

Ten Steps for Building a Stronger Marketing Culture

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Marketing Culture



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Assessing Your Marketing Culture

Do any of these situations sound familiar? If they do, then you've struggled with building and implementing a stronger marketing culture. A culture where marketing isn't an afterthought or a part-time activity. A culture where marketing is front and center—making valuable, strategic contributions every single day.

- You're a marketing professional who battles with the "Marketing Nonbelievers," individuals of all sorts who sometimes say they support marketing efforts, but deep down inside they really don't understand the function that well--much less believe in its value. These individuals may be spread throughout your organization from senior managers (sometimes even presidents and CEOs) all the way down to the frontlines.
- You're a senior manager who's interested in building a marketing culture and you've wrestled with the best approach for getting your staff and colleagues to adopt simple marketing principles and ways of thinking. It can be very, very difficult to get the right people to think in new, outwardly focused ways.
- You're a consultant, advertising or marketing firm account executive or leader of a professional service practice or agency who's undoubtedly seen up and down cycles in the volume of your business. When you reflect on why some periods are better than others, it's easy to see a pattern. When things are good and you're busy, there's less time for marketing. After time--because your marketing activity decreased--your business drops. So, you re-focus on marketing and before long business picks up.
- You're a nonprofit professional or executive director who's looking for ways of developing new funding streams for your agency that rely less on traditional foundation support. Many agencies are beginning to question their long-term viability if they can't find new funding streams, many of which are directly connected to marketing efforts.

Marketing Culture Obstacles

Marketing isn't a natural way of thinking or acting. It's something that has to be learned, practiced and maintained. Because of this, whenever a marketing professional starts talking about building a stronger marketing culture, they usually face one or more of these challenges:

- **Their results are viewed as suspicious, unscientific and down-right lucky.** Rather than admit that marketing got results because of a disciplined process, it's seen as a kind of "marketing mojo" that someone either possesses or they don't. If there was a process, it probably won't happen again.
- **They find that marketing and sales functions aren't always linked.** In larger organizations, the departments may report to different individuals. There is sometimes a distrust and disconnect between the two. Marketing thinks that sales doesn't get the big picture. Sales thinks that marketing is out of touch and has never spent any time with the "customer."

Overcoming Tough Marketing Challenges

These are some of the most difficult marketing challenges that organizations of all sizes face.

1. Figuring out how to make products/services stand out in a crowded marketplace.
2. Selling products that no one knows about or understands.
3. Determining the most effective way to increase your company's visibility.
4. Educating customers and prospects about your products/services.
5. Shortening a long sales cycle (getting them to make faster buying decisions).
6. Writing, developing and designing effective sales materials.
7. Understanding the prospect's buying process and finding the real decision-makers.
8. Building consumer confidence in your product/service quality.
9. Working with limited marketing budgets.
10. Generating enough sales leads so the company can be successful.
11. Effectively following up on sales leads.
12. Establishing clear marketing objectives and developing a plan that works.
13. Implementing a coherent marketing and sales system.
14. Evaluating and measuring marketing

- **They realize that most marketing efforts aren't measured and quantified as much as they should be.** Because executives are used to looking at accounting and financial data, marketing efforts seem vague and hard to measure, which, to them, is one step away from being nearly impossible to manage.

Whether it's one of the issues or some other symptom, there's a clear resistance to fully embracing the marketing function. The sad reality is that because of this lackluster support marketing programs can end up producing less than their potential. And, when times get tough, marketing staffs and budgets are chopped to bits.

In working with hundreds of marketing professionals and senior executives who are trying to improve their organizations' successes, I've identified 10 practical steps you can use to build a stronger marketing culture within your organization. I've grouped these steps into one of two broad areas I call Marketing Mindset and Living It. Marketing Mindset is your overall view of the marketing function. It's my contention that you have to adopt the proper perspectives on marketing before you try to change your culture. When you have the right perspectives, then Living It--or implementing a stronger marketing culture--is the next task. It's my contention that you need both areas--Marketing Mindset and Living It--to sustain a marketing culture within your organization.

Creating a Marketing Mindset

Take these first five steps help you adopt a frame of mind that creates a long-term, viable focus. Once you get yourself in the right frame of mind, implementing a stronger marketing culture will be much, much easier.

Step 1: View Marketing From a Lifetime Customer Value Standpoint

One of the most important concepts sweeping the collective mindset of marketing thinkers is a profound shift from “acquisition-focused marketing” to “lifetime-value marketing.” A company in acquisition mode is all about always finding new customers. It focuses on how many “new” customers signed up during the last sales period and marketing is about generating leads that can be closed quickly and efficiently. It doesn't take very long to feel like you're on a treadmill.

When you take a lifetime customer value view of your prospects, each prospect becomes significantly more valuable. Looking over the entire time someone is a customer, they represent several times--even hundreds of times--the value of the first sale.

It's this strategy that explains why some companies are willing to use such incredible “loss leaders.” For example, in some CD clubs, you can become a member and get 10 CDs for \$.01. Not everyone will buy something more, but some will. In the coming years, they'll buy a lot more than the initial marketing investment.

What is one of your customers' worth over their lifetime? I'm almost frightened when I apply this concept to my client base. It definitely wakes you up and—if for no other reason—is a good motivator to spend enough time prospecting and taking care of your clients.

Step 2: Use Models to Simplify and Communicate Marketing Challenges

Over the years, I've become more and more convinced that marketing is a concept that makes tremendous sense once it is clearly explained. The problem is that it's difficult for many people to explain it clearly.

A simple solution is to use something I call "marketing models." These are process visuals, sets of words and other ideas that help focus your attention on a handful of variables that really matter.

I was recently reminded of a scientific article published in 1953 by Watson and Crick, suggesting a model for the structure of D.N.A. It was a simple model with two circular lines spiraling around each other connected by a series of bridges. At the time, there were at least two other competing models and many people wondered if the Watson and Crick model was accurate. Think what's happened since then and how much modern science owes to this conceptualization—all initially explained with a simple graphic.

● **Four Ps**

A classic model is the "Four Ps" of marketing--Product (features, benefits, unique packaging, etc.), Place (distribution, steps from production to end user, type of outlet...retail, warehouse, etc.), Promotion (marketing, public relations or advertising use to get the word out about the product...newspaper vs. TV or radio, etc.) and Price (how the product or service is priced compared to competitors... every day low prices vs. premium).

The Four Ps are very useful concepts for talking about how a product, service or idea is—or can be—marketed. One of the problems I've found over the years, however, is that the Four Ps are taught primarily in marketing workshops, seminars and university classes. If your boss or senior management missed this session, they won't readily know this model. It might take some explaining.

- **SWOT Analysis**

One model I've found that almost every executive knows about—and knows how to use—is the SWOT Analysis or Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This is a simple, but very effective model of sizing up any challenge, especially marketing ones. I like to explain the concept and display it like this:

SWOT Analysis



Strengths (assets, what's going well, what you already have in place) and Weaknesses (challenges, obstacles you'll have to overcome) are almost always focused on the internal operations of your organization--and it's always easier to make the list of weaknesses twice as long as the strengths.

The Opportunities (what you might do, market or policy changes that might benefit you) and Threats (what might derail your plans, how your business might be harmed) are typically focused on the external elements. What does the market hold in terms of good things (opportunities) and bad things (threats)?

- **Other Models**

Another great place to find marketing models are in introductory marketing textbooks and searching the web. If you can't find a model that someone else created, make up your own for your specific situation.

Here's a trade secret... I've sold many, many projects with the help of a model or process visual--especially when it was based on a specific analysis, survey or some other review of the client's situation I completed. If your graphic skills aren't topnotch, find a designer to help you quickly turn your sketch into a multi-colored, clear, precise visual. You'll find it's much easier to convince someone when they can "see" what you're trying to explain than only using words.

Step 3: Decide on the Purpose of Your Marketing: Building Brand or Generating Leads and Stay Clear About It

When you strip marketing to its core, the function is about accomplishing one of two goals, which are sometimes interrelated.

1. **Marketing is about building brands.** A brand is a collection of feelings and perceptions—hopefully positive—that you want other people to believe about your product, service or idea. It's a shortcut that buyers use when they're faced with a decision—should they buy what you're selling or from someone else? The stronger the brand, generally the greater the value it is to the organization. Think of the hundreds of millions of dollars that leading companies like Coca-Cola have invested in their brands. While this won't happen for every product, strong brands can be created within specific industries or niches--even if that brand is an individual.
2. **Marketing is about generating sales leads.** Marketing is the first step in the “cookbook” or process of converting contacts that are generated through your marketing mix (advertising, news releases, trade shows and other marketing tactics) into prospects, first time customers and then lifetime customers. One way to think about it is that the more leads marketing generates, the better. Another is to take the view that marketing needs to generate "qualified leads" or leads that can become the kinds of profitable customers you want in the long run.

The problem becomes when we don't have a firm focus on what our marketing is supposed to be doing. Creating an image ad, when a lead ad is needed can lead to significant misconceptions and problems. So, get clear in your mind first. Are you trying to build a brand? Generate sales leads? Or both? The answers to these questions helps focus your perspectives.

Step 4: Remember that Marketing is a Process, Not an Event

I'm constantly amazed by statements like this, "Oh! We're marketing our services. We developed a brochure a couple of years ago." While there may be nothing wrong with developing a brochure, but marketing shouldn't be a single act or event. It should always be part of a larger, ongoing process. It's about getting up everyday and trying to get the word out, build your brand, generate qualified sales leads and meet all of the other objectives of your marketing plan.

Step 5: Keep Your Attitude in Check

It takes a long time to change people's perceptions of the value of marketing. When you're one of the few people who truly believes in marketing, it can get pretty lonely and frustrating at times. When this starts to happen, all sorts of thoughts creep into our heads... Should I look for another job? Why doesn't anyone else get it? Why am I killing myself for no good reason?

You know all too well that that if you stay in this negative mindset for very long that it can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. You stop focusing on marketing and start focusing on all of your problems. Your productivity drops and it gets tougher and tougher to get back on track.

What I'm going to say next may seem overly simplistic. I struggled with whether I should even be making these points. But I'm seeing more and more evidence that there seem to be three basic strategies you can use to overcome these bumps in the road. While they seem so obvious and easy-to-do, they are also easy-not-to-do.

1. **Get enough sleep.** When you're batteries are drained, the simplest of tasks are difficult to accomplish. There's more and more medical evidence that as a society we're sleep deprived.

2. **Drink enough water.** Here too, the medical evidence is piling up. It's hard to think and keep our energy up when we are dehydrated.
3. **Create a list.** One of the best ways to get yourself moving again, is to create a list and focus on one task at a time. When you throw yourself into "action," it becomes more and more difficult to focus on negative distractions.

Creating a stronger marketing culture may be one of the most difficult tasks you'll ever do. If you're running into resistance from time-to-time, it's probably because you're starting to make an impact—a long-term difference. Remember to take care of yourself too. If you don't, there may not be anyone left to fight the battle.

Living It

The next five steps are for implementing a stronger marketing culture within your organization. They include techniques like basing your decisions on marketing research or quantifying the results of your marketing efforts. Instead of relying on assertions, you build a process that serves you—and convinces others that you're moving in the right direction. I call this process, "Living It." Every day, you'll find opportunities to transform your culture into one that is more marketing focused.

Step 6: Rely on the Power of Marketing Research to Make Better Decisions and More Convincing Arguments

Do you believe in conducting and using marketing research? Over the years, I've found most marketing professionals fall in one of three camps.

- **Camp #1: True Believers.** These are individuals who understand the value of good research and what it can do for them. They use the primary benefit of research—finding out what people think and then using other people's voices (customers, prospects, consumers, etc.) to justify their marketing recommendations and plans. It's very difficult for senior management to argue with customers. Marketing research brings their voice to the table.

- **Camp #2: Not Sure What to Think About Marketing Research.** There a number of marketing professionals who haven't been exposed to marketing research—or who have had a negative experience with it. If you're in this camp, realize you're on the fence about it. You know theoretically that research can provide insights, but it may not seem like it's worth the effort.
- **Camp #3: Non-believers.** This group of professionals—for a variety of reasons—don't like or use marketing research. They haven't figured out a way to make it a valuable part of their process and they are very confident on their own insights and perceptions about the marketplace.

My message is simple. First, marketing research is the single, best tool for persuading decision-makers to adopt a specific marketing strategy or plan. It's the closest thing to the scientific method that is used in marketing. Second, it's a tool that can help you in ALL phases of your marketing from developing a strategy, testing messages, measuring marketing ROI—even as a tactic such as proprietary research (you might use as special reports) or publicity surveys (designed to generate news coverage).

How To Boost Your Personal Persuasive Power

While using marketing research results to help sell-in your marketing strategies and recommendations is a good strategy, you can also use these techniques for enhancing your personal credibility and persuasiveness.

1. **Be confident in the role you play.** Act the part.
2. **Prove how you've been consistent over the long run.** Most people value consistency and find it appealing.
3. **Show respect and courtesy for your customers and prospects.** No one likes someone who talks behind their backs.
4. **Don't let your verbal (words) and nonverbal (actions, tone of voice, dress, etc.) signals contradict each other.** People will always believe your body language, because it's harder to control and harder to lie about.
5. **Be positive and sincere.**

6. **Listen and learn from your customers and prospects.** They know their situations better than you do. If you're paying attention, they will always leave you clues on how to persuade and sell them.
7. **Speak in words that are interesting and fresh.** Stay away from the worn out words. Use phrases that are colorful and exciting.
8. **Get fired up.** If you are excited and interesting, it will be easier for other people to listen to what you have to say.
9. **Don't be a doormat.** Its embarrassing and frustrating to see someone who always lets other people walk all over them.
10. **Put your customers' and prospects' interests ahead of your own.** Why do so many people feel frightened before they give a presentation? Partly because it's nervous energy and a natural reaction to a stressful situation. But mostly because they are more worried about themselves than the people in the audience. If you worry about your customers and prospects, you have less time and energy to worry about yourself.
11. **Know what's accepted and not accepted in the situation you're in.** Every situation has hidden rules or lines that shouldn't be crossed. When you do, you often hear about it. Knowing where the lines are is key.
12. **Know your language.** Use words you know the definition of and can pronounce. For example, often is always pronounced "often," not off-ten.
13. **Don't call attention to any gaps in your knowledge or shortcomings.** They may be irrelevant and unimportant to your customers and prospects until you mention them.
14. **Be fair and prove it.**
15. **Look for common ground--that emotional and close connection between you and your customers and prospects.** We like other people who have the same beliefs, attitudes, values and goals as we do.
16. **Stay focused on enduring values.** People who are concerned with insignificant details are seen as less credible than people who are concerned with lasting values. Look upward; concentrate on a higher order.
17. **Don't over or underplay your role.** It's easy to spot a fake when they stick out like a sore thumb.

- 18. Choose your words carefully and pick ones that have persuasive power with your customers or prospects.** If you're trying to sell real estate in a rundown neighborhood, you don't want to describe your property as a "slum." The words "redevelopment zone" are much more positive and persuasive. Who wants to invest in a slum when they might find the bargain of their life in a redevelopment zone?

Step 7: Know and Communicate the Difference Between Strategies and Tactics

Two of the most popular words in the marketing vocabulary are strategy and tactic. They are also frequently intertwined and used synonymously, which causes confusion about the purpose and result of marketing.

- **A strategy is your overarching approach.** It's your plan. The big picture of what you're trying to do and might include being the "low-cost provider," "building a household brand," "growing by acquisition," etc.
- **A tactic is the specific tool you're going to use to help accomplish your objectives.** In marketing, it's often the tools you combine to form your marketing mix, such as direct mail, trade advertising, email newsletters, web site, printed brochures, etc.

When we mix the definition of these two concepts, we can become tricked into focusing on the wrong part of a problem. If someone says, "I need a TV commercial." Is this a strategy or tactic? In my book, it's a tactic. Your next question should be, "What are you trying to accomplish?" If the answers don't make sense, then it's usually a good sign that this person is enamored with a tactic and has not thought hard enough about their overall strategy.

When I do a communications audit or look at the overall look and feel of a client's literature, web site and other communications documents, I often find that each brochure or document has its own design and look. There's no consistent overall image that says this document is from the same company. What's worse is when I compare their advertisements to those of competitors. Mix them together on the wall and try to find your own. Much of the time, it's difficult to tell who's ad is who's. No wonder your customers and prospects are having trouble understanding your products and services!

Step 8: Put Your Plan on Paper

There's certainly plenty of evidence that the quickest path to success is to 1) decide what you want and 2) write it down. And we all know that the more clearly written our goals, objectives, action plans, to do's and other lists are, the more our energies will be focused on what we've already decided is important.

While setting goals makes perfect sense, I'm constantly amazed at the number of organizations who don't follow this policy when developing their marketing plans. When I ask, "Can I see your marketing plan," I often hear, "We'll we're trying to update it" or "We haven't looked at it for a while, so it's a little out of date."

For many firms, only annually—if that often—they take time to develop a marketing plan. As the year progresses, they rarely take time to read their plan, up-date it or use it to communicate within their organizations what they're trying to do and how they're trying to do it.

One of the best ways to develop a stronger marketing culture is to get the right people to buy in to it. If you can get their assistance—either formally (through strategy meetings, brainstorming sessions, etc.) or informally (one-on-one conversations, updates, etc.)—when you're developing your plan, it will be a lot easier to get their help when implementing the specifics.

When your plan is clearly written, it helps fend off amnesia, both from your perspective and from the perspectives of other important decision-makers. If you can manage to review your plan every week or two for five minutes, you'll find that it's a lot easier to accomplish your objectives. A marketing plan is not a report to be filed away. It's a living document that helps you manage the marketing function.

Step 9: Link Marketing to Sales

If marketing and sales are two different functions within your organization, keep reading. If not, you may want to skip to Step 10.

While separating the marketing and sales functions may serve some organizations, it tends to create a lot of problems, including:

- Sales thinking that customers belong to them--since they have the relationships.
- Marketing thinking that sales doesn't see the big picture and operates in "silos."
- Sales believing that marketing doesn't really know what customers think, so marketing ends up "misfiring."
- Marketing worries that sales may not be "closing as much as they could be" so it makes marketing's lead generation process look weak.
- Marketing and sales don't talk all that often or share insights that might help the other do their job more effectively.

You get the picture. The list could go on and on. And when you think about, it can almost seem that these two functions are working as much against each other as they are together.

The fact of the matter is that in organizations that have a strong marketing culture, these two functions are virtually seamless. Marketing concentrates on building a brand and generating qualified leads--two vital functions that make selling easier. Sales concentrates on qualifying prospects and closing sales. Marketing then helps manage customer relationships over the long run with customer relationship management programs.

To build a stronger marketing culture, you have to find a way to link your marketing and sales function—even if it hurts and egos get bruised. Getting these two functions to support each other is the only viable long-term strategy.

Questions Marketing and Sales Staffs Need To Jointly Answer About Your Target Market

Your marketing and sales functions should be able to independently come up with the same answers to these questions. If not, there's a good chance they're not working as closely together as they should.

- 1. How much does my prospect (or market, customer, etc.) already know about my topic (company, product, service or idea)?**
- 2. Is my topic too complex for my prospect to understand?** If so, how can I simplify it?
- 3. Does my prospect have direct, real experience with my topic?** Or am I talking about something that is vague and somewhat unreal to him or her?
- 4. Is my prospect likely to challenge my evidence?** Will they take a hard look at how I'm backing up my points and statements.
- 5. Is my topic tangled up with other difficult, hard to understand topics?**
- 6. Am I presenting tired, worn-out, familiar ideas?** Or do I have something fresh to offer?
- 7. Am I talking with real decision-makers or tire-kickers?**
- 8. Does my prospect have a negative attitude about my topic, even before I begin to speak (communicate, market, sell, etc.)?**
- 9. Does my topic conflict with the core beliefs, attitudes and values of my prospect?**
- 10. How much effort—in terms of money, time and energy—will it take for my prospect to do what I'm asking?**
- 11. Is there more than one decision-maker in the group?** Are they easy to get in front of? If not, how will I get in front of them?

- 12. If my prospect accepts my idea (buys my product/service), how much social resistance are they going to feel from coworkers, customers, friends, family members and industry colleagues?**
- 13. Is it going to take individual effort or group effort to do what I'm asking?**
- 14. Is what I'm offering (selling or asking) going to produce immediate rewards, or a more long-term, less gratifying solution?**
- 15. Do I know my prospect's pains and big problems?** Do I know exactly why they buy? What problem or problems are they trying to solve? How much are those problems costing them in terms of frustration, lost opportunities and financial resources?
- 16. Is my prospect emotionally ready to buy?**
- 17. How will my prospect most likely respond to what I have to say?**

Step 10: Measure marketing ROI (Return On Investment) and communicate it clearly.

The single, most important reason for cuts in marketing spending is marketing professionals' inability to communicate their value in using a terminology executives are comfortable with. What is this terminology? Quantification—primarily in the form of financial data.

MBA programs do an excellent job of training senior executives how to understand and use financial data. They are used to running specific reports to determine the health of their organization--and any of its operating units. If some portion of their enterprise isn't meeting the financial or profit expectations, they quickly explore ways of finding and fixing the problem. We've all seen plenty of cases in recent years where the solution is reorganization, selling or closing the struggling department, plant, division or other entity.

What good marketing ROI (return on investment) helps you do is 1) prove the value of your activities and 2) give you a system that can help you improve your marketing system.

When you quantify what's working and why, you have evidence beyond the anecdotal example or your passionate assertions. You start to prove your results based on numeric data-- percentages, numbers of placements, how often you reached your target audience, number of qualified sales leads, etc. When you show data that presents "how much," "how often," "how fast" and "with what impact" your marketing is having, it's much more difficult to argue that it's not working.

Tracking this data also helps you manage it more effectively. When you know which tactics are working and which ones are not, you can stop wasting valuable resources on the things that are producing—or aren't producing enough—results.

A way of thinking about measuring marketing ROI that's been very helpful to a number of my clients is to divide your ROI measurements into two categories:

1. **Program measures:** What is the overall impact of your marketing efforts in terms of improved sales, better name recognition, stronger brand image, etc.? Measures on this level often include tracking surveys that give before and after assessments, tracking your overall lead generation efforts, looking at the percentage of sales increases while there's a promotion going on and comparing it to similar promotions or the same time period a year ago.
2. **Tactic measures:** What is the overall impact of the specific tactic? These may require different measurements for each tactic. For example, quantifying the value of media coverage could include measurements such as:
 - Counting the number of news releases distributed
 - Counting the number of publications who printed the releases
 - Looking at each publications circulation to determine the number of impressions (publication rate X 2.5 or the likely number of people who are reading the publication)
 - Advertising dollar equivalency (how much the same space would have cost if it were purchased as an advertisement)

- Analyzing the content of each article to find out if your key messages were covered and if your company was presented in a positive manner
- Trail or call in rates to the article placements if it includes a "call to action"
- Sales leads that can be directly tied to the placements

When's the best time to measure marketing ROI? Unfortunately, not when most marketers start focusing on it--when the program is up and running or completed. The best time to build a marketing ROI measurement system is when you're putting together your plan. It's also the best time to get key decision-makers to buy into the concept. Getting agreement on how you're going to measure your program—and then giving period updates or reports—is a lot smarter than trying to convince everyone that the program is working after it's been implemented.

One final suggestion. Use the KISS formula when presenting your ROI results. That's "Keep It Short and Simple." Some of the best marketing ROI reports I've seen over the years are one page. If you create an Excel spreadsheet, not only will it force you to get to the bottom line quickly, your format will start to look a lot more like financial data...something most executives are very comfortable viewing.

Final Thoughts

Like anything of value, building a stronger marketing culture is going to take time, maybe a lot longer than you initially think. It's going to take effort, maybe a lot more than you initially think. But, in the end, isn't it worth it?

And as our market spaces become more and more competitive, we may not be able to afford any other strategy.