

OPINIONS

Woolley Marketing: Are you agile or not?

It's a recommendation, rather than a religion, suggests Trinity P3 founder and global CEO Darren Woolley.

March 25, 2021 8:00
by **DARREN WOOLLEY**



There are always new business trends (or fads) coming along: Six Sigma, matrix management, business process re-engineering and of course, agile. Like all corporate fads it has its gurus, disciples and devoted followers, who zealously proclaim its application and advantages.

They preach from the technology transformation pulpit, using their own unique language of tribes, squads and sprints, often leaving their audiences feeling they are missing out on the latest trend that will catapult their organisations into the productivity and performance stratosphere.

Marketing is definitely not immune. Marketers increasingly find themselves in organisations that have embraced agile as an operating model and are left to navigate how to make marketing deliver the promised benefits. This is especially acute for marketers in software and engineering based companies. But the agile gospel and its devotees are also taking over financial services and telecommunications companies too.

The agile movement originated in 2001, with the publications of the "Manifesto for Agile Software Development" written by a group of software developers who were looking for an innovative way to speed up software development. But somewhere along the way, this transitioned to not just a project management methodology, but an organisational design philosophy.



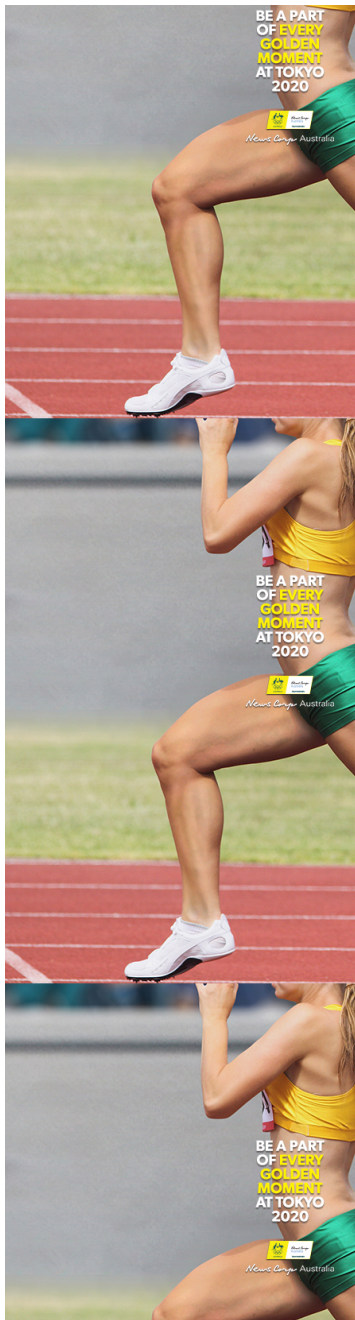
Cartoon by Dennis Flad, published with permission (2021)

Just to clarify here, I personally like to distinguish between two basic interpretations of agile. The first is lowercase agile, which is an adjective that means "able to move quickly and easily". The second, is the uppercase version, agile, which is a noun and is "relating to or denoting a method of project management, used especially for software development, that is characterised by the division of tasks into short phases of work and frequent reassessment and adaptation of plans."

It appears agile's big leap from methodology to organisational philosophy occurred when Spotify became famous for their agile organisation approach, explained in two videos on YouTube by agile/lean coach, Henrik Kniberg, who was at Spotify at the time. This has become so ubiquitous since then that many refer to the 'Spotify model' as the blueprint for their organisational transformation. But as Kate Hobler, at Scrum.org points out: "How many organisations working according to the so-called 'Spotify Model' do you know? Because I know none. Including Spotify itself."

So, where does this leave marketers wanting or needing to be agile or more agile? The fact is that Agile is not a single universal principle, no matter what the devotees may preach. Agile is a philosophy, a manifesto, a set of principles. It is not a process to be slavishly transplanted from one organisation to the next. It actually relies significantly on organisational culture to be successful. It can be particularly successful for particular types of projects and processes. But not even Spotify, the darling of the agile movement, undertakes all business activities with an agile approach. Neither should marketing.





I have seen it very effectively applied to performance marketing, to allow constant progress and improvement, yet fail miserably when used to develop brand strategy. A CMO shared with me that they applied agile to a particular campaign project to break through the organisational barriers and obstacles that had typically stymied projects in the past. But that CMO could not imagine maintaining that level of intensity for day-to-day marketing activities.

Another marketing lead shared that adopting an Agile methodology had more than doubled their team's daily quota of meetings, with sprint planning, daily scrums, sprint reviews, retrospectives and scrums of scrums meetings all filling an already bulging schedule.

And while agencies, particularly those with a strong technology or digital culture, often have agile at the core of their operating model, I have yet to witness an agency using agile for the creative or idea-generating process, beyond the same process advertising creative departments have used since creative teams were first placed together in the 1960s.

So, before you join the agile cult, or perhaps if you are looking to escape it, it is worth remembering that agile provides a framework for a way of working. It is certainly not meant to be a way of life, or a way of business. There are business practices and many marketing practices that can and would benefit from adopting and implementing an agile approach to increase productivity, speed to market and performance. But it is not a religion and should not demand complete devotion of all involved. Otherwise you could find yourself worshipping at the altar of a false God.



Darren Woolley is the founder and global CEO at Trinity P3. Woolley Marketing is a regular Mumbrellacast column.

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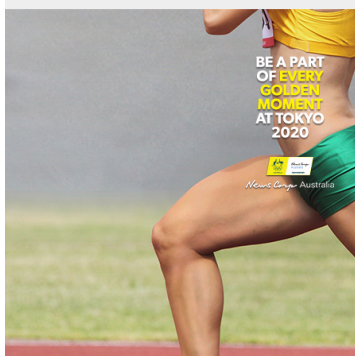
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OPINION

Online qualitative research is here to stay

One outcome of COVID-19? A move towards more immediate, diverse and accessible research, writes Toluna ANZ country director Sej Patel.

March 24, 2021 8:00
by [SEJ PATEL](#)

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There's little COVID-19 hasn't affected. Beyond the news headlines of toilet paper stampedes and Zoom faux pas, the pandemic has forced a massive number of changes across businesses. When it comes to market research, one of the biggest changes we saw in 2020 was the emergence of online qualitative research.

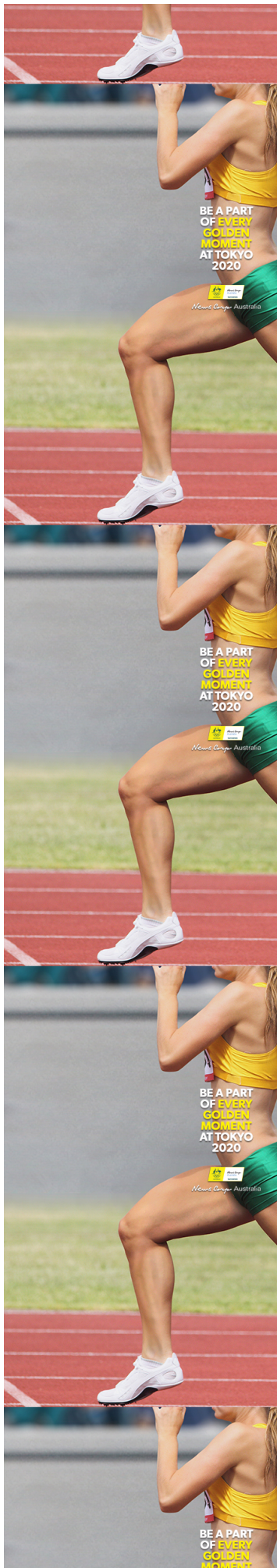
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Traditionally conducted in person, qualitative market research requires select groups of participants to discuss their thoughts, perceptions, opinions and beliefs about products, brands, or even people. However, due to widespread lockdowns and indoor venue caps of one person to every four square metres, the pandemic rendered face to face discussion impossible.

Of course, online qualitative research existed pre-pandemic, but it's only been over the last year that we've seen such widespread adoption. And for brands, a shifting qualitative research online opens up a world of opportunities.



The importance of qualitative research

Although qualitative research has always been important, the time and budget required for such intensive research has often been prohibitive. As such, qualitative research would often take a backseat due to these constraints, with brands instead opting for quantitative research (such as surveys) which can deliver key consumer insights quickly and cost effectively.

But when it comes to testing new concepts or delving deeper into the 'why', there are answers quantitative research simply can't provide. Experienced and highly skilled discussion group moderators can ask more insightful questions and push the discussion deeper, delivering rich consumer insights that brands need to shape their strategy.

Bigger bang for your buck

For brands, moving qualitative research online is a win for overstretched budgets. Doing away with the costs associated with in-person discussion groups offers brands greater access to high quality research for a much lower spend. Removing the physical location of the discussion group also widens the participant pool, further enhancing the insights acquired.



The benefits of online qual

There will always be pros and cons to online qualitative research, and some situations are still better suited to face to face; such as taste testing and product sampling, for example. But beyond the better return on investment, there are other benefits to be had by shifting qual research online:

- Increased accessibility and diversity: Moving qualitative research online means that anyone with internet access can join the discussion, providing greater access to a more diverse group of participants; from rural residents to mobility impaired or even parents with very young children
- Give more people a voice: Face to face discussion groups can sometimes be dominated by certain personality types, leaving quieter participants hesitant to join in. While moving discussions online won't prevent shyness altogether, there's a different dynamic at play which allows more introverted participants a chance to voice their opinions
- Privacy: For some taboo or more intimate topics, online qual provides a layer of anonymity. An online discussion with cameras turned off and real names hidden can embolden people to freely share opinions on topics they'd be embarrassed to discuss in a real world situation

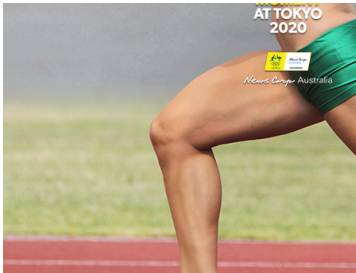
Online qual is here to stay

Now that more brands have had a taste of online, we don't think it's going anywhere. In fact, this is an area we expect to see grow in 2021 and beyond. Not only do we expect to see the continued rise of online qualitative research, but we may finally see a true integration with qualitative and quantitative research – the holy grail of market research – which will give brands both real-time data and cost effective qual insights. It won't have to be an either/or decision.



Sei Patel is the country director of Toluna ANZ.





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