecosystem."[38] Their work allows Disney and its partners to reach highly specific audiences while maintaining creative control, something external agencies can rarely do at such a nuanced, large-scale level.

Hill emphasized that in-house creative doesn't just improve quality, it boosts efficiency and agility, too. Campaigns produced internally are often cheaper, quicker, and easier to optimize. In performance marketing especially, having in-house teams means every dollar can be tracked, every asset A/B tested, and every decision made in real time based on direct feedback.

"We know the brands we work with... we're happy to take the risk," Hill told Marketing Week. Disney's creative teams often run multiple versions of ads on platforms like Facebook, tweaking length and tone to test emotional engagement. This experimentation and rapid iteration process helps the company refine its creative for maximum impact, all without the delays or overhead typical of external agency relationships. [39]

Beyond creative production, Disney has invested heavily in upskilling employees across the organization in digital marketing and content creation. Over 500 employees from marketing, sales, HR, and finance have gone through internal programs to better understand digital channels. Even former Disney President Diego Lerner was taught how to post on Facebook as part of this initiative.

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[37] Ellen Hammett, "Disney on In-Housing, Upskilling and Creating More Effective Marketing," *Marketing Week*, November 30, 2018, https://www.marketingweek.com/disney-inhousing-upskilling-effective-marketing/

[38] Disney CreativeWorks," *Disney Advertising*, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.disneyadvertising.com/disneycreativeworks/#:~:text=WE%20CREATE%20PREMIUM%20BRAND%20STORIES

[39] Hammett, "Disney on In-Housing."

"You've got to change the thinking at the top," Hill explained. By embedding digital fluency across the company, Disney ensures that cross-functional teams can collaborate more effectively, speak a shared language, and make smarter, faster marketing decisions.[40]

In-house creative also plays a critical role in Disney's purpose-led marketing, initiatives where character-driven storytelling intersects with social impact. Campaigns like the "10-Minute Shake Up" with Change4Life use beloved Disney characters to encourage kids to be more active. Because these efforts require a deep emotional connection with families, it makes sense that they are crafted internally by teams who understand the characters and audience intimately.

By investing in in-house creative teams like Yellow Shoes and Disney CreativeWorks, The Walt Disney Company has solidified creative control, increased efficiency, and amplified emotional storytelling across every brand touchpoint. These internal teams act not just as executional engines, but as strategic partners, shaping the brand from the inside out and driving its continued evolution in a digitally connected, purpose-driven world.

Whether crafting magical moments for theme park visitors or co-creating brand experiences with global partners, Disney's in-house model ensures its creative storytelling remains as legendary, and as agile, as the brand itself.

In summary, looking at these major corporations, the reasons for choosing internal agencies vary, but one common factor remains: protecting the brand. In-house teams work closely with marketing and the broader company, ensuring smooth collaboration and efficient execution.

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[40] Ibid.

Chapter No. 5 - A Discussion Summary

5.1 The Role of Vision and Internal Creative Integration in Building a Strong Brand Foundation

This thesis has thus far examined the evolution of in-house creative agencies and their strategic roles within mid-size to large corporations. Such organizations often possess the infrastructure, resources, and brand maturity necessary to embed creative capabilities internally. Establishing an in-house creative agency within these companies tends to be straightforward, especially when external agencies are strategically engaged to complement internal efforts. However, for emerging businesses and startups, the decision to build an in-house creative team from the outset is equally, if not more, critical. Early creative integration not only shapes the brand's identity but also lays the foundation for long-term strategic cohesion.

At the heart of any successful startup lies a clearly articulated vision. Jim Collins and Bill Lazier, in BE 2.0: Beyond Entrepreneurship, assert that a compelling vision is essential for building a great company.[41] They emphasize that founders must define not only what their company does but also why it exists, what it stands for, and where it is going.[42] Vision, in this broader sense, transcends product or profit; it becomes a unifying framework that guides decision-making across all business functions. Therefore, an early and strategic question for founders is whether to integrate an in-house creative function into the company's structure from its inception.

Embedding creative capabilities from the beginning ensures that brand expression aligns with the company’s long-term objectives. A dedicated internal team, collaborating with departments such as marketing, product development, finance, and operations, maintains consistency between creative output and organizational vision. Rather than outsourcing the brand's voice to third-party agencies unfamiliar with the company’s culture, the internal creative team nurtures and defines this identity from within. This approach fosters trust, accelerates collaboration, and facilitates a coherent message across all consumer-facing channels.

Startups, however, typically operate with constrained resources. These limitations necessitate a hybrid model in which the in-house team provides strategic direction while outsourcing complex production tasks, such as television commercials or large-scale video campaigns, to external agencies. Maintaining a full in-house video production department, for instance, may be prohibitively expensive at this stage. Nonetheless, internal creatives play a vital role in guiding

[41] Jim Collins and Bill Lazier, BE 2.0: Turning Your Business into an Enduring Great Company (New York: Portfolio, 2020), 13–15.
[42] Ibid

such outsourced efforts. They ensure that external vendors fully understand the company's goals and brand ethos, serving as both translators and gatekeepers of brand integrity.

This model of creative stewardship ensures that even when execution occurs externally, the conceptual and strategic origin remains internal. As a result, all outputs contribute to a cohesive and authentic brand narrative. This internal-external collaboration safeguards brand consistency and builds the foundation for scalable identity systems, brand guidelines, messaging hierarchies, and visual assets that can evolve with the company's growth.

The value of early-stage creative integration also lies in its contribution to strategic innovation. When creative professionals are involved at the inception of product design, service development, and campaign planning, they offer unique insights that blend imagination with analytical reasoning. These contributions are particularly important in a startup environment, where rapid iteration, consumer feedback, and market adaptability are essential. Creative thinkers can identify emerging patterns, humanize data insights, and articulate stories that resonate with diverse audiences.[43] Their presence ensures that business-building does not rely solely on financial models or operational metrics but also on emotional intelligence and cultural relevance.

Moreover, an internal creative function reinforces continuity and scalability. As companies grow, their brand needs become more complex, requiring adaptation across regions, languages, and platforms. A creative team that has been present from the beginning is better equipped to evolve the brand without compromising its essence. In contrast, companies that rely exclusively on external agencies during the formative years often face fragmentation, inconsistencies, and the need for expensive rebranding efforts later on.

While internal creative ownership is paramount, strategic collaboration with external agencies can still be beneficial. Outside partners bring fresh perspectives, niche expertise, and rapid execution capabilities. However, when these partnerships are guided by an internal team deeply embedded in the company's values, they yield far better outcomes. The shared language and mutual respect fostered between internal and external creatives ensure a harmonious working relationship in which innovation and brand alignment go hand in hand.

This brings us back to a foundational premise of this thesis: a company's brand is its most valuable asset. A brand is more than a visual identity; it is a promise to the consumer. When this promise is delivered consistently and authentically, it generates trust. Over time, this trust becomes the basis of customer loyalty. Whether the company offers a beverage, a piece of technology, a vehicle, or

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[43] Marty Neumeier, The Brand Gap: How to Bridge the Distance Between Business Strategy and Design (Berkeley: New Riders, 2005), 46–49.

a service, the ability to deliver a coherent, emotionally resonant brand experience drives long-term success.

Startups that embed creative leadership at their inception are uniquely positioned to shape this experience. They build a culture where creativity is not isolated to advertising but infused across product development, customer experience, and strategic planning. The establishment of an in-house creative team from the beginning enables the brand to be formed deliberately rather than reactively, ensuring alignment with vision, values, and consumer needs. In doing so, these companies create not only compelling brands but also enduring value.

5.2 Expanding the Value Proposition of In-House Creative Agencies in Startups

Integrating an in-house creative agency during a company's formative stage offers significant operational and strategic advantages. Early creative involvement influences more than just design or advertising; it informs how a company thinks, behaves, and communicates both internally and externally. When a creative team is embedded within the structure of a startup, their contributions extend across all dimensions of organizational development. These include product strategy, customer experience, investor communications, and internal culture. The creative function thus becomes a catalyst for expressing the company's vision with clarity, consistency, and emotional resonance.[44]

A fundamental strength of an in-house creative agency lies in its capacity to foster cross-departmental collaboration. Unlike external vendors, internal creatives operate within the organization's rhythms and workflows. They understand the nuances of departmental objectives and timelines, which enables them to align creative strategies accordingly. This embedded position allows internal creatives to engage in upstream conversations, where strategic planning occurs, rather than reacting to completed briefs. The result is improved communication, fewer iterative delays, and creative outputs that are contextually grounded in the company's broader goals.

In-house creatives also serve as custodians of institutional memory. Their ongoing involvement in the development of the brand positions them to preserve narrative continuity and design coherence. While external agencies often work episodically, internal teams develop a long-term perspective. They retain knowledge of past campaigns, design rationales, and performance metrics, all of which inform future creative decisions. This accumulated insight mitigates the risk of repeating past errors and contributes to more sophisticated and forward-looking brand strategies.

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[44] Scott Bedbury and Stephen Fenichell, A New Brand World: 8 Principles for Achieving Brand Leadership in the 21st Century (New York: Penguin, 2002), 72–76.

The emotional investment of in-house creatives in the company's mission enhances the quality and relevance of their work. Being part of the organizational culture fosters a sense of ownership and pride. In-house creatives are more likely to advocate for brand integrity, challenge assumptions constructively, and propose long-term creative solutions that support the company's strategic vision. Unlike transactional agency engagements, internal teams treat each project as part of a larger narrative arc.

Although maintaining an in-house team may appear costly, particularly for startups, the long-term benefits often outweigh the initial financial outlay. In-house teams eliminate recurring onboarding expenses and reduce inefficiencies related to briefing and ramp-up. They are also more agile, capable of delivering work quickly without sacrificing strategic alignment. In fast-paced startup environments, this speed and adaptability are critical to maintaining relevance and capitalizing on market opportunities.

Beyond external-facing content, internal creative teams also play a pivotal role in shaping company culture. They contribute to the design of onboarding materials, internal communications, and employee engagement campaigns. By reinforcing the company's values and tone across internal platforms, they help cultivate a cohesive culture. This cultural alignment becomes increasingly valuable as the company scales, ensuring that new employees understand and embody the organization's ethos from day one.

In-house teams also serve as incubators for creative experimentation. Free from the constraints of per-deliverable billing structures common to external agencies, internal teams can explore, prototype, and test bold ideas with greater freedom. This flexibility empowers startups to pursue unconventional directions that might not be feasible under traditional agency relationships, where cost and scope restrictions limit experimentation.

While the in-house model offers significant benefits, it is not universally optimal. The decision to build an in-house agency, or to adopt a hybrid or external model, must be grounded in a clear understanding of the company's creative demands, strategic priorities, financial resources, and organizational maturity. Each model presents unique strengths and limitations.

A hybrid model, for example, offers a flexible solution by combining internal ownership with external expertise. Internal teams provide strategic alignment and brand consistency, while external partners contribute specialized capabilities and fresh perspectives. This dual approach enables companies to adapt to shifting needs without sacrificing creative quality or control.

Ultimately, startups that embrace early-stage creative integration, particularly through an in-house agency, position themselves to build strong, scalable brands. They create systems, cultures, and narratives that resonate deeply with audiences and stakeholders alike. In doing so, they transform creativity from a function into a strategic asset, essential for long-term growth and differentiation.

5.3 Further Evaluating In-House Creative Agencies vs. External Agencies vs. Hybrid Models

As corporations increasingly rely on strategic storytelling and consistent creative execution to differentiate themselves in saturated markets, the structure of creative operations becomes a key strategic concern. Organizations typically consider three approaches: developing an in-house creative agency, relying solely on external agencies, or implementing a hybrid model that leverages both. Each model presents distinct advantages and challenges, and the choice among them depends on organizational strategy, capacity, culture, and financial resources.

An in-house agency offers unparalleled control over brand messaging, tone, and visual identity. Internal teams are deeply embedded in the company's culture, which allows them to maintain consistency across campaigns and communication channels. Their proximity to internal stakeholders also enables direct, real-time collaboration, which streamlines approvals and enhances alignment with business objectives. In contrast, external agencies, while often composed of highly skilled professionals, require time-intensive onboarding to grasp the intricacies of a brand. This learning curve can result in misalignment, diluted messaging, or extended production timelines.

Speed to market is a decisive factor in the effectiveness of creative delivery. In fast-moving sectors such as technology, retail, and consumer goods, internal teams frequently outpace external agencies in execution due to their embedded access to decision-makers and faster iteration cycles. However, internal speed is contingent upon having robust creative workflows and project management systems in place. Without these, internal processes can become bottlenecks. External agencies, although slower in initial ramp-up, often compensate with disciplined project timelines, milestone tracking, and experienced production teams.

External agencies excel in driving innovation. Their exposure to diverse clients, industries, and aesthetic approaches fosters a broader creative palette and a willingness to challenge category conventions.[45] In contrast, in-house teams risk becoming creatively insular if they do not actively seek out new influences through professional development, competitive benchmarking, or strategic collaborations. A failure to foster creative cross-pollination can lead to stagnation, even within otherwise high-functioning internal teams.

Confidentiality is another critical consideration. Projects involving proprietary technologies, unreleased products, or strategic pivots are often more secure when developed internally. While

[45] Ana Andjelic, *The Business of Aspiration* (New York: Ideapress Publishing, 2020), 58–62.

external agencies typically sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), the broader dissemination of sensitive material across third-party teams increases the risk of data breaches or intellectual property exposure.[46]

Operational factors also weigh heavily in the decision. Building an in-house agency demands significant investment in hiring and retaining creative talent, including designers, copywriters, strategists, and producers, as well as infrastructure such as hardware, software, and studio space. These investments, though substantial, allow companies to build enduring creative capabilities and institutional memory. In contrast, external agencies offer immediate access to a range of creative skill sets without the associated overhead. However, this convenience does not contribute to long-term internal development or capacity building.

Internal teams must also establish their own workflows, including project intake systems, approval processes, and feedback mechanisms. These systems are often less mature in new in-house teams and require intentional design to be effective. External agencies generally offer well-honed workflows developed through years of serving diverse clients. While these processes are efficient, they may lack the flexibility required to adapt to a company's internal pace or evolving priorities.

Scalability is a distinct advantage of external agencies. Their flexible staffing and resource models allow companies to ramp up or down based on campaign demand. In contrast, in-house teams operate on fixed costs, which can create inefficiencies during periods of low creative volume or overwhelm teams during peak demand. Hybrid models mitigate this risk by deploying internal teams for core branding work while utilizing external partners for specialized projects or overflow capacity.

Internal teams naturally develop stronger cross-functional relationships due to their daily interaction with marketing, product, legal, and executive teams. This proximity fosters alignment and facilitates collaboration. External agencies can build strategic partnerships as well, but such relationships require deliberate cultivation, frequent communication, and careful expectation management.

Financial considerations are central to model selection. Launching an in-house team involves significant capital expenditure in salaries, benefits, technology, and workspace. These fixed costs may deter early-stage companies.[47] External agencies require lower initial investments but

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[46] Deborah Morrison and Glenn Griffin, Creative Strategy and the Business of Design (New York: Allworth Press, 2010), 93–97.

[47] David C. Baker, *The Business of Expertise: How Entrepreneurial Experts Convert Insight to Impact + Wealth* (v, 2017), 123–127.

generally operate at higher per-project rates. Over time, however, in-house teams may be more cost-effective, particularly in organizations with frequent or high-volume creative needs.

Budget predictability also varies between models. In-house teams offer more predictable costs through fixed salaries and infrastructure, while external agencies often introduce budget variability through scope changes, revision rounds, or pricing escalations. Hybrid models strike a balance, offering the stability of internal costs with the flexibility of variable external engagements.

Evaluating return on investment (ROI) requires a multi-dimensional approach. In-house teams can yield strong ROI by improving brand consistency, reducing long-term vendor costs, and enabling faster campaign execution. External agencies may deliver immediate value in cases requiring breakthrough creative, new market entry, or access to niche skills. ROI should be measured not only in financial terms but also in strategic alignment, time-to-market, creative quality, and internal stakeholder satisfaction.

Each creative model carries inherent risks and rewards. In-house agencies offer brand control, speed, and long-term efficiencies but require sustained investment and internal management. External agencies provide creative breadth and flexibility but may face alignment and cost challenges. Hybrid models, while more complex to manage, often deliver the best of both worlds when designed with intention and guided by strategic clarity.

Ultimately, the decision should be based on a rigorous assessment of the company’s creative volume, growth trajectory, organizational culture, and strategic priorities. A flexible, responsive model—anchored in data and adapted over time—will enable organizations to build creative ecosystems that maximize brand value, resilience, and innovation capacity.

Chapter No. 6: Conclusion on the Strategic Advantages of an In-House Creative Agency

This research confirms that establishing an in-house creative agency is a strategically sound and highly beneficial decision for companies seeking quality creative output alongside cost efficiency and optimized operations. Across all chapters of this dissertation, from the literature review through the methodology, case studies, and discussion, the findings consistently demonstrate that internalizing creative capabilities yields significant advantages in terms of financial savings, brand consistency, and operational effectiveness. In an era when over four-fifths of major companies have built in-house agencies,[48] the evidence from this study further validates the wisdom of that trend. By bringing creative functions inside the organization, businesses can achieve a rare synergy: they reduce reliance on expensive external agencies while enhancing the alignment, agility, and overall impact of their marketing communications.

The literature review revealed a clear industry shift and provided a theoretical foundation for why in-house creative agencies have risen to prominence. A key finding in the literature is that cost efficiency stands out as the primary driver for companies moving work in-house. Firms often save on the high fees and markups associated with outsourcing creative projects, instead operating with fixed internal team costs. At the same time, the literature highlighted that in-house teams offer deeper brand knowledge and institutional continuity, as dedicated staff work exclusively on their company's brands. This leads to stronger brand consistency and strategic alignment: internal creatives, immersed in the company's mission and culture, ensure that all campaigns and content adhere to a unified brand vision in a way external agencies, juggling multiple clients, often cannot. The review also noted that while external agencies can inject fresh perspectives, they may lack the sense of ownership and long-term immersion that in-house teams possess. In short, prior research and industry analyses concur that internal agencies can lower costs and speed up output while boosting brand cohesion, validating the core premise of this study.

Another important insight from the literature is the recognition of best practices and potential challenges in establishing an in-house agency. The review outlined how successful in-house teams are built on clear structure, defined roles, and efficient processes. Companies are advised to delineate the scope of the internal agency (e.g. which types of projects it handles), implement streamlined workflows (such as using advanced collaboration tools and well-crafted creative brief processes), and foster a culture of creativity and continuous learning within the team. Effective measurement was also emphasized: setting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) like cost savings, turnaround time, and campaign performance helps demonstrate the in-house agency's value to

[48] O'Brien, Kyle. 2023. In-House Agencies Are Here to Stay, Finds ANA Report. AdWeek.

stakeholders. Notably, the literature pointed out that the top KPI for in-house agencies has traditionally been cost savings, but there is a growing focus on business performance outcomes as well,indicating that companies increasingly view their internal agencies not just as a cheaper alternative, but as a driver of broader marketing success. The review cautioned about challenges such as managing workload and scaling resources, which were identified as common hurdles for in-house teams. It also stressed the importance of attracting and retaining high-quality creative talent, since the agency's effectiveness depends on the skill and innovation of its people. These findings from literature set the stage, suggesting that if a company can implement the right structure and address these challenges, an in-house creative agency can thrive and deliver superior results.

The methodology chapter reinforced these themes by providing a practical roadmap for building and operating an in-house creative agency. It laid out concrete steps and considerations, ensuring that the theoretical advantages of in-housing could be realized in practice. Key methodological findings include the importance of proactive planning and integration: the study demonstrated how embedding the creative team within the company's planning processes (for example, involving them early in annual marketing plan development and maintaining an 18-month master content calendar) leads to more synchronized and timely creative output. By working hand-in-hand with marketing and other departments, an in-house agency can anticipate needs and avoid last-minute outsourcing costs. The methodology also highlighted capability development as a critical factor. Companies must invest in building the core creative skills internally, from graphic design and photography to video production and copywriting, either by upskilling existing staff or hiring specialists. The research documented how a step-by-step development of these capabilities, including training and gradually tackling more advanced projects, allows the in-house team to match the quality of external agencies. Additionally, establishing well-defined processes (such as a standardized creative brief, clear production request protocols, and service level agreements between the internal agency and internal "clients" like brand managers) was found to streamline collaboration and set mutual expectations. This structured approach prevents confusion and rework, thereby optimising operations. The methodology's blueprint effectively addressed common challenges: for instance, to tackle scalability issues, the study recommended careful resource allocation based on each brand's workload and the use of project management tools to handle growing demands. To mitigate talent constraints, it suggested robust hiring practices and continuous professional development to keep the creative team's skills cutting-edge. In summary, the methodology provided evidence that with careful planning, skill-building, and process design, a company can successfully internalize its creative functions without sacrificing quality or efficiency. This framework not only guided the case studies that followed but also stands as a key outcome of the research in its own right, a guide for practitioners on how to implement an in-house agency model effectively.

The case studies carried out in Chapter 4 provided compelling real-world evidence that reinforced the benefits and feasibility of the in-house agency approach. Large industry-leading companies were examined to illustrate how in-house creative teams operate as strategic assets. For example, the Microsoft Story Labs case study exemplified how an internal creative unit can elevate a brand's storytelling and content creation. Microsoft's in-house team proved capable of producing timely, aligned, and emotionally resonant content that deeply connected with audiences, showcasing the value of embedding creative storytelling expertise within the organizational core. This case demonstrated that an internal team, with direct access to the company's innovations and culture, could craft narratives more authentically and responsively than an outside agency, thus strengthening Microsoft's brand engagement. Similarly, Apple's case highlighted that one motivator for in-housing is the need for secrecy and control over marketing communications. Apple, known for its culture of confidentiality and high standards, found that having an internal agency enabled tighter control over product launch campaigns, reducing the risk of leaks and ensuring that every marketing material met Apple's exacting quality and brand ethos. The Apple case underlined that in-house teams can be trusted with sensitive information and can work seamlessly with product development teams, which is vital for technology companies where timing and secrecy are part of the competitive strategy.

Another case study on Google's Creative Lab illustrated how in-house agencies can drive innovation. Google's internal creative group operates at the intersection of marketing and product development and has been cited as a role model for corporate creativity. The research found that Google's in-house team benefited from being entrenched in the company's forward-looking projects and experimental culture, which allowed them to produce highly creative campaigns (for instance, cutting-edge interactive projects and brand experiments) that aligned perfectly with Google's brand identity. This case affirmed that a well-resourced internal agency could equal or surpass external firms in creative innovation, debunking the notion that only outside agencies bring fresh ideas. In the entertainment sector, the Disney case study showed how an in-house agency (such as Disney's "Yellow Shoes" creative team) contributes to powerful brand storytelling. Disney's internal creatives focus on maintaining brand integrity across all outlets, from theme parks to digital content, ensuring consistency in the magical, family-friendly narrative that Disney is known for. The study noted that Disney leverages its in-house agency to quickly adapt campaigns to new films or park attractions, and to upskill internal talent in storytelling and digital media. This not only saves costs on outsourcing but also builds a creative workforce attuned to Disney's brand values for the long term. Collectively, these high-profile cases (Microsoft, Apple, Google, and Disney) substantiated a crucial finding: in-house agencies, when nurtured properly, are capable of delivering work of equal or superior quality to external agencies, while also providing strategic benefits like confidentiality, brand fidelity, and integrated innovation. The successes of these globally recognized companies serve as persuasive evidence that the in-house model can be a source of competitive advantage in diverse industries.

Importantly, the research also investigated a case study of a smaller company to ensure that the conclusions are not limited to corporate giants. The Snackers! case, focusing on a Belizean snack brand, was especially illuminating in contrasting an external-agency approach with an internal-agency approach within the same project. Initially, the company behind Snackers! outsourced its brand launch to external agencies and consultants, a decision that led to costly missteps and misaligned execution. The case detailed how external partners, lacking local market understanding and close oversight, produced marketing materials that failed to resonate with the target consumers – for example, packaging and advertising content that did not fit the cultural context and consumer preferences of Belize. The outcome was an underwhelming product launch, delays, and wasted expenditure on agency fees and ineffective materials. It was only after the company's in-house creative team was empowered to take charge that the brand was successfully turned around. The internal team leveraged its intimate knowledge of the local market and the company's brand ethos ("Made Right, Made Here") to realign the branding, correct the packaging issues, and develop culturally relevant marketing campaigns on a very tight timeline. This swift and effective intervention not only salvaged the Snackers! brand but also re-established the internal agency's central role in the company's branding efforts. The Snackers! case provided a microcosm of the dissertation's core argument: it dramatically underscored that excluding the in-house agency from key projects can lead to strategic drift and inefficiencies, whereas utilizing the internal team's insight and commitment leads to better outcomes. It also highlighted a cautionary aspect – the need for engaged leadership. In Snackers!, the lack of oversight by the marketing leadership over the external agencies allowed problems to fester; once the internal team was given authority (and top management intervened), the project got back on track. Thus, this case reinforced that the benefits of an in-house creative agency (cost control, cultural alignment, fast response, and internal accountability) are applicable not only to large multinational companies but also to smaller businesses and local markets. The lessons from Snackers! echo the broader findings: companies of any size stand to gain from nurturing their internal creative capabilities, especially when leadership actively supports and integrates those teams into the brand's strategic development.

Synthesizing the evidence from all these chapters, the discussion established a comprehensive answer to the research questions. First and foremost, the cost-effectiveness of in-house agencies was confirmed. Both the literature and case studies demonstrated tangible cost benefits – from P&G's marketing savings by cutting agency fees to the Snackers! case where reliance on external partners had led to inflated costs that the in-house team later helped avoid. Financial analysis and industry data indicate that companies can achieve significant budget efficiencies by handling creative production internally, as resources are utilized solely for the company's own projects and overhead is spread across consistent output, rather than paying external markups. Moreover, any initial investments in talent and equipment for an in-house agency tend to be recouped over time through continuous use and the elimination of outside billing. Second, the study decisively found that brand consistency and strategic alignment are stronger with in-house creative teams. In every examined scenario, internal creatives maintained a closer adherence to brand guidelines and adapted more fluidly to the company's evolving strategy and identity. This was evident in the way

Microsoft's Story Labs maintained brand voice, or how Disney's internal agency preserved brand storytelling across mediums. Even literature sources noted that brand stewardship is an "invaluable asset" that many firms are unwilling to outsource, a sentiment echoed by Target's chief creative officer, who insists that the soul of the brand should be guarded by an internal team. This dissertation's findings support that view: entrusting brand creative work to insiders ensures that nuances of brand values and local market culture are respected in every piece of content. Third, regarding operational efficiency, the research found that in-house agencies often deliver faster turnaround times and more flexibility. Internal teams, being embedded in the company's day-to-day operations, can pivot quickly with changing priorities, iterate on creative concepts in real-time with stakeholders, and operate on the company's schedule rather than an external contract timeline. For instance, internal teams at Google and Apple could respond immediately to new developments without the delay of briefing an outside firm. The Snackers! case quantitatively illustrated improved speed: once the in-house team took over, critical brand fixes were implemented within days, a pace an external agency unfamiliar with the company could hardly match. Additionally, the discussion pointed out that by having an in-house agency, companies improve cross-department collaboration, marketers, product managers, and creatives work in tandem, leading to fewer misunderstandings and revision cycles. In sum, the discussion chapter affirmed that all the research objectives were met, and in-house agencies were shown to be cost-effective, to bolster brand integrity, and to streamline creative operations, thereby validating the strategic rationale for moving creative work in-house.

Notably, the discussion also addressed the comparative aspect of in-house agencies versus external agencies (and hybrid models). While championing the benefits of in-house, the study remains cognizant that the optimal solution can vary by context. It was acknowledged that external agencies still play a complementary role for many organizations, particularly for specialized capabilities or overflow capacity. The industry data showing 92% of firms with in-house agencies continuing to use external agencies in some capacity attests to this balanced approach. Our findings concur: a hybrid model can combine the deep brand knowledge of an in-house team with the fresh ideas or additional hands provided by external partners when needed. For example, a company might use its internal team for core brand campaigns and quick-turnaround social media content but still hire an external agency for a one-off Super Bowl ad or a niche technical animation project beyond the in-house scope. The critical point, however, is that even in such arrangements, the in-house agency often takes the lead in strategy and oversight, ensuring that any external work remains aligned with the brand's objectives. This shift in the client–agency relationship was emphasized in the discussion: with strong in-house capabilities, companies have become more discerning and in control of what they outsource. The overall trajectory, supported by both our case studies and industry trends, indicates that the centre of gravity has moved inwards, in-house agencies now handle the majority of day-to-day creative needs, and external agencies serve as adjunct resources rather than core drivers of brand strategy. This finding reinforces the overarching theme that building an in-house creative agency is a wise strategic investment; it grants companies greater self-sufficiency and control over their marketing destiny, while still allowing flexibility to tap external help selectively.

6.1 Strategic Implications and Contributions

The conclusive evidence that in-house creative agencies offer high-quality output with cost efficiency carries several important implications for both business practice and the academic understanding of marketing operations. For practitioners and corporate decision-makers, this research provides a clear mandate: investing in an in-house creative agency can significantly enhance a company's competitive advantage. The ability to produce tailored, consistent brand communications more quickly and at lower cost directly impacts a firm's agility in the market and the strength of its brand equity. In practical terms, companies that have been outsourcing the bulk of their creative work should re-evaluate those models in light of these findings. By internalizing creative production, businesses can achieve better financial control (through fixed staffing costs and better budget predictability) and brand control (through continuous stewardship of brand image). The case studies offer models to emulate, for instance, firms can look at Microsoft's internal storytelling team or Disney's internal creative division as benchmarks for what is possible when creative talent is nurtured inside the organization. One clear implication is that senior leadership should treat the in-house agency as a strategic partner in brand-building, not merely a cost-centre. When supported and integrated properly, an in-house team contributes not only to marketing outputs but also to strategic insights, because they sit at the nexus of consumer feedback, creative trends, and business strategy, internal creatives can inform better decision-making at the brand level. This underscores a contribution of the study: it elevates the role of the in-house creative agency in the discourse of corporate strategy, suggesting that companies view their internal creative capabilities as a key component of their brand management and innovation ecosystem.

The dissertation also contributes a practical framework that businesses can adopt, which is a significant managerial contribution. The detailed methodology and process recommendations act as a blueprint for organizations aiming to establish or enhance their in-house agencies. This includes guidance on how to structure the team (e.g. the mix of designers, writers, videographers, etc.), how to integrate with marketing planning cycles, and how to implement efficient workflows. By following the roadmap outlined in this research, companies can better navigate the common challenges identified, such as scaling resources to meet demand and preventing creative burnout and thus increase the likelihood of their in-house agency's success. The importance of talent management cannot be overstated: a practical implication is that firms must invest in recruiting and developing top creative talent within their in-house teams, offering career growth opportunities and cultivating an environment that rivals external agencies in creative vibrancy. Doing so will address the concern, noted in industry surveys, that keeping internal teams energized and inspired is an ongoing challenge. Here, the study's insights into fostering a culture of continuous learning (for example, through training programs, workshops, and bringing in external mentors or trend briefings) can help practitioners maintain a high level of creativity internally. Another implication is the need for robust performance metrics and accountability for the in-house agency. The research shows that demonstrating value (through cost savings tracked, faster delivery times, campaign results, etc.) is key to securing ongoing executive support. Therefore, establishing a dashboard of metrics aligned with company goals, and reporting successes regularly, is a practice that emerges from this study's findings.

From an academic perspective, this dissertation enriches the literature on marketing and brand management by empirically validating the shift towards internalization of creative services. It reinforces the notion, previously suggested in branding theory, that brand authenticity and coherence are better achieved when those who create brand messages are part of the brand's home organization. The research thus provides evidence for scholars that the structure of a firm's creative resources (in-house vs. external) is an important factor in marketing effectiveness. It connects to organizational theory as well, illustrating how bringing a function in-house can transform workflows and inter-departmental collaboration. In doing so, it offers a case-based examination that complements broader surveys like the ANA reports. The findings about improved integration and knowledge sharing contribute to theories of knowledge management and resource-based views of the firm, by showing how in-house creative talent becomes an internal resource that is valuable, rare, and hard to imitate, essentially an organizational asset that competitors who rely solely on external agencies might lack. Additionally, the nuanced discussion on hybrid models contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of how firms can balance internal and external resources; this can inform future conceptual models about outsourcing decisions and the evolution of agency–client relationships. In summary, the study's contributions span practical guidance for industry and theoretical insights for academia, all reinforcing the central thesis that the in-house creative agency model, when executed well, can yield superior outcomes.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

While this study provides robust evidence of the benefits of in-house creative agencies, it also opens several avenues for further inquiry. One recommendation for future research is to conduct quantitative studies that measure the long-term business impact of in-house agencies across a larger sample of companies. For instance, researchers could examine financial performance, brand equity metrics, or speed-to-market indicators for firms before and after establishing in-house creative teams, to statistically validate the improvements suggested by our qualitative findings. Such studies could strengthen the causal claims about cost savings and brand impact by controlling for external variables. Additionally, future research could explore different industry contexts and geographical markets. The present work looked at companies primarily in technology, retail, and entertainment, as well as a regional case in Belize; however, industries like healthcare, finance, or B2B sectors might have different dynamics when it comes to creative work. Investigating how in-house agencies function in those settings, or in emerging markets versus developed markets, would add depth to the understanding of this phenomenon.

Another valuable direction would be to study the hybrid models in more detail: for example, what is the optimal way to integrate external agency support with a strong in-house team? Researchers could examine successful collaborations between in-house and external agencies to derive models of partnership (e.g., do companies benefit most when the in-house team leads and outsources only tactical executions, or when certain creative specializations are always kept external?). Given that many organizations still use both, pinpointing best practices for coordination between internal and external creatives would be highly useful. Moreover, as the marketing landscape evolves, future studies should consider the impact of technology and new media on in-house agencies. The rise of automation tools, AI in content creation, and advanced data analytics could change how in-house teams operate. Examining how in-house agencies are adopting AI-driven creative tools or leveraging big data (perhaps more swiftly than an external agency might) could reveal another layer of advantage or challenge. Conversely, researchers might look at the creative quality and innovation aspect: a question worth exploring is how to ensure that in-house creatives continue to get external inspiration and avoid groupthink. Longitudinal studies or interviews could focus on how internal teams keep their ideas fresh, do they rotate staff, consult with outside creatives periodically, or participate in industry forums? Understanding the talent development and retention aspects in in-house agencies, such as career trajectories of creative professionals who choose corporate in-house paths versus traditional agency paths, could also provide insight into the sustainability of the in-house model from a human resources perspective.

Finally, further research could build on the findings of this study's case analyses by conducting more case studies in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups. Startups, in particular, may not have the resources to form large in-house agencies, but many are beginning to cultivate internal creative teams early on. Investigating how resource-constrained companies manage to internalize creativity (perhaps one person wearing multiple hats or using lean approaches) and what trade-offs they face would be valuable. It could also be insightful to evaluate if the conclusions drawn here hold true as organizations scale; for example, tracking a company's marketing performance as it grows from startup to mid-size with an evolving in-house team. Such research would extend the practical applicability of the in-house agency model to a broader range of business sizes and models.

6.3 Closing Remarks

In conclusion, the overarching theme of this dissertation is resoundingly supported: building an in-house creative agency is a prudent and beneficial strategic decision for companies aiming to enhance their brand and operational efficiency. The convergence of evidence from literature, detailed process analysis, and real-world cases all points to the same result, in-house agencies serve not only as cost-effective alternatives to external partners but as engines of creative excellence and strategic value within the organization. They allow firms to cultivate a creative workforce that is deeply integrated with the brand's vision and the company's goals, leading to marketing communications that are more coherent, authentic, and responsive. When a company's creative storytellers, designers, and strategists sit under its own roof, the company gains unprecedented control over its narrative and the agility to shape that narrative in real time. The high-quality outputs documented in the case studies, from Microsoft's compelling stories to Disney's cohesive brand experiences, coupled with the efficiency gains (both financial and operational) make a powerful case that the in-house model of creative production can drive long-term business growth and brand strength.

Ultimately, this conclusion encourages business leaders to view their creative function not as an external commodity to be purchased, but as a core competency to be developed internally. By doing so, organizations can unlock a virtuous cycle: cost savings can be reinvested into more creative innovation, brand consistency builds stronger customer trust and engagement, and operational learnings improve future marketing efforts. The decision to establish an in-house creative agency thus emerges as a forward-looking strategy that aligns with the evolving needs of modern marketing. Companies that embrace this model position themselves to be more agile, brand-authentic, and efficient in an increasingly competitive and fast-paced marketplace. This research has provided the justification and a roadmap for that journey, concluding that an in-house creative agency is not just a departmental change, it is a strategic evolution that can profoundly benefit an organization's brand and business for years to come.

Appendices

A - Sample: Production Request form
B - Sample: Service Level Agreement (SLA) template
C - Sample: Operating Procedure (OP) template
D - Sample: Creative Brief template
E - Sample: Brand Pillar template

Appendix A – Sample: Production Request form

PRODUCTION REQUEST

BRAND_CAMPAIGN[1]:
ACCOUNT: Click or tap here to enter text.
E-MAIL: Click or tap here to enter text.
CREATIVE DEVELOPER: Click or tap here to enter text.
REQUEST DATE:

STRATEGY:

TARGET AUDIENCE:

EXECUTION (FNC: Brand, Campaign, Material, Size) [2]:

☐ GRAPHIC DESIGN:

☐ SOCIAL MEDIA:

☐ PHOTOGRAPHY:

☐ VIDEO / REELS:

☐ RADIO:

☐ WEBSITE:

DIRECTIVES (For each execution):

TIMING (Internal):

[1] SKZ_FNC File Naming Convention.xlsx
[2] SKZ_Execution Sizes.xlsx

SAKKISIME & CO.
CREATIVE AND DIGITAL AGENCY

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Appendix B – Sample: Service Level Agreement (SLA) template

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a Bowen Bowen Company

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA) FOR SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Brand Coordinators will deliver a comprehensive annual marketing strategy that Sakkisime will leverage to develop and oversee social media content. This strategy will outline clear social media objectives, campaigns, activations, events, holidays, and posting frequency.

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING:

Sakkisime will develop a 72-week content calendar aligned with the brand's annual marketing strategy and business plan. Planning will be conducted quarterly, three months ahead, to ensure seamless and efficient execution.

PERFORMANCE TRACKING & KPIs:

Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement, follower growth, and reach will be monitored monthly and compiled into a Social Media Report (SMR) for Brand Coordinators to share with stakeholders. Targets will be established in advance, with regular reporting to track progress and performance.

SAKKISIME GOALS:

1. Maintain brand visibility.
2. Elevate the brand's social media presence.
3. Execute digital marketing to increase followers, engagement, and interaction.
4. Inform customers about promotions, activations, and events.
5. Maintain and manage the content calendar in OneNote, ensuring full transparency of the schedule, captions, and hashtags.
6. Visual content includes photography, stories, reels, live event coverage, highlights, graphics design, and exclusive promotional material.
7. SKZ will craft compelling captions, including hashtags, to enhance engagement.

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES:

1. Agree on 18-month calendar with renewal between 12 - 15 months.
   a. This allows agency to comfortably produce content for Q1 and conclude contract in Q2 if not renewed.
   b. Renewal deadline is last day of March or each year.
2. Brand Coordinator(s) will submit Production Requests for additional content with a 3-week lead-time.
3. Sakkisime will manage the production budget with an assigned IO which includes:
   a. Products
   b. Props & Merchandise
   c. Model fees
   d. Transportation
   e. Room & Board for travel
4. Brand covers boosting costs
5. Brand provides prizes for planned activations
6. Brand Coordinators review content weekly and initial each post, failure to comply will be reported to CMO.
7. Brand Coordinator(s) manage all moderation.

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Appendix C – Sample: Operating Procedure (OP) template

Bowen Bowen	**Bowen & Bowen Limited**	Operating Procedure
Business Unit	**Department**	**Area**
OP NO. Document Title		Page **1** of **1**

1.0 **Purpose**
What the Operating Procedure (OP) addresses.
1.1

2.0 **Scope**
The extent of what is covered in the Operating Procedure
2.1

3.0 **Responsibility**
A summary of job titles which have been identified in Section 7.0 Procedure i.e., those that bear responsibility for carrying out an action(s) in the procedure
3.1

4.0 **Definitions**
The meaning of terms used in the Operating Procedure where these may not be clear
4.1

5.0 **References**
Information which has been generated outside the procedure, referred to in Section 7.0 Procedure.
5.1

6.0 **Documentation**
Forms/records/documents generated in Section 7.0 Procedure. A record of quality achievement.
6.1

7.0 **Procedure**
- What is done
- Who does it
- When it is done
- What records are maintained
- Distribution of these records
- Action to be taken in the event of adverse results
- Reference material used

OP No	Issue No:	Issue Date:	Prepared By:	
Responsibility:		Authorization:	Unique ID# Time Stamp User ID (Email address)	
Disclaimer: This document becomes automatically uncontrolled when printed unless otherwise stated.				

Appendix D – Sample: Creative Brief template

BRAND:
INITIATIVE:
AUTHOR:
DATE:

BUSINESS/BRAND ISSUE OR OPPORTUNITY:
Why are we doing this? What are we trying to solve or leverage?
How does the brand positioning/pillars link to the challenge/opportunity?
(Introduction: Explain the background and why this topic is important. Clearly define the problem or opportunity.)

TARGET CONSUMER (OR SHOPPER):
Describe the target for this brand, including demographics, attitudes, and behaviours.
What is the brand personality (describe as a person)?
(Goals & Objectives: Outline what the memo aims to achieve. If it's a proposal, state what success looks like.)

KEY FACT / INSIGHTS:
What is the key insight from the target that the brand/initiative should be helping to solve or leverage?
What does the target think, feel, behave about the brand currently?
What changes do we want to generate with this initiative?
(Solution or Proposal: Present your recommendation or plan. Use logical reasoning and data to support your case.)

OBJECTIVE OF ASSIGNMENT:
Describe the general creative need that will address the consumer challenge/opportunity
Communication: message points or selling proposition. Tone of voice from brand.
How does the brand help use insights to address the challenge / opportunity?
What do we want the target to think, feel, and do once the initiative is implemented?
Note: good to know, references, past initiatives or inspiration
(Supporting Arguments and Data: Include facts, metrics, and relevant analysis. Break down complex points with subheadings if necessary.)

COMPETITIVE REALITY:
What are the relevant competitive products and services?
What are the points of differentiation for our brand?
(Risks and Challenges: Address potential drawbacks or objections. Show that you've thought through possible failures and solutions.)

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Appendix E – Sample: Brand Pillar template

Business Unit	Department	
Brand Pillars	**Brand name**	Page **1** of **1**

PRODUCT TRUTHS:

BRAND TRUTHS:

BRAND WORD:

TARGET(S):

BRAND AMBITION:

Name of brand is...

- One
- Two
- Three

BRAND VISION:

Name of brand will...

- One
- Two
- Three

BUSINESS AMBITION:

BRAND PILLARS	Issue No: 1	Issue Date: YYYY-MM-DD
Brand:	Brand Name	***Disclaimer:*** *This document becomes automatically uncontrolled when printed unless otherwise stated.*
Responsibility:	Title	
Authorized By:	Title	

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