

Building a compelling business case

It's tougher than ever before for companies to grow, with marketing increasingly important in encouraging them to invest. Yet, to convince the Board to invest, marketers need to build a compelling business case that the Board can buy into.

The Board mind set

To protect and manage the company successfully, Boards naturally have:

- **An analytical mind set** focused on growing shareholder value
- **A risk averse mind set**, optimising the NPV of new initiatives, whilst minimising the risk of projects not delivering
- **A short- to mid-term mind set**, looking for ways to grow the business now as well as over the longer term

Yet to be innovative, marketers naturally have:

- **A more creative mind set**, building strong brands, breakthrough innovation and distinctive marketing campaigns
- **A risk taking mind set**, with the bigger the innovation or creative leap, the bigger the rewards but also the bigger the risk
- **A mid- to long-term mind set**, taking time to build and deliver breakthrough ideas that will lead to step change growth

Whilst these differing mind sets are important for company success, they can create a divide between marketing and the Board day-to-day. To develop a strong business case marketers should:

- Be financially rigorous, showing how the investment will generate healthy returns
- Be financially responsible, showing what they are doing to minimise the risk of failure
- Have a short- as well as a long-term mind set, by delivering quick wins alongside the big breakthroughs

Building a strong business case

To be compelling, a business case needs to be structured in an easily accessible top-down way, and supported with strong business financials that show how it will deliver profitable growth. To develop a strong business case efficiently marketers should:

■ Generate a hypothesis to test

Developing what the answer might be upfront, and then testing and adapting it until it holds true. To do this, teams should:

- Create a one page summary of what the recommendation, rationale and so what's might be
- Syndicate the 'answer' with people early on to get their views, both to get data to support the case, as well as any concerns about going to the next stage
- Iterate the one page summary as and when new information comes in

■ Building the case

Finding the data that proves or disproves the hypothesis and adapting the recommendation as needed. Then writing the recommendation up in an easily accessible way, supported by

robust data to build Board confidence. To do this, teams should:

- Draft an outline deck, with each bullet point in the storyline being the focus of at least one chart.
- Evidence each page with 'facts' that help back up the assertion and make a more robust case; these 'facts' can be things like business financials, in-market data and testing, quantitative and qualitative research, customer quotes and external case studies
- Address any concerns that people have raised head-on

■ Presenting the recommendation

Presenting in a way that engages senior management by:

- Sharing the one page storyline, and where possible the presentation deck, with as many senior managers as possible before the meeting, to get their buy-in and ensure any remaining issues are addressed
- Thinking and talking in their language, by putting yourself in the Board's shoes and focusing on what you want them to agree and what they need to hear to agree it
- Once agreed, be on top of the delivery, by proactively tracking performance, addressing issues & managing risks as soon as they come up, thus maintaining Board confidence

For example, a financial services company struggled to get Board buy-in to a brand name change 3 times, primarily due to the lack of financial rigour, such as the commercial upside for the business, and the timeline, costs and risks of doing it. By building a strong business case and syndicating it individually with each Board member beforehand to iron out any remaining issues, the Marketing Director got easy buy-in when it next went to the Board.

Convincing the Board

To convince the Board to invest, marketers need to make a compelling business case that the Board can buy into, by building a clear, easily accessible case on what they want and why, supported with strong business financials and compelling data to build Board confidence, and addressing any concerns that are stopping management from saying 'yes' today.

Ruth Saunders is a joint founder and leading partner of Galleon Blue – a new type of consultancy that merges commercial thinking with branding to help companies maximise the value and return of their brands. With 25 years of experience in marketing and brand strategy (including time at McKinsey, Prophet, Procter & Gamble and Saatchi & Saatchi) Ruth has helped companies across a range of industries and geographies develop and implement more customer-focused and business-driven brand strategies. She can be reached at rsaunders@galleonblue.com or on [+44 7768 600906](tel:+447768600906).

