



BRAND LEARNING

Why Marketing Capability Development has come of age!

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Mhairi McEwan and Andy Bird, managing directors of Brand Learning, the agency winners of this year's Grand Prix with their client AkzoNobel, explain why marketing capability development has come of age.

AkzoNobel, formerly known as ICI Paints, was the winner of this year's Grand Prix in the Marketing Society's Awards for Excellence, for pushing, "the boundaries of what marketing can achieve." The prize wasn't simply a victory for AkzoNobel, it also signified that marketing capability development, a relatively young discipline had come of age.

It's not just AkzoNobel that is investing in marketing capability development. Today, many world-class organisations including Unilever, Tesco, Sara Lee, Phillips, Hewlett Packard, BT, Intercontinental Hotels Group and AstraZeneca are building marketing excellence strategically to drive demand-led growth.

Marketing capability development was relatively unknown 10 years ago when we founded Brand Learning. Fast forward to today and 57% of our clients have established a specific leadership role in their companies called a 'marketing capability director' or 'marketing excellence or marketing development director'.

AkzoNobel won the Grand Prix because of the way it transformed its marketing function and delivered clear impact on the financial performance of the business. From slowing growth and declining brand shares, the business delivered compound annual growth of more than 5% over the last three years to become the global leader in decorative paints.

For world-class organisations like AkzoNobel, marketing capability development is a strategic investment that links to business objectives and is carefully planned with as much focus and effort as the extensive funds that marketers often control.

We all know that customer-centric marketing and brand building can help drive top-line growth by attracting and retaining customer purchasing power. So how does marketing capability development achieve this? By tying training into real business problems, creating a common marketing culture and spreading examples of best practice across the organisation - marketing budgets can work more efficiently.

Marketing capability development ensures companies are marketing as efficiently, effectively and consistently as possible by sharing best practise, maximising ROI and boosting the effectiveness of marketing people and investments. It's more strategic than training because it overhauls the organisation's capabilities, rather than simply improving an individual's skills and behaviour.

Marketing excellence is not a quick fix. It's a long journey. For ICI, it began five years ago when its new chief executive, David Hamill, outlined an ambitious agenda for growth. In 2004, ICI founded the Advance Marketing Academy, supported by Brand Learning to create a world class 'ICI Way of Marketing'. This combined best internal best practice with leading edge external thinking. It continues to develop and evolve today.

Crucially, AkzoNobel's scoop of the Grand Prix has proved that marketing capability development is good for business and it's good for the marketing industry too.



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The BRAND LEARNING WHEEL™

The Brand Learning Wheel illustrates the five core drivers of marketing capability development.

The benefits of a marketing capability programme

- Everyone speaks the same common marketing language across the global organisation, so no more time wasted on definitions.
- By implementing best practice across the organisation, pockets of excellence are shared and distributed evenly. This ensures a company is no longer reliant on a few excellent individuals.
- By being given clear processes and tools to help write an ad brief for example, marketers ensure briefs are founded on powerful insights and clear positioning.
- Tying training into real business issues and problems will lead to immediate and practical application to brands in the business.
- Although there is no precise science to measure results, it will lead to more effective decision making and more efficient marketing investment. It will give a competitive edge and have a tangible effect on marketing effectiveness.
- It will lead to a greater retention of employees and better preparation for senior marketing roles.

Mhairi McEwan and Andy Bird are the founders and managing directors of Brand Learning and Fellows of The Marketing Society. Brand Learning is the leading international specialist in marketing capability development, running programmes in 34 countries last year. It also runs The Marketing Society's Marketing Leader's Programme.

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