

Marketing: Confidently claiming its place at the table

By [Glen Attwell](#), issued by [Dentsu](#)

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Do our marketers of both present and future feel as if the actions and foundations set by those of the past have been the sole driving force behind marketing's undervalued perceptions within the business ecosystem? Asks Glen Attwell, media account manager at [Vizeum South Africa](#)



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Has marketing ever been given a fair shot at the table?

There is no doubt that this question, and many other variations like this, have been debated around boardroom tables both locally and abroad for decades. What we do know, however, is that one underlying notion remains constant throughout. Marketing has never taken on the top spots in most organisations, it may be seen as important, but seldom pinned as a crucial requirement for driving business success, so why is this? Where have we possibly gone wrong in promoting the importance and value of marketing? Has the discipline been wrongly done by? Or are we as marketers, through our actions, actually to blame?

Being a strategist, I quickly began investigating the current landscape. Through the works of global marketing director Ranjita Ghosh, in her article on "[Why Your Business Should Be 'Marketing First'](#)", and supporting findings of the [effects of the pandemic on marketing by Nova and Polar CEO Kunal Gupta](#), it was clearly evident that modern-day organisations do in fact not build marketing into their plans as a key component to driving business success and, furthermore, marketing budgets remain the very first to be cut in tough financial times.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in Q2 of 2020, Nova and Polar CEO Kunal Gupta stated that 24% of brands had subsequently paused their ad spend during the period, and digital and traditional ad spend had decreased by 38% and 43%, respectively.



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So, the thought remains: During a time in which large portions of business operations grinded to a halt, why would companies stop the only way for them to engage and interact with customers, the very thing that keeps their brands relevant and top of mind in an already competitive landscape?

I had originally asked the question: Are the actions of marketers past and present to blame for this under-valued perception? My answer is that I believe this to be partially true.

You see, unfortunately, the straight-forward, hard truth is this: Marketers and marketing as a whole has failed to show tangible and convincing impacts on the business bottom line, so, of course, it is first to be cut, after all, a business is nothing if it is not making money, right?

The reasoning behind my statement around marketers being partially to blame is driven by what I feel is two key factors: (1) a lack of standardised performance reporting across the industry and (2) the depth of the reporting.

The lack of reporting standardisation is seen across the industry – from clients to agencies to media owners. The types of reports, the metrics, the terminology and even the data sources vary considerably. The problem seems to be that 'style of reporting' is regarded as a possible USP (unique selling point) in a very competitive market. But this is problematic in that it breeds inconsistency and leads to possible misunderstanding and misinterpretation by those people in the business for whom marketing is not a forte.

For me, the second factor, depth of reporting, is the main catalyst as to why marketing is not seen as a crucial component to business success. Depth of reporting lies in the ability to showcase real, tangible return on ad spend, something that is more possible than ever before, due to a range of available resources. Marketers today are surrounded by a plethora of incredible models, tools and technologies that allow them to scrutinise ad spend and the resulting performance like never before. Yet, we often find ourselves complacent, reporting on standard metrics and hiding behind jargon that not everyone understands. This is where a large part of the problem lies.

A very beneficial exercise I've begun to implement across all the business accounts I'm involved in, is to ensure that I fully understand the context. At the start of every new project, I imagine that the business is my own and that what I spend on the business is from my own pocket, in other words, something that could drastically impact my family's standard of living. An entrepreneurial mindset, if you will. Then I ask: What I'm trying to achieve, and how much budget I'd require in order for marketing to achieve this?



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This exercise creates a far better personal reflection on how we spend towards marketing activity. And it also helps us scrutinise the return we would get from this spend. With this in mind, we can now reflect on how we would spend the marketing budget we have been given by the business and whether we would still do things the same way. And how we would be showing a tangible return.

I believe that the road ahead is a bright one for marketing. Amongst all the change, the industry remains a fundamental means through which to reach, engage and interact with our consumers. The value we create will have to come from our own abilities as marketers. We need to work together as an industry to standardise the way we report on success, driving

assurance and education in the process. We need to push the boundaries of showcasing real return on ad spend through new digital technologies such as tracking pixels, CRM and innovative marketing models.

Finally, we need to leave behind our current comforts and start unpacking new means through which to show the importance of marketing and advertising on driving business success.



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Because if we don't, marketing's seat at the table will be lost.

About the author



My approach to life is simple: it involves optimism in all respects, empathy to the situation at hand, practicality in building foundations and processes and also future thinking to ensure I implement a degree of innovation into everything I do.

My name is Glen Attwell. I'm a hybrid media account manager at [Vizeum](#), working across the AB InBev core portfolio of brands. My key competencies are media strategy and implementation, both in the digital and traditional media space.

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