

# Winning Ways

These 12 skills separate average potential hires from today's top marketers.

**WANDA KENTON SMITH • JUN 21, 2023**

Back in the day, you earned a marketing degree, landed an entry-level job and then put into practice all that theory you'd learned in college. At larger corporations, you were often in "silo" mode, focused on one narrow slice of the marketing pie.

By contrast, many of today's career-oriented marketers grew up in the era of social media. They've learned organically how to capture attention, and possess a robust skill set after hands-on internships. A 21-year-old can create attention-getting posts, imagery and video. It's a good thing, too, because employers are demanding a higher level of marketing know-how.

One such employer recently asked me to help him fill a mid-level marketing position at his established retail dealership. He had a long-term marketing vision, but needed an in-house marketer with technology chops and social-media chutzpah. Scores of applicants applied, ranging from senior marketing executives to energetic young graduates. As I sorted resumes, it became evident that many highly experienced executives were not simply overqualified, but also were sorely lacking in hands-on prowess. The seasoned warriors brought a strategic mindset, but were accustomed to directing the troops, not to doing the work.

This hiring experience, along with others I've had as a marketing consultant, helped me to identify a dozen of the most important skills for today's top marketers. A strong command of these basics is a good place to start if you're seeking exceptional marketing talent for your organization.

## Communication

Writing, speaking and storytelling are always at the top of my marketer must-have list. The ability to communicate a message or story to an intended audience in a manner that clearly engages them, or calls them to action, is a competitive advantage. These same fundamental communication skills are equally necessary when addressing the C-suite or any other audience. The best marketers are also excellent live (or video) presenters who can deliver a convincing pitch with enthusiasm, power, impact and persuasion.

## Credibility

Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy. This was the battle cry drilled into me as a young journalist. It also applies to marketers: Without accuracy, you have no credibility. Whether you're producing content for social media, submitting a KPI report about key performance indicators, or writing an internal memo, it's essential to proofread and triple-check your work for accuracy. One too many mistakes, and your credibility — and potentially that of the organization you represent — goes up in flames.

## Strategic, Goal-Oriented Planning

Plenty of marketers can manage and deliver a project. A top marketer sees the big picture and can connect the dots among goals, objectives, strategies and tactics. This is an invaluable skill set for the marketer and employer, so much so that early-career marketers should ask to be part of the strategic planning and budgeting process, to learn as much as possible about everything.

## Budgeting

Executives emphasize return on investment, so marketers must have the ability to develop and manage marketing budgets. Marketers also need to identify and understand all related expenses. A working knowledge of the numbers is a prerequisite for anyone to move up the marketing ladder.

## Math

In college, I sat in statistics and math classes, wondering why I needed to learn these boring subjects. Years later, as I analyze information and create reports, I appreciate the mathematical requirement. A top marketer must understand how the numbers work, and know how to use them to measure the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in proving return on investment.

## Customer Focus

The best marketers I know have an authentic, bone-deep passion for delivering the best-possible customer experience. They track the customer journey, develop customer surveys and focus groups, and get out there and listen to customers on a regular basis. Top marketers have an intrinsic concern for those they serve.

## Innovative Problem-Solving

It's important to take calculated risks and think creatively. A healthy sense of curiosity is key. The desire to understand "why" and "how" often leads to new conversations that can shift perspective. Great marketers bring fresh perspectives, insights and ideas to the table.

# Organization

Most of today's marketers manage multiple projects, so the ability to organize and track work is mandatory. Handling everything from files to project timelines falls under this broad header.

# Teamwork

Marketing, by its very nature, requires ongoing interaction with multiple departments including sales, research and design, engineering, finance, accounting and leadership. The ability to be a proactive team player who can work well with others is a mandate for success.

# Self-Assessment

No one is great at everything. It's important to appraise your own talents and weaknesses. Top marketers are deliberate in taking on tasks and roles that tap their strengths and passions, while investing in strategies to fortify and improve the weak spots.

# Desire for Professional Development

Radical changes in marketing and technology occur at warp speed these days. The pros regularly attend webinars and marketing trade shows, participate in marketing forums and professional groups, stay abreast of trends and news, listen to podcasts, and scour top trade publications. They are always learning.

# Specific Knowledge

Last, in addition to all of the above, today's marketers need to understand key areas such as digital advertising, social media and distribution channels, content management, search-engine optimization, search-engine marketing, analytics, key performance indicators, website management, customer relationship management, email marketing, video production, research strategies, and basic photography and design. While this list will vary according to the position, having a sound understanding of these areas is a necessity.

If, like myself, you've been marketing for a long time, I hope this list will help you realize the critical need to invest in professional development so you remain relevant. If you're recruiting for a marketing position, perhaps this list will help you find a marketing rock star.

Either way, let's all keep learning together. (See above: Teamwork.)

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