

Marketing Departments Understaffed, Too Many Move On Quickly

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Even as companies have begun to shell out more money to market products and services to reach consumers with tighter purse strings, their marketing departments are facing major hurdles to getting the job done, a new survey finds.

For one thing, the survey of nearly 400 Marketing Executives Networking Group (MENG) members suggests, more than 70% believe there is a shortage of qualified executive-level talent.

MENG President Richard Guha says companies are shifting employees from other areas into marketing or sitting on job vacancies. "I know companies that have not had a chief marketing officer for two years because they can't find someone," he says. "The alternative has been to rely on consultants."

The financial and the energy sectors, which have not historically spent a lot of money to market consumer services, are stepping up efforts. Guha says many are not finding the marketing people with sufficient experience to execute plans. The electronics industry has also fallen on difficult times.

Many up-and-coming marketing professionals who would have been executives today were laid off in early 2000, following the burst of the dot-com bubble. Chase Norlin--CEO at video search engine Pixsy, who has served as senior business development executive at ValueClick--worked at an early YouTube-like startup, ShareYourWorld, founded in 1998.

Norlin says the sexy dot-coms attracted professionals into marketing, but when the bubble burst many returned to the industries they came from. "There's always a shortage of the best marketing people, especially in tech," he adds.

Guha says companies also have not considered the effects on the marketing industry as Baby Boomers retire.

MENG also partnered with Salary.com to survey marketing salary trends. It found salary parity despite 2006 U.S. Department of Labor statistics that show women made 66.5% of what men made in marketing executive jobs.

That's the good news. But the average tenure of these executives is another thing.

"It's disturbing that the average person these days is in a job for 2.5 years," Guha says. "Very few people join a company saying in a year or two I'll move on. It takes more than a year just to get familiar with the job and the company."

Guha says marketing professionals get the least amount of time to learn a company business, and in many ways they need the most to fully understand the brand's position. Too often, he says, companies bring on competent staff and don't give them the time to figure out the business.

In most cases the executives are brought in to turn around a failing business. If the business doesn't pick up, they are pushed out the door. "We know the average time a chief marketing officer spends in any position is 22 months, and the study suggests many marketing executives have just under eight jobs in about 18 years," he says. "That's quite horrifying." Laurie Sullivan can be reached at sullivan@mediapost.com.