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by ✔ smartsheet

So long, silos:
Strategies to bring teams
closer when budgets are tight

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So long, silos: Strategies to bring teams closer when budgets are tight

These days it seems like the only thing companies are sure of is that they're unsure. And with so much uncertainty comes increased and conflicting pressures to proactively conserve resources while aggressively pursuing growth. In fact, [a recent survey](#) found that B2B marketers list headcount cuts, increasing growth targets, and shrinking budgets as three of their top four biggest challenges.

However, the key to succeeding in this high-stakes environment doesn't lie in how quickly teams move or how little money they spend — it's how well they work together. With [86% of leaders](#) listing "lack of collaboration" as the No. 1 reason for workplace failures, marketers must move in lockstep toward the same goals or risk falling prey to the effects of organizational silos.

Effects of collaboration on company success

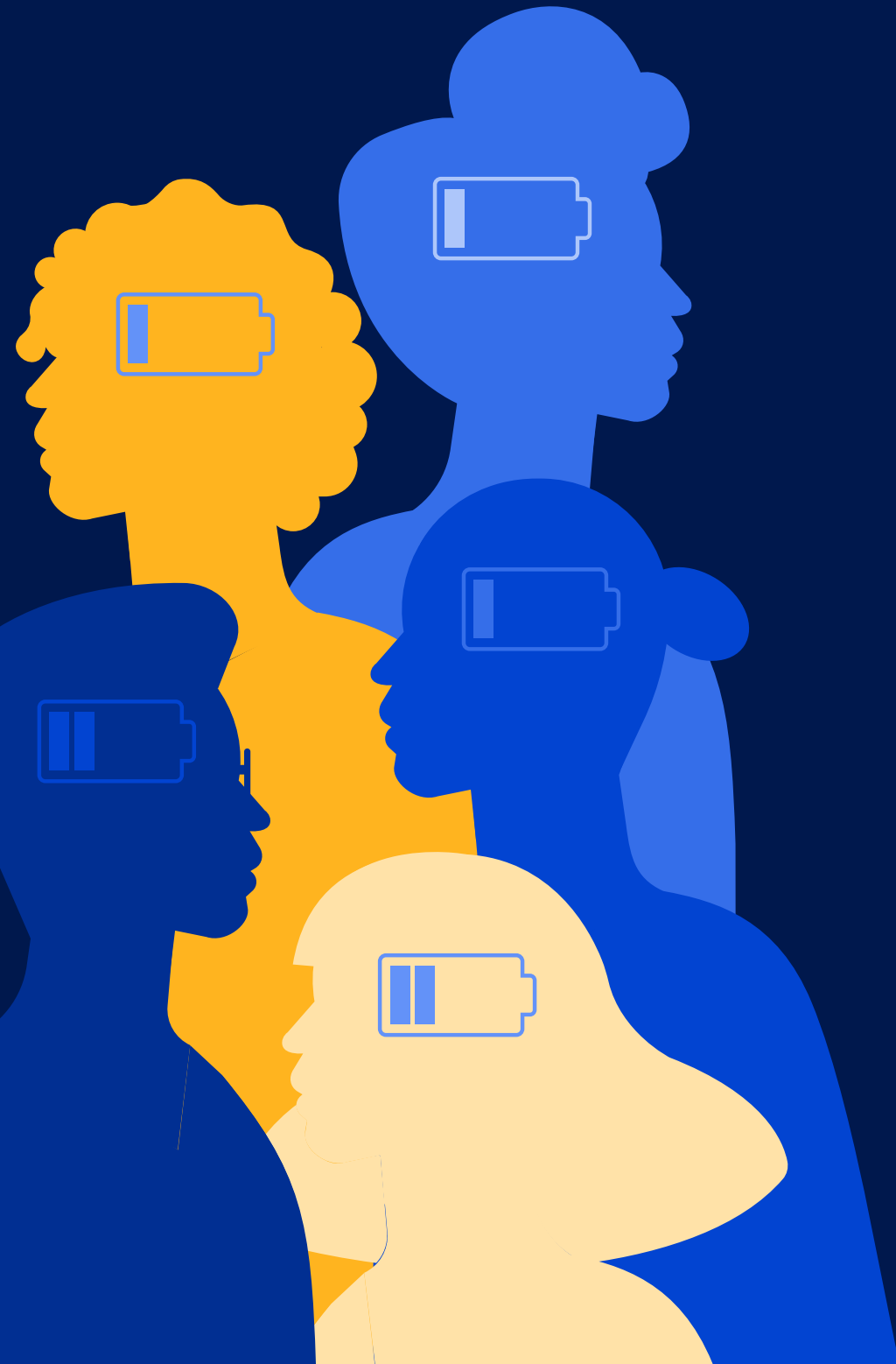
% increase in companies with high collaboration index score



Source: zippia.com

The four types of marketing silos

- 1. Department**
What are other teams doing?
- 2. Technology**
How do I connect data and workflows across tools?
- 3. Communication**
What are my colleagues saying?
- 4. Information**
Where can I find the answers and assets I need?



Whether it's a lack of visibility across department responsibilities, a breakdown in communication between colleagues, tools that don't integrate seamlessly with one another, or information that's isolated to just one area of the business, marketing silos get in the way of teams achieving more with less. From employee burnout to missed deadlines, we're detailing the top five challenges caused by silos and how marketing leaders like you can overcome them to rebuild team synergies and strengthen alignment.

Challenge #1: Employee burnout

One of the biggest and most dangerous side effects of marketing silos is employee burnout. It's all too easy for workers to start feeling overwhelmed and exhausted when managers and colleagues lose sight of what's on their plates and continue adding more. [A recent survey by the American Psychological Association](#) found that a whopping 79% of adult workers had experienced work-related stress in the past month.

What's more, three out of five employees reported negative impacts of this stress, including cognitive weariness, emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, low motivation or energy, and lack of effort at work. Unfortunately, these numbers will only continue to rise as many marketers absorb the impact of increasing headcount cuts. This requires team leaders to find ways to abolish burnout and give employees the resources they need to band together to deliver on their goals.

Schedule team bonding

Set aside an hour each week for everyone on your team to come together and take part in a fun, non-work-related activity. It's critical that this time is scheduled during work hours to give employees a much-needed break and avoid cutting into their already limited personal time.

While happy hours are always a popular option, try adding games or challenges that require team members to communicate and accomplish goals together. Here are a few of our favorites.

Unseen art: Communication is the key to winning this game. Have employees break into pairs and decide who's "the instructor" and who's "the artist." Place a pile of photographs facedown and have each instructor choose one. Next, blindfold each artist and give them a pencil and blank sheet of paper. The instructors must help their blindfolded artists draw what's in their photos by describing the image to them in as much detail as possible. Once the artists are done, everyone votes for the most accurate drawing. The team with the most votes wins.

Marshmallow challenge: This activity teaches employees to embrace agile processes and work together to solve hidden challenges rather than focus on developing and executing a single plan. It requires teams to tap into essential skills we have as kindergarteners but tend to forget as we mature. To play, break folks up into teams of three or four and give each group 20 sticks of uncooked spaghetti, a yard of tape, a yard of string, and one marshmallow. The goal is to build a structure with the marshmallow at the top in 18 minutes or less!



Business book club: While this activity does require employees to put in some additional time and effort outside regular business hours, it can be a big hit depending on your team's interests. To begin, have everyone vote on the business skill they would like to improve, whether it be public speaking, interpersonal communication, or team management, and then choose a book focused on the winning topic. Assign a chapter each week and use your hour to discuss what you learned. Looking for a good book on breaking down organizational silos? We recommend [The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers](#) by Gillian Tett.



Standardize requests with service-level agreements (SLAs)

We're all guilty of emailing or Slacking our favorite team member to ask for "a quick favor" without knowing what else is on their plate. It's easy for these "small asks" to pile up, making it difficult for marketers to prioritize the right work and causing them undue stress.

Standardizing and enforcing marketing request forms ensures that all asks are centrally managed and have the context necessary to prioritize them effectively. It also helps avoid unnecessary or duplicate work (more on this later!). While each marketing request form will vary depending on a team's specific discipline, a good one should contain the following fields:

- » **Project name:** How will the project be referred to internally?
- » **Project type:** Is it editing an image? Building a new email campaign? Planning a customer happy hour?
- » **Project details/specs:** If creating an image, what are the required dimensions? Do we need a .jpg, .png, or both?
- » **Examples and inspiration:** Is there an example the team can refer to?
- » **Target audience:** Whom are we trying to reach with this project?
- » **Purpose and goal:** Do we want the target audience to attend an event? Open an email? Download an e-book?
- » **Success measures:** How will we know if we achieved our purpose or goal?
- » **Due date:** When is the project deadline?
- » **Key stakeholders:** Who is involved in reviewing and approving the project?

Don't have a request form? Not sure where to start building one? We've got you covered. Check out this handy marketing request template!

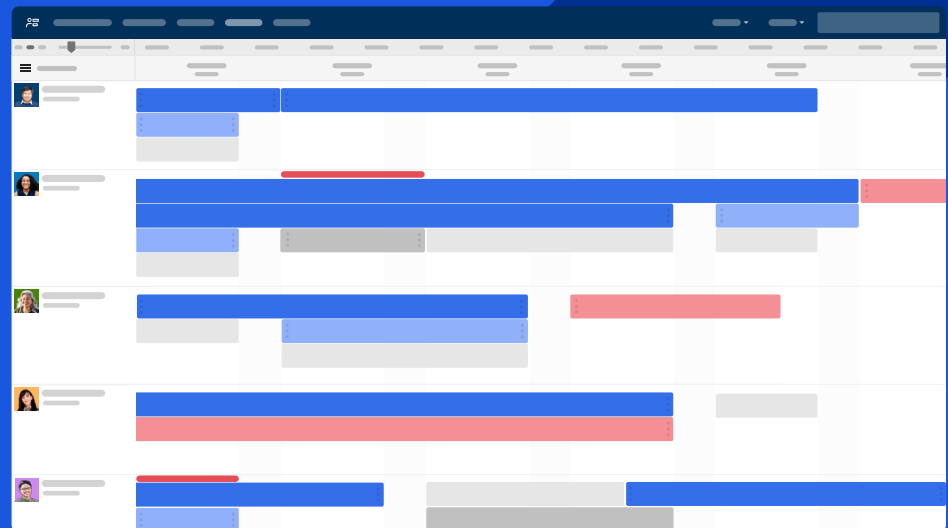
Last but not least, we recommend that every request form feature a service-level agreement, or SLA. An SLA clearly defines the type of work that is handled by your team and the time that is needed to accomplish it so there's no confusion or unrealistic expectations. It also helps eliminate those last-minute "urgent" requests that sidetrack and silo teams. Here's an example of what an SLA might look like for an email marketing team. —————>

Service	Description	Turnaround time
Schedule	The email has already been built in HubSpot and needs to be slotted into the email calendar.	1-2 business days
Build & schedule	The copy and images for the email exist but it needs to be built in HubSpot and scheduled to send.	3-5 business days
Source, build & schedule	Final copy and images must be sourced from other teams before the email can be built in HubSpot and slotted into the calendar.	1-2 weeks, depending on content and design availability

Use a resource management tool

It's much easier to get a complete picture of all in-flight and upcoming work when you field requests and manage projects in a single system. This enables leaders to ensure that work is more evenly distributed across all employees.

Some work management tools provide more robust resource management functionality that allows managers to schedule work across projects and teams based not only on employees' bandwidth and availability, but also on their unique skill sets and expertise. These solutions offer "heatmaps" that make it easy to spot when someone on the team is overbooked and at risk of burning out. Reallocating resources and assigning their work to someone else can be done in just a few clicks and without putting project deadlines and deliverables at risk.




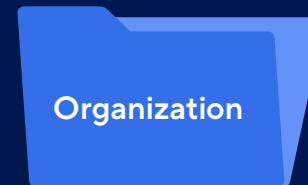
Challenge #2: Unused or off-brand content

Did you know that 56% of brands say they spend money creating digital assets that go unused? Not only is this a major waste, but employees who can't find what they're looking for often resort to using outdated or off-brand content instead. Case in point: 60% of marketers and creatives report that their teammates still use incorrect versions of their company logos in customer-facing assets.

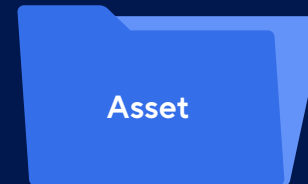
According to marketing and branding expert Andy Cunningham, "Consistency is the holy grail of marketing." Brand inconsistencies create more work for marketing teams by seriously damaging consumer loyalty and brand trust over time. So how can marketers break down the information and communication silos that lead to disorganized, off-brand content?

Build a single source of truth

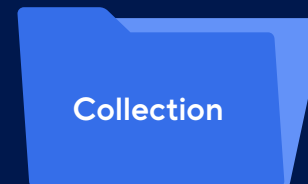
You can't use content that you can't find! That's why it's critical to establish a single source of truth to house all of your final, approved digital assets. And we mean all of them, from PDFs and .jpegs to 8k videos and 3D renderings. However, organization is just as important as centralization. While there are many different ways to organize files, we believe the following structure offers the most flexibility and makes browsing marketing assets a breeze. 



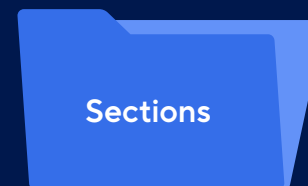
House high-level assets that are applicable to your entire organization.



Segment assets by specific use cases, including business unit, region, project, or campaign.



Store assets for a specific team or group of people, including vendors, partners, or departments within your organization.



Organize assets by file type, including e-books, webinars, email banners, etc.



Define your brand position

Purpose, vision, mission, and values are core elements of brand positioning. Although they sound similar, each one is distinct and builds on the next to create a robust messaging structure that dictates how you choose to represent and articulate who your company is in the market.

PURPOSE

The reason why your company exists (other than to make money).

Example:
To refresh the world and make a difference.
(Coca-Cola)

VISION

The impact and difference you aspire to make in the future.

Example:
To empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.
(Microsoft)

MISSION

What you strive to accomplish each day in service of your vision.

Example:
To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.
(Starbucks)

VALUES

How you conduct yourself in the pursuit of your mission.

Example:
Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to protect nature, do it our way.
(Patagonia)

Ensuring that everyone in the organization is aligned regarding your brand's purpose, vision, mission, and values helps unite employees and makes them feel as though they are working together in service of something bigger than themselves. In turn, this makes them more cognizant of and concerned about using incorrect or off-brand assets that will likely get in the way of achieving their goals and create more work in the long run.

Once these elements are defined, it's important to bring them to life in a visual and easily digestible document that everyone in the marketing organization has access to. Ask team leaders to cover it regularly during meetings, frame it in the office, or have HR incorporate it into new hire training. Every employee should know exactly who your company is and be able to quickly spot anything that looks or sounds out of character.



No time to spin up a creative brand purpose, vision, mission, and values doc? No problem – use this template instead!



Distribute brand guidelines

Brand guidelines establish ground rules around how to publicly express and communicate your brand through visuals and text. But rather than simply providing examples of acceptable (and unacceptable!) branding elements, good guidelines offer a rationale around why specific images or taglines are used and how these choices are grounded in the brand's larger purpose and position.

For example, instead of your brand stating that it only uses photos with people in them, it helps to explain that human-centric photography is used to highlight the brand's vision to bring people from diverse backgrounds together. This level of insight enables anyone on the team to better understand and instantly recognize how your brand should look, sound, and feel to avoid inconsistencies.

Many brands create their guidelines as PDFs, but these documents are static and easily fall prey to version control issues. Top brands silo-proof their brand guidelines by building and housing them in the cloud, where they can be universally accessed and updated in real time.

Challenge #3: Missed deadlines

It's tough to hand off projects when one hand doesn't know what the other is doing. And even if you do manage to pass the baton, there's a high likelihood that key details – such as due dates, end goals, and next steps – will be missing, resulting in project delays and fumbled deadlines.

Take, for example, Domino's pizza. The marketing communications team was juggling sending timely email updates to its internal corporate employees and network of franchise owners across 86 global markets. "We had lots of people communicating to lots of people in lots of different ways," recalls Stacie Barrett, Director of Internal Communications for Domino's.

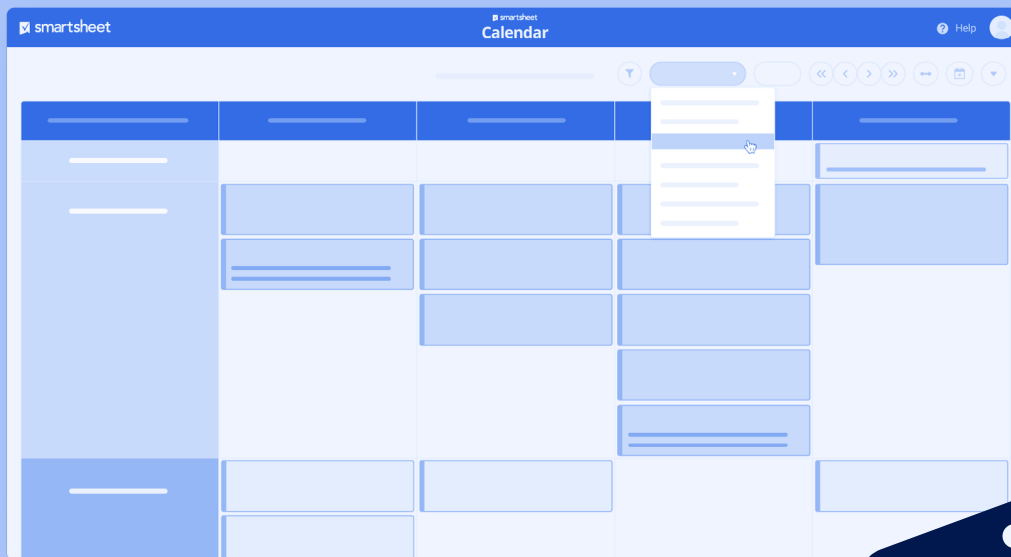
Let's first take a look at how using a shared, centralized calendar helped Barrett and her team enhance cross-functional visibility and nail their communication deadlines. Then we'll dive into a couple other solutions marketers can use to help bridge marketing silos that are getting in the way of delivering more projects on time with fewer resources.



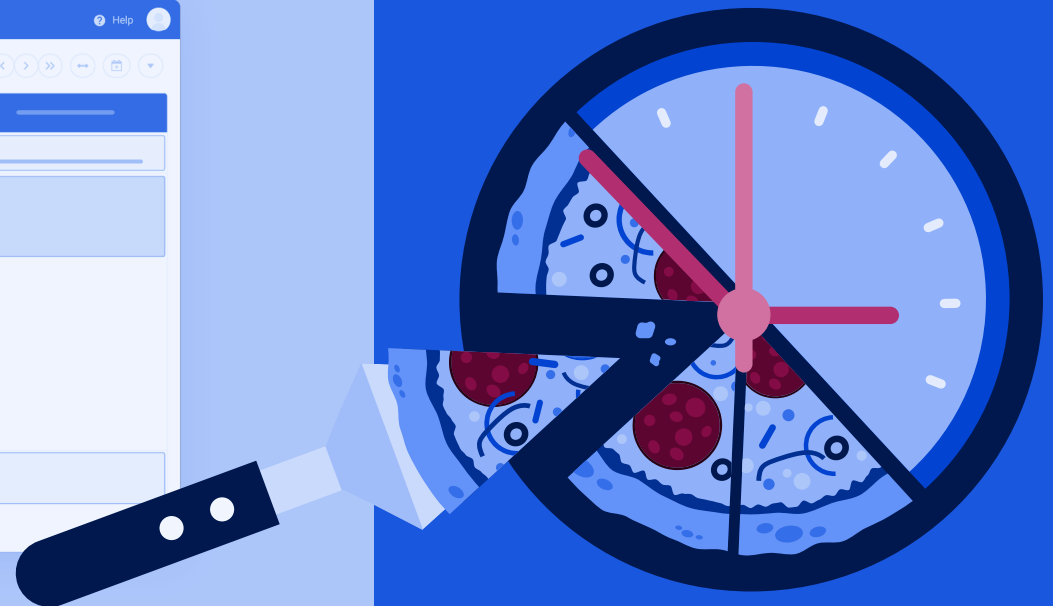
Leverage shared calendars

To continue with the Domino's example, Barrett knew that her team needed a more strategic and organized approach to managing company communications. Today, the internal communications team enters newsletter topics and stand-alone announcements into a shared content calendar, which lets them plan several months out. As new topics are added, the entire team can see whether certain dates are getting too crowded and collaborate with content owners to reschedule announcements if necessary.

"I have a large cross-functional team with a lot of interdependencies, so by creating more transparency around what needs to get done and who needs to do it, we can all work together to solve problems and get things done faster," says Barrett. "We have better visibility, better transparency, and better collaboration, and we have it all with Smartsheet."



Pssst! Want to learn more about how the team at Domino's uses Smartsheet to keep its communications on track? Check out the full success story [here](#).



Create project templates

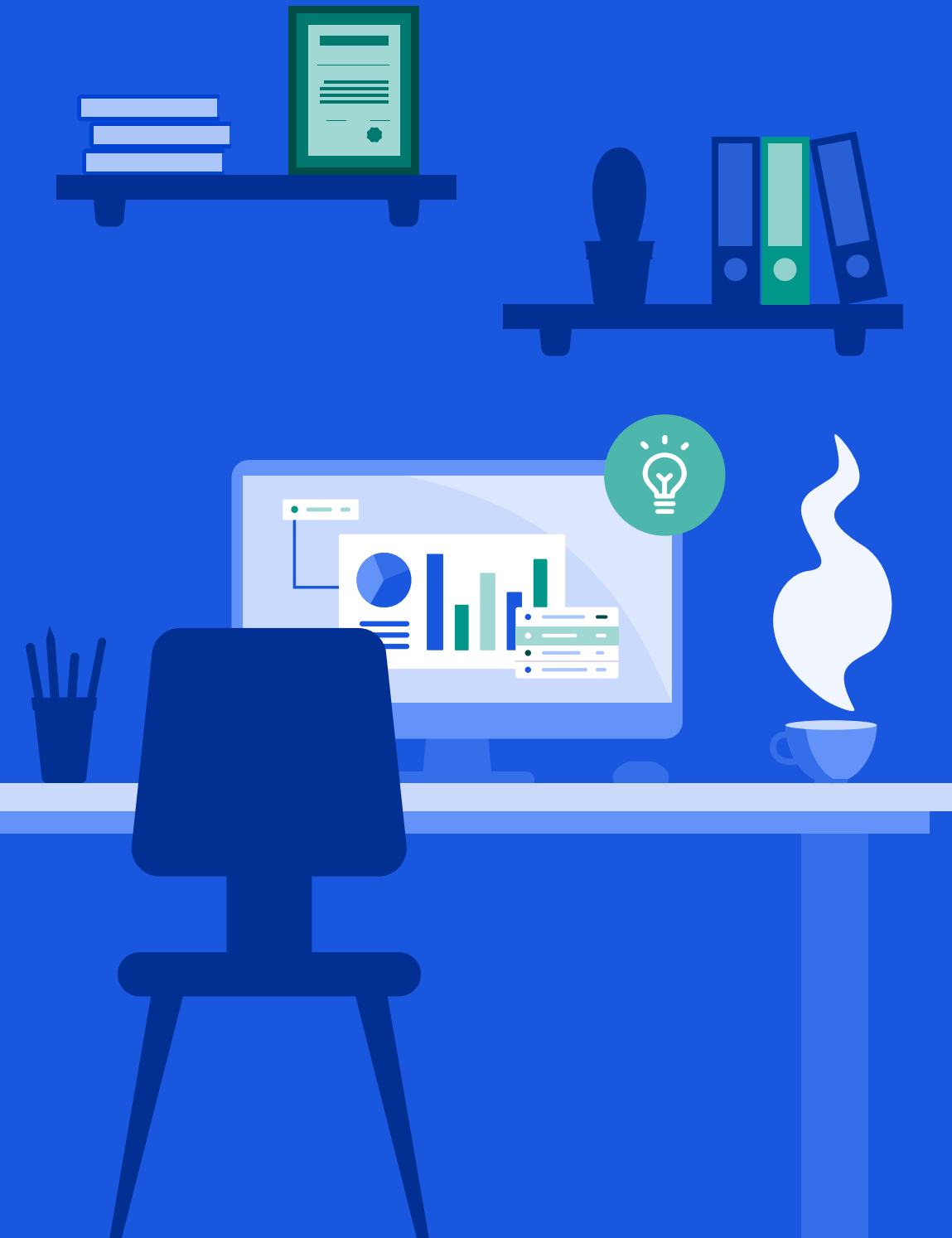
One of the most surefire ways to ensure that everyone on the team knows the right steps to get a project across the finish line on time is to templatize it. This involves mapping out each task that must be completed — including placeholders for all relevant information like budget and associated campaign — as well as who owns it and how long it should take.

While any project can be turned into a template, this solution is most useful for common projects that feature multiple cross-functional stakeholders. That way, each time someone on the team wants to kick off a new recurring project, they simply clone the template, fill out the missing details, and get started. Templates can be refined over time so that the entire team knows exactly what's expected and can run like a well-oiled machine.

Here are a few of our favorite project templates to help you get started:

- [Go-to-market strategy plan](#) (Google Sheets)
- [Marketing project plan](#) (Excel)
- [Social media editorial calendar](#) (Smartsheet)
- [Content marketing roadmap](#) (Excel)
- [Marketing campaign management](#) (Smartsheet)





Harness the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation

AI isn't anywhere near being able to replace human intelligence – but it can definitely make our jobs easier. And one of the most efficient strategies for bridging silos between employees is to take a step back and let technology do it for you. Managing and templating projects [in the latest work management platforms](#) unlocks game-changing AI and automation capabilities for marketers.

For example, workflow automation can notify project owners of approaching due dates, alert stakeholders when they've been assigned new tasks, prompt and send out weekly status updates, and so much more. These automated actions not only help keep teams aligned and on deadline, but they also enable them to move faster by eliminating manual, repetitive tasks.

Challenge #4: Unnecessary or duplicate work

Another side effect of one “hand” not knowing what the other is doing is that sometimes they’re doing the same thing. One study found that employees in the U.S. spend six hours a week duplicating others’ work. That’s almost an entire working day each week, or 52 days a year!

Without a clear line of sight into others’ projects and the results they ultimately deliver, marketing teams waste their limited resources on unnecessary tasks. This time is obviously much better spent on more strategic, revenue-generating activities – but how can marketing leaders ensure that their teams are focused on the most impactful work and not wasting precious hours reinventing the wheel?



Empower self-service

Content production balloons as a brand's marketing efforts expand across new channels, audiences, and regions. It's not uncommon for the EMEA events manager to ask the creative team to spin up an entirely new booth handout for an upcoming conference when one for the U.S. market already exists.

What if instead of reinventing the wheel, creatives could point team members to a selection of pre-approved, on-brand templates they could quickly and independently edit with no design skills necessary? [Adobe Acrobat](#), [Canva](#), [Google Slides](#), and some [digital asset management](#) (DAM) tools are all popular options today's leading brands use to do just that.

Senior marketer and templates guru Miranda Miller has a couple quick tips for leaders looking to empower marketers and free creatives with templates. "I always lock our logo," she says. "Anything that is critical to identifying your brand or upholding its integrity should be off-limits to non-creatives." She also cautions against leaving a big blank space where teams can add any image they want. Instead, offer 3-5 preapproved on-brand options for them to use. The same goes for brand colors, taglines, etc.

THE Should this be a template? CHECKLIST

Is the asset...

- Shorter than three pages, or can each page stand alone (e.g., slides)?
- Evergreen, or will it be used for longer than 90 days?
- 50% or more text-related?
- Going to be used across multiple channels (e.g., email and social)?
- Edited or updated on a regular or frequent basis?
- Able to have 80% or more of its content "locked down" and remain unchanged?
- Going to be used more than once or twice a month, or does the team need more than two versions upfront?

If you answered "yes" to four or more of these questions, **templatize it!**

Clearly label assets

We said it before and we'll say it again: You can't use content that you can't find. In addition to keeping all assets in a central location and clearly organizing them, teams must also define a clear and consistent set of tags that enable anyone to quickly search for the content they need, find what they're looking for, and move on to the next task.

This will effectively eliminate not only the duplicate and unnecessary work that teams put into generating assets that already exist in various silos, but also the time they spend searching for content they can't find. Believe it or not, creative marketers still spend a median of 10 hours per week on repetitive and unnecessary tasks such as resizing and reformatting images, emailing content to colleagues, and searching for files. That's more than 520 hours each year!



Many teams harness AI to automatically generate tags based on what's inside an asset, as well as to automatically learn teams' behaviors and suggest relevant assets as they search. However, here are a few ways to consider manually classifying your content to optimize discoverability and minimize unnecessary or duplicate work:

Asset type

Featured products

Intended marketing funnel stage

Target persona name

Featured colors and hex codes

Relevant use cases

Related customer or partner names

Associated campaign name

Qualitative descriptions (e.g., funny, sad, etc.)

Email marketing benchmarks across industries

Bounce rate

0.30%



Unsubscribe rate

0.24%



CTR

8.93%



Click rate

3.36%



Open rate

37.65%



Closely monitor performance

Continuing to pour time, budget, and energy into content and campaigns that don't deliver ROI just isn't an option for today's thinly stretched teams. Unfortunately, when marketers lack visibility into key performance metrics (KPIs), these wasted efforts happen – a lot.

We mentioned earlier that standardizing and centralizing requests helps minimize unnecessary or duplicate work. We also suggested that every request form require information about the project's purpose and goal, as well as how success will be measured. But simply having this information isn't enough. Teams must follow through by actually measuring the results of their work. Only then can they accurately determine whether this type of project is necessary or worthwhile to do again in the future.

For example, imagine that your sales team requests a new product marketing sheet about the latest platform feature. Taking the time to dig into how many sales people actually viewed, downloaded, and shared this sheet post-production will help you decide how much of your team's limited time and attention to dedicate to these types of requests moving forward.

Research shows that B2B sales reps generally use just 30% of marketing collateral. Does this ring true for your team? If so, try having someone from marketing regularly join one of the sales org's standing meetings to present the latest and greatest sales collateral. Or send out a monthly internal newsletter with direct links to these assets so reps know that they're available and so your team's hard work pays off.

Similarly, an ask to send a customer email touting this new feature and promoting the aforementioned sales sheet should also be measured. Did the customers open the email? Click through? Try the feature? Buy it? Empowering everyone on the team to easily access, visualize, and track these KPIs ensures that your marketing org isn't just working hard, but also smart.

Challenge #5: Low productivity

Have you ever visited and walked through a corn maze in the fall? You're surrounded by sky-high stalks that make it nearly impossible to find your way out without hitting a few dead ends along the way. The experience is essentially the same for marketers working to bring a project to completion in a siloed environment.

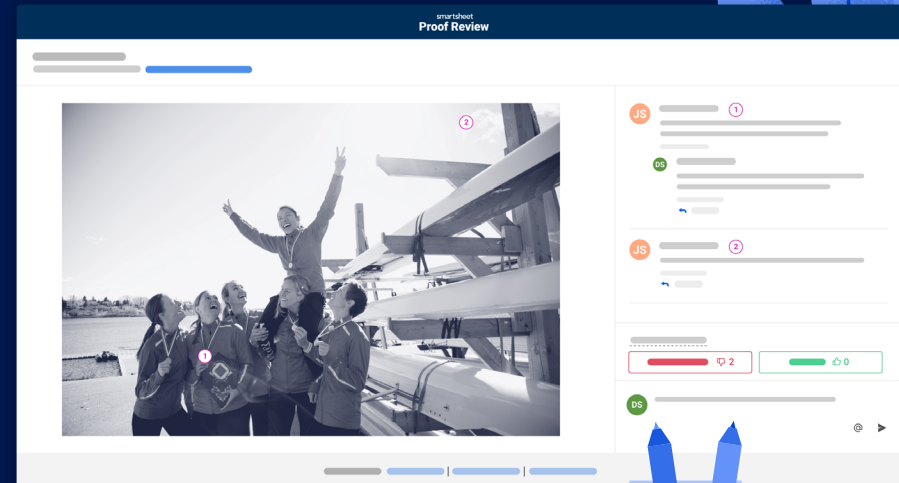
Lack of information and unclear direction force teams to chase down details that often lead to "dead ends" and the need to double back. Despite marketers' hard work, precious time is wasted, and little progress is made. Here are a few ideas to help your team "see over the corn stalks" to enhance their productivity and make it through "the maze."

Centralize feedback

"Teamwork makes the dream work," as the saying goes, so it's no surprise that 75% of employees value feedback on their work. However, it's not uncommon for this feedback to happen via email threads, Slack channels, Zoom meetings, and even office hallway conversations. And what happens when one leader's input directly contradicts another, or when someone is late to the party and introduces version control issues?

Asking your team to connect the dots across versions, channels, and stakeholders is a recipe for human error and inefficiency. That's why it's best to designate a single centralized location for all project feedback and communication where all stakeholders can easily see and asynchronously respond to one another's comments.

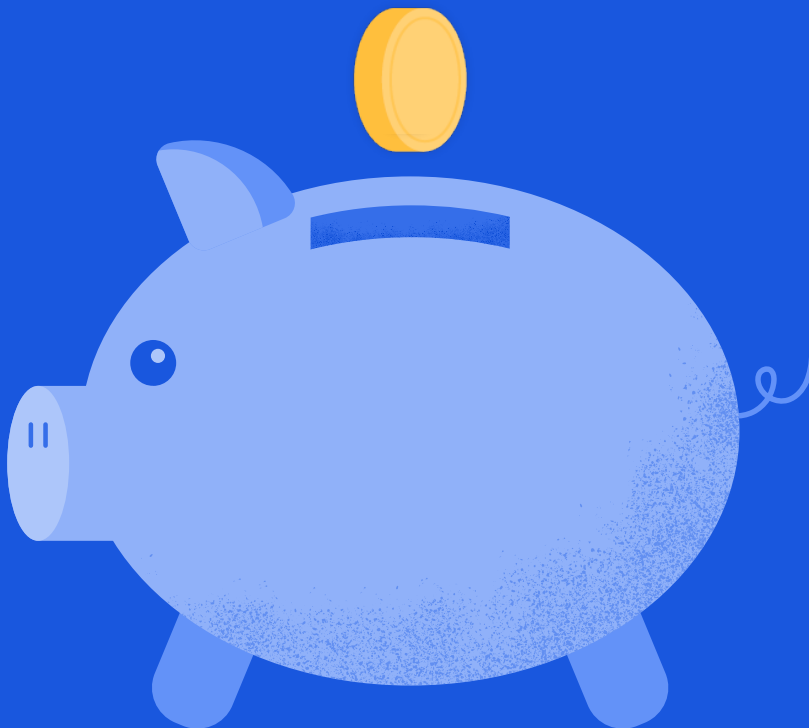
When visual assets are involved, such as email banners or e-books, it's also helpful to leverage a digital annotation or markup tool. This allows you and other leaders to click directly on a word in a document or a part of an image and leave feedback, rather than having to explain which sentence or color to change. This not only saves teams significant time, but it also alleviates the stress of trying to make sense of ambiguous comments.



Institute walking meetings

If you've ever had a question about a project and your colleague's answer was to "schedule a meeting," you're not alone. About 55 million meetings are held each week in the U.S. alone. In fact, the average organization spends about 15% of its employees' total time in meetings – yet 71% of these meetings are considered unproductive.

While centralizing project requests, communication, and feedback will eliminate many unnecessary meetings, try turning the rest into walking meetings – even with remote employees. Walking not only boosts employees' energy, but it also helps bond team members by bringing them together outside the office and off Zoom. Best of all, research shows that people reach decisions twice as fast when on the move rather than sitting at a table or desk.



Meetings cost money

24 billion hours
are wasted annually due to unproductive meetings.

37% of employees
consider "unproductive meetings" to be the highest cost to their org.

65% of employees
believe attending meetings prevents them from completing work.

\$37 billion is lost
in the U.S. every year due to unnecessary meetings.

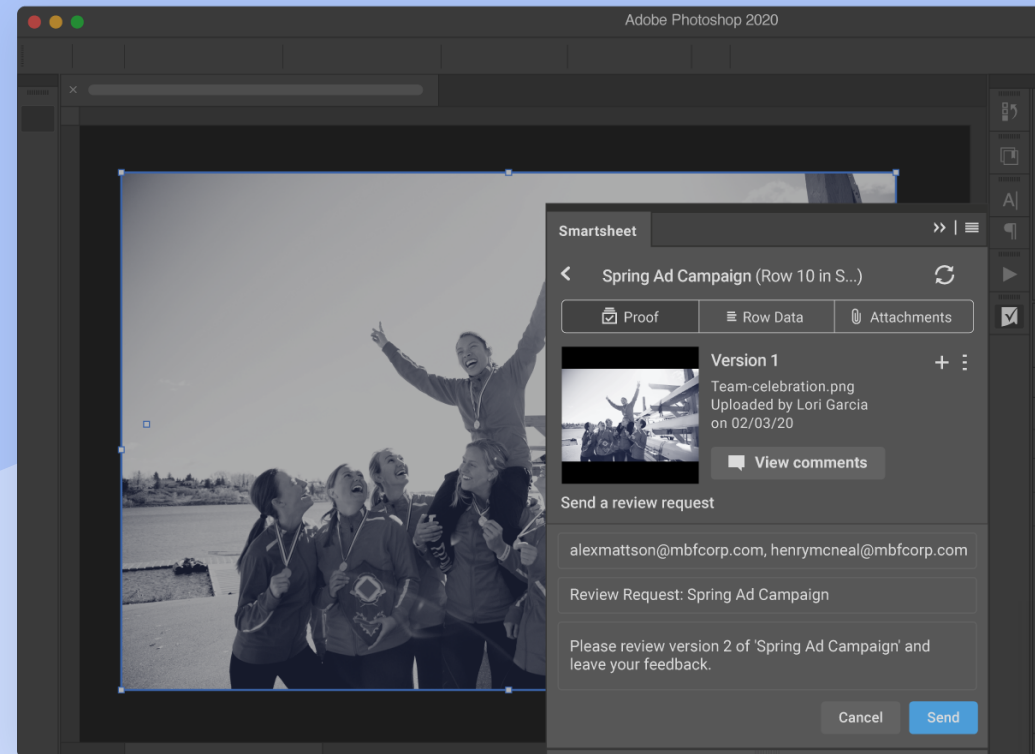
Source: [Zippia](#)

Connect your tools

From marketing automation to work management tools, marketers use many different technologies to get their jobs done. [A recent study](#) showed that it takes workers an average of just over two seconds to adjust each time they toggle between these websites and apps. While this doesn't sound like a lot, the same study determined that this happens about 1,200 times daily, which adds up to nearly four hours each week!

Integrations can eliminate much of this unproductive context switching by enabling teams to access one tool from within another. For example, the [Smartsheet extension for Adobe Creative Cloud](#) allows creatives to see marketing design requests placed in Smartsheet through a dedicated panel in Adobe Photoshop, where they can also submit proofs for review and access teammates' feedback.

Other tools share information with one another in the background, allowing teams to avoid manually uploading/downloading or copying/pasting information between them — automatically eliminating silos. For instance, after a new marketing asset has been approved in Smartsheet, [publish it directly to the Smartsheet digital asset management platform, Brandfolder](#), for sharing and distribution.



Hello, marketing success

Marketers everywhere are feeling the pressure to deliver more content, campaigns, and ROI with less budget, time, and headcount. And department, information, communication, and technology silos are threatening their ability to scale and succeed.

Leaders must find ways to help their teams bridge these gaps and band together. Following the tips outlined in this guide will help your team conquer the negative effects of marketing silos and collaborate more closely than ever before.



Overcoming marketing silos

Employee burnout

Schedule team bonding

Standardize requests with SLAs

Use a resource management tool

Unused/off-brand content

Build a single source of truth

Define your brand position

Distribute brand guidelines

Missed deadlines

Leverage shared calendars

Create project templates

Harness the power of AI/automation

Unnecessary/duplicate work

Empower self-service

Clearly label assets

Closely monitor performance

Low productivity

Centralize feedback

Institute walking meetings

Connect your tools

For more ways marketers at leading brands empower their teams to do more with less, take a peek at this helpful resource:

Top ways Smartsheet and Brandfolder help brands scale on a budget

Show me the ways

