

More on MBAs for CMOs

Timothy B. Corcoran

One of the most popular destinations on this blog is my post about the utility of an MBA for a modern law firm Chief Marketing Officer, and the healthy discussion that ensued. You can re-read that post [here](#). In short, I suggest that the traditional path to prominence in a senior law firm marketing role — including knowing how law firms operate, working for several law firms to establish credibility, and focusing more on tactics than change management — is giving way to a more progressive role where business acumen and sometimes specifically *no* law firm experience is of greater importance (see the quote [here](#) by the law firm leader who specifically recruited a CMO with no legal industry experience).

In my view, an MBA can be very helpful in providing the critical thinking, vocabulary and out-of-industry references to help a law firm CMO. Not all agreed with me, as the comments appended to the post attest. The reality is that some law firms will take years to adapt to the new normal. Herewith I offer two relevant updates to that discussion.

The law firm marketer demographic is skewed toward females, for whatever reasons. However, business schools pose challenges for working mothers who try to squeeze in higher education. Notably, [Wharton](#), the prestigious business school at the University of Pennsylvania, has enjoyed two consecutive years of dramatically increased [female student enrollment](#), and the administration is working to continue this trend. This is a welcome trend, and we can only hope it's both sustainable and mirrored at other schools of all tiers. Diversity of thought, gender, culture and beliefs is critical to the growth and adaptability of a modern enterprise, and as it turns out not all business decisions made by middle-aged white males are as informed as they could be!

Unrelated to this, but no less newsworthy, is a recent poll of corporate CEOs which indicates that executive management questions the relevance of CMOs in the corporate sector. To wit: "[CEOs say that marketers lack business credibility](#)." Oh, the horror! The fact is, there's a [bell curve](#) of competence and productivity in every discipline and it's not at all surprising that as we emerge from a global economic crisis our business leaders question the effectiveness of their marketing professionals, in the same way that they are questioning the ability of their manufacturing operations to operate leaner, their sales teams to sell more, their legal departments to improve predictability (more [here](#))... and we the stockholders question whether the business leaders themselves are effective stewards of our capital investments. Marketers should be held accountable, whether in law firms or corporations, and those who aren't getting it done will need to move on. Such is life.

To a casual reader it may appear as if I long for law firms to operate like big corporations. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have long experience in publicly-traded multinational corporations, and I have a good dose of experience in privately-held enterprises. Most businesses have huge operating inefficiencies, many are rife with internal politics that pose greater obstacles than any competitor, and sadly more than a few have [leaders at the helm](#) focused more on their next bonus than on the long-term health of the business.

That said, there are a number of business practices which, if adopted and adapted by law firm leaders, would hugely improve the efficiency, client focus and profitability of a modern law firm. And that, in a nutshell, is the point of this blog.