

Tips for CMOs: Five Ways to Keep Your Team off the Chopping Block

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When times are tough, heads are on the chopping block and dead wood is being removed, marketing is among first (after HR) to be decapitated, axed or trimmed.

Why do we get dumped first? It's hard for Marketing Teams to measure our value, especially compared to Sales or Engineering. We are also always out in front of the rest of the company—thinking about broad-based, longer term strategies—and not necessarily in touch with the twists and turns of the current economy. While sometimes it can be good, in fact essential, to be thinking ahead, it has got to be frustrating for the CEO to be struggling with making payroll or hitting our numbers for this quarter, and then get a presentation from marketing about a great long-term opportunity, or the latest milestone on a far-reaching (and expensive) ad campaign.

As a result, a lot of marketing jobs are being cut right now. And yet, I know that right after marketing is laid off, the CEO is likely to pick up the phone and hire a marketing consultant. When I ask CEOs why they have set aside budget for outside consulting at the same time as they are laying off team members—they usually say two things:

- The old marketing team wasn't creating enough value to be worth keeping—in fact, many of the marketing teams I've seen aren't involved in the business strategy.
- Now is when marketing is most important – companies need a focused, market-driven strategy to avoid wasting limited resources

For most CEOs, Good marketing is a bit like pornography—it's hard to define precisely, but you know it when you see it. But I think one of the problems is that most CEOs cannot put their finger on what marketing *isn't*

getting done—but they can see that nothing much would change if the whole marketing team disappeared.

So, what's a CMO to do?

1. **Stay informed to what's happening right now with the company.**

Meet regularly with the sales team and ask what the biggest issues are with selling. Connect with product development to help them stay really focused on building products that the market is ready to pay for right now. Provide finance and operations with regular updates on how you measure marketing success. Don't get too far out in front of where the company is—the tougher things are, the less runway you have.

2. **Make sure your team is integrated into the organization.**

Encourage them to build relationships across the organization and to be fluent in the business situation facing your organization. Watch out for Agency-it is—where your team sees themselves as a separate group—it's these self-contained groups that are easiest to get ride of.

3. **Identify and share metrics.**

How do you measure success? Marketing is notoriously hard to measure, but there are a lot of ways you can track your contribution to the business. Things like direct marketing and website performance are easier to track—but it's also worthwhile to note decisions you contributed to that saved or made money for the company. Set objectives and make

sure you track results.

4. **Provide data to finance and operations to help them understand and by making sure that the company understands what marketing is doing.** You need to speak the language of your colleagues, in order to build allies across the organization. If people don't understand what you're doing, they can't value it. And data-driven people like to see data!
5. **Stay flexible.** Marketing teams are great at setting up annual plans and objectives—but sometimes these plans need to change rapidly. Don't complain that the organization is schizophrenic when they ask you to cancel the ad campaign you worked so hard to develop, or to limit product development to customer-requested fixes despite data

that shows long term opportunities. Instead, listen carefully, and think about what you would do if you owned the business. Sometimes quick changes are critical to keep the company alive and cash flow in tact.

CMOs everywhere are in danger of losing their jobs right now—not because of this dismal economy, but because they've forgotten that marketing is about knowing the market and making good decisions about how to reach the market. It's not about pretty pictures, or glossy brochures, or even how much you're Tweeted about. It's about leadership and strategic focus. And in these tough times, when we have less resources than we've ever had, we need the leadership to focus on how we should best use the ammunition we have.

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