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5 Reasons You Need a Sales/Marketing Expert on Your Board

A board of directors should cover expertise from all functions, yet this important role is often not represented. [🔗](#)

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American companies have utilized boards for many decades to allow investors to provide guidance and influence decision making to maximize their investment.

Going back to 1882, John D. Rockefeller established Standard Oil Trust, which effectively consolidated the operations of various oil companies (later spun off into ExxonMobil, Chevron Corporation, and others) under one umbrella. The trust was controlled by a hand-selected board of nine trustees, who managed the affairs of the trust and its subsidiaries. These trustees had significant power and influence over the company operations.

Today, investors continue to heavily influence the composition of a company's board of directors.

The typical board has 10 active members, with collective expertise in leadership, finance, operations, legal, technology, human resources, and sales and marketing. Each member brings specific skills and experiences that contribute to the organization's strategic direction, governance, and oversight.

According to the Spencer Stuart Board Index, more than 50 percent of boards add at least one new member yearly—30 percent of those new board members are active or retired CEOs and 27 percent have financial backgrounds.

Sales and marketing experts are vital at this high level

I suspect the number of board members with sales and marketing expertise is lower than traditional financial titles. I see sales and marketing board members playing an increasingly vital role of providing valuable insight into industry trends, competitive dynamics, company growth challenges, and new market opportunities.

If that sales and marketing executive is also a seasoned CEO, that is a powerful combination of skills and expertise to add to the board.

Here are five reasons you should select a sales and marketing expert for your next board seat.

- **Align directly with investor goals.**

Your investors expect you to accelerate profitable sales growth. That sales growth can be generated from both organic growth and acquisitions. Potential acquisition candidates will be evaluated based on your ability to maximize their current sales performance *and* the ability to find incremental sales and marketing synergies between the two companies.

Adding a seasoned sales and marketing pro to the board who has "been there, done that" gives your internal team fresh insights and additional firepower to measurably increase brand equity and maximize revenue growth.

- **Add a fresh perspective and mindset to the mix.**

In my experience, and based on the Spencer Stuart Board Index data, board seats are largely filled with analytical executives (e.g., financial, operations, legal, technology experts) who follow a precise, linear decision making process to reach a solution.

Sales and marketing pros tend to be non-linear, meaning they use imagination, intuition and creativity to generate fresh, unconventional solutions to revenue growth challenges that would not have been considered otherwise.

I am not suggesting that people can only be highly analytical or highly creative. It is like the misconception that people are either an introvert or extrovert. There is clearly a spectrum between being highly extroverted or highly introverted, and between being creative and analytical.

However, by introducing more creative thinking into the board environment, members will be more likely to explore new ideas, test different approaches, and come up with more innovative solutions that are backed by data.

- **Leverage the sales and marketing successes (and challenges) of other companies.**

Your board should be well-stocked with members with proven expertise in the specific industry in which your company competes. However, by selecting the right sales and marketing focused board member you can also capitalize on the knowledge gained from working with successful brands across multiple sectors.

For example, I've worked with more than 300 brands over my career: global consumer brands, national franchises, tech companies, non-profits, and more. I've worked shoulder-to-shoulder with some of the best sales and marketing superstars around, been actively involved in companies that grew from a startup to a global market leader, and yes of course been involved with products and companies that never lived up to expectations.

The right sales and marketing board member can cross-pollinate big ideas from past experiences—good and bad—over their career to make a big impact on your company's market analysis, branding, customer engagement, and revenue growth strategies.

- **Add firepower to your sales and marketing team.**

Adding a sales and marketing pro to the board can augment and energize your existing sales and marketing teams' efforts.

The sales and marketing board member can serve as a trusted advisor to your staff given that the relationship is completely non-competitive and additive, and be a supportive voice for the sales and marketing initiatives at board meetings.

The right board member will collaborative on problem solving, share experiences working with other companies and potential vendors, and contribute their expertise and ideas to improve the effectiveness of revenue growth strategies

- **Changes the board dynamics.**

The impact of adding sales and marketing firepower could be the catalyst your board needs to maximize profitable growth.

Without a sales and marketing presence at the board level, at best, marketing issues are likely to be ignored. At worst, important marketing issues may be governed by inexperienced board members.

Moreover, in the absence of a sales and marketing board member, priorities are likely to focus on cost cutting rather than growth-oriented strategies, and advice is likely to focus on increasing efficiency rather than changing customer behavior.

If your company is facing sales and marketing challenges, it seems logical to add a seasoned subject matter expert to the team.

Does your board have the right mix of skills?

The right board mix is crucial to addressing the company's business realities. As companies navigate an increasingly challenging and fast-evolving business environment, boards need to embrace a culture of refreshing their membership to maintain the right mix of experiences and perspectives.

Does the current mix of your board members' skills align with the company's emerging sales and marketing issues and growth expectations? If not, it may be time to add a sales and marketing pro to your team.