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The Marketing Skills Gap Paradox: **A New Approach to Closing the Gap**

White Paper

The Paradox

The dark ugly secret that no one wanted to talk about is out in the open. After years of being swept under the rug, the very real issue of the growing marketing skills gap is being openly talked about and not just by marketers. It's on the radar of CEOs, C-Suites, and boards.

With new technologies like voice search and AI, new practices including hybrid ABM and orchestration, expanding power and influence of customers on brands, and the expectation of marketing metrics, in financial terms, at your fingertips - the pace of change in marketing can be overwhelming. The skills gap issue is now every organization's Achilles' heel. And it's everybody's problem – not just the CMO's.

The paradox in this situation is that while organizations expect and need Marketing to develop the foundation from which and to drive revenue growth, few actually understand Marketing.

Even at the CEO level, there is a lack of understanding of what defines a world-class Marketing organization and the metrics by which to manage it. Let alone understand how Marketing competencies and strategies must purposefully evolve as the company progresses through its stages of growth. CEOs rely on trust, gut feel and what worked for them in the past.

Marketing leaders are equally responsible for the paradox. When stepping into the role the pressure to 'move the needle' is so intense that crucial situation assessment, strategic plan and triage are short changed under the pressure of delivering highly visible results in areas that are sore points with the CEO and Board.

Their focus is on the short term pipeline with the long term tabled until they 'come up for air', meaning when the funnel is working and marketing generated leads routinely convert into sales. All too often, that 'air' doesn't come at all or not often enough.

At the root of the paradox is a strategy and marketing disconnect. Organizations rife with gaps miss a direct link between measurable, time-bound business objectives and specific marketing strategies to deliver those results. It's hard to build the right competency portfolio when objectives are vague and even harder if they not relevant of the company's growth stage.

Most plans define revenue, EBITDA, number of customers, and possibly market share targets, and after that everything gets fuzzy.

"If I want to be better than competitors then I'd better do something smart with that pool of people and that means I will provide training, etc."

- Mike Kami,
Protégé of
Peter Drucker

Where are the Gaps?

According to a study by General Assembly, an online micro-education vendor, "[The State of the Skills: Digital Marketing 2018](#)", a majority of the 10,000 study respondents lacked sufficient analytical skills to calculate metrics and sufficiently interpret the best results to define the correct course of action.

"The most common mistake individuals made was not understanding how metrics relate to the various steps in a marketing funnel. Misinterpreting the meaning of metrics at any of these key points can lead to misunderstanding how a campaign is performing down the line, culminating in the potential to make poor decisions with marketing budget, next steps, and beyond."

Common marketing skills gaps:

- Social media,
- Demand generation,
- Content marketing,
- Programmatic advertising,
- Customer experience, and
- Search engine optimization.

When analyzing which marketing channels marketers struggled with the most, the findings are surprising - content marketing, social media and demand generation.

Digging deeper into the content marketing gap, the weakest skills were found in impressions with engagement, video content marketing and defining and evolving SEO to drive asset performance. In social media, it is around paid versus nonpaid tactics and vanity versus business-critical metrics.

Demand generation gaps include not understanding how various multi-touch attribution models works. Outbound marketing gaps are in A/B testing, multi-touch email marketing campaigns, and language and tone tuned to personas.

These gaps should not be a surprise. Of the 15 features available in popular marketing automation systems only a few are used. The [majority of features are used by only 33 percent](#) of companies. The top most used features are: Email, web forms, landing pages and CRM Integration.

In the customer experience skills gap most marketers lack proper training to conduct qualitative and quantitative research or know when to use which method. That in turn limits their ability to define a blueprint to align their organization to customers' expectations across the lifecycle. And with that comes the inability to deliver customer experiences that drive brand preference.

Where are these skill gaps in marketing organizations?

In our consulting work we have found the gaps are most prevalent at and below the Director level, regardless of career tenure. These are the very team members responsible for program execution.

No wonder Marketing and the C-Suite are frustrated and the turnover rate is [17 percent](#), the highest of all job functions.

A New Approach

When confronted with a skills gap, the most common reaction we see is to re-organize, upskill existing headcount, replace the marketing leader, and/or hire additional headcount. While these actions might help in the short term, they don't solve the paradox. A new approach is needed, one that balances short term results with long term sustainability.

From our extensive work with North American and European B2B growth companies, our five step approach to closing the skill gap is as follows:

Step 1: Expand Marketing Objectives in Your Strategic Plan

Ensure your strategic plan includes clearly stated prioritized measurable and time bound marketing strategies, objectives, and tactics that move the needle aggressively. Incorporate the strategies into your MBO/performance process to help employees 'connect the dots' between the company objectives and their individual roles.

Step 2: Makes Skills Assessment a Standard Practice

Assess your marketing programs and competencies twice a year. Compare your results against industry and growth stage benchmarks. Focus on the portfolio and its alignment to company objectives.

Step 3: Get Agile by Defining Core Strategic Skills

Define what marketing activities should be handled internally for strategic, competitive, customer experience or efficiency reasons. Define the associated skills that must be internally mastered then match employees to the skills matrix. The matrix will identify the gaps. Fund every employee to attend one education program annually to build a skill they and you need.

Step 4: Identify Non-Strategic Skills that can be outsourced

Implement a metrics-based plan to determine skill sets that are expected to change rapidly during the year or are not business critical, to head off future emerging gaps.

Step 5: Use SMEs in Short Term Burst to Close Gaps

For the remaining skill gaps, bring in credible subject matter practitioners to move the needle to partner with your team to transfer their knowledge and deepen skills

The American Marketing Association recommends bringing in external resources to help close the skill gap. Their word of caution is "unless marketing leaders start rethinking the skills gap, they could end up dangerously short on talent." And with it negatively impact the top and bottom line.

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Parachute Services

In our 20+ year history of serving B2B growth stage and global companies in technology, manufacturing, distribution, education and professional services, we have routinely encountered the marketing skill gaps. As we worked with clients on business strategy, customer experience and marketing, increasingly our team took it upon themselves to coach clients, share best practices and help to close the gaps.

As a result, New Business Strategies is often asked to step in address specific gaps and level the playing field by improving the organization's ability to compete. Our philosophy is to coach, train, and share best practices to build client self-sufficiency. That became the genesis for our [Parachute Services](#).

Our hands-on approach and experienced marketing team can step in, fill the gaps and get the work done quickly that drives measurable growth. We match your needs and company culture with the expertise needed and the right team members – part- or full-time – until the KPIs are met or for an agreed upon time period. Parachute Services delivers the agility that is critical during times of market change, transition and growth.

Our typical client results:

- 30-75% marketing ROI increase
- 100% increase in qualified leads
- 3-5 x pipeline velocity

The New Business Strategies Parachute Difference:

- We move the needle.
- Our contracts are for 90 days, renewable.
- Jointly define, upfront, target KPIs to achieve.
- Every engagement is customized to meet your situation.
- We transition out by training existing or help to recruit new staff.

Parachute Services include Demand Generation, Strategy and Planning, Social Media and Communications, Routes to Market and Product Marketing.

We'd love to learn what marketing challenges you face, [set up a free 30 minute call](#).

New Business Strategies®

We listen. We craft. We deliver.

New Business Strategies® is a marketing strategy and customer experience consulting firm.

Based in Silicon Valley, CA, we have the proven track record and methodologies to successfully foster enduring and profitable customer relationships.

To learn more please visit us at www.newbizs.com or connect with us at: +1 415.309.7017

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