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C-Suite Strategies to Empower Your Team

You must invest in your marketing efforts to reap the best return

WANDA KENTON SMITH · APR 1, 2019

Last month, I shared four strategies to help marketers better solicit, communicate and create positive synergy with members of the C-Suite. This month, I'll turn the tables to encourage C-Suite executives to invest the time to listen and learn about marketing opportunities while engaging, motivating and empowering their teams so they are enabled and equipped to perform.

Many marketers complain of feeling handcuffed, unable to throttle their organizations forward due to lack of funding or support from the C-Suite. Many believe their leaders simply don't grasp the seismic shift in today's evolving marketing landscape, opting for old-school tradition. They bemoan that their voices aren't heard, that fresh ideas fall on deaf ears. As the proverbial prop turns over time, morale sinks and once-enthusiastic employees jump ship in search of more rewarding career opportunities.

I addressed this concern with NMMA president Thom Dammrich and marketing expert, author and speaker Marcus Sheridan, who presents and consults with multiple industries, including marine. What follows are insights and strategies I've assembled to help C-Suite leaders maximize their organizations' marketing horsepower.

Wake-Up Call

C-Suite execs are busy managing the business, and they expect marketers to do their jobs. However, since the C-Suite approves the marketing budget and direction, a fundamental working knowledge of newer marketing strategies and platforms is imperative to making sound business and financial decisions.

"Not only do marine companies need professionals who really understand marketing, particularly digital marketing and social media, the leadership of marine companies needs to get comfortable with these new marketing vehicles, how they are best used and how to measure them," Dammrich says. "Without support from the top to reallocate budgets and experiment with new things, marketing personnel will be unable to help move their companies and the industry ahead."

Sheridan likewise recommends that leaders get more skin in the game. "It all starts with the ownership that needs to stop looking at what happens 'over there,'" he says. "Owners know if they don't pay attention to finances, they will get screwed or embezzled, so they are aware. This same principle should apply to marketing. ... CEOs and business owners can't afford to be aloof. They need to educate themselves and take ownership. It should be considered an embarrassment for a business owner or executive to not know about social media."

C-Suite On-Boarding

What's the most efficient way to get C-Suite execs up to speed on new marketing technologies and platforms? If you've hired wisely, you have expertise among your internal marketing staff. Invite marketing leaders to educate the leadership team. If internal resources are lacking, source a qualified agency or marketing consultant to conduct an independent audit, or to provide an executive-level overview of new marketing practices and platforms.

Unfortunately, it often takes an outsider to convince the C-Suite to think differently. "Marketers can be a prophet to the world, but no one listens to you from your own hometown," Sheridan says. "In their own town [or business], no one believes them. Their people will listen to other experts through articles, videos or events. It's not fair, but it is what it is. That's why it's important for executives to get in a learning environment and to focus on marketing. Once they've had an opportunity to let it soak in, that's when the magic happens. Until they believe in it, nothing is going to happen."

I can relate. I attended an industry conference a few years ago with my CEO. It proved a great forum to facilitate dialog about our marketing initiatives. In fact, an outside presenter helped him see the light regarding a concept I'd been championing for months. I put aside the ego and took satisfaction in finally getting the green light to launch a coveted initiative that ultimately paid off.

C-Suite execs: Invest in yourself and your marketing team. Attend the Grow Boating Marketing Summit at the International BoatBuilders' Exhibition and Conference with your marketing staff. Take advantage of this educational opportunity designed exclusively with our industry marketers in mind. A day of top-notch, marine-inspired marketing education is well worth your time and dime, as evidenced by the high satisfaction rating of the nearly 200 marine marketers who participated last year.

And you don't have to wait until this year's IBEX show to jumpstart your education. The 2018 presentations are archived at growboating.org. Sit with your marketing team and learn together.

What's more, there's a bounty of books, online resources and on-demand webinars covering every relevant marketing topic at the click of your keyboard.

Revenue-Generating Teams

Organizational charts used to plot sales and marketing in different silos, with sales aligned to revenue and marketing relegated to cost. That dynamic has gone with the dinosaur.

"One of our biggest problems is that leadership doesn't understand or catch the vision of where we are headed digitally," Sheridan says. "They are living in a place where they think the sales department handles the majority of revenue that comes into the company."

Studies have shown again and again that 70 percent of the buying decision is made before someone ever visits the dealership or fills out a form. That means 70 percent of the sales activity is generated directly by the marketing department.

"Most business owners have not adapted to this shift yet," he adds. "Most still see a 10-to-1 sales-to-marketing ratio, which just doesn't make sense. Ten salespeople to one person in marketing is crazy. One person handling 70 percent of the sales process ... that is what is currently happening in the marine industry."

Sheridan advocates a tighter working alliance between a company's sales and marketing departments, along with revenue accountability by the marketing team. He also suggests hiring appropriately to yield desired results. For example, he believes investing in a full-time professional videographer can generate the revenue of 10 salespeople.

Out of the C-Zone

A final C-Suite challenge: Give marketers the freedom and budget to test new strategies. "My impression is that very few marketing dollars, marketing effort and marketing strategy is directed toward digital marketing and social media," Dammrich says. "The beauty of digital marketing and social media is both how measurable it is and how quickly you can react and change what you are doing if you are not getting the response you want."

“Failure to adapt and become more focused on marketing, and particularly digital marketing, will mean slower growth for our industry and for companies in our industry that failed to adapt,” he adds.

I’ll close with this survival epiphany, delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King:

One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of status quo, and it’s fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. Today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.

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