

# Don't become obsolete. Look to your CMO to remain relevant

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Relevance is central to commercial success, but it is not as simplistic as it sounds, and requires a strategic marketing mindset within the strategy of the business. For this reason, the chief marketing officer (CMO) shoulders a deeply conscious role at board level, as this leader must "bring customers into the boardroom".



This is according to Dr Yvonne Saini who serves as the Director: Master of Management in the field of Strategic Marketing at Wits Business School. She pulls no punches in asserting the importance of the role of the CMO and challenges marketers to ask themselves the question, "What am I contributing to enable our business to lead with relevance and vision?"

## Reflect true meaning in customer experience management

The marketing department must be close to customers if it is to be effective, and this calls for specific and strategic imperatives to be assigned to these teams, she says.

CMOs who are entrusted at such a strategic level are given total responsibility for revenue growth and customer experience management. "When enabled at this 'change maker' level, their contribution expands to playing a central role in the design and implementation of related sales conversion strategies within an organisation," she says.

Marketing must not simply stop its delivery at marketing alone but needs to be an integral part of the business for all employees.

Saini adds that it is not enough for the CMO to keep pace with the revolving commercial landscape. "CMOs need to set a quickened pace of efficacy. To do this they must understand new data sources, marketing analytics and processes that are required to make sense of the rapidly changing environment and drive performance and stakeholder value strategies."

## Make the most loyal digital connection for your brand

The role of marketing in an organisation is to articulate and activate the human connection. She explains that it is the marketing department's responsibility to effect socially sensitised communication. "To be successful, CMOs must be able to

develop and implement marketing strategies across high levels of diversity, dynamics and connectedness.”

As a result of the fundamental behavioural shifts induced by Covid-19 and the leap to 100% digital activation almost overnight, different marketing and sales technologies have come into play. “Marketers must watch the trends and know how to adopt these technologies. If they do not, their business will become obsolete,” Saini says, citing the example of Telkom cards which “worked in another time but have become irrelevant since the pandemic”.

“Adoption of technology to meet the needs of customers is a necessity and while marketers have access to an extensive amount of information, they must know how to use this data effectively,” she explains. This calls for a handle on marketing analytics, customer relationship management (CRM), digital marketing, strategic brand management and applied consumer behaviour, modules that are covered in the curriculum. This specialist degree equips any professional with insights on concepts to best understand customers and how they make their decisions.

Marketers need to use technologies to serve their customer-centric purpose and to achieve financial sustainability, Saini adds. However, to do this, there are complexities that one needs to understand, analyse, and respond to quickly. “One good South African example is the retailer Shoprite/Checkers, which scaled up technologically in response to lockdown life, and targeted the middle class with a relevant brand experience of rapid store-to-door delivery.”

## **Align actions with key principles of ethics marketing**

Strategic marketing management is especially challenging in emerging markets – and critical to get right.

On the one hand, organisations operating in the more developed metropolitan and urban areas must understand how to develop and implement marketing strategies across increasingly digitalised customer interfaces. On the other hand, the unparalleled transition of an emerging consumer market comprising 2.7 billion people around the world requires a more traditional approach to marketing strategies.

Saini emphasises the importance of ethics as a business imperative. “To remain relevant every business must improve the lives of the people it touches. In the programme we discuss the theories, but at the same time interrogate how, as marketers and businesses, we can advance society at large.”

There is a clear mandate to secure a more socially conscious world of commerce, and marketers need to know what must be done differently. “Company leaders should look to their CMO to best understand their customers, and strategic marketers would do well to lead the way forward with vision and conscience - the world’s future hangs in the balance,” concludes Saini.

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