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FROM B2B MARKETING



The Commercial Marketer Skills Series: How To Master Market Insights

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The Commercial Marketer Effect

The time is now for B2B marketers…to step up as strategic leaders, reclaim their time, exert their influence, and irrefutably prove their impact!

We are committed to helping B2B marketers achieve this by helping them become commercial marketers – marketers who can build and execute commercially effective strategies through their mastery of six key skills:



Kavita Singh,
Head of Growth Solutions Content,
B2B Marketing

Insight skills

Analytical skills

Financial acumen

Strategic skills

Agile-decision making skills

Collaboration and communication

So what is a commercial marketer?

Let's get straight to the point.

A commercial marketer:

- Thinks strategically and has the marketing skills to drive measurable business growth.
- Thinks about the wider business objectives first and foremost, and marketing tactics and specialisms second.
- Is not primarily occupied by achieving tactical wins, or results in one isolated metric.

To many, this may be self-evident. Of course B2B marketers are there to drive measurable growth. If we're not, why are we here in the first place!?

Self-evident though this may be, the fact is that B2B marketers struggle to operate as commercial marketers. To prove the point, we analyzed the results of hundreds of hours of conversations with members of our B2B marketing community, Propolis, using AI.

The single biggest overarching challenge B2B marketing leaders are facing? According to Propolis AI:

"Proving and communicating the commercial impact of marketing to nonmarketing stakeholders – especially in large or complex organizations. Across the conversations, B2B marketing leaders all mentioned pressure to demonstrate marketing's value to the business, shift perceptions from a 'service function' to a 'business driver' and directly links marketing investments to outcomes like revenue, growth or pipeline.

1. The challenge connects to several root causes:
2. Attribution is difficult in complex, long-cycle sales environments.
3. There's often a knowledge or skill gap between commercial expectations and actual marketing activity, especially after acquisitions or internal restructuring.
4. Marketing leaders have to 'do more with less' and justify every spend amid economic uncertainty.
5. Many marketers still face uneven capability with teams, uneven adoption of key frameworks like ABM,
and pressure to modernize while maintaining proven results.

Essentially, the CMO and senior marketers are consistently fighting to make marketing's impact visible
and respected at the top table, while managing rapid changes in technology, resourcing and skills. Everything else – alignment, tech, skills and tactics – feeds into or stems from that business value conversation."

So, how do I become a commercial marketer?

Let's be clear, every region, sector and organization is going to have its own specific issues, which may require more tailored support. However, we believe there are five key market and business areas that a commercial marketer should be close to, and six key skills that they should possess. If you're on top of both of these sets, you should be in good shape to be a commercial marketer.

Working with our Propolis Experts, we believe there are five key areas of your market and your business you must be close to, in order to have the requisite information to act effectively as a commercial marketer. Miss out on just one of these areas and your ability to make the most strategic decisions possible is going to be diluted.



Business and strategy
(why you're trading)



Product and portfolio
(what you're trading)



Customers, community and team
(who you're serving)



Market, industry and profession
(where you're trading)



Brand, campaigns and channels
(how you're trading)

If you'd like to see how you stack up against these five areas, we recommend checking out the full Commercial Marketing Guide, where you can assess for yourself. If you're in touch with those five areas, you should be in a great place to start thinking about what's going to serve the business first and foremost. However, in order to actually put a plan in place, you'll also need the ability to execute. With that in mind, these are the skills we believe commercial marketers need to act. That's where this report comes in.

In **The Commercial Marketing Skill Series**, we will be focusing on the six skills - essentially a practical guide that will help you become a commercial marketer by mastering each of the skills. For the purposes of this first edition, we will be honing in on market insights. To be clear, this means understanding how your market works and staying informed on industry trends. Having a deeper understanding of your target market is especially important in today's competitive marketplace - from knowing your market sizing and addressable market opportunity to customer profiles and more. In addition, being able to analyze customer strategies, strengths, weaknesses and positioning is imperative.

And in general, it's important to keep up with the marketing landscape and this doesn't mean just keeping up with the hot-button issues. This can be in regards to a trend that is geographic, cultural, social, or even regulatory. And if you're scratching your head and wondering why you haven't placed focus on insight skills, we'll tell you exactly what's stopping marketers from doing so, as well as the consequences.

This report will dive into the critical nature of the skill, the challenges marketers are facing with mastering the skill, as well as tangible expert-led advice and solutions.

The importance and challenges of insight skills

We spoke to Will Gardiner, *VP Marketing*, **Vertice**, and he stressed the importance of market insights saying:

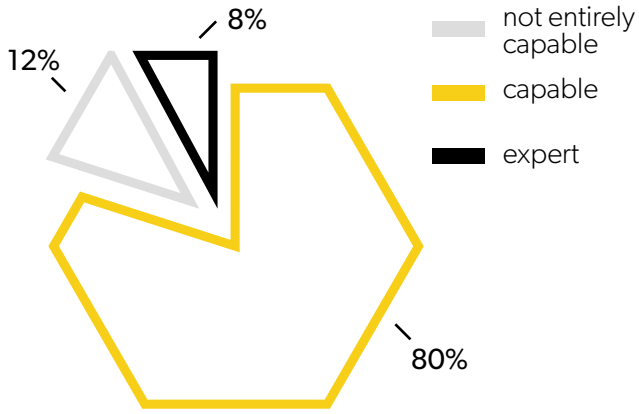
"If the material and message that you're crafting doesn't resonate with your audience, then your marketing is not going to work. But most marketing teams don't pay enough attention to acquiring these insights or the skills to do so - or worse, don't realize they're insufficiently knowledgeable about their target audience."



Will Gardiner,
VP Marketing,
Vertice

When we ran a Propolis poll during our Community Sprint, we found out that only 8% of our community feel like they're an expert in this area. Around 80% claim they're 'capable' and the remaining 12% cited that they were 'not entirely capable' or that they 'don't know how to do this at all'. So while most marketers self-reported that they feel somewhat okay in this category, there is definitely work to be done.

How good are you at researching and understanding your market to ensure your campaigns and strategies are hitting commercial objectives



Judit Szabo, Former Global Head of Demand Generations and Operations, Endava said: *"Insight skills might not come naturally for everyone, because these skills bridge the gap between raw information and actionable strategies. Some people might be strong in working with raw data, while others might be good at building strategies, but in my experience, few marketing professionals have the necessary skills that can build actionable strategies based on raw data. It's hugely beneficial though to flex these muscles, in fact, there hasn't been a better need in the past 20-odd years to be up-to-date on technology innovation trends shaping our own profession in marketing."*



Judit Szabo,
Former Global Head of Demand Generations and Operations,
Endava

Will also suspected that perhaps marketing leaders aren't understanding what 'market insights' truly means. It doesn't mean signing up for 50 newsletters (which you're probably not going to read). Or downloading every report in your industry (which you're probably not going to read). It means making a conscious effort to gather information that will be relevant to your marketing activities.

In a panel discussion we hosted earlier this year, Catherine Dutton, VP, Global, Account-Based Marketing, Pegasystems, added: *"I think insight is crucial. You've got to have up-to-date knowledge and bring that into your organization. It could be things you're reading about, or hearing from people in webinars. The key thing is just being able to relay that insight into a constructive conversation to say 'here's how this affects our business.'"*



Catherine Dutton,
VP, Global, Account-Based Marketing
Pegasystems

Ultimately, another reason marketing might be struggling with this skill? The pressure to deliver with a limited budget could be a potential culprit. After all, it can feel impossible to slow down and ask the important questions when you're operating on a 10 at all times. Nor is it easy to be constantly upskilling yourself in today's fast-moving market.

Judit continued: *"Indeed markets change fast - new regulations, emerging technologies, and shifting customer expectations require us, marketers, to constantly be on top of our toes. Early on in my career, I had a mentor who taught me the one thing I always keep in mind and like to remind my teams about as well: 'never confuse being busy with being efficient'. Having strong insight skills means you're not just reacting to market changes, but you're anticipating them. Can't think of a better thing to focus on if you want to remain informed, relevant and strategic."*

So what are some solutions?

Now that we've established the importance of insight skills, we can divulge a few tips to accomplishing this effectively and with intention. We used some of the tips our Propolis Expert, Georgie Gilmore gave in our **Community Sprint Report** to expand further on solutions.



Georgie Gilmore, *Propolis Expert*, **B2B Marketing**

Develop an outside-in approach to your marketing strategy.

When creating your marketing strategy, put your customers first instead of products and marketing capabilities. If you take on this approach, you'll inevitably create solutions that match customer needs and pain points.

Will said: *"Most marketers have some sort of 90-day plan and that usually includes talking to customers. When I joined Vertice, I spoke to a whole load of customers and it allowed some quick wins on the board because suddenly, we had case studies that we didn't have before. In doing so, I was able to ask them questions such as why they bought that particular service, what resonated, what the pain points were, etc. Marketers who are doing best practices already are probably executing insight skills."*

So how do you do this? Will recommends not seeing the approach as an isolated tactic. He said that talking to customers in general is already good practice whether that be through industry events, customer calls or client visits - especially since you're getting "real-time" insights. However, instead of seeing it as an extra task to take on, embed it on your existing calls as an add on.

He explained: *"Ask customers two or three extra questions during the last five minutes of those calls. You will get gold dust out of them. They'll want to give their opinion. They'll want to help. You've already built credibility and trust with them through talking about the other tactical thing you set the call up for in the first place. Just don't overthink it."*

And then from there? According to Georgie, she recommends asking yourself a set of key questions: what does this insight tell me? What are the opportunities and threats? Is our business strategy fit for purpose? This is where Cat and Will's sentiments come into play. It's about making whatever knowledge you gain as relevant to your business as possible.

Use external intelligence to discover trends in PESTEL

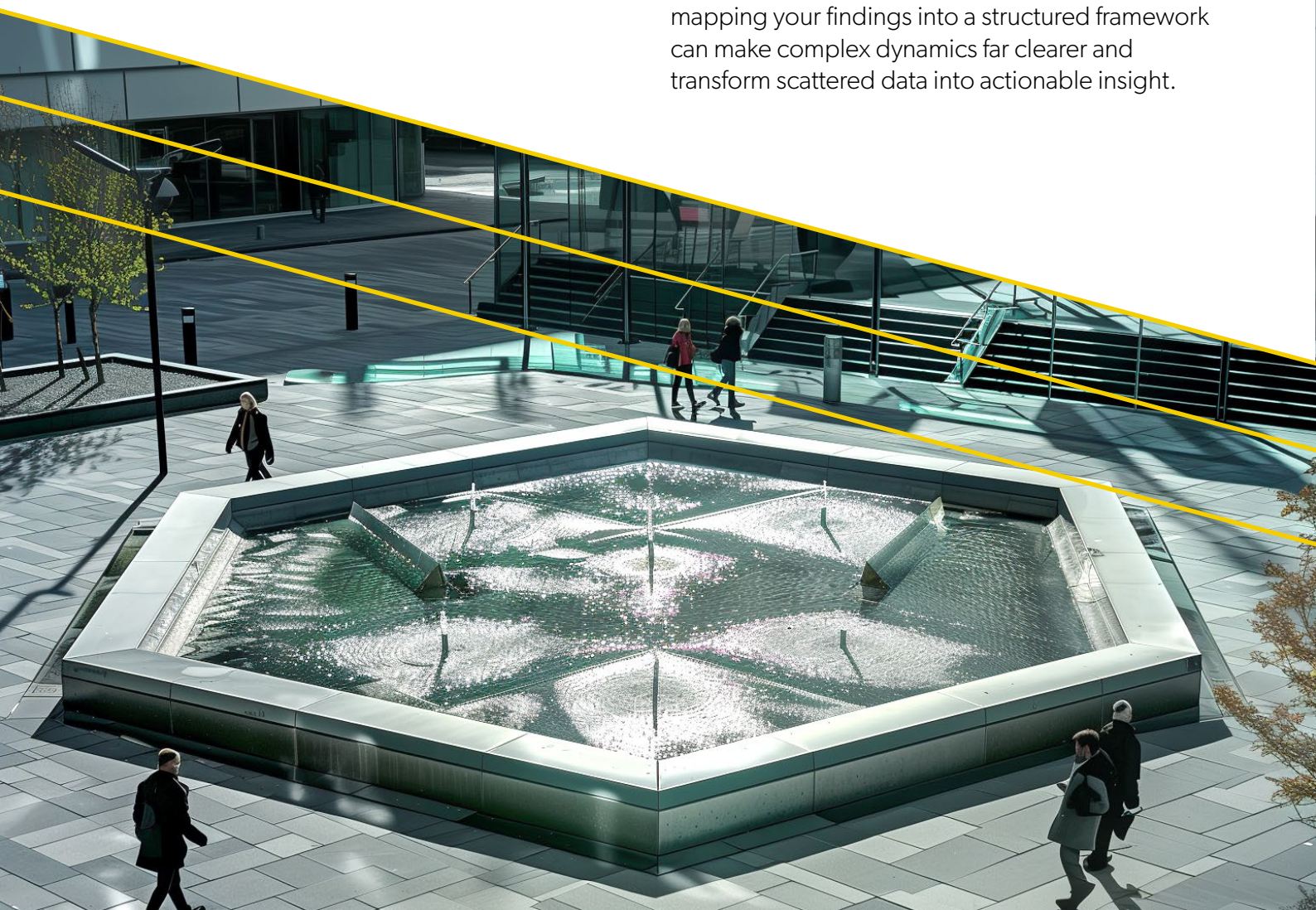
Another one of Georgie's tips from our Community Sprint Report? Using PESTEL. To be clear, this includes political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors. While not all of these dimensions will surface in a client call (especially if the people you're speaking with aren't deeply versed in them), you can expand your perspective by tapping into media reports, industry analysis, and academic research.

And as Will mentioned earlier, signing up for a million newsletters probably won't be helpful - instead, identify what your knowledge gap is and be intentional about your learnings. If you passively sign up for a webinar or are half listening to a podcast, it probably won't be impactful. But if you research extensively on a specific feature or topic related to a campaign or product, then that is where you'll come away with valuable market insights.

Once you have identified the area or topic you want to focus on, Judit advised marketers to keep an eye on channels such as LinkedIn and Twitter instead of trying to read everything online. In addition, she said to devote 15 to 20 minutes a week to reading through updates. If you put a recurring placeholder in your calendar, it might be a nice reminder for yourself.

She explained: *"If someone feels stuck or overwhelmed, the best entry point is to pick one area of business or a customer segment or a technology, etc. and track it consistently for a few weeks. The repetition builds confidence and muscle memories of consulting and interpreting the data sources. Then having a 'so what?' reflection turns raw info into insights."*

And if it still isn't making sense to you, see if you can synthesize things using AI. Even a simple exercise of mapping your findings into a structured framework can make complex dynamics far clearer and transform scattered data into actionable insight.



Marketing insights in practice

What does success look like when you gain market insights? Will cited one example of this. When he worked at Calligo, they launched the first managed data privacy service. He said: *"At the time, GDPR was coming out. It was the perfect time to launch it because no one knew what GDPR was. No one understood it. Everyone thought it was going to half their marketing capability and they didn't understand what the legislation said."*

Although Calligo (at the time) was a cloud services provider first and foremost, the organization didn't have anything to do with data privacy. It just so happened that the company's USP was that they were a privacy by design cloud.

He continued: *"So we had to get into GDPR space and we built this service but it meant that I had to take all of my knowledge and understanding of cloud infrastructure and then go and find out more about data privacy."*

That meant in a short period of time, Will and his team had to understand the legislation, understand the ramifications of it, and identify knowledge gaps in terms of understanding the legislation - all of which was quite the task to take on considering their focus on cloud. However, through interviews with people who were delivering the service and chatting to virtually everyone about GDPR, they were able to gain invaluable insights.

He said: *"It was totally understructured but the fact that we were asking the right questions, it got us so much farther than our competitors trying to do the same thing."*

On the flip side, Judit emphasized lifelong learning and test-and-learn experiments. She led an AI experimentation marketing project team 18 months ago, which resulted in the creation of multiple custom GPTs for various marketing use cases, such as content creation, personalization, market research, tone of voice and account intelligence.

As a result, these custom GPTs have become integral to their GTM motions, with teams using them for AI assistance. She has also ensured that the growing in-built AI capabilities of their marketing and sales tools are being utilized. She said: *"The shift in the approach just within the past 18 months has been moving these initiatives from 'join if you're curious' to 'this is not an option any more if you don't want to fall behind.'"*

Some other benefits from developing your market insight:

Having better positioning: Once you understand your industry's drivers and challenges, you can position your offering as the solution to a specific business challenge instead of just creating another product for the sake of it. By spotting trends at an earlier stage, you can create a proactive strategy and stay ahead of the competitive curve.

Stronger value propositions: To enhance your overall value proposition, you can start to frame a compelling narrative in terms of business outcomes such as cost savings, compliance, risk and other critical factors that actually resonate with your audience.

Trust-building: Decision-makers ultimately value suppliers who understand and are fully aware of their challenges. If you can dish out relevant knowledge at the right time, whether that be around market pressures or emerging trends, customers will resonate with this and it can serve as a signal for credibility.

Relevant in buying cycles: Because buying journeys tend to be long, non-linear, and typically involving multiple stakeholders, you can stay relevant by delivering industry-specific content that resonates at each stage.

Need a hand cultivating these skills?
Use tech to your advantage

By the way, we don't mean just asking Chat GPT for the latest news in B2B marketing. If you're looking for quick ways to upskill your market insight, there are plenty of tools you can check out to do so.

Trend Monitoring

Believe it or not, there are plenty of more advanced ways to keep up with the market using news aggregators and intelligence platforms. Trend monitoring helps marketers stay ahead of shifts while shaping their long-term strategy and messaging to indicate a clear finger on the pulse.

Tools to use:

Feedly Meltwater SEMrush

Intent Data

Intent data can reveal which companies are researching solutions similar to yours. It can strengthen insight by showing not only who happens to be in the market, but when they're most likely to be receptive.

Tools to use:

Cognism RollWorks ZoomInfo

Competitor Benchmarking

Using intelligence technology and website analyzers, competitor benchmarking tools can paint a clear picture of where your business stands relative to rivals. You'll be able to compare your competitors in terms of pricing, messaging, and their strengths. Plus, you can uncover potential gaps in the marketplace.

Tools to use:

Brandwatch Crayon Hootsuite

Deep Research

With the rise of AI, deep research tools can be a quick way to go beyond surface-level information to understand your market at a deeper level. You can use tools to analyze datasets, summarize reports or spot patterns in the industry. However, it's worth noting that nothing replaces a trusted publication - so if you have a chance to read through a new industry report or academic journal, take the time to do so.

Tools to use:

Gemini Perplexity Open AI



To check out the full list of categories and tools in the insights area, check out our full Commercial Marketing Technology Report here.

Conclusion: Be intentional about insights

It's clear that insight skills are important in B2B marketing. As Will had mentioned, using customer insights and asking one or two questions at the end of your calls can be monumental to your insights. And Judit also notes external resources you can use to ensure you're on the pulse of industry trends. The key though? Being intentional about what you're researching. Make sure that every insight you're utilizing is relevant to your organization and you'll be in excellent shape for growth.

Can't get enough commercial marketing content? Our next edition will focus on analytical skills (coming soon). In the meantime, check out our Propolis Commercial Marketing Strategy Pack **here** for more information.

In addition, this report used valuable insights and information using data and insights from Propolis. Propolis is where B2B marketers find the right strategies, frameworks, and skills to confidently drive growth, build teams, and prove a clear business impact. And if you enjoyed the advice from experts like Georgie Gilmore, we highly recommend checking out **Propolis** to find out more about its membership.

This is the first edition of The Commercial Marketer Skills Series.

We will be running both a bi-monthly report and webinar series on each of the **six essential skills** to help you become the commercial marketer.

Our next edition will be focusing on analytical skills - the ability to understand and intepret data in order to make decisions. The report and webinar will be launching on the 11th of December.

You can keep up to date with our series and find out more by following **Propolis on LinkedIn.**

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