



Starting Agile
in Your

Pharmaceutical
Team

Step-by-Step Guide

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Why Agile Marketing in Pharma

Pharmaceutical marketing teams are under more pressure than ever: shorter launch windows, complex regulatory cycles, rising workload, and cross-functional coordination that can involve 150–1,000 people across marketing, medical, regulatory, IT, analytics, and field teams

.Traditional planning approaches—annual plans, multi-week approvals, and siloed workflows—make it difficult to keep up with the speed of scientific data and customer expectations.

Agile Marketing offers a better way. Short, iterative cycles help teams deliver compliant assets faster, reduce rework, and involve medical–legal–regulatory partners earlier in the process. Instead of “big-bang” launches, Agile enables Minimum Viable Campaigns (MVCs), continuous testing, and rapid learning.

What this eBook will teach you:

What makes Agile effective in regulated environments

How to assess organizational readiness

The exact steps to set up Agile squads, sprints, and compliance checkpoints

How leading companies (Pfizer, Charles River, Daiichi Sankyo) made Agile work

A simple blueprint to launch your first Agile pilot

Understand the Barriers: Why Traditional Pharma Marketing Struggles

Before adopting Agile, it helps to understand why the current system slows teams down. The deck highlights several universal challenges in pharmaceutical marketing environments:

- Structural & Operational Barriers
- Sequential medical–legal–regulatory (MLR) review cycles averaging 8–12 weeks
- Heavy upfront planning that delays execution
- Fragmented roles: marketing, IT, medical, regulatory all working in silos
- Limited transparency–bottlenecks only surface late in the process

Human & Organizational Barriers

- High emotional exhaustion and burnout among marketing managers
- Too many responsibilities with insufficient support
- Ambiguity in decision-making and unclear approval ownership
- Lower job satisfaction and high turnover risk

Why Agile Helps

Agile doesn't remove constraints—it reorganizes work so teams can navigate complexity without burning out. Shorter sprints, early compliance involvement, and cross-functional squads address every one of the blockers above.



Step 1: Assess Your Organization's Readiness

Not every team is ready to launch Agile immediately. The deck emphasizes the importance of evaluating readiness across five dimensions :

1. Leadership Commitment

- Do leaders model agile behaviors?*
- Are they willing to delegate decision rights?*
- Is there visible sponsorship and alignment with strategy?*

2. Cultural Mindset

- Do teams feel safe experimenting and learning?*
- Are cross-functional relationships strong enough for collaboration?*
- Does the culture reward outcomes, not just output?*

3. Structural Flexibility

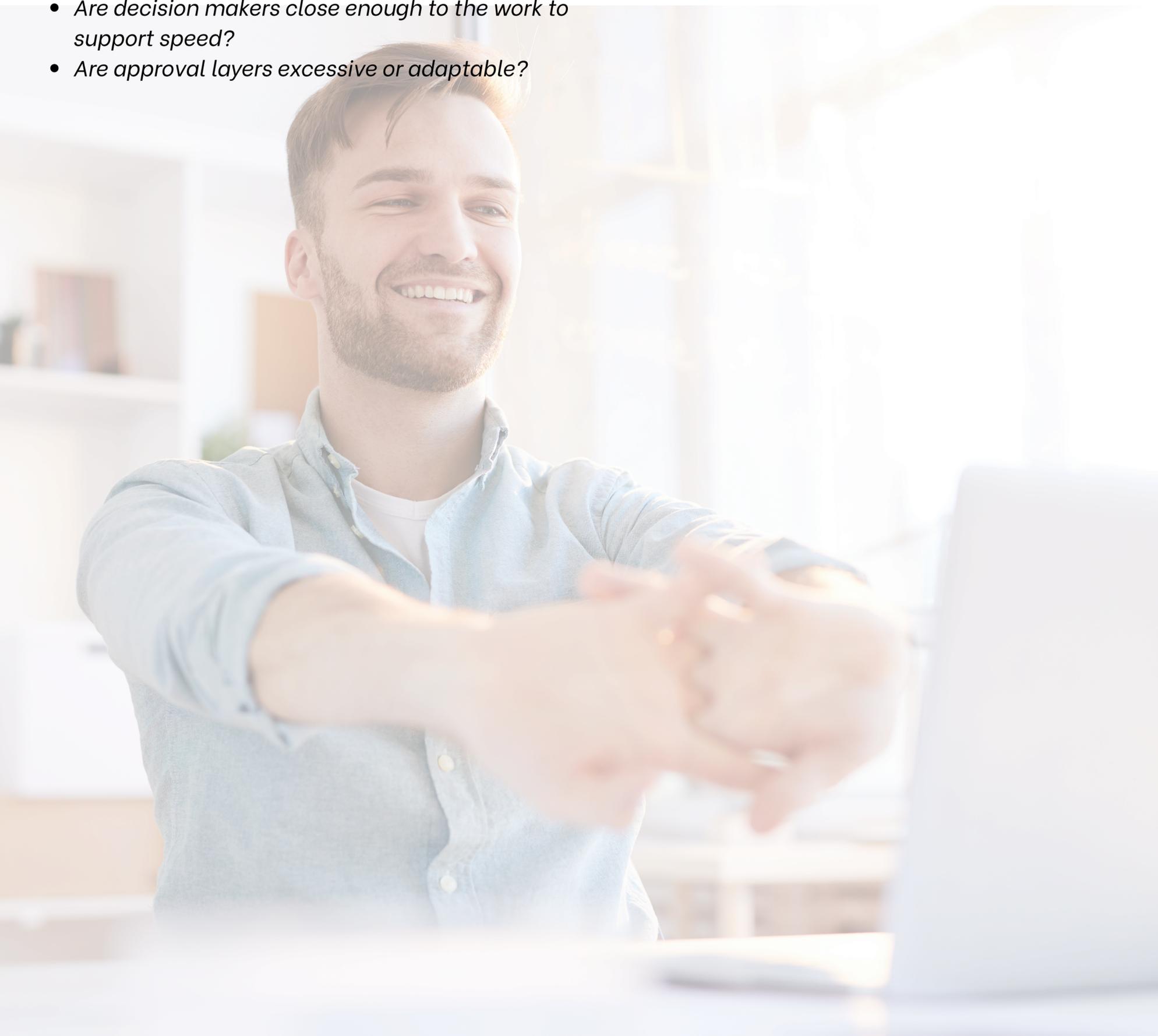
- Can teams work in cross-functional "pods"?*
- Are decision makers close enough to the work to support speed?*
- Are approval layers excessive or adaptable?*

4. Process Agility

- Are planning cycles static or rolling?*
- Is compliance embedded or only engaged at the end?*
- Is work visualized (Kanban, dashboards) to reduce blind spots?*

5. Change Resilience & Learning

- Are feedback loops embraced?*
- Are teams open to upskilling?*
- Does the organization celebrate small wins?*



Step 2: Design a Small, Safe Agile Pilot

The fastest path to success is starting small. The deck recommends a 2-4 week pilot with a narrow scope and clear deliverables.

Choose a Pilot Use Case

- Good candidates:
- One HCP email + matching landing page
- A simple digital asset requiring MLR review
- A field-team support piece for an upcoming meeting
- Form Your Cross-Functional Squad

Include:

- Marketing lead (Product Owner)
- Scrum Master (process guide)
- Copy/design/content creators
- Digital/analytics support
- A dedicated compliance partner (MLR liaison)

Define Success Upfront

- Suggested pilot KPIs:
- Cycle time reduction vs. baseline
- Rework % (MLR comments requiring edits)
- Time to approval
- Engagement uplift (if deployed)



Step 3: Run Your First Agile Sprint

Your deck outlines a clear, replicable sprint model. Here is a simplified version you can drop directly into Canva:

Sprint Planning (60–90 minutes)

- *Set a Sprint Goal (e.g., “Deliver approval-ready email MVC”).*
- *Break work into tasks with a Definition of Ready (DoR)*
- *Claims sourced*
- *Fair balance identified*
- *Required disclosures listed*
- *Add compliance checkpoints*
- *Estimate effort and commit to a realistic backlog*
- *Sprint Execution (2–4 weeks)*

Daily rhythm:

- *15-minute stand-up to surface blockers*
- *Respect Work-In-Progress (WIP) limits*
- *Use AI pre-checks before sending to MLR*
- *Swarm on compliance issues quickly to keep momentum*

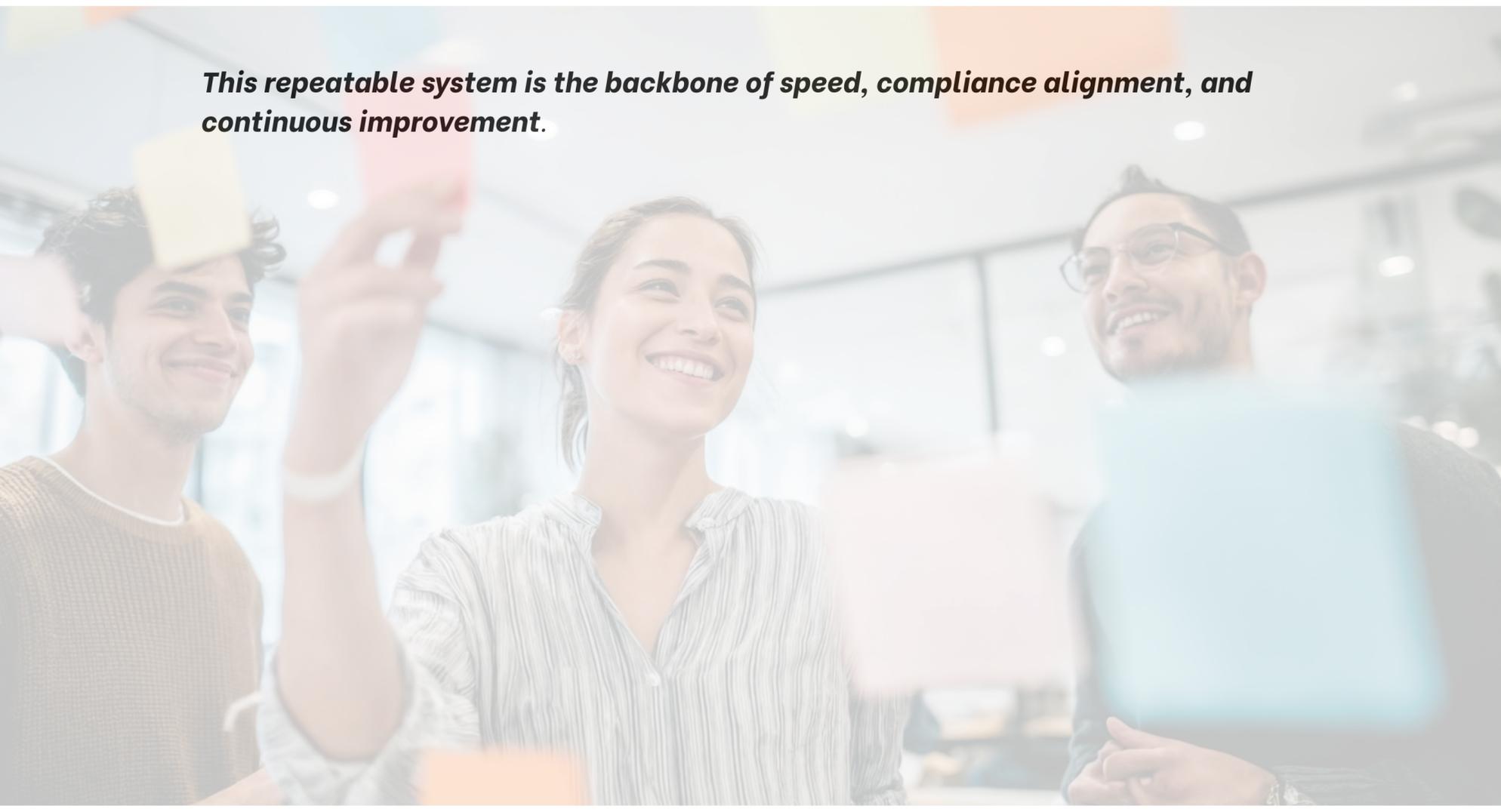
Sprint Review

- *Demonstrate real assets—not slides*
- *Confirm Definition of Done*
- *Capture feedback as new backlog items*
- *Update audit trail (Veeva, Jira, Confluence)*

Sprint Retrospective

- *Review cycle time, rework %, throughput*
- *Identify 1–2 improvements (“move fair balance drafting to Day 1”)*
- *Assign owners and due dates*

This repeatable system is the backbone of speed, compliance alignment, and continuous improvement.



Step 4: Build the Ecosystem – KPIs, Transparency & AI

Once the pilot is running, you begin building the Agile operating ecosystem.

1. Visualize Everything

Kanban boards and dashboards create transparency and highlight bottlenecks early.

Pharmaceutical case studies show cycle times reduced by ~20% when transparency becomes routine

2. Evolve Your KPIs Using the “KPI Ladder”

- Early Phase: Cycle time ↓ 20–30%, rework ↓ <20%
- Mid Phase: +10–20% engagement uplift
- Late Phase: ROI improves 2x–2.5x, faster regulatory adaptation

3. Integrate Compliance Into Sprints

- Pre-approved content blocks
- AI “regulator bots” for pre-check
- Mid-sprint compliance checkpoints

4. Use AI as a Force Multiplier

- Your slides highlight emerging practices:
- AI personas for pre-testing messaging
- AI-driven audit trails
- Automated compliance scans
- NLP for real-time customer sentiment

These tools accelerate everything without compromising accuracy.



Step 5: Scale Your Agile Capability and Build Your Playbook

After a successful pilot, the goal is to scale carefully—building trust, structure, and predictable outcomes.

Start Scaling When:

1. Pilot reduces cycle time
2. Compliance partners report fewer late changes
3. Teams show strong engagement in ceremonies
4. Leaders see transparent metrics and value
5. How to Scale (Based on Your Deck's Capstone Framework)

1. Consolidate Learnings

- Document what worked
- Capture new standards (DoR, DoD, templates)
- Formalize compliance checkpoints

2. Expand to a Second Use Case

- Another brand
- A different channel (e.g., field assets, web)
- A different cross-functional team

3. Strengthen Governance

- Light-touch guardrails
- Delegated decision rights
- Clear escalation paths

4. Invest in Upskilling

- Training for leaders
- Workshops for squads
- Coaching for Scrum Masters

5. Build Your Agile Playbook

- Your playbook should include:
- Readiness summary
- Pilot blueprint
- Communication & engagement plan
- Sprint playbook
- KPI framework

Final Thoughts

Agile in pharmaceuticals is not about moving recklessly fast – it's about creating a disciplined, transparent, compliance-aligned rhythm that enables your teams to keep pace with scientific progress and customer needs.

And with the right starting steps, you can begin this transformation in just a few weeks.

if you would like to use some resources and guides to take you on your journey as well as have a walk through of the processes hearing what others in the industry have done to be successful with Agile Marketing, I encourage you to take my course on Agile Marketing for Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare on Udemy. Here is a link to the course:

<https://www.udemy.com/course/agile-marketing-for-pharma-and-healthcare/?couponCode=JWCONSULTINGC1>