

SMPS *Blueprints 3.0* Emphasizes the Importance of the CMO

By Julie Witecki, CPSM



At a midsized construction company, there is a marketer in Nashville and one in Knoxville. Both manage proposals and promotional campaigns, reporting to their respective office leaders. At the headquarters in Chattanooga, a marketer reports to the chief executive officer but only manages the firm’s digital presence and branding, since the CEO expects office leaders to develop marketing and business development strategies for their locations. As a result, the three marketers rarely have reason to collaborate and often work independently.

This is not a setup for a bad joke but a widespread reality of decentralized and ungoverned marketing and business development programs that plague the architecture, engineering, and construction industry. However, there is a solution to this conundrum—a solution that also drives revenue, relationships, and reputation. It’s a chief marketing officer.

The CMO role is necessary for A/E/C firms to achieve their strategic and financial business goals. This C-suite leadership position guides marketing, business development, and sales efforts in holistic partnership with other business leaders (operations, human resources, finance, technology, etc.). With the new *SMPS Blueprints 3.0*, the path is paved for this new genre of industry leadership.

SMPS *Blueprints 3.0*

The *SMPS Blueprints 3.0*, released in July 2022 at the Amplify A|E|C conference, elevates marketing and business development roles as professional disciplines framed around the SMPS Domains of Practice:

research, strategy, business development, proposals, promotions, and management. The new roadmap shifts paradigms by integrating marketing and business development leadership.

The Role of a CMO

The Chief Marketing, Business Development, Strategy, or Revenue Officer (CMO, for simplicity) is a strategic leadership role that, regardless of firm size, is a core staffing requirement. The C-level role fits into a company’s executive leadership team to build out strategies with tactics, systems, resources, and processes to make vision statements measurable realities. The CMO is a utility player and revenue growth driver armed with information to guide decisions about revenue, relationships, and reputation.

Aligned with the SMPS vision – **business transformed through marketing leadership** – *Blueprints 3.0* outlines an integrated approach to structuring a marketing and business development program designed to drive new and secure repeat business in partnership with firm

operations. Pivotal to the success of this integrated model is strategic executive leadership over the space where marketing and business development converge. The CMO leads this coming together to achieve revenue, relationships, and reputation growth by sharing a unified strategy with the team of discipline practitioners.

The CMO provides focus, inspiration, and unified leadership to the marketing and business development staff. A good CMO shows courage, confidence, and commitment to the professional discipline of marketing. The CMO nurtures strengths and talents while building teams committed to achieving shared goals.

Using *Blueprints 3.0*, the CMO has a guidebook for the skills, attributes, and competencies needed to build a department of professionals. *Blueprints 3.0* provides job descriptions for the primary industry roles. An outline for a marketing/business development department structure looks like this:

- 1 executive officer (chief marketing, business development, strategy, or revenue officer)
- 1 director for each division, office, or functional team
- 1-5 managers for each division, office, or functional team
- 1-3 coordinators for each manager

To right-size a marketing and business development department, 30:1 is the *Blueprints 3.0* working ratio for the total number of professional staff to marketing/business development staff.

Emerging Trends Calling for CMO Leadership

Fortune 500 companies have harnessed the power of CMOs for decades, but the A/E/C industries have been slow to transition from strategy as a by-product of operations. CEOs often manage a dual role of daily operations (always in the hot seat) and future crafting (often on the back burner). However, the compounding social, political, and pandemic impacts of the last 36 months have transformed the competitive landscape in every major metropolitan area. In this new economy, a criticality for the CMO role has emerged in response to significant business shifts. To compete in today's environments, strategy drives revenue and the CMO is at the wheel.

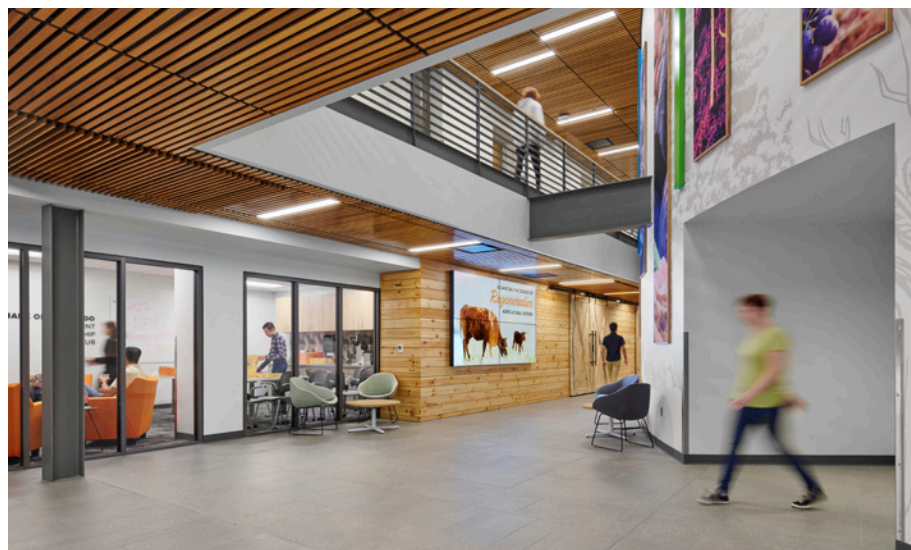
The CMO and the marketing and business development team must be experts on client needs and behaviors, competitors, and industry trends. Companies must make calculated efforts to retain clients because acquiring new ones is increasingly

difficult and expensive. The most effective client retention method is an account-based marketing (ABM) strategy measured by lifetime value objectives. ABM invests aligned marketing and sales resources in targeted, high-value accounts with the ability to generate repeat business. Because ABM integrates marketing and business development, a top-down approach with the CMO managing resources will increase revenue generation with client-centric results.

And it's in the client-centric results where a CMO will show real value. A CMO-lead, ABM client-centric approach can reduce price sensitivity allowing value propositions to distinguish A/E/C companies from the competition. A CMO's influence over strategy can garner exceptional win rates on proposals and competitive bids. More wins mean higher market share and loyal repeat clients.

Another new economy trend transforming business practices is the power of your brand. The nuances and power of brand require that someone serve and protect brand integrity. Remember, brand goes far beyond logos and colors. A brand is how a company is perceived by those who experience it, and the brand can be one of a company's most valuable assets. The need for brand synergy – consistency across all brand/customer interfaces – is often the catalyst for creating the C-suite position.

In partnership with C-suite peers, the CMO works to maintain brand integrity through customer experience programs. Understanding the customer experience (CX) – the customer's subjective response to direct and indirect contact with a company – and managing the quality of the experience is an expanded responsibility of executive marketers. The CMO must be the expert on customer behaviors, hyper-aware of the competitive landscape, knowledgeable of historical business performance, and a follower of industry trends. In short, the CMO is a customer insight engine with responsibilities spanning technology, data and analytics, account growth, and bottom-line impact.



Colorado State University Shepardson Building for Cannon Design, Adolfsen and Peterson Construction, JVA, © Brad Nicol Photography

Becoming a CMO

A master's degree, more than 15 years of experience, and credentialed as a Certified Marketer of Professional Services (CPSM) are the high-water mark for CMOs in the A/E/C industry. The *Blueprints 3.0* recommended career path is through the marketing or business development journey. A CMO's years of experience should be filled with knowledge gained within the SMPS Domains of Practice.

In a broad industry survey conducted for this article, less than 20% of responding companies have a CMO. Most companies identified the director level as the highest level of marketing and business development leadership. However, 45% of marketers and business developers strive for the CMO position. Given the changing business landscape, now is the right time to strategically position your CMO future.

- **Enhance your skills:** Leadership skills go a long way in the C-suite. Focus on your verbal and written communication abilities. Master difficult conversations. Learn to disseminate company initiatives to generate buy-in, consistency, and accountability. Be able to give and receive feedback. Develop a keen sense of business acumen.
- **Amplify your education:** With degrees beyond bachelors becoming the norm, online master's programs in business are often achievable in less than two years and for a nominal cost. Bulk up on industry-recognized certifications and accreditations like CPSM, APMP, LEED, DBIA, etc.
- **Build a network:** Internal relationships – people advocating for your professional advancement – are paramount for promotions. Demonstrate your skills to IT, human resources, legal, accounting, and operations leaders. Build strong and trusted partnerships with your peers.
- **Know your competition:** Always work to strategically position your firm against the competition. Also, know what other opportunities might meet your needs. Understand how your value is perceived elsewhere in case you need to make a move.

72% of marketing leaders said their role had increased in importance during the last year,” according to 3,000 marketers asked in Deloitte’s 26th edition of the CMO Survey.

Comparing CMO Paths

There is no set way to become a CMO in the A/E/C industry. It's rare to find a senior leader of professional services marketing who set college goals to be the CMO of a construction company or an architecture firm. The following are real-life examples of three CMOs in the industry. Their journeys are varied, but the commonalities align with *Blueprints 3.0*: extensive experience, advanced education, and a desire to integrate strategy across all business functions.

1. CMO Through Marketing

Kate has a master's degree in advertising and a bachelor's degree in speech communication. She spent five years as a marketer in commercial real estate before joining a regional general contractor/development company. She was marketing director for the construction and development business units until the two became separate companies. The shifting strategy for the general contracting business created the need for leadership over new marketing and business development methods. The CEO wanted a synergistic program that placed experienced professionals in the right seat in the boat, so Kate pulled together her vision and a job description to pitch for the CMO role. The CEO was thrilled with the solution and expanded the C-suite with Kate's client-centric lens, bringing balance to those who think through construction operations. Kate oversees the vice president of business development and a marketing manager.

2. CMO Through Business Development

Chad has been with the same national general contractor for 25 years. He has an MBA and a bachelor's degree in civil engineering with a career path spanning jobsite project management, business technologies, preconstruction, and client services/business development. Chad's been CMO for the last four years and handles marketing, business development, and sales across the company. The CMO role was created after a transformative restructuring that spread C-suite leadership horizontally across the vertical sectors of the business. Following the guidance of Pat Lencioni for organizational effectiveness, the company culture centers around clarity, focus, and teamwork to spread and nurture its culture – and marketing and business development have a front-row seat with this CMO.

3. CMO Through Operations

A recovering structural engineer with a master's degree in the discipline, Rodd joined a large national general contractor in 2006 as the company's first building information modeling expert. Rodd has served in various leadership roles, but his primary focus has been operational performance. In 2019, the company's former CMO retired, which triggered an outside search for someone with industry knowledge and foresight.

Two things happened. First, Rodd was recognized for his industry knowledge and foresight with a promotion to

chief strategy and client experience officer. Second, an outside-of-the-industry hire was made for a national marketing director, a position that Rodd recommended as the company centralized its marketing efforts. The added layer of leadership ensures that the marketers have direct support and a defined career path. As chief of strategy, he oversees marketing, preconstruction, in-house design, virtual design and construction, and IT/business technology. Business development is coordinated with Rodd's leadership, but business development professionals report to local business unit leaders.

CMO Impact

The bottom line is that CMOs drive revenue by aligning relationships and reputation with vision. Industry organizations and business academia agree that brand preference is directly linked to winning more work at price premiums for more market share. CMOs drive that recognizable, consistent brand by aligning

business processes and talent across the company in a desirable way to ideal clients. A balanced executive leadership team has representatives from all business functions working together to ensure the company holds true to its established plans. CMOs ensure that company strategy is communicated externally and internally, so the audience believes in the company value, endearing customers and employees to the brand.

Marketers and business developers want a way to become executive leaders where they can contribute to overall company success. Career paths with growth and learning opportunities flourish under the guidance of a CMO. A/E/C companies have a chance to elevate marketing and business development roles and put strategy at the forefront of business decision-making. Having a CMO in the C-suite will distinguish your company as a trusted, long-term partner focused on the customer experience and supportive of your bottom line. ■



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Models for Structuring Integrated Marketing and Business Development Teams

