

## An amateurish service?

### Creating an effective marketing function is not just about the right boxes on organisation charts, recruiting talented individuals or having useable systems.

There are grubby, real-world, issues which affect the ability of marketing and BD teams to perform well. For instance, marketing is not the first thought of managing partners, nor is it of any particular importance to them. Gaining consensus amongst partners can be so absorbing that leaders rarely get to the 'important but not vital' issues, which marketing so often is. So, if basic marketing administration is acceptable and if the income from clients flows in, consideration of the function can be very low down on leaders' priorities.

As a result, a partner with no marketing training may be put in charge because they are a voice to the leadership for a certain group of, otherwise unrepresented, partners. Or client service staff may be moved into it because they are ineffective but can't be laid off. Practices rarely understand their own need for marketing and restrict it to, say, a minor promotional role. As a result, the standard of marketing service to the professions, whatever the quality of individuals in the function, is in fact rather amateurish when compared to, say, FMCG teams.

Yet most theory and public debate makes assumptions about the way marketing works; that there is a well developed organisation able to call on resources through rational, justified arguments. There is little talk of the need to convince organisations of the need for marketing, of competing for resources or of organisational politics.

Marketers have an interest in improving the effectiveness of the function. They need to ensure that it evolves appropriately and can handle all the tasks needed to suit the strategic position of the firm and the appetite of partners. There are several components to this.

#### First win respect

Any new practice marketer will be expected to manage practical activities well. These will frequently be ad-hoc projects initiated

by partners between client projects such as events, seminars, pitches and 'thought leadership' projects. Some will not have been properly planned and some suppliers will not be providing competitively priced work. Worse, some long-standing activities will be irrelevant pet projects of important partners, yielding few leads. A good practice marketer can tackle these issues and find cost savings. They can shape a coherent programme which has a cumulative impact, increasing leads and referrals. Through this, the best marketers win respect and become advisers on market-related issues. But, to succeed, they need good consultative skills; treating their partner group like clients.

#### Contribute to the natural momentum of the business

Practices grow mainly from the reputation that partners create through good work. If clients are pleased, they talk to others and work comes in through repeat business and referrals. This, in turn, keeps cost of sale down and prices high. Marketers must plug into this dynamic by measuring the competitive reputation of the practice and choosing marketing activities which amplify the natural reputation of the firm. They will then be able to demonstrate numeric knowledge of competitive reputation and the effect of their work on lead generation.

#### Be numeric

Most practices keep timesheets which are the basis of billing and an important focus of partners. Yet utilisation rates depend on the amount of down time for items like illness, training and administration, even marketing. Yet practitioners spend time on good marketing (talking to clients for example) and inappropriate marketing (writing invitations to events) best left to marketers. So, a step to greater effectiveness is clear, numeric understanding of these non chargeable hours. Every time I have seen the time spent on inappropriate marketing calculated and converted into retail rates, partners have been horrified.

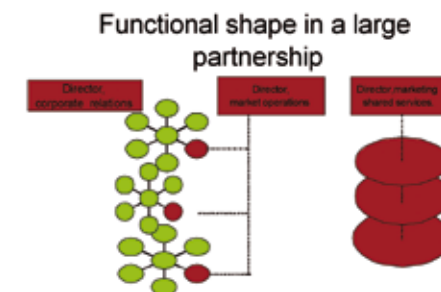
#### Encourage organisational development

One of the most startling differences between professional practices and marketing led companies is the tendency to grow the competence of the marketing function. Sensible leaders build on the inheritance of their predecessors in order to exploit brand equity. Professional practices, by contrast, tend to wipe out the complete function from time to time. As a result, there is no progressive organisational learning and inadequate processes. Marketing directors need to ensure that the skills, processes and competencies of the marketing function are sufficiently robust to meet the needs of the firm.

#### Shape a sensible professional community

Above all else, marketing leaders need to develop a sense of professional community amongst all marketers in their firm. Practice marketers at all levels have a tendency to 'go native', putting absolute priority on the needs of the partners they serve. But they need to have an eye to colleagues in their professional community if they are to thrive when power changes or partners move on.

The organisational shape depicted below reflects the thinking among several leading firms. There is a separation between practice marketers (who directly interface with partners) and marketing services specialists. The latter are grouped into a firm-wide shared service to optimise effectiveness, budgets and supplier management. In some firms, practice marketers report directly to the partner group they serve. In others, they report directly to the CMO but work with the practices as consultants. All are linked, however, in a professional community which sets standards and direction.



There are changes afoot in the professional service industry which herald a change in importance for marketers. Within a generation, it is likely that the quality of professional service marketing will stand alongside those "classically trained" marketers in FMCG. A step toward that will be a greater emphasis amongst marketing leaders on organisational effectiveness.

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