



REACH FOR THE SKY

It is difficult for business-to-business marketers to become chief executives. Unlike accountants they have no well-trodden path to the top. Although there are now many entry-level qualifications available and consensus is building about the skills and knowledge required for junior business-to-business marketing, further up the ladder it becomes much hazier. To an extent this reflects the fact that before the 1990s very few business-to-business companies had a marketing function. The trailblazers who set up those marketing departments are now beginning to wonder about how to make the next step, how to get onto the board, how to reach the top.

Boards of directors are often dominated by what are regarded as the classic disciplines of finance, law and accountancy, and marketing tends to be much less well represented." This is though not an immutable law. As Hugh Burkitt, the chairman of the Marketing Society says: "All of the most successful companies put their customers at the heart of the business, stimulate real demand, and essentially market themselves well. Although most chief executives still come from finance, around twenty per cent come from marketing and if today's senior marketers start acquiring the right skills now there is no reason why that percentage can't increase."

Marketers must understand the commercial realities of business if they are to attain a seat on the board. **Alex Blyth** investigates the prospects for marketers with their sights set on the top jobs

the results of a survey conducted by Loughborough Business School for the CIM on just this topic. Most of the 75 business-to-business marketers interviewed cited "experience and networking" as their most valuable sources of information. Networking with peers through the many sector, discipline or geographic groups that exist is indeed a very common and effective way for senior business-to-business marketers to enhance their skills.

In companies which have effective succession-planning, one of the chief executive's key responsibilities is to act as a mentor to senior executives, imparting the benefit of his/her experience and preparing future leaders for the future. Fiona Stevens, director of marketing & strategy at business-to-business marketing agency The Crocodile, has learnt a great deal through mentoring: "In my previous role as marketing manager at CSF Group, I worked with a marketing director who helped to introduce me to the role of a director. I was exposed to the board and learnt how to present the case for marketing in that arena."

Another way to acquire skills is through formal training. Up until recently there have been very few training courses aimed at senior business-to-business marketers. Marketing trade associations make much of their revenue from training, but most programmes are aimed at junior or middle-ranking staff. This is beginning to change though as several marketing trade associations are launching training courses aimed at more senior executives and managers.

Formal courses

The nature and content of these courses varies quite considerably. From this October the Institute of Direct Marketing is running a series of five business-to-business marketing master classes in areas such as multi-channel customer management, e-marketing, and the law in marketing. These are proving popular and will no doubt be useful, but are more appropriate for middle level marketers. Any marketer who is hoping to join the board in the near future ought to have already mastered all of those aspects of marketing.

The Marketing Society is targeting slightly more senior marketers. Its Marketing Leaders programme was set up in 2004 and is aimed at people who have just become or are about to become marketing directors. Fifteen attendees, including two business-to-business marketers



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Head of business development, Chartered Institute of Marketing

The skills and knowledge required varies depending on the individual and the company. For example, client-side marketers might need to develop team leadership skills, while those on the agency side might need more focus on negotiation skills. However, as John Greenhough, head of business development at The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), explains, there is one area that always requires development: "In order to be able to convince other board members of the importance of marketing, senior marketers often need to learn more about the commercial aspects of marketing. For example, they need to be able to measure the impact of campaigns and to put this into a broader financial context."

Skilling up

There are very few people who can teach these skills. To an extent they can only be learnt from someone who has been a chief executive or a board director. This perhaps explains

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A ROYAL MAIL DIRECTOR'S STORY

Colin Beesley is the business solutions director at the Royal Mail and sits on the board of one of the company's subsidiaries. He joined the company four years ago as sales & marketing director and has worked throughout his career in B2B marketing.

He outlines how he has gained skills and knowledge throughout his career: "I've been lucky to work in companies that have insisted that I spend time in other departments. So I've spent a lot of time actually at the coalface in sales, customer service, finance and so on.

Beesley continues, "as a result I've developed an intimate understanding of how they function giving me a broader

perspective in my work as a director and senior marketer."

Formal training was important to him in his early career but has been less so recently: "I got a degree and the CIM's Certificate, but as I've got more senior I've not really had the time or the self-discipline to get any more qualifications." He spent a year working in Brussels and found that that further broadened his business awareness and his adaptability.

He describes his role now as more general management but believes that senior business-to-business marketers are often well-placed to make that transition: "Success in that role requires an understanding of a customer's business processes and this translates well into general management."



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Crocodile

from Shell and one from Intel, attended a three day residential course at which they heard about brand innovation from Diageo, internal marketing from Orange, external communications from Barnardo's and many other aspects of marketing. The programme was a success and will be repeated next year.

Room for more?

However, there is, as yet, no senior level course that caters specifically for business-to-business marketers. Some argue that there is no need for one. Bryan Foss, a global banking solutions executive at IBM and author of several books on business-to-business marketing argues that: "Much of what is taught in business-to-consumer classes is transferable. The skills are the same, but you do need to translate some of the language and offer business-to-business examples."

There are other qualifications such as the recently established Leadership Programme from the Marketing Communications Consultants Association, which has been designed to offer soft skills such as negotiation and leadership to senior agency staff. The Institute of Directors has its Essential Directors' Programme and Company Direction Programme, both of which equip senior executives with the skills they need to run a company. They

He may well be right, but as a growing number of senior business-to-business marketers prepare to make the next step in their careers they will be looking around for courses that can equip them with the skills to do that. Although what is currently on offer may be adequate, it cannot be long before this very specific – but nonetheless glaring – gap in the market is filled.

However, when it comes to making the leap from Marketing Director to board member and ultimately chief executive, the CIM's Professional Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing seems to be the qualification that most marketers want. There are currently 8000 delegates worldwide studying for this qualification alone. The curriculum focuses on the Professional Marketing Standards and aims to provide senior marketers with the commercial skills required in the boardroom.

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THE MICROSOFT MARKETING ACADEMY

Rikke Rasmussen, marketing academy manager at Microsoft UK believes that most companies take an inefficient approach to the development of their senior staff: "The typical approach is to leave it up to individual employees to find suitable MBAs, diplomas and so on. They spend a lot of time on it and you generally lose them once they've acquired the new qualification."

She is the leader on the Microsoft Marketing Academy, an initiative which aims to tackle this problem by providing formal qualifications for staff in a way which maintains their work/life balance and increases their loyalty to the company.

It was developed in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Marketing and Henley Management College, and senior Microsoft marketers can study for an MSc in Strategic Marketing Leadership.

This innovative approach is popular with staff, with 96 per cent of personnel in the marketing department having signed up to a course within a week of the Academy's launch.

It is now being rolled out globally. Rasmussen explains this success saying: "This is an externally recognised qualification, but the course content has been tailored to be specific to Microsoft, so our employees at every level have the chance to develop skills in a way that is directly relevant to their jobs."



RIKKE RASMUSSEN

Marketing academy
manager, Microsoft UK