

The New CMO Imperative

BY CRAIG PARK, FSMPS, ASSOC. AIA

One of the biggest—maybe the biggest—challenges facing the chief marketing officer in any organization is getting buy-in for global strategies across all the company’s different organizational segments. I recently picked up David Aaker’s new book, *Spanning Silos: The New CMO Imperative* (Boston, Harvard Business School Publishing, 2008), looking for some insight into optimizing my role as CMO for LEO A DALY. What I found was an excellent roadmap to overcoming the challenges that I face every day and that CMOs almost universally are facing in virtually every industry.

When you assume a strategic marketing leadership role in a professional services organization, there are complex synergies that cross the market, geographic, functional, and organizational structures. Each of these “silos” has its own perspective and, in many organizations, its own motivation to maintain local or silo control. Centralizing marketing leadership by establishing a CMO role creates opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed and supported by the CEO, CFO, and COO and their teams.

The CMO’s Challenges

Silos will exist regardless of the size or scope of an organization. The CMO’s challenge is to address the breakdowns that result from ignoring a silo reality. Aaker noted that, without a central perspective, marketing resources are often misallocated, brands lack clarity and linkage, and service offerings and programs are inhibited.

Aaker observed, and I agree, that, without a centralized CMO role, marketing management competence is diluted, marketing success is not leveraged across silos, and there is inadequate cross-silo communication and cooperation. Failure to address these challenges tends to foster a negative attitude toward the concept of central marketing. Unless corporate leadership intervenes, there is generally a lack of necessary support and resources for corporate marketing. This, in turn, makes it difficult to create and implement cross-silo strategies and programs. As a result, marketing is perceived as tactical, not strategic, and the effectiveness of the marketing talent pool is weakened.

By implementing a strong CMO role, marketing resource allocation can be both strategic and holistic. The CMO-led marketing team brings clarity and linkage in silo-spanning brands and develops on-point messages that define the value of all services and programs. A strong CMO team increases the likelihood that marketing management will be seen by corporate and silo leadership as highly competent. Centrally defined, developed, and implemented marketing programs that leverage successes across silos will lead to increased buy-in and support across the organization. As a result, overall communication and cooperation will be improved.

“In the long history of human kind, those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively prevailed.”

— Charles Darwin

My Silos

When I joined LEO A DALY in 2006 as chief marketing officer, the company had four major market sectors (aviation, federal, healthcare, and hospitality) and 20 other minor markets, all supported by the corporate marketing team. We have since subsumed international marketing and business development activities that were formerly led by our CEO.

The LEO A DALY “architectural/engineering” brand had 1 international and 10 domestic offices that have now grown to 6 international and 14 domestic locations. In our structure, these locations are all independent profit centers, which create silo-like perspectives when it comes to interaction with the corporate team.

We also have a separate “engineering/program management” brand that accounts for approximately one-third of our business and performs a range of civil engineering services, delivered through six business units. This disparate set of service lines further complicates our overall marketing strategy.

In addition, there are three distinct silos within the firm’s marketing organization—marketing, business development, and public relations—each with its own silo perspective.

Finally, there are organizational silos created by a newly established “C-Suite” leadership structure that includes management, finance, human resources, benefits, legal, and information technology, in addition to marketing.

As a result, today I face over 30 “silo” perspectives toward corporate marketing. As LEO A DALY continues to grow, that matrix will, no doubt, continue to increase in complexity. Aaker’s book defines a path for CMO success that I found was very much in sync with what I am attempting to implement. For me, this confirmed that his common-sense approach was the right track to becoming a successful CMO.

Roadmap for CMO Success

Aaker postulates that the key to CMO success is focusing on seven key steps:

1. Finding the right role and scope
2. Gaining credibility and buy-in
3. Using teams and other routes to silo linking
4. Developing a common planning process and information system
5. Adapting the master brand to silo markets
6. Prioritizing brands in the portfolio
7. Creating winning marketing programs in a silo world

I found that these seven steps are not linear. They need to be viewed as a holistic challenge. These are the overarching strategies the entire corporate marketing team must address. Only then will the CMO role and team be viewed as successful.

During the last three years, we redefined the structure and roles of the LEO A DALY corporate marketing group into a “service” team in support of all the silos. As a result, we significantly increased interaction and internal cross-silo communication, gaining increased credibility firmwide. We implemented an integral “balanced-scorecard” approach to the one-year and three-year strategic business planning process and applied it across all silos, ensuring we were all speaking the same language and working toward a common vision and mission. We created a common set of financially oriented metrics, tracking long-term, three-to-five-year, “barometric” changes, as well as short-term, quarterly goals.

“The CMO’s challenge is to address the breakdowns that result from ignoring a silo reality.”

We created overarching brand messages customized to meet market and geographic silo needs. We reduced over 25 outdated and diluted market-specific communication pieces into 12 very focused and differentiated messages, adding new technology (BIM) and socioeconomic (sustainability) themes across all brand offerings. We established a strategic style guide for development of new and targeted communications. Now we work with all silos

(management, markets, geographies, and services) in developing, creating, and implementing strong marketing programs.

CMO Archetypes


At LEO A DALY I found that understanding the “right role and scope” was the first important step toward addressing our marketing challenges. Aaker defines several possible roles the CMO can assume. He observantly notes that the CMO will probably need to master and apply all of them based on different and changing silo perspectives.

- **The Facilitator:** By establishing a common collaboration framework, enables business units to develop marketing strategies without the CMO team’s active participation.
- **The Consultant:** Advises and provides companywide insights to the silos in developing and executing marketing strategies.
- **The Service Provider:** Provides consumer research, segmentation studies, employee training, management of sponsorships, and management of third-party suppliers (e.g., photography).
- **The Strategic Partner:** Creates and applies a marketing and branding strategy jointly through teamwork and collaboration.
- **The Strategic Captain:** Conceives, selects, and manages the marketing strategies and programs, interpreting trends and insights into customer and competitor dynamics.

Today, I find that, depending on the situation and need, I apply all of these roles in my position as CMO. The key is understanding when each is applicable.

At the End of the Day

I found applying the silo-spanning strategies that Aaker defines in this well-written book is an excellent roadmap for the CMO. He supports his theory with anecdotal evidence from interviews with over 30 CMOs from Fortune 500 companies. Applying these actions will ultimately lead to strong brands and offerings and great marketing programs.

In all my reading on the challenges of the CMO, I have yet to find a better resource than *Spanning Silos* to gain an understanding of, and an approach to achieving, the organizational goals for marketing—a great resource for any CMO, or aspiring CMO (and CEOs too). I believe at LEO A DALY we are on the right path to building a strong and effective marketing organization. I’ll be referring to Aaker’s book often. 

About the Author



Contributing Editor Craig Park, FSMPS, Assoc. AIA, is vice president and chief marketing officer for LEO A DALY (www.leoadaly.com), an international planning, architecture, engineering, interior design, and program management practice based in Omaha, NE. An SMPS National Past President and the recipient of the 2007 Marketing Achievement Award, Craig can be reached at craig@craigpark.com.