

Thought Leaders



The Five Questions CMOs Should Be Asking Their CEO



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Chief marketing officers have the shortest tenure in the C-suite, according to [Korn Ferry Institute](#). And some large multinationals are dumping the CMO for chief growth or customer or revenue officers. One reason for this shift could be a lack of CEO/CMO alignment. In my experience, the most successful CMOs are the ones who are clearly aligned to the chief executive officer's corporate objectives.

So how does a CMO establish that alignment? Proactively. Let's start with five questions that every CMO should ask their CEO — either at the initial interview or, for those already in the CMO role, with a regular cadence (say, quarterly or annually, depending on the business) throughout the relationship.

What can marketing do or deliver to best support you?

Don't just ask, "What are the corporate objectives?" Ask specifically what the CEO's expectation is of you as the leader of the marketing function to support their objectives.

The CEO may have a very focused requirement of marketing or may have a range of objectives that need supporting. If it is a range of objectives, an essential supplementary question is: How would you prefer to prioritize the objectives for marketing support? This ensures that the marketing objectives each have the same level of priority as each of the CEO's business objectives.

How will you measure my progress and success?

Naturally, if you are aligning to an objective, then you also need to know how your

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contribution and performance will be measured. Get the answers to questions such as: Will there be a mix of hard measures or soft measures? Are there measures currently in place? Where is the company now in terms of marketing's contribution to its success and where would you like it to be?

What is your timeline for delivery?

So, you have an objective and you have the way your performance will be measured. The next obvious question is defining their expectations for the delivery of that objective. An open-ended timeline can be a trap that can come back to bite you.

But if the CEO asks you to set the time frame, then let them know you will be coming back with a plan based on the answer to the last two questions — and expect to finalize the timeline together.

What resources do I have at my disposal?

This includes everything from your marketing budget to the marketing team size and composition to the assets and channels available to you as the marketing lead. It is possible that the CEO will not know what they all are. If this is the case, it's essential to have the CEO agree that, after you have completed an audit, you'll have the flexibility to request and make the changes required to deliver the agreed objectives.

What authority will I have within the organization?

The natural extension of the previous question is getting agreement on the authority of marketing within the organization; specifically, your level of authority to drive action or change not only within marketing, but also within interrelated departments. Marketing is an increasingly broader discipline within most organizations and yet, the marketing lead can be confined within a narrow definition of the function based on culture and past practices.

Asked and Answered

If you ask these questions in the job interview, it will certainly give you clear insight into how well you will be able to work with the CEO and deliver on their expectations. This should be the main consideration for anyone planning to join the C-suite. It also sets you up for what is required in your first 100 days should you be the successful applicant.

For those who are already working in an organization as a CMO, it should become the basis of a regular review with the CEO on the role, function, and performance of marketing under your leadership. Where there are obvious gaps or anomalies in any of the answers to these questions, there is an opportunity for building your case on what the answers should be — with the view to achieving the CEO's objectives in the timeframe agreed.

And if you outlast the CEO, then this will become the first conversation with the new CEO on their appointment.

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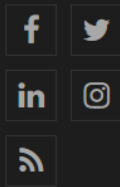
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