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5 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable May 2018



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During May's Leaders roundtable, we asked attendees to share their thoughts on how having knowledge of your customers, your industry, and your business can give you a better understanding of success in your marketing world.

In the book *The 12 Powers of a Marketing Leader* Patrick Barwise and Thomas Barta explain how success in marketing hinges on three things: having intimate knowledge of your customers, an understanding of the industry your business is working in, and knowing the nuts and bolts of your own business. We asked our marketing attendees how well they know the world their business operates in, and how to improve understanding in these three sectors.

Here are the key findings from May's roundtable.

1 Marketers are salespeople too

A huge challenge for marketers when it comes to understanding their customers is not spending enough time at the coal face. How can you drive impact without understanding your customer base? For some, marketing teams are taken out on sales visits, making them feel engaged as part of the business at the same time as gaining a better understanding of the end customer.

"Marketers are salespeople as well," said one attendee, insisting that the way to add value is to support client projects and gain a better understanding of your audience. This also means selling the value of marketing internally, and not being holed up in an 'ivory tower'.

2 Turn customers from 'badvocates' to advocates

You can't beat direct access to customers, and although you can ask them a question with marketing automation tools, it's much better one-to-one. Going to events can also give you a feel for what customers want, and to hear first-hand about their challenges.

When customers share their insights, and make it known what they expect from you, it makes you stand up and listen. Whether this is on a customer advisory board or listening into customer services' calls – feedback from outside the business is invaluable.

"You learn more from unhappy customers," said one attendee, "It's about turning 'badvocates' into advocates." If they're unhappy because they haven't been listened to, they'll feel better when businesses are paying attention to their needs. Making sure problems and complaints don't fall between the cracks is an easy way to turn around consumer thinking.

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3 Getting company messaging consistent is key

To understand the inner workings of your company, communication has to come from everyone, the whole table agreed. Sharing information needs to come from the bottom-up as well as the top-down. Some marketers have regular sharing and learning sessions on key accounts, while others use collaboration tool Slack to ensure messages are being shared.

"Getting the right content to the right people is a real challenge," said one attendee. "We spend so much time internally trying to communicate." But this communication is essential, as others warned that you can have 10 salespeople relaying 10 different messages about the company, so it's important to get internal messaging right. "Making the sales team's messaging consistent is one of the most important things we're in control of," another marketer agreed.

The other thing to watch out for is a battle between HR and comms, which should be a collaboration. Marketers should be working as a team with other sides of the business to share leads and communicate, rather than just "land grab". Getting this right helps to understand your business and sets the right precedent for external communication, as the two messages should mesh.

4 Virtual events can increase engagement

Industry events are another great way to understand your clients and customer issues. Planning ahead and arranging who to meet on the day can help, as can pre-marketing, such as thought leadership pieces to attract as many people as possible to your stand. Breaking down articles into snippets to re-use also gives any content a longer shelf-life.

Customer roundtables also help to get clients in a room talking to their peers. For some attendees, live polling at these events have proved fruitful to instantly see customers' thoughts on a screen as discussions are being had. For others, virtual conferences have been a big opportunity. As well as providing upfront engagement with clients, attendees have spent an average of 95 minutes watching panel sessions online.

5 Co-opetition: partner with your competitors

We asked the group how well they know their competitors, and how this helps them understand their market. The consensus was that competitors are changing, and it pays to look out for disruptors. Identifying rivals as potential collaborators is another way to gain knowledge of your industry and use competition to your advantage.

"Talk to your counterpart," said one attendee, advising marketers to go to events where your competitors are speaking to hear them talk about what they're doing. "One said they only went on social media because we did," one said – a sign that some healthy rivalry can make it known to you what your customers need.

Even though your competitors are changing all the time, it's a good idea to keep your eye on the ball in this area. One attendee said they identify a rival company and then put them into one of three categories: those they should sell with or to, those they should buy, and those they should compete with. "Sometimes it's all three," they said.

And don't forget about contacts you already have – a lot of people go and work for competitors, our attendees remarked. So if you're looking for a better understanding of your industry, you may already know many people in rival organisations.

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About

B2B Marketing

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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