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7 Myths CMOs (and Their Bosses) Gotta Stop Buying

By Gary M. Katz

Sometimes it seems like Chief Marketing Officers are living in the Wild Wild West, riding their horses from town to town, frequenting one saloon after another, stirring up a ruckus, and often leaving their town-folk (employers) wondering why that cowboy (or cowgirl) didn't quite live up to their fantasies.

The cowboy appeal. It's probably what makes certain CMOs attractive to CEOs and their companies in the first place. Have gun, will travel. Always up for a good scrap (even if it's the wrong fight). Good at hitting a target (even if the target turns out to be an innocent bystander).

No wonder the average CMO doesn't hang around town long (or is run out of town).

In order to keep the legend of the cowboy CMO intact, CMOs and the CEOs who hire them have perpetuated a few myths. It's high time (or is it High Noon?) that someone shoots holes in these myths. Because we aren't in the Wild Wild West anymore. We're now in the new world of Marketing Operations 2.0.

Here's seven myths that CMOs and their bosses truly need to stop believing if they want to get the most out of Marketing in today's world:

Myth #1 - "I'll just hire me one of them superstars." Though often forgotten or at the least minimized, people are at the core of any holistic effort to improve Marketing performance and accountability. It would stand to reason that the better the people, the better the Marketing organization. That's why everyone loves superstar performers, and if your organization is fortunate, you may even have a few of them. But let's get real: superstars are not going to solve all of your problems. They might even create a few. Superstars are hard to locate, hard to recruit, hard to afford and hard to keep. A superstar in one company could easily be a goat in another. And the best superstars aren't going to hang around a losing organization (or one that is so dependent on them that they are always expected to save the day). The smart superstar will walk out the door with all the experience and insight they collected on your dime, and you'll be left looking for a new sheriff. And assuming you find a decent one, you'll just be riding a different horse around in the same circle. Because a superstar strategy is neither scalable nor sustainable. And a truly great Marketing organization gets great results not just from the sheriff but all of the town-folk, even the day laborers.



Myth #2 - "If everyone just picks themselves up by the bootstraps and tries harder (or works smarter) ... " Marketing organizations have a bad habit of throwing bodies at problems, often creating huge inefficiencies because they fail to address the real issue – poor capacity management – at the source. Most of us have witnessed – or been in the middle of – people-intensive efforts that could have been easily streamlined with some foresight and a commitment to increasing the capacity of the function. Yet instead of investing in the necessary enabling infrastructure, (process, technology, tools, etc.) we put unnecessary burdens on the shoulders of our people. We've all heard the rallying cry. "People, we need to be better, smarter, faster, more efficient, etc. So we're all going to need to work longer hours. Everyone will be held accountable to deliver more results. And we'll win together." Upon hearing this call to action, we start out wanting to jump in and do our share to bale water from the sinking ship – until we realize our superiors are commandeering the lifeboats for themselves. Expecting more out of your people when you're giving them less support, less resources, etc. just isn't reasonable. Yet we do it with regularity. And we convince ourselves that it works. And maybe it does, for a short period of time. But if you expect your people to show up to work environment every day that resembles the fight-or-flight stress of a battlefield (or gun fight), you are going to experience a lot of casualties.

Myth #3 - "If we can just get some of that Marketing automation, that'll solve our problems." Companies seem to operate in one of two extremes. The younger, scrappier company (or the older company that has never taken Marketing very seriously) may invest very little in technology to support Marketing staff. The cost is poor resource utilization and lost opportunity. On the other side of the fence is the tech-savvy company that treats automation as the panacea to all of its Marketing department ills. It's hard to say which extreme is worse. But from a risk and hard cost standpoint, companies that make poor investments in automation are more exposed. Marketing automation is just a tool. If you have to change your entire company to run the tool, you've made the wrong investment. Your people will revolt. And your technology investment will be largely wasted. Marketing automation should help you to run your company, not the other way around.

Myth #4 - "If we can't quantify it, we shouldn't do it." As a Marketing Operations advocate, I love measurement. I'm titillated by analytics, especially predictive. I dream about a culture of accountability in every organization. Still I know from experience that a fixation on numbers alone, while appealing to the scientists among us, doesn't begin to capture the breadth of insight we need to make a real informed decision. Much of what we achieve in Marketing is extremely difficult (and costly) to quantify. What is the value of a key customer or strategic relationship? To what degree does our brand recognition get us on the short list for our sales opportunities? We may be able to create formulas or models to quantify these assets, but at what cost? If the cost of measuring your Marketing begins to approach the cost of your Marketing, something is definitely wrong.

Myth #5 - "I don't care what it takes, just get it done!" We all love the Nike "Just Do It!" campaign. It plays to our desire to turn our dreams into action. It makes us feel proactive, alive and like we're taking charge of our lives. But "Just do it" also has its dark side. How many times has an executive commanded that we stop making excuses and get something done – damn the consequences? In the process, we alienate our press contacts, our partners, even our customers. We see this often in the sales cycle when we push so hard to make a quarterly quota that we put our customers in awkward (even risky) positions, with nary a care about their exposure. We may get a short-term fix, but in the long run we damage important relationships because we are overly focused on taking care of our company's "needs" at the expense of whatever and whoever is in the way.



Myth #6 - "We can't spare a dime to invest in research." Our bias for action can lead us to believe that research is a waste of time. We convince ourselves that things are moving so fast that any data we collect will have a short shelf life anyway. Or if we realize we don't have a plan to convert data to actionable insight, we justify away the need for research. Or the research we do is conducted by people who don't have the training (or time) to do the job right. So instead, we shoot from the hip. We keep marching out the same Marketing programs that we believe have always worked for us (long after they stopped being effective). Our Marketing plans are grounded in assumptions and beliefs that would likely not survive serious scrutiny. Our entire Marketing effort sits atop a very shaky foundation.

Myth #7 - "We don't have time to examine our own navels." Whoever came up with this comment must have had an issue with process and the value of learning from experience. George Santayana reminds us that "Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Marketing teams need to take the time to collectively review the effectiveness of their Marketing strategies and how well (or poorly) they worked together to realize (or fail to realize) them. Successful execution of Marketing strategy is reinforced by a healthy system. When is the last time your organization underwent a system health check? Did you bring aboard an objective professional to assist in the diagnostic process, or did you do a self-examination? How did that work out? Did you make substantive changes or did you file the learning away to be acted upon some day?

So, here's a message for all you cow-folk out there: stop shooting yourself (and everyone around you) in the foot! You've got an unprecedented opportunity to do things differently. We're in the 21st century now! Let's leave the Old West behind and step into the new world of Web 2.0, Marketing 2.0 and Marketing Operations 2.0. You may not get to flash your shotgun as often, but you'll sure play a bigger role in building a flourishing town (your company) into something of which you can truly be proud.

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About the Author:



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