

# Six steps to better marketing operations management

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A number of factors conspire against marketers these days, making it hard to execute, monitor, and measure marketing operations manually. Here, Assetlink details six steps to aid the troubled CMO...

Shorter product life cycles, simultaneous global product launches and increased focus on multi-channel, integrated campaign management are making it impossible to execute marketing processes manually. In addition Sarbanes-Oxley compliance is forcing marketing organizations to demonstrate transparency and accountability of their operations. As a result the CMO is challenged with instituting efficient and measurable marketing processes.

Culturally, introducing efficiencies into the marketing function is not easy. Marketing teams pride themselves for their strategic thinking and creative skills. Efficient marketing operations management (MOM) often takes a back seat. The problem is further aggravated by heavy dependence on external partners for advertising, promotions, creative design and production. Well thought-out change management practices, combined with the right technology, can help dramatically improve marketing efficiencies. Consequently, marketing teams become more available for greater strategic and creative thinking by automating mundane activities.

## Six steps to marketing efficiencies

Using a Marketing Operations Management (MOM) solution, the CMO can create a marketing culture that will streamline marketing processes at both the operational and campaign level, will propel the organization to reduce waste, and will drive higher revenue returns. It is not as difficult as you may think if you leverage the MOM technology and follow these six simple steps:

### 1. Communicate marketing objectives

All too often, marketing teams tend to repeat the marketing campaigns from one year to another based on their historical returns. The future value often changes based on market trends and competitive environment. This misalignment of business objectives and marketing execution is one of the biggest sources of inefficiencies.

Rigorous quantification of business objectives into marketing performance indicators (MPI) result in Marketing Scorecards, that can help the CMO to consistently communicate marketing objective. MPIs such as brand awareness, market share, leads, customer satisfaction, etc. help marketing teams to align and fine-tune their marketing mix to achieve the marketing objectives. In addition, it helps marketing management to monitor if these objectives are being achieved during the course of execution of marketing activities.

### 2. Define marketing plans

Most marketing planning and budgeting activities tend to be manual, iterative and ad hoc exercises. The final plans are hidden behind mountains of spreadsheets and documents that are not visible to most stakeholders until the last minute. This results in constant and unnecessary urgencies and causes wasteful crisis-driven operations.

Marketers need to define and create a standard, enterprise-wide online template that stores all the captured information as structured document. This will help

marketers ensure the consistency of information, improve collaboration (among authors of the strategic plans and with upper management for the plan review) and automate the generation of reports showing the effect of marketing strategy with respect to marketing objectives, channels, segments and products. Marketers also need to define a consistent format for building an operational plan in terms of marketing activities or initiatives. For example, each marketing activity should have clearly defined parameters such as marketing objectives, products, segments, channels, expected results, etc., in addition to the budget and execution schedule. Taking the time to define a clear and consistent plan-template will ensure that the operational plan data is uniform throughout the organization, has the ability to automate the consolidation of budgets for financial analysis and can generate reports showing break-up of budgets by marketing objectives, channels, segments and products.

### **3. Track marketing budgets**

Today, marketing managers and marketing/financial controllers are forced to spend a significant amount of time tracking budgets for marketing activities, tracking the associated invoices and following up with vendors for payments. Marketing related financial information tends to be processed three times; first, by marketing manager in their Excel spreadsheets, next by the marketing controller in their Access database, and finally by the finance department in the ERP system. As a result, marketing groups have great difficulty adjusting budgets in response to new market and business realities since none of the information on budgets, commitments and spends is current. This makes it almost impossible for marketers to generate reports correlating their budgets with various marketing and business parameters, so it is never really clear to them where the money is being spent.

By creating a single, online centralized system that integrates financial reporting with operational planning tools, marketers can submit the requests for purchase

orders and forward invoices to the controllers. They can also share and integrate forecasting and financial scheduling data, track vendor information, vendor estimates and invoices. More importantly, automating the budgeting functions enables marketers to make instantaneous adjustments in both budget and strategy to ensure optimum effectiveness.

### **4. Streamline and automate marketing workflows**

All too often project managers in marketing service departments are charged with coordinating large numbers of marketing projects related to product launches, advertising, promotions, sponsorships and events between marketing managers and external service providers using rudimentary tools such as spreadsheets and e-mails. Their communications with both marketing managers and external partners tends to be ad hoc, subjective and non-uniform, which leads to inconsistent results.

Marketers need to define both uniform processes and templates in order to streamline communications between different stakeholders. By providing project managers with an online tool that manages workflow, they are able to capture and communicate marketing briefs, track project timelines and assign work to external partners. Further, by automating the tracking function, managers can use this information to integrate with operational planners and generate marketing briefs for executing marketing activities and integrate with budget managers to track vendor estimates and invoices per project.

### **5. Control marketing assets and improve reuse**

Much time, effort and money is wasted due to a marketer's inability to control and manage their marketing assets. Traditionally, product and advertising photos, marketing collateral, logos, etc. are scattered across several media silos, geographical regions, marketing and product teams and even external agencies. Marketing managers and marketing services groups are forced to

spend a significant amount of time and effort searching for them and wind up paying a substantial amount of money to external agencies for fulfillment of their requests. This inconvenience of accessing and retrieving marketing assets results in recurring repurchases and redesigns leading to further cost overruns and time delays.

To overcome these obstacles, CMOs need to create a repository that houses all of their marketing assets and provides controlled access to employees and partners. For instance, by instituting a template driven artwork adaptation system, the marketing department can eliminate graphics production costs and time delays related to the modification of office stationery, customer communications pieces, marketing collateral and promotional items. By housing marketing assets in one centralized location, the entire marketing group will dramatically enhance the reuse of existing assets, resulting in huge cost and time savings.

## 6. Manage brands

One of the most important and over-looked components of an effective marketing strategy is managing your company's brand assets. As a CMO, you need to articulate both your brand strategy and brand essence to your marketing managers and define creative guidelines for external agencies if you want to ensure the consistent and accurate expressions of brands. All too often, companies find themselves investing a significant amount of money and effort in producing and distributing brand books and building and maintaining specialized brand websites. However, the information presented tends to be overwhelming, outdated and represents a "one-way communication" from the corporate headquarters to the markets.

Savvy marketers know that by implementing a collaborative environment that enables brand managers and external suppliers to contribute brand related content, without requiring them to be experts in Internet technologies, results in the organization's ability to access the most up-to-date visual identity elements and track

its usage.

### Changes to processes can reap big benefits

Achieving marketing efficiencies requires a combination of marketing skills and operations management. The biggest hurdle in achieving marketing efficiencies is assessing the current situation in an objective manner, clearly articulating the benefits, managing assets and proving program results. So before you rush to execute "the next big thing" create an environment that encourages dialog with your current marketing team, identifies areas of opportunities and defines objectives and results.

By leveraging technology, marketing objectives can be clearly defined in quantitative terms (hard numbers) and ROI can be easily calculated proving greater efficiencies to your marketing operations.