

GAME PLAN

Ambitious B2B marketers can drive their careers forward in 2013 by implementing a powerful personal action plan. **Lucy Fisher** finds out how

At the start of a new year, most of us will feel motivated to break bad habits and start new, more productive ones. It's also the classic time at many large organisations for staff to start thinking about their personal reviews, ahead of professional development reviews with their line managers. These reviews are the perfect platform for marketers to showcase their ambitions in a strategic way and ensure their role is a valued one across the wider business.

In September 2012, B2B Marketing surveyed more than 100 marketing leaders for its *B2B Marketing*

Leaders Report. Among the key findings, the report revealed getting senior level buy-in is B2B marketing leaders' biggest priority, after keeping on top of marketing trends and technology. Whether it's buy-in to specific marketing activity or simply buy-in to you as an individual, this task is key at every stage of your career if you want to progress.

"To have marketing activity championed by a non-marketer is powerful," points out Javier Diez-Aguirre, director of corporate marketing EMEA at Ricoh Europe. "It's show-time all the time. Make sure everybody knows about what you're doing and explain why it's added value. And focus on the facts, not just the qualitative stuff."

Diez-Aguirre stresses the importance of 'SMART' objectives – those that are strategic, memorable, achievable, realistic and timescaled. And while many organisations focus on professional development reviews typically in January or February, Diez-Aguirre advises marketers to consider their professional development and objectives regularly, rather than on an annual basis. He also encourages marketers to "manage by influence," which of course takes pro-activity and sometimes humility, too. "Very often we are not necessarily subject matter experts," he admits. "It's important to work with other teams during the planning process so goals are aligned." Providing evidence of this kind of approach

to marketing will add fuel to your personal review and show a deeper understanding of business-wide issues.

Increase your visibility

Caroline Taylor, vice president of marketing for IBM UK and Ireland, reiterates Diez-Aguirre's argument about marketers always being 'on show'. She advises that if you want to get noticed, you should ensure you know who your key stakeholders are, volunteer yourself for initiatives and don't be afraid of speaking out.

"You need two things to be successful," she says. "You need to be fabulous and you need to be visibly fabulous. It's all too easy to do the first but forget about the second."

Taylor advises seeking feedback from stakeholders across the business; not just those who you suspect will flatter you. As a

case in point, she reveals getting 'glowing' feedback from her own CFO really shifted her manager's impression of her. "It's especially powerful to get positive feedback from those you may expect to be your adversary," she says.

With responsibility for signing off the promotions within the marcomms function at IBM, Taylor says she's well aware of the need for individuals to stand up and be counted, to be enthusiastic, and build networks both internally and externally.

IBM performance reviews used to take place in January, with career development meetings following in March. Taylor reveals, however, that now a 'career smart' framework has been implemented, whereby managers are strongly encouraged to maintain discussions on an ongoing basis and to have conversations at least once a quarter.

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CAROLINE TAYLOR
VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING
IBM UK AND IRELAND

Own your goals

Successful marketing leaders all agree on one thing: managing your career is your own responsibility, and progression shouldn't be dependent on a one-off annual meeting with your line manager, which may or may not go your way.

This is something Claire Macland, VP, EMEA go-to-market at Avaya feels strongly about. It's all too easy to grumble, she says, "There's a big difference between those who own their careers and those who think the company owes them a career." Macland also advises if it's your ultimate aim to rise through the ranks, it's essential you can see the alignment of your personal tasks with wider business goals. In addition, she warns how some job descriptions are out of date.

"It may be some of your tasks are inherited from someone who thought at the time they were important. Don't let your goals be something that's done to you. Own them." She also cautions against becoming too specialist, too early. "If your job is internally focused and not customer-facing then you probably won't end up in board marketing management," she suggests.

It might, however, be the case that a sideways move is what is needed in order to get your career on the right track. Many advise confidential discussions, within mentorship schemes for instance, as a way to uncover where your passions and capabilities align.

Wherever your heart leads, don't be afraid of being seen as career-hungry. It may not be a very British trait, but open ambition is no bad thing, according to Julie Downing, EVP HR and marketing at IT consultancy NTT Data. Grow your network and your own personal brand she says, using all avenues open to you, and that includes online marketing forums, blogs and social media.

LinkedIn's corporate communications manager for EMEA, Richard George, says the professional networking site is being increasingly used as part of hiring decisions.



"We've got three lines of revenue – premium subscriptions, marketing solutions and talent solutions," he says. "Talent solutions is the biggest and fastest growing. More than 13,000 companies are using our network for this now."

He adds, "There are more than two million companies with pages and information regarding their products, services and ethos, so you can find somebody working at a company you're interested in and ask them how they got their job, or for an introduction."

If indeed you are happy to stay at your current employer, ensure you leverage personal and professional development reviews fully. Downing stresses the importance of thorough preparation and says this has become even more important in the current climate of reduced headcounts. "Having something in writing will help you to structure the discussion," she says. "Set half a day aside to draft it and then go back to it. It's very easy in this fast-moving world for things to get forgotten and, in this economy, people's roles have probably grown."

Break down boundaries

One area marketers can focus on when looking to drive a personal action plan is thinking about a proactive approach to understanding wider business functions.

Debbie Williams, chair of the Institute of Direct Marketing's (IDM) B2B Council and an independent consultant, found going out with sales teams a valuable experience in her career. "Sales always think marketing don't understand them. It shows personal initiative if you set out to understand

10 TOP TIPS to drive professional development

Follow these proactive steps to strengthen your professional development by **Steve Revill**, consulting partner at Positive Momentum

1. Think of 10-15 people that have the biggest impact on your ability to succeed in your job – peers, subordinates and superiors. Mark those relationships out of 10 and set about improving them.

2. Initiate new projects that have a wide impact on business performance. Take on additional responsibilities that will help solve your boss' problems.

3. Map out your boss' relationships and see where they overlap with yours. How can they 'accidentally' hear good things about the work you do and how you've done it?

4. Know your market and ensure you are monitoring competitor activity. Apply this market knowledge to every campaign or project meeting.

5. Stay close to your customers. Larger corporate marketing functions can be disconnected from the customer. Listen in on the call centre. Go out with sales and account managers.

6. View marketing and sales as one continuous process throughout the

sales funnel. Teams are rarely structured that way, so you have to bridge the gaps. Think in terms of lead numbers, quality and revenue.

7. Ask for feedback in an ongoing and structured way – not just as an annual tick-box exercise. It will help you do your job better.

8. Don't be afraid to be stand out and challenge convention. In big organisations, there can be silos that are hard to challenge, but if you do, the end result might well be increased efficiency.

9. Fix broken relationships. Ask yourself why a working relationship is not productive. Be humble. Look at the stronger relationships you do have and think about whether you can replicate elements of these elsewhere.

10. Remember, it's your job to manage your career. Use your external marketing skills (segmentation, targeting and positioning) to create a personal brand communications campaign of your own throughout the year.

their function," she says. Increasingly, she adds, IT and operations are key departments to collaborate with too, given that marketing technologies are exploding.

James Lawton-Hill, head of marketing at Brother UK, highlights the customer service team as another department for marketers to focus on collaboration. "It's important

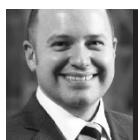
to work closely with the customer service team. People are having conversations daily about your brand. It's up to marketing to drive and support this alignment."

Lawton-Hill says during his career he's learnt how important it is to show business-wide understanding and demonstrate strategic thinking. It can be all too easy to get bogged down in day-to-day tasks and see things only from the perspective of the marketing department. By actively collaborating with other departments, you will have demonstrable evidence for your personal review about how you are supporting the wider organisation.

For Rob Morrice, managing director at agency IAS B2B, a wider perspective is key. Morrice pays for his staff to buy books, watch films, subscribe to professional magazines or attend events that will add to their pool of knowledge. "If you want to be good at ideas and at marketing, then you need both specific knowledge and general knowledge," he says.

Regardless of what your ultimate career game plan is, a well constructed personal review that considers just some of these issues will help drive your professional development in 2013, and beyond.

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