PROPOLIS
FROM B2B MARKETING



The Commercial Marketer Skills Series: How To Build Financial Acumen And Influence Commercial Decisions

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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 non-marketing 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.

The challenge connects to several root causes:

- Attribution is difficult in complex, long-cycle sales environments.
- There's often a knowledge or skill gap between commercial expectations and actual marketing activity, especially after acquisitions or internal restructuring.
- Marketing leaders have to 'do more with less' and justify every spend amid economic uncertainty.
- 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 this series of our **The Commercial Marketer Skills 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 third edition, we will be honing in on **financial acumen**. To be clear, this means understanding the language of the finance team and having enough knowledge to have conversations about marketing's commercial impact on their terms.

What is financial acumen?

So where to begin? First off, it's important to understand what financial acumen means. According to our **Propolis** Expert in Channel & Strategy, Georgie Gilmore, B2B marketers need to understand financial language in order to analyze financial statements – that can include profit & loss, balance sheets, cash flow statements and beyond. They also need to be able to plan and manage marketing budgets while also having SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) marketing KPIs that are aligned to business goals. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, marketing needs to understand the correlation between financial performance and changes in GTM strategy. When you understand these types of figures and documents, you'll be able to make commercial decisions more seamlessly.



Georgie Gilmore
Expert,
B2B Marketing



Sue-Ann Prentice
CMO,
Fluke

And if you've heard the sentiment "You need to be speaking the language of the CFO and CEO" it's because traditional marketing metrics such as clickthrough rates, likes and shares don't mean anything to your C-suite. While it might be valuable to bring to your marketing team, these types of metrics don't give a clear indication of ROI or revenue.

Sue-Ann Prentice, CMO, **Fluke** backed this saying marketers love storytelling, brand building, innovation and creativity, and a skill like financial acumen can feel far removed from that type of thinking. However, in an industry where proving ROI is imperative, it's clear that this mindset around financial decision-making needs to change.

Sue-Ann explained: *"I think financial acumen is no longer something that belongs only to the finance team or finance leaders. I think this is a skill which all leaders now need to have some level of confidence in, regardless of function. There's often a communication gap between marketing (and other functions) and finance where finance talks in terms of EBITDA, margin, and cash flow and in marketing's case, marketers talk about share of voice, leads, and engagement. If no one is willing to bridge the gap, that gap risks getting bigger."*

Why is financial acumen important?

So while this skill is critical to master, it's also become apparent that it's the most difficult one for leaders to wrap their heads around. In fact, according to a recent Propolis poll, just 5% of B2B marketers feel like they're an expert in financial acumen. 45% felt they were 'capable', 45% said they are 'not entirely capable' and that last 5% said they don't know how to approach this skill at all.

When we compared these stats to the other five skills, financial acumen is the skill marketers feel the least confident in. So why is that? Well, we spoke to our **Propolis** Strategy & Engagement Expert, Scott Stockwell, earlier last year to break down the six skills to becoming a commercial marketer in our **Commercial Marketing Martech Report**. And interestingly enough, he pointed out that financial acumen was without a doubt the hardest skill to understand.

Scott said: *"I think the hardest [skill] is probably financial acumen because it is particularly a different language that most marketers are less familiar with. I think most marketers are very good at doing the marketing job and we're very good at talking marketing to marketing. We're not so good at talking about the financial side of the business."*

Vivek Kotru, Global Marketing Director, **Capgemini** furthered this misalignment stating: *"Typical marketing metrics do not engage well with the financial goals of the organization. Connecting marketing metrics to revenue, profitability and other financial measurements is not straightforward. And so, it ends up being avoided which keeps marketers further away from building financial acumen."*

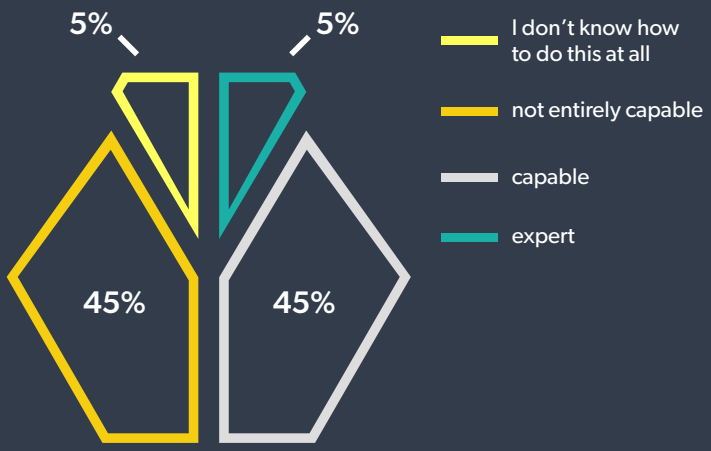


Scott Stockwell
Propolis Expert,
B2B Marketing



Vivek Kotru
Global Marketing Director,
Capgemini

How good are you at understanding financial terminology and goals, and demonstrating the connection with your marketing campaigns and strategies?



Financial acumen in action

Now that we understand the strategic importance of financial acumen (and the struggle), let's dive into what the skill actually looks like in practice. We spoke to Hannah Stringer, Marketing Director, **Moneypenny** who used their company's AI Receptionist as an example.

When the tool was released, its USP was its natural human sounding voice on the other end and its ability to switch through to a real person for more complex queries. As unique as the product was, the team reframed how they talked about the automation tool. Instead of discussing its features, they talked about it in terms of success. For example, instead of highlighting the tech, natural language processing or any of its additional elements, they talked about the agent at a senior level. Hannah said these were the metrics that cut through:

- It captures **more leads** by reducing missed calls
- It **protects billable time** by handling routine enquiries
- It delivers **service at scale** without extra headcount
- It **improves customer experience** while keeping our human touch



Hannah Stringer
Marketing Director,
Moneypenny

She continued: *"Once we speak about it in those terms, the AI Receptionist stops sounding like a gadget and starts sounding like a growth accelerator. It helps us scale faster, control cost-to-serve, support new markets and deliver gold-standard service in the UK and US. That is the kind of story the board wants to hear."*

Vivek also outlined another success story. His first real exposure to financial decision-making cropped up when he led marketing for a business line that owned its P&L.

He said: *"Understanding how marketing costs flow into the cost structure and investment side of the budget helped me prioritize interventions that would create meaningful impact on the P&L. Regular discussions with my business CEO enabled me to shape marketing strategies not just for growth, but also to position our portfolio as a premium services offering—allowing us to command a price premium and ultimately enhance profitability. Even today, marketing is often perceived purely as a cost center. The need is to be data driven and this makes financial literacy an essential capability for every marketing leader."*

SECTION FIVE

The solutions according to our experts

Want to mirror the same type of thinking? We've outlined tangible tips for achieving financial fluency through advice from our experts.

Invest time and build relationships with finance. Ask for their expertise!

In a panel session we conducted last year, Cat Dutton, VP Global Growth Marketing, **Pegasystems** said: *"I don't think we need to be finance experts, but I think we need to understand the basics.*

"Simple things like getting to know someone in the finance team really helps. It doesn't need to be a CFO – it can just be someone in a junior position. Get them to talk you through what the different calculations are and what they mean. I think it's about investing that time and pushing yourself out of your comfort zone to go and find out. The difference it made for me is that it just made me feel a lot more comfortable. I think the other thing is to understand the return on investment that you're driving. What does that actually look like in terms of bottom-line numbers? This gives credibility."

Sue-Ann agreed and added: *"When leaders speak the language of finance, they gain credibility and influence in executive discussions. I would reach out to your finance business partner and spend time in their company building your financial understanding, and the key is to ask lots of questions – find out what's important to them, what they need, how do they need information from you, and ultimately what helps them to support you better."*



Cat Dutton
VP of Global Growth Marketing,
Pegasystems



Finance for regular workshops or meetings

Once you build a relationship with finance, Georgie advised marketing leaders to set up regular meetings to cover budget, planning cycles and business performance. To go a step further, you can help your entire team become financially fluent by asking the finance team to run a 'lunch and learn' or in-depth workshop. The goal here is to see the language the finance team uses and then get your team aligned on the same metrics and lingo moving forward. This will allow others on your team to feel comfortable going to the finance team for advice as well.

Make sure it's a two-way street

Building these relationships is so important but equally, make sure you're communicating marketing's initiatives and impact to the CFO and finance team. If you invite them to team meetings and operation reviews, you're also giving finance an opportunity to see marketing at a more granular level.

Sue-Ann said: *"They can learn more about what you and your team do. You'll be lifting the numbers off the page so the 'costs' become much more to them and then they can understand where and how value is being created from every dollar being spent. And from there, they can even start advocating for you in meetings with other finance team members."*

You want to learn from finance, but equally, they should be learning from you too.

SECTION SIX

The tech to enhance your financial fluency

We've covered some tips to apply for your financial learning – but what about the technology? At first glance, you might think that there's not a whole lot of marketing tools used to enhance your financial acumen. However, you'd be surprised what technology is out there to help elevate your financial approach to marketing. You can see the full breakdown **here** in our Commercial Marketing Martech Report.

Financial Dashboards & Reporting

If you're looking for tools to give you real-time visibility into financial performance, then investing in a financial dashboard is a great way to become financially fluent. You'll be able to monitor campaign performance and revenue impact more accurately. In addition, if there are performance issues that crop up, you'll make proactive adjustments in real time accordingly. These types of tools can help translate complex financial data into actionable strategy and decision making.

Tools to use:

DreamData, DOMO, Tableau

Forecasting & Budgeting Software

Forecasting and budgeting tools can help build accurate revenue models and marketing spend plans. By understanding cost structures, you can allocate resources more effectively, scenario-plan and anticipate market trends. In addition, rather than justifying investments based on intuition or assumptions, forecasting software solidifies marketing decisions to the C-suite by translating marketing plans into financial outcomes.

Tools to use:

Anaplan, Uptempo, Workday

Marketing ROI & Attribution Software

While financial dashboards tell you what happened and forecasting tools tell you what to spend and what outcomes to expect, ROI and attribution software goes beyond planning and reporting. This type of software ultimately answers the question: What specifically caused revenue? You'll be able to quantify ROI and attribute revenue to specific channels, campaigns or other buyer touchpoints. Marketing can then leverage these insights to optimize spend and focus on investments that prove the highest return.

Tools to use:

FunnelFuel, Madison Logic, DreamData

Key Tip: If you're looking to justify any of these types of tools to your C-Suite, make sure you:

1. Position the tools as an enterprise-level financial infrastructure rather than 'marketing technology'.
2. Explain that the investment can help strengthen cross-department alignment.
3. Can help justify strategic decisions across the business.

Conclusion: Put your money on financial acumen

For as difficult as the skill is, financial acumen can provide a goldmine of insights for you and your marketing team. You'll also gain a better understanding of marketing ROI and how to present these figures to your C-Suite. And as we know in B2B, showing your ROI is far more valuable than marketing metrics so it seems like a no brainer to upskill financial acumen.

Vivek said: *"To build confidence in financial management, start by letting go of the misconception that finance is inherently complex or inaccessible."*

So start small. Bridge that gap between marketing and finance teams. And then once you've built that solid relationship, keep the momentum going by investing in tech to enhance your financial learning.

Sue-Ann concluded: *"Commercially minded marketers don't rely on **gut feelings** alone. They actively demonstrate how their decisions are rooted in **data-driven insights.** I would advise to lean into every opportunity possible to demonstrate where and how you are as a marketer/leader and how your team is using data to drive decisions, investment priorities, etc. This again will go a long way to build marketing's credibility with finance and CFO."*

This is the third 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 strategic skills – the ability to lift your head above the parapet, outside of marketing, and looking at what your business overall is looking to achieve, and thinking about how you can support that through marketing.

The report and webinar will be launching in April.

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

PROPOLIS
FROM B2B MARKETING

About B2B MARKETING

B2B Marketing is the world-renowned provider of insight, professional development, events and training for marketers and leaders in B2B.

Since our launch in 2004, we've amassed the largest global network of B2B marketers, giving us the unique ability to place your brand in the centre of the B2B buzz.

At the core of our business are the 85,000+ members of our website worldwide and five of the biggest and most influential annual events in the B2B calendar, alongside a host of webinars, podcasts, roundtables and training.

What can we do for you?

Our dedicated marketing and media solutions team can help you:

Build powerful brand recognition at the heart of the B2B industry.

Deliver your marketing content and proposition to the right audience at the right time through our weekly content emails.

Create compelling stories around your brand with headline-grabbing research and analysis through our reports.

Get face to face and engage with some of the industry's most influential decision-makers and buyers at our events.

Share your brand stories and content with our 160k+ subscribers, 80k+ monthly website users and 260k+ social media following.

Our products

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