Marketing Resource Management:

Defining marketing's back office, and unraveling the technology stack that supports it

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About this eBook

This paper aims to help marketers better leverage available Marketing Resource Management (MRM) technology by decoding vendor capabilities with real-world understanding of how the software functions. This analysis informs how marketing and IT may choose to apply MRM off-the-shelf solutions to their respective enterprise ecosystems.

After reading this paper, marketing and IT will be better able to apply vendor technology and consulting direction to the way marketers think and operate.

CONTENTS

The gap between marketing and IT is closing. Marketers are learning the realities of tools built specifically for them, and IT is becoming sensitive to marketing's unique way of working.

Findings and interpretations expressed herein are based on actual client engagements, peer dialogue, evaluations of various vendors, industry thought leaders, and a review of various industry intermediary reports.

Defining MRM: to understand MRM is to understand its history

The Marketing Resource Management (MRM) landscape is comprised of tools with wide-ranging functionality, leaving it difficult to study the market and easily find solutions that best fit marketing's needs. In our view, marketers most commonly compartmentalize MRM to manage and automate marketing's back-office (see Gartner Definition below). Beyond this definition, a number of vendors wield functionality that naturally extends to support upstream planning and downstream execution capabilities. For the purposes of our focus on MRM here, we acknowledge these additional capabilities, but will focus on the notion of the back-office.

In the mid-2000s Gartner published the first Magic Quadrant report as a component of CRM, broadening CRM's scope to include marketing's back-office. Classifying MRM as part of the greater CRM ecosystem complimented CRM's front-office practices and technologies that enable lead management and customer interactions, and greatly impact sales and customer service functions.

Gartner Definition of Marketing Resource Management

Gartner defines MRM as a set of processes and capabilities designed to enhance a company's ability to orchestrate and optimize internal and external marketing resources. MRM applications enable companies to:

- Plan and budget for marketing activities and programs (strategic planning and financial management).
- Create and develop marketing programs and content (creative production management).
- Collect and manage content and knowledge (digital asset, content, and knowledge management).
- Fulfill and distribute marketing assets, content and collateral (marketing fulfillment).
- Measure, analyze, and optimize marketing performance (MRM analytics).

The conceptual disconnect between MRM and those who use it

MRM unequivocally fills gaps in the capabilities marketing needs to operate, but does have practical challenges for those charged to implement it. These challenges, we believe, are due to how inconsistently MRM is defined and a general void in frameworks and principles marketing needs to plan technology in an actionable context.

Looking to the past, MRM's challenges have been:

- MRM is a technology without commonly understood philosophical underpinnings—as is CRM with Peppers & Rogers—and as a result, many marketers have implemented technology without fully defining organizational context and process. Implementations have not reached their stated goals.

- First-generation MRM vendors have bundled expansive functionality in an attempt to automate all of marketing's back-office needs, promoting a self-contained ERP-like solution, versus a view that connects marketing to the enterprise.

- To the detriment of more progressive collaboration tools, workflow (process automation) functionality has been over-engineered and often creates more inefficiency than it solves. Appropriate and flexible milestone-based workflows are only now being widely deployed.

- MRM has instigated large-scale, big-bang transformation—presumably due to immediate and compelling needs to change—without the proper pacing to boost adoption across a large organization, and architectures that allow for agile implementation methodologies.

Looking to overcome these challenges for the future, we may refine common MRM definitions with more open enterprise-integrated perspectives by framing MRM in a context that permits marketers to leverage enterprise tools and fill gaps with new tools, with common system classifications having traditional names.

Zee Jay Digital Refined Definition

Marketing Resource Management is a suite of enterprise and marketing-specific back-office tools needed to plan, manage, and execute programs and campaigns. Unbundled application areas:

- Project Management & Workflow
- Collaboration/Approvals
- Financial & Strategic Planning
- Procure-to-Pay
- Media Buying
- Calendar
- Digital Asset Management
- Reporting & Analysis
- Vendor Management

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Overcome MRM disconnect with business context

The process challenges are, more fundamentally, attributed to lack of operational philosophy for marketing.

With refinement of the conventional MRM thinking, we add clarity to what MRM is intended to be, and make it possible for marketing and IT to more easily agree on MRM priorities and their value within marketing operations. The definition on page 6 allows for a holistic approach, incorporating process—and therefore people—and technology for marketing and IT leaders to better align MRM to their operations planning function.

Improved Process Context

Marketing has historically struggled with process. Advisors to marketing—e.g., agencies, traditional consultants—have largely missed the mark. Agencies wholly focus on the creative and customer interaction, and traditional consultants apply managerial approaches—lean, six sigma, etc.—not perfectly suited for all marketing processes.

The process challenges are, more fundamentally, attributed to a lack of operational philosophy for marketing. As a result, marketers have not designed repeatable and sufficiently dynamic processes. Without a suitable operational philosophy—and associated processes—marketers have applied MRM in a supply chain context, sometimes resulting in expensive and poorly conceived implementations.

So what is the right process context to best deploy MRM? In marketing, each process area has uniqueness, each requiring very different capabilities. Some tools help marketing relate to their greater enterprise. Some tools are oriented for a small number of users to perform analysis. Other tools are oriented to manage the flow of work across many associates, vendors, and geographies, and still others must facilitate the asynchronous, iterative, and impromptu nature of creative development.

Unfortunately the bundled suite of capabilities challenges most organizations' ability to holistically support individual processes which necessarily step outside of the marketing function.

To rectify, marketing should apply the unbundled MRM application areas to individual process areas, and in doing so, better support very different activities with the best-suited tool(s).

To set context, we can think of a high-level process as shown in Figure 1. The diagram shows the process areas supported by each of the MRM application areas. Could your firm support MRM-like functionality with the tools it has today? If you could not implement new technologies, which marketing processes would remain unsupported?

Figure 1 - Process Areas and Enabling Applications
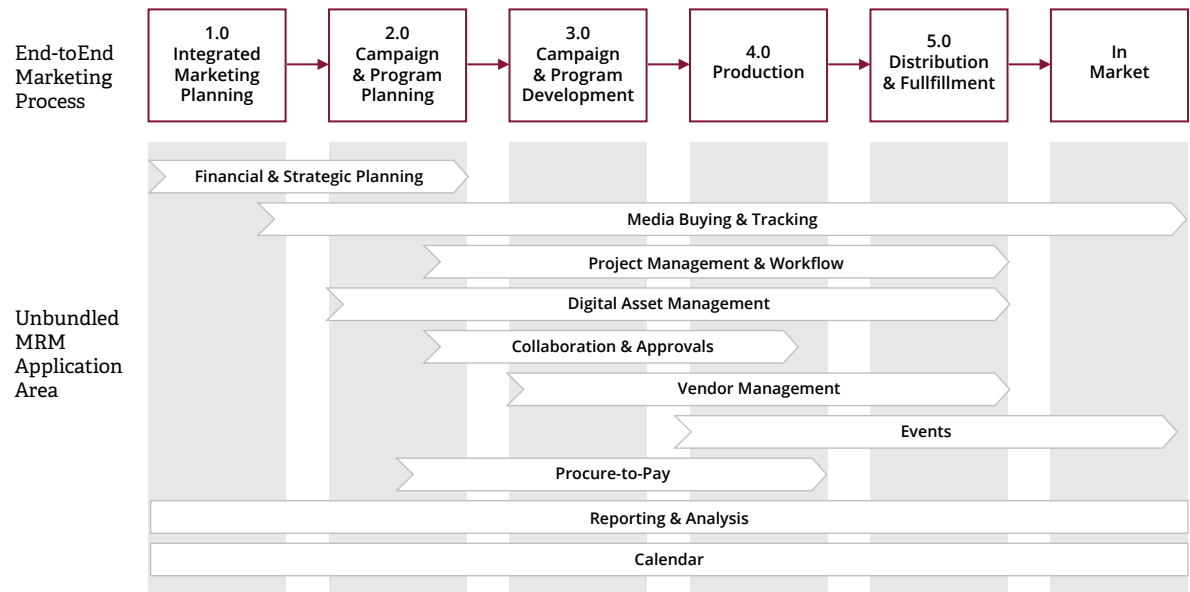
For all firms considering to implement (or re-implement) MRM, the better views of process it has defined, the better marketing and IT will be able to plan technology to meet the goals of its leaders.

Note that credence should be given to MRM as a configurable off-the-shelf (OTS) solution, not a pre-designed process. Each firm is very different and—no matter the software vendor's claims—there must be an emphasis on process design prior to technology implementation. Across dozens of implementations—large and small—we have seen technology first approaches result in fast but unsuccessful implementations, with a hangover for disgruntled users and disappointed sponsors.

Improved Application and Data Context

Large enterprises typically already have some flavors of MRM-like applications operating somewhere in their organizations. Many times the task at hand is to determine how to augment existing tools for current and planned environment. In response, we recommend unbundling self-contained suite of MRM functionality with common system classifications, providing context to better determine gaps and connect to the enterprise with more granular view of components. Advantages of this view are liberating for technology and data management:

Requirements rightfully become the basis for all technology decisions, versus the promise of a very broad OTS application to manage the whole business. For a given requirement, enablement may be evaluated against all available technology: already owned and potential OTS solutions, or best of breed selection at more granular, component level (see Figure 2).

If the enterprise manages financials with Oracle, then ensure marketing financial processes tightly integrate with already defined corporate financial structures. Similarly, if the enterprise uses Ariba for procurement, design marketing processes which take advantage of corporate procurement capabilities, but are still effective for marketing. There are advantages of OTS technology, but it is best to connect to the enterprise for financials and procurement.

## Figure 2 - Common Users and Functions to Manage the Back Office
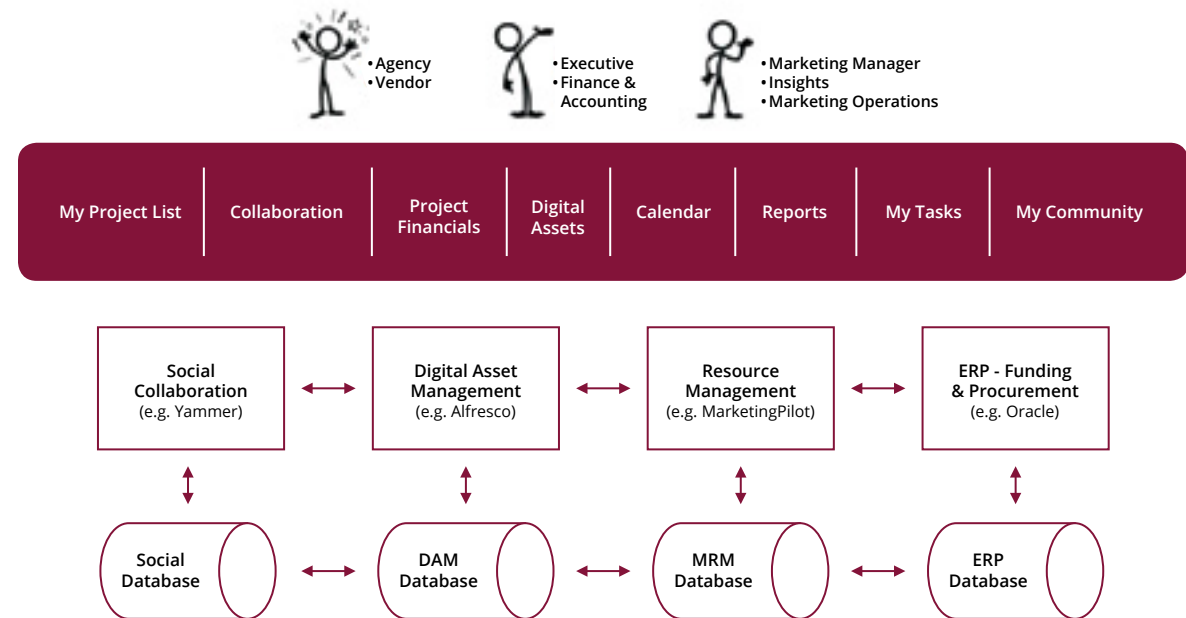
Ability to standardize data models across components. At the component level, each solution will operate on its own design, but in fact, most components can technically be designed on common/ shared standards. For marketing, the foundational standards include: campaign hierarchies, financial hierarchies, digital asset metadata, and customer/channel taxonomies (see Figure 3).

This component approach does not necessarily mean complex integrations are the answer. In fact, we recommend simplicity. Rely on a few simple connections, but enforce strong information standards across all ecosystem components. The most common MRM-related integrations undertaken are MRM to ERP—for financials and procurement, and MRM to DAM—for in-process and finished assets.

If treated as a deliberate design of all system components, integrations or not, marketing and IT can be nimble and manage the standards with a high degree of ease, connecting marketing to the enterprise and further avoiding marketing as an island unto itself.

Promotes usability by avoiding multiple entry points (with portals, mash-ups, etc.). Many firms have envisioned marketing nirvana—where every user has a portal with which to glean all relevant information in real time. While some have accomplished this, the required investment is too great for most. We therefore propose an approach where enterprises can leverage the tools they have today to provide a good user experience to those charged to drive revenue.

Figure 3 - Component Level View
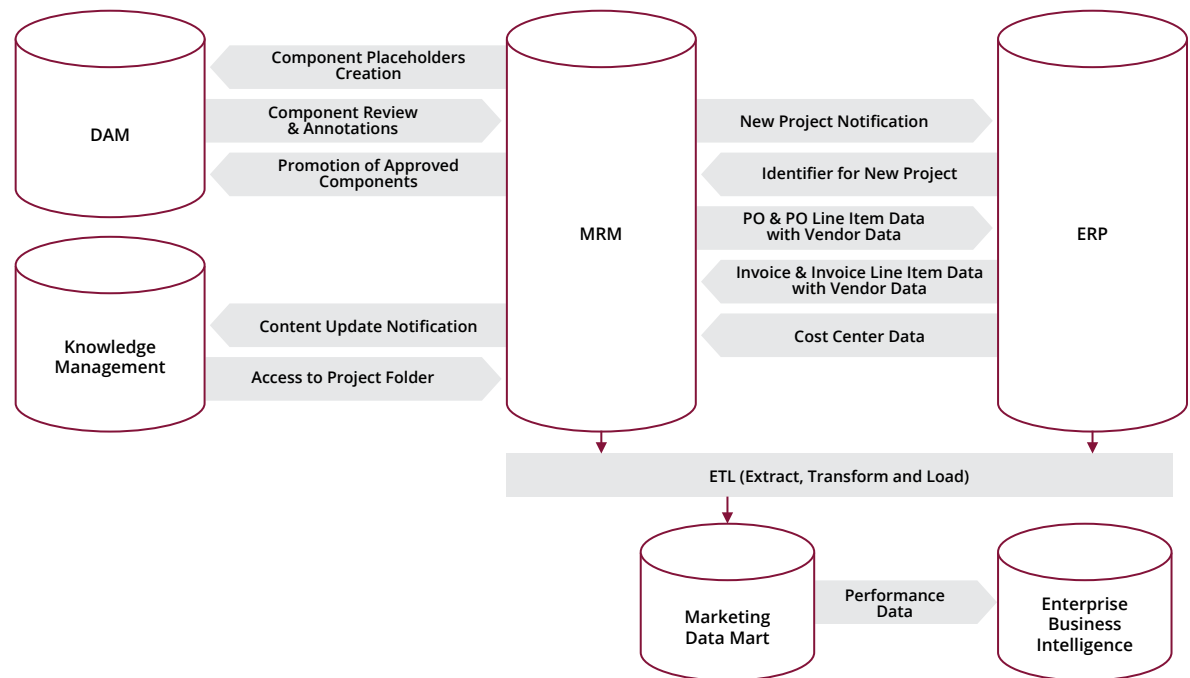
MRM technology is improving, but challenges persist

Stemming from the lack of clarity on how MRM fits within the greater ecosystem of individual marketers, the vendors in the market today have had to build solutions that serve complex and sometimes competing requirements. The result is that, while each tool has its distinct advantages, on the whole, the MRM category has not yet perfected capabilities in core areas.

Table 1: *Specific challenges in the application areas are listed in the following table:*

#	Unbundled Application Area	Aggregated Challenges Across Major Vendors
1	Project Management & Workflow	Important marketing channels (project types) not effectively addressed in most solutions • Events – Ability to group and manage range of event-related activities • Circular/Labels/Packaging – Ability to manage high volume versions on base project • Product information – Ability to associate static or dynamic content to base project and/or versions • Workflow (task assignment) only available at job level, not available for strategic planning • Extensive workflow functionality can lead to overly complex system, long implementation and low user adoption.
2	Collaboration/Approvals	• Limited integrated social interaction, a la Facebook, yammer • Limited ability to manage ideation • Rigid security model design, leaving it difficult to expand awareness beyond assigned team, or no security model leaving critical information at risk • Closed approval system, cannot extend approval requests to non-users • Audio and video markup functionality not available with all major vendors • Email notification inflexibility exists at system level, not chosen by user
3	Financial & Strategic Planning	Limited financial and marketing planning (despite suggestive names of many modules) • Functionality limited to storing a plan • Workflow limited to task execution, not available for planning cycles • Little integration with corporate planning systems (e.g., Hyperion) • Financials only available at job level
4	Procure-to-Pay	• Limited ability to manage media buying commitments • Limited ability to allocate media across executions • Limited ability to manage marketing fluidity across full lifecycle (plan > budget > commitment > PO > billing > payment > reconciliation

Table 1:

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#	Unbundled Application Area	Aggregated Challenges Across Major Vendors
5	Media	• Limited ability to manage media buys and/or allocate to discrete executions • Limited media planning integration to streamline media execution and connect media with developed content.
6	Calendar	• Planning calendars difficult to read and understand, lack functionality • What could be a valuable tool for marketing organization often not used/usable • Campaign/program level calendars often missing or report only
7	Digital Asset Management	• Limited functionality for versioning • Limited functionality for storage, retrieval, archival, and search • Limited functionality for rights management or usage tracking
8	Vendor Management	• Limited functionality for vendor performance tracking • Limited RFP management
9	Reporting & Analysis	• Limited audit trail functionality • Antiquated architecture and therefore difficult to extract data • Operational data availability closely tied to workflow design

Beyond these application area challenges, more generalized challenges, for some vendors, include:

- User Interfaces are not intuitive and are often overwhelming to marketers. Users find navigation to be cumbersome, and implementations therefore require heavy training to ensure adoption.

- True SaaS not available for all leading applications, which increases installation time/expense/complexity, and results in high switching cost.

- Platform architectures are not open (not modern Web services), therefore integrations, customizations and operations are overly complex and expensive.

- Program > Campaign > Project hierarchies are inflexible, meaning workflow automation and calendar functionality are only available at specific levels—tasks or activities.

When evaluating MRM solutions for your organization, explore each of these areas with your short list to ensure the tools can meet your firm's needs. The challenges listed here are aggregated across all vendors. Some vendors may be less challenged than others in certain areas. But make no mistake, while challenges do exist, we believe that, if applied the right way, MRM can be a very valuable toolset to further the planning and execution capabilities across the marketing organization. It's all about setting the right context with rapid and smart planning.

In conclusion

Thoughtful consideration of marketing's extended requirements...ensures maximum value.

Improved process and technology context for MRM ensures marketing and IT frame how MRM can further the goals of their leaders with greater confidence. The result is the application of functionality to areas of best fit for each tool, as each tool excels in different areas. Thoughtful consideration of marketing's extended requirements—those that reach into the enterprise to connect with finance, sales, products, and such—ensures maximum value is extracted from the existing applications in the ecosystem.

About Zee Jay Digital

Zee Jay Digital is focused on the transformation of marketing. We are built to address the industry's challenge to deploy marketing technology for benefits we believe now possible.

Our consultants have the broad experience needed to unify marketing disciplines — blending organization, marketing and technology strategies into vision and execution, while enhancing the customers' journey.