



# FUSE

Executive Hiring Excellence

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VP of  
Marketing



# STEP 1 :

## Understand the role you are hiring for

Before you set out to hire the VP of Marketing, it is important to:

1. Understand the key roles and responsibilities of a marketing leader
2. Identify the company's current needs + stage of growth
3. Attract and go after an individual that is stage appropriate

**\*\* Note: The following proposed framework is for an early-stage VP of Marketing. You may need to adjust your framework based on your company's maturity. \*\***

### Overview of the Marketing Discipline:

Marketing has changed significantly in the last thirty years. In the past, when CPG companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestle, Unilever, etc. dominated the marketplace, the discipline was often primarily understood as brand-building and traditional advertising. With technology advancements and increased user engagement via digital mediums in recent times, marketing tactics and strategies have become increasingly data-driven and digitally focused.

Marketing activity efficacy has historically been difficult to measure and tie to results. However, modern marketing technologies (MarTech) and analytics tools now allow for readily available data. As such, enhanced attribution capabilities are the norm. (Note: this varies based on B2B/ Enterprise and Consumer).

Modern marketing leaders now require skills that extend beyond creativity, branding, storytelling, etc. They must also be analytical, data-driven, and results-oriented. In summary, an ideal candidate will bring a balanced blend of both qualitative and quantitative skills<sup>4</sup>.

**Qualitative skills** – this entails:

- Understanding changes in the world/society/market at large and identifying potential innovative, undiscovered channels for finding and acquiring customers.

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<sup>4</sup> **Note:** it can be rare to find someone who is equally strong in both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the role, so important that candidate can hire well to fill in any potential gaps to their skill sets. More on this below.

- Challenging assumptions, contextualizing all the tools available to drive brand awareness + growth, and fitting these tools in as appropriate for the company. **Note to CEO:** Lean into this area in interviews to see if the candidate is a process person (mechanical) OR a change agent (trying to find new ways to drive alpha).

**Quantitative skills** – this largely pertains to data and feedback loops. The best marketers build a culture of rapid innovation, iteration, etc. A marketing leader's ability to define and implement robust, measurable feedback loops defines success here.

## **Defining the Role:**

### **Marketing Leader = Well Rounded + Growth Obsessed**

As noted above, an ideal marketing leader will bring a strong mix of qualitative and quantitative skills to the discipline. They also need to be manically focused on driving growth objectives for the business (\*\*with spend constraints\*\*). Growth = Customers.

As such, when hiring for a marketing leader in today's environment, a CEO must be aware of the difference between an activities-based candidate versus an output-based candidate. It can be easy for marketers to focus on activities-based marketing (i.e. quantity over quality) and not track the actual impact of the spend. This can result in frivolous spend on tactics that aren't actually moving the business forward. With advanced attribution capabilities now readily available, there are no excuses for any department to spend without driving results.

### **Key components / responsibilities of the marketing discipline:**

**I. Brand marketing:** Telling the story of the company and its products / services.

- **VP of Marketing outputs:**

- Unify a brand to drive growth.
- Help set appropriate expectations and value-story for customers.
- Chief Evangelizer of the customer – they must understand the customer needs inside-and-out and identify reasons for churn (if there is any).

- **Note to CEO:** A company's brand image is important not only for attracting customers but also for employee hiring and retention.

**II. Creating demand:** Responsible for demand generation + enabling sales.

- **VP of Marketing outputs:**

- Build an effective marketing funnel to arm sales with ample leads.
- Arm sales with high quality sales collateral, customer testimonials, and case studies to use in conversations.

- **Note to CEO:** Demand generation requires \$\$\$\$. A company should only be spending money here once product-market-fit is achieved. Otherwise, it will not be efficient.

**III. Product marketing:** Defining the product's position in a market, understanding key competitors, identifying target customers, and creating product messaging to attract potential customers.

- **VP of Marketing outputs:**

- Build product awareness and inject momentum in the market.
- Understand the ever-changing dynamic of customer needs and wants.
- Run effective campaigns with a clear goal and expected return.
- Identify market expansion opportunities and potential threats.

**Challenges to note:**

- It is difficult to get consistent execution across each of the disciplines outlined above. Some candidates may be strong in some of these areas, but not in others. It is possible that you will need to hire supplemental talent to fill the skill gaps.
- Given the qualitative nature of some of these duties, often there can be challenges with consistent execution, analytics, and data.

# STEP 2 :

## Understand the key attributes of a marketing leader

**Overview:** The following provides a closer look at the critical traits/deliverables of an early-stage Marketing leader. Understanding these will help you prioritize potential candidates, and equip you to plan for + manage the strengths and weaknesses of the hired candidate.

**(1) Right brain meets left brain** – As described in the sections above, an ideal candidate for this position will bring together a mix of qualitative + quantitative (analytical) skills. As such, it is important to understand the candidate's level of creativity, but also measurement-based thinking skills.

### When screening for this area in interviews:

- Understand the candidate's prior experience with goal setting, measuring, and setting attribution. If a marketing leader is not an analytical, output-driven person, it will often fall on the CEO to set the goals.
- Dig into examples of the candidate's prior successful working partnerships with Sales (i.e. were they joined at the hip with sales leader(s)? Do they view any sales team wins/losses as marketing team wins/ team losses? How did they set Sales up for success?)
- Pay attention to how the candidate asks you (CEO) about growth during conversations. This will demonstrate if they are growth-focused.
- Determine how self-aware they are. What are their strengths, and where do they need to hire compliments? (i.e. do they have more qualitative or quantitative skills? Uncommon to find someone with a perfect balance of both.)

**(2) Chief customer evangelizer** – The VP of Marketing must understand which customers to go after and then help the company pivot if it is not working. Also, the VP of Marketing needs to be closely tied in with the product and sales teams to communicate any learnings.

### When screening for this area in interviews:

- Ask questions to determine their skills with positioning, driving awareness, etc.
- Are they in touch with / speaking the language of their customers – as well as gathering data on a scalable basis from their customers?
- What systems or communications did they have in place at prior companies to equip the product and sales team with customers insights?

**(3) A strong partner to Sales** – Growth obsession obviously comes into play here, but measurement / attribution skill does as well. There needs to be a joint understanding between Sales and Marketing on attribution and output of qualified leads (aka Marketing’s claimed number of qualified leads need to line up with Sales’ number).

**When screening for this area in interviews:**

- Ask the candidate to explain their relationship with the sales team in prior roles. How did they establish an understanding with regards to attribution?
- Ask the candidate about what they have managed, observed, or learned in a prior negotiation about what qualifies a MQL (Marketing-qualified lead) versus SQL (Sales-qualified lead).
- Ask the candidate to tell you about the growth their prior companies achieved at different stages. You want to know if they are on top of the numbers (paying attention to growth rates, etc.)
- Ask: “Among your prior company experiences, where did you change the trajectory of growth? How did you do it? Did you identify a new channel? did you lower CAC?”
- If the candidate has less experience, ask them about how they developed an understanding of marketing and growth. Who did they learn from? What did they see/ learn from that person?”

**(4) Ability to build a global brand & face of the company** – A company’s brand is crucial for attracting prospective customers and retaining top talent. As a company scales, its brand image will only become increasingly important as you consider category/ market expansion. It will also be a signal of strength to future acquirers, investors, or financial analysts. This component requires artistry, creativity, deep awareness of human behavior/ demography, etc. It is where the “right brain” piece comes especially into play. If the VP of Marketing does not have all of these skills, it is crucial that they can articulate the brand’s needs and goals to an outside party (i.e., agencies, graphic designers, other team members, etc.)

**When screening for this area in interviews:**

- Ask how the candidate helped transform the brand of a prior company. Pay attention to how they talk about the target customers, a behavior or emotion that they tapped into, and how they crafted the company’s story/ positioning to reflect that.
- Ask the candidate to define what makes a great brand. Also ask them to provide examples of brands they respect and why.
- Ask about their previous experience working with or guiding agencies to execute a brief.

# STEP 3 :

## Build a stage framework

**Directions:** Now that you understand the key deliverables of a strong marketing leader, use this framework to understand (1) the type of marketing leader you need based on your company's particular stage; and (2) how your marketing leader(s) should evolve over time.

**Note to CEO:** The main variable across each of these stages is **how marketing spend changes / increases**. This is based off the company's performance in conversion, CAC and LTV over time.

### Phase 1:

#### **Pre-PMF (Product- Market-Fit)**

At this stage, product marketing is likely the first discipline to hire for.

- This marketing leader could report to the Product org. (**Note to CEO:** you need to place this role in an area of the business where it will drive the most impact immediately.)
- It is possible you will also have a person focused on demand generation, but this role will more likely come with PMF.
- An ideal candidate in this stage is a strong writer with solid product sense and can help your company tell its product story to customers.
- **Note to CEO:** If you + your team does not have clear and distilled messaging tactics for selling the product, it will be difficult to do proper demand gen, sales enablement, and drive broader awareness/momentum. If product messaging is not centralized / clarified, often the sales team will start sharing their own narratives with customers!

### Phase 2:

#### **Early PMF**

At this stage, the marketing organization will likely increase responsibilities to include demand generation (Demand Gen).

- An ideal Marketing leader at this stage will have the same skills / aptitudes as described above but will also be able to increase the Demand Gen function (or you will hire for this in a separate role).
  - **Note to CEO:** Demand generation will be most effective when your business is financially able / willing to increase spend to start scaling growth.
  - If the Demand Gen person is a separate role, this person could be placed within the product org initially to build out the system and could move under Sales to ensure accountability.
- The Marketing leader needs to be mechanical and able to identify CAC advantages.



- Other key responsibilities include identifying the best channels (be it traditional or modern channels) and driving SEO / SEM.
- **Note to CEO:** The company needs to have acceptable conversion rates, CAC and LTV metrics before adding in Demand Gen. You cannot spend \$ when customers are churning!

**Phase 3:  
10M+**

This is the initial stage to bring in a CMO to lead brand building efforts.

- Important to hire a brand-focused CMO at this stage to drive growth from \$10M to \$100M revenue. Growth at this stage requires a broader reach and distilled company “brand image” to drive continued “alpha.”
- CMO position will become an increasingly strategic role. The CEO should be able to lean on the CMO as a thought partner for growth strategies (conversations should not solely be about planning and execution).
- All other marketing functions will likely consolidate under the CMO.

**Phase 4:  
Pre-IPO / IPO**

A seasoned, scalable CMO is critical. At this stage you need to sustain growth and will be building out separate marketing functions.

- Requires same responsibilities as above, however some additional marketing functions will be critical to expand growth, including: :
  - Vertical / campaign marketing
  - Advertising
  - Content marketing
  - Events
  - IAR (Industry Analyst Relations) – market positioning + category creation / product expansion
  - PR (Public Relations)
  - Extended Demand Gen channels: i.e. Peer Review sites (G2Crowd, Software Advice)
- The CMO needs to be an amazing storyteller and leader across many marketing teams/ functions.
- The CMO will also need to tell a brand / product story that resonates with not only customers, but also investors and/or financial analysts.
- A CMO at this stage also needs to speak the “language of your customer” fluently and build strong target audience relations. (i.e., if your target customer is a developer, CMO and marketing team members need to fully understand that persona).

# STEP 4 :

## Thorough Diligence is a MUST

After you understand your company's needs + the key deliverables for the marketing leader you are targeting, it is important to do the proper work to prepare for the interview process. Note: many of these components are repeats from prior roles' diligence checklists, however they are still relevant for the VP of Marketing.

### (1) Tips on reading a resume - things to pay attention to:

- **Find a demonstrable track record of success** – Make sure there is evidence of the candidate moving up in their career (i.e. vis-à-vis the companies they joined and roles attained). You want to know the candidate is constantly trying to improve.
- **Frequency of job change** – If there is a lot of “job hopping”, dig into the reasons why. You want someone who is a builder. If they are only at a company for one year, they likely did not build anything substantial while there. It will take time to build out effective marketing strategies and see measurable results.
- **Are they an “A-Player”?** – Did they work at winning companies? Generally, “A-Teams” hire “A-players” and will drive significant output from them. Be sure to investigate the candidate's prior companies and see if they have reputations for strong accountability models. If not, it is important that the candidate is aware of that and articulates it to you.
- **Do they have numbers to describe results they achieved** – Marketing is directly tied to growth, and as such is a quantitative measure of success. A candidate's resume must be OUTPUT-based not activity-based. It must demonstrate that they have savviness with modern MarTech and attribution tools.
- **Ask for examples of prior marketing “product” they supported** – this includes brand materials, writing samples, sales collateral, customer briefs, product demo videos, analyst report performance (if relevant, i.e. Gartner Magic Quadrant), etc.

## (2) Cautions right off the bat – before and during interviews:

- **Referrals** – Do not advance internal, or in-network recommendations too quickly – dig in deeper. Do not immediately assume that the candidate will be a fit just because they come in referred from people you trust.
- **Do not assume executive recruiters are the reference check** – DO IT YOURSELF.
- **Listen for “I” statements versus “we” statements** – “WE” needs to be the primary word used by the candidate when they speak about prior experiences. A VP of Marketing’s work requires contribution from a multitude of team members. They are a direct partner to product and Sales. It is not a solo journey, so the candidate should not be speaking as such!
- **Never hire someone after one interview!** – CEO needs to spend ample time with the candidate. You should feel like you are gaining value from each interaction + getting more excited with each interaction.

## (3) How to complete good reference checks

- **Allocate substantial, quality time** – reference checks are beyond a “check the box” activity. It is important that you spend ample time preparing for and conducting reference checks.
- **Ask for a well-rounded, “360-view” list of references** – Ask the candidate to provide references from three different levels – someone who worked above them (manager), a peer\*, and a direct report. \*At least one of these individuals needs to be a Sales leader.
- **Understand what you are asking about / looking for** – Most people will not agree to do a reference call if they do not have good things to say. As such, make the conversation about FIT, not about generically judging whether this person is “good” or “bad”.
- **Spend time preparing the list of questions** – this is crucial for ensuring you get the most out of the diligence call. Be sure to ask questions that aim to figure out what the person can DO, not what they are like (at least at first). As noted above, culture fit is important and something to address, but you must first understand what the person is capable of, as this will be the initial go/ no go point.
- **Do a lot more LISTENING than talking on these calls** – the more talking the reference does, the more you will learn and the more data you will collect. A good rule of thumb is: 90% listening, 10% talking.
  - **When you talk:** Any speaking you do should be to describe the role and traits you are looking for upfront. OR what you want to validate and / or risk areas you want insight on. Once you have stated those items upfront, direct the conversation from there.
  - [**Note to CEO:** If someone is vague in explaining why said person is no longer at their company, they are probably not disclosing something to you = **RED FLAG.**]
- **DO NOT be swayed by a single reference.** Use it as a data point, not the absolute truth.

