

COLUMNS

## CMO must excel in 4 key areas for corporate storytelling, growth

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The role of chief marketing officer is a difficult one because you have to be many things to many people, and you must excel at them all.

One could argue the CMO has to be the most well-rounded member of the C-suite, able to hold court with technical people as well as with non-technical people, across all areas of the business as well as the industry as a whole.

You have to be a "mile wide" and a "mile deep" to accurately and effectively tell the story of your business and drive the growth you need to succeed.

Four score

There are four skill areas that a CMO must have in the current landscape to succeed and ensure you have an opportunity in the future.

I have come to this conclusion from my own role across multiple companies, including startups as well as large Fortune 300 companies, as well as from the many conversations I have with other executives, industry pundits and recruiters.

Almost unanimously, here are the areas that companies look for in their CMO: synergy, management, thinking and doing. However, the pickings are slim for finding talent that truly excels in all four areas.

A CMO has to be effective at all four, but some situations can see alignment with a candidate if they know they really only need two or three of these based on the state of their business.

Unfortunately, I can also say that if you select a CMO who only excels at two or three of these skills, you will likely be in the market for a new CMO when your business hits the next stage of growth because you will, eventually, need all four.

Startups are a breeding ground for new CMOs and very often a CMO can succeed at this stage by being able to think and do.

Thinking is focused on strategy and vision. A thinker is someone who can lay a foundation for an idea and a high-level plan to get there.

Thinkers are essential for startups because they do not wait for the market to come to them. They tend to go out and

create a market.

If your CMO is a thinker, that is a skill necessary for startups all the way to enterprise and Fortune 500. The type of Thinking evolves over time, but Thinkers adapt well, and they can succeed at most stages.

Enterprise companies tend to look for people who are managers.

In a large enterprise, you end up with a broader marketing team. You have a wider array of skills on the team, and you need a CMO who can take the leadership role, organize the ideas and crystallize a team around them, managing for growth. They are good communicators, and they tend to work well across the C-Suite, as well as down to their teams.

Startups succeed with good managers as well, so this is not endemic to enterprise, but the weighting does tend to sway towards enterprise because the team in a startup is smaller.

Two do

The next two is where it gets tricky for CMOs, and this is why the tenure of the modern CMO seems stuck at around two years.

Synergy and doing: these are rarer in a CMO. I have been witness to this in numerous organizations, and it becomes glaringly clear when you think about it.

Synergy refers to the ability to create deep relationships across sales, product and marketing. Doing refers to, well, simply being able to get in the weeds and do the work. Let me explain.

Synergy is a requirement in today's business environment, but too often there is friction between sales and marketing and also between product and marketing.

Marketing is supposed to be the voice of the customer, and it is supposed to drive pipeline and growth for a business-to-business firm or tell the story and create a brand halo that drives faster sales in business-to-consumer.

Sales also exists to do these same things, and very often you see these two groups battling internally for the credit around one or the other. That should never be the case. They should be working together.

Marketing cannot exist without sales and sales cannot exist without marketing. If you find fault in that statement then your days are numbered.

Sales is the ultimate measurement metric for marketing.

On the flip side, product cannot exist without marketing and marketing cannot exist without product.

A great product will never get sold if nobody knows it exists. A great marketing campaign will ever work if the product is junk.

A successful company must have marketing, sales and product working together seamlessly, but too much of the time there are egos at work and these groups do not get along. When that happens for too long, someone ends up being pushed out.

Doing is an easy one to grasp. There are simply too many marketers who are too far away from the tools they need to be successful.

Many marketers have risen in the ranks to lead, manage and develop strategy, and they have no idea how to execute.

A great marketer still has to be able to get out to sell: do a pitch. They have to be able to execute: build a campaign in a trading desk. Work with technology: play with ChatGPT and use it as a writing partner. Build a webpage: get into a tool such as Webflow or Squarespace and build something.

Marketers need to know how to use tools such as Hubspot or Salesforce, Marketo or Eloqua. They need to play in Canva or build in Promo. They need to be capable of doing something other than writing a tagline or delegating the martech stack.

I SPEAK WITH recruiters and executives across the board and they all want someone who is not afraid to get into the weeds, but the industry is full of people who have no idea what the weeds look like because they are sitting high on their perch and can only spell "data," but they cannot find it or work with it.

The industry is moving fast, and to keep up you have to keep your skills sharp. You have to practice all four of these areas: synergy, manage, think and do. You have to stay crisp, or your tenure is likely to slide even more.

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