

Time for the company CIMO to step into the digital spotlight



By Leigh Andrews 15 Jan 2015

Avanade released a report on the new CIMO role, which is effectively merging the worlds of IT and marketing. E instead of just bogging you down with the findings, Nicolette Singh, Marketing Lead, Avanade South Africa, talk us through what the new CIMO role actually means...



Nicolette Singh, Marketing Lead, Avanade South Africa

Are you the company CIMO? Don't shake your head - there's a chance this is you if you're currently known as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) or Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), as the CIMO is essentially a conglomeration of these roles. The reason for the new role? It's simple - the rise of digital businesses means that the role of IT and marketing is changing. Ideally, CMOs and CIOs can work together to create user-centric experiences for customers by marrying great design skills with technology expertise in order to improve the customer experience for today's hyper-connected digital consumer.

This means that even if you're still seen as the CIO or CMO, you'll probably take on new responsibilities, as a CIMO role is more a way of thinking in the new digital world than a specific person with new tasks.

Singh answers my CIMO-related questions below...

■ ***What prompted the need for the CIMO report?***

Singh: There have been many reports and research suggesting the IT budget will increasingly move to business decision makers. The roles mostly impacted are that of the CMO and CIO as data-driven decisions, the digital world and 'always on' consumers put new pressure on the business to deliver solutions and feedback faster and more effectively. To succeed in the new digital landscape, marketing and IT must partner and find a common point of view: something Avanade calls the Chief Information Marketing Officer (CIMO) perspective. CMOs and CIOs have individual expertise and experience. But to adopt the CIMO perspective, they must share a unified digital vision. This allows their organisation to harness the combined power of marketing and IT to deliver better digitally-enabled experiences for their customers and other key audiences. The report looks at best practice and how to practically achieve this common goal.

■ ***Makes sense. Tell us more about the rise of digital businesses...***

Singh: A recent article by [Forbes](#) points out that the internet is the C-suite's top information resource. Executives find it more valuable for locating business-related information than references from colleagues, personal networks, newspapers and magazines, TV and radio, and conferences and trade shows. Members of the C-suite search for information themselves as this is increasingly not outsourced to someone else. The entire buying and servicing cycle has changed. Consumers expect to do more online and if your company can't deliver the basic support across multiple devices and channels, it will soon be left behind by businesses that can engage with customers in this new reality. As audiences migrate to digital channels, brands need to follow. Beyond aligning to new digital areas, digital techniques offer cost-efficiencies for finding, converting

and retaining customers. As traditional sources of business advantage erode under-competitive pressures, there's a renewed focus on differentiated brand experiences - often utilising these same digital techniques. Today's chief marketing officers are expected to lead the digital transformation, guiding their organisations to new levels of marketing-driven growth. Many of today's CMOs are expected to reimagine products, services and business models, challenging conventional assumptions about how value is created and delivered. Here, digital marketing becomes the foundation for digital business where the nexus of social, mobile, cloud and rich-information forces amplify new levels of differentiation and competitive advantage.

■ ***What does this then mean for the existing roles of IT and marketing?***

Singh: The traditional roles of both IT and marketing are changing fast. Global research from the likes of HBR and Gartner supported by local studies that suggest marketing is taking on a bigger strategic role in this digital world. Companies are looking to the CMO to drive change and help shape a new digital business model, but many CMOs lack the digital marketing expertise to meet the challenge. With the rise of the 'always on' consumer, customer-centric innovation has become a significant differentiator for businesses. However, this type of innovation assumes both consumer and technology understanding. IT has to become more customer-centric and business minded, whereas marketing has to improve its understanding and application of technology. This asks for a new breed of IT-literate marketing experts and business-literate IT professionals.

■ ***How are CIOs and CMOs now merging to address the needs of both roles in this new 'digital' world?***

Singh: The role of the marketer has shifted. Not only are marketers the steward and communicator of the brand, they are now also the steward of interaction and measurement. If today the marketer is using analytics and data in order to better understand customer behaviour, then they have also had to become much more sophisticated in their use of technology. This has put pressure on IT, which historically tended to look after back-end systems. The role of IT has changed from being a steward of the machines to providing a useful and beneficial service to the front office. This is a significant change, and one it is still struggling with. Today, the CMO needs to be very sophisticated in their use of technology in order to understand and measure consumer behaviour. This forces the CIO to become much more responsive to the needs of the CMO, because the expectation is now much higher than in the past. Central to this is the growing budget that marketing has to spend on technology outside of what IT is doing, which is giving the CMO much more control. These changes therefore call for a tighter partnership and greater understanding of the demands these place on the respective roles. Some organisations have responded by introducing a 'Chief Digital Officer' role - a 'best of both worlds' type person that can translate business priorities into technical capabilities. It is also well understood that there's a new breed of marketing professional stepping up - look out for references to 'the rise of the digital CMO'. For many enterprises, there's a mismatch between skills and authority in digital marketing, as CMOs find themselves at a disadvantage among true "digital natives".



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■ ***OK, it's clear why the new role is emerging - what does the new CMO role entail?***

Singh: It will be a while before most organisations combine the CIO and CMO role to better service digital consumers. For

now, it simply talks to a shared vision, a combination of skillsets that involve better use and understanding of consumer insights, data mining, the use of marketing automation tools and breaking through silos to erase seams between channels and experiences. In essence, it is a move to become an 'inbound advocate', shifting from finding customers to getting four. Another critical component involves the use and understanding of data.

The goal of the data-driven marketer is threefold:

1. To optimise and track marketing investments for higher yield and accountability;
2. to better target offers and experiences to drive higher engagement and conversion; and
3. to improve customer experiences for lifetime loyalty.

Closer collaboration is therefore critical to make this work. Digital CMOs look beyond marketing. They're business innovators. They set aside test-and-learn budgets for experimentation with new tactics, technologies, channels and techniques. They challenge existing advantages and business models, motivated by a fear of disruption and an appetite to disrupt.

■ ***What does this mean for traditional IT processes and marketing campaigns alike?***

Singh: Some basic guidelines include to use Agile and lean start-up techniques to launch marketing campaigns in shorter time frames, get in sync with your customers and accelerate social engagement. Use data to target precisely and measure relentlessly. Experiment aggressively and challenge business model assumptions. It truly is a time to rethink your business as a unique value proposition. It is easier than ever before to 'copy' someone. IT processes have to be nimble and fit for purpose. Marketing campaigns should adapt and respond to changes and trends in close to real time. You can no longer sit back at the end of a quarter to 'evaluate performance against campaign objectives'. It has to happen weekly, daily, hourly or on the spot. Your responsiveness depends on your industry and how consumers behave within it. Certainly the tools now exist to make it possible.

■ ***Explain what today's hyper-connected digital consumer really wants, and the impact of this on businesses.***

Singh: Customers are becoming increasingly connected - all the time; with multiple devices and channels. The proliferation of digital touch points has made it difficult for businesses to control and track the customer path to purchase. Business customers spend more time than ever doing online research before interacting with vendors. It is therefore now vital that both IT and marketing use appropriate digital tools to engage with target audiences. Digital consumers like finding their own answers and value recommendations of those in their network. Gone are the days when a business could get away with a 'brochure' type website. Consumers want to get in, find what they need easily and get in touch with you once the decision is 80% made. The potential to attract 'qualified' leads to the sales team is causing a big shift in organisations. Inbound marketing is coming of age. When sellers see customer information that they can draw on to improve their results, they're going to start using that tool better. If a seller can enter the CRM system and see, for example, that their customer recently came to the website and looked at a thought leadership piece and attended an event a few months ago, that's extremely useful to them. Another thing businesses should keep in mind is that consumers are increasingly using mobile devices to connect to information quickly. Customers want the same ease of access and ability to search or buy, whether at home or on the move. Normal office hours have become blurred with private time, so digital customers are really hyper-connected.

■ ***Lastly, share some examples of how Avanade aims to transform every touch point with customers into digitally-empowered experiences.***

Singh: Avanade is a business technology solutions, cloud and managed services provider focused on Microsoft technologies. Improving the customer experience across our digital channels is key to supporting Avanade's broader business objectives, and this is an area where marketing and IT are equally vested. After putting our marketing automation tool in place, the second step was to integrate that with our CRM system. Implementing effective CRM solutions using Microsoft Dynamics is one of Avanade's largest service areas, so by employing these solutions internally as well, we are able to maximise functionality and business impact. Many companies don't use CRM systems to their full extent. They use them primarily for reporting and therefore much of the data that would really help improve their view of customers is missing. With an integrated marketing tool, marketing can ingest a lot of data around customer interactions, which, hopefully, will spur better use of the overall CRM tools by sales and other parts of the business and ultimately improve the customer experience. It's relatively easy to put tools in place, but it's hard to get people to use them in the right way. Avanade has experience in transforming our touch points across multiple geographies in this way and allowed many of our customers to embrace digitally-empowered experiences. This is our job!

And a necessary job at that, with today's ever-shifting consumer landscape.

[Click here](#) to view Avanade's infographic of the six steps to a successful digital customer experience, and [click here](#) for a video on the importance of redefining customer experiences.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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