

# “Person Friday for busy, friendly office.”

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MURRAY CALDER - CHIEF STRATEGY DIRECTOR 05 JUN 2019

This was the entire content of one of the hundreds of ads in the classified section (remember those?) of the Glasgow Herald which I applied to after I left Uni in the teeth of the early 90's recession. I was lucky. I got the job. A job that led to more than a decade in the Scotch Whisky industry learning my craft in one of the categories which best understands how marketing contributes to long-term business success.

The Macallan Langs Partnership was a joint venture between the two whisky companies which also acted as a distributor for various other wines and spirits. My flatmates were at first jealous, then delighted as I brought home a selection of samples.

A year of answering phones, ordering stationery and making the tea led, eventually, to my first experience of working in marketing. I developed a promotion for Galliano cocktails in Scottish ski resorts if you can believe it. I was hooked (on marketing, also ski-ing, not Galliano). Shortly thereafter the business folded. I like to think the two were not connected but I was now, if you will, a castaway.

I was lucky again. I was offered a job at The Macallan distillery on Speyside, the home of Scotch Whisky. After my brief flirtation with marketing, it was back to more administrative tasks. I ordered bottles, labels, and corks, arranged tankers to send bulk whisky to bottling halls, learnt the ins and outs of bills of lading and letters of credit, toured visitors around the distillery and occasionally helped roll a barrel or two in the warehouses. I think I was probably a bit frustrated by this at the time. In hindsight, learning about the industry from the ground up stood me in excellent stead when I finally got the chance to do some more marketing.

I continued to be lucky. The Macallan was bought by Highland Distillers who were in turn bought by The Edrington Group. I was fortunate to land global marketing roles on The Macallan, Highland Park and The Famous Grouse, three of the best whisky brands in the world. There was also a short flirtation with gin – but that's a story for another day.

I was particularly lucky because the people I worked with during my time in the Scotch business had a finely honed appreciation of the business value of marketing. A value that marketing folks today seem largely unable, or unwilling, to express. In an era of increasingly myopic, short-term business outlooks, for all our sakes, this needs to change. Without the contribution that marketing makes to long-term brand building and business growth we'll all be out of a job.

I think a lot of today's problems in marketing, and (and society) can be boiled down to one thing – an unwillingness to make the effort to understand and empathise with people who are not like us. When was the last time you took a finance or production colleague for coffee? How many people do you socialise with regularly who aren't in the game? How much time do you spend in the same places as the target audiences you're trying to reach?

What stuck with me most about my time in the Scotch industry was how much mutual trust and respect existed between production, sales, marketing and finance people. The success of the business was truly a team effort. Marketing worked with Distillation and Warehousing to manage fluctuating stock reserves through the manipulation of price and scarcity. Packaging and Bottling worked with marketing to deliver cost efficiencies while maintaining a premium look and feel. Sales teams helped us understand the unique cultural challenges in markets spread across the world (when we couldn't visit ourselves). And we worked with dedicated Commercial Accountants who helped us demonstrate how all these things came together to deliver long term, sustainable profit from the brands we worked on.

It's not always like that though, is it? I've also had the misfortune to work with businesses where marketing was considered the "flower-arranging", "soft-furnishings" or "colouring-in" department by board colleagues who really should have known better. Attitudes such as these still exist today and not only amongst the dinosaurs – there are plenty tech-bro start-ups also failing to see the value marketing can deliver. To redress this and claim marketing's rightful seat at the top table we need to be bridge builders, not bunker dwellers.

Make friends with or, at the very least, spend time with your colleagues in other functions to understand what it is they do, how they do it and why. Remember that your colleagues are people too – they make decisions based on their emotions, just like you, me, and everyone else. What makes them happy, sad, angry? Ask them what you can do for them that will help them do a better job. This is not to say you should just accept everything you hear in these discussions with colleagues at face value. Interrogate it with the same rigour you'd apply to any other piece of research.

While we're discussing rigour, you really need to know your own discipline if you're going to argue the value you provide. With years of post-University training, it's little wonder that the Chartered Accountants and Lawyers sitting on company board's look askance at marketing's amateurism. Formal marketing education isn't necessarily a pre-requisite although it certainly helps. However, if you're not on (at least) passing terms with the work of Drucker, Binet & Field, Sharp, Feldman, Barden, Sutherland, Shotton, etc. are you sure you're in the right job?

However, probably the single most important action marketing can take to demonstrate the value it delivers is to start measuring the things that matter. Not the things that are easiest to measure, not the things you just happen to have data for, the things that demonstrate the value that marketing delivers to the business.

Much of the scepticism shown by the C-suite towards marketing colleagues arises from a seeming aversion to measurement. Measure the things that matter and you're able to show how marketing investment drives profit both short and long term. If you've made friends with finance then you're going to find this a lot easier.

Why is it that marketing people are so resistant to measurement? Partly I think there's a lot of denying that the job is basically to sell more to more people more often. Making ads, writing copy, designing packaging are all sexier than running spreadsheets. So you end up hearing that "marketing is an art, it can't be measured". Despite the fact that the impact of all these things on the ability of your brand to deliver profit can most definitely be measured.

Then there are those, often in the "colouring in" department kind of organisation who are in fear of their jobs. If their next piece of marketing activity doesn't "work" they face the wrath of the CFO or CEO. Which is ironic since measurement is the only way to provide the data which would prove that what they've done actually has "worked".

And, even if the self-delusion and fear can be overcome, many don't know what to measure, or how. And here, dear reader, I bring you back to the need to befriend your finance team. If anyone in your organisation knows what data exists and how to analyse it I can safely say they will be in your finance team. Make the management accountant your own Person Friday and there is nothing to fear from measurement.

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