

MARKETING JOBS AND BRAND MANAGER JOBS: HOW TO GET INTO MARKETING AND BRAND MANAGEMENT



Marketing Jobs Explained

MBA's may associate marketing with the ubiquitous four Ps and three Cs—product, place, promotion, price, competition, company, and customer. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individuals’ and organizations’ objectives.” Mnemonic devices and official definitions aside, marketing links a company to its customers by aligning the company’s resources to meet the customer’s (or market’s) needs. This process includes many phases, and as a marketer you can be anything from a salesperson to a strategy shaper to a number-cruncher.

Brand building and branding strategies stand at the core of marketing. Although Procter & Gamble was one of the first companies to use “brand management” with Lava soap in the 1920s, the phrase “brand equity” was not coined until the mid-’80s. Once analysts could begin to quantify the value of brands, the concept of “branding” was born. In the past few years, this concept has become an integral part of every company—from start-ups to consumer products behemoths—as strong brands and marketing programs drive shareholder value. Branding provides a necessary shortcut, a quick summation of what a company is all about.

Marketing-related jobs account for about 30 percent of the jobs in most industrialized nations. They are becoming increasingly important in today’s world of constantly evolving technologies, industry consolidations, and rapid economic growth. Consumers today are bombarded with more information than they can process. Marketers fulfill many functions to ensure that the right people get the right information. These include:

- **Advertising:** Determining a promotional message and a channel to reach target customers
- **Brand management:** Managing all aspects of marketing for a product, typically consumer-packaged goods
- **Competitive analysis:** Benchmarking the price, positioning, market share, or other metric against your competition
- **Consumer research:** Determining the characteristics, trends, and needs of a given market
- **Customer relations:** Developing and managing a relationship with customers by ensuring that their needs are met
- **Product management:** Managing all aspects of marketing and development for a product category, typically high-tech consumer products, content, or software
- **Public relations and communications:** Determining overall brand positioning and managing communication channels to generate publicity and influence public perceptions

Sales:

Generating transactions

These marketing functions encompass a wide variety of goals. They can include:

- **Market segmentation:** Determining the target market for your products and services
- **Share of market:** Increasing the number of customers for your products and services
- **Branding:** Enhancing the way customers perceive your product brand or increasing awareness of and exposure to your brand
- **Price strategy:** Determining the price or discounts for your goods and services
- **Channels of distribution:** Determining how to bring your goods and services to the market
- **Product or services mix:** Determining the mix of your product and service offerings
- **Product development:** Designing and building the characteristics of your product or service
- **Positioning:** Using advertising and communications to determine how a product or service is perceived by target customers
- **Product launch:** Introducing a new product or service to market
- **Promotions:** Using communications to increase interest in a product, service, or event
- **Customer acquisition and retention:** Performing activities that increase and maintain the number of customers

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Major Players in Marketing

Marketing’s function differs from company to company. In the consumer products industry, it plays a lead role, while in other sectors it may play a more supporting role. Arenas include:

- **Consumer products:** Consumer packaged goods such as soap or cereal (Unilever, SC Johnson, Kraft)
- **Financial services:** Credit cards, brokerage accounts, mortgages, and banking services (American Express, Citibank, Merrill Lynch)
- **Professional services:** Consulting, legal, accounting, and investment banking (Deloitte, CSFB, Korn/Ferry)
- **Business-to-business:** Raw materials, parts, durable goods (Boeing, United Technologies)
- **Pharmaceuticals:** Prescription drugs (Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Bristol-Myers Squibb)
- **Entertainment and media:** Films, television, and Internet (Disney, TimeWarner, Viacom)
- **Services marketing:** Hotels and restaurants (Marriott, Starwood)
- **Sports:** Professional sports events (NFL, WNBA, Summer Olympics)

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Trends in the Marketing Industry

Message saturation has become a serious issue lately, as consumers are increasingly overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of media available to promote marketing communications. Many companies are adopting innovative approaches, such as permission marketing, to ensure that their message rises above the noise of the marketplace to reach their target audience.

Loyalty marketing is on the rise as companies try to reward their customers for using or buying their goods and services in order to increase the customers switching costs.

The pioneering credit card that offered frequent-flier miles for dollars spent introduced us all to the concept of co-branding. Companies combine their brand assets to market goods and services jointly.

Companies are increasingly using their relationships with customers through one product to cross-sell other products and services. This relationship marketing focuses on building stronger ties with customers.

Product placement in film and television. Mattel toys on *The Apprentice*, for instance, is also important, as many consumers are skipping commercials and recording programs to view later.

In the consumer packaged goods sector, the Wal-Mart effect, where giant retailers place heavy demands on suppliers, is having a sizeable impact on the way CPG companies operate. It's also fueling the continuation of a longstanding trend of consolidation. Most recently, Procter & Gamble swallowed up Gillette, gaining new leverage in negotiating with these retail behemoths.

Getting Hired in Marketing

Before you begin your job hunt in the industry, be aware that the marketing business has many facets—from market research to product development to branding—and includes various industries and products. Decide which one most appeals to you and focus your search there.

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Salary of Marketing Professionals

Most new MBAs entering brand management will start as Assistant Brand Managers with a starting salary around \$80,000. A signing bonus of a few thousand dollars more is customary of big firms. Associate brand/marketing managers (one to two years out of business school) can expect \$90,000 to \$100,000 a year. Outside of brand management the salary range differs according to the type of position, and the size of the employer.

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Hours

As a brand manager of marketing associate, you won't be working investment banking hours, but don't expect a stroll down Easy Street. Although official business hours may be 9 to 5, if you take those bookends literally, you'll earn disapproving glances from management and a fast track to career stagnation. "Our employees are the kinds of people who are inspired to give more and work a little longer," says a Coca-Cola recruiter. "That's just part of our culture." The cyclical requirements of the fiscal calendar will also have an impact on your hours; when budget time rolls around, expect to clock in some long workdays. One veteran sums it up: "You need to be willing to put in long hours when necessary, but generally the business is known to offer reasonable work-life balance."

Travel

While some of your b-school classmates may not see the inside of their own homes from one month to the next, as a general rule, travel is relatively infrequent in this business. Sales meetings, conferences, and research in the field may help you rack up a few frequent flier miles, but you typically won't be hopping on a plane at a moment's notice. One important exception is the international brand manager. This position requires frequent overseas travel.

Office Culture

Words like collegial, fun, and informal were all used to describe the atmosphere in this industry. The dress code is typically business casual, although some image-conscious employers, like cosmetics companies, may expect men to wear a suit and tie. Obviously, dress to match the situation: When you're meeting an important client, dress up. But you knew that already.

Of course, the culture varies from company to company. One associate marketing manager describes her office as "moderately hierarchical and old-world corporate: Junior people are clustered in cubicles à la Dilbert, while brand managers and above enjoy offices with windows and great views." Another, however, characterizes her work environment as "open and informal. There is very little memo-writing and a lot of one-on-one/small-group verbal communication. Everyone has an open-door policy." Spend time in a potential new office to get a true feel for its atmosphere.

Socially, the teamwork involved in this industry encourages frequent interaction among colleagues. In the words of an associate marketing manager in consumer pharmaceuticals, "We are very close, and team activities are often scheduled to maintain excitement and keep attitudes upbeat." An associate brand manager in the consumer packaged goods area claims, "The community is pretty close-knit, especially among people in the same start group or in start groups one to two years apart. There aren't too many formal, organized happy hours, but I socialize with my co-workers quite often. There are division-wide as well as brand-team activities organized about two, three times a year."

Such company-sanctioned socializing is common. Says one associate marketing manager at a large consumer products corporation, "The company encourages teams to dine and engage in other off-site activities frequently for team-building and morale-boosting. They give us a generous budget." Client entertaining, on the other hand, is generally infrequent in this business. You won't find the same wining and dining that you might in investment banking or consulting.

See: [Organization Culture Matters Most](#)

The Crowd

MBAs in the marketing biz come from all walks of life—"engineers to advertising execs to environmentalists to salespeople." One senior analyst at a large high-tech corporation attests that "just about any background can be leveraged in some way. You don't have to be an expert in the marketplace, but you have to be able to learn quickly, turn information around, and be decisive."

It is common for marketing executives to have experience in other industries. One insider explains, "Many MBAs in marketing are former consultants or investment bankers who burned out of that lifestyle and are looking for a more manageable professional life. Everyone seems to have outside interests—many of my colleagues take classes in the evenings or on weekends, are interested in athletics, and travel for pleasure." Also, the male-female ratio in this industry is much more balanced than it is in many others (like investment banking). Women make up a large chunk of marketing majors at most B-schools.

How to Get Marketing Jobs

Most people we spoke to in the marketing industry were recruited on campus. Those who have changed jobs since B-school networked with peers from their MBA programs. They recommend identifying a contact and scheduling an informational interview with him/her. Use that connection to forward your resumé to the appropriate party rather than sending a blind resumé to human resources.

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If I could do it again, I would:

- Talk to as many contacts in the industry as possible to get smart about what types of jobs are out there. Find out how positions differ in large and small companies—there are pros and cons to both.
- Read trade magazines and industry periodicals to become familiar with trends and issues.
- Understand fully the categories the company competes in—read trade magazines, visit Web sites, or go to your local grocery store and study the shelves!
- "Be an intelligent and aware consumer—study store shelves, watch TV ads, etc."
- "Not limit myself to my area of expertise. For example, you don't have to be an IT expert to work on marketing for a tech company. There is a lot of movement in this industry—take advantage of it!"

Tips to ace your marketing interview:

- Demonstrate your understanding of the company, its mission, and the market in which it competes.
- Wow them with your intensity and energy. As one insider notes, "This is a topsy-turvy, ever-changing industry."
- Emphasize your strong leadership and your people skills.
- Exhibit a passionate interest in the business.
- Demonstrate strong quantitative skills.
- "Be passionate, be a leader, be a high performer, and show a repeated history of these things."

- Be prepared for cases. Marketing firms are turning increasingly to the case-study method to test your analytical abilities and assess your marketing skills. They typically provide an open-ended question involving a strategic-marketing situation and ask you to address it. An example would be: "Polarama is a firm that markets children's toys with a North Pole theme. They are considering whether or not to introduce 'snow ball,' a new line of Beanie Baby-esque stuffed animals, in time for the holiday season. What would you recommend?"
- Be prepared for situational leadership questions. Be aware that interviewers are not only assessing the quality of your answer, but also looking for evidence of specific leadership skills necessary for success in their environment. The answers they are looking for may or may not be related to the question they've asked you. For example, if an interviewer says, "Tell me about a time in your previous job when your team faced a deadline that you thought you would be unable to meet, but you found a way to complete the task on time," he or she may in fact be more interested in what you say about your team relationships, than in how you actually addressed the issue.

See:

- [21 Major Job Interview Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs](#)
- [The Five Musts of Interviewing](#)
- [How to Answer the Tell Me About Yourself Interview Question](#)
- [The Best Way to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews](#)

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Moving Up in Marketing

The consensus is that you can move up quickly in this field (we spoke with one MBA in the industry who has been promoted three times in only two and a half years!), especially at more junior levels. At most companies, you can be a senior manager/director within about five years. What follows is an average timeline in the marketing divisions of several large corporations:

Consumer Packaged Goods

Post-MBA:

- Assistant brand manager (12-18 months)
- Associate brand manager (12-18 months)
- Brand manager (18-24 months)
- Senior brand manager (minimum two years)
- Category business director
- Vice president

"There is a lot of upward mobility at more junior levels, but it's more difficult to move from senior brand manager to category business director since there are a limited number of positions and little turnover. After five years, I want to be a senior brand manager who is a strong candidate for the next category business director opening."

Consumer Pharmaceuticals

Post-MBA:

- Associate marketing manager (two years)
- Marketing manager (three to four years)
- Franchise director (three to four years)
- Vice president

Consumer Products

Post-MBA:

- Associate marketing manager (two-and-a-half to three years)
- Brand manager (two to three years)
- Marketing manager (one to two years)
- Marketing director
- Vice president of marketing (can take 10 to 15 years to get to this level)

"If you're considered top of the heap, the next step is general manager of a division. From there, it's on to CEO!"

* Note that while many large corporations have clearly defined tracks, smaller organizations often have no typical path. Do your research while you're interviewing to determine what the ladder is like at a particular company.

What It Takes to Be Good at Marketing

Communication, presentation, and personal skills are keys to success in the marketing biz. One associate sums up a prime candidate as the kind of person who can keep a small- to medium-size crowd at a party entertained. The job will likely entail leading teams and motivating people. It is important to be outgoing, possess the ability to influence others, and work effectively on a team.

People skills need to be balanced with efficiency and organization. Marketing execs must work well cross-functionally, adapt quickly, and still maintain a professional and personable demeanor. You have to identify issues quickly and summarize them succinctly without being curt or blunt.

Quantitative skills, strong analytical and writing abilities, and strategic thinking are also qualities that are key to success in this industry.

What is a Typical Day Like in a Marketing Job?

There really is no typical day is a chorus we heard again and again. One insider says, I lead a variety of projects that have cross-functional teams, so some days I'm running from meeting to meeting, while other days I'm doing individual analyses. Activities could include:

- Meeting with your brand team or talking one-on-one with a brand manager
- Attending a training workshop from an outside supplier
- Conducting financial analysis—looking at volume and profit numbers in a category or for a specific product
- Discussing technical feasibility of a product with R&D
- Analyzing market research issues
- Planning or attending focus groups
- Discussing trade issues with sales department
- Fulfilling requests of PR agency for information

What Are the Most Common Marketing Buzzwords?

- Customer loyalty
- Personalization
- Incentivize
- Cannibalization
- CRM (customer relationship management)
- CPFR—Collaborative Planning, Forecasting and Replenishment
- RFID—Radio Frequency Identification
- P&L
- Category management
- Category killer
- Brand switchers
- Lovemark
- Premiums/tchotchkes
- Private labeling

What Are the Pros & Cons of a Marketing Career?

Pros of a Career in Marketing

- Smart, motivated people

- Great training and preparation for the future
- Variety—you are always working on different projects with different people. The job is never monotonous. Also, if you don't like a project, you know it will end, and in a few months you'll be able to do something else.
- Flexibility
- High-level of activity
- Develop and hone management skills
- Creativity
- Diversity of tasks
- Ability to influence business, even as a newcomer
- Mature industry

Cons of a Career in Marketing

- Stressful crunch periods
- There can be a lot of dry number-crunching in the first years
- Office politics

Misconceptions About Marketing Careers

- **Myth:** "It's all about strategy and developing marketing plans."
- **Reality:** There are a lot of details in this job that can really bog you down if you're not careful.
- **Myth:** "Marketing is 'fluff' and not quantitative."
- **Reality:** Strong quantitative skills are becoming increasingly important and highly valued in this industry. Ph.D.s in statistics are common, particularly in market research divisions.
- **Myth:** "This is a glamorous industry."
- **Reality:** As in any business, there are perks as well as more tedious tasks that must be completed.
- **Myth:** "Marketing is nothing but advertising and designing coupon artwork."
- **Reality:** That's just one tiny piece. Marketing is much more than advertising.
- **Myth:** "Brand people are cheerleader-types."
- **Reality:** This is a demanding job and requires a lot of analytical thinking and "alone time" in the cubicle thinking about business issues.

Great Perks

- Team dinners
- Recruiting trips
- Work-from-home flexibility
- Access to an incredible amount of information
- Product discounts
- Free magazines

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