The "Fundamentals" Are Still Important But the Marketing Organization and Communication Must Evolve

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A recent survey of CEOs by Frost & Sullivan found that 93% of CEOs cite growth as their number one priority. Since all companies need to grow this is not a surprising statistic but what was unexpected was that almost two-thirds of the same CEO cohort expressed doubt that their own teams could meet identified growth targets. How does thisdissatisfaction alter Marketing's role, and what can marketers do to contribute more effectively to the CEO's growth targets? If marketing leaders want to be trusted growth partners for the CEO, they must first rethink their current organization and communication strategies.

Frost & Sullivan has previously studied the non-changing role of marketing fundamentals and it is still marketing's job to build compelling value propositions with target audiences to promote products or services. Nowadays, however, it is increasingly marketing's responsibility to contextualize this core activity within a growth-focused framework. If CEOs care about growth above all else, then all functions, including marketing, must build growth-accelerating activities into their core responsibilities. Such a shared cross-functional mandate is highly dependent upon effective internal communications that ensure all functions are communicating the same message to the marketplace. It is therefore critically important that Marketing learn how to communicate effectively with internal stakeholders.

In most organizations today the marketing team must participate in active and meaningful dialogues with the other functional areas to reinforce the brand and messaging both internally and externally. The extent of the interaction with these other functional areas will vary depending on your organization. Technology-driven companies are inherently different from sales-driven companies in their approach, but the need for continuity of message and brand across all potential client touch points remains the same. For example, calls to a contact center are scripted and prepared to ensure that the correct message and experience is imparted – but what about calls to a billing specialist to resolve an invoicing issue? Furthermore, is your company's IT department making decisions that affect the client experience? Conversely, is the Marketing department leveraging IT-related knowledge for service level agreements on marketing-related technology? Synchronized messaging and communication across all these functional areas can only be achieved with a structured dialogue and the marketing team must be a part of that effort.

Salesforce.com helps illustrate this point about the evolving role of Marketing. Industry convergence has created Software-as-a-Service applications that blur the lines between CRM, finance software, marketing lead management, and web analytics. This convergence requires marketers to consider a wide range of functional partners when selecting a program: corporate development, sales management, accounting/finance and IT teams all have a voice. No one functional area takes precedence in this decision-making process, because their needs are all inter-related. At the end of the day, this application will reach across many functional areas with the ultimate goal of shaping client perceptions and advancing the objectives of the organization.

In addition, cross-functional communication can positively affect employee morale and productivity, because it creates a shared experience of working toward common goals. For example, if the accounting team understands the needs of a new product launch and how it will be invoiced, it will not only provide peace of mind to the marketing team but will also allow for dialogue about other important issues that might not even be on the radar. A failed conference bridge line during a crucial sales meeting or a slow web site ultimately affects everyone within an organization if the result is lost clients and falling revenues. What starts as a strong internal dialogue will translate to an external strength of brand and message.

So whether the marketing team is experimenting with new technology to increase web site traffic or reviewing how the finance team collects customer data, it must share a strategy and communication platform with its functional partners that will enable it to meet the CEO's growth objectives.