

**MISSING  
THE MARK:  
THE DIGITAL  
MARKETING  
SKILLS GAP IN  
THE USA, UK &  
IRELAND**

[digitalmarketinginstitute.com](https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com)



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## OVERVIEW

# Executive Summary



Ian Dodson, Digital Marketing Institute



'Only 8% of marketers tested achieved entry level digital marketing skills'

As the digital economy continues to experience huge global growth, digital transformation is wielding an inescapable influence on every organization across every industry. According to Accenture, the intensified use of digital technologies could add a colossal \$1.36 trillion to total global economic output by 2020.

To put that figure into context, this means that digital advancements have the potential to add an economy the size of South Korea to the global market.

Organizations have had to adapt their marketing methods and techniques in order to survive. As a result, the need for relevant and cutting-edge digital strategies and tactics is a priority for skilled digital professionals.

Together, these factors are stimulating job creation, and triggering competitiveness between employers as they struggle to find individuals with essential digital skills. Salaries are expanding in the digital field and benefits are becoming increasingly enticing.

Yet despite the need for digital professionals with specific proficiencies, there is an unavoidable and growing skills gap affecting organizations' abilities to successfully leverage digital.

In 2014, the Digital Marketing Institute produced its inaugural digital skills report, which highlighted an enormous talent deficit. Our test-based review discovered that 8 in 10 professionals with a marketing remit in Ireland failed to achieve entry level digital competency, with digital marketing proficiency a notable 34% lower than their international counterparts.

For our 2016 report, we broadened our area of focus and tested marketing professionals across a variety of industries in the USA, UK, and Ireland. Amazingly while 59% of marketers in the USA, 47% in the UK and 51% Ireland perceived themselves as very or fairly competent in digital marketing, the actual level of their skills when assessed is equally low across all three countries - scoring 38% on average. In fact, only 8% of marketers tested achieved entry level skills.

While digital marketing skill levels were found to be low across all sectors, our research highlighted that abilities in the USA and UK are slightly higher

in marketing/communications and technology sectors while hospitality/leisure, retail and food and beverage were the worst performing sectors. Interestingly along with the marketing/communications and technology sectors in Ireland, the hospitality/leisure and education sectors showed high digital marketing abilities.

From an organizational perspective, digital competency in the USA improves amongst larger businesses with between 51 and 250 employees while in the UK (38%) and Ireland (39%) skills levels are highest in small businesses with 10 employees or less. In addition, only 31% of U.S. marketers say their organizations are very or fairly engaged with digital marketing with only 1 in 5 working for companies that offer digital marketing training.

These results reinforce that now more than ever, there is a global digital talent crisis - and if it isn't addressed imminently, as the digital industry continues to evolve and innovate, skill levels will continue to decline.

CONTINUED

## Executive Summary

As digital specialists and the global certification body for digital education, we know digital. We know the challenges that organizations and individuals come up against in the face of a constantly changing digital landscape.

As digital channels continue to evolve they have transformed the way in which consumers research, interact with brands, and ultimately purchase. This impacts not only e-commerce retailers, who sell directly online, but brick-and-mortar businesses. In fact, Google found that '3 in 4 people who find local information in search results helpful are more likely to visit stores' and '50% of consumers will visit a store within one day of a local search on their smartphone'.

Despite digital marketing now being an integral part of any successful business, there is a persistent and growing global skills gap that is threatening to undermine future organizational growth. In the U.S. alone nearly half of marketers

cite a lack of in-house expertise as one of their greatest challenges and there is an urgent need for digital skills education for professionals.

Such is the pace of digital that it is not enough for organizations to just invest in technologies.

They need to also invest in digital marketing and skills education. Without this investment, organizations risk falling behind and becoming less competitive in the global market. Now is the time for companies to embark or progress on a digital transformation path to secure a brighter future.



Ian Dodson,  
Co-Founder, Digital Marketing Institute

“There has never been a greater time of promise or greater peril. We must develop a comprehensive and globally shared view of how technology is affecting our lives and reshaping our economic, social, cultural and human environments.”

– Klaus Schwab, Founder, World Economic Forum

# Methodology Summary

This report was conducted on behalf of the Digital Marketing Institute by Behavior & Attitudes between 27th June and 8th July 2016. In total, 908 employees involved in marketing for their organizations across Ireland, the UK and the USA had their digital marketing competencies tested and surveyed.

A spread of business areas was assessed across each sample, and each country's data was also weighted in terms of organizational size; i.e., number of employees.

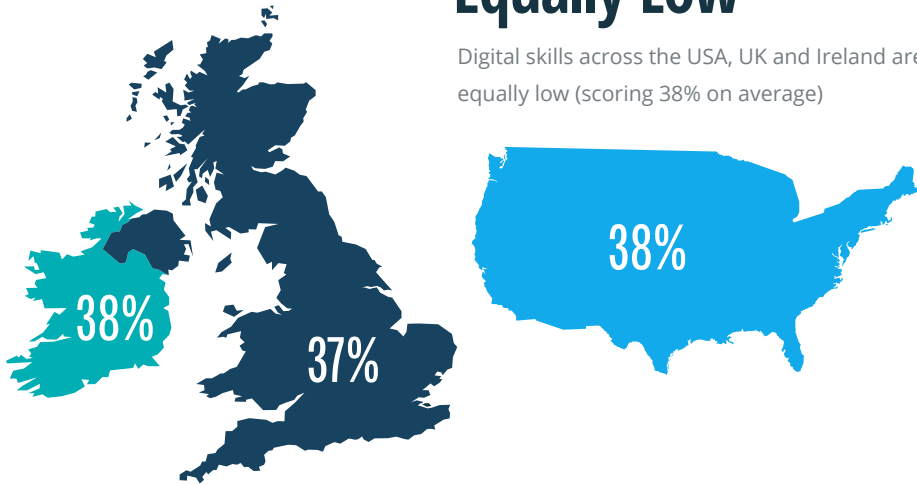


# Report Highlights

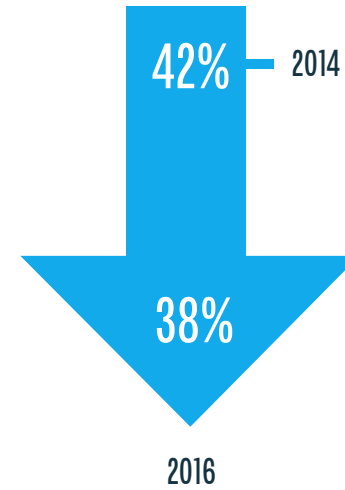
The global decline in digital capabilities

## Equally Low

Digital skills across the USA, UK and Ireland are all equally low (scoring 38% on average)



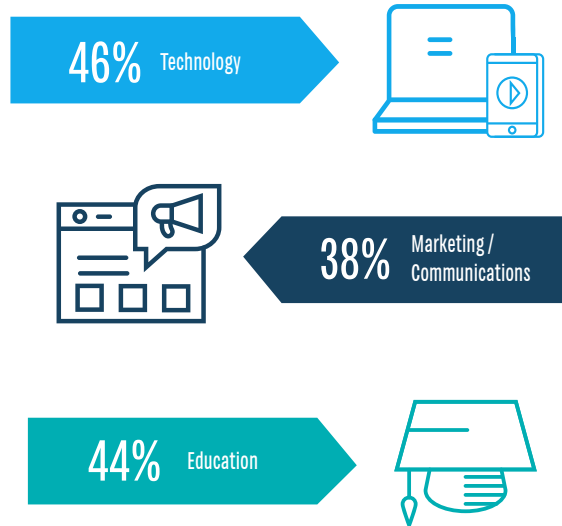
IRELAND UK USA



## Decreasing Skills

Digital skill levels have decreased since 2014, from 42% to 38%

## Top Skill levels by Sector



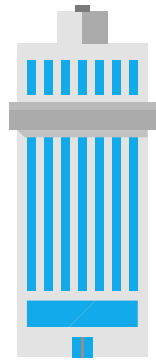
## Specialism

Marketers in the USA and Ireland thrive at mobile marketing, while the UK performs best in digital strategy. All three equally struggle with digital display advertising.



# Organization Skills

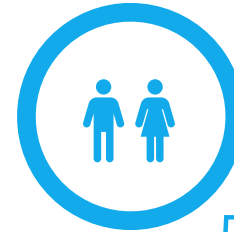
In the UK (38%) and Ireland (39%) digital skill levels are at their highest in small businesses with 10 employees or less. In the USA, digital competency improves amongst larger organizations with between 51 and 250 employees (39%)



39%

# Competency

59% of Irish workers agree that their organization is involved in digital marketing, but is not very competent at it, compared to their UK (46%) and USA (47%) counterparts



59%

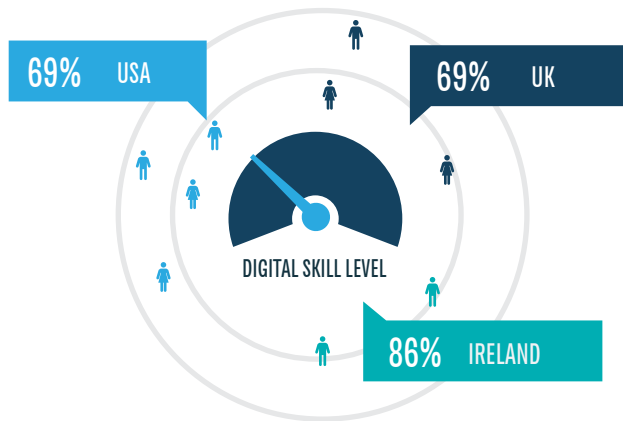


47%



46%

IRELAND UK USA

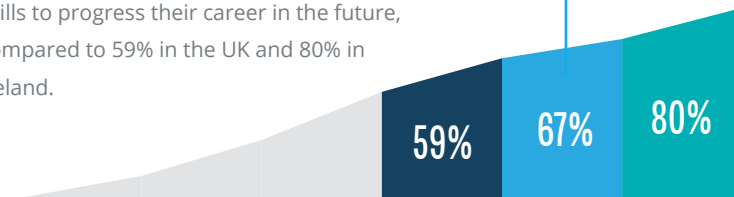


# Need to Improve

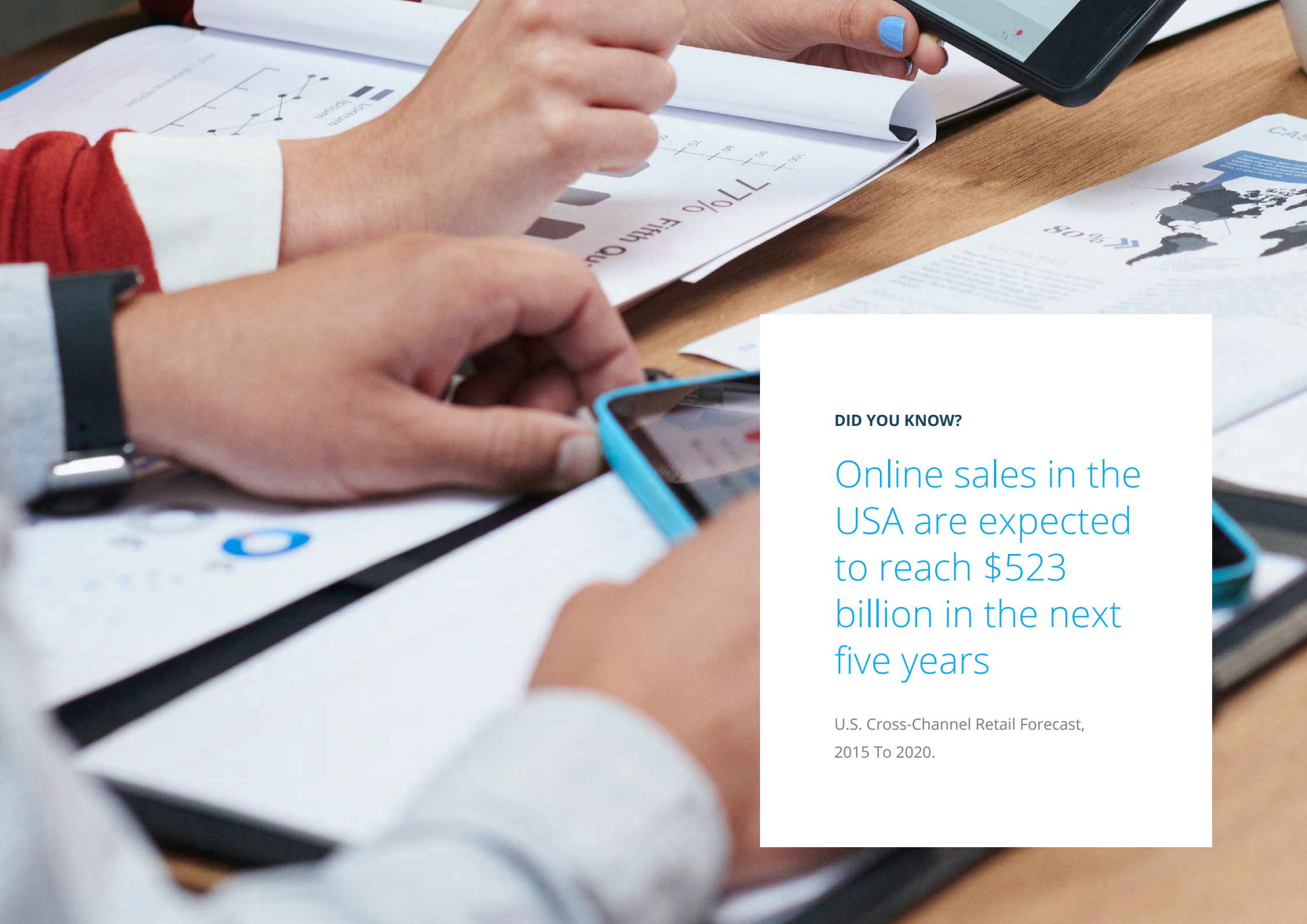
Over two thirds of marketers in the USA and UK feel they will need to improve their digital marketing skills to remain competent in their current role in the future. This is compared to 86% in Ireland.

# Career Progression

67% of marketers in the USA feel they will need to improve their digital marketing skills to progress their career in the future, compared to 59% in the UK and 80% in Ireland.







**DID YOU KNOW?**

Online sales in the USA are expected to reach \$523 billion in the next five years

U.S. Cross-Channel Retail Forecast,  
2015 To 2020.

# Marketers' poor performance highlights a severe global digital skills shortage

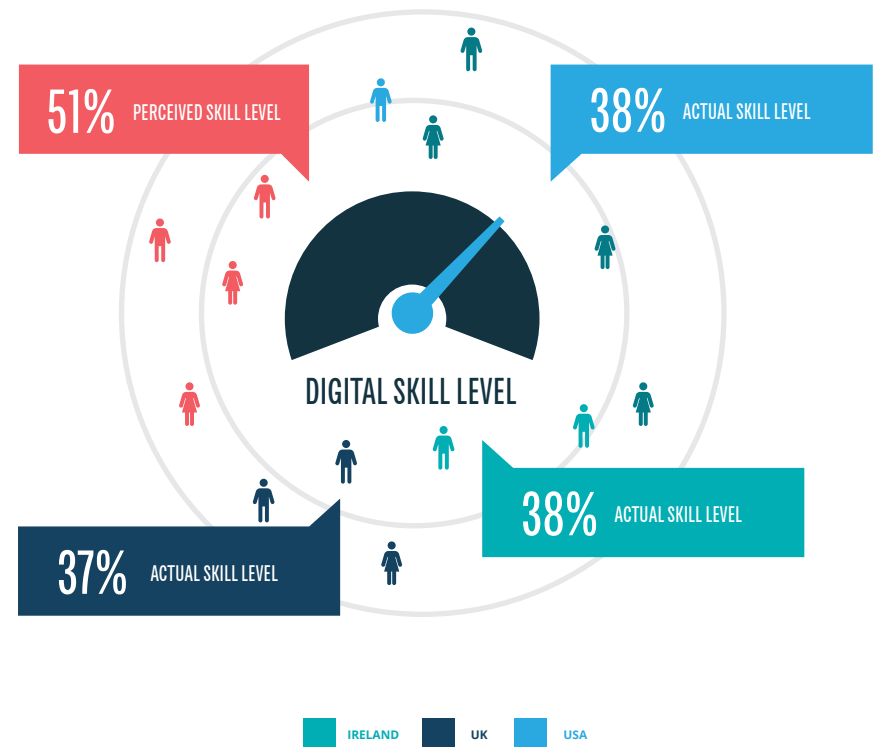
Digital marketing continues to establish itself as an essential skillset for organizations of all sizes, within every industry. Yet despite the undeniable need for these capabilities, the majority of digital professionals fail to achieve entry-level competency in digital marketing skills, with skill levels registering equally low across the USA, UK and Ireland.

In the USA, 51% of digital marketers rated themselves as very or fairly competent, but in a test-based review, only 38% of these professionals actually reached a competent skill level. US digital marketers scored highest in mobile skills, with 39% of respondents achieving competency, and lowest in display advertising, with only 35% receiving a competent rating or higher.

Marketing professionals in the UK scored an average of just 37%, emphasizing the fact that many businesses and organizations are struggling to keep pace with the rate of digital evolution. Overall, UK marketing professionals scored the highest across the three countries in the category of strategy (42%), while its weakest skills were email marketing (33%) and display advertising (30%).

Similarly, digital skill levels are continuing to fall in Ireland, with marketing professionals achieving an average score of just 38%, down from 42% in 2014. In Ireland, the most significant drop in skills was in the mobile category with participants scoring 40% on average, a 7% drop from 2014. There were also sharp declines in search marketing skills (37% vs. 41%), display (35% vs. 39%), strategy (38% vs. 40%), email (38% vs. 40%) and social media (37% vs. 40%).

These results are unacceptable, and highlight a persistent, and widening skills gap that has the potential to seriously threaten the growth of the digital economy at a global level.





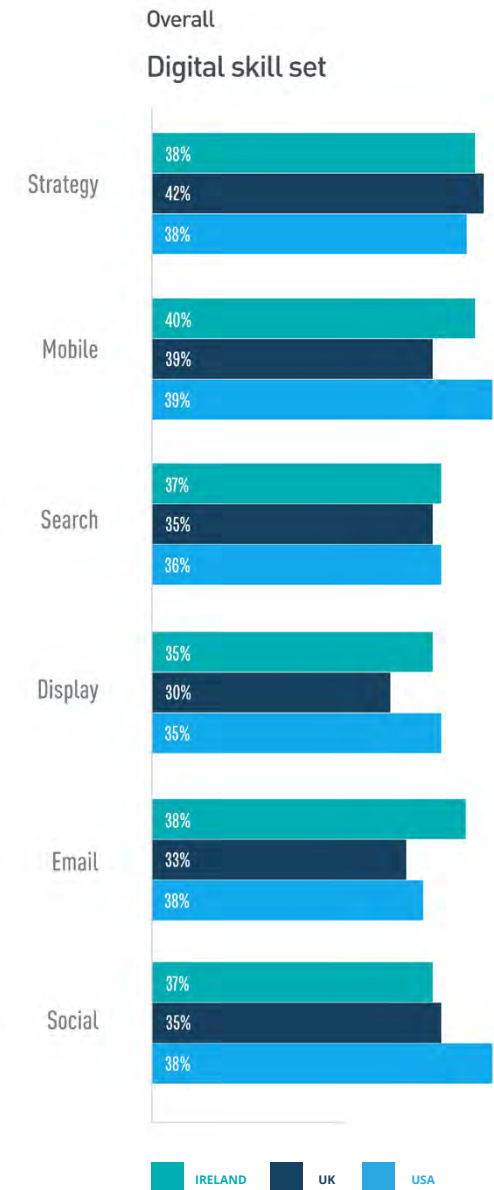
# Strategy & planning is the main digital skills gap in organizations

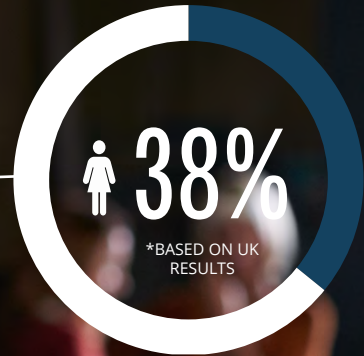
Across Ireland (42%), the UK (55%) and most notably the USA (58%), strategy and planning is cited as the leading digital skills gap in organizations. For the USA in particular, a staggering 63% of respondents who were working in digital marketing roles claimed to struggle with strategy and planning skills.

Within smaller organizations in Ireland, Research and Insights, as well as Analytics and Reporting also register as prominent skills gaps. It's interesting to note that marketing professionals not only in retail, but marketing/communications and technology sectors particularly struggled with research and measuring the effectiveness of their digital efforts.

**In the UK, Analytics and Reporting was the significant skill gap, especially in the marketing/communications sector as 45% claimed their measurement skills suffered most.**

Worryingly, this indicates a lack of knowledge surrounding the foundational structure of digital marketing. It could also legislate for the distinct lack of organizational engagement, if companies fail to understand the basic principles, and in turn benefits, of digital.





## Female marketers outperform men in digital marketing capabilities

In the USA and the UK, female digital marketers have higher digital skill levels than their male counterparts, outperforming them by 2 percentage points in the UK (38% vs.36%) and 1 percentage point in the US (38% vs. 37%). In Ireland, it is the male marketers who surpass women,

Yet despite this overall marginal skill success, women are still largely under-represented in the digital sector. In a [recent digital marketing gender study](#), only 30.1% of the respondents were female, compared to 69.5% male marketers. In that study, males dominated higher-level jobs and commanded significantly higher salaries. In the US, for example, the average salary for a man in the digital industry was \$84,330, whereas a woman's salary was approximately \$67,293.

If more digitally competent females held digital marketing positions within organizations, this could expedite digital transformation on an international level.

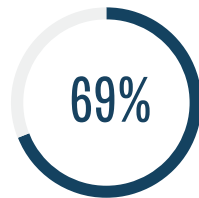
IRELAND



USA



UK



How many marketing professionals feel they need to improve their digital marketing skills to remain competent in their role in the future?





# Attitudes to technology and digital marketing are hindering success

There is a demonstrable reluctance to embrace digital tools and techniques across all three countries surveyed. The USA (63% the UK (52%) and Ireland (72%) are unanimous in their verdict that becoming more digitally focused will be critical to their organization in the next two years.

However, key concerns for respondents include the fact they feel that a lack of urgency exists in their organization to develop a focus on digital transformation, with 59% of American marketers claiming this was their primary point of anxiety.

Irish employees were particularly preoccupied with the pace of technology change in their organization, citing that it was simply too slow. This complements the lack of digital marketing competence that all three countries feel their organization possesses, despite being involved in digital to some degree.

In Ireland, the smaller the organization, the greater these concerns. Similarly, marketing professionals who weren't involved in digital marketing were more worried. The education (87%) and retail (78%) sectors especially acknowledged the importance of digital for their organization in the future, as the rise of e-commerce retailers and online learning has become unavoidable.

In the UK and USA concerns were more widespread, with larger organizations (76% for UK, 78% for USA) appreciating the value of digital marketing and its growing value over the next two years

They are also more prone to fear a lack of urgency and a pace of digital transformation that is too slow to suffice. Interestingly, in both countries it was the hospitality and leisure along with the food and beverage industries that placed most emphasis on the need for digital transformation in the coming years, demonstrating the universal value of digital skills, regardless of company size, or sector.

**A fear of losing power in their organization, which hinders the adoption of digital marketing, was highest amongst employees aged between 18 and 49, across all countries.**

If these concerns are not addressed through senior buy-in and organization-wide education, the international inability to affect economic growth through progressive digital strategy will be severely impacted.

# Marketers fear that digital advancements may leave them redundant

Our research found that a large proportion of marketers aren't confident that their current job or occupation will exist in its current form in 30 years, indicating an insecurity that most likely stems from a lack of understanding and sufficient skills training.

**UK respondents are especially pessimistic, with 40% expressing doubts about their ultimate job security. This figure is slightly lower at 31% for USA and 30% for Ireland.**

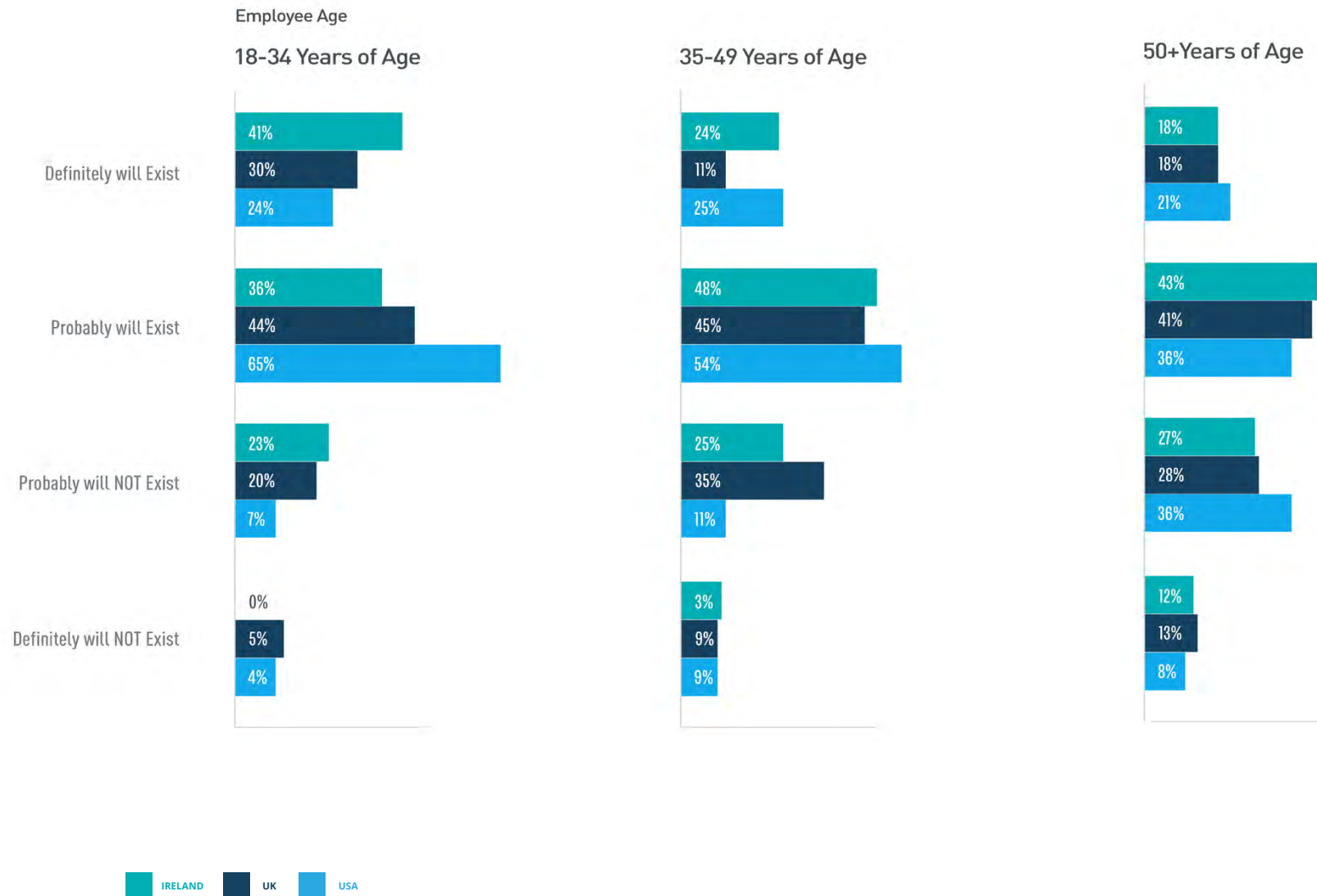
There is a stronger sense of apprehension among older employees across all three countries surveyed, with 44% of employees in the U.S., 41% UK, and 39% in Ireland aged 50+ worrying about the safety of their roles in the face of digital innovations.

Similarly, employees in smaller organizations are more pessimistic about their career prospects, which reinforces the idea that digital education and knowledge should be made available to organizations in their entirety, regardless of size or industry.

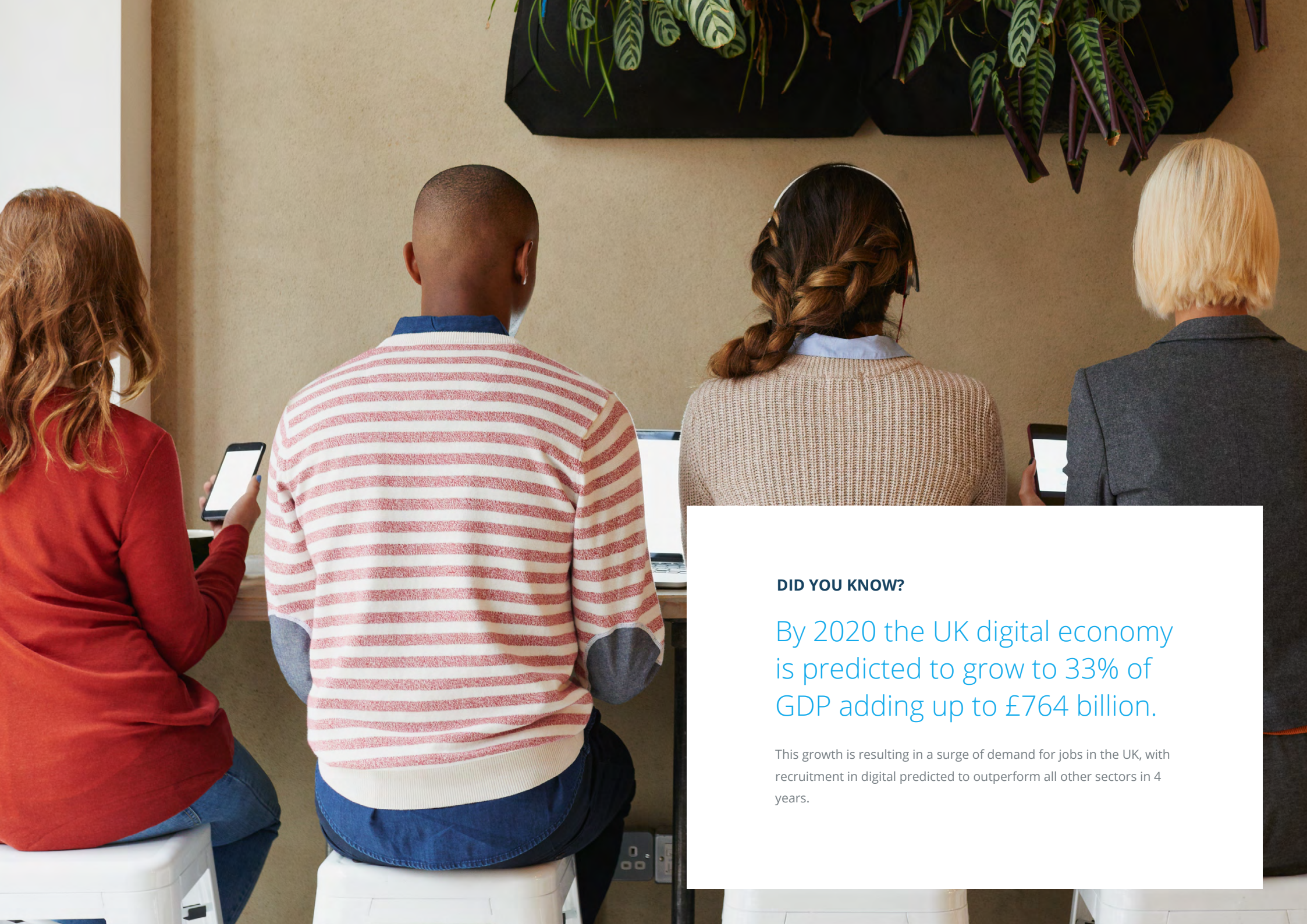
This will help to avoid a fear of failure to adopt digital that stems from ingrained traditional mindsets and a lack of understanding.



## Belief that current marketing role won't exist in its current form in 30 years time **based on age**







**DID YOU KNOW?**

By 2020 the UK digital economy is predicted to grow to 33% of GDP adding up to £764 billion.

This growth is resulting in a surge of demand for jobs in the UK, with recruitment in digital predicted to outperform all other sectors in 4 years.



## The greatest digital marketing challenges

All three countries surveyed claimed that the single greatest barrier to effectively adopting digital marketing was a lack of resources. In the USA, UK and Ireland, organizations are consistently failing to allocate sufficient budget, time and skilled personnel to cultivate a digital strategy that could generate substantial return on investment.

Other key factors identified as obstacles to digital transformation include a lack of expertise-in-house and lack of organizational commitment to the area. In general, the smaller the organization, the more lack of resources and expertise in-house are cited as issues, especially in Ireland and the USA.

Nevertheless, whatever an organization's size or available budget, these challenges can be overcome with the worthwhile investment of skills training. **The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) collected training information from over 2500 firms and found that organizations that offer comprehensive training have 218% higher income per employee than those with less comprehensive training.**

Besides increased revenue generation, digital skills training can also result in labour savings, reduction in lost workdays and productivity increases due to the stimulation of employees.

# The digital skills gap

The need for digital transformation is universally accepted. In the USA, 63% of workers are most likely to agree that becoming more digitally focussed will be critical to their organization in the next two years. The figure is even greater for Irish marketers at 72%. Yet this acknowledgement is coupled with an unsurprising admission that modern marketers feel they don't possess the necessary skills.

**47% of US marketers and 46% of those in the UK agree that their organization is involved in digital marketing, but is not very competent at it.**

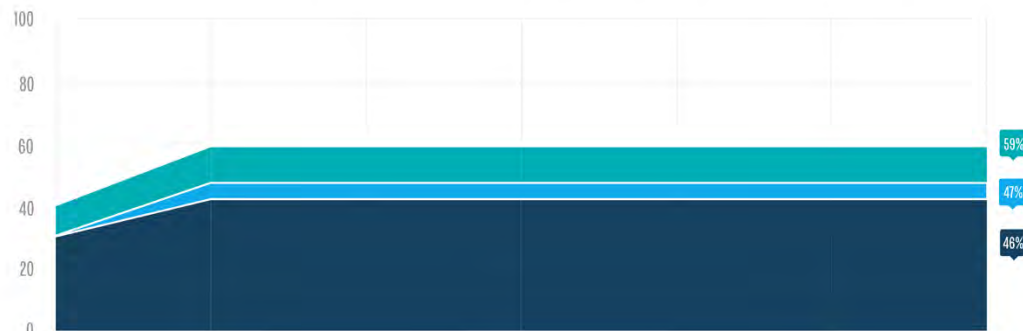
Clearly, the capacity to exercise digital tools and strategies is imperative knowledge for marketing professionals, many of whom fear redundancy due to an ever-evolving technological landscape.

Traditional marketers are struggling to upskill, marketing graduates have studied a syllabus that doesn't include digital techniques, and digital professionals have inconsistent abilities due to a lack of standardized skills training.

Because of these shortfalls, employees are pessimistic about their job security, with 40% of UK employees feeling it will not exist in its current form in 30 years, followed by 31% of marketers in the USA and 30% in Ireland.

It is essential to invest more heavily in training, not only for new entrants to an organization, but at a senior level, to ensure knowledge capital permeates the entire organization and progressive, profitable adoption isn't hindered by decision makers and budget holders who haven't recognized the tangible value of digital skills.

Workers who agree that their organization is involved in digital marketing, but is not very competent at it.



# Organizational Engagement

## Key Findings

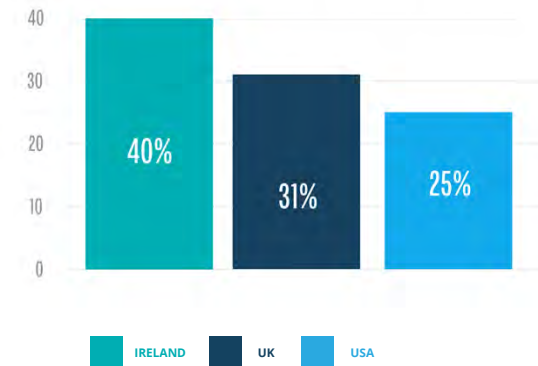
Despite being digital natives, millennials are the least skilled digital marketers of all age groups scoring 38% in the USA, 34% in Ireland and 31% in the UK. In all three countries, the 35-49 age group is most skilled.

Surprisingly, self-employed workers were found to be the most skilled in digital marketing in all three countries.

## Organizational engagement is low

We discovered that Irish organizations are felt to be more digitally engaged (40%), with the USA at 31% and the UK with the lowest organizational engagement levels at 25%. Yet even at their highest, these figures are troublingly low. The general consensus among employees is that the pace of technological and digital change within their organizations is too slow, and that factors such as a fear of loss of control, especially among employees aged 35-49 years, is hindering its adoption.

Organizational Engagement By Country



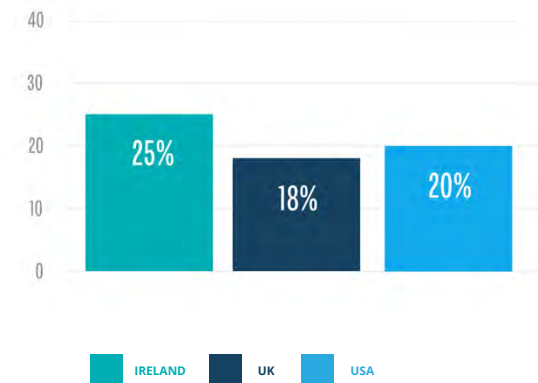
## Levels of training support are low

The extent to which organizations offer digital skills training, either internally or externally, is too limited to leverage the full advantages of digital.

Only 25% of organizations in Ireland, 20% in the UK and 18% in the US provide essential training support, figures which further diminish the smaller the company size.

Digital transformation can help organizations to develop their competitive edge and improve employee productivity, yet there is still a large volume of decision makers in senior management positions who need to be convinced that digital tools and techniques are worth the investment. Predictably, our research found that a lack of expertise in-house, particularly in Ireland and the USA, was one of the greatest digital marketing challenges facing organizations today.

Organizational Training Support By Country



A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a red, white, and blue plaid button-down shirt, is looking down at a laptop screen. The background is a blurred office or public space with warm lighting and other people in the distance.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

59% of American marketers feel a lack of urgency exists in their organization to embrace digital transformation.

Traditionally, what separated an average company from a great company had been technology. We're in the middle of a transformation. Today what differentiates an average company from a great company is talent'

– Wade Burgess, VP Talent Solutions, LinkedIn



A man with dark hair, wearing glasses and large black headphones, is seated in a grey office chair. He is looking down at a computer screen, which is partially visible in the foreground. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a dark grey cable-knit sweater. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an office or home workspace.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Irish consumers spend €850,000 per hour online, a 20% increase since 2012 which is expected to grow by a quarter in next 3-5 years

Assessment of the Macro-Economic Impact of Internet/Digital on the Irish Economy; Indecon

# Conclusion

Digital technology has fundamentally transformed every business sector. At every stage of the customer journey, including the decision to purchase, consumers are more empowered, informed and influenced by their digital activity.

It is the companies that acknowledge and adapt to this digital evolution that are experiencing ongoing and enhanced success. More than a third of CMOs say that digital marketing will account for 75% or more of their spending within the next five years. This isn't surprising when you consider that two thirds of revenue growth from consumers and advertising will be digital by 2018.

However, in order to really take advantage of the economic opportunities that digital marketing can offer, there needs to be a fundamental readjustment of the outlook on skills training.

The speed at which the digital landscape is evolving means that the only way to keep pace is through the cultivation of an environment that promotes continuous upskilling and professional development. Our report highlights that digital skills gaps exist on a global level, across an assortment of industries, within organizations of all sizes and in employees of varying ages. Digital skills are essential for driving revenue and ensuring ongoing success for organizations. A lack of digital skills will inevitably impede this progression.

According to Adobe, companies with a plan for their digital maturity seek to train and advance the skills of their existing workforce, and hire the people they need to get the most from digital tools and technology. The key is to implement a strategic and sustainable education plan so both individuals and companies can keep pace with the industry and employers can not only attract but also retain valuable employees.

If you're interested in finding out how Digital Marketing Institute can help with digital transformation, at both an individual and organizational level, email:

[business@digitalmarketinginstitute.com](mailto:business@digitalmarketinginstitute.com)





## About the Digital Diagnostic

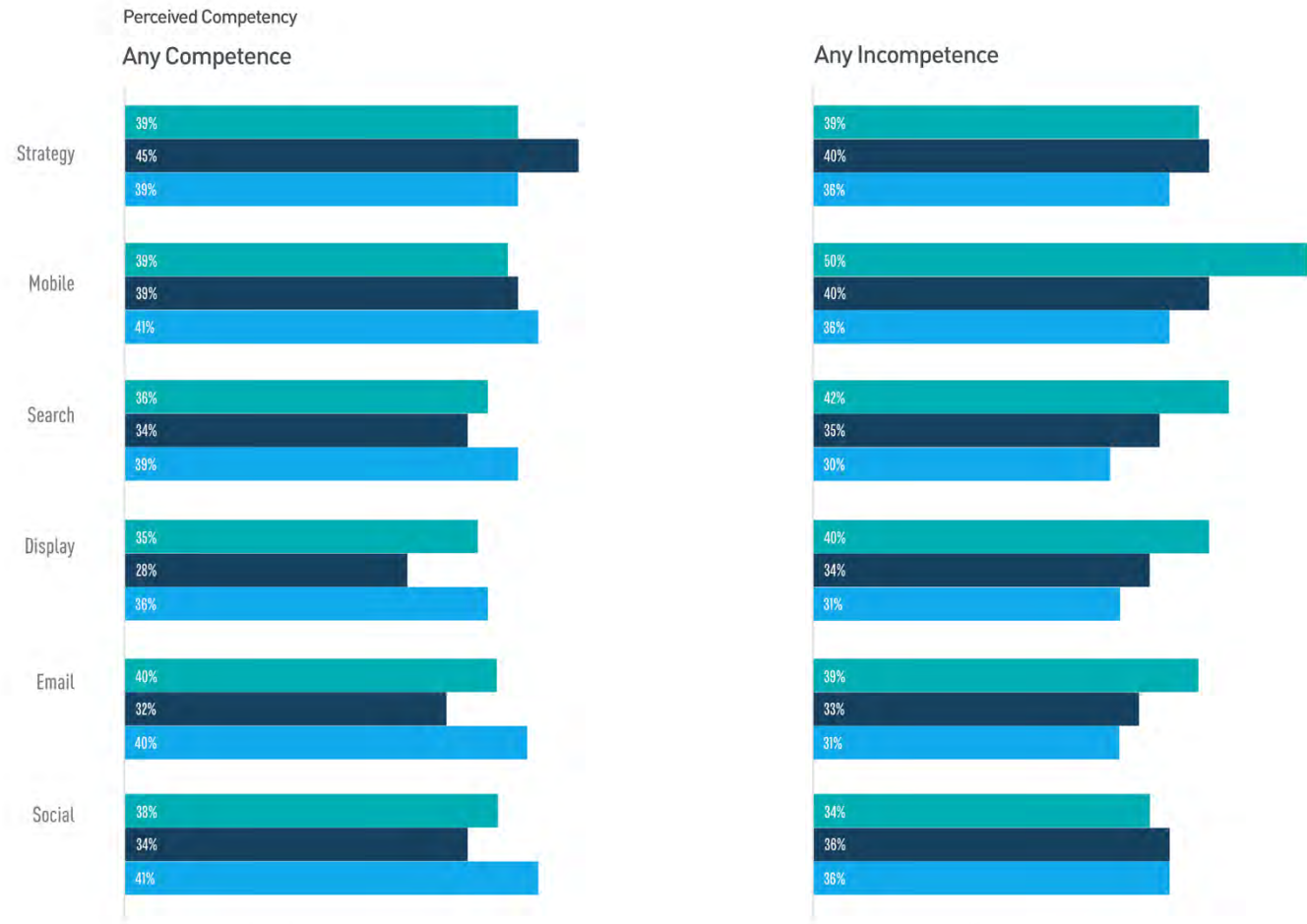
Our Digital Diagnostic enables organizations to assess their digital skills and benchmark the skills of individuals, teams or departments across a number of core digital marketing competencies.

Based on the results, a bespoke training program can be developed that will address the digital gaps in any business.

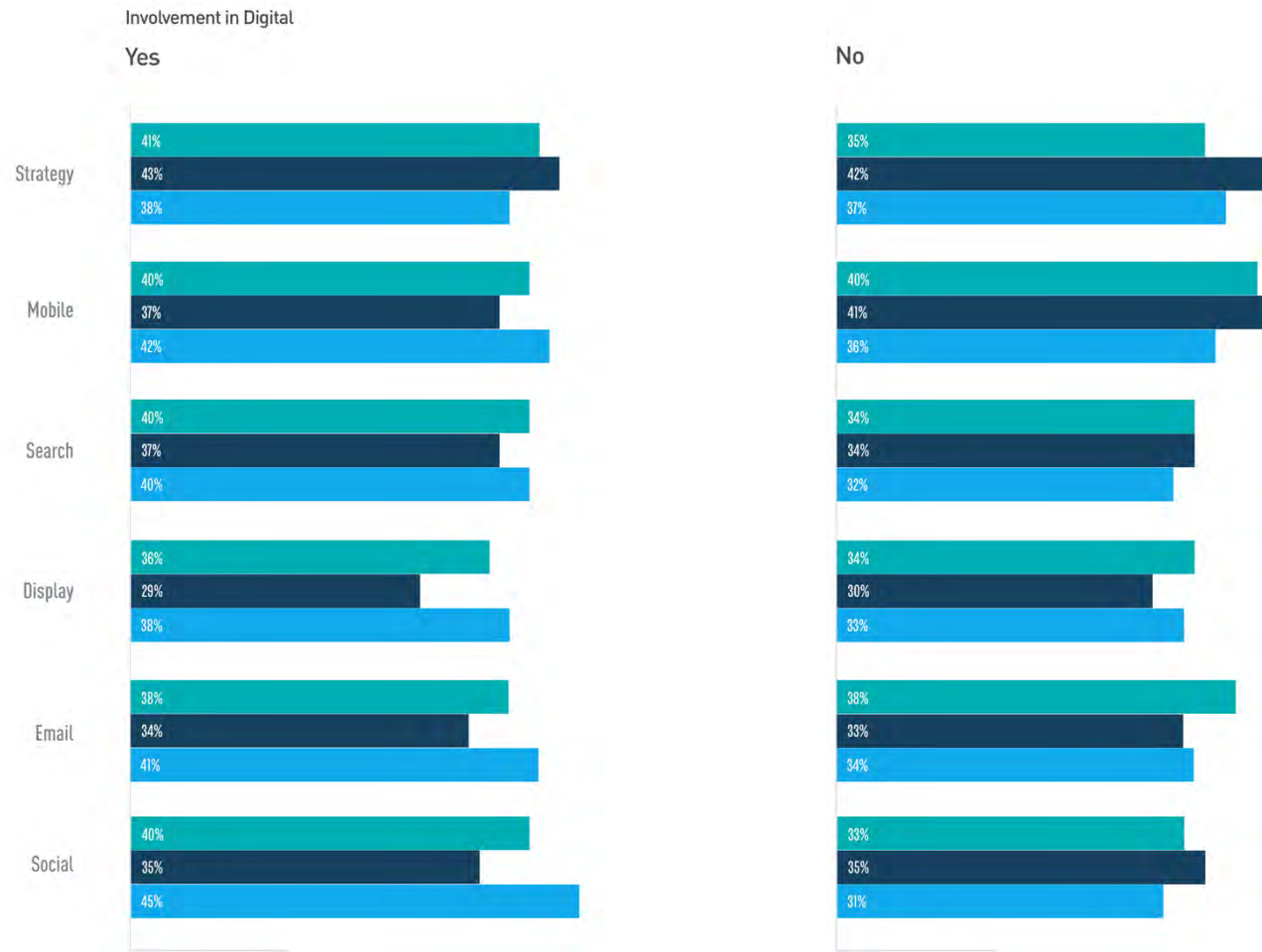
[testyourdigital.com](https://testyourdigital.com)

# Skills Data

## Digital skill levels - overall percentage



## Digital skill levels - overall percentage



## Digital skill levels - overall percentage scores by company size



## Digital skill levels - overall percentage scores by experience



## Digital skill levels - overall percentage scores by experience

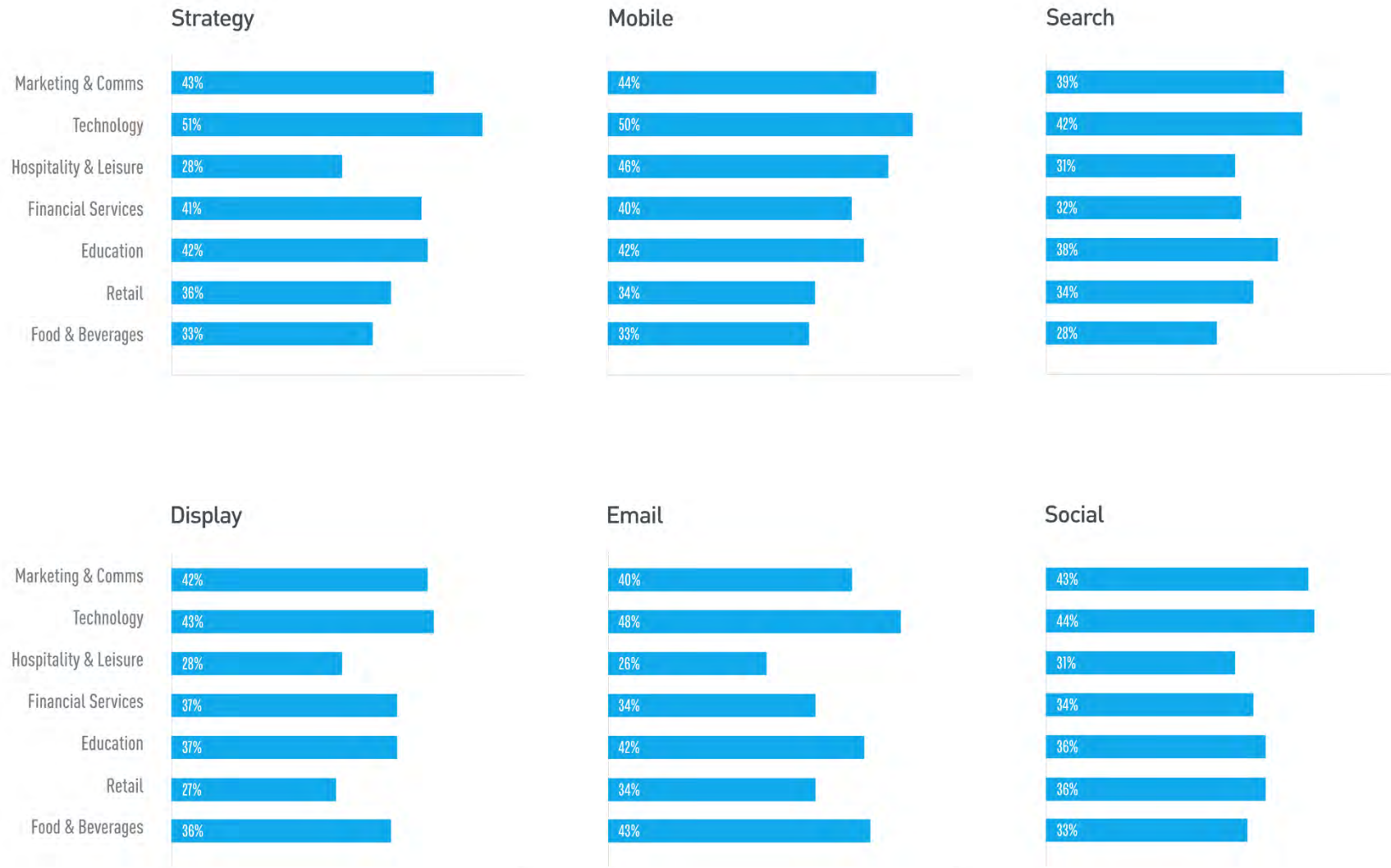


## Digital skill levels - overall percentage scores by **experience**





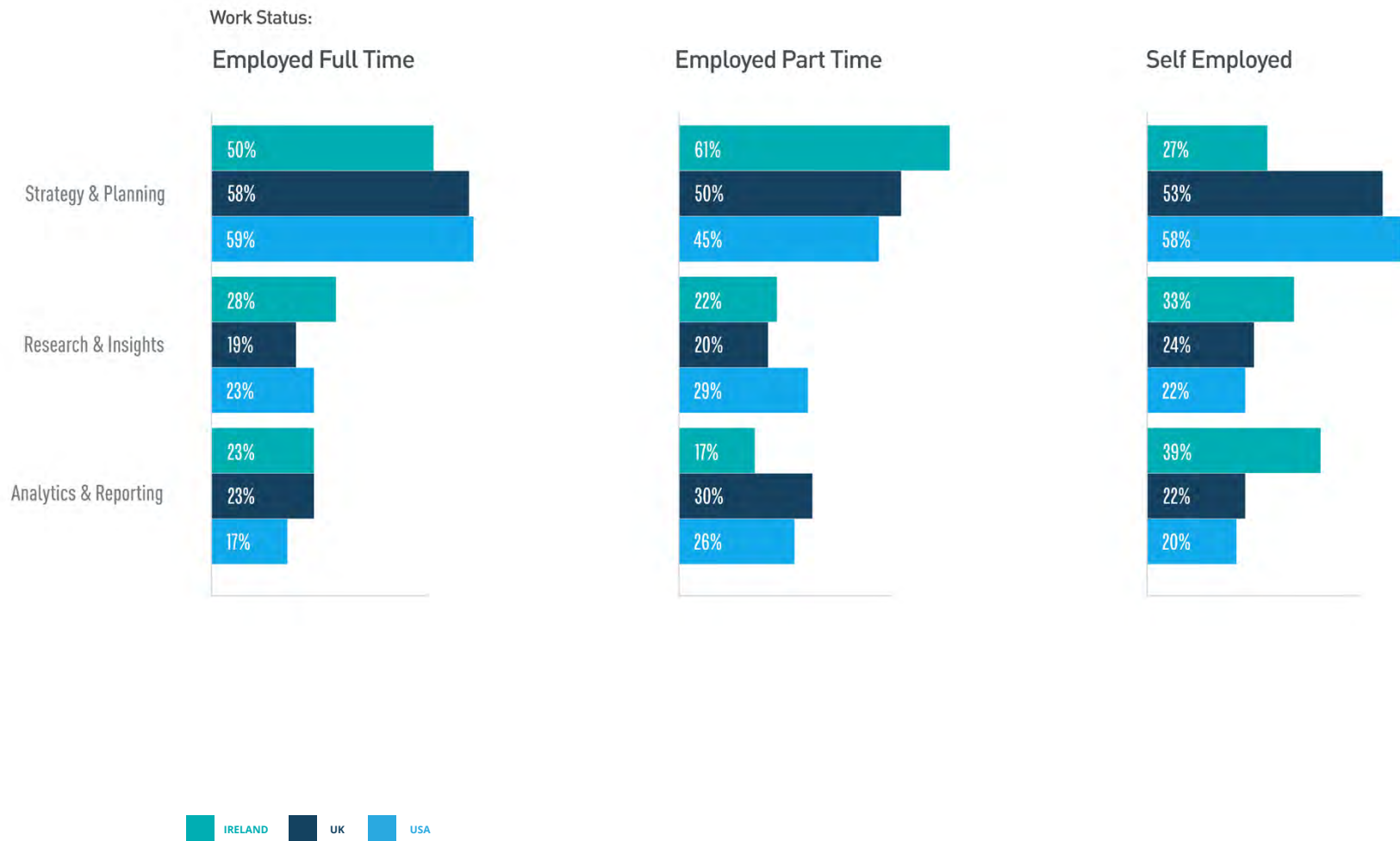
## Digital skill levels - overall percentage scores by experience



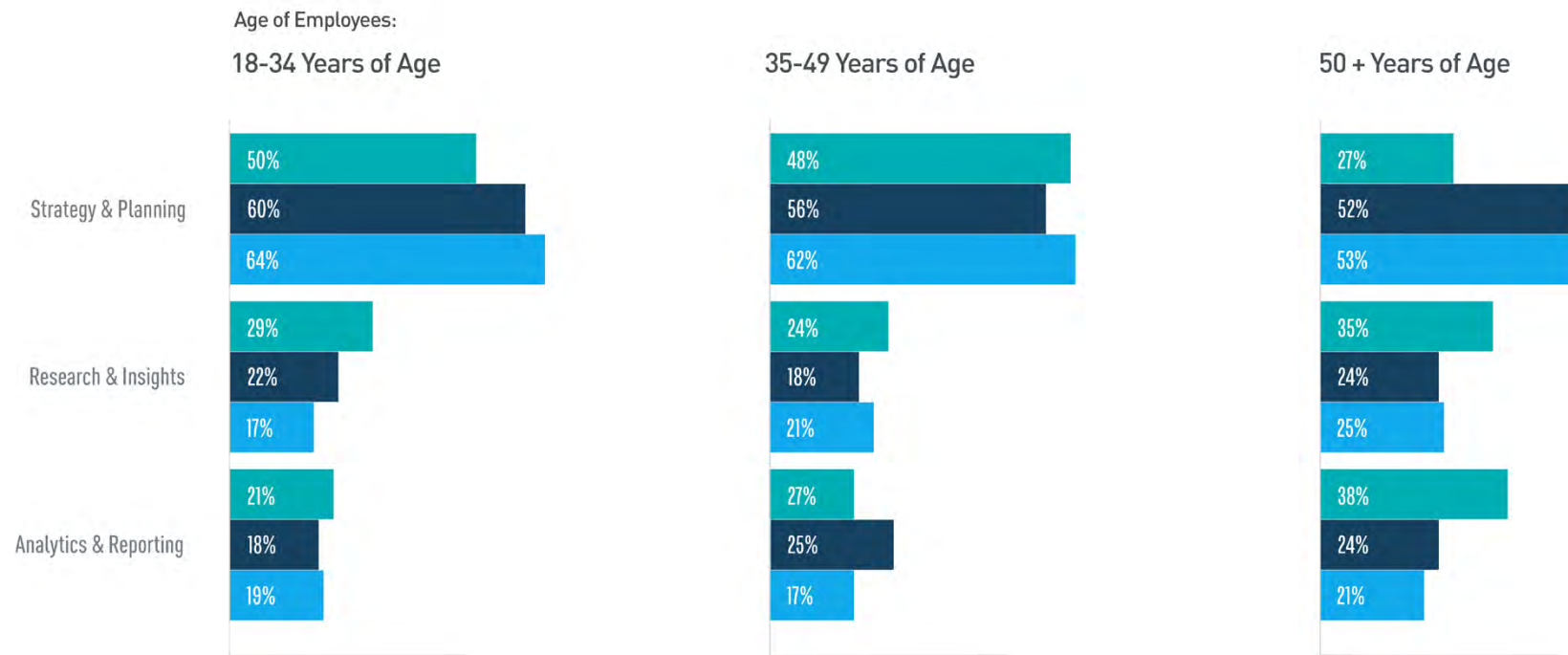
## Digital skill levels - overall percentage score by work status



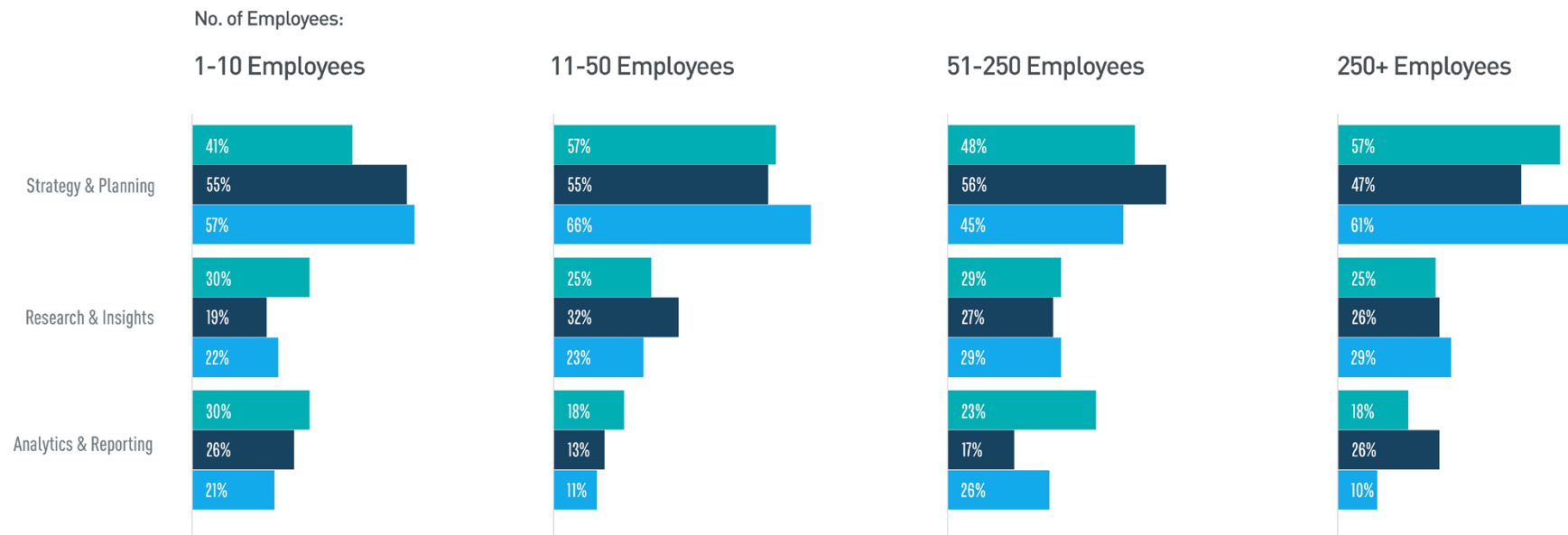
## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on **work status**



## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on **employee age**



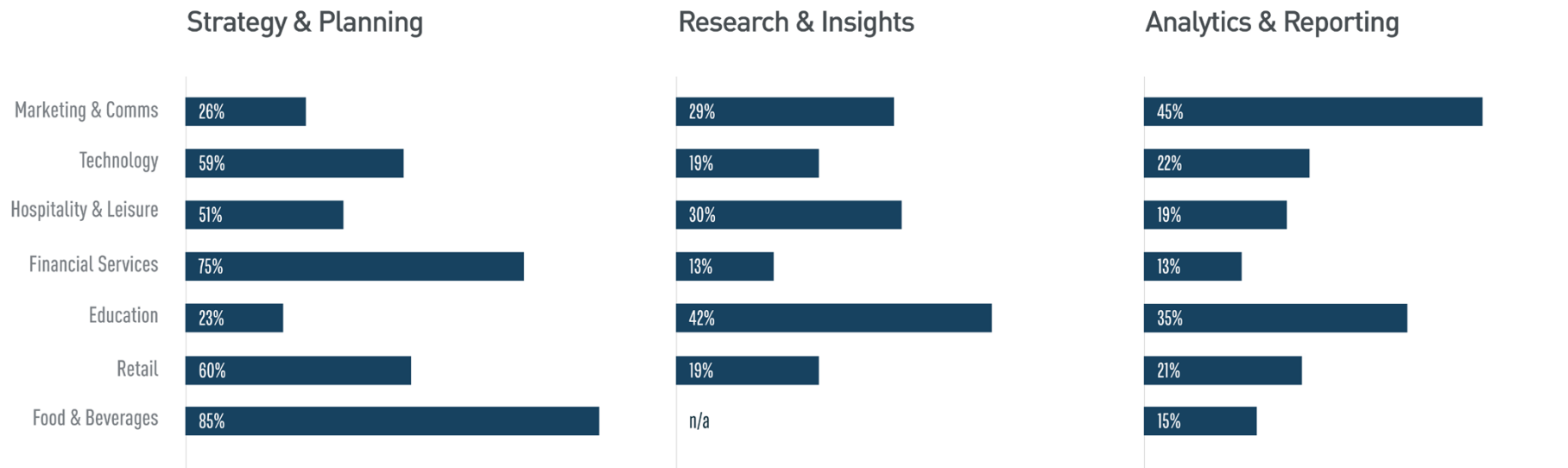
## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on **organization size**



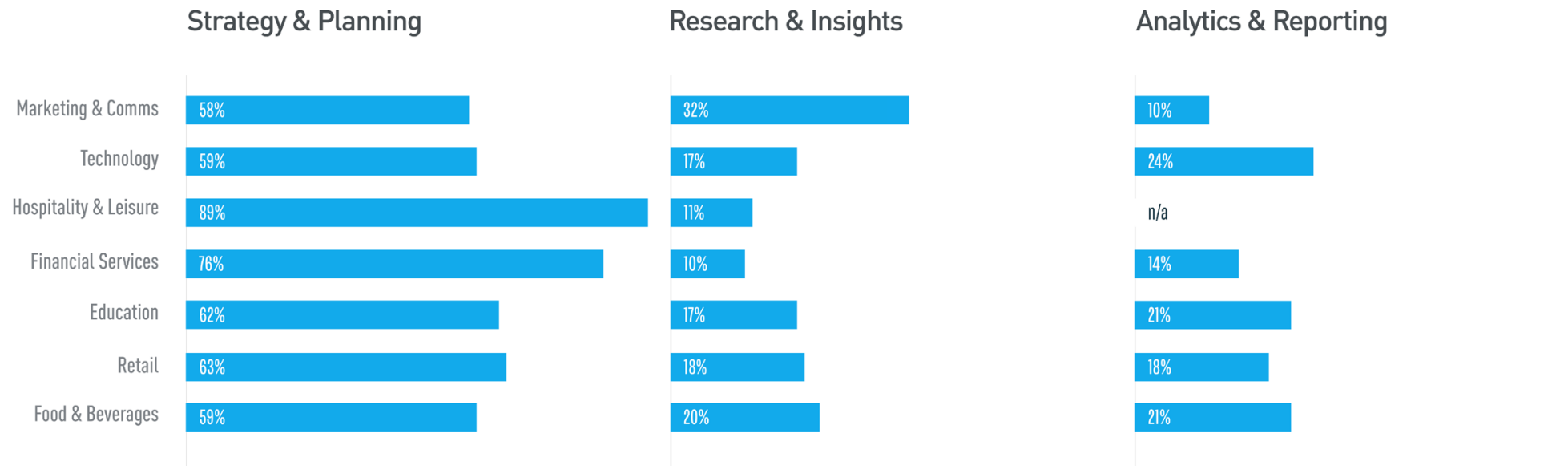
## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on industry (Ireland)



## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on industry (UK)



## The main digital skills gap in organizations based on industry (USA)





## Perceived challenges for digital marketing in organizations based on **employment status**



## Perceived challenges for digital marketing in organizations based on age

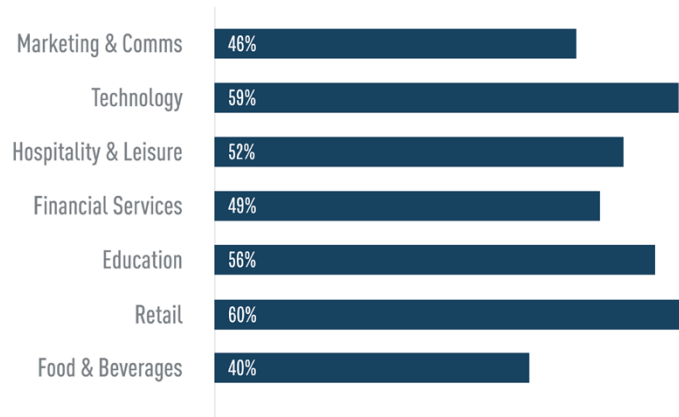


## Perceived challenges for digital marketing in organizations based on industry



## Perceived challenges for digital marketing in organizations based on **industry (UK)**

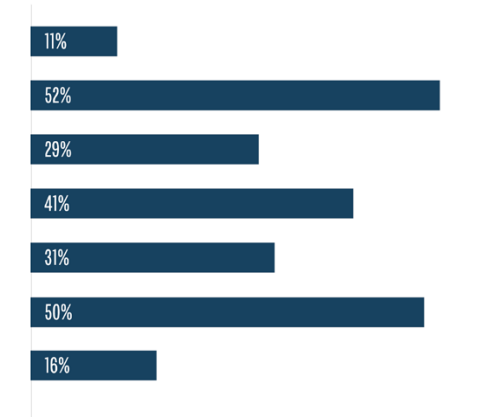
### Lack of Resources



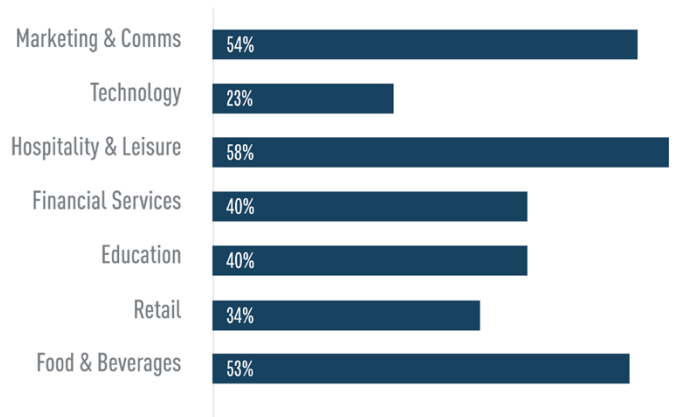
### Lack of Expertise In-House



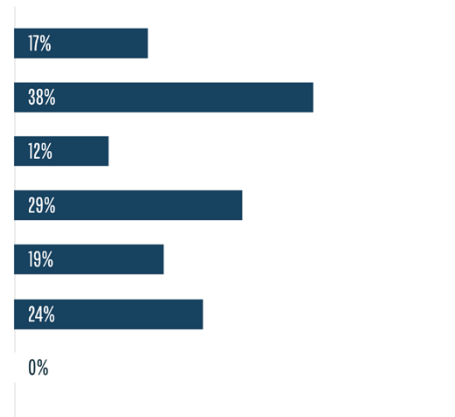
### Lack of Org. Commitment to Area



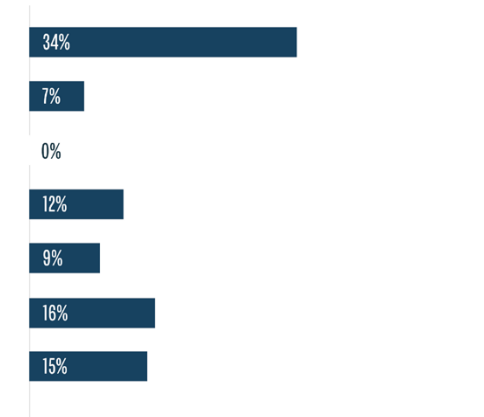
### Creating Engaging Content



### Measuring Effectiveness



### Digital Skills Gap Internally



## Perceived challenges for digital marketing in organizations based on industry (United States)

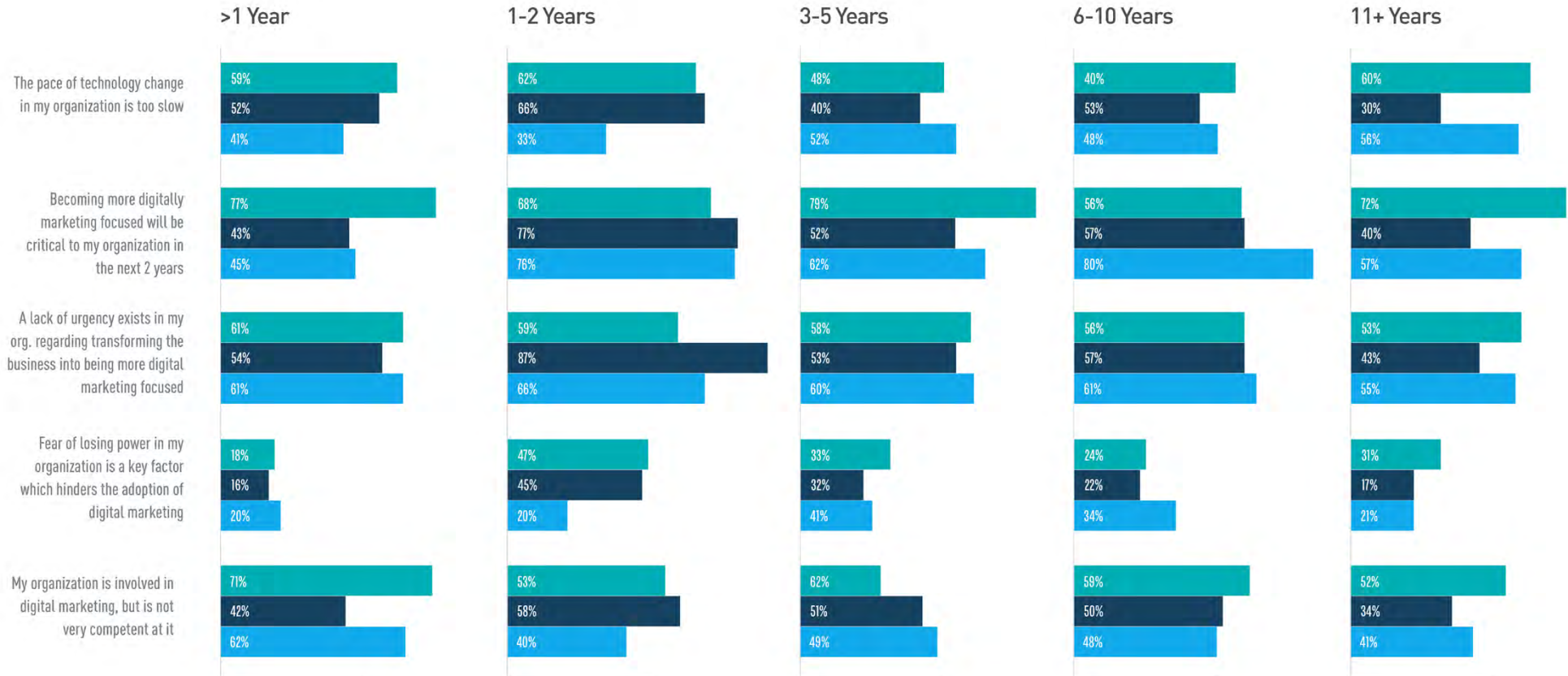


## Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on organization size



## Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on **employee experience**

No. of Years Marketing Experience Agree that



IRELAND UK USA

## Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on **employee age**

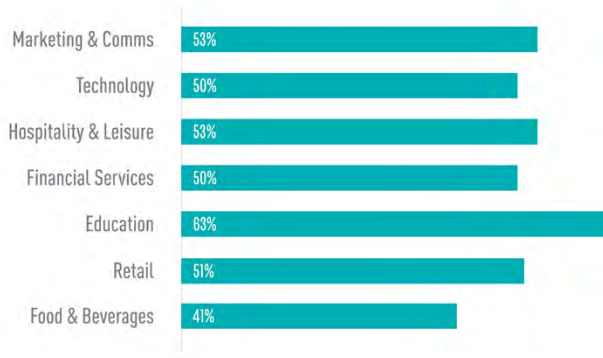




## Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on industry (Ireland)

### Employees in sector agree that:

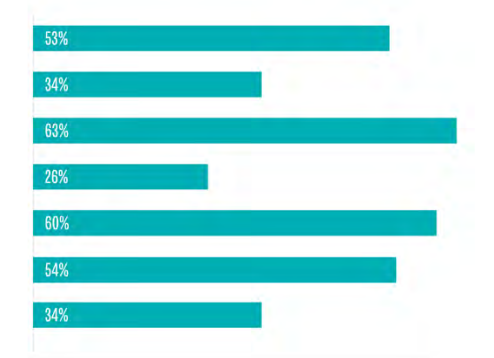
The pace of technology change in my organization is too slow



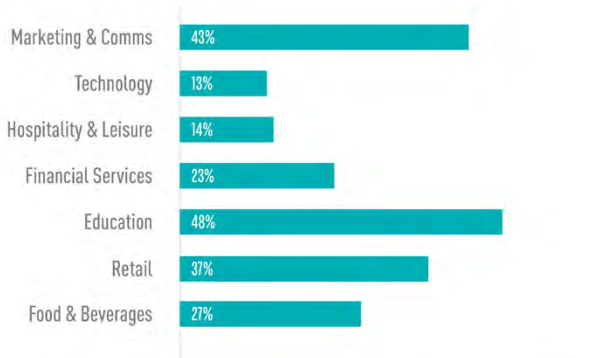
Becoming more digitally marketing focused will be critical to my organization



Lack of urgency in my org. regarding transforming the business into being more digital marketing focused



Fear of losing power in my organization is a key factor which hinders the adoption of digital marketing



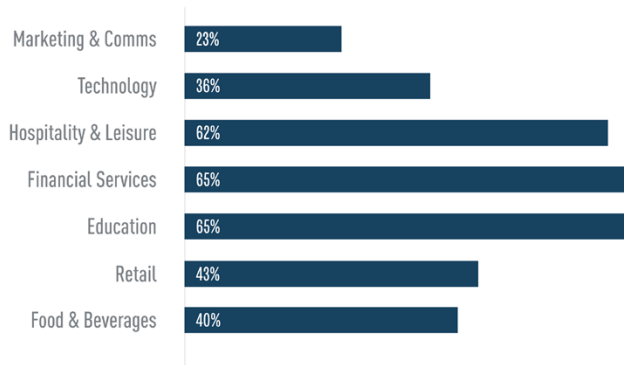
My organization is involved in digital marketing, but is not very competent at it



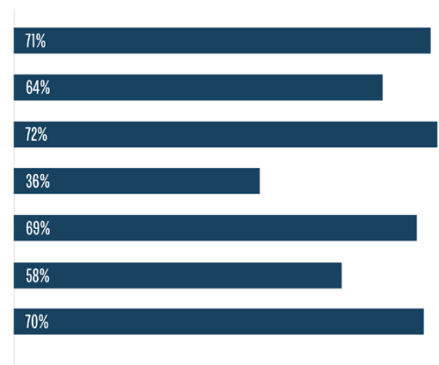
# Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on industry (UK)

## Employees in sector agree that:

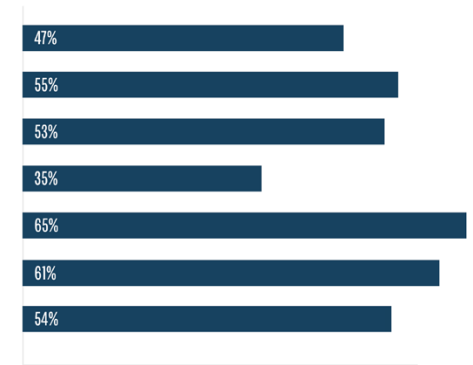
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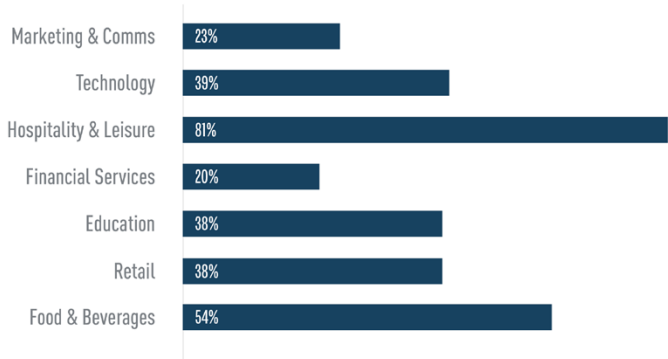
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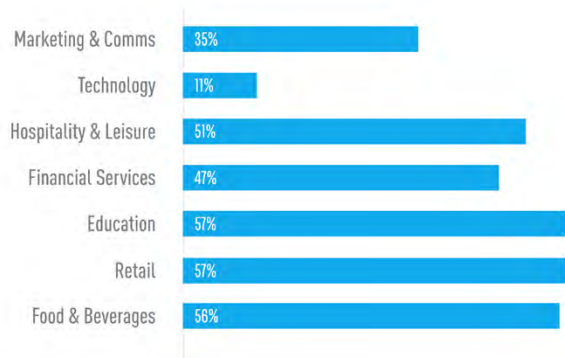
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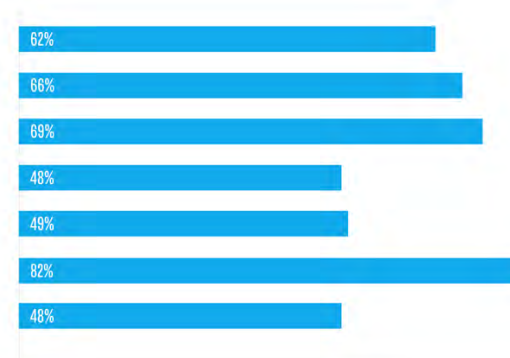
## Attitudes to technology and digital marketing based on industry (UK)

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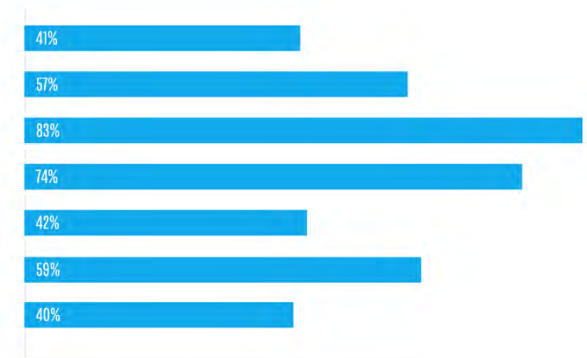
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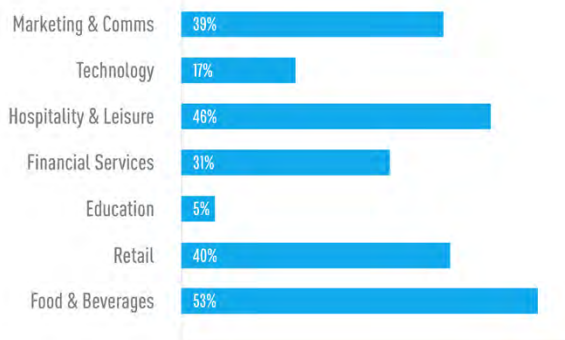
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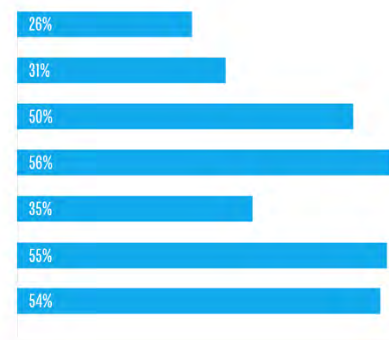
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My organization is involved in digital marketing, but is not very competent at it



# Belief that current marketing role won't exist in its current form in 30 years time **based on organization size**



# Belief that current marketing role won't exist in its current form in 30 years time **based on employee experience**

## No. of Years Marketing Experience Agree that

