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Picking your battles: How to influence your CEO

7 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable July 2018



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You've made it as a leader of marketing, now you must take the reins and protect your kingdom in a tactical and non-aggressive way. Pick your battles, but never be at war.

Below, we relay the discussion held by a group of senior marketing leaders during B2B Marketing's July roundtable. They discussed how to influence, push back, and gain the attention of the CEO. Here's what they shared.

1 Getting CEOs to stick to decisions is tough

With so many aspects of the company to consider, CEOs can be easily swayed into a different way of thinking. One marketer expressed their frustration with coming to a decision with the CEO, only for it to be retracted when they spoke to another head of department. "CEOs are going to change their minds a lot, it's their prerogative, you need to be able to roll with that," they said. This is something you should expect but it's imperative that you fight for the decisions that matter most.

2 A lot of people don't know what good looks like

Other departments are happy to offer their opinion on why a marketing idea isn't good, without understanding what successful marketing looks like. A leader must immerse the company in the marketing process; proving the value and outlining the activities marketing do beyond just 'colouring in'. Recognise that not everyone will get it at first, but work on this. Preaching will get you nowhere.

3 Know and balance your CEO's goals

You may be hitting your own goals but if you're not hitting your CEO's you may be at risk of being replaced. It's imperative that you tailor your marketing to the company objectives. CEOs can have their own personal goals, particularly if they're short-term – this is something that needs to be considered carefully. Ensure you push longer-term goals into the limelight too.

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4 Work with what grabs the CEO's attention

A CEO's background will give you a good idea of their mindset and how they make decisions. For example an ex-FD is likely to focus on ROI, while an ex-marketer may focus on brand impact. Play to this. You may even be able to work out who their influencers are and improve communication with them.

Most CEOs have short attention spans so it pays to be concise. One marketer said he presented his argument in three short snappy sections: the goal or problem, the actions, and the solutions. It was agreed the underlining thing was to really communicate what could be at stake.

5 Break the silo

A good way to convince a CEO of your proposal is to seek support from other heads of department. One marketer said if they go into a boardroom to present a view radically different to everyone else, they're bound to get lost in conversation. That's why it's essential to understand the goals of other areas of the business and how marketing can connect with them. You'll also begin to pick up how decisions in the company are really made.

6 The role of marketing has changed

The role of marketing has changed drastically over the years. Now digital is central to all of our lives, everyone has an idea on how it can be used to help the business; this puts pressure on marketing to to adopt new digital techniques. The senior leaders agreed that no marketer can ever know everything. "It's sometimes about accepting you don't know it all, which can be difficult," said one marketer. You need to manage the expectations of what marketing can deliver. But it's important that you know enough in any one topic to be a strong and active part of any business conversation.

"Sales think they know the customers, but they don't really"

7 Marketing has lost its way from the customer

Marketing should be the voice of the customer, yet this patch can sometimes be fiercely defended by sales. One marketer who had recently transferred from B2C to B2B noted the difficultly in not being able to interact with customers, often having to rely on sporadic feedback from the sales teams. "Sales think they know the customers, but they don't really," said another marketer.

One marketing leader suggested joining the sales team in their client meetings so they can learn about both parties at once. It's a case of not letting sales getting in the way; ask multiple sales people if you can tag along until someone says yes. If you're not able to, try external research, customer advisory boards and asking people at events. Seeing customers can give credibility to ideas.

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About

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The B2B Leaders programme is a network of the most senior marketing figures at prestigious B2B brands.

Members benefit from a unique and invaluable opportunity to regularly network and collaborate with senior-level peers, sharing insights and discussing strategic challenges at events every month.

Membership is by invitation only, and includes:

- Your B2B Leaders Forum ticket, the only B2B marketing leaders event of its kind.
- Regular roundtables focusing on key marketing leadership topics.
- Monthly roundtable findings reports.
- Annual *B2B Leaders Report*, with key research data and insights.
- Monthly Premium content reports.
- A subscription to *B2B Marketing* magazine.

The B2B Leaders programme counts senior marketing names from Deloitte, Oracle, Atos, Dell, HSBC, KPMG and Adobe among its members, all sharing ideas on topics ranging from team development to board interaction.

To register your interest in the programme call +44 (0)20 7014 4920 or email adam.harper@b2bmarketing.net.



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