AGENTS OF CHANGE

The STANDOUT Agency Performance Report 2026

Benchmarks and insights from the STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™

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Foreword

The STANDOUT Agency System™ was built on a simple premise: that most marketing agencies underperform not because they lack talent, but because they lack structure. The eight levers of the system - Sales & Marketing, Team, Ambition, Numbers, Development, Operations, Uniqueness, and Technology - define the areas that separate agencies that grow with confidence from those that stay trapped in the founder's hands.

The STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™ was created to give agency leaders an honest benchmark against those eight levers. This report brings together the aggregated data from 32 agencies that have recently completed the scorecard. It is not a collection of best-practice theory. It is a data-led picture of where marketing agencies actually are - their genuine strengths, their consistent blind spots, and the structural gaps that constrain growth.

The findings are anonymised. No individual agency is named. What you will find instead are patterns: the habits that show up reliably in the strongest performers, the weaknesses that appear across agencies of all sizes, and the gaps that matter most for owners who want to build a business that works without them.

Read this report with your own agency in mind. Where do you recognise yourself? Where do you see the gap between where you are and where you need to be? If it prompts the question "I wonder what my score is" - the scorecard is waiting for you at the end.

Gareth Healey
Founder, Agents of Change

Executive Summary

32	63.5%	44%
Agencies Benchmarked	**Average Overall Score**	**Score 70% or Above**
Completed scorecards	Range: 26% – 90%	25% score below 50%

Three Headline Findings

Most agencies are stuck in the middle. The average score of 63.5% and the broad distribution - spanning 64 percentage points from lowest to highest - tells us that while some agencies have built genuinely strong, scalable businesses, most are still works in progress. A quarter of respondents score below 50%, suggesting significant structural gaps. Nearly 45% score 70% or above, indicating a group of genuinely well-run agencies at the top.

Sales & Marketing is the single biggest structural gap. With an average score of 53%, it sits 9 points below the next weakest lever and 16 points below the strongest. Agencies are not generating new business consistently, do not have a repeatable sales process, and tend to rely on relationships and reputation rather than a system. This is not a niche weakness - it shows up across every agency size band.

Then comes perhaps the biggest surprise revealed by the data. Agencies claim they know their value even if they are not taking it to market. Uniqueness - how clearly the agency is differentiated in the market and how effectively it articulates its value - is the highest-scoring lever (69.4%), and the individual question "our prospects choose us for clear reasons beyond price" scores 3.62 out of 5 - well above the Sales & Marketing questions. It seems agencies have a position, they are just not consistently exploiting it.

Lever Scorecard

Lever	Avg Score	Rating
Uniqueness	**69.4%**	Developing
Development	**69.2%**	Developing
Operations	**66.7%**	Developing
Numbers	**63.4%**	Developing
Team	**62.1%**	Developing
Ambition	**61.6%**	Developing
Technology	**61.3%**	Developing
Sales & Marketing	**53.4%**	Needs Attention

About the STANDOUT Agency System™

The STANDOUT Agency System™ is a framework for diagnosing, building, and scaling a marketing agency. It maps the business across eight levers - each representing a distinct area of operational or commercial performance. Every lever comprises three diagnostic statements, each scored on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), giving a lever score out of 15 and an overall agency score out of 120.

Lever	What It Measures
Sales & Marketing	**How consistently new business is generated and whether a repeatable sales process exists.**
Team	**Whether roles are clearly defined, accountability is owned, and delivery does not depend on key individuals.**
Ambition	**The clarity and credibility of the agency's long-term vision and whether strategic decisions are plan-led.**
Numbers	**Confidence in financial management, forecasting, and pricing discipline.**
Development	**The quality and proactivity of client relationship management, and how revenue concentration is managed.**
Operations	**How repeatable, documented, and predictable delivery is across the agency.**
Uniqueness	**How clearly the agency is differentiated in the market and how effectively it articulates its value.**
Technology	**Whether technology is used strategically to drive insight, efficiency, and scale - or simply as admin overhead.**

Each lever is scored out of 100% for benchmarking purposes. A score of 70% or above is considered "Strong." A score between 55% and 69% is "Developing." Below 55% indicates the lever "Needs Attention" and is likely to be a drag on growth or exit value.

Who Took Part

32 agencies completed the STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™ in full. The scorecard takes an average of three minutes to complete. Respondents are predominantly UK-based founder-owners of small-to-mid-size agencies.

Agency Size

Agency Size	Respondents	Share	Average Score
1–3 people	3	9%	40.0%
4–10 people	6	19%	72.3%
11–25 people	11	34%	63.5%
26–49 people	5	16%	65.2%
50+ people	6	19%	64.0%

Role of Respondent

Role	Respondents	Share	Average Score
Founder / Owner	18	56%	69.1%
Managing Director / CEO	4	13%	65.2%
Leadership Team Member	7	22%	47.7%

Geography

Geography	Respondents
United Kingdom	**24 respondents - 75% of total**
India	**2 respondents**
Indonesia, Italy, Hungary, UAE, Spain, United States	**1 respondent each**

The overwhelming majority of respondents are UK-based. While international agencies have taken the scorecard, benchmarks in this report are most directly relevant to the UK agency market.

The Overall Picture

The average overall score across all 32 agencies is 63.5% - with a standard deviation of 18 percentage points. That spread matters. It tells us this is not a group of broadly similar agencies hovering around a mid-point. There is a meaningful gap between the best-run agencies in this sample and the most structurally challenged ones.

Score Distribution

Band	Agencies	Share	What This Tells Us
Below 50%	8	25%	Significant structural gaps across multiple levers
50% – 69%	10	31%	Functionally capable, commercially constrained
70% and above	14	44%	Well-structured, scalable agencies

The group scoring 70% and above are not outliers - they represent nearly half the sample. Agencies in this band tend to score well across most levers. There is a consistent pattern at the top: strength in one area correlates with strength across others.

The middle band (50%–69%) represents the most common trajectory. These agencies have genuine capability. They deliver good work, often have a clear positioning, and manage their clients well. What holds them back is a combination of inconsistent new business, underdeveloped systems, and financial management that is retrospective rather than predictive.

Agencies scoring below 50% are typically at an early stage of building management structure. The data shows this group is predominantly smaller agencies (1–3 people) and leadership team members rather than founders - a finding explored further in the cross-lever patterns section.

The Consistency Gap

Perhaps the most telling finding at the overall level is this: the five lowest-scoring questions in the entire scorecard are all about consistency and systems - not capability. Agencies struggle not with the quality of their work but with the reliability and repeatability of how they generate, price, and deliver it.

Lever 1: Sales & Marketing

Average Score: 53.4% | Rating: Needs Attention | Rank: 8th of 8
The single weakest lever across the entire sample. Every agency size band scores below 60% on Sales & Marketing.

Sales & Marketing measures how consistently agencies generate new business. The three statements probe whether new business performance is reliable month to month, whether wins are the result of a repeatable process, and whether marketing activity is proactive rather than reactive.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Our new business performance is relatively consistent from month to month.	**2.62**	52%
When we win new clients it's usually the result of a repeatable sales process rather than a reliance on relationships or reputation.	**2.59**	52%
Our marketing activity is consistent and proactive, rather than only happening when growth is urgently needed.	**2.78**	56%

What the Data Tells Us

The second statement - "we win as a result of a repeatable sales process" - scores 2.59 out of 5. This is the single lowest-scoring question in the entire scorecard. The implication is stark: most agencies win work because of who they know or what they have done before, not because they have a system for finding, qualifying, and closing new clients. When the pipeline dries up, the response is panic rather than process.

The first and third statements compound the picture. New business performance is inconsistent (2.62) and marketing activity is reactive rather than proactive (2.78). Agencies tend to generate marketing energy when they need clients urgently - creating a boom-and-bust cycle that destabilises revenue and undermines the confidence that comes from a predictable pipeline.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

The agencies scoring 70%+ on Sales & Marketing run marketing as a business function, not a founder activity. They have a defined sales process with stages, ownership, and review cadences. Marketing runs continuously - content, outreach, events - not in sprints triggered by a revenue dip. New business performance is measured monthly, with a pipeline number that everyone in the leadership team understands.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies wait to be found. Their last three clients came from referrals, a friend of a friend, or a piece of old work being shared. They have tried content marketing at some point but it stopped when delivery got busy. When asked "what is your sales process?", the honest answer is: "we pitch when we get asked."

Lever 2: Team

Average Score: 62.1% | Rating: Developing | Rank: 5th of 8
Founder dependency remains a consistent challenge. Role clarity exists, but accountability and independence from senior leaders are still developing.

The Team lever examines whether the agency's delivery structure is genuinely people-independent. It measures role clarity, senior leader involvement in day-to-day client work, and how clearly accountability for outcomes is owned.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Our delivery team is structured in clearly defined roles that work together rather than relying on key individuals.	**3.25**	65%
The agency can deliver work effectively without our senior leaders being involved in day-to-day client work.	**2.94**	59%
Accountability for outcomes is clearly defined and explicitly owned in our agency.	**3.12**	62%

What the Data Tells Us

Role clarity is the relative strength here (3.25), suggesting most agencies have at least attempted to define who does what. The more telling finding is statement five: senior leader independence from day-to-day client work scores 2.94 - below the midpoint. This is the classic founder-dependency pattern. The founder or senior leader is still in the work, still the client's primary point of contact, still the person the team turns to when a problem arises.

Accountability (3.12) sits in developing territory. Roles may be defined on paper, but clear ownership of outcomes - being responsible not just for tasks but for results - remains elusive for most agencies in this sample.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies have a leadership team that does not need to be in every client meeting. Roles have clear outcome ownership, not just task lists. When the founder is on holiday, delivery does not slow down, client relationships do not deteriorate, and the team does not wait for approval before acting.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies have skilled people in undefined roles. Everyone knows roughly what they do, but there is no job spec that defines what "done" looks like. The founder reviews every piece of work before it goes to the client. Clients expect to speak to the founder. When asked who owns retention, the honest answer is "me" - meaning the founder.

Lever 3: Ambition

Average Score: 61.6% | Rating: Developing | Rank: 6th of 8
A three-year vision exists in many agencies, but it is not consistently guiding strategic decisions. Confidence in the business model varies widely.

The Ambition lever examines whether the agency has a credible long-term plan and whether that plan is genuinely influencing day-to-day decisions. It measures vision clarity, the extent to which strategy is plan-led rather than reactive, and confidence in the business model.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
We have a clearly defined three-year vision of what success looks like for the agency.	**2.91**	58%
Our strategic decisions are guided by a clear long-term plan rather than made reactively.	**3.25**	65%
We are confident that our current business model can deliver our future goals.	**3.09**	62%

What the Data Tells Us

The three-year vision statement scores 2.91 - the fifth lowest in the entire scorecard, and below the benchmark for a lever that should be a foundational strength. Many agencies have a vague idea of where they want to be but have not codified it into a usable plan. The vision lives in the founder's head, not in a document that guides decisions.

The second statement scores higher (3.25), which may initially seem contradictory - but it reflects something common in agencies: they make strategic decisions, but those decisions are often driven by client needs, team pressures, or market opportunities rather than a long-term plan. Strategy happens, but it happens reactively.

Confidence in the business model (3.09) sits in the middle, which signals a meaningful latent anxiety: many agency owners are unsure whether the way they currently operate can actually deliver the business they want to build.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies have a three-year plan that is specific and written down. It defines revenue targets, the client profile they are optimising for, the headcount model, the capability they intend to build, and what they are explicitly choosing not to do. Strategic decisions - new hires, new services, pricing changes - are tested against the plan.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies are perpetually busy with the next thing. Vision conversations happen in strategy days that produce nothing lasting. The agency grows opportunistically - taking work that comes rather than pursuing work that fits. Ambition exists; a plan does not.

Lever 4: Numbers

Average Score: 63.4% | Rating: Developing | Rank: 4th of 8
Financial management is the fourth-strongest lever but sits firmly in "developing" territory. Pricing confidence is the most persistent weakness.

The Numbers lever measures how actively and confidently agency leaders manage their financial performance. It covers profitability management, revenue forecasting, and pricing discipline.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Profitability is actively managed, not just reviewed retrospectively in our agency.	**3.22**	64%
Our future revenue and cash flow can be predicted with a good level of confidence.	**3.16**	63%
We make pricing decisions confidently, without being driven by fear of losing work.	**3.12**	62%

What the Data Tells Us

The three Numbers statements score closely together - 3.22, 3.16, and 3.12 - which suggests this is a lever where agencies are broadly at a similar level of development rather than having sharp variations between statements. The overall picture is of agencies that understand their numbers but are not yet fully in command of them.

Pricing confidence (3.12) is the weakest of the three, and this finding recurs across the sector consistently. Agencies price under pressure. They discount to win work. They absorb scope increases rather than raising fees. The pricing conversation is treated as a risk to manage rather than a value conversation to lead. The lack of pricing confidence noted here is somewhat at odds with the greater confidence shown in the Uniqueness lever with many respondents scoring themselves highly on clarity of value.

Forecasting (3.16) being below 3.5 is a concern given the typical revenue composition of agencies - predominantly retainers and project work with relatively predictable repeat patterns. The barrier is usually not the data but the habit: agencies that forecast confidently do so because they have built the process and practised it weekly, not because they have better clients.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies review profitability by client and by service line monthly - not annually when the accountant asks. They have a rolling 90-day cash flow forecast. Pricing decisions are led by value and margin, not by what they think the client will accept. When asked "what is your net margin?", the answer comes without hesitation.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies find out how the year went when their accountant files. Pricing is reverse-engineered from a number that feels acceptable to the client. Cash flow anxiety is a near-permanent background condition. The answer to "what will your revenue be next quarter?" is "it depends on whether that pitch converts."

Lever 5: Development

Average Score: 69.2% | Rating: Developing–Strong | Rank: 2nd of 8
The strongest individual question in the entire scorecard sits in this lever. Agencies build excellent client relationships - but account growth is still too reactive.

The Development lever examines the quality of ongoing client relationships - specifically whether relationships grow in value over time, whether account growth is proactive or simply reactive to client requests, and how well revenue concentration risk is managed.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Our client relationships continue to grow in value beyond the initial engagement.	**3.94**	79%
Growth of our client accounts is a result of our proactive planning, not just a reaction to client requests.	**3.16**	63%
Our revenue is well distributed and not overly dependent on a small number of clients.	**3.28**	66%

What the Data Tells Us

The first statement scores 3.94 out of 5 - the highest score of any individual question across the entire scorecard. UK agencies build strong client relationships. They keep clients, deepen trust, and grow accounts over time. This is a genuine sector-wide strength.

The gap between statement thirteen (3.94) and statement fourteen (3.16) is one of the most revealing findings in the dataset. Agencies grow client accounts not through deliberate planning - presenting new solutions, identifying growth opportunities, managing structured review conversations - but by responding to what the client asks for. This is a significant missed opportunity. Reactive growth is uncontrolled growth: it depends on the client's timing, the client's awareness of their own needs, and the quality of the relationship rather than the quality of the agency's commercial strategy.

Revenue concentration (3.28) is in the developing category - suggesting that while agencies are not dangerously exposed to single clients, their revenue is not as well-distributed as the business's resilience would require.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies hold structured quarterly business reviews with major clients - not just project updates. They have a client development plan per account, with identified growth opportunities, a timeline, and a named owner. Revenue concentration is tracked, and any client representing more than 20% of revenue triggers a deliberate diversification plan.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies are excellent account managers but poor account developers. The relationship is warm; the commercial ambition is absent. New work from existing clients arrives when the client thinks of it, not when the agency proposes it. The biggest clients are also the biggest single points of revenue failure.

Lever 6: Operations

Average Score: 66.7% | Rating: Developing | Rank: 3rd of 8
Scoping and pricing consistency is a relative strength. The persistent gap is knowledge documentation - delivery still lives in people's heads.

The Operations lever measures the repeatability and predictability of how the agency delivers its work. It covers consistent scoping and pricing, delivery timeline predictability, and whether operational knowledge is embedded in systems or held only by individuals.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Projects with similar requirements are scoped and priced in a consistent way.	**3.69**	74%
Our delivery timelines and margins are generally predictable and well controlled.	**3.31**	66%
Knowledge about how work is delivered is embedded in our business systems, not just in the heads of our people.	**3.00**	60%

What the Data Tells Us

Scoping consistency (3.69) is the second-highest individual question score in the dataset. Agencies have broadly learned - often through painful experience - that inconsistent scoping leads to margin erosion and client disappointment. This is one area where operational learning has genuinely translated into practice.

Delivery predictability (3.31) is in reasonable shape, sitting just above the midpoint. But it is the third statement that reveals the underlying fragility of operations across the sector: knowledge documentation scores exactly 3.00. Delivery knowledge lives in the heads of specific people. When those people leave, are promoted, or are ill, the quality and speed of delivery are at risk. This is not a minor operational detail - it is one of the primary reasons agencies fail to scale beyond a certain size, and one of the key factors that depresses agency valuations at exit.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies have a documented delivery methodology that a new hire could follow within their first two weeks. Project templates, briefing documents, quality standards, and review checkpoints exist as living documents - not PDFs no one reads. When a key person leaves, the knowledge stays.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies rely on certain individuals to hold things together. When the best project manager is off sick, three things slip. When the senior creative leaves, clients are anxious. The agency's knowledge of how to deliver its best work lives in two or three people. That is not a system - it is a dependency.

Lever 7: Uniqueness

Average Score: 69.4% | Rating: Developing–Strong | Rank: 1st of 8
The highest-scoring lever. Agencies know what makes them different - the gap is turning that clarity into a consistent commercial advantage.

The Uniqueness lever examines how clearly differentiated the agency is in the market. It covers whether prospects choose the agency for specific, articulable reasons, whether the agency can clearly state why clients should choose it over alternatives, and whether it consistently avoids competing in crowded undifferentiated pitches.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Prospective clients choose our agency for clear reasons beyond price or execution alone.	**3.62**	72%
It is easy for us to articulate why prospective clients should choose our agency over alternatives.	**3.53**	71%
We rarely find ourselves competing in crowded pitches with similar-looking firms.	**3.25**	65%

What the Data Tells Us

Uniqueness is the highest-scoring lever - and yet it sits at 69.4%, still technically in "developing" territory. That gap between perception and performance is worth examining. Agencies score well on clarity of value (3.62) and ease of articulation (3.53), but the conversion of that clarity into a genuinely differentiated market position - one that consistently keeps agencies out of commodity pitches - is not yet there for most (3.25).

The pairing of Uniqueness as the strongest lever and Sales & Marketing as the weakest is the report's most structurally important finding. Agencies know what they stand for. They can articulate it when asked. But they are not consistently taking that message to market, building an audience around it, or using it to generate a flow of well-qualified inbound interest. The positioning exists. The engine that converts it into pipeline does not.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies have a specific, ownable market position - not "we do great creative" or "we're a full-service digital agency," but a precisely defined WHO they serve, WHAT outcome they deliver, and WHY they deliver it better than anyone else. That position is consistent across the website, proposals, discovery conversations, and how the team talks about the agency at networking events.

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies can articulate their differentiation in a room but cannot consistently reflect it in their marketing. Their website looks like their competitors'. Their case studies could belong to any agency. When a prospect asks "why should I choose you?", the answer is competent but not compelling.

Lever 8: Technology

Average Score: 61.3% | Rating: Developing | Rank: 7th of 8
Technology generates insight and efficiency for a minority of agencies. For most, it remains a source of administration rather than competitive advantage.

The Technology lever examines whether the agency uses technology like AI and SaaS tools strategically - to generate meaningful insight, to reduce manual effort, and as part of a deliberate plan to support growth and scale. It is not a measure of how many tools an agency uses but of how purposefully it uses them.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
Core technology-backed tools provide meaningful insight and efficiency data, not just administrative burden.	**2.84**	57%
The technology we use reduces manual work rather than creating workarounds.	**3.12**	62%
Technology decisions are made as part of a deliberate strategy to support us as we scale.	**3.22**	64%

What the Data Tells Us

The first statement - tools providing meaningful insight rather than administrative burden - scores 2.84, the fourth-lowest question in the scorecard. This reflects a common pattern in agencies: technology has been adopted piecemeal over time, with tools chosen to solve immediate problems rather than as part of an integrated strategy. The result is a stack of tools that generates data without generating insight, and that requires manual reconciliation rather than enabling automation.

The second statement (3.12) and third (3.22) score slightly higher but remain below the 3.5 threshold that would suggest technology is genuinely working for the agency. Deliberate strategy around technology is nascent - agencies know they should be more intentional, but few have made it a leadership priority.

In the context of AI adoption - which is accelerating rapidly across the marketing sector - the Technology lever will become more consequential, not less. Agencies that develop deliberate, strategic approaches to technology now will compound their advantage as AI tools mature. Those that continue to accumulate tools without strategy will compound their inefficiency.

What STANDOUT Agencies Look Like

Strong agencies have a documented technology stack with a clear purpose for each tool. Reporting is automated. Project margin data flows without spreadsheet reconciliation. AI tools are embedded in creative and operational workflows with defined standards. Technology decisions go through a brief evaluation against the agency's growth plan - not just "the account manager showed us a demo."

What Standstill Agencies Look Like

Weak agencies have 12 tools, use 6 of them properly, pay for 3 they have forgotten about, and maintain 4 spreadsheets that duplicate what the tools should be doing. Technology conversations are dominated by which platform to migrate to next, rather than how to extract more value from what already exists.

Patterns Across the Data

Agency Size vs. Performance: Bigger Is Not Better

The relationship between agency size and scorecard performance is not linear. The strongest performers in this sample are 4–10 person agencies, averaging 72.3% - above agencies of every other size band, including those with 50 or more staff.

Agency Size	Respondents	Average Score	Performance Band
1–3 people	3	40.0%	Needs Attention
4–10 people	6	72.3%	Strong
11–25 people	11	63.5%	Developing
26–49 people	5	65.2%	Developing
50+ people	6	64.0%	Developing

The plateau effect is significant: agencies scoring 63–65% across the 11-person, 26-49-person, and 50+ bands suggests that growth in headcount, on its own, does not translate into improvement in systems, structure, or commercial discipline. **Agencies scale people before they scale process. The result is a business that has more complexity but not more control.**

The 4–10 person band's outperformance may reflect a specific moment in an agency's lifecycle: large enough to have defined roles and operational structure, small enough that the founder's standards still permeate the business. The challenge for agencies moving beyond this size is maintaining that structural discipline as headcount grows.

The Perception Gap: Founders vs. Leadership Teams

The most striking role-level finding is the 21-point gap between how founders and leadership team members score the same business.

Role	Average Score
Founder / Owner	**69.1% average (n=18)**
Managing Director / CEO	**65.2% average (n=4)**
Leadership Team Member	**47.7% average (n=7)**

Leadership team members score the agency at an average of 47.7% - 21 points below founders at 69.1%. This is not a marginal difference. It reflects a fundamental divergence in how senior leadership perceives the business relative to those who work within it.

There are two plausible explanations. The first is founder optimism bias - founders assess the agency against their intention (the strategy they have in their head) rather than against what is actually embedded in the business. The second, more troubling interpretation, is that key strategic and operational improvements the founder believes are in place simply have not been communicated, embedded, or experienced by the rest of the leadership team. Either way, this gap represents a meaningful risk: agencies that believe they are more mature than they are will underinvest in the structural development they actually need.

For founders reading this report: the gap between how you score your business and how your team scores it may be the most important diagnostic in this entire dataset.

What STANDOUT Agencies Do Differently

Fourteen agencies in this sample - 44% of the total - score 70% or above on the overall scorecard. These are not perfect businesses. They have weaknesses, as every business does. But they share a set of consistent habits that distinguish them from the rest of the sample.

They lift all levers together

Top-performing agencies score well across most of the eight levers - not just one or two. The correlation between overall score and lever-level consistency is strong. Agencies that try to build a scalable business by fixing a single lever while neglecting others tend to plateau. The agencies in the 70%+ band have typically addressed structure, commercial discipline, positioning, and team capability in parallel - not sequentially.

They have a working Sales & Marketing function

Even among top performers, Sales & Marketing is the weakest lever. But the agencies in this band score considerably higher on S&M than the rest of the sample. The difference is not usually that they have a large marketing team - most of these are 4–25 person agencies. The difference is that someone owns the commercial development function, there is a defined process, and marketing activity happens on a schedule rather than in response to a revenue dip.

Their Uniqueness is commercially active, not just intellectually clear

Top performers don't just know their positioning - they use it. Their messaging is consistent across website, proposals, and outreach. Their sales process is anchored to the value they deliver, not to a price negotiation. They avoid crowded commodity pitches because they have spent time cultivating the right types of prospects through the right channels, and those prospects are pre-qualified by the time a formal conversation begins.

Their knowledge is in the business, not just in their people

The Operations lever is typically one of the strongest for top-performing agencies. Their delivery methodology is documented. Briefing and quality-checking processes exist and are followed. When a key person leaves - and in all agencies, key people do eventually leave - the business does not miss a beat. This is what enables growth: not the absence of strong individuals, but the presence of systems that amplify them.

The agencies in the 70%+ band are not exceptional agencies. They are well-run ones.

The distance between a 60% agency and a 75% agency is not talent. It is structure, habits, and deliberate commercial discipline - all of which are learnable.

The Five Biggest Gaps

The five lowest-scoring questions across the entire sample represent the most consistent structural weaknesses in marketing agencies today. They are ranked here from lowest to highest average score.

Scorecard Statement	Score /5	%
When we win new clients it's usually the result of a repeatable sales process rather than relationships or reputation.	**2.59**	52%
Our new business performance is relatively consistent from month to month.	**2.62**	52%
Our marketing activity is consistent and proactive, rather than only happening when growth is urgently needed.	**2.78**	56%
Core technology-backed tools provide meaningful insight and efficiency data, not just administrative burden.	**2.84**	57%
We have a clearly defined three-year vision of what success looks like for the agency.	**2.91**	58%

Three of the five lowest-scoring questions sit in the Sales & Marketing lever - confirming that this is not just a weak lever but a structural failure that cuts across agency size, seniority, and geography. The other two gaps - technology providing insight and a defined three-year vision - sit at the strategic infrastructure level. These are not operational details. They are foundational conditions for building a scalable, valuable business.

What These Five Gaps Have in Common

They are all about building a system rather than relying on a person. A repeatable sales process replaces reliance on the founder's relationships. Consistent marketing replaces reactive sprints. Technology that generates insight replaces manual data wrangling. A written three-year vision replaces the plan that exists only in the founder's head.

Agencies that address these five gaps are not just fixing weaknesses. They are building the structural foundations that enable everything else - better team performance, better pricing conversations, better client development, and ultimately a more valuable, more transferable business.

Every one of these five gaps is fixable within 12 months for an agency with the commitment to address them.
The barrier is rarely resource or capability. It is priority and habit.

How Does Your Agency Compare?

The benchmarks in this report give you a reference point - but they are only useful if you know where you stand against them.

The STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™ takes three minutes to complete. It gives you an overall score across all eight levers, a question-by-question breakdown, and a personalised result that identifies your strongest and weakest areas.

Take the STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™:
www.weareagentsofchange.com/standout-scorecard
Three minutes. Eight levers. One honest benchmark for your agency.

Questions to Consider as You Read This Report

Sales & Marketing: If your pipeline dried up tomorrow, how long before the business felt it? Do you have a process for generating new business - or just a track record of winning it?

Team: If you stepped away from client work for three months, what would happen? Who is accountable for the outcomes the agency promises - not just the tasks it delivers?

Ambition: Can you describe your agency in three years in specific, measurable terms? Is that description written down and shared with your leadership team?

Numbers: Do you know your net margin right now, without asking your accountant? Do you have a 90-day cash flow forecast that you review weekly?

Development: When did you last proactively propose something to your biggest client - not in response to a brief, but as a new idea from you? What is your most concentrated revenue risk?

Operations: If your best project manager left tomorrow, what would happen? Which parts of your delivery methodology live only in people's heads?

Uniqueness: Is your positioning specific enough to meaningfully exclude some clients? Would your current clients describe your agency the same way you would?

Technology: Does your technology stack make you faster and smarter - or does it mainly create more spreadsheets? What is your strategy for AI in the next 12 months?

About Agents of Change

Agents of Change is a strategic advisory practice for marketing agency owners. Founded by Gareth Healey, a former agency owner and management consultant, and Callum Healey, a psychology graduate and AI consultant, it exists to help agency leaders build businesses that are structured, scalable, and genuinely valuable.

The STANDOUT Agency System™ and the STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™ are the frameworks through which Agents of Change delivers its advisory work. They are built on a simple belief: that the barriers to agency growth are structural, not creative - and that the right framework, applied with discipline, can turn a founder-dependent agency into a genuine asset.

Website	www.weareagentsofchange.com
Scorecard	www.weareagentsofchange.com/standout-scorecard
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This report is based on anonymised, aggregated data from 32 completed STANDOUT Agency Scorecard™ responses. No individual agency or respondent is identified.