

Auditing the uncharted: Expanding the scope of Marketing Audits.

As marketing functions diversify beyond media and creative, new areas of spend — from affiliate marketing to loyalty platforms — are gaining strategic and financial importance. This evolution demands broader, data-driven compliance audits to ensure transparency, contract integrity and full commercial accountability across all marketing operations.

Background

While media, creative, production, and influencer contract audits have become standard industry practice or are becoming so, many other marketing disciplines continue to operate without equivalent commercial review.

Yet their financial scale and strategic impact have grown significantly — and with that, so have the risks.

As agency models evolve and scopes widen, the absence of structured compliance oversight can expose brands to inefficiencies, value leakage and non-compliance. A fit-for-purpose, modern compliance framework is now essential to ensure transparency, measurable value delivery, and contractual integrity across the marketing ecosystem.

Expanding the Scope of Marketing Audits

Beyond media and creative, many marketing areas offer valuable opportunities for contract compliance auditing.

Any activity governed by a contract, budget, KPIs and/or pass through costs can be audited — yet certain areas consistently deliver strong financial returns and operational insights.

Key audit candidates include:

Affiliate Marketing, Experiential & Sponsorships, Loyalty Platforms, Legal Services and Field Force Management.

1. Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is a performance-based model where brands reward partners for driving sales, leads, or traffic.

Given its heavy reliance on platforms and complex commission structures, auditing ensures payment accuracy, proper attribution, and contract compliance.

Typical Issues / Findings:

- Platform and service fees

- Voucher code misuse and revenue leakage
- Affiliate commission validation
- Cash flow and reconciliation management

2. Experiential, Sponsorship, and Event Management

These disciplines deliver immersive brand experiences through live or virtual activations.

Managed by creative agencies or holding company divisions, they involve diverse cost structures and multiple third parties.

Issues / Findings:

- Lack of cost transparency
- Remuneration model inconsistencies (fee-based, time-based, output-driven)
- Pass-through cost validation and production credits
- Related-party transactions and hidden mark-ups
- Talent and asset management
- Cash flow oversight and expense control
- Vertical integration exposure (e.g., vehicle hire, travel, studios)

3. Loyalty Platforms

Loyalty platforms drive retention and engagement through digital rewards systems.

Despite high spend levels, many programs lack clear KPIs and structured performance reviews.

Issues / Findings:

- Platform and agency management fees
- Pass-through cost reconciliation (activations, rewards)
- Cash management and deferred revenue handling

4. Legal Services

Legal engagements represent substantial investments but are rarely audited.

Reviewing time allocations, rates, and resource mixes helps ensure value, fairness, and compliance with retainers or capped-fee agreements.

Issues / Findings:

- Staff time and billing accuracy
- Hourly rate adherence and timesheet accuracy
- Fee reconciliation and out-of-scope charging
- Resource mix (partner vs. associate ratios)
- Performance or success-based payments

5. Field Force Management

Field force suppliers manage large, on-ground teams responsible for sales, service, or retail execution

It is often one of the biggest non-media expenditures in FMCG and tech.

Issues / Findings:

- Fee structure and resource allocation
- Incentive and performance tracking
- Proof of activity (POA) documentation and validation

How 3A Compliance Delivers Value

Audit: End-to-end Contract Compliance Audits across different disciplines, identifying areas of financial leakage and contractual non-compliance.

Analysis: Advising and supporting where and when to audit.

Assessment: Providing clear recommendations, remediation actions, and future control enhancements to reinforce transparency, audit cadence and maximise commercial return.

Summary

Contract compliance auditing delivers measurable value well beyond traditional media and creative reviews.

Auditing large and complex spend areas such as affiliate marketing, loyalty programs, field operations and legal services consistently generates strong ROI and process improvements.

Expanding audits into these emerging disciplines strengthens financial control, promotes transparency, and safeguards future marketing investments — ensuring issues are identified early and prevented from recurring

3A Compliance turns contract compliance into competitive advantage — delivering actionable audits, proven ROI, and clarity that strengthens agency partnerships and business performance.