



# CMO Vibe Check:

## MARKETING LEADERS SPEAK AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT

CEOs are ratcheting up the pressure on marketing to deliver results with fewer resources. The voice of the customer holds more influence than ever. The very role of the chief marketing officer is rapidly evolving — and in some cases endangered, with brands like UPS and Uber eliminating the position altogether. At this pivotal moment, HATCH hosted a group of accomplished CMOs across industries to discuss their biggest challenges face-to-face. In a candid roundtable discussion moderated by Mike Proulx, VP, Research Director at Forrester, here's what we heard about balancing performance and brand, building teams for the future, and securing marketing's place at the leadership table.

### BRAND OR PERFORMANCE? YOU NEED BOTH

CMOs are tasked with meeting near-term performance numbers and hitting lead generation and sales goals, but they know in their bones brand-building work is just as critical — and will pay off by generating more demand down the line. For some CMOs, that means raising awareness for under-the-radar brands; for others, it's nurturing awareness into loyalty and "brand love."

To nail this balancing act, CMOs need to make data as integral to brand-building as it is to day-to-day performance marketing, utilizing the information at their disposal to deliver relevant — and even more personalized — brand messaging through a wide array of channels and platforms. But "data" is a four-letter word for some CMOs: According to our panel, their teams have no shortage of data but often lack the skills and resources to make sense of it all and put it to work effectively.

One market truth these CMOs understand deeply is that a growing number of consumers are motivated by a brand's purpose. This year, several of the CMOs are pushing to make their organizations stand for **something** bigger in order to stoke passion and community around their brand, both internally and externally. One leader pointed to a simple way of gauging progress: How many cars in the organization's parking lot show brand pride with a bumper sticker or window decal?

**"WE HAVE TO PERFORM  
AND TRANSFORM AT  
THE SAME TIME."**

— SaaS CMO

## GETTING AND KEEPING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Moderator Mike Proulx shared Forrester's findings on the misalignment between CEOs and CMOs. Forrester's research showed only 54% of B2C chief marketing officers report directly to their organization's CEO. Another key data point: While 90% of CEOs indicated that their focus on customers guides their brand, product and pricing strategies, only 57% of CMOs agreed. Given these disconnects, how do CMOs ensure their perspectives are heard and heeded by others on the leadership team?

**It's vital to be a businessperson first and a marketer second, said one CMO, eliciting nods of agreement around the table. CMOs must understand what drives growth for the business so they can redefine marketing priorities as business priorities, demonstrate the value of their marketing efforts, and make an airtight strategic case for their proposed initiatives, especially at a time when marketing budgets are under closer scrutiny.**

The power of the CMO's voice at the table is amplified by their ability to speak for the customer, so CMOs need to understand their audience better than anyone. Modern consumers have come to expect seamless, personalized experiences across touchpoints; CMOs are the leaders who know their customers well enough to ensure the organization's business strategy is aligned with those expectations.

**"YOU HAVE TO HAVE  
CONVICTION AND A  
POINT OF VIEW TO EARN  
TRUST AND PARTNERSHIP  
WITH THE CEO."**

– Healthcare CMO

## A TALENT GAP BETWEEN DATA AND STRATEGY

The social, digital world has provided marketers with a previously unimaginable wealth of data. But just having this data isn't enough. They need humans with the skills and strategic mindset to interpret, curate and utilize it. And that's where the talent gap lies that keeps CMOs up at night.

These CMOs believe in the timeless power of brand storytelling, but with a modern twist: The stories they tell should be informed by data insights. To seamlessly combine the elements of data, strategy and content requires marketers with a golden skillset one CMO compared to "alchemy." Finding those people, or upskilling current team members to become them, is a top talent priority.

As the CMOs discussed how to blend data and human insight, it echoed the common sports debate of analytics vs. instinct. Whether a CMO or a coach, some leaders are more comfortable making decisions based on what the data shows them, while others prefer to go with their gut in the end. No matter which camp they are in, though, CMOs need more "assistant coaches" who can help them use data strategically.

**"WE DON'T NEED  
MORE DATA. WE  
NEED HUMAN BEINGS  
WITH JUDGMENT."**

– SaaS CMO

**"KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT,  
AGENCIES. DON'T TRY TO BE  
EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE."**

– Education CMO

## FINDING THE RIGHT AGENCY PARTNERS (PLURAL)

While many came of age in a marketing world where agencies of record were the norm, CMOs don't have time for nostalgia. They are embracing the project-based agency model as a new, more flexible normal. Even without an AOR, many turn to the same agencies repeatedly for project work, building on positive past experiences and relationships.

Several CMOs also expressed a preference for specialization over full-service agencies whose true strengths and weaknesses can only be learned the hard way. By working with multiple agencies specializing in disciplines like branding, digital marketing, and content creation, CMOs can build a well-rounded roster of agency partners to meet their specific needs. Which isn't to say it's easy: Finding the perfect combination of agencies in a fragmented landscape, then keeping them aligned, can require significant cat-herding.

Not everything about the brand-agency relationship has changed. The CMOs still prize the decidedly old-school values of honesty, accountability, and transparency from agencies. And, as ever, agencies can stay on CMOs good side by offering strategic partnership and a steady flow of smart, fresh ideas.

## SECURING MARKETING'S SEAT AT THE TABLE

Marketers are facing demands from many fronts: anxious CEOs, empowered customers, the never-ending tide of new data to wade through. To tackle them head-on, marketing leaders must play several different roles seamlessly in any given day: The business-minded executive; the brand builder; the customer-obsessed envoy; the data-to-content translator; the multi-agency choreographer. By pulling off this feat of balance and versatility, marketers can prove that we should always have a seat at the table in any growth-minded organization.

***Want a seat at the next CMO Roundtable? Send us a note: [hello@hatchtheagency.com](mailto:hello@hatchtheagency.com)***

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** HATCH The Agency would like to thank the marketing leaders who generously gave their time and shared their perspectives at our first CMO Roundtable. We're thrilled you enjoyed this opportunity to converse and connect with peers. Based on your enthusiastic response, we're excited to hold a second CMO Roundtable with a new group of panelists later this year.

Our gratitude to Mike Proulx for expertly moderating a lively, fast-moving discussion that touched on a wide range of issues in a short time, and for sharing his Forrester team's eye-opening research to inform the discussion.

And thanks to GBH, a true Boston institution, for providing a perfect venue for the evening.



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