PROPOLIS
FROM B2B MARKETING



The Commercial Marketer Skills Series: How To Think More Like a B2B Strategist And Drive ROI Effortlessly

b2bmarketing.net/propolis

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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 fourth edition, we will be honing in on **strategic skills**. 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.

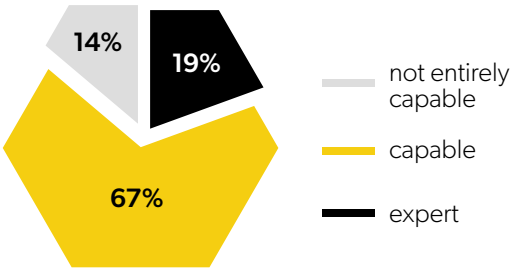
What even are strategic skills?

These days, we're hearing constant rhetoric about 'putting our strategic hats on' or becoming 'strategists' rather than marketers. But what does that mean in 2026 in a B2B world where proving marketing impact and ROI is imperative?

Well, strategic thinking requires planning and making decisions that align with your business goals and growth opportunities for both the short and long term. This requires strong planning skills as well as the ability to problem solve in order to execute a strategy from a practical point of view as well. Finally, we think part of strategic skills, especially in marketing, requires you to be able to lift your head above the parapet - outside of marketing.

In our Propolis Community Sprint, we asked marketers 'How good are you at developing marketing campaigns and strategies that deliver against your business' overall goals?'. Only 19% said they were experts - 67% said they're capable and 14% claim they're not entirely capable. While other skills in our series proved to be more difficult to marketers (analytical thinking and financial acumen), it is still slightly concerning that a good number of marketers aren't entirely confident in this field.

How good are you at developing marketing campaigns and strategies that deliver against your business' overall goals?



So why is that? We spoke with Gareth Nicholls, B2B Marketing Strategist and he said there's often a focus on execution over strategy in marketing. He explained: *"Organizations frequently prioritize fast-paced, visible tactics over foundational, long-term brand strategy, leaving teams feeling they are creating 'noise' rather than lasting value."*



Gareth Nicholls
B2B Marketing Strategist

We also spoke to Katie Hungerford, *Marketing Director*, **Talking Talent** and she uttered the same sentiment.

She said: *"Many marketers spend the majority of their time on tactical delivery rather than long-term planning, so they simply get less practice at strategy. Recent economic pressures have also pushed teams toward short-term activation, which is well-documented in research such as that by Les Binet and Peter Field 'The Long and the Short of It' showing how organizations lean heavily into immediate results during tougher market conditions.*

"Leaders play a big role in breaking this cycle by helping teams build their strategic confidence, giving them space to think and modelling what good strategic decision-making looks like."



Katie Hungerford,
Marketing Director,
Talking Talent

Some other factors in play? Gareth cited a few more possibilities including:

AI and data skills gap:
Marketers know AI and data matter but often lack the training and confidence to use or interpret them effectively.

Low strategic influence:
Marketing is often seen as a cost center, limiting authority and ability to drive strategic change.

Pressure and imposter syndrome:
High expectations to "know everything" create self-doubt, especially among less experienced marketers.

Lack of development support:
Limited access to training and mentorship makes it harder to build strong strategic thinking skills.

The solutions according to our experts

So how can marketers start building stronger strategic skills in practice?

1. Move from tactics to strategy

Developing strong strategic skills means shifting your focus from surface-level metrics like impressions or traffic to outcomes that truly matter at the executive level, such as MQLs, SQLs, and pipeline revenue. This mindset forces you to think beyond activity and toward business impact, aligning marketing efforts with broader organizational goals. According to Gareth, studying approaches like ABM reinforces this by encouraging you to treat high-value prospects as individual markets, requiring deeper insight, prioritization, and long-term planning. It also strengthens collaboration with sales, ensuring marketing strategy is directly tied to revenue generation.

As Gareth puts it, "In terms of ABM, it provides immediate value by identifying ready-to-buy accounts, allowing sales and marketing to focus resources on prospects with the highest propensity to convert, rather than chasing unqualified leads. And for the long term, ABM acts as a foundational strategy for sustainable growth, improving customer retention, increasing average deal sizes, and strengthening brand reputation over time."

But making this shift in mindset doesn't happen in isolation.

2. Learn from the best

So how do you develop this mindset shift? On top of strong frameworks to help you upskill, you should be learning from your colleagues as well - more specifically, the ones who you see as strategists. This might mean going to your manager or CEO, or this might be someone in a completely different department.

Katie said: "Find someone in the organization who is strong strategically and learn from them, whether that's shadowing, asking to join planning sessions or building a mentor-style relationship. Work with your manager to set stretch goals that give you the opportunity to work on more complex, cross-functional initiatives."

In addition, if you talk and network with other peers in your exact role, you'll be able to see how they might frame strategic goals. Do they create similar strategic frameworks? Do they visualize and present to the C-suite in a different way to you? And are they utilizing any third-party sources or networks that are helping them? These are all good things to consider when taking in someone else's expertise.

And then from there, you can start working on your strategy plan, which will be essential to honing in on the business goals.

3. Build your framework using the business' long-term strategy

To develop a strong strategy framework, *Propolis Expert*, Georgie Gilmore advised that marketers first understand the business' five-year goals and the role marketing has to play in order to deliver these. And to think that far ahead can be a challenge in itself - especially in our current marketplace where being agile is essential.

In a B2B Marketing podcast episode with Fiona McKenzie, *President, Europe*, **Marketbridge**, we spoke in-depth about this topic as she said it's important to schedule time to strategy planning. She explained that a lot of the time, it comes down to clearing out a day in your calendar and creating that headspace so you can do your best thinking. And when you do carve out that time, start by thinking about the bigger picture. She said: *"When you come up with your marketing framework, it's not about the marketing...In terms of the business vision and what the long-term growth objectives of the organization are, that's where you start."*

Fiona even cited one success story where a CMO worked on her strategic framework months ahead of when she normally would have. By doing that, she was able to take her ideas against that long-term business vision and start conversations early with the CEO. As a result of her planning process, the CEO shaped his strategic plan in the same way, which then cascaded business goals down to the rest of the organization.



Georgie Gilmore
Expert,
Propolis



Fiona McKenzie
President, Europe,
Marketbridge

4. Plan for the short-term pivots

Fiona advised leaders to look at their marketing plans as a long-term framework but to think of it as a plan that might adjust quarter-to-quarter. Why is this? She explained: *"I think we need to make some budget decisions in the moment...Customers are changing. Markets are changing fast. We do live in a quite volatile world right now so we need to consider that when thinking about our plans."*

While long-term goals are essential to map out, the short-term goals are not to be forgotten. Ultimately, if you're thinking long-term but also using an outside-in approach, you'll come back to the customer's needs first and foremost. And that might mean adjusting in the moment for your short-term goals and leaving room in your frameworks for experimentation.

Katie advised: *"Short- and long-term goals should be planned together, not in competition. The best approach is to build a "two-speed" plan: one that delivers immediate commercial outcomes, and another that builds brand and market position over time. Be explicit about what will create value now, what builds future value and how they support each other."*

KEY TIP:

When developing your plan, an outside-in marketing approach is key. This can help prioritize customer needs, behaviors, and market trends. And from there, you can start developing products and services around the market rather than the

SECTION FOUR

The tech to enhance your strategic prowess

On the surface, it might seem like strategy is simply about locking yourself away to think, BUT that doesn't mean there isn't tech you should know about. Using roadmapping tools, performance tracking and brainstorming tools, you can create in-depth frameworks, workshop ideas with the C-suite and track performance stats effectively. If you're looking for more technology suggestions to becoming commercially-minded, we highly recommend checking out our **martech report here.**

Ideation & Brainstorming Tools

If you're someone who needs to visualize your ideas and thought process, then ideation and brainstorming tools might be the perfect tool to invest in - and the best part? A lot of them happen to be free. These tools enable marketing teams to visually map out ideas, identify possible connections and explore multiple paths in a structured and organized way. Ideal for the beginning stages of a strategic plan, they help teams move from abstract ideas to actionable plans and themes. From a leader perspective, this is also a great way to challenge your team to problem solve together.

Tools to use:

Figma Miro Mural

Business Performance Tracking

Business performance tracking platforms can transform your raw data into visual dashboards and real-time insights. These tools help marketers recognize trends sooner, measure progress against KPIs and identify possible risks. Using this information, teams can start making decisions based on data-back evidence rather than assumptions and intuition alone. And this can help build the ability to link operational metrics with long-term strategic goals.

Tools to use:

FunnelFuel Power BI Tableau

Strategic Roadmapping & OKR Tools

While brainstorming tools show you what could be done and business performance tracking indicates how you're doing, strategic roadmapping software helps you understand what is going to be done, when and why. They can translate your strategy into structured initiatives, timelines and measurable objectives. And luckily, this can be done so across teams. So not only do they improve alignment and accountability across the marketing team, but they also make goals more transparent and trackable. Thus, it enhances a marketer's ability to think long-term while managing short-term performance and execution seamlessly.

Tools to use:

Asana Monday.com Stormboard

Conclusion: Closing the strategic skills gap

Overall, the challenge facing B2B marketers is not a lack of activity, but a lack of strategic clarity and confidence. Pressures such as constant tactical demands, limited influence, and gaps in skills development have kept many marketers focused on short-term outputs rather than long-term business impact.

However, becoming a commercial marketer requires a clear shift in mindset - one that prioritizes business goals, customer insight, and measurable revenue contribution over isolated marketing metrics. By building stronger connections to the wider business, investing in continuous learning, and adopting structured strategic frameworks, marketers can begin to bridge this gap.

Approaches like aligning with long-term business objectives, balancing short- and long-term planning, and adopting models such as ABM demonstrate how marketing can directly influence growth. When marketers embrace this shift, they not only strengthen their own capabilities but also elevate the role of marketing from a perceived cost centre to a critical driver of business success.

This is the fourth 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 agile-decision making - being able to leverage real-time analytics and the latest market insights, in order to make rapid adjustments and improvements instinctively where and when needed.

The report and webinar will be launching in June 2026.

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

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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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B2B Marketing
Westgate House
9 Holborn
London
EC1N 2LL

info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net



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