

• MARKETING & CREATIVE AGENCY · GUIDE

The skills matrix *for agency teams*

An agency lives or dies by whether it can staff the work it wins, across strategy, creative, copy, paid media, SEO, social and analytics. When a discipline rests on one person, a clash of deadlines or a single resignation can put client work at risk. A skills matrix maps capability across every discipline, so an agency can see where its bench is deep enough to deliver, and where it is one absence from a problem.



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Reading time 12 min · **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework · **Updated** May 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

An agency skills matrix maps the team against the disciplines the work spans, strategy, creative and design, copywriting, paid media, SEO, social, content and analytics, plus account management, scored on a clear scale. Read it for bench depth: how many people can deliver each discipline to the level client work needs. In short: **it shows, discipline by discipline, whether the agency has the depth to staff its projects, so thin disciplines that rest on one person stand out before they put client work at risk.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Agencies staff to their service mix.** The disciplines you sell, creative, paid, SEO, analytics, are the ones you must have the bench to deliver.
- **Bench depth is the question.** Not "can we do SEO?" but "how many people can deliver it well, if one is booked or off?".
- **Thin disciplines are a delivery risk.** A discipline resting on one person can stall client work when deadlines clash or they leave.
- **Spot overload and hiring needs.** The matrix shows who is the sole cover for in-demand skills, and where to hire or develop.
- **Map breadth and depth.** Agencies need flexible all-rounders and deep specialists; the matrix captures both.

— START HERE

Can you *staff what you sell*?

An agency's product is its people's capability, billed out across the disciplines it offers. So the question that matters is not whether the agency can do a thing once, but whether it has the **bench depth** to deliver every discipline it sells, reliably, across all the client work in flight at once. A skills matrix answers that by mapping capability across the disciplines, revealing where the bench is deep and where it is dangerously thin.

Map the disciplines you sell

An agency matrix maps the team against the **disciplines** the work spans: strategy, creative and design, copywriting, paid media, SEO, social, content, analytics, plus account management and the craft skills your offer depends on. Agencies staff to their service mix, a performance shop needs depth in paid media and analytics, a creative shop in design and copy, so the matrix should reflect the disciplines you actually sell, each scored separately, because strength in design says nothing about strength in analytics.

Read it for bench depth

The insight an agency needs is **depth, not just presence**. One brilliant SEO specialist looks like a strength until they are booked on another account, on holiday, or they resign, at which point SEO delivery stops. Reading the matrix for how many people can deliver each discipline to the level client work

requires turns "we can do that" into the more honest "we have three people who can deliver that well", or the uncomfortable "we have one". Depth is what lets an agency take on concurrent work without overcommitting.

Spot overload and where to hire

Because it shows who can cover what, the matrix also surfaces **overload and hiring needs**. When one person is the sole capable cover for an in-demand discipline, they become a bottleneck, overworked and a single point of failure at once. The matrix makes that visible, so an agency can redistribute work, develop a second person, or hire deliberately for the disciplines where demand outstrips the bench, rather than discovering the gap when a pitch is won and there is no one free to deliver it.

— WHY IT MATTERS NOW

A thin bench *risks the work*

In an agency, a discipline that rests on one person is a live risk to client delivery, one clash of deadlines or one resignation from a missed deadline or a dropped ball. Seeing bench depth across disciplines is how an agency protects its delivery and its reputation.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable workforce skills data, so most agencies resource on memory and gut feel.

39%

WEF, 2025

of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030, as channels, platforms and AI tools shift fast.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to change; in agencies they show as work that cannot be staffed.

The pressure on agencies is that work is won in bursts and must be staffed immediately, across many disciplines, often concurrently. Resourcing on memory, who usually does this?, hides the real picture: which disciplines are thin, who is overloaded, where a single absence breaks delivery. A skills matrix replaces that guesswork with a clear view of **bench depth by discipline**: where the agency can comfortably staff concurrent work, where it is stretched, and where one person is the only cover. Seeing this lets an agency resource confidently, redistribute before people burn out, develop

second-line depth in thin disciplines, and hire ahead of demand, so winning the work is matched by being able to deliver it.

— WHAT IT REVEALS

Four things an agency matrix reveals

Read for bench depth, an agency skills matrix reveals four things that bear directly on whether client work gets delivered well. Each turns resourcing from guesswork into evidence.

REVEALS 01

Where the bench is thin

By counting who can deliver each discipline to standard, the matrix shows the disciplines resting on one person, the ones that put client work at risk.

REVEALS 02

Who is overloaded

It flags the sole cover for in-demand disciplines, the people who become bottlenecks and burnout risks, so work can be redistributed.

REVEALS 03

Where to hire or develop

It pinpoints the disciplines where demand outstrips the bench, so hiring and development target real gaps rather than guesses.

REVEALS 04

Breadth and specialism

It distinguishes flexible all-rounders from deep specialists, so an agency can staff projects with the right mix of both.

The common thread is matching **capability to the work the agency takes on**. An agency does not fail for want of talent; it fails when the talent it has cannot be spread across the work it has won, because a key discipline rests on too few people. The matrix is the instrument that makes bench depth visible, so an agency can resource confidently, protect its people from overload, develop and hire ahead of demand, and deliver every discipline it sells as reliably as the day it pitched for the work.

— THE SCALE BEHIND THE SCORES

The 0 to 5 capability framework

An agency matrix needs a scale that distinguishes someone learning a discipline from someone who can deliver it to a client unsupervised. This

framework, developed by Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith, draws that line at Level 3, delivers client-quality work unaided, with Level 4 plus the leads who can set creative or technical direction.

-
- 0** **Not required for the role** EXCLUDED
The discipline is not part of this person's role, for example paid media for a pure designer. Excluded from their score, not counted as a gap.
-
- 1** **In training / Junior** WEIGHTING 25%
Learning the discipline, works under review. Up to 75% there. Useful support on a project, but not someone you can put in front of a client unaided.
-
- 2** **Developing** WEIGHTING 50%
More than 75% trained; handles routine client work alone, but the complex or high-profile work still needs a senior eye. Developing bench, not yet full depth.
-
- 3** **Capable** WEIGHTING 75% · CLIENT-READY
Delivers client-quality work in the discipline unsupervised. The level that counts as genuine bench depth, two or more here means a discipline is safely staffed.
-
- 4** **Specialist / Lead** WEIGHTING 100%
Deep craft; handles the most demanding work, sets direction and mentors others. Your discipline leads and senior specialists, the people to build depth behind.
-
- 5** **Strategic ownership / Authority** WEIGHTING 100%
Shapes the agency's approach in the discipline and its reputation for it. The purple flag marks your creative directors, heads of department and principal strategists.

Count the client-ready bench per discipline

For each discipline, count how many people are at Level 3 or above, that is your real, client-ready bench. A discipline with only one capable person is a **delivery risk**: fine until that person is booked, off, or leaves. The aim for any discipline you actively sell is at least two capable people, so concurrent work can be staffed and no single absence stops delivery. The weightings let you express each discipline's strength as a percentage too.

A worked example. Why two disciplines you "offer" differ in risk:

Creative / design 5 people at L3+ → deep bench, staff concurrent work freely
Paid media 0 at the required L3, best is L2 → **cannot staff it well**
both are on the rate card – only one is safely deliverable.

— [SEE THE BENCH](#)

Bench depth, *discipline by discipline*

Here is the agency's bench laid out: each discipline a row, each person a dot placed at their capability level, with the dark tick marking the level client work requires. A row with several dots at or past the tick is a deep bench; a row with one or two dots short of it is a discipline that cannot reliably be staffed. The thin rows are where the risk lives.

BENCH DEPTH BY DISCIPLINE · EACH DOT A PERSON



2

thin disciplines: paid media and analytics each rest on too few people below the level client work needs

Illustrative agency on the Upleashed 0 to 5 framework. Each dot is a person at their capability level; the tick is the level client work requires.

WHAT THE AGENCY LEAD READS HERE

- **Paid media is the biggest risk.** Only two people and both below the required level, dots in red and amber, short of the tick. The agency sells paid media but cannot currently staff it to standard; develop or hire here first.
- **Analytics is thin too.** A shallow bench below requirement. As measurement and reporting underpin every account, this gap quietly undermines the whole offer, a priority to build.
- **Creative and design is deep.** Five people, several at or above the tick, the healthy pattern. Concurrent work can be staffed comfortably, and there is cover when someone is booked or away.
- **Watch the single-cover disciplines.** Where only one dot clears the tick, the discipline works today but rests on one person. Build a second capable person before a clash or departure exposes it.

— READY-TO-USE EXAMPLES

Example disciplines to map for an agency

An agency matrix should map the disciplines you sell, plus the craft and account skills that deliver them. Here are ready-to-adapt categories, a starting point to tailor to your agency's offer.

Category	Examples to map (the columns)	Watch out for
Strategy & planning	Brand strategy, campaign planning, audience and market insight	Strategy resting entirely on one or two senior heads
Creative	Art direction, design, copywriting, motion, UX	Mapping "creative" as one skill rather than distinct crafts
Performance	Paid media / PPC, SEO, paid social, CRO	Selling performance services on a one-person bench
Content & social	Content, social media, community, influencer	Assuming juniors can carry high-profile client work alone
Data & delivery	Analytics, measurement, account management, project delivery	Under-mapping analytics, which underpins every account

Map the disciplines your agency actually sells, scored so Level 3 means someone can deliver client-quality work in that discipline unaided, and read the matrix for depth, how many capable people per discipline, not just presence. Capture both all-rounders and specialists, since agencies need flexible cover and deep craft. As always, map the disciplines that matter to your offer, keep the scores current as people grow and tools change, and use the bench picture when resourcing projects and planning hires, not after a pitch is won.

— AVOID THESE

Six mistakes on an agency matrix

MISTAKE 01

Confusing presence with depth

"We can do SEO" is not "we have depth in SEO". Count how many can deliver it, not whether anyone can.

MISTAKE 02

Selling a one-person discipline

A service on the rate card with one capable person is fragile. Build a second before you sell it hard.

MISTAKE 03

Ignoring overload

Sole cover for an in-demand skill burns people out. Spot the bottleneck and redistribute or hire.

MISTAKE 04

"Creative" as one skill

Design, copy, motion and UX are distinct crafts. Map them separately or the bench looks deeper than it is.

MISTAKE 05

Under-mapping analytics

Measurement underpins every account. A thin analytics bench quietly weakens the whole offer.

MISTAKE 06

Resourcing from memory

Gut-feel staffing hides the thin disciplines. Resource from the matrix, before the work is won.

The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes bench depth *obvious*.

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template just makes the agency view effortless: score the team on the 0 to 5 scale across the disciplines, set the level client work needs, and the capable bench per discipline is counted for you, so the thin disciplines, the overloaded sole-cover people and the hiring priorities stand out, before a won pitch finds you with no one free to deliver it.



The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix counts the client-ready bench per discipline, the basis for spotting thin disciplines and overloaded people, all on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.

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— COMMON QUESTIONS

Quick *answers*

Q What is a skills matrix for a marketing or creative agency?

It is a grid mapping the team against the disciplines the agency sells, strategy, creative and design, copywriting, paid media, SEO, social, content and analytics, plus account management, with a level in each cell. Read for bench depth, it shows how many people can deliver each discipline to client standard, and where the bench is thin.

Q Why focus on bench depth rather than coverage?

Because an agency staffs many projects at once. Having one person who can do a discipline is not enough if they are booked, on holiday, or leave. Bench depth, how many capable people per discipline, is what lets an agency take on concurrent work and survive an absence without client delivery suffering.

Q How does it help with resourcing?

It replaces gut-feel staffing with a clear view of who can deliver what, and to what level. When a pitch is won, you can see immediately whether you have the bench to staff it, who is already overloaded, and where you would be relying on a single person, so you resource confidently rather than discovering the gap mid-project.

Q Which disciplines should I map?

The disciplines your agency actually sells, mapped as distinct crafts: strategy, art direction, design, copywriting, motion, UX, paid media, SEO, social, content and analytics, plus account management and delivery. Avoid lumping "creative" into one skill, and do not under-map analytics, which underpins every account.

Q How does it help me decide who to hire?

By showing where demand outstrips the bench. A discipline you sell actively but can staff with only one capable person, or none at the required level, is a clear hiring or development priority. The matrix turns hiring from a reaction to a won pitch into a deliberate plan to build depth where the agency is thinnest.

Q Does it work for a small studio?

Yes, and arguably it matters more. In a small team, disciplines naturally rest on one or two people, so single points of failure are common and a single absence is felt immediately. Mapping the bench, even for a handful of people, shows exactly where the studio is exposed and where a hire or some cross-training would most reduce risk.

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Alex is the creator of the Upleashed capability framework that powers Skills Matrix Template, the award-winning Excel skills matrix. A Chartered Manager with an MBA, an LLM and a doctorate in business administration, he has spent more than two decades helping operations, HR and quality teams turn capability from a gut feel into something they can measure, manage and prove.

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A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex J. Martin-Smith".

Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith

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Win the work, *and staff it*.

You now have the agency method. The quickest way to start is to list the disciplines you sell, score the team in each, and mark the level client work needs. The thin disciplines and single-cover people you find are exactly where to build depth or hire, before the next pitch you win has no one free to deliver it.

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