



A Parliamentary forum for Media and Marketing Debate

## Is the marketing sector heading towards a skills crisis?

**“The skills crisis in the marketing sector is a profound problem and this is one symptom of a much wider issue in the discipline”. These were the words of Richard Kenyon, Director of Marketing and Communications, Everton Football Club. He was presenting the motion ‘The marketing sector is heading towards a skills crisis’ at the Debating Group debate on 28 January 2019 at the House of Commons. The debate was sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Marketing. In the unavoidable absence of the Rt Hon Dame Cheryl Gillan DBE MP, it was chaired by Andrew Marsden, Chairman of the Debating Group.**

Richard Kenyon argued that the problem is a result of decades of marketing being ill-defined and therefore misunderstood, and of it not *earning* the respect it should have at the highest level of business.

The lack of marketing representation in the Boardroom and the number of untrained marketers are other symptoms and why we find ourselves heading for this latest skills crisis – one which, in fact, we may already have entered into.

Richard Kenyon explained the skills crisis.

- Only 33.6% of marketers rate their organisation’s data skills above average.
- Lack of data skills – something so critical to business success and marketing success – an area in which marketers irrespective of discipline or sector need to have a degree of expertise. It is incredible to think that a quarter of marketers personally rank this as their number one gap in skills.
- A benchmarking test of digital marketing skills of 5,000 marketing professionals, carried out by Target Internet, showed that on average, marketing directors had lower understanding of data and analytics than junior executives with only 1-2 years of marketing experience.
- Across the marketing profession as a whole, professional marketers’ skills were strongest in email marketing and general marketing, but weakest in content and mobile marketing and in skills related to usability and the user experience.
- As if that was not enough – they rank a lack skills in research and insight and – perhaps explaining the Boardroom issues – management and leadership skills as the next biggest gap.
- Furthermore, marketers report that there are skills gaps in analytics and content marketing across all seniority levels and sectors.
- And marketers in senior roles lack working knowledge of SEO, social media and programmatic advertising.

While some senior marketers may have studied before some of these areas even existed, they could have invested in CPD. It is no wonder talent in data and digital is in so much in demand – there simply are not enough people with these skills who are good enough.

Other research shows a lack of training for all grades in mobile marketing, optimisation, marketing automation, search marketing and data analysis and reporting.

Richard Kenyon commented, “So senior managers who do not fully understand and operators who lack training sounds like our crisis might be here for a while”.

Summing this up, marketers themselves say there is a skills gap in data, research and analysis. This is damning when you consider this is the area where marketing should be leading the way. Senior marketers admit to not being fully comfortable with digital and practitioners seem to say that there is a paucity of training being provided for them.

Ranked just behind these as an area of concern is a stated skills gap in the areas of management and leadership.

Richard Kenyon questioned the cause of this mess. Surely we could have seen this skills gap coming.

After all, marketing as a profession is becoming less attractive and less relevant for young people. CIM’s survey of 500 young people aged 17-19, who have left school or college in the past six months, found that four in 10 (41%) are interested in a career in marketing. Around a quarter (28%) felt the best way to embark on that career was by going to university, a fifth (21%) said a trainee marketing job, and 14% thought the best route was through a marketing qualification. Only 3% of University students think marketing offers the best careers opportunity (unidays) – one fifth of these state medicine as a good option, a quarter that state engineering and one third state finance and accountancy.

Those who do go on to study it, don’t stay in it – nationally, 82.5% of marketing graduates are employed after completion of their degree. Of this number, 51.1% go into marketing, PR and sales. More than half of these students state that marketing was never or hardly ever mentioned at their school, with only 1% saying it was talked about a lot (unidays). And marketing is the lowest-rated degree for delivering the best possible career, chosen by only 2% of respondents.

And the younger you go, the worse it gets. According to a *Marketing Week* survey, 0% of year 9 pupils said that they believe marketing offers them the best career prospects and only 4% would even consider a career in the discipline. Aside from them thinking that it is boring, repetitive, stressful and unable to give them the lifestyle they will want, they do not actually know what it is. They think it is interruptive – presumably linking it with advertising – and just ‘selling stuff’. Perhaps most damning, however, is they do not see it as a career with real prospects. Students are least likely to associate a marketing career with helping them to progress to the role of CEO.

And, of course, they would be right! Only 5% of UK marketing directors sit on the Board of FTSE 100 companies and it is worse in the US. There is a reason for this. And it is not some big conspiracy against the profession. Chairmen and CEOs are not sitting there with some irrational bias that marketers are not good enough to be in the room – they are doing this because there are not people within their business demonstrating the value, or if we are being blunt about it, deserving to earn a seat at the top table.

Marketers in senior positions are failing to lead the business in the way they should – failing to take responsibility for the entire customer experience and owning growth strategies. If they were, they would be on the Board. It is down to the marketers to take responsibility, to develop senior business skills, to drive retention, acquisition, profitability, customer relations, all of which needs a champion

in the Boardroom. So why isn't it the Marketing Director? Richard Kenyon believes that the discipline is ill-defined and not earning respect. And, as we have seen, marketers state they have a skills gap in leadership, so even the best practitioners may not be at the top table because they do not have the business and leadership skills. Marketing Directors should be linking cross functional teams, the first port of call for the Chairman or CEO on any matters relating to business insight, growth, customers, the soul and essence of its organisation – taking ownership of experience, data, digital, PR and reputation, sales and growth – uniting departments and untangling internal challenges that can naturally exist in organisations. But that is very rarely the case.

Marketers are truly in a viscous circle. They are not getting the numbers or interest at the top of the funnel: you can enter the sector without qualifications. We lack the right skills, we do not earn the respect and understanding of the wider business world – which means we do not get the interest and understanding to attract the best young people – and so it goes around.

We need a series of significant sustainable interventions to break this cycle.

While the feedback from the surveys of young people is chastening, more than 50% of those questioned did say that they would consider a career where they could use creative skills or contribute to growing businesses, so perhaps if we can be effective in re-positioning our profession we can turn things around.

If young people – millennials and younger – saw our profession as the creative, digital force which works across all business units to bind diverse departments together and lead business growth – as it should – then we would be in a much better place.

There is huge diversity within the marketing discipline – which, while currently confusing could become compelling and part of an attractive recruitment-focused narrative.

That has to be priority number one – but it will not come easily and it will need collaboration between stakeholders and individuals themselves to step up. It is a huge task, a long-lasting integrated marketing, PR and engagement campaign, requiring skill, resource and bravery. And it must start at the youngest ages possible – in primary school – captivating youngsters and providing an outlet for these creative young digital natives to prosper. As part of widening the appeal, we must also embrace diversity and open the profession up to everyone – offering a pathway for talented, creative and driven young people from working class backgrounds, something in which the profession has not got a good record.

The challenge, of course, is who is responsible? Who is up for leading this? Richard Kenyon commented, “I know that CIM and *Marketing Week* are both running campaigns to highlight and provide best practice answers for addressing this issue. But more needs to be done”.

Finally, we must ensure and make meaningful a genuine industry-wide commitment to formal training and CPD.

For too long, becoming and maintaining status as a marketer has been too easy. A bricklayer, a window cleaner, a vet, a GP could call themselves a marketer tomorrow and even set up in practice.

It is either a scandal – or a great opportunity, depending on your disposition – to read in *Marketing Week's* 2019 salary survey that the majority of marketers have not studied for a marketing qualification of any kind. Are they actually marketers then? Who says who is and who is not? “I couldn't decide to be a lawyer, accountant, financial advisor or any number of other respected professions tomorrow without proving at least some level of proficiency, so why should marketing be in this position?”

We need some rigour in the entry process and give some respect to the title of ‘marketer’ or we shall continue forever in this viscous circle. “How can we earn respect for our profession when it would appear we do not respect it ourselves?”

“I have personal experience of working with a marketing manager at a decent sized professional services firm who had reached that well-paid management position by carrying out fairly routine – barely marketing-related tasks for the partners – helping organising events for the partners, ‘having a good creative eye’, no qualifications, few skills, and absolutely no chance of making a difference or giving our profession the credibility it deserves at the top level of that particular organisation”. This is one example, but marketers in the audience would have similar experiences.

The obvious irony in the above is that this professional services firm – a law firm – would never dream of letting an untrained solicitor work alone on one of their cases or handle their clients. But, if it is only the marketing team, then qualifications do not seem to matter. If marketing – the discipline – is by CIM’s own definition ‘*The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably*’ – then surely giving the responsibility to untrained people is negligent on behalf of the employer. But why would they know any different when the qualifications are fragmented, confusing and, as we heard earlier, rare.

The industry itself does not even ask for professional qualifications. Admittedly, not a particularly robust piece of research, “but”, said Richard Kenyon, “from a Google search I carried out this week – from 20 adverts for mid-level marketers with decent salaries only three of them stated it was essential to have a marketing qualification – and, to be honest, I wasn’t that surprised”.

Richard Kenyon concluded: “Tinkering around the edges on this won’t work. We’ve tried that. The industry needs to come together and establish something like a licence to practice. Other professions have it and that gives them status, credibility and allows for benchmarking, helping the best to rise to the top. All things we need. It’s a big ask, a long, complex journey but an essential one if marketing is to have a positive future – both in the classrooms of today and the Boardrooms of tomorrow”.

### **Identity crisis**

Opposing the motion, **Gemma Butler, Marketing Director, Chartered Institute of Marketing**, argued that while there are indeed skills gaps within the industry, these are not signs of a crisis, but rather a reflection of a constantly evolving and diverse industry. She asked, “How can we declare a skills crisis when we do not know what skills we need?” In a lot of cases organisations do not know or define the role they want marketing to play and therefore the roles and skills needed to deliver against the strategy and objectives. Gemma Butler suggested we are not heading towards a marketing skills crisis, but that marketing is in fact deep in the midst of an identity crisis.

Gemma Butler went on to present the landscape in which we operate and some of the factors that demonstrate that marketing has focused so hard on keeping up and adapting, that it has lost its core identity. But through the whirlwind of change, marketers have adapted and are still adapting. Uncertainty has not caused the profession to crumble, but conversely to strengthen – to build more competence, more skills, more job roles and opportunities and to embrace digital technologies.

Marketing has focused so hard on keeping up and adapting that it has lost its core identity. This is not surprising given the landscape has and is constantly evolving; technology continues to advance; we have more data than we know what to do with; an environment where competition and noise vying for consumers’ attention is fierce and thanks to technology and the internet, consumers continuously change behaviours and have access to more knowledge.

But what is marketing? It has always been subject to multiple interpretations. When Gemma Butler typed ‘what is marketing?’ into Google, an article from 2011 gave 72 definitions from various sources such as Kotler, the DMA and included jobs such as CMOs and digital strategists. However, the rise of

digital and the rapid developments of technology have brought about more change. The lines between functions, namely IT, Digital, Marketing and Customer Service have blurred and roles are being created or rebranded at all levels with little reasoning or understanding. At senior level there are: Chief Marketing Officer, Chief Commercial Officer, Chief Data Office, Chief Customer Officer and Chief Digital Officer. Just because Marketing is not explicit in the role title does not mean Marketing to the Customer is not represented at the Board level. Indeed 33% of CEOs with a marketing background are in the largest companies.

She cited the fact that Easy Jet replaced its Chief Commercial Officer in favour of a Chief Data Officer in January 2018. However, four months later it re-introduced the CMO. Moreover ex-House of Fraser Chief Customer Officer has recently been appointed as Interim Chief Digital Officer for Arcadia Group.

It is not just at the top that there is an identity crisis. It is even more prolific as you move through the levels, with more roles created all the time. Just a quick search brings up the Social Media Editor; SEO Editor, Social Media Manager, Web Marketing Manager, Content Marketing Manager, Internet Marketing Specialist, E-Commerce Marketing Manager, Email Marketer, Search Engine Marketing Analyst, Direct Marketing Specialist, and the list goes on and on.

It is not that we have too few people. In its quest to keep up, marketing has only succeeded in creating more confusion and more roles than it needs and that has driven a perceived need for more skills. Roles are littered with ambiguity, making it harder to recruit. Many organisations are not even sure what roles they need.

Despite the whirlwind of change, marketers have adapted to change and taken on digitisation. How many other professions have adapted to changes? Gemma Butler enumerated the changes:

- The role of marketing has evolved. Marketing has gone from 5-year plans, creative agency meetings, campaign management, budget management, to social media, websites, content marketing, video, and apps, SEO, programmatic, big data, experiential, VR, AR and AI.
- Online presence is critical across multiple platforms.
- Consumers view our businesses at many different angles – websites, reviews, social activity. They can say what they think publicly and how you respond can make or break a business. Consistency is key and building trust is a longer and harder process.
- Digital has been a minefield not only in terms of technology and channels but in working out what you need and what you measure.
- Costs are up and budgets are down.
- Automation goes up and teams get leaner.
- There are decisions around in-house versus outsourced.
- Targeting of audiences – the endless possibilities and how far do you go down the personalised road?
- Social media has placed a massive window on every organisation that uses it.
- Businesses have been quick to realise, especially over the last five years, how critically important social media is to generating revenue and brand awareness.
- Trust and credibility is more important than ever before.
- It is customer first, not business first, so strategies need to adapt.
- It is not the size of a company that denotes its market value: AirB & B with a market value of \$53-65B has 3,100 employees, Marriot, with 226,000 employees has a market value of \$46B.

Gemma Butler concluded that marketing, in its endeavour to be the growth engine for business, has lost its identity. There will always be skills gaps in every industry and profession. However, marketing has not helped itself by doing what it does best and ‘creating’ a whole set of shiny new roles, or that is how they are perceived. There is not a skills crisis; there is an identity crisis which is causing confusion internally and externally. Marketing at all levels need to stand up for marketing and

show what it really does. Organisational structure, roles, their purpose and what they do, need to align to the strategy.

The role of marketing itself has change dramatically over the last ten years and it has adapted faster than any other profession. But we need to stop rebranding ourselves and start redefining ourselves. Marketing needs to market itself.

## **Training**

Seconding the motion, **Russell Parsons, Editor of *Marketing Week***, argued that the marketing sector is indeed heading for a skills crisis and not all adds up to diminished effectiveness and dwindling impact.

The first issue is lack of training. *Marketing Week's* career and salary survey found more than half of marketers (53%) say they have not studied a marketing-related academic or professional qualification of any kind. A couple of years ago, it asked people whether they thought it necessary to have a qualification of any kind. Only 43% agreed.

While not arguing for marketing degrees, Russell Parsons contended that there are many failings in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, a disconnect between theory in practice in itself contributing to a skills crisis. What they, and indeed other courses and training will invariably give you is an understanding of everything you need to be a good marketer – everything from orientation to strategy though to execution. This lack of schooling in marketing fundamentals is pushing people to the bottom of the funnel, straight to tactical execution, and this adds up to a problem in itself. According to research from Les Binet and Peter Field, the effectiveness of British campaigns over the last five years – measured in terms of market share, profit and penetration – has started to recede. It is argued that short-termism and an obsession with tactics is the cause.

Russell Parsons suggested that lack of appreciation of formal training and skills is the cause. Marketing is not just about bravery, curiosity and boldness. It is about having commercial acumen, understanding of profit margins and gross margins. You need training to understand this. It is the way we all improve and ultimately move the discipline of marketing forward.

The second issue is the gap in digital technology skills. Technology and data have altered the business and marketing landscape forever, providing untold opportunities and huge challenges. Data dexterity is now essential for those who want to thrive. However, research by *Marketing Week* revealed that firms are battling with a lack of expertise in this area. A quarter of marketers (24%) ranked it as their biggest perceived skills gap. The data skills gap is way ahead of all other areas perceived as lacking. Billions of data points are available to customers, but marketers need the skills to analyse, extract and make sense of this data. If not, there will be a vacuum filled by peers who can analyse, but not add insight with the customer in mind. Consequently you will end up with products effectively driven by chief information officers, data scientists or technologists that are well short of being customer orientated.

The third issue is there are not enough marketers. Marketing faces many challenges, but the single biggest is the looming recruitment crisis. It looms over the industry like a portentous black cloud, but it is not getting anywhere near the attention it deserves. If it is not dealt with the industry faces a perfect storm.

In March 2018, *Marketing Week* published a piece that should have been a huge wakeup call for the industry. In a representative sample of thousands, only 3% of university students said that marketing offers the best career opportunities, a finding mirrored by children interviewed at comprehensive schools. The research found that perception of marketing is poor, if people even know what it is. Marketing is confused with advertising, which is not well thought of and is far from the thoughts of those gearing up for a career.

There is a great irony in this, as there has never been so much variety to the job of marketing. There are so many platforms where marketers can spread their creative wings, more data to challenge the numerate, technology adoption to attract the digitally inclined, as well, of course, to drive business growth. The ‘product’ is the right one: the job is varied, it is exciting and can be influential. But it is time to do a job of marketing on marketing.

To borrow the sentiment of Professor Bryon Sharp, more category buyers need to be reached. Apprenticeships are a means to attract potential marketers at a younger age and those who would not ordinarily think of marketing as a career option.

Meanwhile, the biggest recruiters of marketing talent need to cast their net more widely. The industry as a whole – particularly those with big stakes in marketing’s future – needs to get out, talk about marketing, and explain the variety and the opportunity. And not just among university students, but at schools across the country.

There is also the issue of those falling into the industry. The most recent survey found that 90% of marketers are degree educated but only 25.7% have a marketing undergraduate degree. This suggests that there are a number of graduates stumbling into marketing as an after-thought or secondary choice.

Russell Parsons concluded that the marketing industry is heading towards a crisis for three reasons: a lack of formal training, a gap in the requisite skills and a failure to market marketing. It is time to do a better job of marketing marketing.

### **Contextual requirements**

Seconding the opposition, **Michelle Carvill, Author and Founder and Director of Carvill Creative**, argued that the claim that we are heading for a skills crisis is not true. She set out to demonstrate that there is a wealth of talent out there, to show where it is coming from and where to look for it. Secondly, to demonstrate how technology is supporting the skills growth within the profession, allowing marketers, and therefore businesses, to be efficient and agile and thirdly to showcase how the skills gap can be tackled.

She pointed out that 13,500 students (both student students and studying marketers in role) took CIM assessments last year. And there are many other institutions dedicated to training. The CIM professional qualifications are a mix of theory and practice, and as you move through your career experience and network, they become the critical tools to move forward.

Marketers need to stay relevant and CIM continues to drive the importance of Continued Professional Development.

Michelle Carvill argued that, given how marketing is so inextricably linked to business and business is to marketing, it is misleading to split out business and marketing and suggest they are different. The majority of business degrees include a marketing element and the majority of marketing degrees, a business component.

She stressed the ‘contextual requirements’ for marketing skills. What the organisation does and where their audiences are affect the marketing practices they require and execute. This can change from organisation to organisation. At a time when we have more jobs than candidates, another area we have to consider when recruiting the best talent is that many organisations often only look at active candidate. However, 89% of people say they would leave their current organisation for the right opportunity and 94% are open to being approached.

Looking at the areas in which graduates work, the 2018 Laminate report, ‘What do graduates do’ found that of those who studied accountancy and finance, 73% went on to a Masters and in the range

of four masters studied, it includes a BSc in Marketing. Of those who read business studies and management, 21% go on to work in marketing. Those doing hospitality Studies, go on to an MSc in Marketing and 29.7% go on to work in Marketing. English graduates also go on to study for an MA in marketing and 16.4% go into marketing. Many language graduates take an MSc in Strategic Marketing and 18.9% go into Marketing. PR is attributed within marketing throughout the study. Of those doing a Masters in Business, 53% go into marketing roles and 12% into business roles. The report outlines the array of 'marketing' related job titles that are as tailored and varied as required by the organisation. Marketers take their expertise into the fabric of organisations, not necessarily as a label associated with the marketing department nor as a traditional linear function.

Michelle Carvill went on to discuss how technology supports marketing and marketers, suggesting that we embrace technology and let it help not hinder. Data dexterity is essential for those that want to thrive. Data scientists and data analysts work with marketing and 44% of marketers use big data to improve their effectiveness. Businesses use the insights from the data to know what the users are more inclined to do, what they like most and what does not interest them at all. This can help businesses preplan their marketing campaigns increasing the chance of success.

Marketing is not unique in having skills gaps in data analysis. But it needs to be strategic. When it comes to marketing, technology is helping companies to gather more insight into their audiences and offer a better experience to their users and also market themselves better. Artificial intelligence, for instance is beneficial for both businesses and users, letting marketers focus on the customer.

### **Discussion from the floor**

The following contributions were made from the floor:

#### **For the motion:**

- The contributor joined the CIM in 1972 and passed the Diploma in 1974. However, the CIM does not have universally recognised professional qualifications. The world believes that marketing is about advertising, brochures and short-term sales. The industry needs strategic thinking. Skilled marketers should be leaders in the Boardroom.
- It is frustrating that marketing does not do a good enough job in marketing itself. It is not marketing to young people to get them to choose marketing as a career. The industry needs senior role models to tell children about marketing. It is a complex discipline which is constantly evolving. Marketers are experts in complex skills.
- There is a lack of marketing skills in small businesses. Many consider 'strategy' something for the 'big boys'. The CIM considers large companies and is not meeting the needs of small businesses. Entrepreneurs often do not get a breakthrough because they don't have marketing skills.
- There are a lot of differences in the industry. The education system is not good at marketing. There are tremendous opportunities for leadership and for seeing a place for marketing within the business life of the UK. Is there a case for one qualification?

#### **Against the motion**

- The contributor pointed out that at the University of Brighton there is a 3-year module teaching the Principles of Marketing, integrating marketing skills and data analysis.
- The contributor studied the CIM Diploma in the '60s. In those days the crisis was 'It will not catch on'. We are getting confused: we now have an identity crisis, not a skills crisis.
- Every industry finds it difficult to recruit the people they are looking for.

- Every company needs marketing, but they don't always look for marketers. In the years to come robots will replace data analysts.
- The skills you need in marketing are not unique to marketing. You don't need a marketing qualification to be in the Boardroom, but that may be a component.
- Key marketing skills change. There will always be a skills crisis, because the discipline evolves.
- Marketing has new, exciting skills. There is not a skills shortage, but an audience that is smarter and which understands marketing better. Marketing has a lot more work to do in targeting people in a different way.
- Language is important. The contributor engages in strategic marketing for schools, but doesn't talk about marketing to schools, rather as helping them in recruiting more students. The contributor sees it as an image, not a skills problem.
- We have to speak each others' language in business. It is not a question of getting a degree or qualification, but communicating.
- The value of academic qualifications in marketing has evolved. The landscape has been transformed and we should be proud of how we have dealt with technology. A series of tactics is not strategy. If marketing people think tactics is strategy, they will be disappointed.
- The contributor, from the London College of Fashion, commented that many fashion graduates go into industry with a lack of marketing and business acumen. The aim of the College is to get marketing to play a key role in the creative process. Marketing is now embedded in each of the courses in the College. He pointed out that in Zambia, a Marketing Degree is mandatory for an Arts qualification.
- More people are needed with qualifications in marketing. Marketing is not about only one thing. The CIM has a responsibility to address every aspect of marketing. The CIM has a broad positioning problem. Its purpose is to grow and simplify business.

### **Agnostic**

- The biggest problem for the CIM is that it is focused on profit centres and big companies. A lot of marketing is happening at smaller levels. In the health sector, it is patient experience, rather than marketing where a need is perceived. Marketing has to think of different organisations and the way it presents itself to meet their needs.

### **Summing up**

Summing up for the Opposition, **Gamma Butler** argued that the definition of marketing is not clear cut and nor is the way it is portrayed. Organisational structures are not straightforward and nor is marketing. Strategic vigour has not been applied, but marketing is equipped to deal with this.

Too much emphasis has been on thinking rather than doing. There is always a skills gap in every industry. In marketing, there is not a skills crisis, but an identity crisis, both internally and externally. As a profession, marketing has adapted. We now have, not to rebrand, but to redefine ourselves.

Summing up for the motion, **Richard Kenyon** re-affirmed that we are heading for a skills crisis in the marketing sector. There is a skills gap in data and a broader gap in confidence and leadership. Marketers are telling us there is an issue. We have to listen again to the marketers of the future – to

hope that a good percentage of children in Year 9 will think of marketing as a good option for their career. You don't have to be an expert in a particular business – you have to be able to lead, and to be close to the customer. At the moment marketers are not in the Boardroom because of the skills crisis.

### **The result**

The motion was defeated.

### **Next debate**

The next debate will take place on **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019** sponsored by the Advertising Association. For more details contact Doreen Blythe, Debating Group Secretary, e-mail: [doreen.blythe22@btinternet.com](mailto:doreen.blythe22@btinternet.com)