
Why Marketers get no respect

By Niraj Dawar

Put on your thick skin, your Kevlar vest — this blog post is not for the faint of heart.

The problem is not just that consumers find marketers unsavory, it is also that even within the company marketers get no respect.

The CEO wonders how you spend your time, the CFO wonders how you spend the company's money, the sales folks think you're too conceptual, too abstract, and not sufficiently focused on the immediate business, and the production and supply chain guys just think you're full of hot air. So, we have a slight image problem. And where there is smoke...

... there must be mirrors. Let's peer into one, and see what gives.

No, it's not the gel in the hair, the overly-angular glasses, the impossibly pointy shoes, the (to others) unfounded rosy optimism. Those don't help, but they're not the only source of the image problem – we need to look beyond the superficial here (I know, tough, boring, dreary, but it needs to be done). Here are three reasons why marketers get no respect:

1. *Marketing isn't delivering competitive advantage.* Since the heyday of mass media and mass brands, marketing's strategic contribution has diminished. It has increasingly become tactical, moving the needle on share points but only to lose them within the quarter. In many companies, marketing is no longer contributing to the building of *sustainable* competitive advantage. Think of the reasons your company is (or is not) reliably and consistently more profitable than its rivals in the industry. How many of those reasons are marketing reasons? You can think of at most one: brand loyalty. But loyalty is a disappearing

commodity – relish it while you can. No wonder marketers aren't making it to the top of organizations like they used to – what they're offering the business is not strategic, and they're not building lasting competitive advantage any more.

2. *Marketing isn't demonstrating ROI.* Not only are we not contributing to sustainable competitive advantage, we're still trying to convince the rest of the organization that marketing expenditure is in fact investment. We'd have an easier time doing this if we could show that money spent on Marketing has an adequate (stellar?) return on investment. Even today, when data are available on every customer's every transaction, we have difficulty demonstrating ROI.
3. *Marketing is a cost center.* The folks in Sales are pounding the pavement, engaged in tough customer negotiations, coordinating customer solutions to delivery and billing issues, moving volume, and meeting quotas. At the end of the day, they do one thing that makes them really look good: they *bring in revenue*. What do the marketing folks do? Conceptualize, position, create value propositions, market research, oversee agencies, and as a result: be a *cost center*. From the salesperson's perspective, marketers are the university professors of the corporate world — they wouldn't know how to bring in revenue if tenure depended on it. But they do have the temerity to tell the CFO they need a multi-million dollar budget to build...wait for it... mind-space. Ha!

So what can marketing do to regain respect? Simple: contribute to sustainable competitive advantage; demonstrate ROI; and connect the dots from spend to revenue. I know, simpler said than done. But at least now we've got a To-Do list. And for concrete ideas on each of these, continue to watch this space. Ok, you can take off the Kevlar vest now (and while you're at it, consider pitching the pointy shoes).

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