

5 ways boards can give CMOs the support they need to achieve success

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As more organisations rely on their digital marketing teams for the heavy lifting when it comes to revenue growth, making sure they have the support they need has become critical. Incubeta MD, MEA, Roan Mackintosh, shares five vitally important ways boards can support their chief marketing officers (CMOs) so they are best placed to deliver on their growing mandate.



Roan Mackintosh

Support your CMO by giving them oversight of the customer journey

Boards should be viewing the CMOs as master builders. To be truly successful as the digital master builder you must be allowed to have oversight and access to every touchpoint that affects the customer journey. In far too many organisations we see how customer service - no matter the channel that is used - is a completely separate division, cut off from the marketing and greater communication efforts.

Marketing, and digital marketing (including digital marketing partners and agencies) in particular, are often siloed from the general organisation. Their job is seen as nothing more than creating leads and driving sales. However, while a great digital campaign could get the customer through the funnel, customers are sometimes met with either a poor automated response, or customer service whose main objective is to pass the customer back to the marketing department. This poor experience will not only result in a lost sale but also lost customers.

This communication gap is being exacerbated as more digital channels are embraced. Rather than treating CMOs as master builders, they are seen and treated as project managers. This is a missed opportunity for boards to empower the person most able to coordinate a superior customer experience across the brand.

Recognise your CMOs and give them a permanent seat at the table

A recent [study](#) by organisational consultants, Korn Ferry, has shown US CMOs hold the shortest tenure of all the C-suite executives, holding their positions for just three to four years. And this is not too different in many sectors in South Africa.

Another big problem is that, according to [Deloitte](#), just 26% of CMOs regularly attend board meetings.

Together these findings speak to the lack of real influence marketing leaders have in organisational decision making. CMOs may have the title, but they are still not recognised. It is a sad reality that many CMOs are being asked to fulfil the role of chief growth officer, with little support behind them.

As a first step, boards need to agree on what the role of the CMO is. Unfortunately, there is very little consensus on this across the industry and this could play into the problem of casting the CMO as the project manager, rather than the master builder of customer acquisition and retention.

Bigger budgets won't help without better cooperation

Without a doubt, CMOs need budgetary support to ensure they can deliver on expectations. However, it is also up to the CMO to show that they are not just throwing money at a problem that should be fixed at a strategy level.

There is also a natural tension about where the budget should come from. For instance, CMOs often correctly identify that they need martech to improve measurement and efficacy. Whether that tech should come out of the IT department or marketing budget is where it sometimes gets tricky.

What's more, IT leaders will often prefer to build systems themselves rather than buying off the shelf. This is not always the best solution. Where IT can help, however, is in back-end development work on loyalty programs or propensity modelling and collection and integration of data. IT can add meaningful value if the development teams work closely with marketing, building internal support systems.

Boards that understand the potential disconnect between departments - especially IT and marketing - are best placed to help ensure cooperation. This needs to come down to a KPI level, but more importantly by encouraging the close working relationship between teams and their leaders. We advise setting up centres of excellence which include department heads.

Success has changed, so should the metrics

Just as the inter-departmental support should form part of KPIs, boards need to work with CMOs to shift the metrics against which they will be measured.

Too many companies are focussing on metrics that are not really helping their business. New customer growth is not the definition of success. Having 100,000 people coming to your website with 10 of them buying a product or 1,000 people coming to your website with 10 of them making a purchase has the same business value. However, the cost per acquisition is lower to reach 1,000 people, so make sure you are securing and retaining the right customers.

In line with this, boards need to be briefed by their CMOs about better metrics - such as shifting from tracking the number of newsletter subscribers to rather focus on customer lifetime value. But they also need to support that shift, understand why it needs to change and support their CMO in achieving their new targets.

Give them the forum they need to make the changes the business needs

Finally, CMOs can help transform businesses. But they can only do this if they have the support of their fellow C-suite colleagues and their boards. Truly successful CMOs need forums in which they can be heard, where they can help other leaders understand why and how things need to change and how they can be supported. CMOs need to be viewed as master builders and then supported in their vision for the transformation they have planned. Preferably at regular board meetings.

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