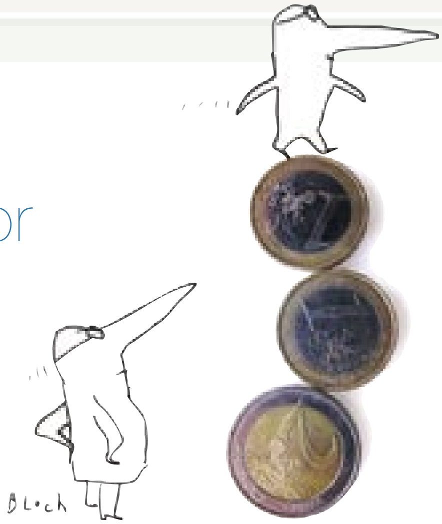

A credibility gap for **marketers**

Fran Cassidy, Anthony Freeling, and Dieter Kiewell

CMOs should be aware of how they are perceived within the organization and alter their approach accordingly.

It's a perennial concern: companies need good marketing, but many don't trust those they hire to do the job. Marketers have a credibility problem because the creativity that is their lifeblood often runs counter to the discipline required to excel in other parts of the organization.

EXHIBIT

Split personalities

Attributes of marketers that are most frequently cited by CEOs/CMOs

Positive	Negative
• Committed	• Inconsistent
• Creative	• Undisciplined
• Energetic	• Expensive
• Essential	• Narrow
• Hardworking	• Self-important
• Inspiring	• Uncommercial
• Passionate	• Not accountable
• Talented	• Faddish

Source: 2004 Marketing Society–McKinsey survey of >30 CEOs/CMOs

According to recent interviews with more than 30 European CEOs and chief marketing officers (CMOs), this long-simmering stew—exacerbated by fragmenting customer segments, brands, and channels—is now boiling over in Europe, just as it has in the United States.[1] These complications heighten the need for effective marketing while expanding its scope beyond traditional duties, such as managing brands and conducting consumer research.[2] Today's marketers must tailor and integrate their strategies with a more complex set of approaches to product development, supply chains, manufacturing, and sales. Doing so may often mean investing more resources in training and support infrastructure and encouraging marketing employees, from the front lines to the senior team, to break out of the traditional silos that can impede the marketing organization's progress.

More than half of those interviewed were underwhelmed by their marketers' analytical skills and business acumen. And nearly every CEO expressed some variation on the concern that marketers, in spite of their creative strengths, "don't think like businessmen" and display behavior that, in the words of one CEO, is "more akin to a recalcitrant child than an adult" (exhibit). Many CEOs, for example, expressed frustration at being asked for funds in the absence of—or even in contradiction to—data regarding the proposed initiatives. Such actions can create a vicious cycle of underperformance. After all, marketers who can't provide a solid business rationale for their ideas are likely to have difficulty securing the resources needed to implement those ideas. And if marketers can't demonstrate satisfactory returns on their investments, they are less likely to get resources in the future.

While there is no single formula for marketers to establish credibility within the company, in our experience influential CMOs often take two concurrent courses of action. First, they put in place metrics and processes to track the impact of marketing initiatives, both in areas (such as pricing) that lend themselves to measurement and in others (such as customer segmentation) where the benefits are more qualitative. Tangible results provide CMOs with the real-world feedback they need to experiment, learn from their mistakes, and adapt rapidly—all requirements for meeting today's more complex marketing challenges.

Second, effective CMOs work with line managers in the marketing organization to identify and upgrade a select number (typically no more than two or three) of the marketing-related skills whose improvement will most benefit the company's commercial performance. These could be functional talents, such as branding and pricing, or analytical skills that help to quantify the relationship between marketing goals and results, for example. Success usually requires a combination of training (sometimes at corporate universities) and experience (in pilots and small-scale rollouts), and the best CMOs use multifunctional teams whenever possible.

By reacting nimbly, demonstrating results, and building skills, marketers can go a long way toward reversing the vicious cycle that afflicts them. CMOs who take these steps are more likely to stay focused on issues central to the business, to improve current returns, and to sow the seeds of future growth.

Anthony Freeling is an alumnus of McKinsey's London office, where **Dieter Kiewell** is a principal; **Fran Cassidy** is a board director of The Marketing Society, in the United Kingdom.

[1] The authors conducted this research from June to December 2004 in collaboration with The Marketing Society, based in the United Kingdom. The authors would especially like to thank Fiona Stewart for her role in conducting many of the interviews and developing conclusions.

[2] David C. Court, "A new model for marketing," *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 2004 Number 4, pp. 4–5 (www.mckinseyquarterly.com/links/17289).