



How to Influence Marketing Decisions When Your Boss or Client Is Dead Wrong

by Elaine Fogel

When your boss or client has the final say, and the decision doesn't make good marketing sense, what do you do?

Do you throw a tantrum? Likely not, although you probably feel like it. Do you make another attempt at convincing him/her that the decision is not in the organization's best interest? What if s/he won't budge?

This dilemma is not uncommon. Many senior managers have little marketing knowledge, yet the buck *does* stop with them.

Here's an approach to help you "convince" your boss or client that you have a solid point.

Be prepared

Do the research. Try to learn as much as you can about the individual just as you would research your target market segments. Try to understand what makes him/her tick, how s/he learns, receives information, and manages people.

Anticipate the objections when you first make a recommendation. Back it up with external resources. Try to solve an organization problem and meet his/her needs with your marketing suggestion. Then wait to try again at another time if s/he doesn't bite immediately.

Submit a proposal using facts

Take the time to prepare a written proposal that includes hard, cold facts and figures. See if there are any case studies on the same topic and include them. Use some of the elements of a business or marketing plan to make your case, starting with the executive summary.

Ensure there's ample information on the ROI (return on investment). What's involved up front? How long will a return take? What's the worst and best-case scenarios? What's the out clause—how can you get out of it or go to plan B in case it doesn't work as you anticipate?

Show how the concept ties into the marketing plan

If there's a marketing plan, connect the dots and explain how the concept is aligned with it. If not, reference the overall marketing strategy. Try not to be didactic, but engaging and conversational.

If you can align your ideas with the organization's mission statement, that's a bonus. This can reinforce that the advice is in the organization's best interests.

Gently stroke the boss or client's ego without being inauthentic. Try to refer to something s/he said previously that reinforces your case. Try not to antagonize or threaten him/her, and approach the issue in partnership.

Send relevant articles

Any articles or studies that educate while reinforcing your position can help sway the decision-maker. External experts can often place more weight on your side.

Make your boss/client your partner

Break bread together. Have lunch. Then before it's over, make your pitch, including why you feel it would be beneficial for the organization. It's *always* about the organization and *not* about the individuals.

Get support from other senior managers

Internal marketers can play politics just as easily as anyone else. Build your network and get support for your efforts from colleagues who understand what you're trying to achieve for the organization.

Conduct lunch and learn marketing talks

For internal marketers, help facilitate support for marketing by enlightening the staff on the value marketing brings to your organization. Use examples and answer questions. Staff often like to feel engaged in other areas of the organization.

Get an outsider's input

Bring in another specialist or colleague who can supplement what you're already saying. Do it under the guise of a professional development workshop, brainstorming, or planning meeting so it's not a blatant ploy.

Toot your horn

When you do good work, don't be shy to send an announcement or talk it up. That's how you can build credibility for your department or company. Better yet, get others to say it and it has even more value.

Steward positive relationships

Be genuine; show you care and build relationships with the people around you and beyond the marketing department. The boss or client may see that and trust you more.

Stay positive

Admittedly, this is challenging. It can get frustrating trying to stay on track and do the right thing. No matter how wrong your boss or client is, try to phrase things positively with a smile.

Try coaching or leadership training

Get some help with your presentation or persuasion skills. Maybe your communication style could be more effective.

When all else fails...

You have two choices, depending on the seriousness of the situation. If it's not urgent, let it go. Revisit it again at another time. Things may just come around without your action.

If the issue is an ethical one, or one where your integrity as a professional is compromised, you need to decide whether to cut your losses. That's often difficult, but if it means doing something that goes against the fiber of your marketing being, it may not be worth it in the long run.

As marketing professionals, our personal brand and reputation is our worth.

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Published on October 23, 2007