

# SAP's Alicia Tillman on the Makeup of a Modern Marketing Team and an Experience-Driven Economy

**ARTICLE | SEPTEMBER 24, 2019**

**eMarketer Editors**

**A**s CMO of one of the largest software companies in the world, SAP's Alicia Tillman believes that quality of experience is at the center of today's economy. Even in the B2B sector, Tillman focuses her efforts on telling a consumer-centric story, not only marketing to the stakeholders in charge of purchasing technology, but also the employees who use it. She finds that her marketing team does this best when data is successfully interpreted and used to shape a narrative that resonates with consumers of technology within the business.

As part of our upcoming report on the future of the CMO, we spoke with Tillman about the modern marketing team, reaching millennial consumers B2B realm and the challenges of being a CMO.

## **What are the most critical components of a modern marketing team?**

I would say two things. First, you need to have the ability to provide intelligence and data. Over the past decade, marketers have worked hard, as every function has in a company, to get access to data ... and derive intelligence from the data. What are we learning from it? How

does it enable us to better shape an experience for a customer? I'm not saying everybody is going to be a data scientist, but ... there needs to be a function within any marketing organization where you have people who understand data enough to truly understand the intelligence that it's bringing to you.

The second is you need to be able to shape that intelligence into a story. You need storytellers. You need not only people who are very business-savvy, but also have a beautiful way of being able to tell a story about your brand that speaks to the value connected to being able to deliver it in a way that is relevant, connected and emotional.

### **As CMO, what is top of mind for you at SAP, and where do you see it going and driving the business?**

We live in a very experience-driven economy. Business is won or lost based on the quality of the experience that your company, product, brand and employees are delivering. It's top of mind for every CMO in any company, regardless of the industry that you're in, be it consumer or B2B.

So when I think about the role of the marketer, in particular, we have a tremendous opportunity to really help get closer to the customer, to truly understand, not just their feedback, but also their needs, and that should be able to shape our operation as a result of it.

### **How does a CMO push forward to deliver and work through challenges?**

The pressures are real. I've been in the corporate environment now for over 10 years, and I've had the privilege of working with fantastic corporations throughout my career. But all of them are focused on the cost of growing the business. You're challenged, often, on headcount and programs, yet wanting to give more to this project or that project. Whether you're growing rapidly or not, that's always going to be the reality you're faced with.

For me, it's about understanding what matters to your stakeholders and what's commanding results in the marketplace, and this is where you make some really tough decisions because everybody on your team feels that they're working on the most important project.

## **How has your brand story and audience transformed?**

We need to take a hard look at the story that we are positioning in the marketplace, about the value of our brand. I was talking with a group of employees, and they were asking me about the 47-year-old brand.

What's the story we need today vs. how you shared the story then?

Millennials have grown up with technology and, in a lot of ways, they're making choices based on the quality of the technology that they use day to day to perform their job. Therefore, you're no longer messaging to one person, nor are you messaging about features and functionality, but you're messaging to a broader group with lots of differences.

## **How does this change the way you operate as a marketer?**

The dynamic has changed so much that it's cause for our story to need to be differentiated to talk about value and purpose, and be authentic because people want authenticity, and they want to buy from brands that stand for something, have a voice and take a stand on issues.

Regardless of me being a B2B or not, it has to be much more of a consumer-based story because of the broad group that we now need to speak with and because, regardless of the industry sector that you're in, people buy based on the quality of the experience and how much that resonates and speaks to what they're after.

*Make sure to read our "Future of the CMO" report, publishing in October.*