

The Shift: Becoming Visionary Marketers Who Control Quest for Growth



By Scott Davis

A series of profound shifts have ushered in a new era in marketing, an era marked by Visionary Marketers who know that no one is better suited to help drive the growth agenda than the head of marketing.

Consider how three noted Visionary Marketers have become integral to their companies' growth agendas:

- Burger King's Russ Klein asserts, "Anything that's a growth factor is fair game for me to stick my nose into." Klein is responsible for product mix, pricing strategy, product development, market planning, supply chain, and mix management, on top of more traditional marketing responsibilities. He's considered the CEO's right-hand man, as reflected in his title—President, Global Marketing Strategy and Innovation.
- Stephen Quinn, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at Walmart, continues to shed light on how the world's largest retailer can grow organically. Using robust insights, Quinn has put focus on the segments that matter—those that are open to Walmart's proposition and can provide growth and healthy margins. "Even though most of America shops at Walmart, not all of America is Walmart's target," he says. Leveraging that understanding has helped Walmart's sales outpace its competitors.
- General Electric's marketing, led by Beth Comstock, co-owns growth and innovation because GE's CEO Jeff Immelt believes in the link between customer insights and growth. Immelt made marketing responsible for owning customer insights, and, in turn, a co-conspirator of the growth agenda for one of the world's most successful companies.

These Visionary Marketers are seizing the opportunity to become one of the core senior executives helping to drive their company's growth agenda and, in the process, signaling an opportunity for all marketers to shift their charge from supporting sales to one of direct line responsibility for successful and profitable growth.

From deeply understanding today's and tomorrow's customers' needs, wants, behaviors, and media consumption patterns, to translating these into new products, services, experiences, and relationships that customers want, Visionary Marketers are helping their organizations match these customer dynamics with internal capabilities for maximum external impact.

Five Shifts Toward Role as Visionary

The ability to move into roles of greater influence and impact as

Visionary Marketers requires marketers to undertake five shifts:

- A shift from *Creating Marketing Strategies* to *Driving Business Impact*;
- A shift from *Controlling the Message* to *Galvanizing Your Network*;
- A shift from *Incremental Improvements* to *Pervasive Innovation*;
- A shift from *Managing Marketing Investments* to *Inspiring Marketing Excellence*; and
- A shift from an *Operational Focus* to a *Relentless Customer Focus*.

Of course, a shift is difficult to do, and it doesn't happen overnight.

Those who have been successful have managed to get out of the traditional "marcomm" trap and have helped to seize the growth agenda, primarily by shifting Marketing's profile, as a function and as individuals, to one that's more strategic. Once the profile shifts and Marketing becomes a key strategic driver of the growth agenda, it becomes easier to be the strategic partner to the CEO and broader C-suite and an undeniable asset to the organization.

The new formula for success starts with a new imperative. Marketers must become deeper strategic thinkers and bring that capability to bear across more of the business landscape. Those who contribute strategically and use their skills, capabilities, and knowledge will accomplish both shifts.

Proof Points for Aspiring Visionary Marketers

The marketer who aspires to become the CEO's true partner in growth needs to bring together a balance of hard and soft skills. This is not unlike a chef at a five-star restaurant who must carefully blend ingredients to achieve outstanding results. The aspiring Visionary Marketer must:

- Consistently exceed expectations for marketing excellence;
- Build operating credibility with the CEO, CFO, and the rest of the C-suite;
- Show capability and muscle in driving strategic discussions at the corporate level;
- Consistently innovate across the enterprise; and
- Lead by example, and inspire the organization to deliver results based on world-class marketing and business strategies and plans.

Of course, the basic ingredient—exceeding your company's expectations for marketing excellence—is a prerequisite to earning the right for a more strategic profile. If you can't handle the responsibilities you already have, then why should the CEO think you're ready for more? That's the stark, realistic situation at the top—CEOs will bring

the right marketer into the inner circle, but that marketer must be proven. By successfully executing a world-class marketing plan, intimately tied to the company's strategic growth plan, and delivering quantifiable results, you will make a convincing argument that you as a marketer can play two roles simultaneously: that of a great strategic thinker and that of a great in-market executor.

Walmart's Stephen Quinn admits that early in his tenure as CMO, he did everything, big and small, with a purpose. If he needed to write the weekly circular, he had no issue with doing the task himself. Although he had aspirations for the role that went far beyond the circular, he also knew that he would be judged as much on executing in a manner that would delight the 1.5 million store associates and 140 million weekly shoppers as he would be on thinking strategically.

Some CMOs with a successful background as a strategist are accountable beyond delivering on their marketing communication goals. Steve Meyer, who has headed marketing at Dell Services and Trilogy Software, believes "there's no substitute for putting real points on the board—led by analytics focused on true 'business impact' rather than just traditional brand metrics like advertising tracking and equity studies. You can earn a real seat at the table."

Shifting Through The Five Marketing Roles

Achieving such a shift requires taking the marketer's role from Tactician to Facilitator to Leader to Visionary. Each role has specific attributes, and each allows marketers to see, much like a great brand identity is earned over time, that they can follow an aspirational path, earning their way to the leadership position they know they should possess.

As Tactician, the marketer is responsible for succeeding at delivering on a set of tactics or programs required to fulfill a strategic imperative. The Tactician, in effect, operates with a checklist or a to-do list of activities to achieve over a calendar year; value is often measured by the amount of "stuff" checked off. The Tactician tends to stay in the marketing box, playing the functional role well, but not viewed as an important or critical asset across the organization. Lots of good stuff is accomplished, but nothing is viewed as very strategic.

The Facilitator incorporates all of the Tactician responsibilities while also beginning to help the organization as a whole develop and leverage shared approaches to traditional marketing communications and sales. Marketing develops a common language around marketing and brand and develops approaches, tools, and methodologies. The Facilitator starts to lead discussions around best practices inside and outside the organization. Although Facilitators are not usually viewed as very

strategic, they are starting to play on a broader platform and building a voice within the organization.

The Leader carries out all of the Tactician and Facilitator responsibilities and uses customer insights and knowledge, beginning to show marketing's customer-led strategic muscle throughout the organization. The Leader is known as the guardian of the brand, the keeper of the customer, a savvy marketing ROI investor. The Leader lives up to this title primarily within the marketing function, while recognizing the need to become more influential with other functions, such as human resources, finance, operations, and sales. Although it's not expected, the Leader looks to serve up strategic issues and opportunities, start dialogues across the organization, and drive towards customer-insight-led opportunities (in the broadest sense of the word) that can move the whole organization forward.

The Visionary Marketer encompasses all of these other roles and also plays that central role in driving strategy—from eliciting imperatives to prioritizing them and putting economic values around each. In addition, the Visionary Marketer proactively collaborates across all functions, consistently pushes the growth agenda, has deep-seated relationships with the CEO and the board, and is always commercially oriented.

Ultimate success comes from recognizing the importance of achieving each aspect of each type of marketing role, as well as recognizing that each role builds on successful achievement of the responsibilities housed in the previous one. You need to accumulate, and perhaps disperse or delegate, responsibilities within each role to others.

It's a new era for marketers, marked by massive shifts around them—as well as shifts they must themselves take charge of seeing through. In the end, how effectively they manage the process will totally change the skill sets, roles, and relevance of marketing to the organization as Visionary Marketers become the rule, not the exception.



*Scott Davis is a Senior Partner with Prophet (www.prophet.com), a global consultancy that helps senior management more effectively use branding, design, marketing, and innovation to drive profitable growth. This article is based on aspects of his forthcoming book, *The Shift*, to be published in June, 2009 by Jossey-Bass. He can be reached at sdavis@prophet.com.*