

What Matters Most In Selecting Marketing Automation?

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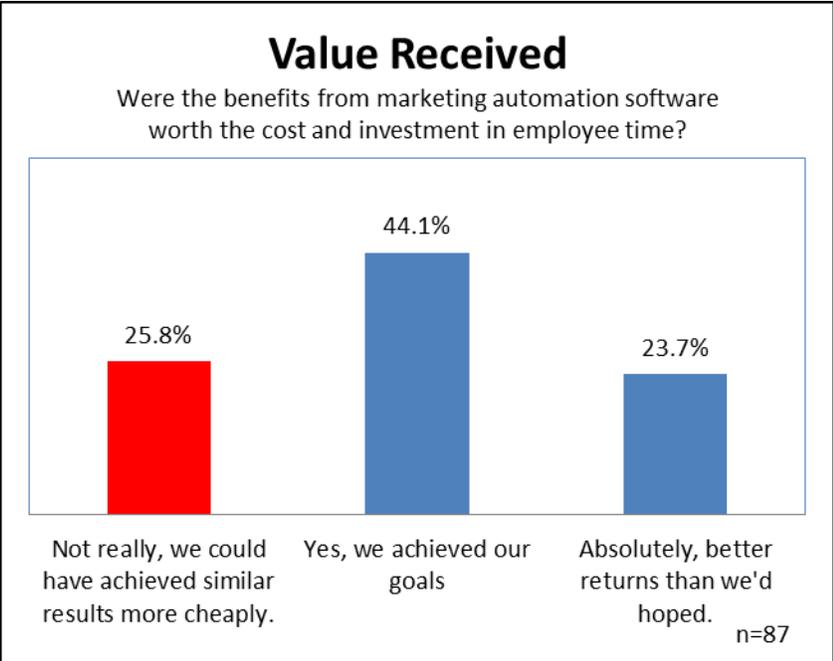
Introduction

Thousands of companies have now purchased marketing automation systems. An overwhelming majority is satisfied with their results, but a significant minority is not. A recent survey by Raab Associates and VentureBeat found that many satisfaction problems can be traced to choices made at the start of the acquisition process. This paper presents those findings and shows how you can successfully evaluate and deploy a marketing automation solution.

Buyer Satisfaction Is Mixed

Our research asked recent buyers of marketing automation whether the benefits of their systems were worth the cost and investment in employee time. Almost 75% said they met or exceeded their goals. But the remainder, 25.8%, said they could have achieved similar results more cheaply through other means. Ouch!

Another question asked buyers to rate (on a scale of 1 to 5) how well the software lived up to expectations and improved marketing results. The average rating was 3.2 and almost 18% gave a strongly negative rating of 1 or 2. The balance of our analysis looked for survey answers that correlated with unusually high or low average satisfaction ratings, and tried to understand why.

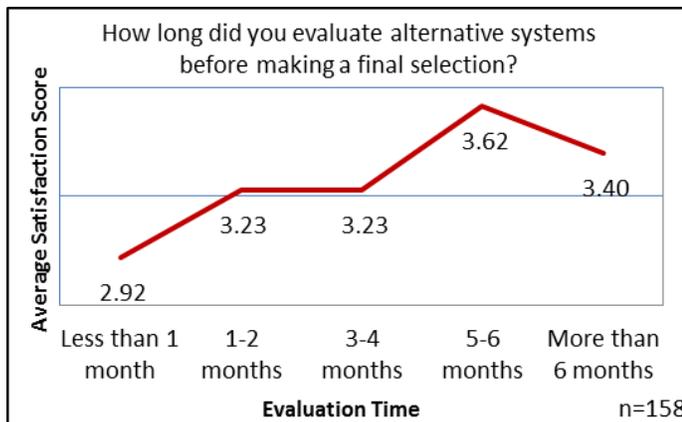


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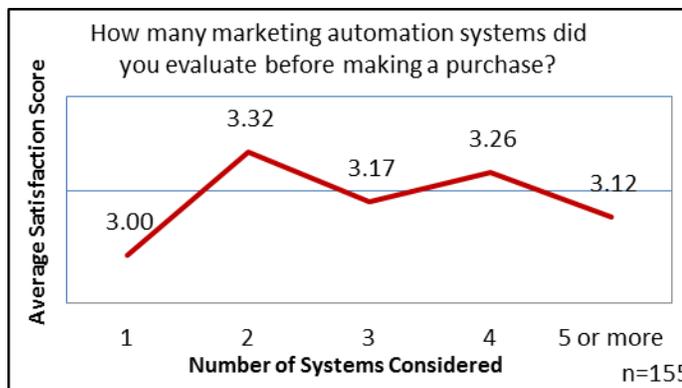
What We Found

We found several buyer behaviors that strongly correlated with low satisfaction. The most prominent were:

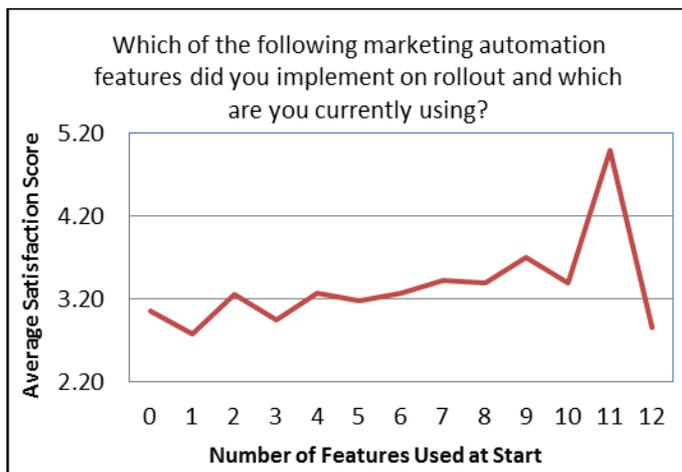
- **Selecting too quickly.** Buyers who spent less than one month comparing vendors were substantially less satisfied than everyone else, and those who spent five months to six months had substantially above-average satisfaction. Taking your time clearly pays off – although taking too long could itself be a sign of problems.



- **Considering too few.** Buyers who looked at only one system had notably low satisfaction. Scores rise sharply when two systems are considered, but then fall slightly as the number moves beyond two. Looking at more than five systems is another sign of a troubled project.

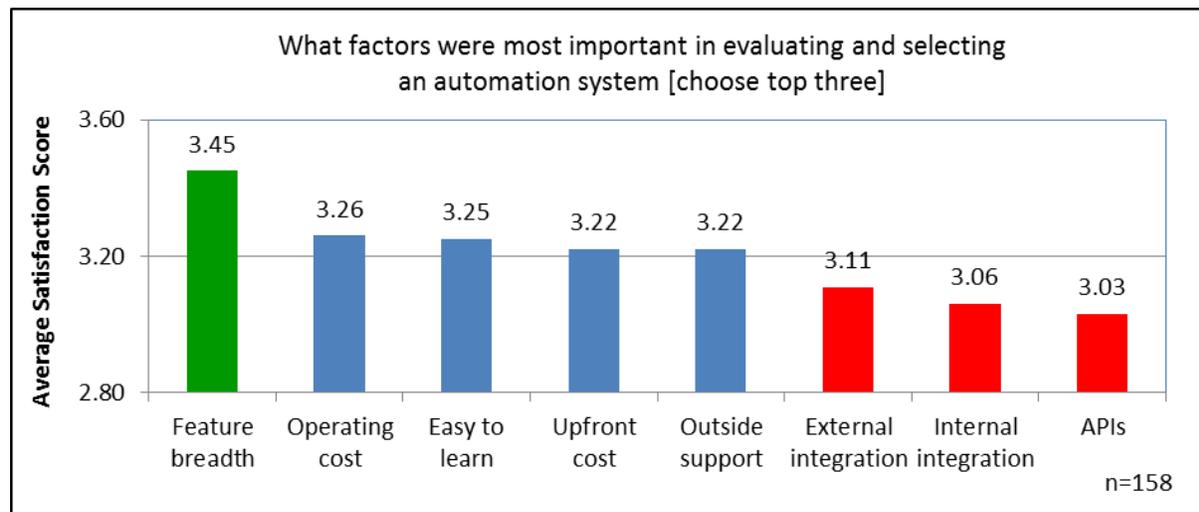


- **Starting too small.** There was a slight but definite increase in satisfaction among buyers who used more features at the start of their deployment. This was especially notable because it appears to contradict the popular “crawl-walk-run” approach, in which marketers start with a simple marketing automation deployment and add features over time.



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- **Ignoring features.** Buyers who evaluated systems based on feature breadth were substantially more satisfied than buyers who did not. Conversely, satisfaction of buyers who evaluated on integration capabilities was significantly below average. Other common considerations, including cost, ease of learning, and availability of outside support, had little relationship to results.



What It Means

The common thread connecting factors that influenced satisfaction is **preparation**. Marketers who took the time to understand their needs, searched carefully for a system that met them, and deployed sophisticated marketing programs from the start had good results. Marketers who looked quickly, took the first system they found, and deployed with little advance planning were likely to pick a system that didn't match their needs – or may have chosen a system that was technically adequate but failed to use it effectively.

This insight may also explain why the *number* of systems considered didn't matter so long as marketers considered more than one. The benefit came from the comparison process itself, which forced marketers to define their requirements. They received this benefit regardless of how many systems they evaluated or which one they finally chose.

What Didn't Matter

The survey also explored a number of other factors that turned out to have no significant correlation with satisfaction. These included size of training budgets, success measures, project goals, and company size.

Other findings in the research support this view.

- Satisfaction was highest among marketers who completed their deployment within one to two months – suggesting that they had planned carefully and were prepared to execute efficiently once the project had begun.
- Satisfaction was low among marketers who integrated with external email and business intelligence systems, two features that are typically provided by the

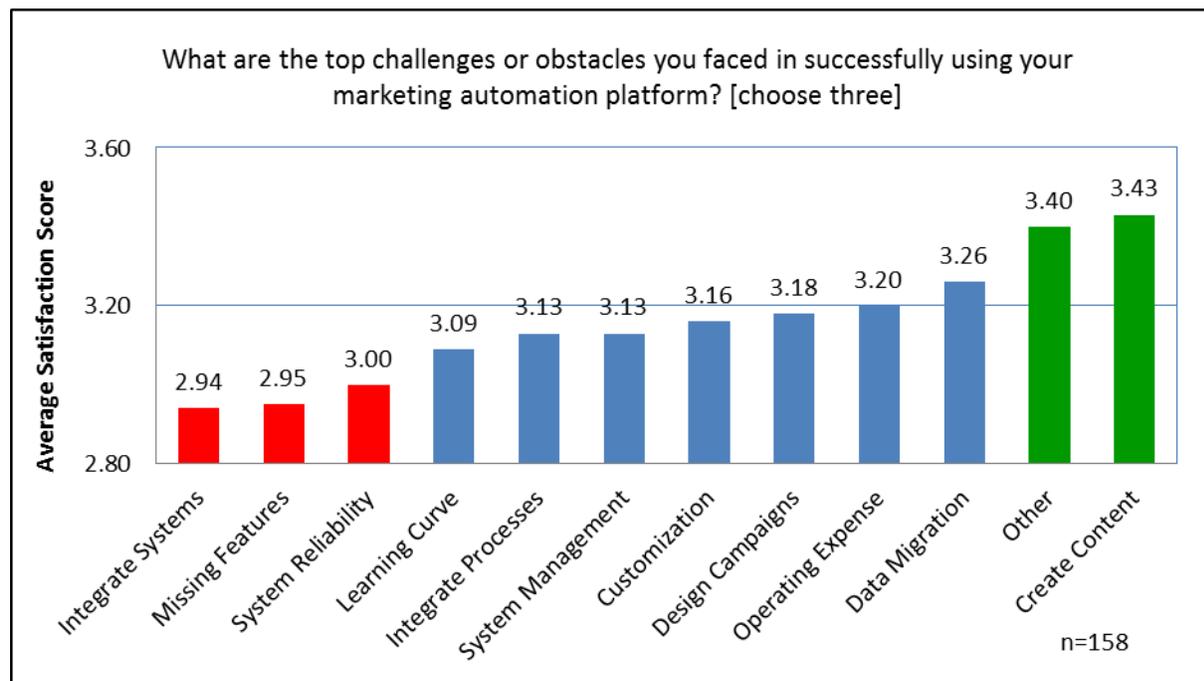
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marketing automation system itself. Marketers who integrated external systems apparently found the internal capabilities inadequate, presumably because they failed to assess them properly in advance. By contrast, satisfaction was high among marketers who integrated web content management and search engine optimization, functions which are rarely part of marketing automation products.

- Satisfaction was higher among marketers in the industries with the most survey respondents, including consulting, business services, and technology. These are the industries where users and vendors have the most experience and are thus most likely to understand their marketing automation requirements.
- Satisfaction was highest among marketers who deployed their systems without adding staff or contract resources, suggesting those firms fully prepared their existing staff for the new work.

Closer Look: Obstacles to Use

The survey didn't explicitly ask marketers whether selecting the wrong system was an obstacle to their success. But their answers do point in that direction. Satisfaction was lowest among buyers who cited integration with company systems, missing features, and system reliability as obstacles. Those are all problems which are caused by the specific marketing automation system and cannot be corrected once the system is installed. At the other extreme, people who cited content creation as an obstacle were highly satisfied, suggesting that they were able to overcome whatever problems they had initially.



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The remaining problems had to do with setting up the system (customization, data migration), learning to use it (learning curve, system management), or organizational issues (integrate processes, design campaigns, operating expense). Unlike fundamental system problems, these obstacles can be overcome given some effort. The intermediate satisfaction levels suggest this is what happened.

What You Should Do

The clear lesson of this study is that preparation is the key to success. Marketers must first build clear understanding of how they'll use marketing automation and then identify the system features they'll need to support that use. Only then should they start to evaluate systems, using the requirements as a benchmark. Nor is picking the right system enough: their preparation should include the training, program design, and process changes needed to use the new system effectively. Time invested in preparation will more than pay for itself in terms of a faster and more effective deployment. Here are specific guidelines for running a successful project:

- **Take your time.** Selecting a system in less than one month is the single most powerful mistake identified in this study. Looking at just one system is almost as harmful. No matter how eager you are to start using marketing automation, take the time to run a thorough selection process.
- **Do your homework.** Effective selection is based on a concrete understanding of how you'll use the system. This requires defining the marketing programs you'll run, systems you'll integrate, staff you'll need, and business processes you'll change. Only after you know these can you start to judge which systems will best fit your business.
- **Focus on features.** The key to success is getting a system with the features you need. Don't get buried in technical details or be distracted by user interfaces and pricing. Focus on defining your actual feature requirements and determining which systems really provide them. This requires hands-on testing against detailed scenarios tied directly to your planned marketing automation programs. Anything less increases your risk of failure.
- **Plan ahead.** The most effective deployments use a full range of features from the beginning, integrate with multiple existing systems, and add new processes and organizational capabilities. Implementing these successfully takes careful planning, so the organization knows exactly what to do and what comes next. Without this sort of preparation, your project is likely to stall after the initial stages.
- **Deploy quickly.** Once the planning is complete, execute quickly and efficiently. Use outside resources as necessary to supplement your existing staff. The goal is to deliver meaningful value from the start and then steadily expand into new areas.

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About the Survey

VentureBeat and Raab Associates conducted this survey of marketing automation users in February and March, 2014, asking for responses on the Venture Beat Web site, Raab Associates' Customer Experience Matrix blog, and through social media. A total of 158 valid responses were received. The majority were from small companies (under 100 employees) and held senior positions (marketing director or higher).

To purchase the complete 57 page report, visit <http://insight.venturebeat.com/>

About Raab Associates

Raab Associates is a consultancy specializing in marketing technology and analytics. Typical engagements include business needs assessment, technology audits, vendor selection, results analysis, and dashboard development. The company also consults with industry vendors on products and marketing strategy. It publishes the B2B Marketing Automation Vendor Selection Tool (VEST), the industry's most comprehensive independent guide to B//2B marketing automation systems.

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