SURVEY RESULTS

Marketing Relationship Survey

Chemistry mattered through change

As marketing teams adapted to the pandemic, they continued to value chemistry, clear communication and trusted referrals.

2021

Research by Setup®

Digital investment and relationships shaped 2021

Client and agency respondents described shiftingprioritiesalongsideasteady need for trust and communication.

30%

Brandrespondents likely or somewhatlikelyto switch agencies

92%

Brandssaid marketing's roleroseor stayedthe same

90%

Agencies ratedreferrals their most effectiveway to find clients

Brands reviewed who could keep up

Almost one-thirdofbrandrespondentswerelikelyor somewhat likely to switch agencies in the next six months.

Chemistry held its place

Both sidesrankedchemistryfirst as an agency selection factor. Professionalism, creativity and cost also remained important in the published comparison.

Digital work attracted spend

Leadingareasfor planned increasesincluded content, video, digital media, websites and user experience, and social or influencer marketing.

Both sides put chemistry first

The survey identified the workingrelationshipasaprioritya longside practical agency capabilities.

What held steady

Chemistry, professionalism, creativity and cost remained important in Setup's comparison with earlier surveys.

Brands used referrals and word of mouth to find partners. Ninety percent of agency respondents called referrals their most effective route to new clients.

What shifted

Sometraditional signals such as awards, proximity and the seniority of the proposed team had become less important in the comparison Setup published.

The 2021 report highlights shorter planning cycles and a need for partners who can adapt as priorities change.

What to test in selection

Askeach finalisttoworkthrougha change in brief and explain how the people on the account would respond.

Planned increases favored digital work

Setup identifiedfiveleadingareaswherebrandswereincreasingspendingcompared with 2020.

Content and reach

Contentmarketing, videoand digital media were among the leading areas.

Social media and influencer marketing also featured on the list.

Digital experience

Website and user experience investment stood out as brands adjusted the ways they reach and serve customers.

Ninety-two percent of brand respondents reported that marketing's role in their organization had risen or stayed the same during the pandemic.

For brands and agencies

Tienew digital spendto a specificcustomer or business outcome, then decide which partner owns each part of the work.

Both sides asked for more transparency

Brandandagencyrespondentswantedabetterunderstandingofhowthe other side worked.

What brands asked for

About one-third of brand respondents wanted agencies to understand their business better. The report also emphasized transparency and communication.

Clients wanted agencies to connect day-to-day work to business objectives.

What agencies asked for

More than half of agency respondents wanted transparency and better communication with partners who could listen and set clear expectations.

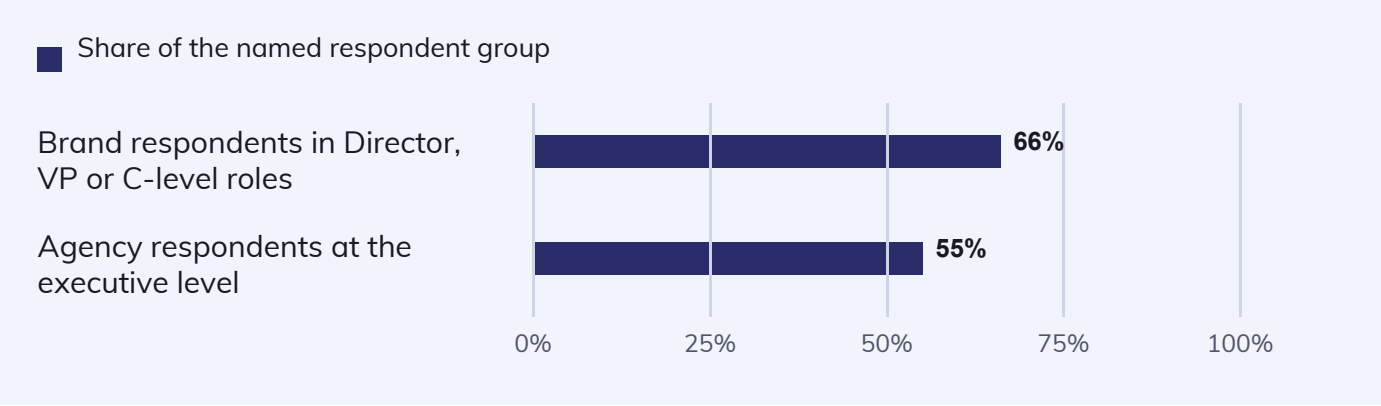
Useful inputs included business context, objectives and a shared view of success.

A starting point

Inthe next review, share what has changed on each side and agree which decisions or risks need earlier visibility.

Senior marketers were well represented

Two measures from each respondent group's reported profile.



Source: Setup's published 2021 results. Each bar represents its own group and definition of seniority.

More than 300 marketers took part across brands and agencies.

About the 2021 survey

Setup'spublished2021editionstudiedagencyselection,spending and partnership expectations.

300+
Marketers across brands and agencies

66%
Brand respondents at Director level or above

55%
Agencyrespondents at the executive level

Study scope	This edition is part of the annual Marketing Relationship Survey. Setup also conducted shorter COVID-19 studies in 2020.
How to read	Percentages describe the named respondent group. The report uses the published results for the 2021 edition.
Source	The original results page includes the full findings and examples from marketers.

Read Setup's published 2021 findings ›