

Essentials Advice from the top



Mike Hoban, Scottish Widows

Mike Hoban worked for RHM, Allied Domecq and WH Smith before his current role as marketing director at Scottish Widows.

What has changed in marketing during your career?

In years gone by, success was defined simply by the volume of customers and the breadth of your distribution. Now it is determined by the ability to make insightful connections that also deliver a profit. Hand-in-hand with this is the

increased sophistication that can be a real distraction. Just because you have a box full of Christmas decorations doesn't mean you need to put them all on the tree. Too many marketers are seduced by the conceptual niceties of integrated campaigns and the glamour of expensive production values. The real value of FMCG training is in teaching you to focus on what matters to customers. There is no place to hide.

What is the most exciting challenge in your sector?

I think all marketing is about making a connection with the customer. In financial services, there is still a perceived gulf between customers and organisations, not just in the niche areas of insurance, but in mainstream banking. There is still a dramatic opportunity. I believe the next Tim Mason will be in financial services.

What advice would you give to young marketers today?

Make sure you want to be in marketing. If you really want to be a chief executive, become an accountant. If your aim is to transform businesses, marketing could give you the chance.



Andrew Blazye, dunnhumby

Andrew Blazye spent 20 years at Shell in various senior global marketing roles before moving to dunnhumby in 2006 as customer experience director.

What has changed in marketing during your career?

The increasing acceptability and even desirability of customer self-service has driven innovation. From Amazon to Travelodge and even to self-checkouts in supermarkets, consumers' desire to be in control

knows no limits. This is a trend that has a lot further to run.

What is the most exciting challenge in your sector?

For dunnhumby, our challenges lie in internationalisation. This is not just about interpreting data through culturally relevant insights, but also about building partnerships on an international scale. Most critically, perhaps, it's about building our people to be international in their outlook. Broad capability is just as important as specific competencies.

What advice would you give to young marketers today?

Look for companies that have a great idea and the resources to make things happen. Make sure there's scope to grow both with, and within, the firm. It is critical to quiz them on how they will offer you the chance for early accountability. The great advantage of a large company is the ability to allow young marketers to cut their teeth on P&L challenges without doing too much damage. Smaller companies have to manufacture these opportunities with 'special projects' and new ventures.

What sort of brand is best?

FMCG brand management and, ultimately, category management remain the holy grails of marketing because they control not just communications but also production. Increasingly, though, the consumer data of FMCG marketers is less relevant than that of their retail customer intermediaries, who truly understand their shopper. Reflecting this, point of awareness, point of purchase and point of consumption are now recognised as distinct touchpoints by leading FMCG marketers. Retail and financial services firms have greater data resources, greater innovation challenges and a richer set of touchpoints. It is a shame that marketers don't always get access to, or control over, these key elements.

In these industries, the best place to start in marketing is not within the marketing team. Store management is a critical place in terms of experience, control and customer insight, but from a profitability standpoint, you cannot succeed without understanding the buying decisions that determine profitability. Attaining both the broad view and the power to achieve change in the service sector are much more challenging, but worth aiming for.

No single set of skills, and no single organisation type or sector, will suffice to create the 'total marketer'. Practitioners will have to accept increasing mobility to build their career.

Best practice: Vodafone

Due to customer expectations and convergence, at any one time Vodafone has up to 50 customer innovations under

On 18 July, the next piece in the series investigates how, with the landscape broken down into endless specialisms and sub-specialisms, you can build a satisfying career

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consideration. Finding ways to evaluate these before they suck up research and development spend and marketing investment is critical. Vodafone's Differentiation Potential System (DPS) enables it to assess which innovations have merit in which markets as quickly as possible. The system produces a single set of metrics for product development, with actionable diagnostics to refine the concept, and streamlined concept testing. Financial and customer resources are then allocated to the most promising ideas. At the heart of this system is a mechanism that assesses relevance, differentiation and the size of the market opportunity.

Each concept is tested with at least 1200 customers in Vodafone's key target segments, and, critically, the fieldwork is turned around within three weeks, ensuring that fresh ideas get to market quickly. One example is Vodafone's 'Simply' offering, whose specifications (simple-to-use phones with only basic features) were founded on direct customer input. The approach adds new layers of marketing sophistication, builds a single global/local team with a common language around research and development, and places marketers at the heart of profit-and-loss-based decision-making.

For Gillian George, senior customer insights manager at Vodafone, the consumer is driving the initiative. 'Plenty of organisations have used balanced scorecard or customer equity-type approaches at the tail end of the marketing process,' she says. 'By striving to embed this thinking into our research and development, we hope that we can make the whole organisation more customer-responsive.'