



## BRAND LEARNING

### **13/04/2007 - How to Develop Marketing Capability**

#### **Lessons for the Modern Marketer**

Training can provide benefits beyond the individual employees. Mhairi McEwan, co-founder of Brand Learning, explains why marketing capability development is good for business.

Training for marketers has come of age. No longer the preserve of studying for trade association exams or nodding off during lengthy PowerPoint presentations, a number of enlightened companies have realised that well-trained marketers can help boost the bottom line. A rigorous approach to improving the marketing effectiveness of a company by investment in building the capabilities of the whole marketing organisation is known as marketing capability development. Companies including Unilever, Hewlett Packard, Diageo, SABMiller, Tesco and BT are all investing to create a common marketing language, processes and tools and spreading examples of best practice across the organisation in order to drive growth with training being tied into addressing real business issues. Crucially, marketing capability development goes well beyond conventional training, bringing tangible commercial benefits by teaching marketers to work more effectively. It is a strategic approach to people development that aims to build marketing excellence. Marketing capability development boosts the performance of a team or business as well as an individual, which means it is a potential driver for growth, rather than a cost.

#### **The history of marketing universities**

Traditionally, rigorous marketing training has been the remit of 'FMCG universities' like Unilever and Procter & Gamble, who have always been well respected as training grounds for young graduates. In 1999, Unilever embedded its training and capability programmes into a global unit called the Unilever 'Marketing Academy'. Unilever's global Academy was launched and run by Andy Bird, co-founder of Brand Learning. It was endorsed and backed by a Council of 25 senior managers, one from each business group, to ensure everyone was in agreement. Similarly, Procter & Gamble has a rigorous internal marketing capability programme that actively involves its senior management.

#### **A common way**

More recently, external issues such as globalisation, mergers and acquisitions and increased commercial pressure have led other savvy companies to appreciate the importance of creating a common way of marketing across their organisation. It is no coincidence that the list of companies from Tesco to BT to Diageo to Hewlett Packard who have launched marketing capability programmes also tend to be at the forefront of marketing in their fields. For example, Diageo realised it needed to create a coherent brand building programme when it was formed from four very different companies - Guinness, UDV, Pillsbury and Burger King. Many of its marketers were speaking a different language and had a different understanding of common terms such as consumer insight, for example. This is a common problem among companies as marketers increasingly switch jobs more frequently.

Since 2000, Diageo has invested well over £35 million to train over 6,000 marketers in courses that have run across 12 languages in 80 countries. Its



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senior directors believe that the 'Diageo Way of Brand Building' or DWBB has helped to boost the growth of its core brands. Similarly, SABMiller launched a global marketing excellence programme called 'The Marketing Way' in 2001. It enables the global drinks company to judge the health of its brands in the same way from Cape Town to Moscow.

### **The three Ds**

Brand Learning advocates a three-pronged approach for companies keen to build marketing capability development: diagnosis, development and delivery. Diagnosis is about establishing the priority of needs for an organisation and scoping the capability development programme, development is about creating the right content, processes, best practice tools and benchmarks, while delivery is about launching and embedding the new skills and behaviours through different blended learning solutions.

### **Diagnosis**

In terms of diagnosis, it could be that one particular organisation needs to improve its approach to consumer insight, while another might believe that its priority is writing better communications briefs, for example. It makes more sense to work out the business priorities of an organisation, rather than launching a generic marketing capability programme from scratch, which could lack impact.

### **Development**

The development of an effective marketing excellence programme can be time consuming. One of the hardest elements is sourcing best practice within a global organisation, because typically pockets of excellence are not in one place. One company may have six different ways of writing advertising briefs depending on where the marketer first learnt their trade, and what country they are based in. In order to ensure training is as relevant and time-efficient as possible, both Unilever and Procter & Gamble tie training into real, live business issues. This approach has two benefits. First, it ensures that employees find the training saves time and helps them on the 'day job'. Second, it ensures that managers better value staff training because it often results in a solution for a real business problem.

### **Delivery**

Finally, the delivery of a capability development programme is often achieved best through blended learning, which means using different learning solutions to suit the culture and task in hand. At this point it is helpful to use an analogy. Learning is similar to brand communications, because they both try to change how people think and behave. While brand communications try to influence the behaviour of consumers, learning programmes aim to change the way employees behave.

The same comparison can be drawn between blended learning and integrated communications. While the 30 second TV spot was considered the holy grail of marketing, an integrated approach is more effective for today's media fragmentation. A week-long training course is learning's equivalent of the 30 second TV spot. And blended learning plays a similar role to integrated communications; it is about delivering a relevant communication at an



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appropriate time in a targeted way. This means that instead of training being confined to workshops, learning is delivered through a variety of different channels. These can include toolkits, online classrooms, e-modules delivered in bite-sized chunks, face-to-face mentoring with line managers, assignments, and a chance to practise new skills on the job.

### **Measure for measure**

Marketing capability development is still in its infancy as a discipline and inevitably there are some burgeoning issues that need to be resolved. For example, the ability to measure the effectiveness of a programme in terms of business performance is one issue that many marketing capability directors are grappling with.

In the same way that a marketing director wants to say that an investment of x on a TV campaign has led to a y% increase in sales, a marketing capability development director wants accountability too. Although most marketing capability development departments can draw on anecdotal examples to prove the effectiveness of marketing excellence programmes, it's still an inexact science. Ensuring business objectives and key performance indicators are set before a programme is developed is helping.

Developing robust, rigorous marketing capability programmes is demanding and constant. The content of learning programmes must continually be updated to ensure that learning is as topical and as relevant to the business as possible. Time is one of the biggest challenges for ambitious marketing capability programmes. Pressurised marketers need to believe that time training is time well spent, and this is why it's essential that programmes be tied into real business issues. Similarly, a marketing capability director must ensure the entire organisation endorses the initiative in order to boost effectiveness. Ideally, senior management should also be actively involved in both training and mentoring staff.

The changing role of the marketer means that marketing capability directors must ensure that marketing departments are well equipped to handle issues such as media fragmentation. This means that programmes should also continually evolve to include newer disciplines like digital marketing.

However, these are merely the challenges that come with staying at the peak of your game. Companies like Procter & Gamble and Unilever are convinced that their well-established marketing excellence programmes give them a competitive edge and have a tangible effect on marketing effectiveness. Similarly, it's no coincidence that other companies developing marketing capability initiatives such as Tesco, Diageo, Hewlett Packard and SAB Miller also tend to be market leaders. It's simple - marketing capability is good for business.