



# Introducing the Chief Community Officer

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**Marketing Has Changed. So Must Its Leadership**

**DDB<sup>o</sup>**

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The Italian writer Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote, “If you want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.” Nowhere is this truer than in the field of marketing, where we have probably seen more change in the past ten years than the previous fifty.

The increasing sophistication of consumers, new behavior-altering technologies, channel growth and media fragmentation, and the speed of transactions and innovations, among other factors, have all combined to challenge marketers everywhere regardless of company, industry, size, or geography. Every company, every brand, everyone now faces the same situation – how do we engage consumers to become brand loyalists and advocates?

We have been exploring these challenges through DDB’s series of Yellow Papers. In the past year, this thought leadership has covered the issues of reinventing how we market, including:

- The new digital media universe, how it began as a distribution channel and evolved to the valuable content channel it is today.
- How marketing communications has rightfully moved from monologue to dialogue; that is from broadcasting to a passive herd to engaging an active swarm of consumers and influencers.
- The shift of control to the consumer, who is now playing an active role in the ideation of products and services as well as the communications meant to drive awareness, trial and purchase.
- The undeniable force of social networks and the influence these virtual swarms play in determining whether consumers flock to or flee brands.
- How the consumer is now the medium rather than the recipient of messages.
- How size truly does not matter in this new environment because those who move rapidly with shared conviction win the day – speed has become the new big.



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A year ago I addressed the Association of National Advertisers' annual conference and shared my thoughts on how we should be reorganizing to take advantage of the changing face of marketing. One recommendation, which I continue to advocate strongly, is the introduction of a new marketing role: The Chief Community Officer (CCO).

### **Why Another Chief?**

Marketing and branding are now a dialogue. We are moving away from a view of the world solely defined by the doctrine of herd marketing – one-way, mass communication – and recognizing the increasing power of people communicating with each other and with companies. In this new era, successful brands will be built through brand communities.

The responsibility for building successful brands will continue to ride, in large part, on great creative directors and marketing leaders who can define the strategic direction and expression of a brand. Acknowledging the evolution in communications, many of the best creative minds and CMOs have begun to lead the charge in transitioning to community engagement, jumping with enthusiasm into many new interactive and nontraditional areas of marketing.

However, I believe agencies will need a very strong and influential advocate to help adjust to this emphasis on community. Someone at a very high level needs to take responsibility for guiding brand marketing efforts to reach and influence these communities and for ensuring that these new skill sets resonate throughout the agency. The more digital communities influence consumer behavior, the more I believe we require an entirely new marketing function: the Chief Community Officer.

In fact, this function may require multiple people at multiple levels. One level may involve responding to feedback from consumers. Another level may involve decisions for creating marketing activities that engage these consumers. Still others encompass things like the product development dialogue between you and your brand community, or the service dialogue.

Today these are all disjointed functions that fall under a variety of titles: marketing, public relations, R&D and customer support. Each of these roles has its own agenda and its own pressures; for example, I am sure that many VPs of customer care have goals that revolve around quality service and daily lives that are consumed by average hold times and costs per call. Worse, many of these functions can conflict with one another unless they are steered in the right direction at a high enough management level.

This is an area where things need to change. We traditionally frame the marketing process around the endgame of selling products, to the point where some consider “sales and marketing” a unified discipline. Open a marketing textbook from 20 years ago, for example, and you will see a focus on the traditional “four Ps”: product, price, place, and promotion.

We need to move from the four Ps to the three Cs, a construct I advocate in my book, *The Nature of Marketing, Marketing to the Swarm as well as the Herd*. These are conviction, collaboration and creativity. In this world a Chief Community Officer ideally oversees the relationship between brands and their communities, not just in the narrow confines of how a consumer interacts with a product at point of purchase, but also in how consumers interact with each other. These consumer-to-consumer interactions take place on the web and on the street and serve as a powerful influence in shaping our views and preferences. A Chief Community Officer implicitly understands how to align all areas of marketing to influence consumers and engage their communities around brands.

## A Chief Community Officer ideally oversees the relationship between brands and their communities.

This principle applies to advertising agencies as much as any business and I am putting my own money where my mouth is – where I feel our future lies. Chief Community Officers have already been appointed at our DDB New York and Paris offices and we have recently started hiring for this position at some of our other major offices around the world. For example, take the Chief Community Officer appointed at DDB Paris. He not only has a great creative track record, but he is also a successful blogger, video journalist, and author. Put his name and DDB’s in a search engine and you will find thousands of entries. He is about as plugged in as they come.

This is where I see our own creative leadership heading in the future. As a company culture, we never were much for simply sitting around in conference rooms concocting brand messages. We have always been tightly integrated with our clients and our consumers, and now we are shifting toward a closer, more interactive relationship with the digital swarm as well.

In fact, our affiliate RadarDDB is a prototype agency which uses Web 2.0 technologies and new social media channels to seed relevant brand dialogue into the daily lives of consumers. This approach builds engaging brand relationships and recaptures some of the influence lost in a world of consumer-generated content. The Chief Community Officer is the first step in bringing this function into the marketing organization and assimilating the process across all marketing disciplines.



## Four Roles for the Chief Community Officer

Now I would like to move from my company to yours, and paint a picture of the kind of Chief Community Officer I think you will need to effectively influence and manage your relationship with your consumers, whether you are an agency or a client. I see four key roles for this person: changing thinking at the organizational level, understanding and managing points of leverage, monitoring and responding to the community, and then going a step further and serving as a community agent. Let's look at each of these roles.

The term "Chief Community Officer" correctly implies an advocacy to the community. A good Chief Community Officer must serve as an evangelist who works hand in hand with firms and their Chief Marketing Officers to develop a much better understanding of the communities that will help advocate their brands.

# 1

## First Role

Forward-thinking Chief Marketing Officers have started to see the world through the lens of community, and a Chief Community Officer can help formalize this role. The first role involves recalibrating the way we think about brand building. Let me walk you through how it compares with the traditional view of marketing:

- Instead of developing products and services by "listening" to the market, a CCO makes sure consumers have a real voice in the process.
- Instead of just creating brand advertising, a Chief Community Officer works to build a community around your brand, using multiple channels.
- Instead of focusing on pre-sale activities and seeing areas like service and support as tacitly "someone else's job," a CCO takes great interest in what consumers are telling the company and each other.
- Instead of just disseminating a brand message, a CCO makes sure your organization is living its message.
- Instead of advocating for the consumer, the CCO views the entire community as the new consumer.

This leads us to a central issue: results. If you were to ask me if the ultimate goal of a Chief Community Officer was to produce financial results, what would I say?

The first answer I would give you to this question would be "yes." The second would be that you are asking the wrong question.

I feel that every job should improve the financial posture of its organization. And there should be some reasonable way of measuring this success to provide Chief Community Officer accountability. But I am going to tell you something equally important: Too much pressure for short-term results runs contrary to the goals of working with the swarm.

Currently, the lifespan of a Chief Marketing Officer's job is often measured in months, even among some of the world's largest brands. According to search firm Spencer Stuart, the average CMO tenure is less than two years. Research from the Harvard Business School suggests that one of the key reasons for this is that expectations for short-term performance change are too high.

We know enough about swarm behavior today to say that building an engaged brand community is key to growth and success. We also know that building this community involves steps that may not immediately equate to short-term sales: things like listening to consumers, co-creating products and services with them, and creating an infrastructure that attracts a community.

Personally, I feel that a Chief Community Officer should be held accountable for engaging the community in the short term, and for financial performance in the longer term. A different set of metrics will help people get a handle on their relationship with the community, and whether they and their organization are helping it or hurting it. From there, my belief is that the financial results of successfully engaging consumers will generally speak for themselves.

**Recalibrating  
the way we  
think about  
brandbuilding**

# 2

## Second Role

This leads us to the second role: understand and manage points of leverage. A Chief Community Officer should be someone who understands all patterns of influence online and offline, in much the same way a media planner understands patterns of media consumption. This means knowing the touch points of your brand community, studying their wants, needs, and lifestyles, and using this data to inform your marketing efforts.

How does this differ from traditional marketing? The mind-set of a traditional Chief Marketing Officer is to look for influencers to create “buzz” among the media, the power users, the bloggers, and the industry experts. “Buzz” is great but it only begins to tap into the social community.

One of the core principles from my book is that today you can find influence everywhere, and a Chief Community Officer should ideally be a student of how patterns of influence and leverage emerge and dissipate. What happens when a hot new product erupts online, or a public relations fiasco draws thousands of comments to the blogosphere? And how should you respond to these stimuli?

I would propose that a Chief Community Officer become a student of “new buzz,” the kind of influence you cannot necessarily wine, dine, or influence with a press release. Your key points of leverage were once journalists or bloggers, but today they also lie in the community’s gathering places. So now you are also looking at things like what you say in a product forum, or how you

“seed” new products to consumers who will talk about them, or how you handle service recovery knowing that someone could be recording the call.

For example, in June 2006 an AOL user by the name of Vincent Ferrari recorded his experience trying to cancel his account with an aggressive and uncooperative phone representative and then posted it to his blog. The resulting firestorm of publicity put Ferrari in the national media spotlight. Consumerist.com dubbed his recording “the best thing we have ever posted.” Less than six weeks later, AOL shut down their retention centers and switched much of its service to a free advertiser-supported model.

As one example of where we are heading, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (yes, there is one) lists what they see as five basic elements for marketing from person to person:

- Educating people about your products and services
- Identifying people most likely to share their opinions
- Providing tools that make it easier to share information
- Studying how, where, and when opinions are being shared
- Listening and responding to supporters, detractors, and neutrals

According to consulting firm Influencer50, fewer than half of influencers today are traditional ones like journalists and analysts, who represented almost 80 percent of influencers as recently as the 1990s.

## become a student of “new buzz”

This means that a Chief Community Officer should be able to identify who can influence people at every level, from good media advocacy to thinking more like a customer. Today we need to understand everyone who can engage and lead the swarm.

Old buzz is not going away any time soon. If a large newspaper runs a positive story about you, or broadcast media starts talking about you, or Oprah Winfrey chooses your book for her book club, people will flock toward you. But when you multiply this kind of exposure by what happens when people begin to talk to each other, engage their social networks, blog, Twitter or text, you start reaching beyond response rates and getting small points of leverage that can lead communities to flock toward you. In a digital world, leveraging a small number of people can quickly become the voice of a hundred, a thousand, or even a million or more.

The “Whassup” campaign for Bud Light, which *Adweek* recently named one of the greatest campaigns of the past three decades, is a good example of engaging the community. While it received significant media exposure, it succeeded by catching the attention of the community and becoming a “cultural catchphrase” and an “internet sensation with countless parodies.” Even eight years later a pro-Obama parody “received over three million views on YouTube” within just a few days. “Naturally, some tuned in for the politics. But no doubt a great many also felt nostalgia for just ‘watching the game, having a Bud.’” *Barbara Lippert, Adweek.com, Feb. 4, 2008*

# A Chief Community Officer should be aware of what the swarm is saying about a company and responsible for developing a strategy to engage the swarm appropriately.

## 3 Third Role

The third role of the CCO is to monitor and respond to the community. For fun, try doing what your consumers do: Go online and search for your product or service by name to see how people rate it and what they are saying on discussion boards. You might even try entering the name of a company with the word “sucks” after it and see what comes up.

Then go visit some of the sites devoted to discussing consumer problems, like Consumerist.com or product discussion forums. Often you will see gruesome tales of poor service, indifferent employees, or bad products. More important, you will often see posted comments on how the rest of the swarm feels about these brands.

Now, look to see how companies respond to complaints. Once in a while, some of them will actually post a reply explaining their side of the story or apologize and make things right. More often than not, you will see no response at all. In my view, a Chief Community Officer should be aware of what the swarm is saying about a company and responsible for developing a strategy to engage the swarm appropriately.

A recent Motrin web ad illustrates an example of the power of social media and the need to listen carefully to your brand community. The “ad designed to commiserate with moms about the aches and pains that come with toting around baby” had a very negative effect because it also suggested that “babywearing” was a “fashion” that made parents look “tired and crazy.” Motrin quickly pulled the ad and issued an apology after the resulting backlash of moms via Twitter crashed Motrin’s website and was covered extensively by online and offline media. Nothing can substitute for joining the conversation. *AAA Smart Brief, October 18, 2008*

Not everyone shares the idea of engaging consumers in cyberspace. For example, one blogger complained to retailer Target about what she felt was a sexually suggestive billboard, and received a reply stating that “Target does not participate with nontraditional media outlets.” This response garnered a lot more publicity than the billboard controversy itself, with the snub eventually landing on the pages of *The New York Times* – these examples represent the risks and rewards in the new world of communications.

# 4

## Fourth Role

The last role of the Chief Community Officer is to serve as a community agent. This role facilitates moving from delivering brand messages to engaging brand communities. This is where the community in Chief Community Officer really comes in: creating an environment where swarms of consumers interact with you, and, ideally, each other.

Traditional marketers, on the other hand, advocate being the “voice of the customer,” a concept derived from sterile analysis far from actual contact, behavior or custom. What I am proposing is that a CCO must learn where these consumers live and move there, at least figuratively.

Specifically, I see a number of ways in which the Chief Community Officer can help channel efforts of the marketing team to turn consumers into communities:

- Building and maintaining communications channels where both your consumers and your organization have a voice, from traditional contact mechanisms to social networks.
- Creating affinity groups around brand desire by finding points of attraction and developing incentives to connect with your brand.
- Facilitating interactions between community members, from virtual gathering places like online discussion forums to real ones that get community members interacting with each other where they live and work.
- Turning community members into community influencers by rewarding, motivating, and empowering those who are (or could be) closest to your brand.

Sometimes harnessing a brand or product community even has an immediate cost benefit. Take customer support as an example. Some companies, like Apple and Dell, are harnessing the energy of their own best consumers to provide peer support on top of their regular customer service through community forums that are monitored and moderated by employees.

Product communities like these do much more than reduce the cost of service, however. They harness a level of collective knowledge that few companies alone could muster, in much the same way as resources like Wikipedia emerge from the input of its users. They provide a sense of how the community is feeling about specific products and services. Most of all, they help people who identify with your product to establish their own voice.

Chief Community Officers can help create the environment that nurtures and rewards these voices: perks, insider privileges, gifts, and perhaps even opportunities for co-creation. They can make it possible for key people to test drive your latest car, review your new computer, or go backstage for your next show. Ideally, they turn consumers into partners and evangelists, and in the process turn engagement into influence.

**In the process, turn the engagement into influence.**

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## On Any Given Day

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These are skills requiring an overpowering curiosity into how communities work. They are unstable groupings, moving quickly based on new information and experiences. In order to know them, you need to spend time every day with them, be part of them, understand their positive and negative contributions to the brand, be interested in their problems and solve them, do them favors, and dialogue empathetically and passionately. This requires a huge investment of time.

Chief Community Officers must be experts in content and channel. One must be at home with new technologies and comfortable with the relaxed, yet powerful manner of communications.

However, the most important thing about having a Chief Community Officer in your organization goes beyond a job description – it is a mind-set. It means looking at the relationship between you and your brand community in much the same way you look at your own family or community, as a relationship that needs to be nurtured and maintained. These communities have enormous influence over purchase intent and should be considered a key ingredient in the ability to generate sustainable relationships with customers.

1, Vincent Ferrari, "Cancelling AOL", <http://www.insignificantthoughts.com/?s=Cancelling+AOL>

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