

A new framework to help marketing lead in business

Johnny Corbett

Source: WARC Exclusive, June 2019

Downloaded from WARC

Presents a new framework that provides a guide for marketers to understand the challenges they need to confront to make marketing a leading force within their business.

- There are three areas of a marketers world – customer, capability and culture – all of which take resources in time, energy and investment to keep performance on track.
- Clear signposts for improvement include the right balance of short and long term activation, a good grounding in the fundamentals of mental and physical availability, and a clear understanding of why creativity and emotion are important commercial tools.
- While the framework focuses on the overall macro domain of marketing as a function or discipline, it is just as relevant at a micro level for significant projects or business initiatives.
- Marketers are recommended to use the framework as part of a broader discussion with their wider teams, to understand how they feel about their own capability and what external partners feel about your customer focus.

Need to know

- The world in which businesses and brands now operate is more complicated and marketing's ability to lead within business has become more challenging.
- As the business world evolves, marketers need to ensure that they understand and adapt how they work to ensure that customer insight continues to drive their business.
- At its most basic, this new framework provides a guide for marketers to understand the challenges they need to confront to make marketing a leading force within their business.
- This framework explores three 'forces' impacting the marketing function – Customer, Capability and Culture – all of which take resources in time, energy and investment to keep performance on track.

It enables marketers to:

- Simplify and structure the big opportunities and challenges they need to tackle
- Set strategies for teams and projects with clarity and confidence

- Identify obstacles that hinder teams from delivering against marketing potential and identify viable solutions to move the business forward
- Help teams understand their own capability, identifying strengths and weaknesses
- Understand the wider understanding of marketing within the business as well as what external partners feel about the organisation's customer focus
- The overarching implication is that for marketing to continue – or return to – being a driving force of business, marketers need to embrace more than just 'the customer'.
- Clear signposts for improvement include the right balance of short and long term activation, a good grounding in the fundamentals of mental and physical availability, and a clear understanding of why creativity and emotion are important commercial tools
- Skills and talent are required to cover the 'traditional' marketing domains – of understanding, meeting, and informing customer needs profitably – but also the commercial arguments to persuade a business to invest resources as well as the human skills needed to coach and train leaders and teams.
- While the framework focusses on the overall macro domain of marketing as a function or discipline, it is just as relevant at a micro level for significant projects or business initiatives.

Marketing and marketers operate in a challenging and changing environment

If saying that the marketing world has evolved over the past decade is an understatement, then trying to explore the drivers of that change is an exercise as huge as boiling the ocean (though perhaps nowadays "downloading the internet" would be more appropriate).

Whatever your perspective on why we are where we are – digital explosion, global recession, failure of trust, lack of capability – it is safe to say that the world in which businesses operate looks fundamentally different today to how it did a decade ago.

With that change has come new challenges for marketers; while 15 years ago the concept of a "marketing-led" business was not all that peculiar, today it would raise eyebrows; at the top of organisations the CMO has the shortest tenure of any role on the C-suite¹; at the opposite end less than 5% of graduates believe that marketing offers a real career opportunity.²

And marketers haven't always tackled those challenges brilliantly; campaign effectiveness has fallen³, short-termism has risen and Mark Ritson's column inches against shoddy marketing grow ever longer.

That's something businesses should worry about. Marketing and brand building are investments in long term profit growth and a solid brand is, to quote David Kershaw, CEO at M&C Saatchi, "an insurance policy in an ever-turbulent world; more needed than ever."

Over the years I've been lucky enough to work on some of the world's best brands in leading businesses like Diageo, Birds Eye and Dulux.

To a "normal" person (a customer or consumer, rather than a marketer) that mix of alcoholic drinks, frozen fish and paint might seem a bizarre combination. In business, what they have in common is that marketing – the practice of bringing customer insight into a business and using it to create competitive advantage – is seen as a discipline that drives business performance. Marketers are responsible for customer insight and marketing is at

the heart of setting the strategy, overseeing performance and creating the buzz in the business.

For a marketer, that creates opportunity, because it provides the chance to serve the customer better, and in doing so drive growth. It's still a challenging job – especially as the number of touchpoints and purchase points has exploded – but it means that marketing plays a role in leading the business.

Identifying what helps and what hinders marketing from leading in business

Over the past 12 months I have spoken to a huge range of brand and business leaders about the challenges facing marketing today; about what helps and what hinders marketing from leading in business. It's been a diverse mix of brand owners and their creative partners, covering product and service, B2B and B2C, digital and physical.

Some have said that “marketing is dead” and some that “the opportunity for marketing has never been greater.” Indeed, some have said both. All agreed that the world in which businesses and brands now operate is more complicated, and that marketing's ability to lead within business has become more challenging.

Support to understand and simplify what it takes for marketing to lead in a business is as valuable as it is scarce. If the framework below – developed as a result of the conversations I have had – plays some role in addressing the challenges marketing leaders face, then it's a useful addition to the corporate dialogue.

I've been hugely appreciative of the honesty in these conversations; the challenge is one which has clearly resonated with people responsible for some of the industry's most admired brands and businesses. With that honesty has to come a certain degree of confidentiality; I've been given a 'warts and all' perspective, but nobody wants to be identified as 'the warty one.' That said, I hope the direct quotes I've included here give a sense of the colour of the conversations.

This framework is a tool to help marketing lead in business; by understanding the forces at work in their organisations, diagnosing where challenges exist, and uncovering solutions to address those challenges.

It's simple enough to be understood in one sitting. It is also instructive; pointing the direction for marketers to follow, providing guidance to frame both thinking and action planning.

As ever, depth of understanding is important; the more rigour applied to using the framework as a diagnostic tool, the richer the conversations and outcomes. However, there are also some easy to process actions which marketers can start adopting today, which I have covered at the bottom of this summary.

Three forces to help marketing lead in business

There are three areas of a marketers world – Customer, Capability and Culture – all of which take resources in time, energy and investment to keep performance on track. These 'forces' interact with each other, the balance across all three needs to be maintained, and what each needs to deliver should be determined by a clear business or organisational strategy.

1: Customer: the creative output developed in response to insights about a brand's

audiences.



The creative output developed in response to insights about a brand's audiences.



Products



Brands & Branding



Communications & Advertising



Content & Creative



Customer Journeys

The force of the customer's world, contains all the parts of your brand a customer touches, sees, hears and, nowadays, that they experience. Best developed along a defined customer journey in response to insights about your audiences, this is what is traditionally viewed as the heartland of marketing delivery. Are the products or services being sold desirable, are the assets distinctive and are branding, communications and experience materials consistent and creatively impactful?

2: Capability: knowledge, skills, attitudes and reference points that a team needs to deliver results

The knowledge, skills and setup needed for for marketing to achieve desired results



Knowledge & Skills



Attitudes



Structure and capacity



Reference Points



Systems & Equipment



CAPABILITY

The force of capabilities, and the gaps, vary hugely across different organisations, depending on their history, and their future plans. They include the standard definition of capability – skills – but crucially also cover the information and understanding of why we do our jobs (knowledge), and the beliefs held by a team about what good is and what it looks like (attitudes and reference points).

3: Culture: the 'permission' – either explicit or implicit – granted by the organisation for marketing to lead in the business



CULTURE

The 'permission' granted by an organisation – explicitly or implicitly – for Marketing to lead in the business



Relationships



Opinions & Language



Authority



Decision Making



Influence

Cultural forces – across a whole business – are a vital part of any team's or businesses' ability to do their job, but specifically here it's focussed on the authority or permission marketing has to set the agenda for an organisation. Are they a crucial part of decision making? Do they drive the business strategy, or respond to it? Are the decisions they make, the people in their teams, and the output they create seen as vital for commercial success and is the quality of marketing understood and respected?

The sweetspot: balance and the impact of imbalance

When the three forces are balanced, marketing is set up for success; with a strong outward facing brand experience, the capability to manage that experience today, and for tomorrow, and a business which sets marketing up to be a successful driving force within the organisation.

THE SWEETSPOT

Balance across Business, People and Plans



Everybody knows the role that Marketing plays in delivering business results.



There's confidence that Marketing has what it needs deliver the business results needed.



Connected teams understand the role they play in helping Marketing deliver results.



CULTURE

The 'permission' granted by the organisation for Marketing to lead in the business



CAPABILITY

The knowledge, skills and setup needed for marketing to achieve desired results



CUSTOMER

The external face of your brand that people see outside the organisation

Customer, Capability and Culture all interact with each other, but the balance is a delicate thing to strike

and when it is out of kilter - where one (or more) is missing - some consistent challenges occur; emotional 'hallmarks' which can undermine strong marketing delivery.

Customer & Capability, without Culture – Frustration

Commonly this looks like marketers who have had solid training and experience (Capability) and brands with distinctive and consistent brand promises, products, communications and experiences (Customer) but whose organisations think (Culturally) of marketing as a secondary function; who 'like' the brand but don't respect it as a source of growth.



Customer & Capability, without Culture → Frustration

Frustration arises because you have good people and brands being held back from delivering the marketing that they believe in and that could be most effective. It seems to occur in businesses where other functions have a legacy of being the 'agenda drivers' – for example in industries where product is the champion, and "new news" needs to be launched (whether the consumer really needs it or not), or where short-term commercial challenges take precedence.

As one CPG marketer put it to me "in marketing we all believe in the power of the brand to drive long term commercial success, we've even got econometrics to show it, but that all goes out of the window when the conversation turns to what the next price promotion is going to be."

Culture & Customer, without Capability – Exhaustion

These businesses tend to be investing in marketing and believe (Culturally) that the brand is an asset which delivers growth – even if they have only anecdotal proof of that. They have solid brand assets and a history of good marketing results (Customer). But the Capability gap means they often deliver these results through blood, sweat and tears, rather than through focus, diligence and coherence. There are often lots of ideas, but no way of knowing why they are good, with leaders who frequently need to step in to compensate for gaps in team capability.



Culture & Customer, without Capability → Exhaustion

The exhaustion comes from teams who are often excited by the brands they are working on but lack the experience or training necessary to be able to execute smoothly. It's not always just about 'process' – though I was amused by the story of the digital entertainment brand who ran a Christmas campaign every year, religiously started planning for it in September, and wondered why it was always done in such a rush – capability gaps can occur across the marketing mix, in everything from creative to commercial understanding.

I have to admit to being uncomfortably surprised by how common it was to find people being asked to do things that the role should have been able to do, but the person in the role was unqualified for. At its simplest, this is the world of the Firefighting Marketing Director – as a frustrated FMCG leader exclaimed: "I'm an experienced senior marketing leader who ends up doing everybody else's jobs!"

Culture & Capability without Customer – Indifference

Of all the examples I found, these businesses are perhaps the most fascinating. The assumption would be that if the Culture and Capability are there, then the Customer facing world would follow; however there seems to be a tendency for marketing with this profile to look a bit 'lopsided' – they tend to be more 'functional' than 'emotional.'

At its most blunt, the marketing delivery lacks powerful emotional insight and leaves the brands suffering from 'Indifference.'

They have a strong belief in marketing investment, but that investment is often short-termist, heavily focussed on performance marketing and conversion at the bottom of the funnel, rather than longer-term, brand building investment at the top of the funnel.



Culture & Capability without Customer → Indifference

In the Customer world, if brand building investment is even part of the mix, communication tends to be either category generic – with heavyweight budgets making up for lower impact creativity – or product rather than brand led.

To use Simon Sinek's language, there's a lot of What and How, but not enough Why.

In Capability, they'll often have champion 'number-led marketing' with lots of data and metrics, a strong performance marketing resource, but underestimate the impact that emotion and creativity could have in their plans (or indeed the risk inherent in lacking emotion and creativity).

The indifference therefore arises from output which could be so much more powerful if the power of true insight was unleashed behind it (and absolutely, understanding what a real insight is crops up regularly as one of the areas for improvement in Capability.)

The 'traditional' categories which are referenced in this area are Auto, Perfume and Watches – categories with 'identifi' advertising where you struggle to recall which brand it was for, as well as those brands who invest in advertising where creativity is limited to "a spinning packshot" – driving awareness perhaps, but not salience.

However this is also the story of tech where the purity of the product, the lower-funnel, and the digital algorithm has got in the way of what the bigger consumer proposition is. One online fashion brand carries the unenviable reputation as a place where "the performance system is amazing, and the brand has been a real figurehead of the category but mention anything like brand Strategy or Advertising and you get sent out of the room."

Implications: marketing needs to move beyond the customer

At its most basic, the framework provides a guide for marketers to understand the challenges they need to front into to make marketing a leading force within their businesses. The overarching implication would be that for marketing to continue – or return to – being a driving force of business, marketers need to embrace more than just the customer.

Certainly, in the 'Customer' world there are some clear signposts for improvement – to name but a few (and not

enough); the right balance of short and long term activation, a good grounding in the fundamentals of mental and physical availability, and a clear understanding of why creativity and emotion are important commercial tools⁴ – marketing has never been easy, and today’s environment is as challenging as any.

In Capability, just being ‘a good customer marketer’ is no longer enough. Brands need investment to thrive – yes economic investment, but also the people investment in teams, and the energy of an organisation to get behind the plans. Capability therefore needs to cover the ‘traditional’ marketing domains – of understanding, meeting, and informing customer needs profitably – but also the commercial arguments to persuade a business to invest, and the human skills needed to motivate.

Culturally, for marketing teams to lead the business agenda they need to demonstrate, with evidence and humility, why their business should care. The information and the results that marketing brings to the table are critical ingredients for commercial success; they are the insight about customers which can be used to unlock growth, and the long-term profit impact that comes from having powerful brands. But those things are no longer ‘givens’; they need to be monitored and the results communicated so that the whole business champions them, not just marketing.

Recommended actions and next steps

The first recommendation would be the simple act of reflection; contemplating the following questions:

- Where your business or organisation might ‘map’ on the framework
- In each area what would ‘great’ look like, and how close to that are you at the moment?
- How might some of the challenges you face be addressed as a result

We would also recommend using the framework as part of a broader discussion with wider team, to understand for example:

- How do your team or function feel about their own capability?
- What do the wider organisation feel about the culture of marketing within the business?
- What do external partners (retailers, agencies, suppliers) feel about your Customer focus?

Understand where you are compared to other organisations and get some more robust data and insight on your business:

- Setting ambitious targets in each area which you regularly review as a team
- Identifying the ‘From’ and ‘To’ states in the three areas and the key stages between the two
- Giving ownership of a plan in each area to a member of your team or business to drive action

While the framework focusses on the overall macro domain of marketing as a function or discipline, it is just as relevant at a micro level for significant projects or business initiatives; it can be used to:

- Identify what customer insight is needed for a project to be successful
- The skills and knowledge a team will need to deliver projects and initiatives
- Cultural barriers or obstacles which might hinder successful project deliver

A final word on ‘marketing’

In the course of developing this framework it has become clear just how vague the definition of marketing has become. Many people have asked me “what do you mean by marketing?” or commented that the framework “isn’t about marketing, it’s about business.”

When I have used the term marketing here, I have used it to refer to the practice of bringing customer insight into a business and using it to create competitive advantage.

Some businesses do that through a function called Marketing, some complement that with a Chief Customer Officer, some with a Head of Effectiveness, some with Customer Experience and Customer Service functions; but all of these still fit within that broader definition of ‘marketing.’ The evolution of these functions demonstrates part of the challenge for the modern marketer; to truly make marketing a driving force with their business they need to be working more broadly across the organisation than ever before.

Whatever business decides to call it, or how to structure their teams, marketing has always been – and still is – about understanding the customer and using that knowledge to make a commercial difference.

In a world of turbulence, that constant should be a welcome relief.

Sources

1. http://static.kornferry.com/media/sidebar_downloads/Tenure-Comparisons-of-C-Suite.pdf
2. <https://www.marketingweek.com/2018/03/06/marketing-recruitment-crisis/>
3. <https://effworks.co.uk/ten-best-charts-binet-field/>
4. <https://effworks.co.uk/effectiveness-in-context/> and <https://ipa.co.uk/knowledge/publications-reports/the-long-and-the-short-of-it-balancing-short-and-long-term-marketing-strategies>

About the author

Johnny Corbett

Founder and Director, Hammond and Finch Ltd

enquiries@hammondandfinch.com

[LinkedIn](#)

www.hammondandfinch.com

Johnny Corbett is the Founder and Director of Hammond and Finch Ltd; the Marketing and Communications consultancy that helps marketing lead in business.

Johnny is part of The Marketing Society Leaders Programme alumni, and has worked on a number of commercial, sales and marketing leadership teams; he gets as excited about people and leadership as he does about great brands and business results; “whether working with businesses, brands, or people, it’s about unlocking the potential to make extraordinary things happen.”

© Copyright WARC 2019

WARC Ltd.

Americas: 229 West 43rd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036, United States - Tel: +1 212 201 2800

APAC: OUE Downtown 1, #44-03, 6 Shenton Way, 068809, Singapore - Tel: +65 3157 6200

EMEA: 33 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6UF, United Kingdom - Tel: +44 (0)20 7467 8100

www.warc.com

All rights reserved including database rights. This electronic file is for the personal use of authorised users based at the subscribing company's office location. It may not be reproduced, posted on intranets, extranets or the internet, e-mailed, archived or shared electronically either within the purchaser's organisation or externally without express written permission from Warc.

WARC[^]
BY ASCENTIAL

