

Building an Agile Marketing Team

INTLAND
SOFTWARE



This case study has been prepared in collaboration with Evan Leybourn,
the author of theagiledirector.com



Intland – Building an Agile Marketing Team

Headquartered in Germany, Intland develops an Application Lifecycle Management product for the software industry, known as codeBeamer. codeBeamer supports the complete software development lifecycle from demand, requirements, development, to test management. As a commercial ALM tool, codeBeamer is used worldwide particularly in Germany and the US, across multiple industries. It is also available on [Javaforge, free of charge for open-source projects.](#)

The Problem

Like many technology companies, our focus was traditionally on product development rather than marketing. By focusing on our technology, we had minimal investment in marketing and did not have a dedicated marketing team. This is fairly common in technology companies of similar size, where:

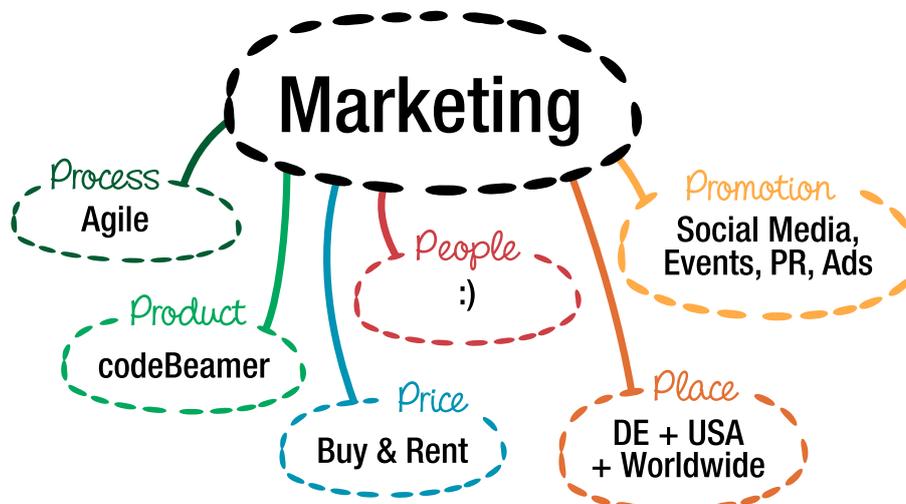
- marketing is not a dedicated function,
- marketing responsibilities are shared across other functions, such as sales,
- there are no dedicated marketing resources
- individuals responsible for marketing activities have alternate, or competing, priorities.



At Intland, it wasn't until 2013 that we recognised that, due to our growing international presence and organic growth, marketing was essential for further success.

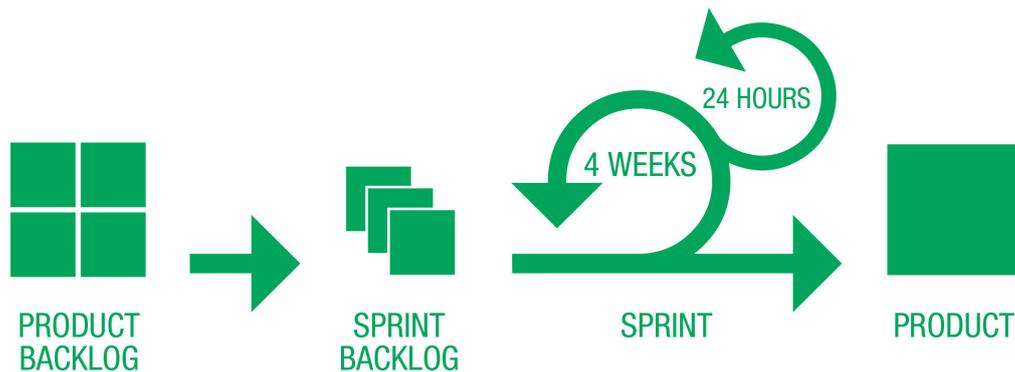
The Solution

We established a dedicated, although distributed, marketing team, with the most critical competencies (communication, public relations (PR), design, business development, digital marketing, etc.). The new team is primarily responsible for communication, corporate identity, and events management.

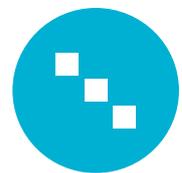


Next, we considered how to integrate this new marketing team into our existing, non-hierarchical, company structure. Inland was already successfully using Agile (specifically Scrum) for product delivery; would this also work for the marketing team? Starting with the concepts described in Eric Ries' book "The Lean Startup", we worked closely with the software development teams to learn how they applied Agile techniques and principles.

We chose to create an [Agile marketing approach](#), based primarily on Scrum, with 4-week sprints. Our Agile processes include:



- **Backlog:** We created a marketing backlog where we collect business requirements (user stories) and issues to be worked on. We used an issue tracker to help maintain this backlog.
- **Defined Workflow:** We created a simple workflow to track the flow of requirements and issues. The main statuses are: Submit, Close, Partly Close, Restart, and Postpone. We are currently considering how we can improve this workflow to make it more insightful.
- **Agile Planning Board:** We then setup an Agile Planning Board that contained all the tasks within a sprint. The highest priority requirements and issues are brought into this sprint backlog. Marketing sprints differ from software development sprints, as we need to allocate additional time to respond to rapid changes in the market. Therefore our burndown chart also looks different. Like traditional Scrum, we measure our sprint backlog based on the number of story points remaining, and at the end, any remaining tasks are postponed until the next sprint.
- **Story Points:** We also introduced Story Points as a means of estimating the complexity of marketing tasks. This helped us visualize the contribution of each team member and gave a quick overview of our distribution of task complexity.



- **Kanban Board and WIP Limits:** To manage the day-to-day work of the marketing team, we introduced the use of a dedicated Kanban board. This board shows all the tasks with their status; Todo, In Progress, Done. We have also setup strict WIP limits to manage the flow and help visualise when we are overloaded.



This Agile approach to marketing means we don't plan big-bang campaigns, but rather small experiments (within each sprint). If a marketing approach does not work, we can change it with minimal cost.

The Implementation

Because our Agile marketing process was developed when we initially created the team, we did not need to adapt to any existing practices. Therefore the marketing team could adopt the Scrum approach fairly easily. We spent the first month experimenting and learning how Scrum can work for us, and after that it became an everyday practice.

Over time, we have had to make some changes and improvements to our processes. For example, we added the postponed status to our workflow when we recognized that we had cases where there was a delay in our client's acceptance, so issues could not be closed within the sprint. We have also had to modify the value of a story point in order to have comparable measures. At the beginning there were some misunderstandings on how to use story points which resulted in discrepancies.

The Challenges

Our first challenge was to overcome the fact that this was a new department with staff who had never worked together, and no one had any experience with Agile practices. We approached this in three ways:

- We socialized the idea to get buy-in,
- We learned about Agile
- and we tailored it to the needs of marketing.



Learn why
Kanban Board
is ideal for the
collaboration
of Marketing
Teams.

It was easy to sell the idea to our new marketing team, since the software development department has proven that the Agile approach could work. To understand its fundamental values, we started reading lots of articles and books about Agile. Ultimately what drove the success of this Agile adoption was the fact that management gave us the freedom to pick-up only those Agile practices that were applicable to marketing; that is, to select what was useful and leave out what was not.

Ultimately, our adoption of Scrum in a marketing context was not overly challenging, nor did we have any cultural acceptance issues. While all of us have different work styles based on our work history, we really enjoyed implementing of Scrum and learned something new (which is very rewarding).

The Outcome

Our Agile marketing team has, by all measures, been successful. The team is highly-productive and has already achieved a number of beneficial outcomes for Intland. In the last 3-months, we have closed between 55 to 60 requirements/issues per month and have grown to 4 full-time employees. This is especially impressive when you consider that our marketing team has only been in existence for 3 months, marketing is new to the company, and we are working in a new domain.

As a testament of success, both the marketing team members and other company executive are happy with our Agile marketing approach. The basis of all parties' satisfaction is our approach to communication, which is an essential part of Agile. From the marketing team's point of view, there have been a number of direct benefits from our Agile adoption. These include:

- A democratic work process. Greater transparency – everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute.
- A supportive work environment – great collaboration and information sharing means that team members can expect support if needed.
- Motivation – Because Agile is not a competition, the team feels motivated to work together. Additionally, our clearly defined sprint goals are really motivating the team.



Useful Tools in Marketing

Requirements Reuse, What applies for Software Development also Applies for Marketing.

Finally, my advice to a marketing department that wants to adopt Agile practices would be:

1. Don't expect that, in and of itself, a new method will change the behaviour of the team or immediately improve performance. The method and measurement have to fit the team dynamics, and all team members have to accept it.
2. Never stop improving how you work together. The success of a marketing team is driven by the team as a whole, not by individuals. To that end, it is important to always communicate how each individual contributes to the team's overall performance.
3. Give freedom to team members. This increases their performance, and creates the opportunity for new ideas to arise.
4. Finally, an Agile approach needs some consistent disciplines. For example, make sure the Kanban board is updated on a daily basis.

At Intland, we are proud that our marketing team is successfully using Agile and that they have shown a deep understanding of the underlying Agile principles in their work.



Join our Webinar

How to be Agile in Sales and Marketing

Date: 28, May 2014, 4:00 pm (CET)

Download our Sales and Agile Marketing template
with codeBeamer 7.3
or
contact our Sales Department (sales@intland.com)
to request a demo.

