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# The unbearable lightness of marketing leadership

Jean-Luc Ambrosi | 20 May, 2014 11:42 | Comments | Share this post |

As the role of CMO and marketing leader evolves at a frantic pace, growing exponentially in complexity, a question remains: Should managers without recognised marketing credentials be appointed marketing leaders or CMOs?

We're living in a world where marketing increasingly relies on the use of precise techniques within a complex ecosystem, yet we still see non-experts placed at the helm. These are people with no marketing qualifications or experience but who have been attracted by marketing's sexiness, amused by advertising, can use the words 'social media' and 'mobile' in conversations, and possibly possess strong business acumen, but are not true experts. If you are not qualified, well, you are not qualified.

Why is it important, you may ask? Wouldn't it suffice to have a good manager leading a marketing team? The reality is that this lack of expertise often leads to a short tenure, or worse, managers who can damage organisations because they don't provide adequate, strategic business support and appropriate customer strategies: making the lightness of marketing leadership an organisation-wide issue.

The multitude of marketing channels and need to integrate all customer interactions today requires marketing leaders to move from an 'I think' mode to a rigorous process of decision making. Understanding and mastering both the technical and strategic skills now associated with managing the marketing function is vital. Modern marketing leaders must possess a mix of sound technical knowledge across many areas including branding, direct response, customer data, segmentation, channel engagement, content strategy, digital and traditional mediums, coupled with a genuine ability to lead and build multifaceted strategies.

Marketing's significant evolution has created a gap in knowledge around its progression and the added complexities of the function. It wasn't so long ago that marketing teams discovered the use of databases and it was only yesterday that the online world brought forward a plethora of new channels and data.

Marketers have, however, often been their own worst enemies. Too many have outsourced strategy to agencies and suppliers of all kinds, relying on others to do their jobs and build their intellectual property. This has made it look like almost anyone could lead marketing, as long as they can manage people and suppliers.

At the same time, many marketers have lacked integration with other functions across their organisation, working in isolation to the business realities and lacking accountability. Driving and owning strategy and being integrated with the business is the only way to demonstrate marketing leadership, the breadth and impact of marketing activities, while educating the business about the true value-add and contribution to the bottom line.

As a result, many organisational leaders don't fully understand the role marketing plays, leaving the door open to aspirational managers who think they can lead marketing because anyone can do marketing. In a way they are right: Anyone can do marketing, but the reality is few can do it well and fewer are accomplished at it.

In the same vein, anyone can be a mechanic as judged by the number of backyard operators. But would you really want to be one of their customers?

The status of marketing needs to be better promoted to the business world. I have no doubt that this will come in time as the profession has become far more sophisticated and complex. Universities and industry players have a big role to play and so do marketing leaders.

Look elsewhere and there is no question about the professional recognition of accountants such as Chartered Accountants (CA). So why can accountants build better brands? It's probably because they employ good marketers.

Tags: leadership, marketing careers, CMO role

**Jean-Luc Ambrosi**



Jean-Luc Ambrosi is an award winning marketer and recognised expert in branding and customer relationship management. He is the author of the new book, Branding to Differ, a strategic and practical guide on how to build and manage a successful brand.

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