

Traditional CMO Roles Won't Position Your Company or Your Career for Growth

The environment for marketers is changing dramatically. Marketing's leadership in driving business success has never been more in demand, and those who have demonstrably begun to expand mindsets, skills, and capabilities are setting the standard.

The difference this shift makes has never been more evident than during the bleakness of the lingering recession. Businesses whose marketing leaders have embraced its components may not have emerged unscathed, but they at least have found themselves entering 2010 with substantial positive momentum.

You can similarly improve your impact and reputation in 2010 and beyond while influencing your career trajectory. It's all about starting to undertake one or more of these shifts:

From defensive back to quarterback. Too often, we see senior marketers intent on holding their ground as they play the defensive strategy. Instead, like a skilled quarterback, they must become the playmaker for the team—which, incidentally, consists of the entire company, not just the marketing function. The quarterbacks not only have earned a seat at the strategic table, but they are helping chart their organization's path forward by rebuilding trust in their brands and helping to define and achieve the organization's growth agenda.

From innovator to inventor. Innovation for innovation's sake is not going to drive the business. Senior management is increasingly on the lookout for marketers who don't merely do things better, but reinvent how they go about things. This is particularly true in the face of vastly changing consumer behavior dynamics as evidenced by the explosion in social media. It's forcing a massive reinvention of ways to both interpret customer needs and to market more successfully. Safeway CMO Diane Dietz has gone beyond innovation to essentially reinvent how to market in a grocery retail environment. Her ability to anticipate trends with the right products (private label and Bright Green line) and customer experiences (Lifestyle stores) has pushed household and transaction counts and volume up, despite persistent soft sales in the overall category.

From mechanic to driver. Having spent considerable


time under the hood understanding the metrics and analytics that gauge the engine's performance, it's time for marketers to get behind the wheel and start driving the business. This is how E-Trade CMO Nick Utton helped the business emerge from the financial-market meltdown, demonstrating how marketing acquires customers and drives growth. Utton has taken risks and succeeded by using disarming humor to engage and connect with customers, while many of his competitors have taken a far more subdued approach. The trick, as Utton has demonstrated, is to develop the skill of effective gear shifting to modulate speed when necessary—along with a comfort for taking smart risks while navigating the routes to success.

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guarantees you'll be marginalized.

From artist to architect. Empathy and creativity are something good CMOs must have in strong measure to understand and deliver against customer motivations. But that must be balanced by a strong strategic and analytic bent—the ability to rethink the ways the business creates differentiation and preference in an era marked by proliferating channels and new ways of customer connection within them. Mark Addicks, CMO of General Mills, has moved adeptly here. On one hand, he leads creative application of analytics to better understand the digital success of its products in the context of consumers' digital lives. But his inventiveness takes other forms as well, as evidenced by the use of imaginary brand champions that are real enough to guide marketing campaigns, create communities and promote lifestyles around products.

From producer to director. Producers are good to have around. They make sure the production is running smoothly and the finances are in place and being deployed properly. But as we go from a "me" to a "we" setting, it's a director who's really needed: The creative, inspirational force who has the vision for what needs to be accomplished, and the collaborative chops to marshal

the skills and forces of many. Consider Intel VP-CMO Deborah Conrad, who has successfully reinvigorated and reframed the Intel brand as “Sponsors of Tomorrow”—the brains enabling and empowering expanding technologies. She’s behind a dramatic shift in focus from products to the people behind them. It goes well beyond clever communications. Her selfless efforts to connect with new partners in an expansive global network speak to how she’s made this role work for her—and Intel.

As we emerge from the recession, we must resist the temptation of sliding back into comfort zones that could be characterized as “m”arketing versus “M”arketing. That’s a sure way to be marginalized, as the pressures to do and be more are not going to abate. Take the time to start shifting your approach and mindset; both you and your organization will be the better for it. 

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