

Do you have a clear picture of your marketing team's performance? *Conduct a marketing assessment now to prepare for 2007*

by Mike Gospe

Many businesses will soon begin the process of planning their marketing programs and budgets for 2007. To help chief marketing officers and their directors prepare for this exercise, it makes sense to conduct an annual assessment of the marketing organization's strengths and weaknesses before allocating dollars. An audit and assessment of the people, processes and plans will identify gaps and risks in your organization so you can fix them.

What is a marketing assessment?

A thorough marketing assessment produces information that helps senior managers evaluate their current marketing organization in order to make better strategic and tactical decisions. In addition, a marketing assessment helps educate or update staff about external audiences, competitors, trends, and other drivers affecting profitability, customer loyalty, and market growth. An assessment is also an effective means of providing senior executives, particularly a newly-hired CMO or VP of Marketing, with the information needed to analyze and rate their staff's marketing abilities.

Three areas covered in a typical marketing assessment include the **product lifecycle** (e.g. the creation of MRDs, PRDs), **integrated demand creation** (e.g. the execution of multi-faceted demand generation activities), and **market intelligence gathering** (e.g. the process and tools used to collect and internally communicate market- and product-requirements and data).

	Product Lifecycle	Integrated Demand Creation	Market Intelligence Gathering
Planning			
Processes			
People			

The best place to start is with your own self assessment. Grade your organization's effectiveness in each quadrant shown in this table. How would you assess the health of your organization along these dimensions?

1. **Planning:** Your ability to effectively plan strategies and tactics for each of these areas,

2. **Processes:** A hard look at the methods and tasks used to create, gain approval, execute, and analyze results in each program area, and
3. **People:** An assessment of the skill sets residing in your staff and their abilities.

Your self-assessment is a good first step. Next you need a more comprehensive audit; however, your marketing managers don't have time to conduct as thorough an analysis as is needed, and they are likely to be biased in the outcome. The quickest and best way to complete a thorough and unbiased audit and assessment is to hire a trusted marketing expert to lead the process. Although the details and focus of each marketing assessment will be unique to that business, the following paragraphs provide a generic overview of what to expect.

Product Lifecycle: Review your product positioning and lifecycle strategies

What processes are in place to create, review, and approve marketing requirements documents (MRDs) and product requirements documents (PRDs)? Who is tasked with the responsibility of positioning your products? How coordinated are your alpha and beta programs?

The marketing assessor will investigate the differences between stated product lifecycle processes and reality. Product marketing, product management, and development teams each play a role; and, they can sometimes be at odds. A marketing assessor can identify road blocks and dissimilar expectations and recommend tighter cohesion between these teams. In order to most effectively manage the product lifecycle (from development through obsolescence), your marketing team must have the right people with the right skill sets, the right processes, and the right plans. A marketing assessment will help you sort out each of these areas.

Integrated Demand Creation: Evaluate marcom campaigns and programs

Are you executing multi-faceted programs that encourage your prospects and customers to engage in an ongoing dialog? Or, are you executing a series of isolated, independent marketing activities?

Your marketing promotions should be strategic, targeted, and cost-effective based on industry response standards and your organization's historic response rates. Feedback from your customers can help you determine the communication channels of most interest to individual members. The marketing assessor will help you determine if you are utilizing the most effective range of promotional channels and tactics and not relying too heavily on just one or two formats, such as email or events.

Market Intelligence Gathering: Collect and share market data

How well do you understand the issues driving your customers' businesses? Do you have a process for systematically collecting and communicating market data and knowledge internally? A marketing assessment looks at who collects this data and how it is used (or not) internally in the development of the MRD, PRD, and demand generation campaigns.

The marketing assessor will interview a variety of staff members to identify the current level of available market intelligence. They can determine what, if any, statistically rigorous market research exists on the interests, needs, perceptions, opinions, and expectations of your customers, prospects, and other supporters or stakeholders. Information may be gathered from customer visits, product focus groups, customer advisory boards, sales reps, analyst interviews, etc. The assessor will also take a look at how your company houses and shares this information. This repository can be your greatest asset — or worst albatross. Most of the time, this information is only captured in individual's heads or their hard drives. Without a repository, you are at risk of losing this valuable corporate information when they leave the company.

KickStart Alliance: Your marketing assessor

Take better control of your marketing organization, and you will get better results. KickStart Alliance offers independent analysis of your staff, product lifecycle processes, and strategic marketing plans. We work with your leadership team to conduct a 360 degree review of the people, processes, and plans associated with your marketing efforts. The result of our assessment is a set of documented action-oriented recommendations that will help you determine and justify your budget requests. The process usually takes between 3 - 6 weeks. Let us show you how we can help you get your team to the next level of performance.

About the Author:

Mike Gospe helps marketing teams architect and hone their marketing processes and plans. Mike designs and facilitates team workshops to help structure and coordinate market- and product-requirements gathering processes, design and execute multi-faceted demand generation campaigns, and identify and resolve product management and product marketing roles and responsibilities issues. Mike also facilitates customer advisory board meetings. You can contact Mike at mikeg@kickstartall.com.

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