

Dimensions – July 2015



Organisations' Purpose and the role of Marketing

There are regular debates about the role of Marketing, as a function, within organisations; often centred around the influence it achieves at Board level.

Quadrant has been prompted to revisit the debate by the increasing coverage surrounding the purpose of organisations and brands, the ethics of consumerism and sustainability in its different forms, and what some are calling 'Marketing for good' (image above from Marketing magazine article May 2015)

Our start point, though, is a benchmarking study conducted by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and published in 2009. This indicated that Marketing could play one of four different roles within an organisation ('leading, influencing or supporting?').

- i. **A specialist communications function**; with a primary role of implementing strategy through marketing communications programmes and management
- ii. **A support activity**; responsible for providing a 'sales support' function
- iii. **The 'customer champion'**; responsible for advocating and representing the customer in management decision making
- iv. **A trusted advisor**; responsible for contributing to strategy development as well as fulfilling operational marketing management requirements

Which of these roles is most appropriate will depend on the individual organisation, its marketplace, and the expertise and resource of the Marketing team but they are not mutually exclusive. It might be expected that the team includes communications specialists and valuable support is provided to 'Sales', but their primary role might still be to act as the customer and

indeed 'market champion', with an in depth understanding of market trends and likely future scenarios.

Fast forward to 2013 and the Marketing Society's new 'Manifesto for Marketing', which has at its core three challenges for marketers to become 'bolder leaders':

- a. **Pursue your purpose**; defining your organisation's purpose, making sustainable growth your central aim, and leaving a positive legacy
- b. **Champion customers**; anticipating customer needs, shaping the customer experience, and finding creative ways to engage
- c. **Mobilising the organisation**; collaborating with your peers, bringing the voice of the customer into the boardroom, and quantifying the cost and value to your work

Two years later and there seems to be no doubting the shift in attitudes towards the importance of sustainable living. It is an issue that young people globally believe is important to their lives, and many commercial businesses, as well as not for profit organisations, are responding. Unilever is a good example, with its 'Sustainable Living Plan'; to quote Keith Weed, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, 'For our brands, we are seeing particular growth in sales for those that have built purpose and sustainability into their brand mixes'.

If this is the way forward for organisations to succeed (sustainably) in the future, and who would disagree, then who better to adopt a key strategic role than Marketing? Marketing should be close to customers and their market, and should act and be recognised as a trusted advisor to senior management.

It may be a step up for many but it is a challenge that should be welcomed. If there was ever a time for Marketing to prove its value to the Board and stakeholders, now is it.

If you're looking to review your organisation's purpose, brand strategy and proposition, or the role and purpose of Marketing, we'd be pleased to have an initial chat.