

# A tale of two disciplines: managing marketing people

**M**arketing is largely perceived as a creative industry. Figures published by Research International show that advertising and promotion are far and away seen as the primary functions of the marketing department by other employees and managers.<sup>1</sup>

But there is more to marketing than communications and advertising. It is partly a science, and partly an art. There are few disciplines that require both a creative imagination as well as familiarity with statistics and number-crunching. As a consequence, the challenges of managing marketing people are somewhat different to those in other professions.

The danger of having predominantly creative people in roles that require a synthesis of creativity and rigour is that it leads to many of the problems facing marketing departments today: a perception that little meaningful measurement takes place. There is little understanding on the part of shareholders, and even some directors, of how marketing creates value and can influence bottom line profit. All this adds up to marketing not getting the credit, nor the results, it could. The end result is that marketing is perceived in some quarters as the non-rigorous, 'fluffy' end of business.

In *The Economist's* 2004 summit paper, marketing languishes at the

very bottom of the managerial pile in terms of reputation.<sup>2</sup> We have known about the reputation crisis facing marketing for some time now. A study of 'how others perceive marketing' carried out by Dr Susan Baker of Cranfield School of Management produced, in the words of Robert Shaw and David Merrick who used the study, 'an unflattering caricature of marketing, which unfortunately is widely acknowledged by both marketers and their colleagues in other functions.' Shaw and Merrick continue, 'What is particularly apparent is marketing's perceived lack of accountability, characterised by the words "unaccountable, untouchable, expensive and slippery".'<sup>3</sup>



To redress this reputation crisis, we need a more scientific mind-set that can blend with the more creative aspects of marketing. Marketing must move away from being perceived, taught and recruited as a predominantly creative discipline, towards one which embraces elements of both creative and scientific approaches. If marketers can become more aware of metrics, and develop an understanding of how marketing can be made more accountable, there is a chance that we can raise the dignity of the profession to a level where the lack of marketers in the boardroom can be addressed. Widely acknowledged as a problem for marketers, the reason is perhaps not that the marketing function is undervalued, but that marketers need to widen their general business knowledge in order to hold their own amongst board members who have emerged from other departments.

Why does marketing have so many creative rather than scientific types? The problem is that marketers are action oriented, thinks Laurie Wood. 'Their preferred learning styles are similarly activity-based (learning by doing). Stopping to reflect, analyse and synthesise does not come easily to these types. If the learning model does not enforce the reflective element, then a short-cut loop is created based on continuous action and little or no learning'<sup>4</sup>

In which case, the learning model needs to change. And from that point, we need to emphasise the scientific elements during the recruitment process. There are several ways to change the way marketing people are managed:

- Recruitment – to select people who have analytical and creative skills.
- Motivation – to stimulate more interaction between the creatively-minded members of the profession and the scientifically-minded ones, and to reduce the natural distance that makes each type wary of the other.

As Juanita Cockton points out, 'Too often it is assumed that if you are a marketer you can do all marketing jobs and tasks. That has never been the case and as with most professions these days expertise requires deeper skills – not just broader ones.' To manage marketing people means 'recruiting and building teams with a combination of skills that will advance the organisation. Creativity needs to be supported with hard facts – and evidence of how the team will deliver the marketing promise.'<sup>5</sup>

Marketing has the opportunity to drive business. The first step is to communicate marketing as a mixture of scientific and creative disciplines. The second step is to train existing marketers in the

If marketers can become more aware of metrics, and develop an understanding of how marketing can be made more accountable, there is a chance that we can raise the dignity of the profession.

economic or accountancy skills where they are currently lacking, and to introduce an understanding of Shareholder Value Added and metrics. And the third step is to attract scientifically-minded people to counterbalance the creative marketing employees, and to recruit marketers who have the magic blend of scientific and creative abilities.

These elements combined can help put marketing in its rightful place, at the heart of business; and increase respect for the value of the profession as a whole. ●

Extract from *A Tale of Two Disciplines: Managing Marketing People*. © The Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2005. Reproduced with kind permission. For the full paper please visit [www.cim.co.uk](http://www.cim.co.uk).

---

1. **Davison, L.** (2004). *Marketing in the Spotlight: What People Really Think of Marketing*. Research International, 17th March.

2. Davison, *ibid*.

3. **Shaw, R., and Merrick, D.** (2005). *Marketing Payback: Is Your Marketing Profitable?* Harlow: FT Prentice Hall, p. 13.

4. *Correspondence with Insights*. Chartered Institute of Marketing, April 2005.

5. *Correspondence with Insights*. Chartered Institute of Marketing, May 2005.