



Alignment: Key to Marketing Performance

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Just as your car runs more smoothly and requires less energy to go faster and farther when the wheels are in perfect alignment, you perform better when your marketing is in alignment with the business. When marketing is in alignment with the business, you are more likely to travel in the same direction.

Alignment and accountability are the first steps every aspiring marketing organization must take to improve its performance management and measurement. Alignment and accountability are inextricably linked and are the cornerstones for transforming marketing into a center of excellence. Without alignment, it's impossible to quantify the value of marketing to the business, and to select the right metrics -- metrics that measure whether you are doing the right things to generate value for the organization.

The most sophisticated data collection and analysis can be completely undermined by a lack of proper alignment. Best-in-class marketing organizations create a direct line of sight between their marketing investments, activities and business outcomes. Alignment enables marketing to clarify the strategic intent of all the investments it makes, and to measure and communicate the degree to which marketing delivers on its commitments.

Defining alignment

Finding the correct path to proper alignment can be confusing at first. Marketing groups often take a bottom-up approach to planning, and focus on developing marketing programs that usually include some combination of what has always been done or what they know best. Programs may not seem tightly connected to the business. The metrics typically used at the program level do not always demonstrate the connection between the broader business initiatives. As a result, it is difficult to quantify marketing's contribution to the business, and the picture is hazy. This jeopardizes continued investments in marketing and can obscure the steps it should -- and should not -- be taking.

An outcome-based approach to alignment flips this problem on its head -- creating a top-down perspective, starting with the business' success factors and working "down the ladder" to reveal what marketing can do to support the business.

Metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) can then be established to directly tie what marketing is doing with the success of the business. When done correctly, alignment provides greater insight into how marketing is expected to make a difference and provides you with that essential roadmap.

Is your marketing organization aligned?

You will know that you have achieved proper alignment when:

1. Marketing projects are prioritized based on their value and impact to broader organizational outcomes; not on what has the most political capital, is easiest to do, or the furthest behind schedule.
2. There is a direct line of sight between investments (money and people), objectives, program strategy and tactics.
3. Each member of the marketing team understands their role and actions necessary to achieve the business outcomes.
4. It is clear who is accountable for enduring execution of initiatives, projects and tasks.

Select an approach

If you think you need to improve your alignment, then you will need an approach. There are many ways to address alignment. The most important consideration is to choose a method that will visually convey the connection between marketing activities and business results and provide insight into selecting outcome-based metrics.

Too many of the metrics used today tell whether the tactics being implemented are being done correctly. If that's you, then the key step to take after alignment is to identify metrics that will help determine whether you are doing the right things. The alignment approach you take should help reveal these types of metrics.

Instead of telling colleagues how important alignment is, show them by using quantifiable data. By connecting alignment and accountability, you can focus on measuring and managing marketing's performance in a way that truly demonstrates the ability of marketing to generate value -- and its contribution to the organization

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