

## Business and Communication Insights

A good reputation doesn't go unnoticed with buyers, investors and recruits. In many markets it is the most valuable asset you can have. Kelso Consulting works with ambitious businesses of all sizes that want to significantly enhance their reputation so they are recognised as leaders in their markets.

We particularly specialise in securing prominent editorial coverage in the national and international business media.

We also create and implement integrated business development programmes for businesses that want a pipeline of leads created quickly. These campaigns combine a range of marketing techniques to secure meetings with decision-makers for our clients targets.

## How to get on the board and stay there

**How can marketers make their mark at the most senior levels of business. Mark Johnson asks the marketers who know.**

In ultra-competitive times, companies place a great deal more value on marketing. It is perhaps surprising then that where competition has increased in the professional services sector, few professional service firms have appointed marketers to the board or made them partner.

On this score, professional services may seem slightly behind the times, but in fact they are not alone in under representing the marketing function at the most senior levels of business. New research released last May by The Chartered Institute of Marketing, revealed that only eight of the FTSE 100 companies have a marketing director on their executive board.

Though the data is not available, the fact that marketing directors at this level in professional services are probably even rarer is widely surmised from observation. Nonetheless, a question rarely debated openly within the competitive world of professional services is: Why are there not more?

"The professional services sector knows it needs good communications. That's not the battle. It is to prove the value you can bring as a marketer," says Emma Brierley, CEO of human resources company, The Xchange Team.

According to those marketers who have made it to the board or are offered partner status, the problem is primarily cultural. Neither marketers nor the professional services firms have sufficient mutual experience.

Marketing as a business function - and therefore marketers too - have grown up and out of FMCG companies driven by understanding exactly who the consumer is and what he or she wants. Marketers who transfer to the partner-based collegiate, networking style of accountancy and insurance firms find themselves in unfamiliar waters and are very often unable to prove themselves. As former Andersen marketing partner, Edward Bowman explains: "Unlike marketers in an FMCG, in the professional services sector marketers are viewed as a cost, and treated as a second-class citizen."

*“It’s all about winning respect. If you don’t do that, you’re dead”*



Laurie Young

*“The battle... is to prove the value you can bring as a marketer”*



Emma Brierley

What he also points out as perhaps less appreciated by marketers is the fact that most professional service firms themselves have little marketing expertise and consequently tend to undervalue marketers.

On the latter issue, Bowman - who now runs his own marketing consultancy - says most professional services firms have yet to realise the potential of a serious investment in marketing.

“There is a big opportunity for marketers in professional services because most of them are highly sophisticated sales organisations, but they don’t understand marketing.”

“Sales-led organisations tend to sell anything to anybody. Market-led companies select who they sell to. Professionals services are unsophisticated about how they focus on the market, target customers and understand what they need,” adds Bowman.

Although the sector is seeing increasing competition and is beginning to realise the need for better marketing and PR, one sticking point for most partnerships and executive boards is the fact that marketers are not fee-earners. And fee-earners are the lifeblood of most professional service partnerships. Overcoming that obstacle is key, say some senior marketers.

Laurie Young, a marketer who has managed to do just that, has been made the first marketing professional to join accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers at partner level in its 120-year history.

He was made marketing partner - corporate finance and recovery, at the accountancy firm four years ago. He believes that to reach partner or board level, a marketer must develop and demonstrate a fee-earning capacity. “I’m somebody who has generated substantial fees in my own right,” says Young. Young’s marketing career spans working for state-owned BT during privatisation and computer company Unisys, before he established his own firm Blakes Marketing Practice in 1994, which he sold five years later.

“A fee-generating capability and judgment about what works in the professional services are very important,” he says. “It’s all about winning respect. If you don’t do that, you’re dead,” adds Young.

Hilderbrandt Consulting, associate consultant, Francis Quinlan - a former marketing director at Arthur Andersen - says marketers must create opportunities to generate revenue or develop a unique expertise in order to win respect at partner or board level.

“Marketers are in effect eunuchs in very sophisticated service companies. They don’t have daily contact with the market-place and don’t have skills the buyers want. The buyers don’t want to meet an intermediary, they want the expertise,” adds Quinlan.

“The only way to overcome that is to have an aggregate overview of the marketplace or sector they [the partners] are working with, so you have a broader view where the fee earners only have a very specific view,” adds Quinlan.

Bowman recommends that marketers use the skills that anyone with agency experience would have, to contribute to the bottom line: account pitches. “Marketers can add value by providing insight to the pitch team or by giving specific advice about pitch flow, pitch documents and so forth, as well as becoming part of the pitch team. They could also get smarter about business development and key account management.”

Gracechurch Consulting director Steve Blundell, who was formerly a marketing director at law firm Denton Wilde Sapte, advises marketers: ‘They need to be able to build trust in a non-threatening way and fit in without being abrasive.’

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*Edward Bowman*

## Tips from the top, and how to get there:

- 1 Learn about business development and key account management in this specialist area.
- 2 Take every opportunity to get involved in revenue generation.
- 3 Be a master of your own field.
- 4 Work at building trust with partners and the board.
- 5 Identify measurable targets that demonstrate the value of marketing.



Francis Quinlan

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“Nearly all marketers are hired to be change agents,” adds Blundell. “But they have to do it without alienating the partners and that is a truly difficult trick to pull. The danger is they might become a thorn in the side of the partners, or simply become an order-taker, never really fitting in. The middle ground is a delicate balancing act,” comments the Gracechurch Consulting director.

Proving the value of marketing to a sceptical board is key to winning trust and respect, says former PricewaterhouseCoopers director of marketing and communications, Roger White. “Marketers need to put firm, measurable targets in place and show they are delivering against them,” says White.

You have to have access to the most senior people. So much of partnership culture is collegiate and based on relationships and so you need the buy-in of partners and the people around you.”

While much of the advice offered by those who have risen to the level of partner within professional service firms centres on the need for transformation, from pure marketer to hybrid of marketing expert and fee-earner in order to make it to the board, some offer more stark advice.

Young offers this guidance: “If you are invited to join a professional service firm as a marketer, don’t join at director level, only as a partner. A director is seen as a tactical implementer and is not listened to by any of the partners.”

Either way, there are few easy routes to the top for those unwilling to face a challenge.

Making it to partner as a marketing professional. Laurie Young leads the debate on March 9th 2004. See inside back cover for more details.



Steve Blundell

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