



Marketing Teams and Talent Renewal:

Building High-Performing, ROI-Driven Teams After the Storm

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Marketing Didn't Break. The Model Did.

In recent years, the challenges marketing teams face haven't been about a lack of great people — they've been about the way teams are structured, supported, and expected to deliver. Agencies have often become further removed from day-to-day business needs, while in-house models have sometimes prioritised speed of hiring over building capability.

At the same time, the pace of change has accelerated: budgets have tightened, AI is shifting workflows, and demand cycles rarely pause long enough to reset. Many teams have kept going, but often at the expense of continuity, confidence, and sustainability. This report exists to help organisations build something stronger — not to return to what was, but to design what's next.

The Shift: From Talent as Headcount to Talent as Infrastructure

The most resilient marketing organisations in 2026 are not asking, "Who do we hire next?"

They are asking:

- How should work actually flow through this organisation?
- Which capabilities must live inside — and which should plug in?
- How do we scale output without burning out judgment?
- How do we design teams that survive volatility, not just growth cycles?

This is not a talent question. It's an operating model question. Talent, today, is infrastructure. It is the system that converts intent into execution, execution into learning, and learning into sustained performance. When that system is poorly designed, no amount of hiring or AI will fix it.

At MASH, we work inside marketing organisations every day — embedded in tools, workflows, rituals, and real constraints.

What we see consistently is this:
Most organisations don't have a talent problem.
They have a capability architecture problem.

Teams are overloaded not because
they lack people, but because:

- Capabilities are fragmented across vendors
- Decision-making sits too far from execution
- Learning resets every time a partner changes
- Output is optimised, but judgment is not protected

This report reflects how high-performing teams are being rebuilt from the inside out — not through outsourcing or seat-filling, but through integrated capability design.

What This Report Is — and What It Is Not

This is not:

- A defence of traditional agencies
- A pitch for in-housing
- A case for more headcount
- A manifesto about AI replacing people

It is:

- A practical POV on rebuilding marketing engines after disruption
- A framework for architecting teams around outcomes, not org charts
- A perspective shaped by lived, embedded work — not theory alone
- A guide to designing talent systems that compound value over time

The sections that follow unpack how leading organisations are rethinking talent, augmentation, and team architecture, and how MASH helps operationalise this shift without breaking what already works.

Read this report not as a set of ideas, but as a design logic for how modern marketing teams now need to be built.





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Introduction: Marketing Teams and Talent Renewed, Sustainably

Today's marketing conditions have changed: AI pressure, budget scrutiny, layoff fatigue, and a marketplace where marketing ecosystems are no longer “nice to have” but central to brand growth. In this environment, talent is your unfair advantage in the consumer landscape – if you design it intentionally.

After years of layoffs, restructures, and operating in survival mode, businesses across industries are now asking the same question: What does a sustainable talent and resourcing strategy look like? In this quarter's report, we unpack how brands can rebuild their talent engines – this time with more clarity, intention, and business ROI in mind.

At MASH, we believe this moment requires more than rethinking how organisations recruit full-time employees. It calls for re-architecting teams, relying on inbound capabilities, and reinvesting in talent ecosystems that can flex across business cycles. From creative and strategy to influencer marketing and innovation, this report explores what the next generation of augmented teams looks like – and how MASH is helping businesses upgrade from within.

This report is mainly written for CMOs, Marketing Directors, Marketing Managers and anyone responsible for building teams to solve marketing challenges from communications, influencer marketing, and creative, from ideation to execution, all the way to long-term maintenance and optimisation of programmes. Especially in times where marketing is requiring faster operation than ever before, often in real-time, always-on, to navigate the global audience demands.



Why Your Talent and Resource Strategy Needs Reinvention in 2026?

Over the last few years, marketing and media teams have faced challenging times.

- **Large-scale layoffs and restructuring** across entertainment, media, and marketing – over 17,000 jobs cut in US entertainment and media in 2025 alone, an 18% increase on 2024. A ripple effect that always reaches the EU and the APAC region.
- **AI-driven headcount pressure** – up to 36% of CMOs expect to reduce marketing staff in the next 12–24 months due to AI and efficiency mandates.
- **Burnout at record levels** – around 70% of professionals in media, marketing, and creative sectors in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US report experiencing burnout in the past 12 months. A number that doesn't seem to be lowering.

The result: many teams are running leaner on paper, but heavier in reality, delivering more with fewer resources. Patching up talent structures with old ways cannot be allowed to happen because of a strong sense of “never again!” when thinking back to the layoff and restructuring years. We all have seen firsthand what it does to people!

This is the moment to redesign the talent operating engine, not just refill the seats. Or worse, expect the overloaded internal talent system to carry to business demands without additional support.



Redefining the Core Concepts

Before we go and address these areas in more detail and come forward with solutions, we also want to redefine a few basics for the 2026 reality.

What is Talent in Marketing?

In a modern marketing organisation, talent is not just “headcount”. Talent is the engine of ROI: it is how ideas become campaigns, how campaigns become results, and how results become successful programmes.

Talent is not just about who you hire internally. It’s the marketing team architecture you build, the energy you protect, and the systems (partners and technology) you invest in to make the work sustainable. In 2026, the question to ask is: “What is the makeup of my resources across internal full-time teams, agency partners and technology?”

What Is Augmentation of Marketing Capabilities?

Augmentation has been around for decades and is now a mainstream workforce strategy. It’s the practice of expanding your internal team with external specialist talent embedded into brands’ teams (on-site or remote) to extend skills, capacity and execution. It keeps accountability in-house while providing flexibility, scalability, and access to specialist skills without long recruitment cycles and permanent overhead costs.

Globally, augmentation and hybrid models have moved from fringe tactic to mainstream operating strategy. Hybrid and embedded models are increasingly positioned as the “third option” between fully in-house and fully outsourced, combining the speed and brand intimacy of internal teams with the specialist depth and agility of agencies.



For CMOs and CFOs, the ROI of augmented teams typically shows up in five places:

- **Speed to Market.** Embedded, augmented teams shorten the distance between idea and execution by working inside the brand's systems and approvals. Proximity delivers both speed, quality and deep understanding, which we like to refer to as "MASHers get you half-sentence" effect.
- **Cost Flexibility.** Brands can scale up or down based on pipeline, seasonal spikes, or experimentation – without long-term headcount commitments or severance risk.
- **Access to Specialist Capabilities.** Brands gain access to niche skills (e.g. creator economy operations, newsroom-like content engines, AI-assisted creative workflows) that would be expensive or slow to build internally. Also, using external expertise helps to build, test, and systemise new functions before deciding what to fully internalise.
- **Higher Output Without Burnout.** Augmented partner teams absorb extra volume and complexity, reducing overload for core teams and decreasing the burnout-linked performance drop.
- **Better Alignment to Brand & Business.** Unlike traditional outsourcing or vendor models, augmentation keeps accountability, decision-making, and learning loops inside the organisation, so knowledge compounds instead of leaking away.

Historically, augmentation = "we need more people, fast." We have been moving away from the "extra pair of hands" and "bums on seats" concept and ideology towards a strategic capability layer. Augmentation is making a comeback in a new suit.

The future of augmentation is not just plugging headcount gaps – it's about architecting teams and talent. Companies that are moving towards a blended workforce: core internal full-time teams + embedded specialists + partners (incl. technology), will be operating within one ecosystem, in one rhythm, with unified and seamless operations, communication and ways of working.

This isn't outsourcing. It's organisational upgrading. At MASH, we exist to give brands the talent and workflows they need to move faster, think sharper and reduce burnout.

These are the foundations for team architecture.



Introducing – MASH Team Architecture for Building High-Performing Client Partner Teams

Most organisations don't have a talent shortage. They have a capability clarity problem.

There, we said it. This is why the call for sustainable team architecture is becoming so important.

It helps internal teams identify who does what, including what should be kept in-house and what should be delivered by agency partner teams. How work moves and who is moving it, and how capabilities cluster around business outcomes throughout the seasons of marketing projects and programmes.

At MASH, we approach team architecture through an outcome-first design, and it starts with the business questions:

- What are we actually trying to solve? (e.g. "Increase creator-led share of voice in APAC" or "Reduce campaign cycle time from 16 to 8 weeks")
- What capabilities are required to do that consistently, not just once?

High-performing marketing teams are moving away from rigid hierarchies towards cross-functional talent and resource engines that are:

- Built around problems to solve, e.g. "Influencer Marketing Engine and OS (operating system) for Brand X" for short-mid-long-term?
- Resourced with multidimensional marketing talent who are project management extraordinaire to be able to navigate the changing landscape of marketing programmes and business goals over time, moving seamlessly from one business requirement to another.
- Supported by clear processes, dashboards, and feedback loops with their partner organisations to clearly track the input, output, performance and impact of the extended workforces.

It All Starts with **The MASH Method™**

DISCOVER

1. Discover

We discover the real problem that needs solving and define what “good” looks like.

- Where is the friction: capabilities, capacity, process, clarity, or structure?
- What business outcomes actually matter?
- What does a successful talent engine look like in the brand’s context?

DESIGN

2. Design

We design models that blend people, process, and performance.

- Team and talent architecture (including M-shaped roles).
- Operating rhythms and decision cadences for collective operations.
- End-to-end dual-culture representation to ensure alignment between different ways of working, internally and externally.

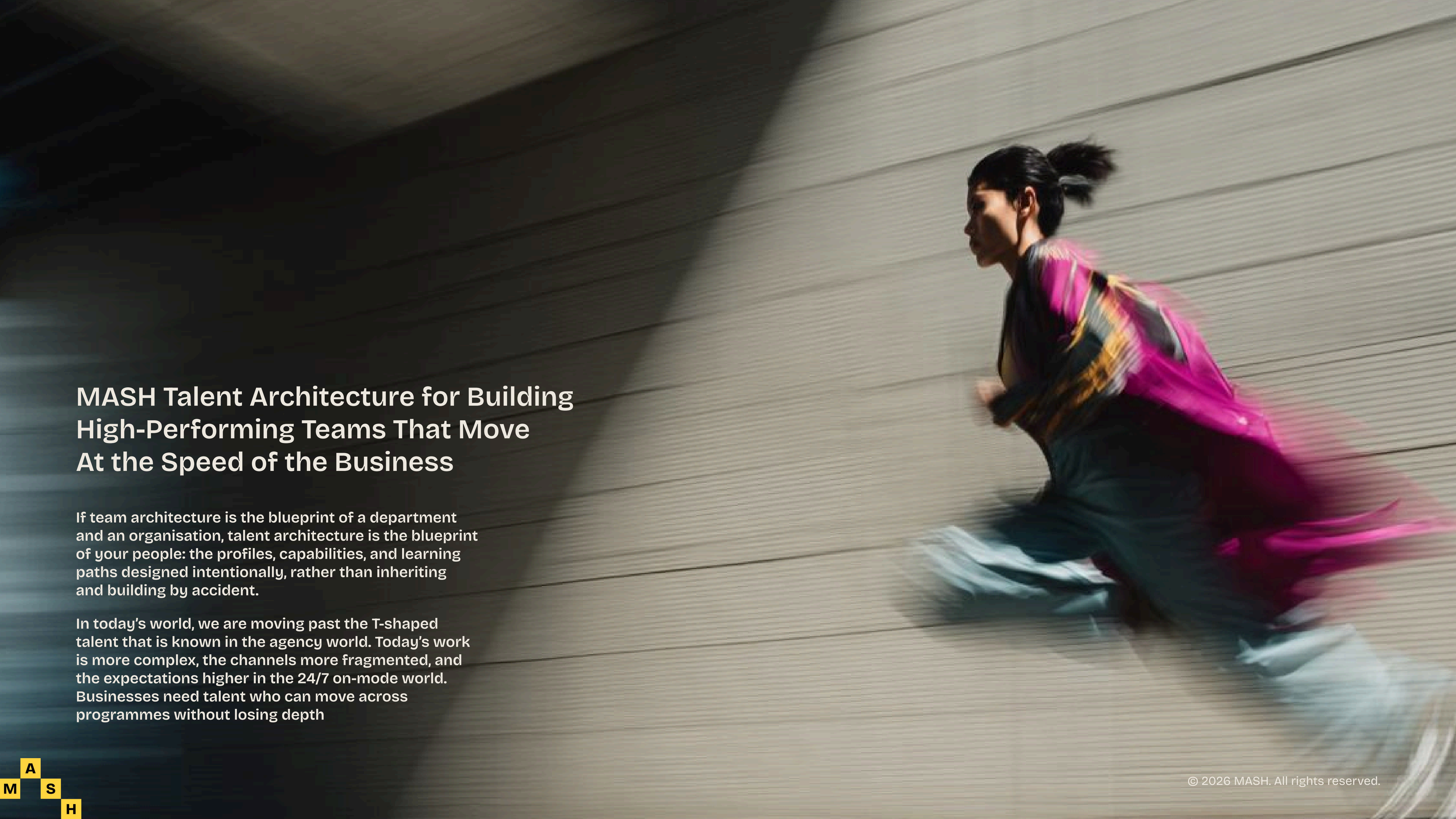
DELIVER

3. Deliver

We deliver embedded generalist experts, talent development, and quarterly workflow systems deliberately structured to flex and optimise.

- Deploy MASHers into your organisation as strategic thinkers and systematic executors.
- Run continuous capability building and performance reviews through modern and client-specific L&D programmes, with continuous feedback loops.
- Adjust structure, talent mix, pricing models and ways of working as the brand’s needs evolve.

This is how we strengthen brands from within – not simply easing the workload (we refer to it as the “shoulder-drop moment”), but by building the engine that lets our clients’ internal teams, agency partners, and marketing programmes work better together.



MASH Talent Architecture for Building High-Performing Teams That Move At the Speed of the Business

If team architecture is the blueprint of a department and an organisation, talent architecture is the blueprint of your people: the profiles, capabilities, and learning paths designed intentionally, rather than inheriting and building by accident.

In today's world, we are moving past the T-shaped talent that is known in the agency world. Today's work is more complex, the channels more fragmented, and the expectations higher in the 24/7 on-mode world. Businesses need talent who can move across programmes without losing depth



At MASH, we have adapted a M-Shaped talent methodology to evaluate and appreciate the “je ne sais quoi” every single MASHer brings to clients’ teams and projects. MASHers are multidimensional generalist experts who bring both width and depth.

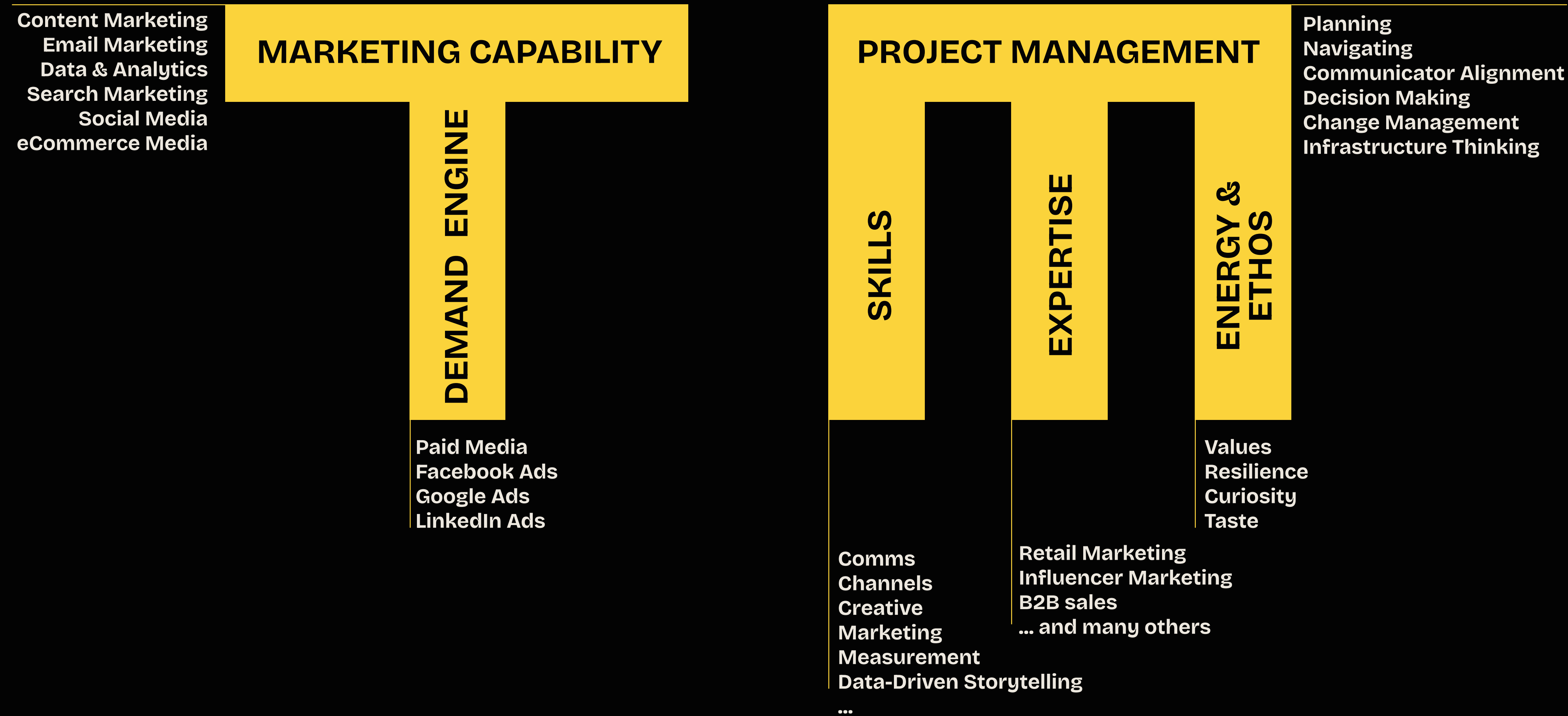
It is the combination of:

1. **Skills** – functional capabilities (e.g. media, social, strategy, research, analytics, production, operations)
2. **Expertise** – depth in specific contexts and industries (e.g. retail marketing, influencer ecosystems, creator economy, B2B SaaS, social creative).
3. **Energy & Ethos** – the way they show up: their presence, nuance, values, cultural fluency, and stance in life – what they stand for.
4. **Execution** – the project management repertoire in the ability to move work from idea to go-to-market while building on infrastructural thinking and the ability to connect the dots (AI won’t save you here without a real human context when prompting!)

For marketing leaders, M-shaped talent:

- Improves quality, because the strategic executor understands execution realities and vice versa.
- Increases flexibility, because talent can move between projects and phases as priorities shift.
- Protects against single-point failures, because knowledge is distributed across capabilities, not just titles.
- Reduces handoffs, because one person can hold multiple perspectives, removing the need for constant handovers and briefing sessions.

The Architecture of Marketing Capability Beyond T-Shaped Talent





Talent renewed is not a slogan.

It's a choice: to build partner teams that are capable and commercially sharp – and to stop drifting back to versions of “the new normal” that are quietly breaking everyone. The organisations that will thrive from here are the ones willing to re-architect how work gets done, who they bring to the table, and how seriously they take the ecosystems around their core teams.

MASH plugs into that work as a marketing resource engine – to help architect, elevate and stabilise what's already inside. We don't replace traditional agencies, and we don't pretend to be a catch-all solution. Instead, we sit alongside your existing partners and internal teams, embedding high-performing M-shaped talent who work inside your tools, your workflows and your culture.

Our aim is simple: leave your organisation stronger, clearer and calmer (we do what we do for that “shoulder-drop-moment”) than we found it – with better talent architecture, cleaner operating rhythms, and partner teams that can move at the speed of the business without burning out the people inside it. This isn't outsourcing; it's organisational upgrading.

However you choose to do it – with us or with others – the invitation for 2026 is the same: design your teams and talent with purpose.





A Closing Perspective: What This Means for Marketing Leaders in 2026

What this report ultimately shows is that marketing did not arrive at its current state because of a sudden shortage of talent. It arrived here because organisations continued to rebuild teams on top of operating models that were no longer fit for the realities of modern marketing. When pressure increased — from AI, from budget scrutiny, from always-on demands — those models revealed their limits. Teams moved faster, but with less resilience. Output increased, but confidence thinned. Over time, the system itself became the constraint.

Throughout this report, one idea has remained constant: talent, in 2026, can no longer be treated as a collection of roles or a series of hiring decisions. Talent is infrastructure. It is the system that determines how work flows through an organisation, how decisions are made, how learning compounds, and how sustainable performance is achieved over time. When that infrastructure is poorly designed, no amount of headcount, external support, or technology will resolve the underlying strain. When it is designed with intention, teams gain not only speed, but stability and clarity.

The organisations that are beginning to outperform in this environment are not those with the largest teams or the most complex partner ecosystems. They are the ones that have taken the time to rethink how capability is architected across internal teams, embedded specialists, agency partners, and technology. They have moved beyond rigid distinctions between in-house and external, and instead focused on building integrated systems that protect judgment, reduce unnecessary friction, and allow people to operate at the pace the business requires without burning out.

This is the shift MASH is designed to support. We work inside marketing organisations to help architect and stabilise these systems — not by replacing existing teams or partners, but by strengthening how they operate together. By embedding M-shaped talent directly into client environments, aligning to existing tools and workflows, and continuously recalibrating capability as business needs evolve, MASH helps organisations move from reactive resourcing toward intentional team design. The goal is not dependency, but durability: leaving organisations clearer, calmer, and better equipped to manage complexity long after individual engagements evolve.

Renewing marketing talent, then, is not a matter of adopting a new structure or following a trend. It is a strategic choice about how seriously organisations are willing to design the systems that carry their work. The invitation for 2026 is not simply to move faster or to do more with less, but to build marketing engines that can sustain performance, protect people, and adapt as conditions continue to change. However organisations choose to move forward, the imperative is the same: to design teams and talent on purpose — and to recognise that the model they choose now will quietly shape everything that follows.



About MASH

MASH builds modern marketing teams designed for how brands actually operate today.

Our teams plug directly into your workflows, tools, culture, and goals, operating as part of your business rather than alongside it. Through our Integrated Capability models — spanning studios, creator engines, and operational leadership — we help brands scale content, creators, and marketing systems across markets with clarity and momentum. This isn't seat-filling or off-payroll resourcing; it's capability designed around real business needs. Whether embedded on-site or distributed across Asia, MASH teams run inside your marketing engine, bringing the structure, leadership, and performance rigour required to succeed in 2026 and beyond.

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