



## BUILDING THE DIGITAL TEAM OF THE FUTURE

Dealing with the rapid pace of change in digital marketing is a challenge many companies acknowledge is a steep one.

In fact a recent survey conducted by digital marketing training experts the Knowledge Engineers, found that 81 per cent of businesses felt they were not keeping up with developments.

Clearly the digital team of the future needs to be more flexible, adept and aware of market trends in order to keep up with consumer demand and remain competitive.

To address these issues faced by many businesses EMR partnered with the Knowledge Engineers to host a roundtable discussion in July 2014 that brought together

marketing and digital leaders from a range of major enterprises to focus on this very topic. Reflecting on the latest research, trends and challenges, the panel considered how they could overcome such problems, particularly through the recruitment and retention of talented professionals with the ability to make a difference.



## Leadership

The role of leadership was a key topic in the discussion. In particular, it noted that a close and well-coordinated working relationship between the chief marketing officer (CMO) and either their chief executive (CEO) or chief information officer (CIO) can make a critical difference. The importance of this was emphasised by a recent IBM report highlighting the significance of the CMO, who will be spending more on IT than the CIO by 2017.

However, for many businesses, there is a conflict between the need to innovate and plan for the future on one hand, and the need to deliver short-term results. The CEO can often face a hard challenge persuading shareholders to accept the benefits of a longer-term approach.

The discussion concluded that the CEO and CIO need to be on-side when a CMO seeks to bring about change. In particular, they must be willing to allow the CMO to take risks and to try ideas that may fail. That way, they will in due course find new innovations that work and take the company forward.

Trust is vital in this situation. The Knowledge Engineers

research found only 27.6 per cent of company bosses felt they knew enough about digital. The question, therefore, is whether they are prepared to hire talented professionals with the right knowledge and skills, and then allow them to put this to best use.

Emphasising the importance of a close working relationship between the CIO and CMO in a recent article for the Guardian, Bluewolf CMO Corinne Sklar commented:

**“These two executives have a critical role today in helping to craft a customer - obsessed vision and strategy to deliver what customers expect from your business today.”**

It was also clear that the companies where resistance to change is greatest tend to be longer standing businesses and therefore keener to rely on the methods that worked yesterday, rather than those that will be needed in the future.

By contrast, inertia is far less common in newer businesses where modern methods of digital marketing are accepted

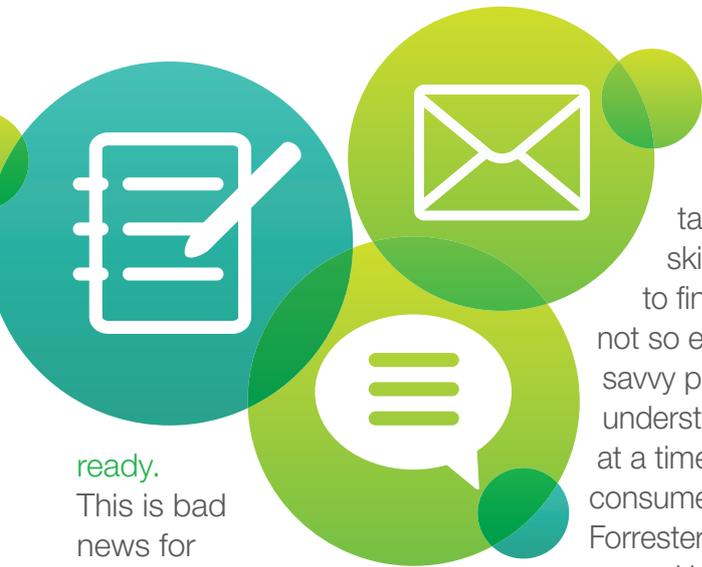
and established. An area in which they may thrive is mobile, which according to research conducted by eMarketer would account for 70 per cent of digital spend in the UK by 2018. This particular development also creates huge demand for mobile specialists.



## Digital evolution

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of the struggle of digital marketers to keep up with latest trends is the growing gap between mobile usage and marketing spend in this area. A similar gap exists in the area of data.

Research by the [Knowledge Engineers](#) highlights the problem. For example, **65 per cent of consumers in the UK and the US have smartphones, but only 15 per cent of company websites are mobile**



ready.

This is bad news for companies who sell heavily online, as 79 per cent of UK and US consumers use mobile devices as a primary touch point when shopping. Closing this gap will require a realisation from senior management of the need to adjust budgets, but it also reflects the old problem of departments remaining isolated from each other. The discussion agreed that the solution lies in making sure marketing and digital teams are given regular training to keep up with new trends, as well as being more fluid and flexible in moving between departments, to eliminate this silo effect.

This can have a direct impact on the delivery of digital experience, as highlighted by research from Forrester and Adobe. This found that the biggest pain point for companies planning digital experience projects was the task of dividing responsibilities among marketing, IT and business development sectors - a problem for 60 per cent of companies.

However, none of this will be

possible without bringing in the right talent to eliminate the skills gap. It may be easy to find web analysts, but not so easy to find tech-savvy people with a good understanding of business at a time of rapid change in consumer tastes. In fact, the Forrester research found the second largest pain point - affecting 58 per cent - was a lack of appropriate skills. The panel agreed that the solution is not to bring in people who can do no more than meet immediate needs, as these will soon change. Instead, businesses should seek talented, flexible people with the ability to adjust, learn and innovate to meet new and changing circumstances.



### Developing an innovative culture

It is evident, therefore, that an innovative culture is required. But developing this is not easy. To succeed, a marketing department needs enough people who have not just talent and innovative ideas, but the fortitude to push for them in the face of scepticism. It is this character trait that may make all the difference when bosses are often so sceptical of original ideas.

Chairing the discussion, Niall McKinney of the Knowledge Engineers noted the problem is not just the scepticism of CEOs who may not understand the importance of digital marketing particularly well. Sometimes marketers themselves, despite needing a broad understanding of the latest industry trends, have a tendency to network less, attend fewer events and read blogs and tweets less than other people in a company. That is one particular example of becoming 'siloed' that needs to be addressed.



### Retaining top digital talent

Retaining top digital talent is a real problem acknowledged by the discussion. The conflict in this instance is between the need to have people capable of performing very specific roles and the reality that this very lack of variety may prompt their departures. With alternatives - and higher salaries - being readily available, this is a real problem.

As an example of this, a study by The Candidate in 2013 found businesses in the north west of England who earned at least 20 per cent of revenue via digital channels had to recruit once a year on average to replace people leaving their digital

marketing teams. Of those leaving, 87 per cent had been in the role for less than two years. However, this issue is not restricted to particular regions but a trend witnessed across most marketing and digital teams within the UK.

However, to do so means businesses must be willing to rip up the old rulebook. When the only constant is change, there is no alternative, but understandable timidity and a short-term focus can threaten this.

“As the digital space has evolved we’ve witnessed an increase in demand for hyper-specialist marketers in areas such as mobile, SEO, PPC, user experience etc. However, retention of such experts has become particularly challenging for businesses who don’t appreciate the

commercial value of such individuals and how they can incorporate their skills into the wider business. As a result digital specialists in these areas are moving on to new businesses mapping their own career path.”

Serrol Osman  
Managing Director, EMR

Recognising this problem, the roundtable discussion agreed that plenty of training and broad job descriptions are vital to retention. Senior leaders need to be willing to allow staff to work outside their core areas - even if it constitutes business risks. On balance, this is a lesser danger than the loss of valuable talent.

Because some companies are sure to hold themselves back, it is the businesses who show flexibility, initiative, a willingness to trust talented people to leave their silos behind and, above all, appreciate the importance of linking an understanding of technology with its potential to transform a businesses marketing who will succeed.

## Summary

The key to overcoming the digital challenge is to understand that a series of potential conflicts and barriers do exist, but can be overcome.

