

By David Aaker, Vice-Chairman of Prophet

The marketing function of the future will continue to be polarized. Chief Marketing Officers within firms that view marketing as tactical and who are preoccupied with short-term financials will struggle to have real impact. Other CMOs, increasingly, I believe, the majority, will elevate marketing to be a visible driver of success by being a strategic partner within the firm.

In the latter group, the CMO and his or her team will have been successful at addressing five challenges.

First, they will find ways to generate home run brand-building programs that break out of the clutter even at the sacrifice of schedules and budgets. This will involve creative thinking, organizational tolerance for change, and talent in execution. It will also involve the capability of drawing upon a wide spectrum of resources, including the use of influentials in the marketplace, guerrilla marketing, leveraging the Internet, and connecting with the customer's activities and values.

Second, marketing will be the driver behind achieving growth through business development, a priority for most CEOs. This also will require creativity and a willingness to suspend boundaries. The goal should be for the CEO to look to marketing for the development of growth platforms, whether from developing and leveraging brand assets or finding new markets.

Third, CMOs will find ways to truly connect to the customer by building relationship-based loyalty going

beyond product-centered and product-driven approaches. A strong relationship can have a variety of sources, such as organizational associations (e.g., innovation, the environment, customer concern or high standards), the delivery of emotional benefits, or creation of active customer dialogues.

Fourth, the brand will be managed across the product and geographic silos in order to allocate marketing investment optimally, drive brand consistency, leverage cross-market insights and data, and create synergy by leveraging effective programs. The route will usually be to create, expand, or energize central marketing departments, without which the firm, at best, will be under a severe competitive disadvantage.

Finally, these CMOs will ensure relevance. When competing in dynamic markets, the most strategic challenge is to make sure that the firm produces offerings that customers want to buy. The need is to detect and evaluate trends and develop responsive offerings supported by brand assets.

In a growing number of businesses, marketing will have more of a strategic role. That means the marketing group must have the skills and talent to think strategically and the credibility to influence the CEO to think in terms of building branded assets rather than immediate sales. It's not an easy task, for sure.

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