

Future-Proof Marketing:

How to Build a Team Ready for Tomorrow

In partnership
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INTRODUCTION

As customer expectations grow at an unprecedented pace and organisations are forced to evolve accordingly, the need for marketers to be forward thinking and future-proof their skills, and teams has never been more important. However, designing a forward-looking strategy is one thing. Finding and retaining the talent who can deliver on it is another entirely. This is particularly pertinent at a time when marketing departments are under more pressure than ever to highlight their true value contribution and the lines are blurring between marketing, digital, social, customer, sales and operations, and everything in-between.

The primary purpose of this white paper is to explore the challenges that the marketing function is currently facing surrounding talent acquisition and retention by better defining the role of a marketing professional in an increasingly dynamic market. It will also posit solutions to better meet the needs and expectations of the talent pool.

By gaining a more comprehensive understanding of what talented professionals are looking for from a marketing role, we can identify key areas for improvements to be made. Similarly, knowing the fundamental skills and capabilities that are crucial to business success in such a competitive industry will allow for smarter targeting and future planning.

CONTRIBUTORS

This white paper has been produced by Michael Page, in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Primary research was carried out in early 2018, with findings discussed at a Michael Page/Page Executive Marketing roundtable seminar, attended by Marketing Directors from a broad range of sectors, in London in July 2018.

The primary stakeholders who have contributed to this white paper are:



Mark Lawson-Jones, Associate Partner, Page Executive

Mark is responsible for general management executive appointments at Board level and specialises in Marketing and Commercial functions.

He has 12 years of recruitment experience. His focus is on main board and senior management level appointments across consumer, B2B, technology and pharmaceutical sectors. His client base includes both UK and multi-national businesses and those ranging from privately held, owner driven businesses, through to quoted companies and private equity-backed organisations.



Gemma Butler, Director of Marketing, CIM

Gemma is the Marketing Director at the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Experienced in both corporate and not-for-profit organisations, she spent over 16 years in leading corporates specialising in proposition development and buying. In her current role leading the marketing department at CIM, Gemma brings strong commercial and strategic experience and is part of the senior management team.



Huw Jones, Operating Director, Michael Page

Huw has been with Michael Page for 10 years and has over 16 years of experience working in recruitment. He has worked with blue-chip companies operating in a number of industry sectors including technology, retail, financial services, professional services and business services. Some of these brands have included Sky, British Gas, O2, Samsung, TSB and Royal Caribbean. Currently, Huw is responsible for eight teams of marketing, HR, and sales recruitment specialists covering the entire South East region for PageGroup.

METHODOLOGY

We surveyed approximately 1,700 senior candidates across the marketing function from a variety of business sectors in the UK and across different sectors. The purpose of this survey was to understand some of the push factors for why people leave organisations from a marketing perspective. If you can build a comprehensive understanding of why people leave a marketing role, it will also allow you to better understand why people join organisations. With this information, marketing leaders can put in place processes to help attract and retain top talent in the marketing sector. We then presented this information at a recent Michael Page/Page Executive roundtable in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Against the backdrop of a market fighting for talent and a significant skills gap, organisations are struggling to hold onto their top performers. At a time when retaining and nurturing talent has never been more important, senior leaders are caught at a crossroads when it comes to moving the function forward.

Losing talent to competitors, building diverse teams and fostering inclusive cultures to support these teams, while fighting for a seat at the table, presents conflicting challenges for marketing functions right across the UK. Roles are changing, although perceptions among senior leaders have yet to shift. The lines between digital and marketing are blurred and a key question has arisen from this: is there a true distinction between them or are we overcomplicating what should really be one collaborative business function?

In order to truly understand these issues within the market, it is vital to assess what it is that the workforce is looking for. If you understand why people are leaving, then you can gauge what they might be looking for. By identifying key push and pull factors in the market, businesses can better align their recruitment efforts to target the talent they are looking for. Once this is achieved, it's about keeping a happy and motivated workforce through a clear mission and long-term goals.



Losing talent in a competitive market

It was highlighted during our roundtable event that employees – millennials, in particular – are especially comfortable with changing jobs. This can be every 18 months if need be. Their biggest reasons for leaving are often the vision and direction of the business. The motivations of the workforce have changed significantly. Salary is no longer the defining factor for many professionals exploring their options in the market. However, this becomes more complex when you take into consideration the diversity within the workforce. Different generations are motivated by different life factors, as are men and women. Men typically leave if the direction of business doesn't align with their vision while women seek opportunities elsewhere when they feel there is a possible lack of career progression.

MLJ: "The big things are the direction of the business, poor job satisfaction and a lack of challenges within a job - they're quite interlinked. The interesting element is that the salary is at the bottom of the list."



Attracting talent to join a new marketing team

The traditional recruitment process, whereby an employer had their pick of the bunch and candidates had to work hard to sell themselves and highlight their suitability for the role, has changed. Today, interviews should be a two-way conversation and more than ever business need to sell the opportunity to the candidates to compete for top talent. But what do they want from a new role? From our research, many professionals were looking for a challenge along with an insight into the direction that the business is heading.

Anonymous Marketing Director: "I had an interview with a millennial candidate, he ended up being a fantastic asset to the business, but after we had sat down and said, "Hey, how are you doing?" his first words to me were, "Sell me the business. Why should I come to work for you?"

"I've seen a lot of this kind of attitude with the younger, highly skilled workers. They see themselves as having a career that they control – they work for you for the period they decide to."



Diversity and inclusion challenges

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are two aspects of business culture that have become absolutely essential to not only attract candidates but to nurture and support them in their roles to ensure they stay with the business. Yet, this is still a challenge for many organisations. The fact is, D&I is a topic that isn't going away and the workforce of today expects to see a certain level of commitment from the organisations they work for to champion these initiatives.

HJ: "It started to become more apparent that the people we were hiring into our organisation were less motivated by money and more motivated about the direction, the vision, the culture and more and more importantly, the diversity and inclusion policy that the organisation has."

Anonymous Marketing leader: "Diversity and inclusion for parents, women, all these things, should be within the fabric of the organisation; everybody should be living and breathing these things. They shouldn't be separate."



Flexible/Dynamic working

In addition to the growing list of what is expected of a business in terms of D&I and corporate social responsibility (CSR), the expectations for certain benefits have also increased. There has been a huge increase in demand for flexible/dynamic working among the millennial generation. Professionals are much more conscious of maintaining a positive work-life balance. Maintaining employee well-being, which dynamic working can help to support, can reduce employee turnover and directly improve the bottom line, which has meant that many businesses now allow employees to flex the typical 9-5 working day around their own schedules.

MLJ: "Work-life balance is a pull factor that has become more popular over the last few years. People are very keen to have their career, and work is very much an important part of it, but also have the flexibility to enjoy their home life as well. And that can relate to a number of different things in terms of flexible working patterns."



Perceptions of marketing

In the business world, marketing is viewed differently within every organisation. Some companies centre all business decisions on the customer insights and data that marketing can provide, while others still only use the function to run advertising campaigns.

Anonymous Marketing Leader: "I think that one of the challenges I have found is being able to grow in my career and go higher, but how suitable is marketing or having a marketing title to that progression? If you think about becoming a Chief Commercial Officer, I think that sales or business development will always be preferred to a marketer or somebody with a marketing background."

GB: "Generally, the Finance Director will get a main seat at the table because they're talking about the figures, but they tend to look back at facts; what has happened drives their views when setting budget and targets. The role marketing plays can vary between organisations. I've spoken to organisations where marketing's role is to drive brand awareness and run campaigns. Other organisations put marketing as a more central commercially focused role, creating propositions and driving revenue."



The role of marketers

There is no denying that the traditional marketing role has changed significantly. The digital era has meant that there has been a crossover between the roles of a professional in marketing and those that sit on a digital team. In addition to this, new legislation changes that affect entire organisations are increasingly being assigned to marketing to take the lead.

With organisations of all sizes grappling with changes such as GDPR, Gemma explains that strategic skills have never been more important for marketers: "Strategic skills are critical. If we are the voice of the customer, if we understand the customer journey and if we can work across different parts of the business, then we need to sit at board level. This can be quite difficult in some organisations, for marketers to be able to say, 'This is what we need to do as a business.' Marketing needs to be aligned with the business objectives."

Anonymous event attendee: "I think that there are too many structures in which marketers tend to still report to sales rather than the other way around. I think that is where there is a great opportunity for marketers, and I think that it's disappointing that it hasn't happened as fast as it should. As marketers, we are now really owning the customer journey."

"We have all seen similar issues with GDPR – was it owned by legal, marketing or IT? And I think that more and more of these challenges are going to come along, marketing is, in my view, not stepping up."



Upcoming challenges

The ongoing challenges for marketing professionals, of course, include the skills gap, an increasingly competitive market and the fight for a seat at the table. But today's business world is constantly changing. New technologies are disrupting the function daily, which means new challenges. The risk of this is that the function may get lost within organisations as teams are becoming leaner and marketing budgets are reduced.

Anonymous event attendee: "If we can't prove ourselves, we're going to continue to have our teams cut and lose budget. I think we as marketers, need to work out how to overcome that."

Anonymous Marketing Leader: "The volume of content that emerges every day is probably three folds of what it was five years ago. Cutting through and making an impact is a lot harder than it once was. We've put a lot of effort into fine-tuning, tailoring, being customer-centric, but if you look at the engagement – maybe it's just not great content, I don't know – the engagement levels are down."

SOLUTION



Digital and marketing as a unified function

Without a clear purpose and direction, marketing teams can fall into the trap of taking on multiple and often conflicting projects. The current struggle between defining the role of marketing and digital has caused a somewhat internal struggle for resources. A unified approach to digital marketing has been highlighted as one solution to this.

Anonymous Marketing Leader: "I encourage the CIM to encourage marketers to grow those skills that millennials or the X Generation need – the core marketing skills. Then more senior marketers, along with marketeers at all levels, need to have digital skills because without that, it's not going to be an integrated conversation."

Delegate, Marketing Leader: "In our organisation, they're working in silos, but actually, at the end of the day, we're all serving the same customer and we're all on that same journey. So, I don't know how this would work but having an organisation where all of those functions are working together telling the same story, to grow the business, would be ideal."

Anonymous Marketing Leader: "We're trying to achieve a culture where everyone in the organisation is considered part of our digital and marketing function in some way. Everyone has marketing titles – even people who are going to do our service delivery and are speaking to our customers all the time."

"But it's that informal balance across who does what, where and it's drawing those lines where we're having some interesting conversations. I think it's making us a better organisation."



Culture, attitude and structure

Event attendee, Marketing Director: "With very lean teams and leaner budgets, in a very fast moving environment, it's about getting the right people. And if you've got the right people with the right mindset, it's about then training them - as long as they're willing to be open. We've had to move on quite a few people who have not been willing to do this."

"If someone's trained in one thing and they don't want to do the other part, it's really difficult. So, I think that the ability to be agile, and flexibility, have to be key. You have to be able to wear different hats all the time. I think that's where all of this comes in, making sure that the people in your team have all the experience that you need but everyone has to be retrained. Everyone has to be quite skilled up these days. But you also have to work with an organisation that wants to support that as well."

Event attendee, Marketing Specialist: "For me, it's not the structure, it's the culture. So, I think this has been summed up already, but you can have all the different structures you like, it's pretty subjective. One business might have marketing on the board, another reporting to sales or ops but as marketeers we just need to get more involved with the whole value chain in the customer journey now. It just goes back to that flexibility point. These days you can't have, "not my jobbers" in the business, you've got to have some kind of control and accountability, but it's all a bit more blurry. So, structure to me, is not as important as the culture. The structure doesn't matter if you don't have a culture, good coordination and collaboration. If it's in a silo it doesn't really matter what the structure is."



Bring back core marketing skills

HJ: "We've bamboozled ourselves into believing that just because millennials can use Facebook, they therefore must be fantastic at digital; often you just need to upskill them in marketing. When hiring, it's a matter of saying, 'Well, they're great, they're coming in with really good social media skills. Great, let's train them in the marketing.' Just train them as a marketer, not as a digital person."

Anonymous Marketing Director: "We're spending all of our training budgets this year on strategic planning and campaign planning. Campaign planning for the more junior team members and strategic planning for the more senior members. Because you know, they can come in and ask me if they can go on an AI or VR training course and the answer is going to be 'no'. Actually, I just want you to be able to plan an integrated marketing campaign."

Anonymous attendee, Marketing Director: "I think that all comes back to the younger marketers and what we are training them in, they all understand what their job is. I think a lot of the marketers coming into the profession think the golden bullet is digital - if I know digital, I'll be fine. And that's true. But as a fundamental skill, I think we need to be teaching commercial skills and analytical skills. So, right from the get-go, they know that their job is to make money, not just to write emails and put out social media posts because that in of itself is not enough."

GB: "It's interesting to note that at the CIM we had GDPR training and it became the top-selling course. But as soon as May 25th happened [when GDPR came into force], Principles Of Copywriting, which had been our best-selling course for the previous four years, was soon number one again. The fact is that people still want to learn how to write and that is a skill missing within many organisations."



Meeting the expectations of an evolving workforce

Defining the needs of different talent pools

MLJ: "We have noticed a split between genders in terms of their broad needs. Men will often leave due to the direction of the business – it isn't in their ideal situation. Women will often leave a role due to a lack of career progression."

"The baby boomers, are much more concerned about job satisfaction and challenge. Generation X is much more into work-life balance and challenge. Part of that is if they are driven by the stages they are at in their life. For the millennials though, it's very different; they are very much team orientated and they're not going to sacrifice their lifestyles for their work. The way that they engage in the business is very, very different, and that's a big challenge. So, understanding those different pools when recruiting helps to sell the opportunity back to these candidates."

Flexible working

MLJ: "As we move towards more flexible working patterns, we might see the typical 9-5 changing from 'you have to be working' to 'you can start early or finish later as long as the work gets done'. A lot of organisations are shifting their focus to be more about the results. However, it's important to consider how you manage that remotely, particularly when there's poor performance."

Diversity and inclusion

HJ: "Everybody has to buy into the concept that they can have diversity and inclusion. Not only from the senior leadership team but most importantly the people on the ground. The most junior people are the people that really push this agenda and make it happen."

"If you can address D&I in your organisation, it would improve employee morale and it also makes you a better business to attract and retain new talent. From a recruitment organisation, the businesses that we partner with, want an organisation who is on top of their diversity and inclusion policies. It is the right ethical and moral thing to do. And if you do that, you give everybody the best opportunity to succeed in your organisation and therefore your organisation will grow and be more successful."



Cutting through the noise

Anonymous Marketing Professional: "There's a lot of noise around digitisation and how in the next 10 years, everything is going to be data rich – such as tailored offers to the customers. Ultimately, when someone wants something, they're still going to get out and look for it. I think it's just finding the balance of how much the people really can expect to be interested in something delivered in a push notification on their smartphone and how to not get carried away with that too much."

James Delves, Head of PR, CIM: "We discussed the role of AI in customer choice. Does AI actually give you more choice or just take it away? Will it just serve you things it thinks you need, do you still get to see those other choices that you really want or does it just give you the same vanilla options? In the future, will people just push away from that, will people just spurn technology and decide to look through web pages themselves because they don't trust their companies to serve them the real thing?"

"I think it's going back to what Gemma said about the actual customer behaviours. It's probably more important than just jumping on every new tech that comes your way, in some cases you might have to, but maybe it would just complicate things."

GB: "I'm hoping that GDPR helps bring back the fact that marketers have to think about what they're doing and ask themselves, 'Right, what does my customer want because I can't just send 500k emails out today.' You have to build up that value because customers can now say, 'Well, we aren't ticking that box.'

"I think, once everything calms down it makes you stop and think and hopefully, that will bring back core marketing skills – the copywriting skills and how you add value and communicate on message all become more and more important."

CONCLUSION

While it is difficult to comprehensively address the challenges that marketing faces in terms of talent attraction and retention, there are ways to improve them. In fact, if efforts are focused not only on finding the talent you want and need but also on evolving your team, empowering them to think more strategically, and bring more to the table in terms of strategy and business direction, you will develop highly valuable assets for your organisation. In addition to a strong team, you have skilled marketing professionals driving the quest for a proper seat at the table.

Ultimately, like with the skills gap, solving the challenges around the definition of the role of marketers and creating a more collaborative approach to the function is an industry-wide issue that cannot be solved overnight. In fact, perhaps part of the issue in solving the skills gaps is due to the inconsistent messaging around which roles entail what, and where digital vs. marketing sit with an organisation's value chain. If all roles were to include an element of digital, and marketing was to take on digital as part of the single function, then it would perhaps create a much stronger approach to business and a clearer career opportunity for upcoming talent.

From the discussions that took place at the roundtable event, it is clear that change is needed. Many marketing leaders want to see shifts in the culture and organisation's approach to attracting marketing talent and the way that the function is viewed by other areas of their business.

For a confidential discussion about attracting and hiring talent, contact:

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