



Trend 1

Senior marketing leaders building influence with soft skills

Modern marketing leaders find themselves at the vanguard of corporate leadership and collaboration. As custodians of their organisation's narrative, they collaborate not only with their marketing colleagues, but with colleagues throughout their organisation. Soft skills, rather than technical skills, have emerged as the key currency for marketing leaders – and are essential for effective cross-functional collaboration.

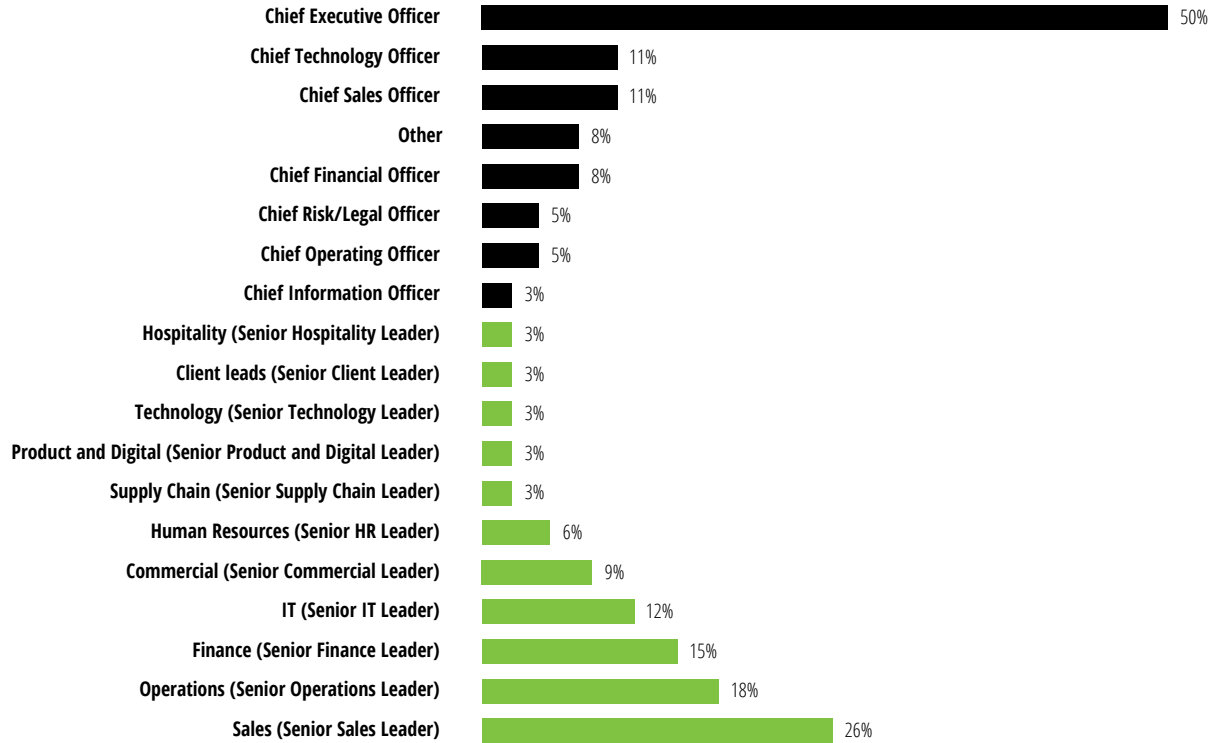
Senior marketing leaders are not confined by departmental walls

Marketing exists at the intersection of consumer behaviour, technological innovation and human storytelling. The role of marketing leaders relies heavily on connecting marketing with the organisation's wider objectives. To be successful, they must be effective collaborators, joining the dots between marketing and other key functions within the organisation.

One way to delineate the role performed by a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) to that of a senior marketing executive (SME) is to examine their most important strategic partners. As a marketing leader becomes more senior, their key strategic partners within the organisation change.



FIGURE 1: Question: Who is your most important strategic partner in the organisation outside marketing?



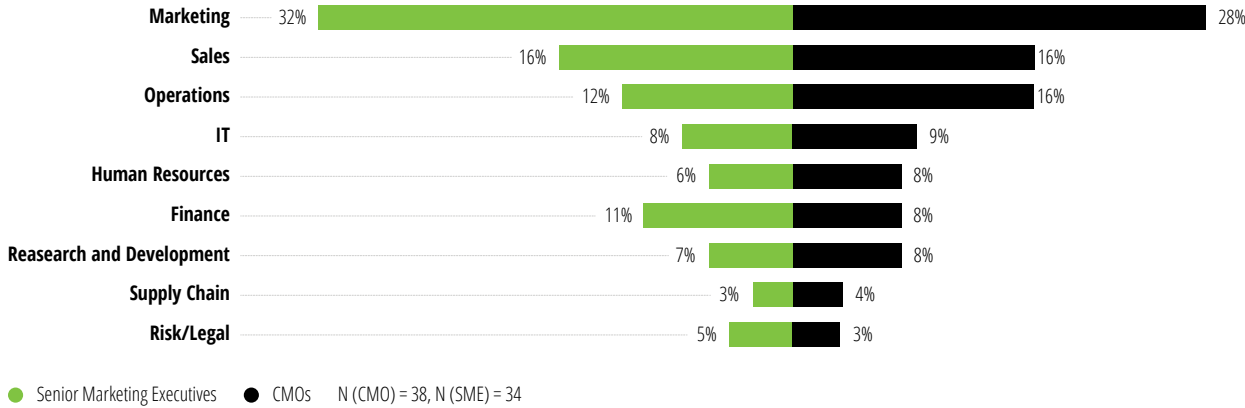
● Strategic partner - CMO ● Strategic partner - SME N (CMO) = 38, N (SME) = 34

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2023

As a CMO, there is a 50 per cent chance that your most important strategic partner is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The strategic alignment of the CEO and CMO roles provides the CMO with a holistic view of the organisation and its many departmental functions. It also highlights how central marketing is to an organisation's strategy and, ultimately, its success.

The most important strategic partners for SMEs vary widely with sales, operations and finance all featuring prominently. This underscores not only the diverse nature of SME roles but also the importance of the marketing function to all areas of the organisation. As an SME moves through the ranks up to the CMO role they should be aware that the CEO will likely become their closest strategic ally in the organisation and their role becomes less about running marketing and more about helping run the business.

FIGURE 2: Question: What proportion of your time do you spend working with people from the functions listed below?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2023

CMOs and SMEs spend their time working with people across a broad range of different roles. Both groups spend approximately 70 per cent of the time working with people from outside marketing and only 30 per cent of their time working with marketing. CMOs, in particular, spend only 28 per cent of their time working with people from the

marketing function. This proclivity to work with functions from outside of marketing underscores marketing leaders as cross-functional collaborators, whose influence extends well beyond their own department. It reflects the need for leaders in marketing to forge and maintain relationships with those in other departments to support wider

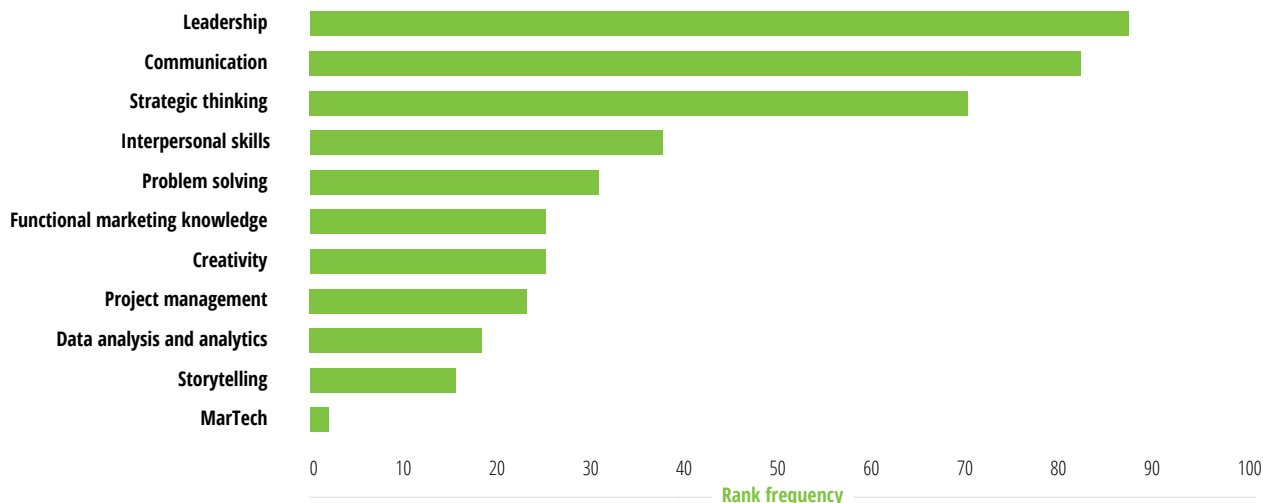


organisational objectives. In previous Deloitte research, CMOs were shown to collaborate at a lower rate than their C-suite peers.¹ However, our latest research suggests this has changed as CMOs are working alongside other functions more than they work with other marketers.

Soft skills are most valued by marketing leaders

The skills most important to marketing leaders reflect the collaborative nature of their roles. Today's marketing leaders need to be adept at managing relationships with a huge range of stakeholders both inside and out of their organisation.²

FIGURE 3: Question: What skills are most useful for your current role? (Rank top 3 with 1 being most useful)



N (CMO + SME) = 72

Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2023

The skills most useful to marketing leaders reinforce the notion that they are collaborators and leaders, whose role extends beyond the confines of their

own function. The three skills ranked most useful – leadership, communication and strategic thinking – are rooted in interpersonal interactions, emotional

intelligence and the capacity to navigate and influence human dynamics. At the other end of the spectrum, the skills viewed as the least useful – MarTech, storytelling and data analysis and analytics – are more technical in nature. The data suggests that when developing a marketing strategy, the value of soft skills eclipses those that are more technical and tangible in nature.

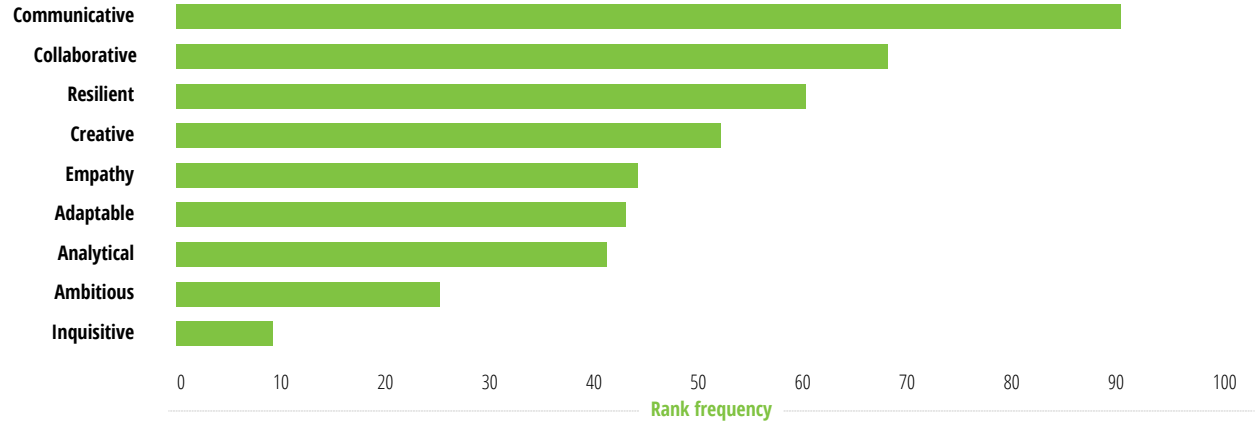
Interestingly, CMOs held a variety of roles prior to becoming a CMO, reflecting the varied paths to this level. The CMOs in this study held a range of roles across sectors including CMO, Vice President, Managing Director, Chief Financial Officer, Head of Research & Development, Manager in Retail, Creative Director and Human Resources Director. This points to the transferability of skills across industries especially the need for soft skills, and the breadth and depth of experience CMOs often bring to the role.

Communication is key for senior marketers

The personality traits needed for the senior marketer role bolster the argument that communication and collaboration are the key to being successful.

There are many reasons why communication has emerged as the most important skill for marketers to possess. Senior marketing leaders must be able to speak to a range of audiences. Communicating with other marketers to align on strategy is only a small part of their role – they must also be adept at communicating their organisation's key messages to their shareholders, customers and wider public. They must also be able to foster collaboration within the organisation itself, given that they spend 70 per cent of their time working with those from outside the marketing function. It is essential that senior marketing leaders can collaborate to join the dots between the organisation's marketing function and wider business objectives.

FIGURE 4: Question: What personality traits are most important for your role? (Rank top 3 with 1 being most important)



N (CMO + SME) = 72

Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2023

Resilience also ranks high, demonstrating that it is a necessary personality trait to reach the upper echelon of an organisation's marketing function. The business environment that marketers must rely on is subject to fast-moving change, be it

the introduction of new technologies, changing consumer preferences or disruption to existing business models.³ It is essential that marketing leaders can adapt to change while handling potential set-backs and the unpredictability of the business

landscape. Navigating this uncertainty and relishing the pressure to make decisions which ripple through an entire organisation make resilience vital for marketing leaders.

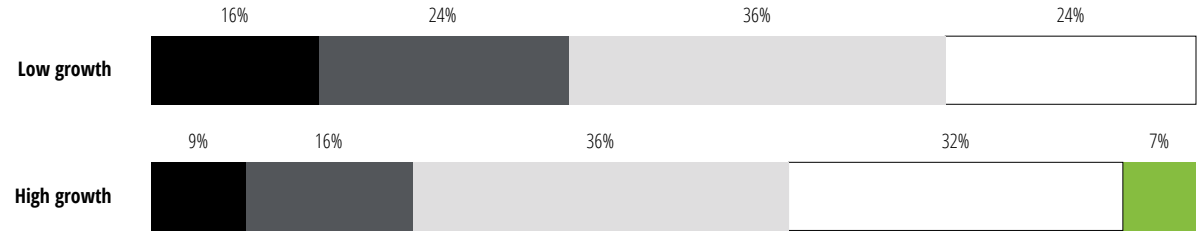
Fast growing organisations increasingly expect to outsource creative work

Marketing leaders in fast-growing organisations increasingly expect to collaborate with external agencies to deliver creative work.

Nearly 40 per cent of fast-growing organisations expect that they will increase the amount of creative work outsourced to external agencies compared to only 24 per cent of the low growth group – allowing them to tap into other sources of creative expertise to manage the demand. This heightens the need for effective communication and collaboration by senior marketers to co-ordinate a coherent creative strategy between in-house and external teams.



FIGURE 5: Question: How do you think the proportion of creative work outsourced by your organisation to external advertising agencies will change in the next two years?



● Decrease significantly ● Decrease somewhat ● Remain unchanged ○ Increase somewhat ● Increase significantly

N (CMO + SME) = 69*, N (Low Growth) = 25, N (High Growth) = 44

*N (Don't Know) = 3 Respondents excluded

Note: High growth organisations are those which reported that revenue has increased over the last twelve months. Low growth organisations are those which reported that revenue has remained static or decreased over the last twelve months.

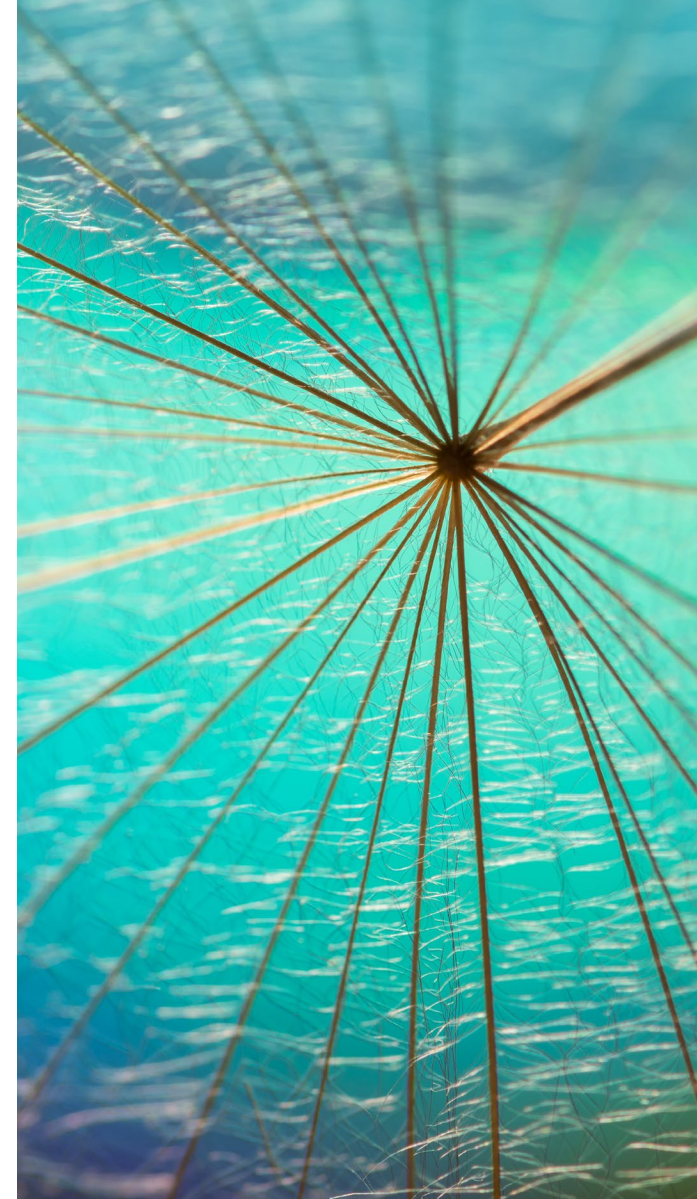
Source: Deloitte analysis, 2023

In summary

The message is clear: the role of the senior marketer extends to all corners of the organisation and well beyond. To develop and perform well as a CMO, marketers should consider the recommendations noted below.

Key recommendations:

- **Network and make connections outside your function.** CMOs spend only 30 per cent of their time with other marketers. To be an effective CMO, you must build your network outside your own function, connecting the marketing function with wider business objectives.
- **Develop your soft skills.** Soft skills, like communication, collaboration and leadership, are more important than technical expertise when it comes to the top roles in marketing. These are the skills that organisations are increasingly seeking - be sure you understand how to demonstrate them.
- **Be resilient.** The path to CMO is not straightforward. CMOs come from a wide range of backgrounds and face a huge variety of potential challenges on the road to achieving their position at the apex of their organisation's marketing effort. To be an effective CMO, you must relish these challenges and be comfortable making difficult decisions under pressure.



Endnotes

1. [The makings of a more confident CMO](#), Deloitte Insights, 2019.
2. [The C-Suite Skills That Matter Most](#), Harvard Business Review, 2022.
3. [Striving for success: The path to becoming a CMO](#), Deloitte, 2023.

Recognition and appreciation

Special thanks to the Next Generation CMO Programme for their insight and supporting the research.



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