



MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Working Group

Susan,

In the first of a two-part series on building our teams, The Council's Marketing & Communications Working Group heard from a panel of their peers about the ways they're structuring their M&C teams, and the roles they plan to create or fill in the future. A recording of the meeting is [available here](#).

If you're pressed for time, we've captured some key takeaways from our experts:

1. Make the case for more.

It's never easy selling a new position into leadership, but according to Working Group members who have been there before, it gets easier. Britni Shrout, Executive Vice President of Marketing & Communications at MJ Insurance, says she made the case for new hires by tracking the amount of time she spent on projects that were not core to the business. "I didn't track every minute, but I quickly found out that I was spending far more time on reactionary projects vs. focusing on growth strategy." Shrout presented leadership with a list of things she could focus on without expanding her team, along with what would no longer be in scope. Tracking her projects also helped Shrout decide what roles she should add to her team, based on the skills needed to accomplish the work that would be taken off her plate. After receiving approval to fill two new positions, she is focused on hiring a content specialist with strong copywriting skills, as well as an entry level MarComm specialist.

2. Strong writing skills are a must. Insurance acumen...not so much.

Justin Jacobs, SVP of Marketing at IMA, says that everyone on his Marketing

team is a writer first. Regardless of whether or not your writing will be used in customer-facing materials, or just internal emails to business partners, Jacobs said written communication is such an integral part of the job that it has become one of the most important skills on his new hire wish list. “I’ve swung and missed before in this area and it’s painful for everyone involved. We now heavily vet people’s personal writing style and communication style as part of our interview process.” When it comes to relevant experience in the insurance industry, however, Jacobs doesn’t draw a hard line. “Insurance is complicated, but it’s not rocket science. Finding great marketing talent, and then teaching them enough about insurance to be dangerous, is the most cost-effective route in my opinion.”

3. Specialist or generalist? Choose wisely.

At the local level, many marketers are “jacks of all trades” – which is necessary to meet the needs of their firms. But Steven Handmaker, Chief Marketing Officer of MarshMcLennan Agency (MMA) said that with more than 100 individual marketers spread across the country, he’s focused on finding the folks who are specialized in certain disciplines. “Right now, we’re not looking for generalists,” said Handmaker. “I want a marketer who has some passionate, proven interest and experience in a specific area – whether it be social, content, design, video, etc.” While he loves a go-to attitude, Handmaker says he’s not looking for the person that says “I can do anything! Just let me go.” Rather, he’s looking for a professional who has spent a few years carving out a niche for themselves within the broader marketing team.

4. Get creative about hiring and onboarding.

It’s challenging to get a true sense of someone’s work and communication style when many of us are working remote. Jacobs at IMA said that in addition to having his candidates take a personality test and submit writing samples, he also strikes up a conversation with them via email. “I just don’t like some people’s email style,” Jacobs said, “and that can bleed out into other areas of interaction with our business partners and set our department in a bad light.” He says by starting an email conversation with a candidate, he can also get a better sense of how they’ll work with other members of his team.

5. Map roles to your profit centers and core competencies.

Shrout, Jacobs and Handmaker are all being intentional about mapping new

and existing roles to the business. Shroul says she's hiring a Content Specialist to bridge the gap between her subject matter experts and their target customer. "We want someone who can build relationships with our producers and consultants and pull the information they need from those experts to create compelling content." Jacobs is creating P&L-aligned roles to profit centers like P&C, EB, etc., while Handmaker has established four "Centers of Excellence" to support MMA's success and continued growth-- Brand and Corporate Communications, Business Line Strategy, Channel Management and Marketing Technology.

6. Think differently about diversity.

Bridget Scott, Vice President and Director of Corporate Marketing at Hylant, said she's challenging her team to ask themselves what is missing from their culture, as opposed to who most neatly fits within it – a nod to organizational psychologist Adam Grant. "We've also made commitments within Marketing on what we want the organization to look like in the future, to make sure our brand represents that." Handmaker of MMA says his organization has looked at less obvious aspects of diversity, beyond gender and race. They've worked with a local non-profit that links up employers and professionals with Autism who have exceptional skills – particularly in the areas of digital programming and animation.

7. Get comfy being uncomfortable.

Jacobs from IMA said he's focused on hiring talent who feel comfortable "operating in the grey." While it's more of a personality trait than a job skill, Jacobs said the ability to embrace a situation without bright lines or swim lanes is a must. "I have yet to see our president or any other leader come to me and say 'go do this,'" he said. It's crucial that Marketing professionals get smart about their business, find the problem statements within their focus areas and create opportunities to provide value to the broader organization.

Our next Marketing & Communications Working Group meeting is scheduled for November 7th. Visit The Council web site to register. Feel free to forward this email on to your peers at member firms who have yet to sign up. Also, a reminder that our M&C Working Group Basecamp is a great place for you to connect with your colleagues at

member firms. Send us a quick email by [clicking here](#) or replying to this email to be added to Basecamp.

Thank you all for your contributions to this special group.



Susan Rushford

*Co-Chair, Marketing & Communications Working Group
SVP, Marketing & Communications, The Council*

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The Council of Insurance Agents & Brokers
701 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Suite 750
Washington, DC 20004

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