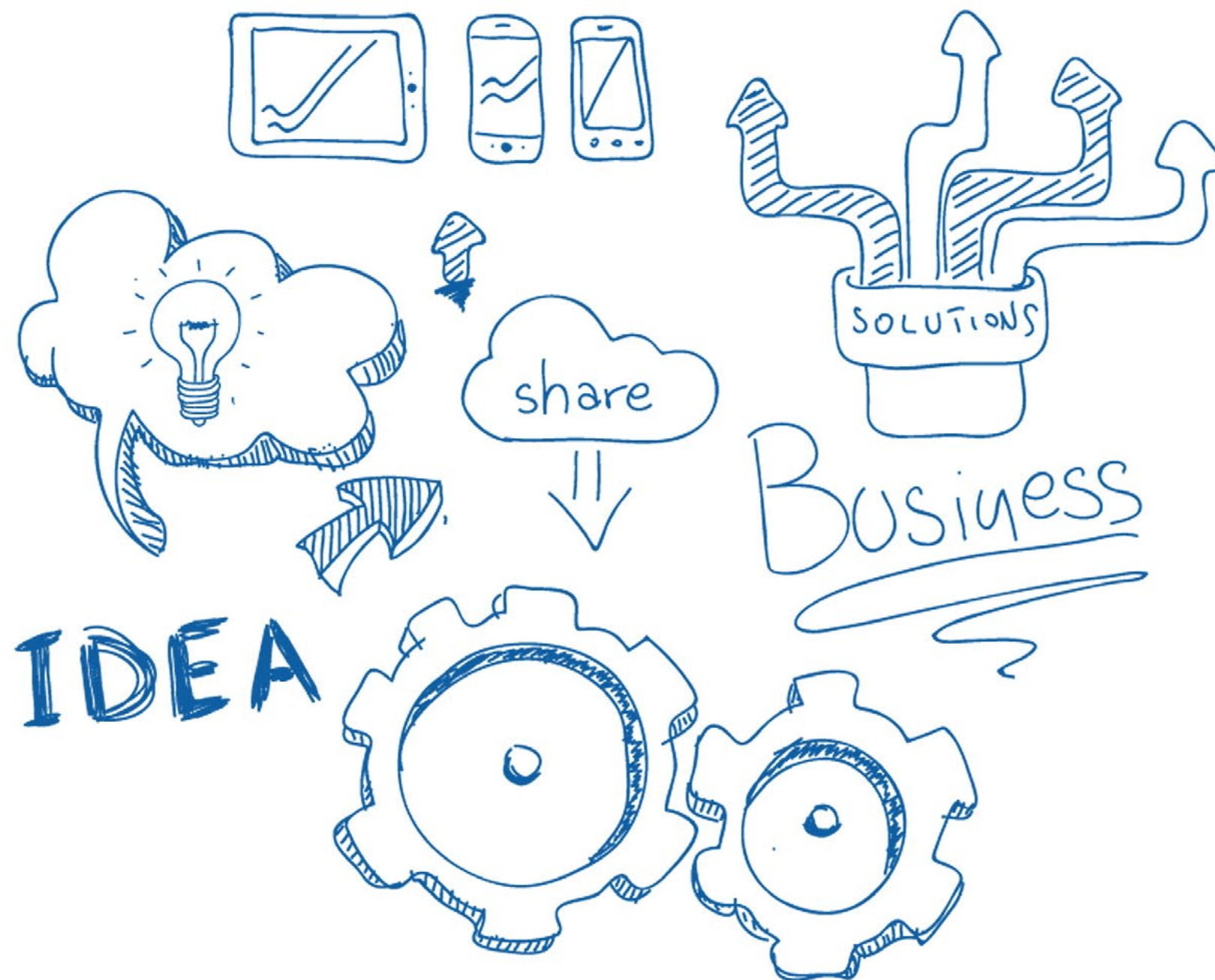


Choosing the Right Implementation Partner



Provided by

bubblebox



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Content Marketing

What it is, why it works

Content Marketing is redefining lead generation and customer engagement. It's described by The Content Marketing Institute as "a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience - and ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."

Technology is the driving force behind all great content marketing initiatives, and its allure is clear; the ability to segment, personalize and automate communications has proven to turn prospects into leads, leads into customers, and customers into lifelong, repeat buyers. Even more alluring is the ability to gather real-time analytics on content performance and return on investment (ROI), arming businesses with the insights to test, gauge, and continuously improve.

But here's the catch: content marketing ROI doesn't just happen.

You need to establish a clear
roadmap for success.



The Trouble with Content Marketing

Entering the world of content marketing is an exciting endeavor for any business, and it's easy to become enchanted by what features the technology will deliver. While advanced features are impressive, most users will not use these features within the first 12 months of selecting a tool; by then, these impressive features will likely become commonplace with all available platforms on the market.

Waters get murky when companies dive into content marketing head first. They invest in a powerful technology platform under the assumption that their IT and Marketing teams have the skills to seamlessly implement and optimize the solution.

Selecting the right platform
is only 30% of a successful
content marketing journey.

The other 70% lies in
ensuring the technology works
for your business.

As emergent technologies, content marketing tools demand specialized skills, best practice knowledge and technical expertise that the average marketer or IT specialist simply won't have.

Circle Research reveals that 61% of B2B marketers described the implementation experience as "difficult", while 51% argued that choosing a supplier who provides ongoing consultancy would have made the process a lot easier. Organizations that endeavor to implement a content marketing platform without the necessary skills and expertise typically encounter bigger problems in the long run.

How does a poor implementation impact your business?

- Increased costs
- Delayed campaigns
- Messy data
- Project failures
- Averse user adoption
- Suboptimal ROI



Invest in Success

Work with an Implementation Partner

Avoid the risks

You can avoid the risks associated with a poor implementation by working with a reputable implementation partner. There are numerous consultancies and agencies geared towards helping organizations provision the software and define a clear strategy for maximum ROI.

In case we haven't stressed it enough: implementing a content marketing solution is a big step, especially for teams that don't have the in-house resource. From CRM integration to adding tracking code to your website, email authentication to setting up users - the onboarding process demands a high level of skill and expertise.

Beyond technical configuration, a successful implementation demands a comprehensive understanding of your business and its content marketing goals. The right partner should work to understand what your current tools give you, what your current challenges are, and identify what gaps are present.

Strategy is everything

Only 38% of B2B companies feel like their content marketing efforts are effective, which comes as no surprise when you consider that 48% of B2B marketers do not have a documented content strategy.

They should work alongside you to establish a strategic roadmap and offer post-implementation services to ensure continuous improvement of your chosen solution.

Working with an implementation partner makes a lot of sense when it comes to getting up and running with a new content marketing solution; however, with so many options on the market, it can be challenging to find a consultancy that's right for your business. Like any relationship, sometimes the chemistry just isn't there.

Knowing what to look for in an implementation partner can save you from making a decision that sets your business up for failure. If you want to excel in content marketing and achieve the ROI of your dreams, you need a seasoned expert on your team.

Qualities to look for in an Implementation Partner

1 They relate strategy to the product sooner rather than later

2 They bring the "services" component to the table early

3 They know marketing

4 They involve key stakeholders early

5 They dig deep into your data

6 They are agile and innovative

7 They don't leave you hanging post implementation

1 They relate strategy to the product soon rather than later

Implementation Strategy

Beware of consultancies that take a purely prescriptive approach to implementation; when it comes to onboarding, there's no such thing as "one-size-fits-all"; every business has different requirements which impact the way your platform will be provisioned.

The right implementation partner endeavours to understand what you want to get out of your content marketing solution early on, so that they can configure an onboarding strategy that's tailor made for your needs. Think long term: talk to them about your content marketing goals for the first 6 months as opposed to the first 60 or 90 days. Most vendors advocate that the software will be provisioned within 48 hours of signing the agreement, but unless you have a clear implementation strategy, you probably won't gain value from the solution for awhile.

The best consultancies will supply you with a detailed implementation plan outlining the deliverables of the service engagement so that you know exactly what to expect; steer clear of partners who offer "full-service" implementations which remove you and your organization's key stakeholders from the onboarding process.

Reputable consultancies will never conduct an implementation for you. As the old saying goes: "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."



Implementation partners who are invested in your long-term success will make you get your hands dirty.

They'll walk you through every stage of the onboarding process, but won't perform tasks on your behalf (unless absolutely necessary). They'll provide you with resources to prepare for each session, and hold you accountable for your own learning. This is how an effective partner ensures your team's success.

Taking a hands-on approach to implementation gives you confidence to use and optimize the tool long after the experts leave.

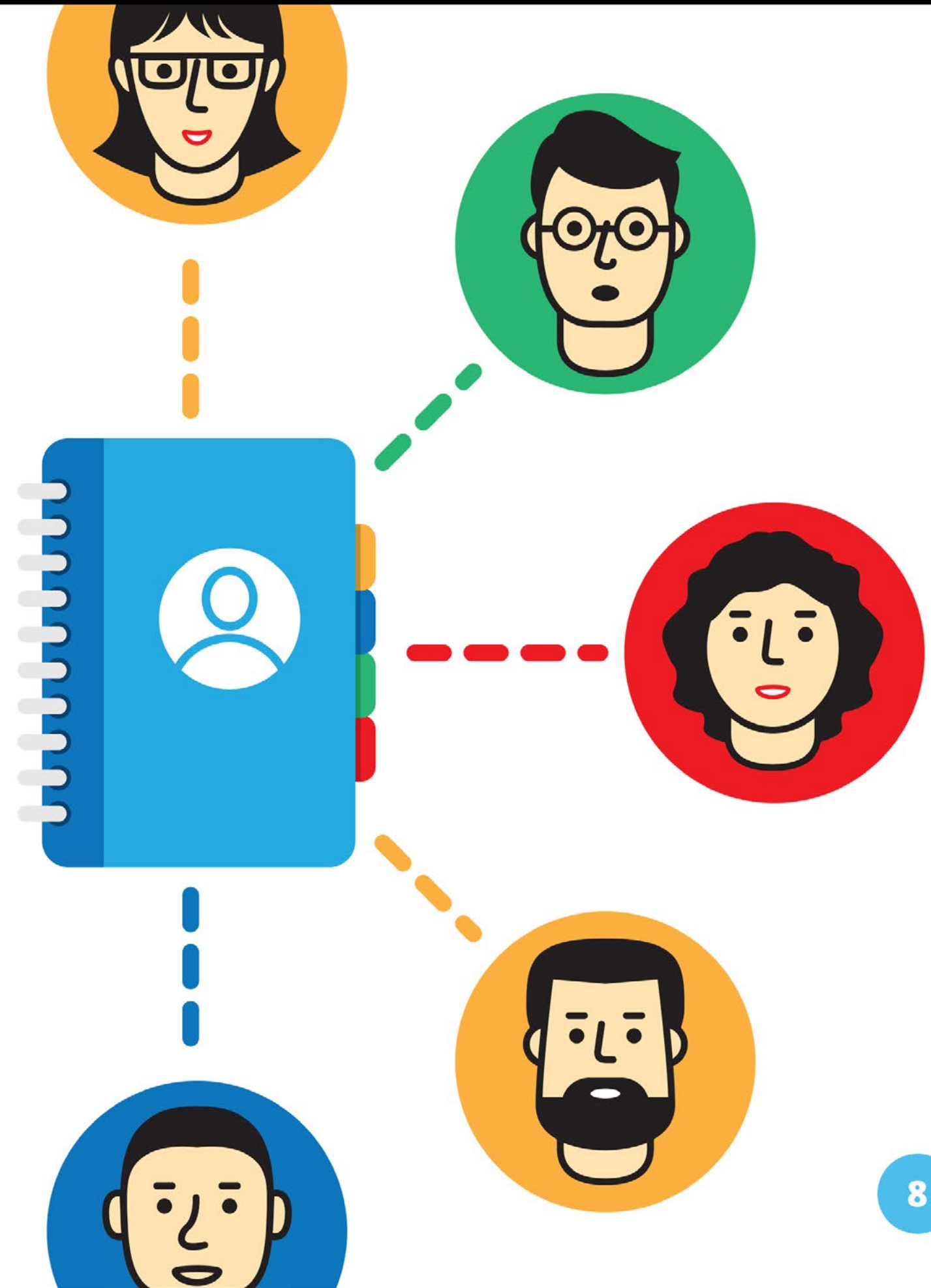
Contact Strategy

Choose an implementation partner that's willing to get into the details about who your business is targeting - and why. Developing a detailed contact strategy is critical to your content marketing success. Salesforce Marketing Cloud describes an effective contact strategy as "what we are going to send, who we are going to send it to, and how we will send it."

A successful contact strategy defines your buyer personas and gets to the essence of the types of information each customer segment wants to receive; it determines the cadence and frequency of your messaging and lays the groundwork for KPIs.

Work with an implementation partner that offers more than technical expertise; agencies that offer strategic services will ensure you develop a contact strategy that actually works.

The right consultancy will have experience working with brands or industries similar to your own, and will therefore bring a deep understanding of what strategic approach is going to deliver maximum ROI.



2 They bring the “services” component to the table early

You can't choose the right partner by only speaking to the sales team. As you know, “sales” are not the “doers” in the story - neither are Solution Engineers or Account Managers. Sales are excellent at ensuring that the prospect - you - are informed of the latest and greatest platform features, and all proclaim to have the best solution. Once the “deal” is done, they'll pass your information over to the implementers - also termed “Client Services,” with whom you'll spend most of the ongoing engagement.

Before you agree to any partnership, speak to the implementation team and ask them questions that will help you make an informed decision. All too often companies ask the wrong questions in the search for the right partner. For example, asking about the number of implementations they have performed won't tell you anything about the quality of the work; asking about the complexity or success of those implementations will offer more insight on the partner's ability to meet your requirements.



The decision makers within your organization may ask about whether the Client Services team is certified in your chosen content marketing tool; what they don't realize is that technical designations are fairly easy to acquire and don't say much about a partner's ability to conduct a successful implementation. In other words, a certified partner can still perform a lousy service engagement.

So how do you assess a partner's ability to perform a successful implementation? Ask for a live demo. It's easy to hide incompetencies behind screenshots, but live demos allow you to assess the implementer's skills and knowledge - in action.

A live demo also presents the perfect opportunity for you to evaluate the implementer's communications skills; if they struggle to talk you through processes or break down complex technical concepts in layman's terms, you probably won't gain much value from the implementation.

In addition to assessing communication skills, use the demo to evaluate the implementer's methodology - are they rigid or flexible? As we'll explain in #4, it's important to choose a partner that's agile; what worked for one client might not work for your business. The right partner should be willing to modify its methods in order to accommodate your organizational requirements - remember, there's no such thing as “one size fits all” when it comes to implementation!

Another relevant evaluation criteria pertains to the level of support you will have access to during and after the service engagement. Ask Client Services about the level of support you will have access to and the average response time for phone and email queries. As we explain in #7, post-implementation support is crucial; agencies that don't offer anything in this regard aren't invested in your long term success.

"In order for consultants and internal people to work as one team, they need to share the same values and work culture. A highly collaborative implementation partner may not work well within a hierarchical client culture and vice versa. Chemistry between team members also plays a part in customer experience and should be taken into account."

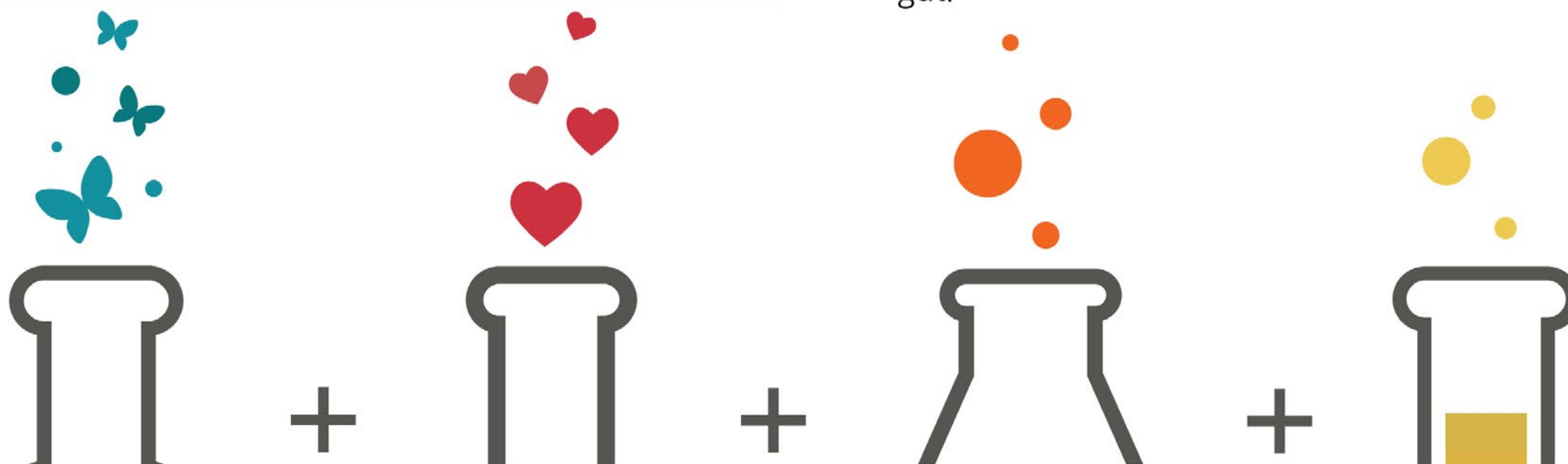
Additional factors to consider:

Business savvy: Do they understand your organization's business requirements? Do they approach your content marketing platform as a business solution or a technical solution? Do they have experience with project management? How do they handle change management?

Cost: How does the scope of the implementation relate to cost? How does the cost compare to other partners and what they deliver?

Consultancy: Are they familiar with best practices? Do they ask a lot of questions? Do their questions challenge your thinking and inspire breakthrough ideas?

Culture: An implementation requires that you work closely with other people. Therefore, it's important that your company values and culture align with that of your chosen partner. Sometimes it's simply a matter of chemistry: either you have it or you don't - go with your gut!



3 They know marketing

Too many partners talk about implementation as a prescriptive process. Telling you which buttons to press - or providing a few landing pages, forms or email templates - won't deliver results. You need a high degree of consultancy behind the onboarding process to ensure the platform is configured specifically for your business.

An implementation partner with roots in marketing will be able to guide you on best practices to optimize your chosen platform.

Agencies who take a purely technical approach won't be able to advise on what subject lines yield the highest open rates or what content drives engagement for bottom-funnel leads. Choosing an implementation partner who truly knows marketing will accelerate your ROI.

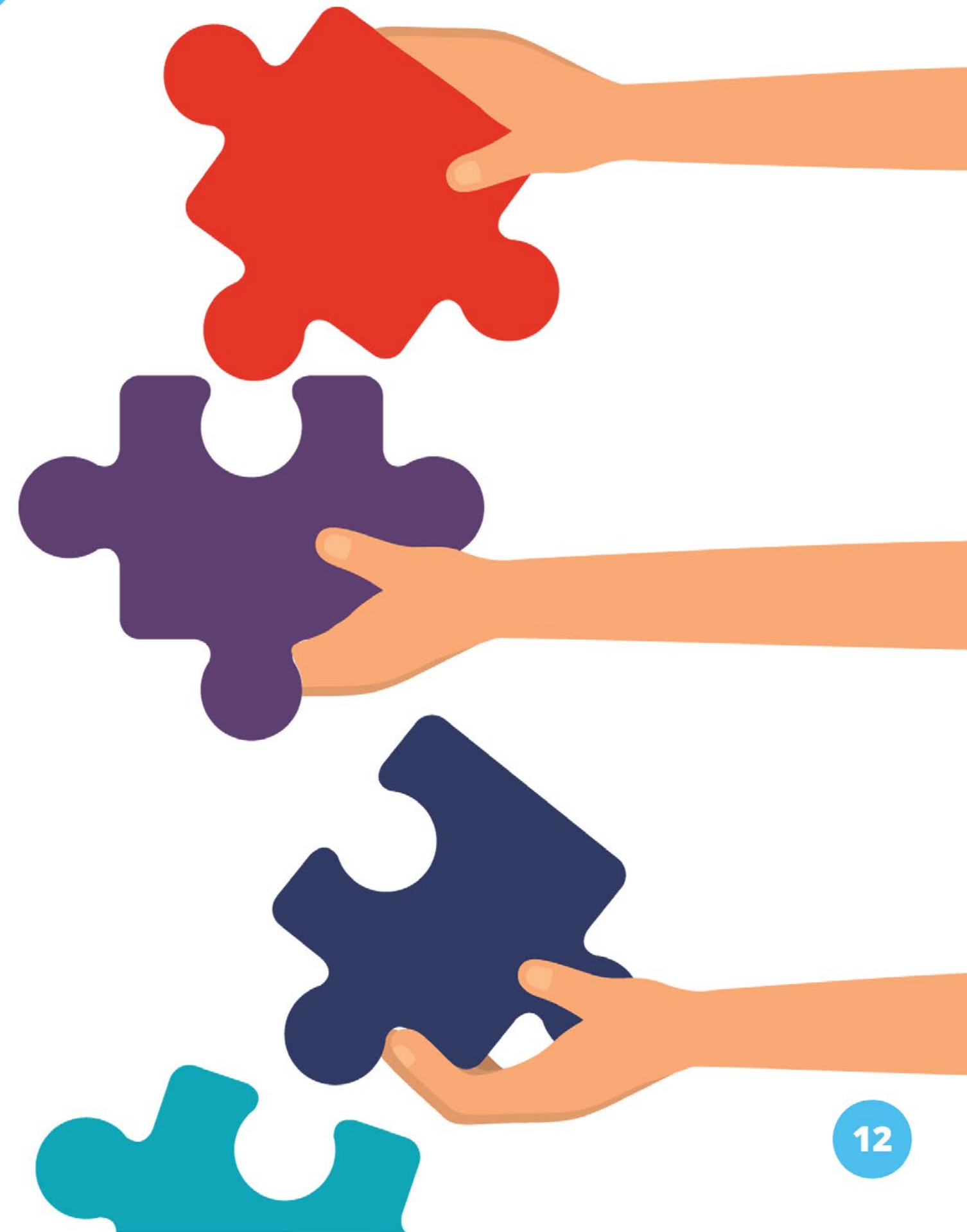


4 They involve key stakeholders early

Too many content marketing platforms are chosen in silo, and it is often seen as the marketer's job to implement the solution. The success of your content marketing program depends on having the right people involved in the onboarding process. Pardot suggests that implementation be managed from the top-down in any given organization:

"executives need to demonstrate the importance of the solution for the success of the employees as well as the company, explaining the features of the platform to employees and specifically to the users."

It's an implementation partner's job to involve key stakeholders at the right stages of the onboarding process. It's obvious that executives or decision makers need to be involved for buy-in, but what about the sales team? Oftentimes sales teams miss the point of content marketing; they don't see its initial value and the impact that a successful program can have on the company's bottom line - and their individual wallets. The ability to automate sales processes through the production of timely, relevant content is a game-changer in so many ways; it improves sales communication, accelerates the funnel and produces qualified leads. With an effective content marketing solution, sales and marketing are aligned - making it easier for both departments to do their jobs.



Pardot offers a list of **other stakeholders** that could be involved during the onboarding process:

Marketing Team

Responsible for email creative, form/landing page look and feel, lead flow process, nurturing program design, PPC integration.

Webmaster

Responsible for placing JavaScript tracking code within the element of the webpage, implementing iframe code for Pardot forms.

IT Admin

Responsible for creation of vanity domain record (e.g. www2.yourdomain.com), implementing email authentication (DKIM and SPF).

Marketing Agency

Responsible for overall strategy for online marketing and lead management/nurturing, and for creative for landing page and email assets.

Sales Leadership

Responsible for coordinating sales training, adoption of email plug-in, working with marketing to set lead assignment processes.

CRM Admin

Responsible for installing Pardot's CRM application, setting up custom fields/layout, adding activities iframe.



5 They dig deep into your data

Talk of content marketing solutions inevitably lead to talk of data integration - and how big of a headache it is. In fact, data integration is one of the most common challenges among users of marketing automation technology. According to Circle Research,

“51% of B2B marketers “describe data integration as a challenge.”

If you're using a CRM, it pays to integrate the platform with your content marketing solution in order to sync contacts and leads and gain deeper insights on prospect activity. Ensure that you choose an implementation partner who has documented experience performing integrations with your chosen CRM. A successful integration will ensure that your data is available for use in the shortest possible timeframe.

Acquiring net new leads is often seen as the initial metric for a successful content marketing program. The right implementation partner will help you sift through your current database in order to uncover deeper insights on your current prospects and customers. It's important to determine the depth of your data; if your data is thin deep - how will you segment?

Working with an expert to sort out your current data stack is the key to ensuring new data is useful.

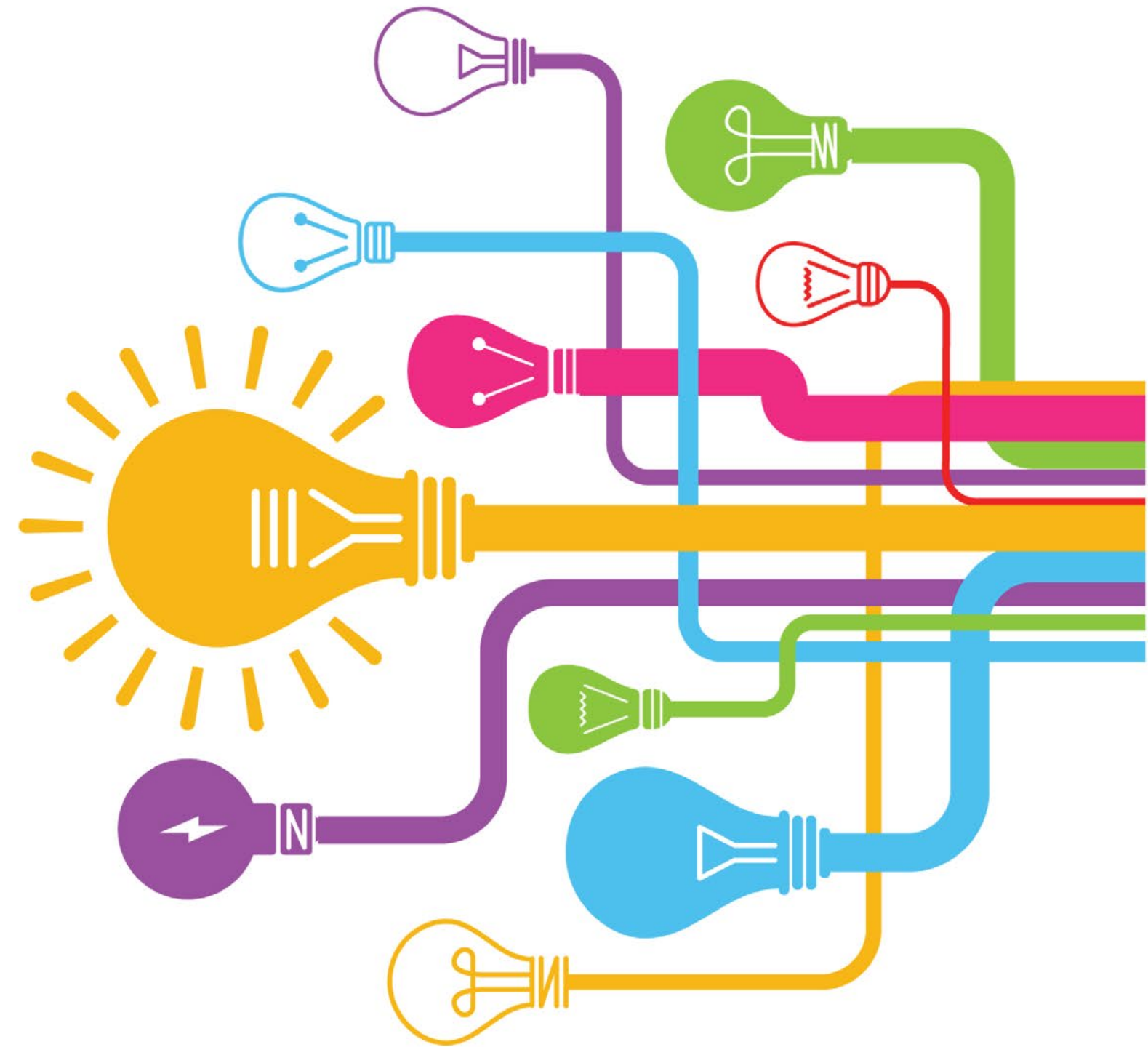


6 They are agile and innovative

Innovations within your chosen content marketing platform happen faster than you think. Solutions from the world's biggest vendors are updated on a cyclical basis, making it crucial that you choose an implementation partner that can support these regular changes.

Choosing the Right Partner...

Assessing a partner's ability to handle innovation is easy: simply go to their website. Do they have a blog? An implementation partner that maintains an up to date blog demonstrates thought leadership and a willingness to stay ahead of the curve. High quality agencies strive to keep their audience informed of the latest industry innovations; a willingness to share accumulated knowledge through a blog or other relevant mediums is indicative of a partner who's equipped to handle innovations within your chosen solution.



7 They don't leave you hanging post implementation

This is a big one. There's nothing worse than an implementation partner that leaves you out to dry once the service engagement is complete. Before you sign on the dotted line, it's important to ask a potential partner about the strategic services and consultancy that will be available to you post-implementation.

While you may feel confident with your ability to use your solution after the implementation, the onboarding process typically only covers the tool's basic functionalities. As you gain more experience with the solution, you'll likely want to explore more complex features; the best agencies offer a variety of training and strategic services that enable your organization to expand the value of your content marketing tool.

Make the most of the implementation process - before and after - by building a relationship with your implementation partner.

Whether you're looking for a refresher on the basics, campaign management or in-depth training on advanced features - the right partner will have programs available to support your continued learning. Content marketing is a journey; implementation partners that don't offer post-onboarding services aren't invested in your long term success.



How You Win with the right partner

Choosing to work with an implementation partner is all about maximizing your investment in content marketing technology and bringing value to your business as quickly as possible. When you consider all of the moving parts involved in a successful content marketing program, it's no wonder why companies who tackle implementation on their own face a gruelling uphill battle. From a time, cost and resource perspective, it's wise to seek the services of a partner that's well versed in your chosen platform from a technical and strategic standpoint.

Here are the key benefits of working with an implementation partner:

They're experts

This is a no-brainer. One of the benefits of working with a seasoned professional is not having to waste time figuring out the best way to execute a task with your chosen content marketing solution. With any platform there are numerous means to the same end; reputable agencies understand best practices and therefore offer the most efficient pathways to great results. Working with an expert also means that they'll get the implementation right - the first time. Endeavouring to "do it yourself" involves a lot of guesswork, a high margin for error, and greater costs in the long run.





They **inspire** you to **think** differently

According to The Economist book 'Business Consulting: A Guide to How It Works and How to Make it Work', good consultants add value by encouraging you to think outside the box: "they can act like a spark within your organization and force you to challenge your assumptions." Conversely, "not-so-good consultants just confirm what you already know and do. It is then a matter of imitation and not adding any value, a waste of energy and money." While it can be reassuring to work with an implementation partner who can validate what you already knew, the right partner goes the extra mile to inspire disruptive thinking and uncover value in your solution that you didn't even know was there.

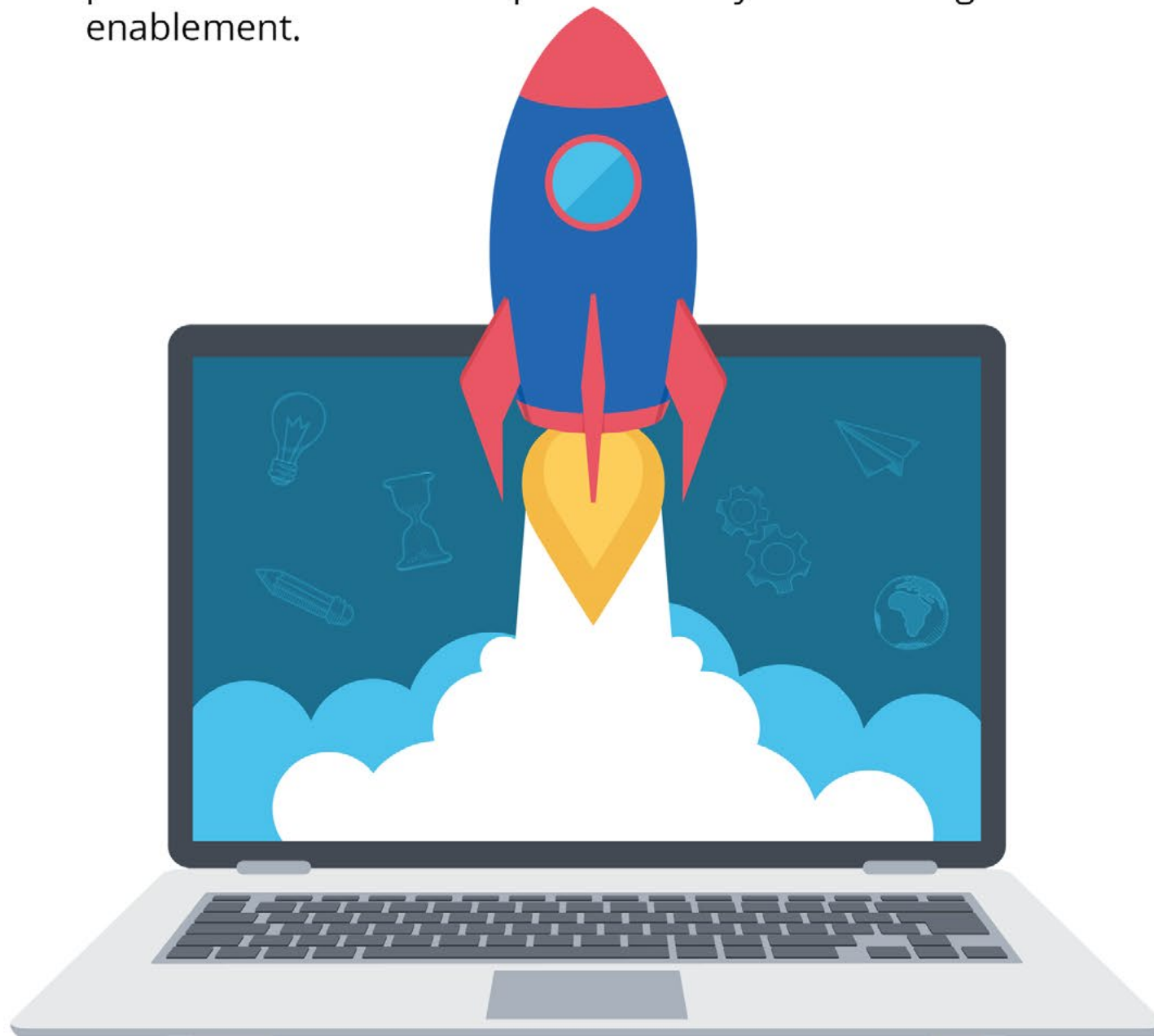
They're **technical** and **strategic**

For most organizations, implementing a content marketing solution is a huge leap. The right partner becomes an arm on your team with a breadth of specialized capabilities in tow; they're the one's steering the ship to ensure that your solution delivers the results you promised to your organization. An expert helps you blend the technical with the strategic to ensure that your solution has a transformative impact on your business.



They're fast

Working with a partner with a proven track record of successful implementations means that there's no guesswork involved; in fact, they could probably conduct the whole service engagement in their sleep! Reputable consultants understand your need to get that expected ROI as quickly as possible, and therefore endeavour to implement your solution as quickly and seamlessly as possible - without compromise to your learning and enablement.



They have foresight

As with any technology platform, issues arise. Unresolved errors that occur during the implementation process can have damaging, long-term impacts on your content marketing program, and can breed a lot of frustration within your organization. There's something to be said for consultants who have implemented countless solutions similar to your own; they have the foresight to avoid common pitfalls, and the expertise to solve problems should they occur.

They **save** you **money** in the long run

Working with an implementation partner gives you laser sharp focus. There's no time wasted trying to "figure things out" on your own - saving you money in the form of opportunity cost. The experts arm you with the tools, best practice knowledge and skill set to operate your solution efficiently, laying the foundation for you to gain the highest possible ROI. Increased efficiency means that you can start executing professional content marketing campaigns in the shortest possible timeframe, empowering your organization to attract more qualified leads and close sales at lightning speed.



Are you ready to set your team up for Success?

Content Marketing is supposed to be a solution to a problem, not a problem in itself. Choosing the right implementation partner ensures that you get off to a smooth start and primes your organization for long-term success. Taking the time to find a partnership that aligns with your business requirements is an important part of making your content marketing aspirations a reality.

In your search for the right implementation partner, consider the following questions:

- Do they relate strategy to your chosen solution?
- Do they involve the services team sooner rather than later?
- Are they well versed in marketing best practices?
- Will they involve your key stakeholders at the right time?
- Are they data-driven?
- Are they agile and innovative?
- Do they offer post-implementation support and training?

About Bubblebox

Bubblebox deploys marketing cloud services to leading global brands. We understand the needs of the modern marketer and offer an impartial approach to delivering on-site and email personalization initiatives that drive revenues.

Through cost-effective training, efficient implementation programs and advanced consultative techniques, we enable clients to achieve their goals fast. We are Marketing Cloud Experts.



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