Amplience

AGILE TEAMS AND WORKFLOWS

For The Modern Era

Contents

What Is Agile Content Production and How Can It Improve Your Digital Shopping Experience?

Do your customers seem to have an ever-growing appetite for more engaging content? You're not alone.

For any retail business to compete online today, it's not enough to simply say the right things. You have to say them in the right places, at the right time, in a way that resonates with your specific audience in that moment. This race for attention puts increasing pressure on your marketing and eCommerce teams.

Through a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative study, analyzing and interviewing several international enterprise retailers, we identified six main challenges that retailers and brands face when it comes to winning the race for attention:

1. Serving generic content to customers, providing a one size fits all experience
2. Lack required content to support key customer missions effectively
3. Separation between editorial / lifestyle and shopper journey content
4. Slow to react to changes in consumer behavior and beliefs
5. Inability to serve mobile app content
6. Content must be built multiple times to provide an omnichannel experience

Our analysis concluded that a lack of agile working, disconnected systems, and a physical separation of Creative, Merchandising and eCommerce teams has created an "us versus them" siloed culture.

So what's the answer?

It starts with your content production processes. This process has historically been centered around production for websites and traditional media, breaking the process down into sections that dedicated teams were responsible for. Teams effectively throw the content over the wall to the next team once their task is completed, repeating until it's ready for production. Meaning that content is developed in isolation instead of the focus being on the overall customer experience. And it takes weeks – even months – to complete.

We've seen companies take as long as nine weeks to get from ideation to execution. How can you possibly produce timely, relevant content when you're working to those timeframes?

When you look at a typical production process it's easy to see where the problems lie. When analyzing a waterfall content production process (i.e. breaking down content into smaller and smaller pieces), we found:

- Only 11% of activity was value added

- 79% of time was wasted – 7.8 weeks in total

We can visualize this value-add vs non-value-add on a timeline to identify the wastage, as shown on the top graphic.

Another way to visualize this flow is through a value stream map, as shown on the bottom graphic, demonstrating how a single unit brief goes through multiple handoffs and batch approvals, causing an overload of work in progress (WIP) and rework.

How do you address this, then? You may have heard of lean methodology. Essentially, it's about cutting down the non-value add activities – the 7.8 weeks in the above graphic. Lean methodology looks to understand and improve holistic process through streamlining each of individual production activities and handoffs. It does this by focusing on reducing five key elements: time wasted between activities, setup time, queuing times between and number of activities / handoffs, and finally, the number of works in progress.
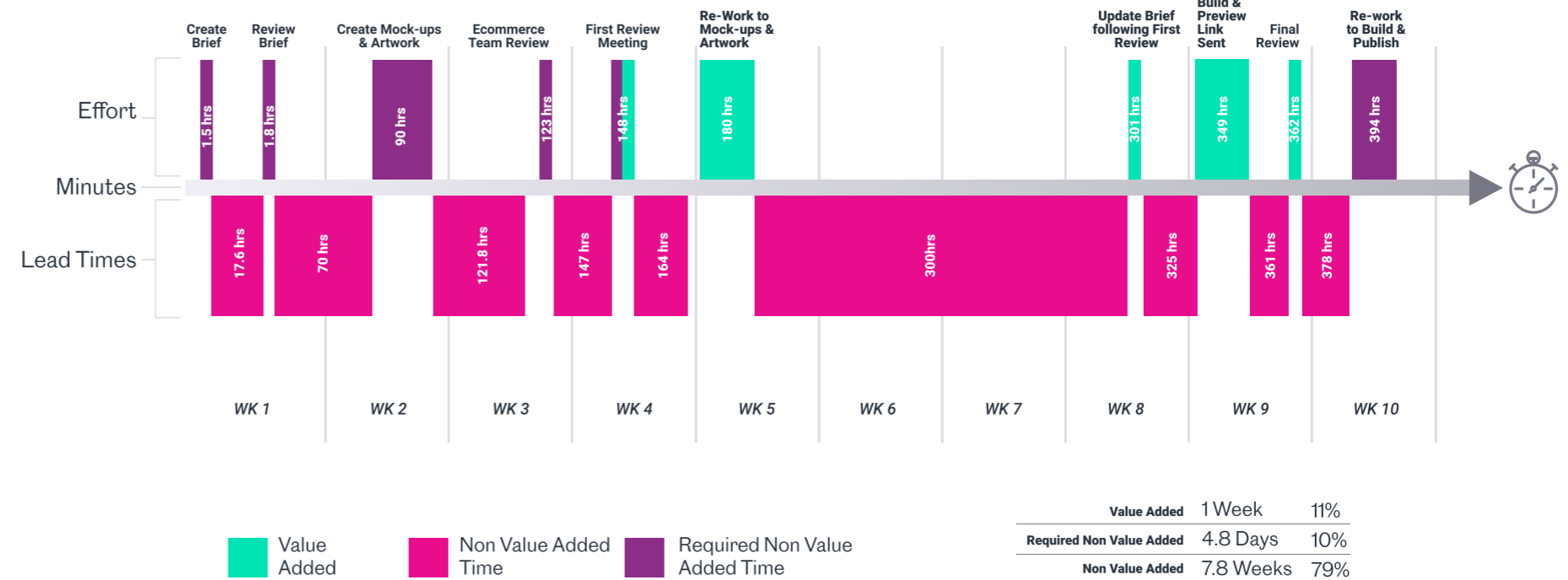
The idea is that by doing all the above, you optimize the process and maximize the value-add time – increasing the speed of the value-add activities, for example, or reducing the resources needed to carry them out.

Creating an environment with the exact resources you need to carry out the work in a predictable, controllable, sustainable manner, empowering you to rapidly respond to signals from your customers.

In the context of content production, lean methodology requires teams whose sole purpose is authoring and managing content for digital interfaces, either acting alongside the existing hierarchies and traditional over-the-wall approach (aka waterfall) or replacing them altogether. These teams become the chosen few that execute your organization's content strategy and fulfill the objectives of the business.

In the next sections we'll dive a little deeper into this problem and outline how to implement a lean and agile approach to solve them.

Production Workflow

	Value Added	1 Week	11%
	Required Non Value Added	4.8 Days	10%
	Non Value Added	7.8 Weeks	79%

Value Added

Non Value Added Time

Required Non Value Added Time

!Error Rate 70%

1 BRIEF 60 Min

475

WIP 420 Min
Wait 45 Min
Setup 30 Min

!Error Rate 60%

2 CREATE 60 Min

240

WIP 120 Min
Wait 75 Min
Setup 45 Min

!Error Rate 50%

3 PRODUCE 180 Min

485

WIP 300 Min
Wait 125 Min
Setup 60 Min

!Error Rate 50%

4 PUBLISH 60 Min

155

WIP 75 Min
Wait 60 Min
Setup 20 Min

Task Time = 360 Mins / 6 Hrs
Completion time = 1,715 Mins / ~ 4 Days

Right 1st time = 10%

The Content Production Bottleneck

Most organizations operate with numerous departments that have their own sub-cultures, objectives and processes, culminating in them seeking to maximize their own performance and outcomes. While common, this is not ideal for agile content and commerce teams that need to be pro-active and move quickly.

Marketing and sales typically create the campaigns and work out budgets. If there's a separate eCommerce department it may be involved too, but it's more common for eCommerce to live in marketing or even IT. Regardless of its location and structure, eCommerce is usually more hands-on in terms of platform ownership and actual content changes and oversight, while the responsibility for asset generation lives with brand and creative.

Everybody wants a say. And for their say to be the winner. And they want to do their part in their own time, in their own way. Hence the waterfall approach to content – the drawn out 'throwing over the wall' from one specialized department to the next for weeks on end until something diluted and possibly irrelevant or of lesser value is finally ready and pushed live.

That process alone is usually *months* long and generally has quite a bit of drag from dependencies, heavy process and governance. Nobody wants a mistake or deviance from the plan, and every box is checked before anything moves. It feels good having completed so many micro-tasks and half a dozen departments have left their mark – for better or worse.

Business groups work for weeks or months then hand it over to development for completion, hoping nothing is lost in translation and that priorities and resourcing remain in the favor of the content. But as we all know, that's a big ask. Priorities change. Resources shift. Customer whims bounce around. Value is easily lost as costs (sunk and opportunity) begin to spiral. And the outcome that everyone should have been focused on collectively – a fantastic customer experience – has fallen flat.

Consider the Typical Content Process:

EMAIL/SLACK/MEETINGS/SPREADSHEETS
1. Idea (business group)
2. Straw Man (business group)
3. Validation and Checks/Balances (broader organization)
4. Initial Working Concept (business group)

PM TOOL + CREATIVE TOOLS
5. Brief (business group)
6. Initial Assets and Comps (creative)
7. Review and Revisions (business group)
8. Refined Comps (creative)
9. Final Proofing (business group + creative)

DEV TOOLS/STAGING + PM TOOL
10. Initial Build (development)
11. Review and Revisions (business group + creative)
12. Final build (development)

PLATFORM/CMS
13. Staging and QA/UAT (development + business group)
14. Approval (business group)
15. Push Live/Publish (development)

ANALYTICS/BI
16. Monitor and Report (business group)

The processes that worked in the past were not designed for the content demands of today. That's why today's commerce environment and content challenges are best tackled with a lean and agile approach.

To be clear: we're not advocating a complete ripping out and replacement of your existing organizational structure all at once or undoing what works well for you. 'What we are advocating for, however, is that organizations take a moment to step back and consider different ways of structuring teams and workflows, shifting to a COPE (create once, publish everywhere) mindset and looking at where they can adopt best practices from those doing agile most effectively.

Introducing Content Experience Operations

One way to empower your teams to create the most compelling eCommerce experiences is through adopting and embracing a Content eXperience Operations (CXOps) approach to your team structures and workflows.

W hat is CXOps? We hear you ask. Essentially it brings together key stakeholders and resources from the various departments who arefocused on digital content from ideation to publishing (and likely post-publish tracking and reporting) in specialized teams who leverage agile methodologies.

How is this different from what you're doing today? CXOps makes the working group a permanent fixture of the organization and formalizes processes to be more agile. It's no longer "we also need something for the site" but rather a concerted effort to compose a true omni-channel, omni-device experience that's owned by the business group but leverages cutting-edge technology and expertly architected solutions.

CXOps would ideally be part of a broader department focused solely on digital experiences and report up to a Chief Experience Officer or similar. Casting off the constraints of waterfall practices and the siloed, slow, inner-focused tendencies resulting from decades of print and traditional media, the CXOps approach embraces agile principles (tailored to content instead of development) and is focused outward, to the customer.
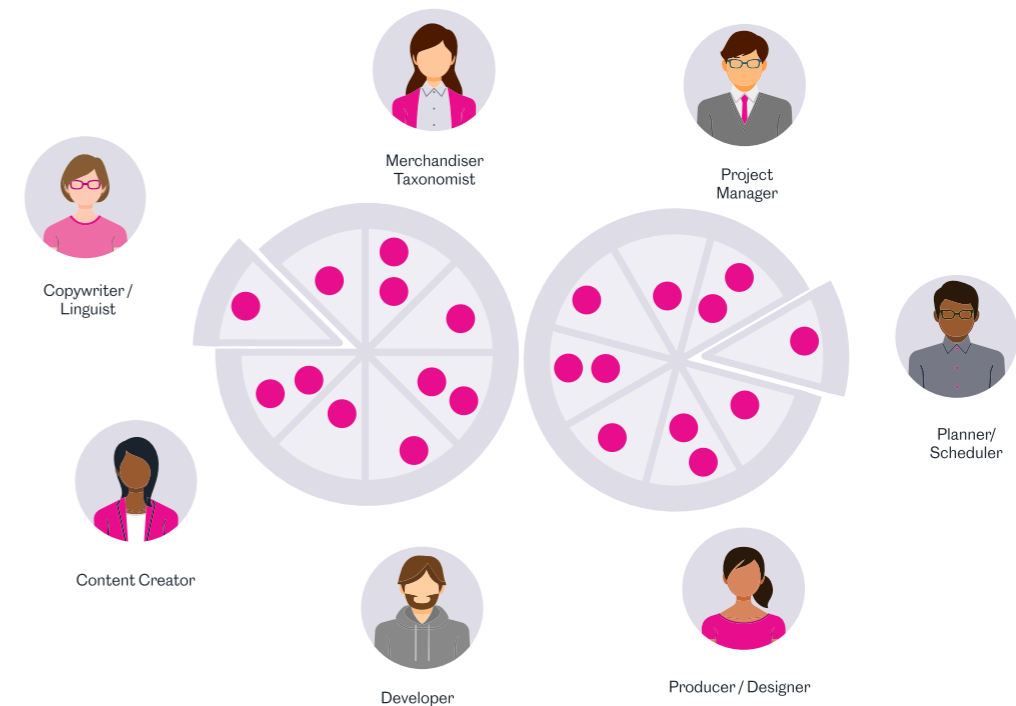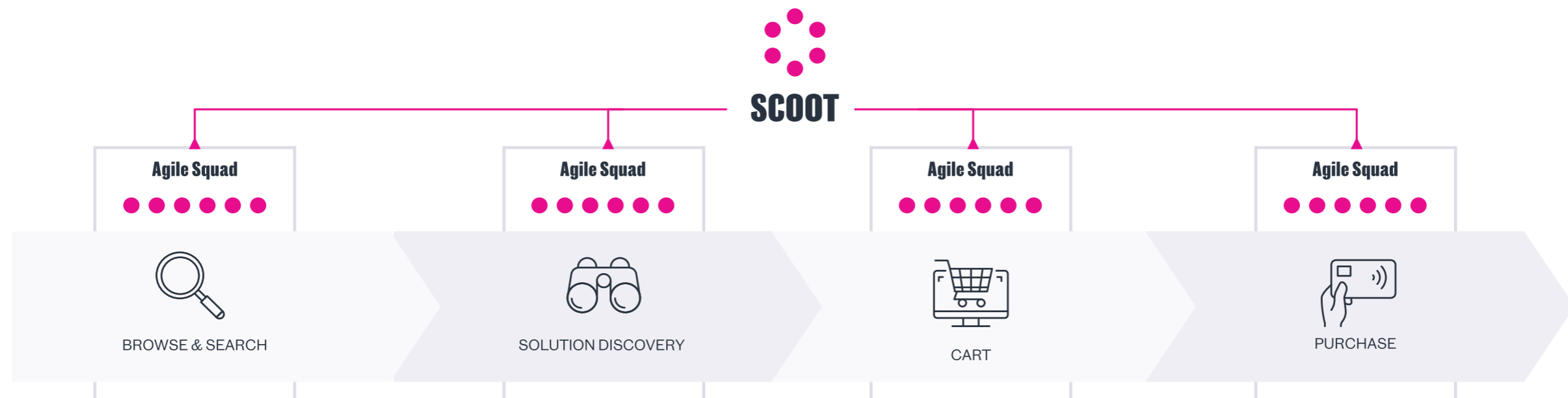
New Ways of Working – Process and People

This new way of doing things results in close-knit working groups or 'action teams' that move fast enough to produce consistent, quality output at scale. And they can 'swarm' from their respective departments when needed to address a major campaign, content change or industry shift.

A ction teams distill down the larger departments like creative from numerous designers and artists to perhaps a single 'key producer' resource and a single stakeholder resource. The same is true for other departments, allowing them to make refinements and decisions much faster. And the content retains more of its initial magic than when it's diluted and dies by committee.
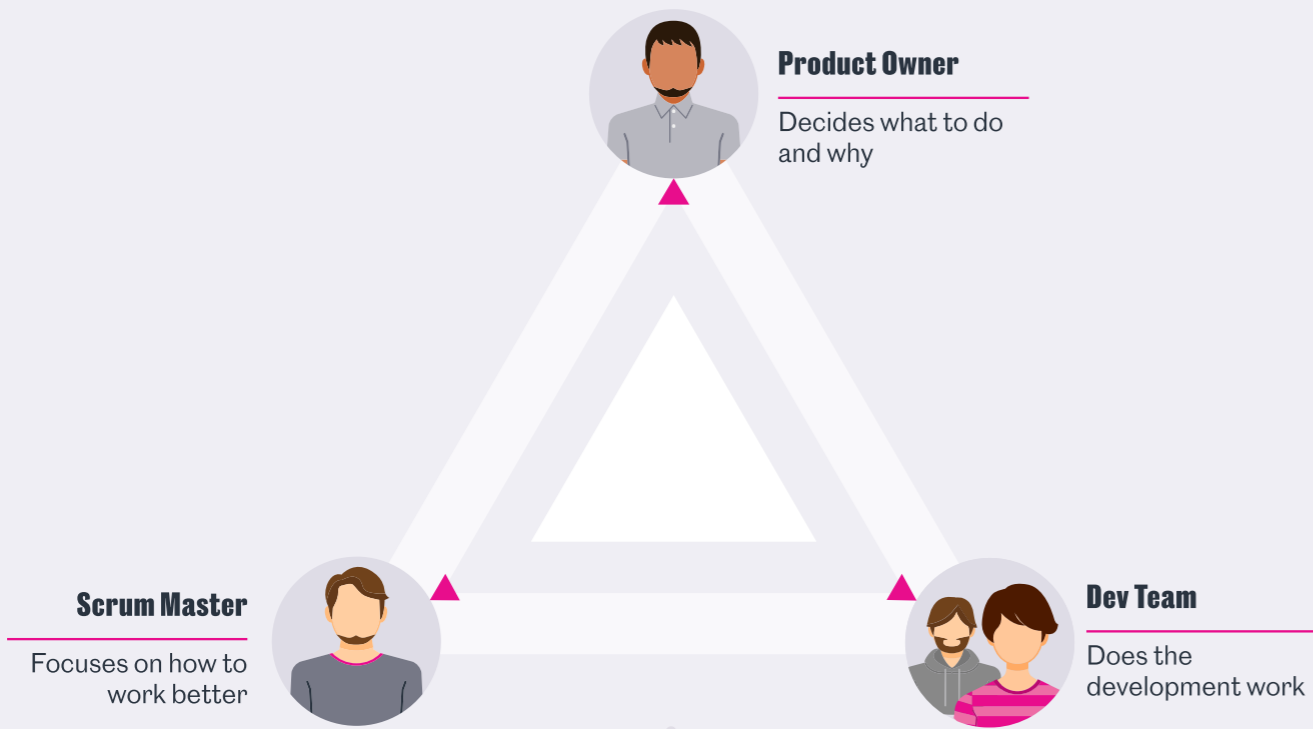
The goal is to keep momentum going and the group small, following the two-pizza rule promoted by Jeff Bezos. The ultimate state is then to create and empower small teams of subject matter experts who can move quickly and with focus.

Copywriter / Linguist

Merchandiser Taxonomist

Project Manager

Planner / Scheduler

Content Creator

Developer

Producer / Designer

We call these teams 'SCOOTs' (Specialized Content Oversight and Operations Teams). They take the guidance and building blocks from the action teams and execute the bulk of the content work post-ideation.
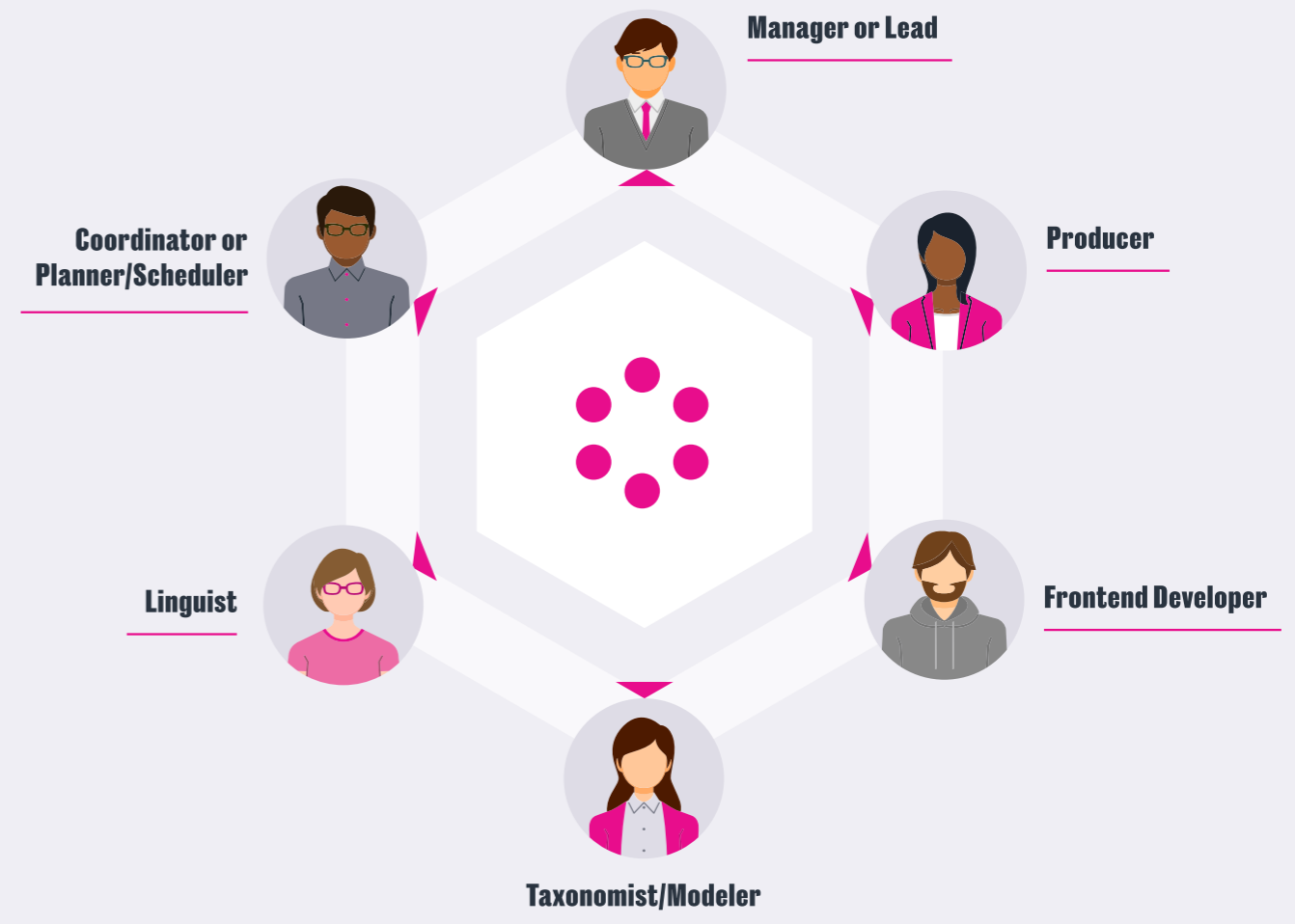

SCOOT

Agile Squad	Agile Squad	Agile Squad	Agile Squad
BROWSE & SEARCH	SOLUTION DISCOVERY	CART	PURCHASE

SCRUM Team Roles

Product Owner
Decides what to do and why

Scrum Master
Focuses on how to work better

Dev Team
Does the development work

SCOOTs are very similar to scrum development teams, but instead of writing code and being tech-focused, they consist of business and technical resources that compose, schedule, and publish content.

SCOOT Team Roles

Manager or Lead

Producer

Coordinator or Planner/Scheduler

Frontend Developer

Linguist

Taxonomist/Modeler

SCOOTs are tasked with ensuring consistency across the customer journey, regardless of channel, device, person, or funnel point, with expertise in content and commerce.

A typical SCOOT might consist of the following roles and responsibilities:

MANAGER OR LEAD

- Similar to a Product Owner and a specialist in content and commerce
- Ensures the team understands the objectives and is functioning well
- Works directly with stakeholders and action teams to understand the vision and strategy
- Secures approvals and handles obstacles and major changes
- Grooms the content backlog and helps build the content roadmap

LINGUIST

- Likely a copywriter with a marketing background
- Closely involved in persona management and staying on-brand
- Owns translations (if applicable)
- Owns voice content (if applicable)

TAXONOMIST/MODELER

- Likely an analyst or merchandiser background
- Owns the overall structure of the content, both the content types (modeled schema) and the relationship of the content (content graph)
- Works to ensure consistent classification and tagging of content
- Helps the developer optimize the schemas and model new content

PRODUCER

- Typically a designer or UX specialist
- Primary "power user" who builds the content items
- Is skilled in digital media and asset management
- Is well-versed in the channels and how the platform and tools work with the CMS
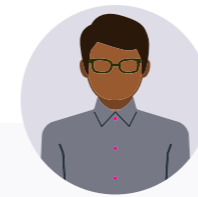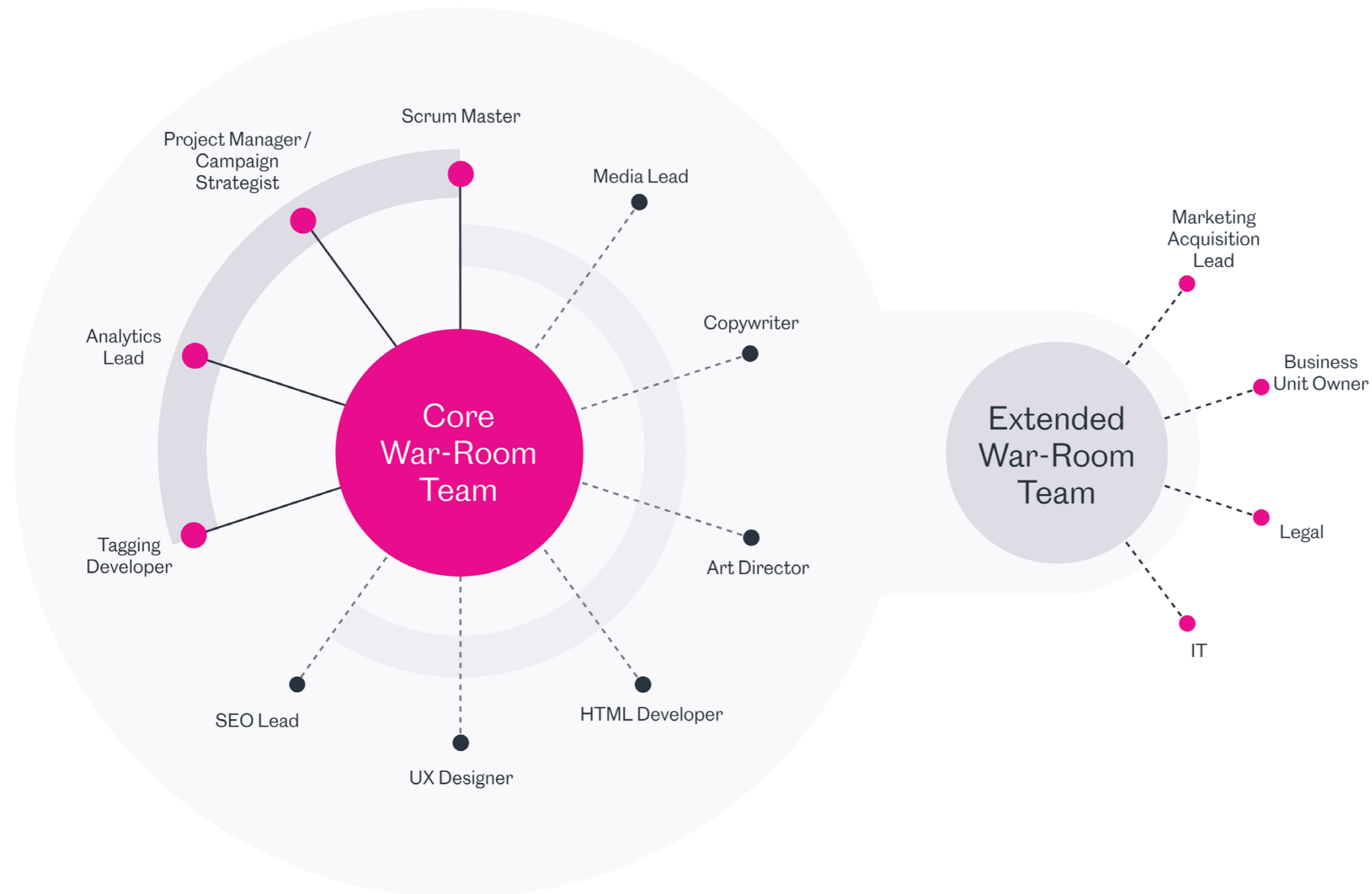
COORDINATOR OR PLANNER/SCHEDULER

- Similar to a Scrum Master or Project Manager
- Ensures briefs and assets are ready
- Helps plan the work and schedules content releases
- Works directly with project management tools, communicates and organizes review sessions, feedback, etc

FRONTEND DEVELOPER

- Specializes in JavaScript and APIs
- Owns the frontend renders and schemas
- Works directly with the broader IT/dev resources
- Assists with performance and compliance

A Typical Agile Action Room

Scrum Master

Project Manager / Campaign Strategist

Media Lead

Copywriter

Analytics Lead

Core War-Room Team

Tagging Developer

Art Director

SEO Lead

HTML Developer

UX Designer

Marketing Acquisition Lead

Extended War-Room Team

Business Unit Owner

Legal

IT

Unlike the traditional, reactive eCommerce war rooms that spring up only when things go wrong, Agile Action Rooms bring together the multi-disciplinary action and SCOOTs that run cross-functional, collaborative sessions to rapidly iterate and deliver against the objective approved in the brief. This approach tears down the silos and eliminates the waterfall workflows, resulting in outputs that are more consistent and higher in quality than the months-old artifacts resulting from monolithic-era approaches.

The Agile Content Production Process

CXOps is the realization of true collaboration between numerous departments from both business and tech, harnessing the best of agile principles and development best practices and their application to content management and commerce.

What's more, it strengthens governance by involving fewer resources, promoting transparency and collaboration, and keeping leadership focused on strategy while letting those closest to the customer execute the work. Instead of a linear, sequential process that's heavy on back-and-forth and up-the-ladder approvals, CXOps takes basic requirements, swarms to work out the kinks, then hands the raw assets to the SCOOT to conduct final assembly and publish.

What used to take months now happens in weeks – even days or hours in some cases.

EMAIL/SLACK/MEETINGS/SPREADSHEETS
1. Idea (business group)
2. Initial Working Concept (business group)
3. Validation and Checks/Balances (broader organization)

PM TOOL
4. Brief (business group)

AMPLIENCE + CREATIVE TOOLS
5. Initial Assets (Action Team)

AMPLIENCE
6. Action Room Swarm – Alignment and Delegation (Action Team + SCOOT)
7. Content Build (SCOOT)
8. Action Room Swarm – Revisions and Approvals (Action Team + SCOOT)
9. Scheduling and/or Publish (SCOOT)

ANALYTICS/BI
10. Monitor and Report (business group)

Without development's involvement, the business group retains ownership of the process. There are no release windows or competition with tech debt and break-fix user stories. And with increased flexibility and specialized teams, you can easily absorb any changing requirements from external pressures (competitor actions, supply chain issues, etc) or internal pressures (strategy shifts, turnover, etc).

Governance consists largely of having solid requirements combined with guidelines around style, brand and content. The smaller group of resources with appropriate permissions, change logs and C-suite accountability mean there are fewer heads to count and fewer touchpoints to potentially disrupt progress or go astray from the brief.

The Tools That Make Agility Happen

Changing your processes will likely highlight the inefficiencies of the tools you're creating content in. The next step on the journey to superior efficiency is to provide the tools your teams need to maximize your new lean and agile processes.

I t's important to first investigate the areas that are causing friction when it comes to executing new ways of working. Identify the areas where most time is wasted – is it in the ideation stage, the iteration, or the implementation? Once you have identified this you can evaluate the most effective tools that will enable you to remove further friction from the process. The starting point is to look at your project management approach - how are you staying lean and monitoring the content production? In our experience working with over 350 of the world's leading retailers and brands, one of the most effective methods is to utilize a Kanban approach, with a Kanban board that limits work in progress and represents production as a flow.

Kanban generates a mentality shift. Rather than stating what stage the content is at, it states the input the content is ready for, pulling it through the content production process. There are plenty of other agile methodologies that you can use, but in our experience, Kanban is the most suitable for dashboards to monitor content creation. That's why we've built a Kanban board visualization into our content management system (CMS) to champion this way of working.

We've found that once you have implemented a lean production process the next largest reduction in efficiency comes from the feedback and iteration stages.

Project Dashboard

| To Do | Ready for Design | Ready for Copy | Ready for Review | Ready for QA | Done |
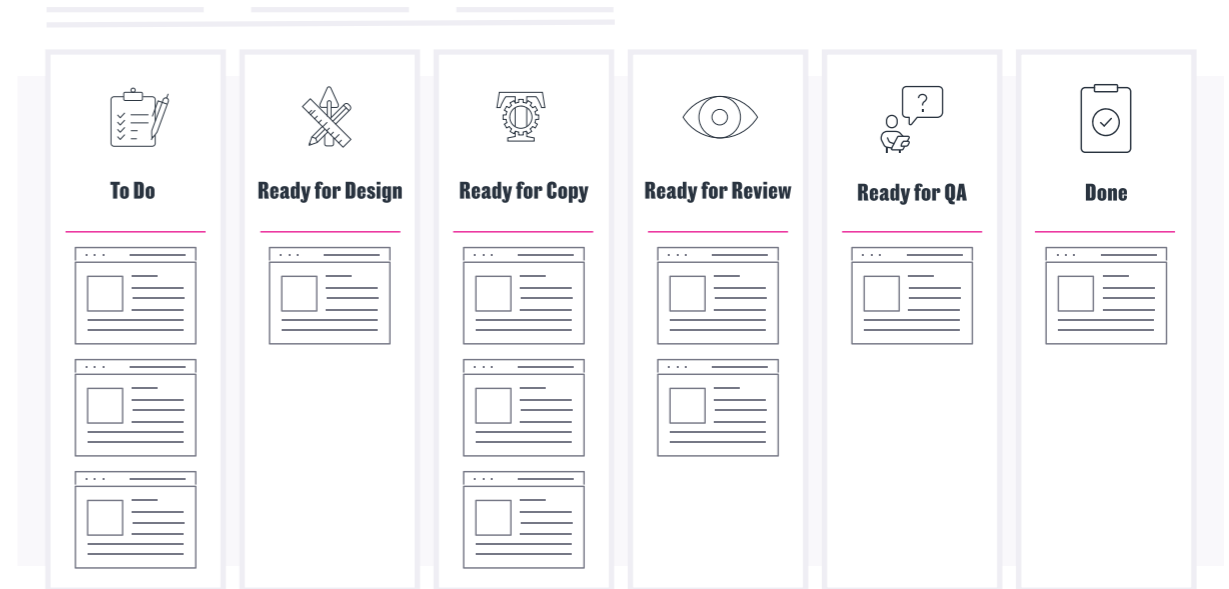
Often content is created in different tools, from InDesign and Photoshop or Figma to the content management system (CMS). When you create the content in different tools it makes it very difficult to review the holistic experience. Teams end up flipping from one tab or tool to another to work out what the entire experience will look like across all channels, resulting in cognitive switching penalties. Ensuring consistency across all channels for the entire experience becomes very difficult to achieve and review at speed.

Different departments need to work in different tools – we can't get away from that. The solution is to have a central point that all the content components are pulled into. This is where you can leverage your CMS to its full potential. It should become the single-place-of-truth where all the up-to-date pieces of content go once they're ready for review. The SCOOT teams then have the flexibility they need to work with their preferred tool for the job whilst providing an environment to efficiently review all aspects of the content across all channels with the CXOps, in one single tool. Now CXOps and SCOOT teams can come together, virtually or otherwise, to review and iterate all elements of the customer journey together through one simple interface.

"The copy here doesn't quite work." No problem.

The copywriter then goes and makes the changes in real-time to review. The same for graphics and further changes. Everyone can see, review and provide feedback on the holistic experience to finally approve the real-time changes. This may be where your tools start to let you down if you're working with an older CMS. Many were designed and born out of the web era before the iPhone even existed. They're not built to allow you to create content across all channels and preview from a single place.

The Bottleneck: Production and Publishing

Arduous effort for ONE piece of content for ONE channel
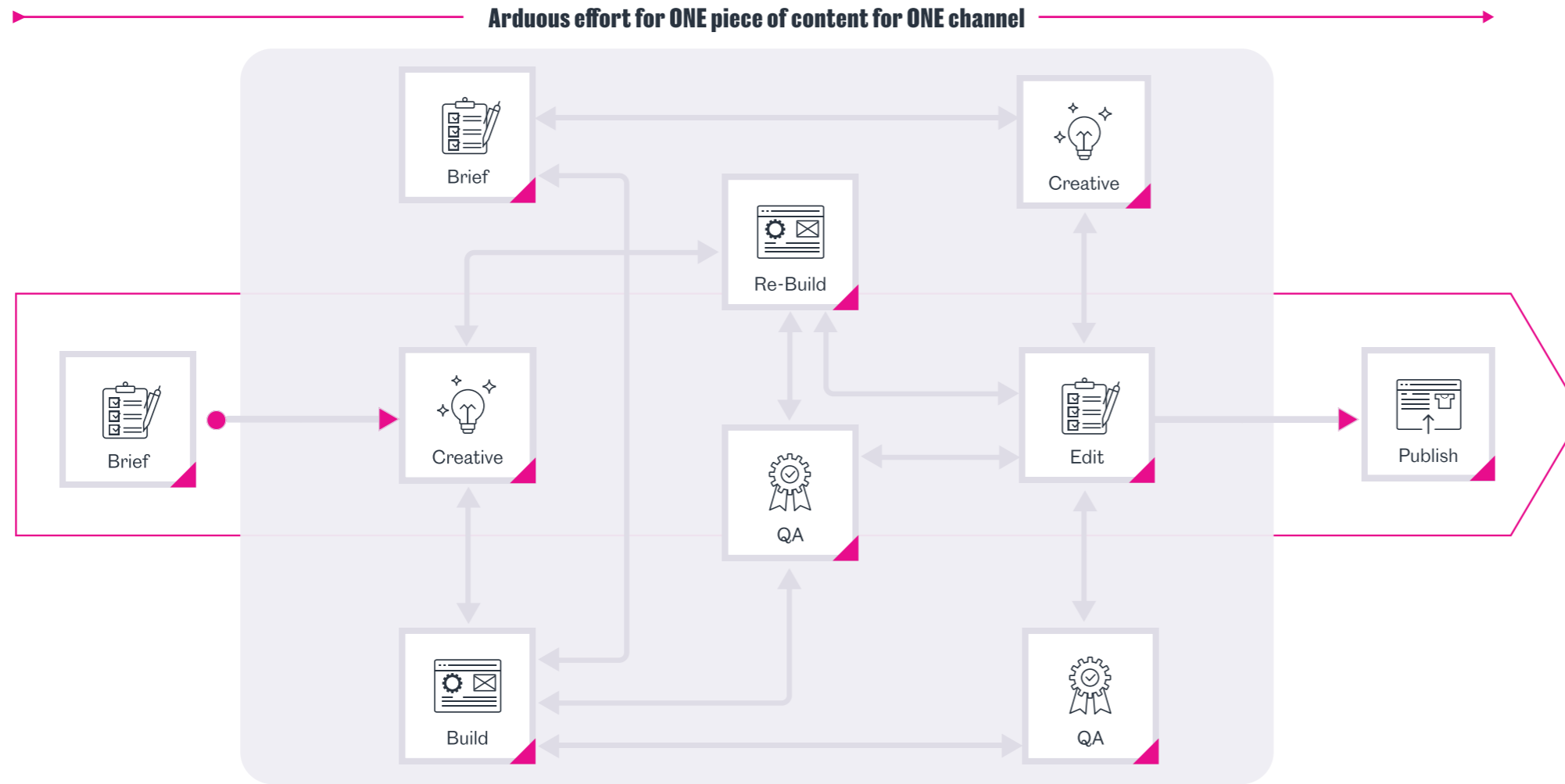
They can at times require you to duplicate your content production in other tools in order to deliver content to non-web channels like apps or wearables, which is going to make the above process much less efficient.

If this is the case then we would recommend adopting a modern CMS that incorporates MACH principles (Micro-services, API-first, Cloud native, Headless). They were built for the omni-channel era and so natively support the whole range of channels we have in the modern day.

You can work effectively and amplify your content across all channels through modular content – it's all managed from one place. You can even preview your entire experience be it app, website or mobile in the eyes of your customer. At any point in the future. Allowing your CXOps and SCOOT teams to ensure a consistent and seamless experience.

Amplience Collapses Content Production

2 hours

1000's Of Journeys, Digital Touch Points, Cultures , Every Channel

The Time to Move Is Now

The previous approach to content production was riddled with frustrations. Organizations still invest massive capital and time forecasting, planning and executing against short-term objectives and are backed into a corner with monolithic stacks and outdated processes. They simply can't get ahead.

As organizations mature they see the value in structuring themselves around commerce and content, embracing more agile principles and enacting more agile practices. Mindsets shift from "it costs lots of money to change" to "how much revenue are we leaving on the table by not doing it a different way?" Discussions emerge about flattening the org chart, standing up small, specialized teams and ripping out legacy systems and workflows.

It's an evolution that is often measured in years.

To be truly agile your teams need to be empowered with tools that allow them to do the job they need to. At Amplience we champion the MACH principles (micro-services, API-first, cloud-native, headless). They provide the flexibility to quickly upgrade and alter your technologies to enable new ways of working or improve elements of the customer experience, at speed and with ease. This inherent flexibility is key, and it's especially important in the wake of Covid as consumer behaviors rapidly shift and the future feels less and less predictable.

Going agile is the human portion of the equation. It's a shift in how organizations structure themselves and their work to move faster without sacrificing quality. This combination of an agile approach enabled by MACH technology principles empowers you to be proactive rather than reactive, always going after 'what's next'.

It can't and won't happen overnight. And every organization's evolution will be unique. But implementing even small changes over time has knock-on effects with outsized impact.

The businesses that have already started their agile and MACH journey are the ones that will compete and thrive in the months and years to come.

Want to identify a CMS that allows you to be truly agile? Head to our **Headless CMS Buyers Guide** page.
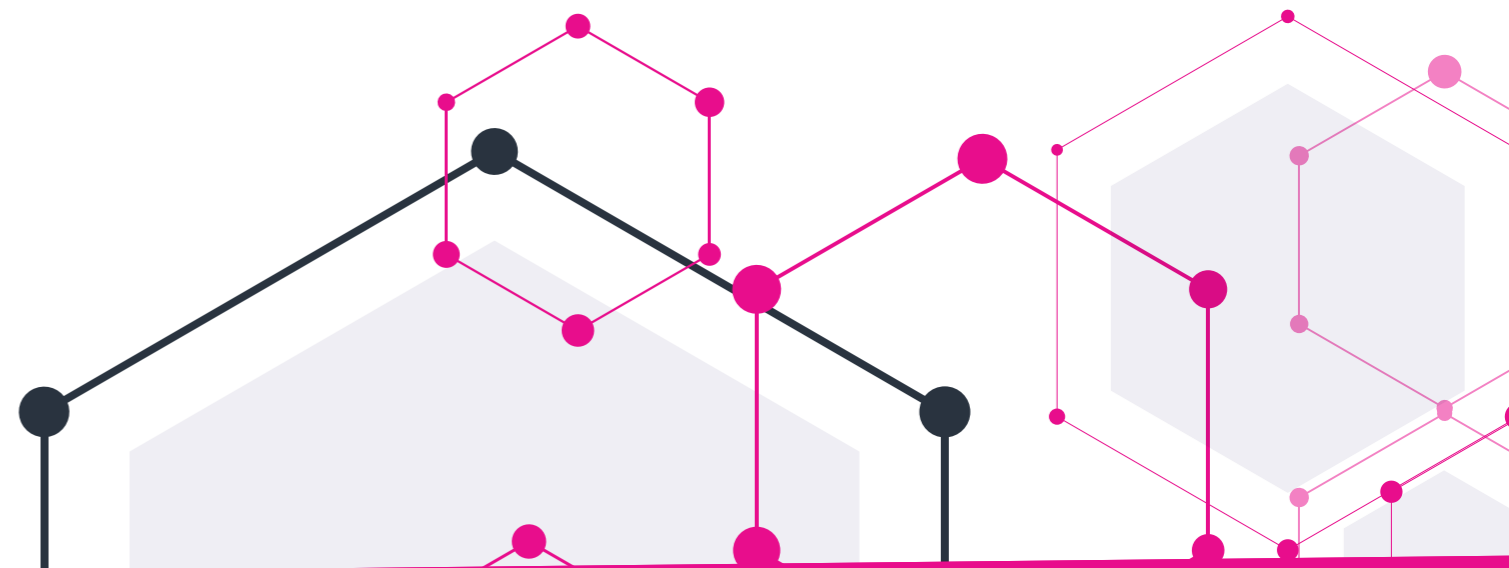
Mike joined Amplience as a Customer Success Manager after spending a decade on the merchant side. Mike has been involved in all aspects of ecommerce, from running a photo studio and writing product copy to launching a new ecommerce program for a bricks-and-clicks retailer. Most recently he was a Senior Manager of Ecommerce for a Fortune 500 brand, where he managed site content and digital marketing for multiple sites and was involved in their ecommerce replatform project. As a customer Success Manager, Mike provides consultative account management focused on building longterm relationships and growth, with a focus on product adoption, best practice guidance, and diagnostics.

Amplience powers digital-first brands and retailers with the freedom to do more. Our low-code CMS, DAM and Digital Experience Management platform allows more than 350 of the world's leading brand teams to manage content, not code. The result is a rapid ROI for our clients who are delivering data and insight-driven customer experiences that drive deeper, more valuable customer relationships. Amplience supports the industry's transition to Microservice, API-first, Cloud and Headless (MACH) technologies, is MACH certified and an executive member of the MACH Alliance.

Named a Strong Performer, Amplience was recognized by Forrester in The Forrester Wave™: Agile Content Management Systems (CMSes), Q1 2021 report with the highest possible scores attained in the criteria of decoupled delivery, deployment and system performance, components, and marketplaces.

Powering customer experiences for the world's most innovative brands, Amplience's customers include Ulta Beauty, Coach, GAP, Crate & Barrel, Harry Rosen and Missguided.

The Freedom to
DO MORE

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