

CMO of the future: Confronting the talent crunch

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According to the CMO Growth Council, marketing as a career choice needs a makeover in order to attract the right talent for the future.

- Marketing is struggling to attract top level talent, with consulting, tech and startups considered more attractive career options.
- Creating a campaign to make marketing more attractive as a career is one part of the solution, but brands also need to think more strategically about developing the skillsets their business needs within their existing staff.
- Today's marketer must be able to understand the importance of performance marketing in the digital era and the classic principles of long-term brand building – developing both abilities within staff needs to be a priority for talent development programmes.
- Marketers need to work harder to translate the sometimes vague ROI of marketing into business language which moves the C-suite.

The job of the marketer has arguably never been more exciting. Creativity, business and technology are overlapping and creating entire new career pathways that didn't exist even five years ago.

And yet, marketing has developed the perception of being an 'unsexy' career compared to consulting, the "promised land" of start-ups or tech giants such as Facebook or Google, according to new work from the CMO Growth Council, an initiative set up by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and Cannes Lions.

The occupation of 'marketer' in 2019 needs a major facelift to attract the best and brightest talent the industry needs, according to Alicia Hatch, Chief Marketing Officer at Deloitte Digital. This means not only capturing the attention of those at the start of their careers, but modernising the skillsets of those marketers already working at brands.

"All of a sudden, marketing is falling behind... marketing is far behind even core business processes as choice of career path," said Hatch at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity recently.

In Hatch's view, it's time for an entirely new story about what a career in marketing looks like: that being "right on the front lines" with customers makes marketing "an absolute sandbox for innovation" and a worthy career

choice.

LEGO, the children's toy brand, has a well thought out approach to talent development, according to the company's Chief Marketing Officer, Julia Goldin.

"I need people who have the competencies to be able to think about the holistic consumer experience: listening to consumers, understanding where the opportunities are, inspiring the designers, and orchestrating how the whole experience comes to life. Finally, actually reaching the consumer across the whole value chain. It's a pretty important and significant job, in terms of identifying the future, setting the vision and then making it happen," Goldin said.

Creating a campaign to make marketing more attractive as a career is one part of the solution, but brands also need to think more strategically about developing the skillsets their business needs within their existing staff, Goldin said.

"We need to create a broader access to training and development for people that are already in our organisations, that's really important because the world will continue to change. And we need to make sure that people can actually learn whatever they need to know, in order to be able to embrace change, and lead change within their own organisations."

One of the major areas the CMO Growth Council has focused on, Goldin said, was the need to develop clear competencies for success. At Deloitte Digital, in-house training programmes are helping the company's marketers to develop more rounded skillsets which the whole organisation is benefiting from. Being able to approach a challenge from different directions, Hatch said, has been particularly useful in the innovation space.

"We're cross-training across every competency, so that everyone gets exposed to all types of work. We've created internal rotation programs: for three weeks you sit in on meetings related to a competency, and learn for the purpose of being able to work in an integrated team. What I've discovered is it's actually increasing the empathy in the organisation. People are understanding one another and working much more fluidly together, which in turn is driving innovation," Hatch said.

"Those are the types of organisations that will also attract top talent. I've seen that happen. As we've started these programs, the types of resumes that we're getting are better - it's a place people want to work."

The digital era is producing hordes of highly-skilled performance marketers, but with short-termism proven to be damaging the long-term salience of brands, the 'old school' techniques of brand building have arguably never been more important. When it comes to getting the right talent, not every brand is hiring the right mix of skills.

Today's marketer must be able to understand the importance of performance marketing in the digital era and the classic principles of long-term brand building, Goldin said. Developing both abilities within staff needs to be a priority for talent development programmes.

"One of the unique things about marketers is that they're both right brain and left brain. They can't just do performance marketing, it's not enough. They have to be able to translate data into inspirational engaging ideas for our consumers. If you look back 20 years ago, they were the same foundational skills... we have lost sight of how important they are," Goldin said.

"Right now, marketing in the digital world and data analytics are really important. But (the industry) have gotten so carried away with the importance of these, that they've started to hire just that profile. That's not enough," she added.

What type of skillset propels a marketer into a Chief Marketing Officer leadership role? Someone who can translate the world of marketing into the language of the C-suite. This is particularly important for proving the value of marketing to the Chief Financial Officer in an era where marketing budgets are ever-shrinking.

“The CFO has no idea what we're talking about when we tell him about our ROI. Because the KPIs that we're using are in our own language - it's like speaking Russian to Mandarin speakers. There is no understanding of our value. Translating is an important job I think we all have right now in order to demonstrate the value of the profession,” Hatch explained.

Goldin cited strategic acumen, commercial nous and the ability to integrate as three important skills for CMOs.

“It's super important to be able to develop strategy, and to turn that into very clear direction for an organization. Commercial thinking, because we need to be able to turn engaging value-creating ideas into tangible commercial results,” Goldin said.

“It's a really, really important step that leaders need, to understand what actually is expected of the marketing function.”

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