

Why companies turn to fractional CMOs

Article

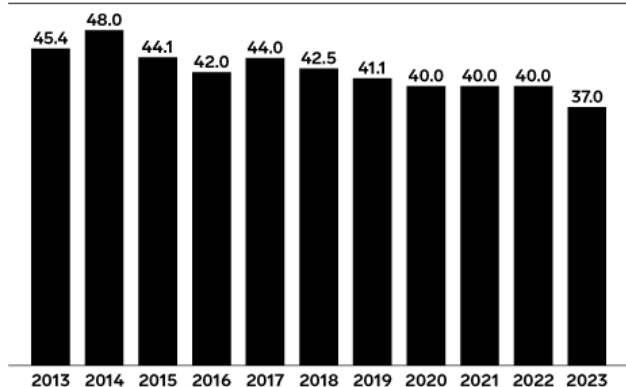


Average [CMO](#) tenure in 2023 at top US advertisers is three years and one month, 11 months lower than the average was about a decade ago, according to April 2024 data from Spencer Stuart.

Amid turnover, facing tightening [marketing](#) budgets, and pivots to new technology like generative AI, some companies are hiring temporary, contracted fractional CMOs to lead their marketing.

Average CMO Tenure at Top US Advertisers, 2013-2023

months



Note: among CMOs from the top 100 companies included in the Ad Age Leading National Advertisers list; read as the average CMO tenure at consumer advertising companies in 2023 was 37.0 months

Source: Spencer Stuart, "Annual CMO Tenure Study," April 17, 2024

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Fractional CMOs tend to have a much higher level of integration within a company than hiring [marketing agencies](#), said Lauren Mead, fractional CMO and founder of Mead Marketing. They also differ from interim CMOs, who fill the role as companies look to hire full time (though fractional CMOs may serve as interim CMOs). Instead, fractional CMOs work with companies that don't have CMOs either because the position has been [eliminated due to budget constraints](#) or because the company has not previously had need for a CMO.

"My typical clients are companies that are not yet large enough to require the level of experience of a [full-time] CMO," said Mead. Fractional CMOs tend to provide part-time assistance to these companies, often splitting their time between several clients. "People often are surprised how productive and how much I can get done in a short amount of hours, just because I'm not getting pulled into some of the nitty gritty that drags people down in terms of productivity. We're just more efficient with how we use our time," said Mead.

Fractional CMOs can be found via LinkedIn or via fractional CMO networks, such as Grow Powered or CMOx. But before contracting, brands looking to work with fractional CMOs must first understand what their needs are.

Some fractional CMOs work entirely in strategy, said Mead. That can be useful for companies looking for top-level advice, but it also means companies may need to hire additional people to execute the fractional CMO's analysis. To avoid extra costs, companies should hire fractional CMOs who can strategize and implement plans.

Organizations may also select fractional CMOs based on desired skills. Many companies are hiring contract workers who are genAI experts, Hayden Brown, CEO of Upwork, said at TechBrew's "Onboarding Your Favorite New Coworker: AI" event in June. "Clearly there are clients who want specialists in AI work areas," she said.

While Brown was speaking of contract workers in general, she also mentioned the importance of having those specialists at the highest levels in companies to "lead from the top" in genAI experimentation. A fractional CMO could fill that need for specialization.

Companies undergoing rapid change, such as shifting business models or preparing to go public, may also work with fractional CMOs. "I mainly work with tech companies," said Mead. "These companies are growing pretty quickly, and the skills that they may need for a CMO today could be totally different than the skills that they need for a CMO in a year and a half."

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