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What Makes a Great Multichannel Marketer?

Nov 3, 2008 4:41 PM, By Jerry Bernhart

In my corporate presentations on talent management, I talk a lot about the value of "A" talent. These are the individuals who personify the gold standard of exceptional performance and distinguish themselves by consistently delivering outstanding results and inspiring and motivating others.

Ranked against their peers they represent the top 20% of the multichannel marketing talent pool that's out there. Studies conducted by McKinsey & Co. suggest that highly talented marketers are as much as 130% more productive than low-performing marketers. For those who market to multiple customer touch-points, the differential value of a superior performer is likely even greater.

Sometime ago, the CEO of a major catalog/Internet/retail company asked me to start a search for a vice president of CRM. He made it clear that anyone less than "best in class" need not apply, so I asked: "Aside from what is written on the job description, what in your view would distinguish a superior multichannel marketer from someone who is average?"

"I'll know it when I see it," he said. Good to know, I thought, but how will that help me qualify someone who can deliver knockout results for my client?

That got me thinking: What exactly do great multichannel marketers do differently? What is it about them that makes them more prized than their B- and C-level counterparts? Do they have special talent that no one else has?

When you think about it, having talent may seem rare and special but it really isn't. Everyone has a unique set of talents. But it's the candidates who find roles that allow them to cultivate their talent who become special. If I could bottle those special qualities, this is what I'd put on the label:

- Ability to focus on top line growth. Charlie Silver, consultant and former vice president of marketing at Bloomingdale's Direct, says the best multichannel marketers think differently because they look at the sum of the parts. "They know which channels are more effective for prospecting or brand building, but these individuals don't fall into silos," says Silver. "They achieve marketing synergy across all channels to grow the overall business."
- Highly adept with analytics. The best multichannel marketers are testers, and they know the metrics inside out. "They are very at home with numbers," says Erik Martinez, director of e-commerce at apparel merchant Peruvian Connection. "To them, analytics is a cornerstone of world class multichannel marketing."
- A strong drive to succeed. The best multichannel marketers have a constant, self-imposed drive to strive. Multichannel marketers are highly competitive and they have a need to compare their accomplishments with companies they compete with. They are not risk averse, and they crave recognition. They also are highly driven by a desire to put beliefs into action.
- The ability to hire top talent. It's an irrefutable fact: Superior multichannel marketing leaders surround themselves with other superior performers. These leaders invest in their best and brightest employees, and maximize those employees' contributions to the company.
- Outstanding ability to engage and motivate others. Having good verbal communications skills won't buy you a ticket into the A club. The elite possess an exceptional talent for communicating. The best multichannel marketers ask the right questions, they know how to build feelings of mutual support, they create enthusiasm, and they have the ability to

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