

Marketing remodelled

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Date: 1 November 2014

As the digital revolution rattles the business world, the shockwaves continue to shake up the way we work – not least in marketing, which is emerging with a renewed sense of purpose

There's a theory doing the rounds at the moment, which runs something like this. Marketers are being squeezed out of a job.

Whereas 10 years ago marketers had a unique niche, with skills and roles that no one else in the corporate world would dream of taking on, these days everyone is a bit of a marketer. A customer service agent with a Twitter account is a marketer. The data scientist who crunches numbers to determine price points, she's a marketer too. The finance guy who keeps doing press interviews, well, what's he up to if it isn't marketing?

And what about product designers? Look at Jony Ive at Apple. His ruminations on skeuomorphic aesthetics have more impact on Apple's brand feel than anything coming out of the "official" marketing department. Maybe, says this theory, marketers are finished. Their roles are being parcelled out to other departments.

But is it true, are marketers being squeezed out of a job? Jackie Nixon, Cisco head of marketing, UK and Ireland, is a reliable sounding board. Cisco makes internet networking hardware, and employs 74,000 people. It's a solid, reliable firm not given to hysterical hyperbole. Yet to Nixon, the "everyone is a marketer" theory holds true. It's old news, in fact.

"Everyone's always been a marketer," says Nixon. "Employees are your greatest ambassadors; we've known it for a long time."

Social media, in particular, is cementing this. "We have a blog with five people writing on it each week, including the CEO, apprentices, technical people and so on," says Nixon. "There is no way marketing alone can do all that." She says it's a change she welcomes. "The reach becomes so much greater. Instead of one-to-one conversations it is like standing on top of a mountain with a loud hailer. Yes, marketing is changing."

At JWT, one of WPP's star divisions, managing director Toby Hoare also has some traumatic news for marketers. "In many large companies the role of procurement people has over-ridden the role of the marketing people. Often the procurement department has more power over what the company should or shouldn't do than marketing. In many cases the marketing experts don't even have access to the boardroom."

This lack of power manifests itself in finances, as Hoare points out. "In the old days the marketing director would be able to argue what their budget should be. Now it is more complicated. There are many other parties involved."

The upshot is that marketers are frequently unhappy. "Marketing people don't seem to stay in their jobs for very long," he says. "The number who have been in their roles for a long time is very small. They are hired to do a job, but not given the tools or room to do it. The churn in the marketing community is not slowing down."

The views of smaller firms also suggest that marketing is increasingly a role carried out by non-marketers. At CrowdControlHQ, which makes social media monitoring software, marketing director Michelle Leavesley says: "Even police constables and paramedics are tasked with engaging with the public via Facebook and Twitter." When PC Plod is doing your job, then you know things aren't quite right.

The new world order

So that's the bad news. But wait a moment, because the good news is that although the "everyone is a marketer" theory has support, the issue is far more nuanced than that. In fact, the consensus is more accurately characterised as "everyone is trying to be a marketer". Just because folk from the office junior to boardroom fossils are taking part in various aspects of marketing doesn't mean they are any good at it. And it doesn't seem to be making professional marketers obsolete. In fact, the new emphasis on total-company marketing means the role is more important than ever. As Jackie Nixon of Cisco explains, the new role is vital.

"I liken it to a conductor of an orchestra, rather than solo performers, as they used to be. Marketers have the opportunity to

set the pace, and the emphasis, and to amplify the sound being made,” she says.

At Cisco the marketing team doesn't try to monopolise marketing. Instead, it shapes everything being done under the wider marketing umbrella.

“For example, before the Infosec internet security conference we spoke to partners and our internal employees and offered them training around using social media. We explained what we were going to do, what hashtags to use, what works well on a blog, on LinkedIn and on Twitter. ‘Come with us!’ was our message, and it worked really, really well.” In a nutshell, says Nixon, “we have a role in educating and informing. Only marketing has those skills.”

The marketing department as a consultancy, as a co-ordinating centre, and as a centre of academic excellence – this is the new, improved role for the profession.

One CIM member put it rather nicely. Julie Henderson is brand director at Astellas Pharma, an \$11bn revenue global pharmaceutical giant. “It's true to some extent that everyone is involved in marketing,” she says, “if you consider it from the perspective that most people can understand the need to establish a product onto the market and drive growth, and this would require that you understand the brand objectives.”

“But the role of a marketer is so much more broad and complex now, far removed from the concept that it's just about advertising and promotion.

“For example, I collaborate with health economists to deliver the value proposition of the medicines we market to our customers. That doesn't make the health economist a marketer, or me an economist. My role is to understand the complexities of the market, recognise the customer groups we need to communicate with and package the data in a way that the customer will understand it, while positioning the brand in a holistic way for the market.

“A marketer's job, therefore, has become much more complicated and they need to be able to lead in a complex matrix environment,” says Henderson. “Marketers need to know when to bring in expertise from different functions in order to address opportunities and challenges in the marketplace most appropriately.

“A marketer has to be able to navigate different customer communication channels to reach customers, delivering tailored messages in line with ever increasing customer expectations,” she concludes.

This is precisely the model that marketers such as James Hacon, director of marketing for Elliotts Agency, a marketing firm in the leisure industry with clients such as Virgin Wines and Greggs, are seeing. Hacon says: “Many of our clients have traditionally worked with central brand and marketing departments that would take responsibility for all activity across the group. We are increasingly working in a way where the central marketing team takes the role of consultant or adviser to the general managers and area managers, and sometimes even to the junior operational staff who take responsibility for local marketing.”

Conducting the orchestra

Outside the marketing profession this new position for marketing also gains endorsements. Many readers will be familiar with Amanda Fone of f1 recruitment, which recruits marketers for large corporations. Fone says the unique skills of marketers will mean their role remains vital. “I've been in this sector for 32 years, and never before has there been such a need for specialists in the marketing mix,” she reports. “Our clients want specialists, not generalists. We still need creative thinkers. PR is still alive. Events is still alive. People who can make 30-second films and people who really understand digital are essential.”

Fone acknowledges that Toby Hoare's point about marketers not getting on to boards is a “big question”, and says it can be remedied by marketers brushing up on technical skills. “The debate is whether the marketing boss will be the chief technical officer or chief digital officer. Marketers need to understand technology. They need to understand the big bang happening with programmatic advertising,” she says.

If they can do that, marketers will become indispensable, and therefore far more likely to make it to the board than before. The marketer's role in the corporate structure will be unassailable. After all, an office junior who can fiddle around with Tweetdeck may think of themselves as having a marketing role, but start talking about real-time-bidding algorithms and they'll turn tail and run.

Even entrepreneurs retain respect for the skillset of marketers. Celebrity chef Patrick Drake, the founder of Hello Fresh home food delivery service, whose TV show airs in 68 countries, says entrepreneurs have a clearer picture of the value of marketers. “True marketing is still very specialised,” admits Drake. “It needs someone with specific technical knowledge. People sometimes confuse marketing with branding and PR. Few people can do the full marketing range. All they can do is a sub-section.”

For his firm, which will send out millions of meals this year, marketing is so important he promoted his marketer to managing director. "Marketing people are in a great position to become MD," says Drake. "If they have good strategic vision they can be far more suitable than operations guys."

A happy ending

Peer into institutions of varying size and role and you'll see this new theme of marketers as technical experts, advising and overseeing, taking root. At the Mental Health Foundation charity it is an established methodology. Marketing manager Joanna Carson says: "We work with our fundraising department, having final sign off on tone of voice and identity, to ensure there is a consistent approach across all our promotions. We encourage creativity in all our teams." By doing this she harnesses the full talents of the staff. "I have no problem with people being creative and passionate," states Carson.

The new model means getting the most out of everyone, from board members through to researchers. Everyone contributes to marketing, and marketers make sure all contributions are helpful and on-message.

Naturally, you'll see different models in different firms. Toby Hoare at JWT stresses: "I'd be hesitant to say there was any one pattern.

There is a big difference between global firms and a local marketer with a single brand," he says. "Our clients come in all shapes."

But the evidence is clear: marketers remain vital. As Cisco's Nixon says. "In no way are marketers obsolete. We still have skillsets no one else has. We understand the data. We know how to use search terms. We know what channel to use. No one else knows that."

Far from the end of a profession, what we are seeing is the genesis of a new – and rather exciting – era.

What do marketers think about their profession?

An in-depth survey, DNA of a marketing leader, by FTSE-250 listed recruiter Hays suggests the profession is buoyant, despite a number of challenges. The survey, which questioned 370 senior marketing people across the UK, revealed that 76 per cent said they would choose marketing again if they were starting their career again. Only 4 per cent want a complete career change.

The need for an improvement in digital skills was apparent, with fewer than 15 per cent of marketers rate their digital skills as very good, and only 18 per cent rate their teams as at a high standard. Under half the organisations surveyed had a marketer on the board.

Clare Kemsley, managing director of Hays Marketing says: "Marketers are still vital, they still have a unique role. When the Cystic Fibrosis Trust recently recruited it said it wanted a storyteller. That's what marketers can do: deliver real, compelling content."

- See more at: <http://www.themarketer.co.uk/analysis/in-depth/marketing-remodelled/#sthash.MHCf18aZ.dpuf>