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## Marketing Operations: Solving Marketing's Seven Deadly Sins

by Gary M. Katz

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Busy corporate marketing groups can be so focused on tactics and fire-fighting that they jeopardize their marketing investment.

The tendency to overreact to events, tackle symptoms rather than underlying fundamental problems and jump at the opportunity to please the boss can prove fatal. Crippled marketing efforts can leave promising companies in the dust, or at least handicapped at the starting gate.

Admired technology companies (like Intel, IBM and Adobe) are leveraging Marketing Operations to improve performance and measure ROI as they refine their marketing organizations using an operational focus. Marketing Operations is an emerging discipline that increases efficiency and drives consistent results in marketing-focused organizations. It builds a foundation for excellence by reinforcing marketing strategy with metrics, infrastructure, business processes, best practices, budgeting and reporting.

While Marketing Operations is uniquely suited to tackle marketing's most challenging problems in Fortune 500 companies, you don't have to be an Intel or Adobe to benefit. Here are the seven deadliest marketing sins that plague companies of all sizes and how Marketing Operations addresses them.

### Problem #1: Ill-defined metrics

Today's corporate marketing departments must justify their existence. The need to measure results is inevitable. However, the instincts and skills that make a corporate marketing professional great—a bias toward action, verbal and written acuity and a talent for relationship-building—often don't translate into an ability or willingness to scientifically and objectively evaluate success.

Broken systems and the unwillingness of the organization to pay for marketing measurement also conspire against the effort to define meaningful success metrics.

**Solution:** Marketing Operations ensures that the right processes are in place to establish meaningful metrics at the front end of the marketing process, enabling success measurement processes at key intervals and as each program concludes.

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### **Problem #2: Slammed resources**

The prevailing attitude of "doing more with less" can leave key people discouraged and overwhelmed, near burnout—and, eventually, circulating their resumes. The consequences for organizations are costly mistakes, high turnover, collapsed programs when key people leave, and missed opportunities to leverage important, but ownerless, programs.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations addresses resource limitations by ensuring workload is effectively allocated, roles are clearly defined, interdependencies are understood, team members are satisfied with their jobs, and valued-added programs and associated resources—whether through additional headcount or outsourcing—can be justified to executive management.

### **Problem #3: Sketchy institutional memory**

Successful marketing programs depend on accurate information, a historical view into past successes and failures, and the ability to recognize patterns that link seemingly unrelated data points.

Unfortunately, in many marketing organizations, this crucial knowledge is scattered all over the company. It's in the heads of individual workers, on shelves, on people's hard drives and in long-forgotten filing systems. Often, when people leave, a big piece of organizational knowledge goes with them. Information loss is a huge productivity killer for marketing teams. Trying to regain this lost insight wastes previous marketing investments.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations facilitates knowledge sharing, creates an enduring repository of information and encourages decision-making based on fact rather than hunches or gut feelings.

### **Problem #4: Constrained creativity**

The best creative solutions come from the collaboration of many brains. A consequence of the age of the "individual-contributor/director" is constrained creativity. When the entire creative burden falls mostly on one corporate marketer, the ability to think out of the box can be severely affected. Creative synergy results from many minds thinking as one.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations enables the creative process to benefit from the synergy of team.

### **Problem #5: Failed supplier relationships**

Most successful companies can point to numerous strong, long-term marketing supplier relationships they consider to be integral to their success. Likewise, a pattern of failed supplier relationships is often an indicator of marketing department failure, rather than poor vendor performance.

Unfortunately, companies that have had consistently bad relationships with outside vendors and suppliers often react by bringing everything in-house. While this strategy may provide the illusion of control, it allows marketing managers to deflect the blame for failures, rather than teaching them how to manage their outsourcing program by taking responsibility for the results. In addition, this "band-aid" strategy won't scale with the organization as it grows.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations helps set realistic expectations and mutual accountability between suppliers and the organization, increasing the effectiveness of outsource partners by empowering them to act as an extension of the internal team.

### **Problem #6: Lost discretionary budgets**

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Budgets are never set in stone. Often, it's "use it or lose it." For some managers, it's "misuse it and lose it anyway." Unfortunately, many corporate marketing departments end up leaving discretionary budget on the table or allocating it to the wrong initiatives. This discretionary Catch 22-marketing budget dilemma occurs because...

- It's very time consuming to manage the budget effectively, especially in companies with broken financial systems.
- Each marketing-spend decision creates more work for the one-person or small-team marketing department in terms of project management, measurement, supplier management, etc.
- Doubt persists about the ability to successfully justify the expenditure to management.
- Focus is instinctively on high-visibility marketing activities and C-level executive requests over good fiscal management.
- Most marketing types are inclined toward creativity rather than finance.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations facilitates implementing the system-support infrastructure and financial-management discipline needed to protect valuable marketing budgets.

#### **Problem #7: Narrow marketing mix**

Many companies align their fate with the success of too few marketing programs—whether it's lead generation, public relations, trade shows or advertising. Over-reliance on any particular program can derail a company, especially if a key program unexpectedly loses momentum. In the meantime, programs that could have had strong leverage never get a chance to prove their mettle and are forever relegated to the "B" list.

*Solution:* Marketing Operations puts the means in place to launch potentially high-value marketing programs that would otherwise never get out of the starting gate.

#### **The Bottom Line**

In a nutshell, Marketing Operations is your company's best bet to...

- Ensure that success can be measured and replicated
- Leverage systems and processes to enable consistently excellent performance
- Run its marketing department more like a business.

Implementing a Marketing Operations program takes buy-in from key executives and the commitment of the entire marketing team. However, considering the positive results and high return on investment experienced by Fortune 500 companies and those that wish to emulate them, it is well worth the effort.

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