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Whom should the CMO fire today?

Here are some traits that a marketing head should spot as the must do-not-haves in the team

It is interesting to explore in a typical marketing team, who the CMO should fire if he has to optimize on headcount. There is a temptation to offer ready answers based on who is the weak link, most often in terms of the skill area.

I think it should be our designer” is the most expected answer. Why? Not sure! Under deep pressure to prove high marketing RoIs in hyper-competitive markets, CMOs often need to optimize resources, trying to focus best efforts on customer acquisition. But it is interesting to explore in a typical marketing team, who the CMO should fire if he has to optimize on headcount. There is a temptation to offer ready answers based on who is the weak link, most often in terms of the skill area. For e.g., my content writer has poor English, my PR guys do not understand messaging, etc. CMOs could also decide on this based on what is the flavour of the day or based on attitudes of individual team members.

While these are definitely very important for the marketing team member, a rigorous focus on an overall marketing picture is probably the most important skill of a marketer. I have had deep conversations with CMOs across three industries -IT, Pharma and Hospitality, in the last three months and the findings are interesting. Here are some traits which the CMO should spot as the must do-not-haves in the team:

- **MARKETING IS ABOVE BUSINESS** (Or Business is not My Business. I am Just Supposed to be Creative Syndrome)

Ironically, most marketing team members do not understand the nature of an organization's business and how it makes money. Understanding of customer segments, channels, business models, pricing strategies, profitability and how the company enhances the stickiness of customers as also enhancing efforts to gain new ones is the *raison d'être* for companies. Marketing does not and should not act in isolation to the business.

- **MY BRAND IS WEAK** (Or I am Too Small a Person to Influence the Brand Syndrome)

This is probably the swing in the opposite direction, where marketers have a constricted view of what their brand stands for and the amount of influence it wields in the market. The fallout of this is that the brand is under-pitched and under-valued. Marketers need to understand the brand in entirety -customers, positioning, strengths and weaknesses, some fundamental do's and don'ts while communicating to the external world, etc. And thereby position the brand aggressively in the marketplace.

- **POOR UNDERSTANDING OF CUSTOMERS**

(Or Who is the Customer Syndrome)

A bane of B2B marketing is the growing distance between customers and marketers. With field visits rare and informal conversations rarer, marketers rely on market research reports and 'downloads' from sales teams to understand what the customers are up to, what their unstated needs are, and if there is an opportunity for a new need or want which has gone unaddressed. The sales teams are most often focused on progressing and closing the sale. This means that there is no one who is actually picking up the subtle signals from customers. Marketers have to be the voice of the customer inside the organization.

- **LIMITED VIEW OF THE MARKETING FUNCTION** (Or I am God's gift to the Web Design World and I Do Not Want To be a Generalist Syndrome)

In my view, there are nothing like verticals in Marketing. A marketer is a marketer first and then a PR professional, a social media expert, a branding honcho, etc. Why? The starting point of a successful PR programme, a social media campaign or advertisement is a customer insight. This should lead to an impactful way of messaging about the product that the marketer positions. These are fundamentals of marketing. One cannot jump these steps at any cost. Irrespective of the function a marketing team member performs, he needs to remember that he is marketing. Basic as it might sound, it is not uncommon to find many marketing professionals define their work around their skill area and not the impact it is creating.

- **NOT UNDERSTANDING NEW AGE MEDIA** (Or All This Does Not Work Syndrome)

Ignoring the new age media is a severe career limiting move today. A deep understanding of the social space is a must for every marketer. The level of engagement with the same can vary across companies and brands, but understand social media, a marketer should. This is true of every new media which comes by. A marketer should have an appetite to study and evaluate these for his brand. A marketing team which has a sound understanding of these basics can thrive in any market and achieve unbelievable results. The best way to start the journey towards getting this understanding would probably be to understand the business the brand is in.



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