



To Be a Great Marketer, You Have to Be a Great Leader First

A key piece of advice from an entrepreneur who has been in the business for years. Find out how to up your marketing game.

By Jon Miller | Aug 9, 2013

I've been thinking about what it means to be a marketing leader in today's chaotic world, and was recently reminded of some key lessons in leadership and innovation.

Be a Business Leader First, and a Marketer Second

Many CMOs say that thinking and acting like a business leader is one of the characteristics most integral to their success.

I've written about the role of a "true" marketing leader before. There's a key philosophical difference between a CMO and a VP of Marketing: the former is a business leader, the latter runs a marketing department. As business leaders, CMOs must earn their seat at the revenue table with other C-level executives and board members. CMOs fuse strategic long-term vision with a strong bias for sales and marketing integration, and they balance creativity with hard financial data, marketing analytics and measurement.

Get Intimate

Every successful marketing strategy, be it avant-garde or staid and conventional, originates with the target market. Leading CMOs orbit around the customer, and are obsessed with understanding their target market. (They aren't called market-ers for nothing!)

Marketo's own research provides support here: high-growth companies are significantly more likely than low-growth companies to incorporate customer satisfaction into their marketing executive's compensation. This is not a coincidence. These brands know their success depends on their CMOs' intimacy with customers. Information is power in today's marketplace; it serves as a springboard for our next lesson: innovation.

Innovation and the Innovator's Dilemma

Innovation goes hand-in-hand with a marketer's ability to position an organization to be intimate with its customers. It's about transformation and reinvention. But this can be painfully difficult, because in many cases it means moving away from the exact things that made us successful in the past. Even if we're not faced with major disruptions, yesterday's novel approach quickly becomes today's industry standard.

The effective CMO continually asks him or herself, "How can I transform our marketing and our business?"

This is a mindset of 180-degree turns and 100 percent improvement. With the iPad, Steve Jobs perceived what the customer wanted before the customer even knew it, and now Apple is promoting the post-PC era. Netflix built its brand around delivering DVDs in the mail and now is doing everything it can to make that business obsolete. As marketing leaders, we must have a vested interest in conceptualizing and embracing strategies and tactics that are alien to us.

Applying the Lessons

When we founded Marketo, we took our intimate understanding of what marketers needed and combined it with a unique business model and super-efficient revenue engine to build one of the fastest growing SaaS companies of all time.

I attribute much of our current success to the "new" [lead generation](#) tactics we employed at our inception: great thought leadership and content marketing to generate awareness and inbound leads, aggressive use of online marketing to generate qualified prospects, smart use of lead nurturing to develop relationships with prospects that are not yet ready to buy, and a highly-efficient inside sales model supported by a steady stream of high-quality scored leads. These are now best marketing practices across all industries.

However, we need to continually evolve our marketing tactics to retain our competitive advantage. We market to marketers, so we need to always be embracing the future of marketing in our everyday activities.

What's Next

The most important lesson here is not to be afraid to question the way things are and to try new things. Experiment. Test. Be nimble in your responses. Think big, move quickly and execute flawlessly. And of course, if something isn't going to work out, be sure you fail early and fail fast.

How are you transforming and innovating your marketing strategies? What sacred cows are you questioning?

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