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Marketing has key role to play

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Senior executive accountants who scratch their heads when told not to "respray their auditors" may not be taking the marketing role seriously enough.

"Respraying auditors" was used by the chief executive officer of a Fortune 100 company, speaking at Deloitte's global new partners conference in China last week, to describe putting non-marketing professionals in charge of the marketing department.

"His message was you've got to take it [marketing] more seriously. It's a specialist role and it's got to be taken to the highest levels," said David Redhill, chief marketing officer at big four accounting firm Deloitte.

Mr Redhill's CMO position is a unique one for a big four firm, and indicative of the growing appreciation of marketing in the strategic planning of professional service firms. But while he has seen marketing's status improve over the past 15 years, marketing executives can still do more to improve their situation.

In a survey released this week, Roundtable Consulting examines whether marketing is playing a strategic role and if not, what are the hurdles getting in the way.

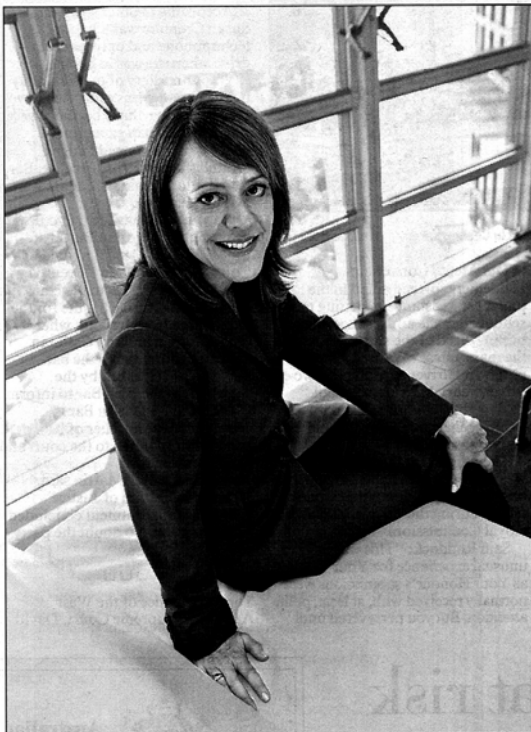
The main finding of the survey is that the marketing role in professional service firms has to do a lot more work if it wants to play a consistent part in an organisation's strategic planning.

According to the survey, marketers participate at an organisations' highest level meetings only 60 per cent of the time. Additionally, respondents said they were formal members of the senior leadership team only 41 per cent of the time.

And if they were employed by an organisation of 50 to 249 people, it was tougher to get senior management's attention than if they worked for a larger or smaller firm.

"They [the big firms] can't afford not to develop strategy without marketing, whereas the firms in the middle haven't really got there yet. They are still sort of operating along consensus management lines," Mr Redhill said.

He pointed to reputation management, the need for branding to



Roundtable's Jennifer Smokevitch says marketing is still evolving. Photo: PHIL CARRICK

differentiate in a market where everybody is selling a commodity service like audit, and developing existing services in new ways to solve problems, as underpinning the bigger role for marketing.

"The time of just flogging what we've got in terms of our technical competency is gone as a marketing strategy. That's just seen as selling."

While Jennifer Smokevitch, a director of Roundtable Consulting, acknowledged that marketing is still evolving as an integral and strategic player in professional firms, she said that the strategic development of individual professional service marketers tended to be at one of four levels.

The least evolved marketing approach was where the business knew it needed to do something but was not sure exactly what. The next level up was the organisation that attempted marketing without any real marketing knowledge.

Level three was slightly more positive for marketing personnel as it meant the organisation was starting to take marketing seriously, although budgets and people were still separate. Marketing executives at level four, the ideal level, were regular participants in the strategic planning process.

Getting to the top level was the thrust of Ms Smokevitch's workshop held in Sydney this Tuesday

KEY POINTS

- A number of big firms do not have strategic marketing plans.
- The marketing function is yet to play an integral role in many firms.

and attended by about 60 people at the offices of law firm Clayton Utz.

As one survey respondent noted: "It appears that marketing does not yet have the strategic voice in professional services that it would like to have."

The mixed attitude to their marketing people by professional service firms is reflected in the four key areas that, according to Ms Smokevitch, marketers will have to improve if they want to be more effective at a strategic level.

The four key areas include creating marketing plans which are strongly supportive of the longer term strategic goals of the business. This aim is in contrast to the survey finding that 42 per cent believe that marketing plans are not strongly supportive.

Only one-third reported that marketing participated fully in the strategic planning process and about 15 per cent participated not at all, or only partially. Consulting had the largest participation at 60 per cent while accounting, the lowest, was at 17 per cent.

Significantly, 30 per cent of marketers' organisations do not have a formal marketing plan at the highest level, across the organisation. And in an industry where client relationships are crucial, wrote Ms Smokevitch in her study, 35 per cent do not have marketing plans for individual clients. Moreover, in professions that are constantly working with numbers, only 12 per cent evaluate the return on marketing dollars spent.

"Perhaps one of the reasons marketing is not valued is its inability to demonstrate results and justify its return on investment," she stated.

However, less than 10 per cent justify their results through a more qualitative process. For instance, one key indicator of marketing effectiveness for a big firm is the number of job applicants on its website, which it considers shows the level of brand awareness that can attract talent in a competitive market.

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