

Vital Skills for Modern Day Consumer Marketers

CHAPTER

19

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Introduction

What does it take to be a good marketer? This a question that has been debated for many years, and there can justifiably be many answers and opinions. This chapter does not intend to give a standard textbook definition of a good marketing professional, but instead presents a view of the different roles marketers can perform, and the current and future expectations of their changing roles to suit today's evolving business environment.

This chapter covers the roles and requirements for marketers in the corporate business world and contrasts these with the skill sets required for the growing global small-business marketer.

What skills do modern marketers need?

Today, holistic business understanding is critical for great marketers. Marketers must have a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) mindset, seeing the bigger picture and owning the brand results, not just a few marketing metrics that do not clearly link back (as detailed extensively in Chapter 2). Marketing must be viewed as revenue generator, not a cost centre¹.

What we cannot accept at any point is the marketer saying that they delivered what they were tasked to do – drive the brand or awareness or some other marketing-centric metric, but in reality, sales and other sales oriented metrics are declining. (Ajit Sivadasan, Lenovo Head of Global ecommerce, Sales, Marketing and Technology)²

The argument for holistic business building by marketers is proven by Procter & Gamble (P&G), which consistently tops the list when it comes to the best company to work for when developing C-suite marketing executives.

Procter & Gamble's Brand Management organisation has proven to be a great training ground for marketing executives ... Deeply rooted in the consumer, P&G marketers learn how to glean powerful business insights and use them to create leading edge product and marketing innovations that drive sustainable top-line and bottom-line results. These experiences produce powerful business and marketing leaders capable of building iconic brands and empowered organisations that produce sustainable results. (Deb Henretta, former Group President, P&G)³

While a broad business understanding has always been important, it is increasingly imperative in today's environment. The business world is arguably tougher than it has ever been and is characterised by shareholder pressure, hostile investors, tougher regulations, fewer resources and smaller teams with increasingly demanding deliverables.

Understanding the required metrics to identify performance results, undertake the necessary analysis and recommend a course of action have become vital skills for modern-day marketers. Research conducted by Marketing Week UK⁴ showed that:

- 80% of CEOs are not impressed by the performance of marketing teams.
- Marketers fail to align their efforts with financial realities.
- CFOs think marketers are 'fluffy and weak'.
- 83% of marketers are unable to quantify return on investment (ROI) from their marketing activities.

Marketers will never be able to stand their ground if they cannot interact on the same level with financial officers and the new emerging data scientists who are using predictive modelling techniques.

What do we look for when hiring marketers?

In marketing, there are a number of competencies required to be successful. After reading this book, it should be clear that multiple disciplines of learning are needed to be a truly strategic consumer marketer. This is summed up in the quote below by *Jesse Williams, Director of Marketing ExecuVision*.⁵

The role that marketing plays has evolved – marketing is slowly turning into a hybrid of creative, technical and analytical functions all focused on bottom-line growth. It's important that those with aspirations of pursuing a career in marketing are made aware of this evolution and equip themselves with an updated set of skills.

There are a few key skills that all marketers should possess:

- The ability to think strategically with the use of analytics to justify decisions
- The ability to lead
- A strong ability to drive action
- The ability to implement and execute supporting tactics

The foundation of strategic thinking, which is the basis of all great marketing, is analytical rigour. Great marketers can draw information from varied sources, and, using data and judgement, find meaningful connections and insights that determine the strategic direction a business should take. They realise the importance of continually innovating by going beyond accepted ideas and leveraging their technical mastery to translate their findings into concise and easy to understand business-building strategies.

Regardless of the role in marketing, the expectations related to data and analytics need to be consistent. While there will always be more advanced analytical and technical positions, there is a new baseline for all marketers. The skill set includes a knowledge of data management principles and analytical strategies, and an understanding of the role of data quality, the importance of data governance, and the value of data in marketing disciplines. (Adele Sweetwood, Senior Vice President of Global Marketing and Shared Services at SAS Institute)⁶

Great marketers are great leaders (see Chapter 2). They recognise opportunities and very clearly paint a picture of where the business needs to go and what it takes to get there. The ability to influence is a key leadership trait that marketers need to develop, as they are not only required to have an external influence on consumers; they are also required to have an influence within the organisation in order to ensure that everyone buys into and pursues the marketing vision and strategy.

Communication is key in marketing and a key enabler of leadership. If a marketer cannot effectively get his or her ideas and vision across, the chances of success are slim. Given that marketers generally need to work closely with or lead multi-functional teams to deliver projects, their ability to work collaboratively with team mates will determine whether they are successful or not.

Great marketers have the ability to drive action and execute strategies. They do this by being very clear about what the top priorities are and focusing their attention on those areas of activity required to deliver on the marketing strategy. They do so with a sense of urgency, stopping at nothing to deliver exceptional results. A strategy is meaningless if it is not translated into action, so great marketing needs to drive action. The marketer is the catalyst for this. As Amazon states in its leadership principles: 'Speed matters in business. Many decisions and actions are reversible and do not need extensive study. We value calculated risk-taking.'⁷

The rise of small business

Small start-up, local businesses are challenging large, traditionally dominant global multinationals. Despite having tremendous resources, because of the size of these multinationals, many also tend to be less agile, which opens a gap up for smaller businesses, especially if they are in tune with the unfulfilled needs of the consumer. These smaller local businesses also play an important economic role in creating employment and growing the economy. The results are David versus Goliath type case studies. Two great South African examples include Stellenbosch 'Fitch & Leedes' going up against Coca Cola's 'Schweppes' and Bliss Chemical's launch of 'Maq' washing powder in a Unilever stronghold.

Chill Beverages, owner of Fitch & Leedes was able to bring innovation such as South Africa's first pink tonic⁸, cashing in on the country's gin boom.⁹ In a mixer category which had more or less one player, Schweppes, for over a century, Fitch & Leedes was able to latch onto a consumer need around premium mixology. The brand continues to grow, investing in production capacity and now exporting internationally.¹⁰

In a market traditionally dominated by Unilever brands such as Sunlight, Omo and Surf,¹¹ Maq has shown continued growth in a highly competitive category, and is now not only a household name but the second-largest manufacturer of washing powder in South Africa.¹² This success here has had them venture into new categories such as fabric softener and dishwashing detergent.¹³

As these small businesses grow, the key will be to remain as agile as possible, and marketing plays a huge role here. 'Since the marketing team is at the heart of executing the growth plan, it must be at the centre of the company's focus on agility... improving access to market data, enhancing speed and quality of data analysis, and reducing marketing campaign execution timelines' (Brian Ricci, CMO at Chief Outsiders).¹⁴

The value of hard skills and soft skills for working within small business contexts

The fact that marketers need to leverage multi-functional teams' expertise to holistically run the business makes key their ability to work collaboratively.

Leadership, communication and the ability to work well with others are often erroneously referred to as soft skills. This is a huge misnomer, as soft skills implies that these are less important skills, when in fact they usually make or break any career where collaborative work processes are prevalent.

Critical thinking, persuasive writing, communications, and teamwork are not fluffy, nice-to-have value-adds. They're hard-won and rigorously maintained abilities that are better referred to as 'power skills'. (Anant Agarwal, CEO of edX)¹⁵

Beyond career longevity, data show that 'soft skills' are at the heart of business success. This makes sense when you consider that no organisation can thrive without a compelling, hands-on leader and teams within the organisation which can communicate and work effectively with each other. A 2017 Deloitte report claimed that two-thirds of all jobs will be soft-skill intensive by 2030¹⁶.

However, what do small and medium-sized enterprise employers want to see in a marketing professional? A CV that is not just a list of knowledge or skills, but one with practical examples and a demonstration of them being used on the job¹⁷. These skills include being an effective collaborator, having confident leadership, analytical thinking and problem solving, a good work ethic and attitude, sound interpersonal skills, teamwork, adaptability and flexibility and proven ability to communicate.

Many small businesses consider these skills and attributes to be critically important for success in their environments. The key attitudes they aim to cultivate are:¹⁸

- Teamwork, communication skills and the flexibility to handle multiple roles.
- Being a good team player who has a 'can-do' attitude and takes the initiative.

These specific skills are often not formally covered in marketing courses. Smaller companies generally value attitude, flexibility, and commitment above technical skills, although some of these attributes are often said to be lacking in graduates. Among the missing attributes are commercial awareness, commitment, and confidence.¹⁹

SMEs do generally integrate marketing into their overall business activities, but, unlike larger companies, they often do not have a specific marketing department. A marketer operating in this context must know how to operate on a small budget and be able to select and utilise cost-effective media to give profitable returns.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of skills and attributes valued in smaller businesses. In today's workplace, having knowledge and technical skills without the ability to implement a strategy within an organisation due to lack of interpersonal skills will restrict your marketing efforts.

Other key skills a graduate marketer needs to possess (in addition to those covered above) include digital marketing, the ability to interpret and manage social media interaction, and business networking. Furthermore, two critical areas that have to be built into the marketer's mindset and skills set are financial metrics and an appreciation of marketing databases for sourcing information to populate the metrics.

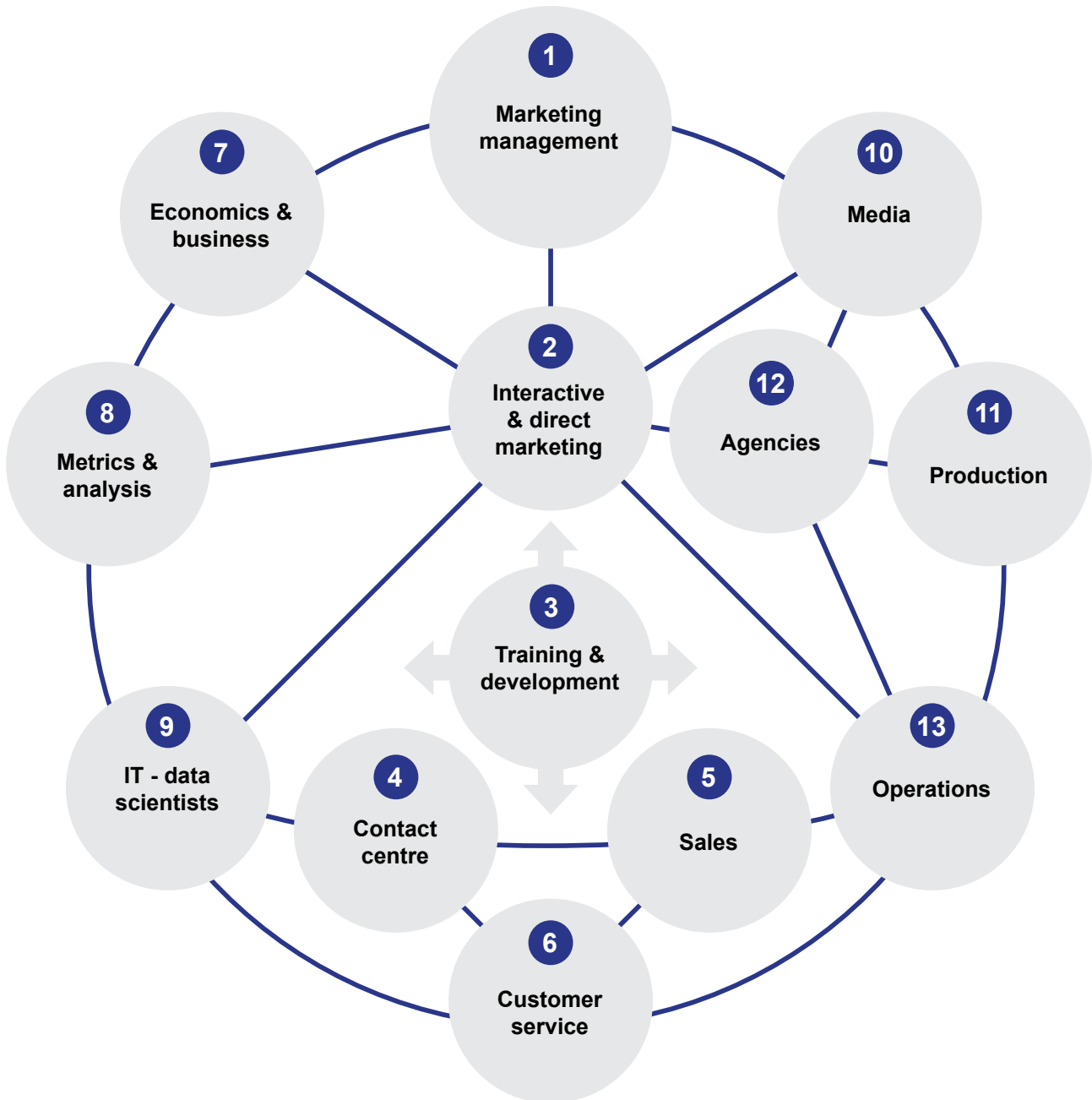
Careers in marketing

What does it mean to have a career in marketing? Today, it is an ever-moving field. So far, we have looked at core marketing roles in big business, but know that we should not expect to always find a defined marketing manager role across the wider industry. Individuals working in the marketing industry (including sales and communications) can have multiple roles, and organisations can have differing approaches to these roles with varying levels of authority.

Marketing as a matrix of different roles

On a wider industry scale, there are a multitude of functions that contribute towards the greater output of marketing and its related functions. The Careers Vista model (Figure 19.1) consists of 13 work opportunity zones within the South African marketing industry.²⁰

Figure 19.1: Careers Vista Model: Marketing industry job zones



In the Careers Vista model, each of the work opportunity zones consists of a set of functions within the marketing industry, each function consists of a range of activities, and each activity has a range of occupations. Overall, within the wider concept of the word 'marketing', there are dozens of occupations and tasks required to fulfil the overall deliverables from under the banner of each term.

The critical foundation for commencing a career pathway is to have a long-term view, or vista, of the range of future opportunities within the greater marketing industry, and to be able to identify the required skills. The next step is to identify any personal gaps or deficits that require attention through further training and work experience.

The 13 zones of the Careers Vista model are:

- 1. Marketing management:** The scope of marketing management covers a multitude of functions and responsibilities, ranging from micro-marketing dealing with customers, to macro-marketing with a wider view of the economics of the whole marketing system and its effect on society. Marketing management roles cover many functions, such as strategic planning, governance and compliance with relevant legislation, and brand ownership for an organisation and brings the functions all together, combining with the further specialisations which are contained in the other zones in the model.
- 2. Interactive marketing:** This is a fast-growing sector of the marketing functions and today defines itself internationally as comprising direct and digital media interactive marketing activities, strongly driven by the use of database information for communicating with consumers. Many of the activities of this zone utilise the functions of the other zones.
- 3. Training and development:** This zone encapsulates the requirements of individuals and their personal career development requirements. For individuals who want to work in a training environment within an organisation, there are a range of activities that are involved within this zone. For individuals who want to progress in their marketing careers, these functions and terms offer guidance towards the types of programmes and qualifications required for careers.
- 4. Contact centre:** This is an important function in the overall marketing and communications facilities for an organisation and is often under-rated and under-resourced. The centres will handle outbound and inbound calls from the public and are generally a highly technical environment which are geared to fully utilise the database. It is a large employer of staff and many get their first job experience, either fulltime or part-time, in these centres handling customer service enquiries or making sales.
- 5. Sales:** An important component of the marketing mix, for without the result of sales, there could be no business. Personal selling is a person-to-person process, in which the seller needs to identify the potential buyer's needs and offers the relevant good or service to make the sale. However, the sale process may not be just to individual consumers, it can also be to companies. Salespeople can use electronic technical support in their interactions. There are different structures in sales processes and these offer a range of job opportunities.
- 6. Customer service:** This zone is important in dealing with customers, for without customers there is no business, and without business there are no jobs. Marketing and sales may create new customers, but customer services are the key support functions to maintain satisfaction levels and retain customers. Handling a wide range of tasks across several industries is a good starting platform for gaining experience of a company and its customer base.

- 7. Economics and business:** Marketing is a core activity of the overall business and should run hand-in-hand with these two functions. Business needs profit to survive and grow; profit comes from sales and marketing creates the environment for sales. Marketers need to understand the functions within the economics and business zone, as the functions here are the financial foundations for marketing to move forward. Knowledge of costs, budgets and pricing are all part of this function.
- 8. Metrics and analysis:** This zone brings in a whole range of metrics within functions that are critical for the calculations of current performances and future analysis. It requires a knowledge of finance, maths, the gathering and interpretation of market research and testing results, analytical techniques and future predictive modelling which provides important support functions for marketing. This is the mathematical and information support structure for marketing.
- 9. IT and data:** Today data underpins all marketing activities and around the world the word data is being incorporated into marketing titles. Industry associations in main economies are now titled Data and Marketing Associations. Knowledge and understanding of the value of data for driving marketing is now essential. Data marketers are becoming key players in the future of marketing, needing key IT and analytical skills for planning data-driven marketing communication promotions.
- 10. Media:** Marketing managers and agencies require media channels to deliver their messages. The media industry has a vast array of occupations for those with the necessary training. Jobs include media planners (who are heavily involved in strategy, research and analytics), media buyers and various forms of media delivery. Media delivery may include roles in content creation and design as well as radio, television and outdoor media implementation. Roles like animators and film directors may be categorised here or in agencies as many companies fulfill both functions. Not all the functions provided by an agency to a client are necessarily produced in-house; often certain tasks are outsourced to independent suppliers or entrepreneurs. Various functions within an agency require a range of different skills, from creative design and copywriting to the statistics of media planning.
- 11. Production:** This zone is often unnoticed and sometimes discounted but consists of critical support functions that allow marketers to deliver their marketing communication activities. Some functions are outsourced to suppliers but all are important cogs in the delivery of marketing and there is a wide range of occupations linked to each function, such as product development, graphic design and printing, all of which contribute to the greater output of marketing. Other possible production roles include filming, content creation, radio and print design, photography, music, animal wrangling, model/talent management and set building. Larger agencies may provide these functions in-house.
- 12. Agencies:** Agencies provide the marketing industry with a wide range of functions that companies can outsource to. These functions can include communication, PR, social media management, eventing and sponsorships. For example, advertising agencies can provide creative execution of the marketers communication tactics. Many agency functions can be deemed independent industries within themselves, with multiple sub-functions and occupations.

The range of skills required across all these functions provides multiple opportunities to apply different marketing skills. Advertising agencies in particular play a key partnership role with marketing given the importance of strong messaging. Advertising agencies provide an important contribution to strategy planning and brand positioning by acting as the brand custodians and delivery of the advertising communication.

- 13. Operations:** The functions within the zone of operations can be varied and far-reaching. The range of functions depends on the type of business and could be a part of the activities required by marketers to successfully complete their tasks. Within each function there are a range of job roles, including response handling, loyalty programme management and distribution of marketing sales promotion material. Often these support functions are outsourced and not under the direct control of marketing but are still essential functions needed to support the final marketing outcome.

Often an individual enters one zone in the early stages of their career and then sees opportunities to move into other zones. Whatever your starting point or overall career trajectory, all the experience you gain along the way can be carried forward into other functions and zones. The skills you acquire in one zone can fast-track you in another zone, which could drive your career in a different direction.

This broad umbrella of the multitude of functions within marketing demonstrates the range of skills that can be accumulated and allows for mobility within the industry. As a manager, you have to be aware of all these functions that can contribute to establishing a successful operation. The zones are all interlinked and they all contribute to the greater deliverables of marketing.

Choice of careers

Students are often hesitant about seeking employment opportunities within the smaller business sector. There is a mindset that working for a large organisation is the only or best way to get experience, when in fact the small business sector represents a dominant portion of all private sector employment in South Africa.

Initially students believe larger organisations are a safer bet for their first job and that the career prospects are greater, but students who have joined a smaller organisation often have a different mindset after their initial workplace experience. Many professionals in small business contexts find they learn more skills and have more rapid professional development, they receive more responsibility earlier in their careers, and there is more potential for them to stand out and be recognised.

These statements from students who experienced working for a small business demonstrate these principles:²¹

You become a fundamental part of a team; you can make a difference. You are encouraged to put your own ideas into action and are heard.

and

Smaller companies are fast moving, and often very innovative.

How do marketers stay ahead of the game?

Lifelong self-development is critical if you want to stay ahead of the game in the marketing field. The arrogance of thinking you know it all is the biggest downfall of any marketer. It is critical to bring the outside world in and actually live and experience what the target market does. It is only in doing this that we as marketers can truly satisfy their unmet needs.

There are no consumers in the boardroom, so you need to go out and find them. Speak to consumers; watch them shop; find out what they are watching; whom they are interacting with; what makes them tick? What are their dreams and desires? What keeps them up at night? What is that one thing holding them back from making their dreams come true? This is a key role for market research.

Learn from the competition. Who is doing it better than you? Why are they winning?

A curious dissatisfaction with the status quo will set up any marketer for a very fulfilling career.

Remember, revenue comes from the outside, from customers buying your products and services. Not from implementing new systems, changing business processes, or other activities designed to increase operational efficiency – these internally focused activities are often time sucks that can destroy profit margins. Shift at least half of your focus outside of internal matters and channel your efforts into activities that drive revenue growth. Customers don't care about your infrastructure or production costs. They buy products and services that help them improve a condition like solving a problem or capitalising on an opportunity. (Scott Edinger)²²

To keep up to date, you can join marketing associations, network at events and business functions, stay in touch with the business world, listen to what is happening around you, and keep reading.

As graduates, embrace the concept of lifelong learning by continually upgrading your skills and attending short courses on new topics in marketing to keep up to date.

For the university undergraduates, go for practical internships. Take the challenge to review a range of key business activities within an organisation and not just restrict yourself to marketing functions. Be proactive and be noticed.

Finally, be able embrace and adapt to change. It will happen all through your life and, with technical innovations, is happening at a faster and faster pace today than ever before, so accept and prepare for it from this moment onwards.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we covered how a new marketer needs to develop a range of skills to cater for the wide range of occupations within the greater marketing industry. Identifying the opportunities and accumulating the experiences on a continuing basis is a challenge facing all new entrants to the industry. To be a good marketer, you need to be able to think strategically, not just by using conventional marketing knowledge, but also having a sound analytical approach, a financial, commercial awareness and being a good team player with the ability to handle and manage multiple roles.

In the future, there may be a lesser focus for job opportunities within large corporates, but potentially there will be a greater focus on small businesses in which you can gain experience, either in start-ups or helping to expand a potential growth business. Small business employers look for a good work ethic, a positive attitude and people who are adaptable and flexible in their approach to handle any challenges, and this is the challenge for each individual in the future.

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