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## Creating Better Synergy: Marketers and the C-Suite

Strategies to help you present (and sell) your ideas to top management

WANDA KENTON SMITH · FEB 26, 2019

At the Grow Boating Marketing Summit last year, a millennial lodged a complaint during a Marcus Sheridan presentation. She said she loves attending educational conferences but that the results leave her exasperated because the ideas she brings back to the business are typically ignored or shot down by top executives in her C-Suite. The audience response suggested she isn't alone.

A popular author, trainer and presenter whose company services multiple industries, Sheridan validated her grievance. In a follow-up interview, he said a lack of buy-in by management to marketing recommendations is the top frustration of marketers. "I hear this complaint every day, in every industry," Sheridan says. "Marketers feel they have their arms tied behind their back. It's the single biggest problem I see in the world of marketing today.

"The percentage of turnover within marketing circles is at an all-time high," he adds. "From studies I've read, the numbers are just crazy. Marketers are choosing not to make careers at companies because they feel handcuffed. Give them an opportunity to do something creative and to make a difference, and they will stay."

Marketers and business executives share the responsibility for creating better synergy and improving communication. Failure to connect and communicate, with the resulting misfires on both sides, jeopardizes the organization and puts the business at risk.

NMMA president Thom Dammrich echoes this sentiment. "Not only do marine companies need professionals who really understand marketing, and particularly digital marketing and social media, the leadership of marine companies needs to get comfortable with these new marketing vehicles, as well as know how to best use and measure them," he says.

An advocate of advancing industry marketing, Dammrich sees the disconnect as more than an issue of employee turnover. "Without support from the top to reallocate budgets and experiment with new things, marketing personnel can't help their companies move ahead," he says.

As a marine marketer for more than 30 years who has worked inside and outside the boardroom, I relate from a unique perspective. As the gulf between new-world marketing and old-school practices widens, there is a deepening chasm between marketers and the C-Suite. As this tug-of-war intensifies, marketers must up their games to become better-skilled presenters if they hope to garner critical C-Suite support.

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### C-Suite Marketing Strategies

To marketers: I'm sure you have great ideas to propel your company forward, and you've probably invested in continuing education to stay abreast of trends. If your ideas fall on deaf ears, don't give up. Here are some key strategies to help you sell your most compelling ideas to top management.

## 1. AVOID MARKETING SPEAK

Sheridan says marketers often aren't good communicators. To effectuate change, we must shift our mindset and approach. Specifically, marketers must think, plan and present like business owners and sales professionals. Avoid peppering pitches with marketing mumbo-jumbo. Though we might assume our command of marketing lingo lends greater credibility, it can backfire and result in project rejection.

"Until marketers speak like business owners and salespeople, they are going to be terribly ineffective," Sheridan says. "Marketers need to quit using dumb phrases and marketing rhetoric that doesn't mean a thing to the CEO. For example, the CEO probably doesn't understand what content marketing means, but he may understand that the organization needs to do a better job of addressing key prospect questions or objections. Present the problem and the solution in clear language that an executive can understand."

## 2. SELL NUMBERS vs. THE CAMPAIGN

The C-Suite is keyed in to the bottom line. Deliver numbers instead of fancy campaign creative when presenting new initiatives. Tie marketing directly to revenue. "Make it all about the numbers instead of the big campaign," Sheridan says. "Campaigns per se don't pay bills. Realize as a marketer you have fiscal and financial responsibilities to the company just like the salespeople do. This approach will definitely gain a higher level of respect."

Dammrich agrees. "If there is resistance from the C-Suite, start small, demonstrate results, show them the measurability of digital and social, and the flexibility and agility you have to make changes on the fly," he says. "The C-Suite measures everything else in a business. If you want to get them comfortable with new marketing channels, demonstrate how measurable they are."

## 3. JUST DO IT

"Sometimes you've just got to go rogue and do something audacious," Sheridan says. "Stop asking permission on every little thing that you do. Test-market something. Measure the results and then prove it to your team. It's better to say whoa than giddy-up."

While you shouldn't roll the dice in a big-way with the corporate pocketbook, that isn't to suggest you should avoid taking calculated risks and deploying smart test marketing strategies. If there is a prized project you are passionate about that you believe can make a significant impact on the business, take a gamble. Today's digital platforms are cost effective, allowing you to test on the cheap while tracking and measuring ROI. Believe me, there is real power in walking into the boardroom with proven results in hand.

## 4. SMALL THINGS ARE BIG

There are plenty of small things you can do to enhance your interactions with the C-Suite. Do your homework. Know your CEO's communication style and adjust your pitch to be successful. Perhaps you're a more formal, detail-oriented presenter who includes a wealth of background data to support your position, but your CEO is more casual and a cut-to-the-chase personality who prefers the 30,000-foot view. Present in a manner that works with your decision-maker. Confer with managers and others who have direct access to the executive.

Within the presentation framework, immediately define the problem that your initiative solves. Executives must quickly understand the primary issue.

Include time to answer questions in your presentation. Prepare for impromptu dialog, don't be offended by pointed queries and anticipate potential objections. If you're thrown a curve ball and don't know an answer, admit that you're in the dark; you can commit to further research and then follow up. Leave a single-page executive summary that captures and highlights key points.

Finally, bring enthusiasm to your presentation. Your passion for the project may be the secret sauce needed to push it to the next phase.

In my next column, I'll address C-Suite strategies to motivate, mobilize and manage your marketing team to greater success.

*This article originally appeared in the March 2019 issue.*