

Part 3

# Big “M” Marketing Just Got Bigger

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If markets are transformed and the marketing function is evolving at an accelerated rate, who can you rely on to lead a re-imagined marketing function? What does the leader look like that will be adept at creating connections to consumers in a rapidly changing world?

It's the “who” question that so many fail to ask. Adapting to change requires more than an understanding of the new landscape. The new vision of markets and marketing must be led by the new marketer – individuals with the skills and vision necessary to navigate the upended industry.

To explore the future of marketing, we conducted one-on-one interviews with 65 executives from 61 companies around the world, examining a single question:

***“How will the marketing function look different post Covid-19?”***

After explaining how markets had shifted and the marketing function had been rewired, they turned their attention to the leadership question. What kind of person is best suited to lead this change?

Leaders outlined key traits. The new marketer must:

- Be digitally fluent
- Support agile creativity and innovation
- See themselves not as tacticians but as general managers
- Possess a visionary outlook and empowering leadership style

## Digital Fluency

Ability to function in virtual space is a must-have for any leader today, but for marketers it holds special significance. In the pandemic period and beyond, digital is the lifeline to the consumer.

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Alex Ho, CMO, Terminix

Leading others who are digital experts is no longer enough. As virtual spaces have expanded and e-commerce penetration has made step change increases, leaders at the top must demonstrate digital fluency. Executives we interviewed believe there is a case to be made that the marketers, in many industries, have the right and responsibility to carry the torch as the ambassador for digital transformation. Finance needs to fund it, HR needs to find the talent and Tech teams need to help develop the capabilities, but it all starts with a clear understanding of the consumer and consumer needs. This is the dominant realm of the marketer.

“The need for classical marketing generalists should continue, but the pandemic is accelerating consumer adoption of online business models. So in the very near future, DTC and digital marketing expertise are going to become “need to have” skills over and above classic CPG experience,” said Alex Ho, CMO, Terminix.

## Agile Creativity and Innovation

Speed is in the air. Consistently we are hearing that new ideas that would have taken a year to develop are going from idea to implementation in weeks. Doing so requires bold ideas and people who can cut through clutter and challenge cultural norms in organizations.

We have written previously about three primary marketing archetypes – The Perfect Performer, The Maverick and the Creative Spark. Most organizations have been heavily skewed (and rightly so) to Perfect Performers who deliver consistently at high levels and reinforce company culture. But Marketers are now being called to a higher cause. To break down barriers and drive rapid innovation, there may need to be a greater shift than ever before to Mavericks and Creative Sparks – marketers willing to shape and challenge organizations' culture and take risks in the spirit of innovation.

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Josh Margolis, Vice President and Head, Loyalty and Digital Products,  
Caesars Entertainment

Even in the earliest days of the pandemic, marketing leaders saw agility emerge as a critical skill. Rishi Dhingra, Global Sector Leader/VP, Global Family Care for Kimberly-Clark saw this unfold in real time. “We went from idea to campaign execution for the #ShareASquare Campaign in 72 hours. The fact that we could do it is because we had the right team members, including our agency partners.” The right team extends to team leaders who can support agile creativity and innovation.

That ability to lead change on an accelerated schedule will continue to be critical. “A premium will be placed on people and organizations who can push through red tape and make change happen quickly to adjust to customer's shifting needs in times of crisis,” said Josh Margolis, Vice President and Head, Loyalty and Digital Products, Caesars Entertainment.

## Big “M” Marketer

But the marketer will need more than just new skill sets. The right individual to lead change must see the job not as a tactician but as a steward of the enterprise – Marketing with a capital ‘M.’

There is a need for top marketing leaders to think about all the levers that impact the customer. Big “M” Marketing is when marketers think of marketing more broadly than the marketing function. Up until recently the focus, for many, was on growth, which included the rise of the Chief Growth Officer. While these priorities remain, in many sectors there will be increased focus on productivity and returns. Marketers who can think and operate as general managers, balance purpose, drive brand development, AND performance marketing execution will thrive. With increased attention by consumers on transparency, trust, safety and personalization, a true understanding of supply chains and customer journey will also increase in importance.

Many of the leaders we interviewed echoed this requirement.

“COVID has forced marketers to keep what they’ve always been at their core – understanding consumers. But COVID has forced marketers to take massive leaps forward in general management thinking,” said Andy Gibson, CEO, Agile Pursuits Franchising Inc, Tide Cleaners, for P&G.

“Our marketing function has evolved over time in order to ensure we are adapting to changes in the external environment as well as progression of our business. We have tried to broaden the depth of experience for our marketers, making them more general managers, building adaptability and resilience with an end-to-end mindset,” says Duda Kertesz, President, U.S. Skin Health, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health. “A marketer has to be able to do digital, to understand customers, to understand the P&L. This may not be comfortable for more traditionalists; however, the generalist approach opens up doors to more differentiated career pathways and progression.”

Leaders say times have fundamentally revamped the job requirements. “I see the new marketer much more as a business manager than a brand manager,” said Polina Sousa, Vice President Marketing, Coca Cola. In the history of the beverage company, marketers were valued for their communications skills, their innovation orientation and their love for the brand, she said. “But I see that this is not enough anymore. Marketing is the heart of the company and our

role is to generate demand. There is no point in having a beautiful campaign, an incredible product in the gondola or a top packaging and not helping the consumer to want to try it and, after they try it, choose our brand every time they have to make a choice. The marketer has to understand the entire value chain, manage a P&L, work with the commercial and financial team, and think of ideas that bring more revenue and bottom line for the company.”

## Empowering Visionary

None of this new thinking can be executed without a singular ability to envision and support a changed future. Many of today’s leaders have lived through years of growth and have not been fully battle tested in crisis. The executives we spoke to identified a powerful combination for marketers of the future. Successful leaders must set a purpose driven vision for the future, during VUCA periods that are expected to continue. With employees, more than ever, working remotely, it is essential to unite them. However, in a world that is now changing faster than ever, decisions can only happen quickly when those locally feel empowered to make them.

This ability to convey inspiration and vision from the center while empowering locally, will be particularly crucial since work-from-home strategies may still be in place for some time to come.

“Marketing was already complicated and now we’re writing a new playbook in real-time,” said Jonathan Mildenhall, CEO TwentyFirstCentury Brand, former CMO of Airbnb.

We couldn’t agree more with this perspective. Great marketing leaders have the ability to step up today and make an impact that transcends the walls of the function, unite their organizations, communicate a sense purpose, and create the meaningful connections that consumers so deeply seek today. And it just might take a few more Mavericks and Creative Sparks to get there.

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## Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro-website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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