Mozilla CMO Jascha Kaykas-Wolff on the Merits of Agile Marketing

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eMarketer Editors

J ascha Kaykas-Wolff, CMO of Mozilla, thinks some marketers struggle with communicating priorities to the rest of their organization, which is why he's a believer of Agile marketing.

Derived from a term used by software developers that stresses collaboration between self-organizing, cross-functional teams, Kaykas-Wolff uses the Agile system to make sure his team's goals align with the company's. Small teams are formed to tackle Mozilla's top marketing priorities, which Kaykas-Wolff believes will have a greater impact on Mozilla's key performance indicators (KPIs).

Mozilla's CMO spoke to eMarketer for our recent report on the future of the CMO about the merits of Agile marketing and how being a better business leader makes him a better CMO.

What are the biggest challenges facing marketing organizations today? And how do you, as CMO, address them?

It's very difficult with functionally built [marketing] organizations to align the best members of your team to solve the hardest and most important business problems. So we use an Agile system. We divide our team up into what we call durable teams with a maximum of eight people, headed by a team lead. That team lead is responsible for

creating the priorities that the team works on, and a program manager is responsible for the coordination of the team and time management. We deploy the idea of the durable team out to eight or more major business problems that we're trying to solve over the course of the year.

Could you provide an example?

If we're looking at product growth in specific regions, we would say the most important business problem that marketing can solve over the next 12 months is to grow [Mozilla Firefox on desktop] in France. And we'll deploy the best team members that we have ... regardless of where they fit functionally to help solve that problem. We create a durable team that has a team lead, a program manager, and then we fill that team with copywriters, developers, communications experts, brand designers, you name it; whatever's most appropriate. This allows our team to understand not just how our resources are being invested, but that our best people are helping us try and solve the most important problems, instead of worrying about whose team is responsible for what.

How do you think the implementation of the Agile work structure differentiates you as a CMO compared with your peers at other companies?

When you use a system like Agile to help a team be more impactful in the organization, you can be supremely confident and differentiated as a CMO. You understand the way that business is working and have built a team structure that allows you to deploy the best and most important resources to solve the most important problems. This is the ultimate responsibility you have as a business leader and business owner. You have to make sure your investments are going to places that are most impactful. It's a massive differentiator in the space.

Do you feel like the implementation of Agile has helped remove some of the barriers that other CMOs are facing?

Marketing teams have a couple of big challenges they have to address. Generally speaking, most marketing teams are absolutely miserable at communicating their priorities to each other. It's ironic, because we're

expected to be one of the more highly developed communication functions in the company. And that is only exacerbated when you leave your marketing department. Other business leaders will look to market teams and have no idea what they're doing. So this kind of system allows for much cleaner and transparent communication of priorities within an organization, but it also allows for you as the business leader for marketing to be able to express priorities. That helps you align better with how the rest of the business is working.

You also mentioned time management?

Marketing teams don't know how to manage time well. If we look at our compatriots in product or engineering, there's usually a problem that has to be solved. They're competent at being able to break down the components of the problem, estimate the amount of person hours it's going to take to solve that problem, and then come back with an estimate. If your CEO asks, "How much time is it going to take for us to build this thing?" The engineer on a product team can do that. Conversely, when a marketing team is engaged, oftentimes the question is very different. It's, "Can you get all of this done by next Thursday?"

When you use an Agile system within marketing, you start to get visibility into the throughput of your organization. You can say, "This is how much time it will take to launch a new website, build a marketing campaign, run a global SEO project." You can break down these components and estimate instead of saying, "Oh, we're gonna have this done by next Thursday because that's all the time we have."

Could these miscommunications between marketing and the rest of the business explain why the lifespan of the CMO has become much shorter?

Businesses operates one way—on core KPI revenue, profit margin, or whatever they may be— and then marketing says, "Cool, that's great. We're going to go do these things." And we're going to give you alternative metrics that show that the work that we're doing is impactful, but doesn't have a very strong relationship with the key metrics that drive the business. This is a systemic problem with marketing. So when I see something like that being written, my first

thought is that marketing organization probably wasn't the driver. When I think about the responsibility of the senior-most marketer in an organization, it's to be the best business leader they possibly can be in the C-suite, who happens to also be a depth expert in marketing activity.

When the organization is built to support that orientation, you future-proof the function and—more importantly—you make sure the business has all of the keys to be able to assign the right resources to solve the right business problems. Because that's what we should all be doing. The future of marketing is not to be more awesome marketers, it's to be great business leaders who understand how to go to market, and understand the dynamics of going to market.

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