



Talent Triage: Finding and Training Tomorrow's CCOs

Preparing future 'marketing maestros'

While participating in a recent Arthur Page Society panel of senior branding, advertising and PR executives, my colleagues and I were asked to focus on the changing role of the Corporate Communications Officer (CCO). Speaking in front of the Page Future Leaders group, we agreed that corporate communications and marketing functions should all be in lockstep and, ideally, report into the same corporate officer (the CMO, in my view).

Yet there was also general acknowledgment that, aside from fairly elite assemblies like these up-and-coming Page members, there has been relatively limited effort by corporations, agencies and especially colleges and universities, to properly train the next generation of communications leaders as cross-functional, multi-disciplined marketing managers.

Perhaps motivated by industry leaders like WPP's Martin Sorrell—who has been aggressively pitching the virtues of cross-agency "horizontality"—clients and their agencies are inexorably moving toward more integrated management of marketing and corporate communications.

As agencies puncture the fine line between social media management and classic PR, there is growing demand for a new generation of leaders that is comfortable managing the full spectrum of branded content development, execution and management.

So where to find these professionally and culturally ambidextrous marketing communications virtuosos? Are they being trained to "look across the aisle" by the ad agencies, media groups, digital branding specialists or direct marketing agencies that hired them?

Some of the big marketing conglomerates make the attempt. WPP's "Maestro" training immerses its most promising senior managers from across agencies and geographies in a weeklong, intensive workshop, teaching high-level listening and client management skills.

Omnicom offers some similar programs and no doubt the other major ad-holding companies are following suit.

Do these highly selective programs work? For those who attend, yes. Having personally participated in WPP's Maestro program as both student and faculty, it is an extraordinary experience.

However, all of these programs require active follow-up and deep internal evangelism to become fully ingrained in corporate culture. Unfortunately,

available resources are simply never enough to ensure effective, ongoing reinforcement.

It's very hard to ensure such learning really sticks, but PR managers might consider the following when contemplating integrated communications training programs:

- **Built-in budgeting.** Most cross-pollination programs ultimately fail due to short-term funding.

To have lasting impact, they must be viewed as long-term investments in the organization, in good times and bad, and virtually inviolable from a budgetary standpoint.

- **Eliminate the elitism.** Don't confine the training to middle and upper management—preparing future "marketing maestros" should begin at the earliest stages of young careers.

Weeklong workshops are impractical at this level, but why not invite outside agencies to participate in an ongoing series of webinars where junior employees can spend an hour at their convenience hearing what other communications professionals do in their respective disciplines?

These can be produced and distributed at minimal cost—but should be required viewing.

- **Compensate collaboration.** We all talk about the vir-

tues of working with outside partners, but unless there is a tangible reward, both to the agencies involved and especially the individuals who have to execute the plan, it is too often more talk than walk.

Only when individually motivating P&Ls are adjusted to reward rising above personal and corporate agendas to serve the client collectively can real collaboration work.

- **Nurture the network.** As agencies more broadly train their employees in the art of cross-disciplined marketing communications, make it easy for them to stay linked with their fellow trainees.

This can be done with digital communities, of course. But how about special projects where employees can apply their collaborative skills for the greater good of their clients and/or serve a nonprofit of some kind?

These efforts will ensure that knowledge gained is continuously applied, and more than just a "check-the-box" exercise. **PRN**

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