



Marketing Operations: Pit Crew or Service Station?

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A Marketing Operations (Ops) function can serve as the choreographer and conductor for helping Marketing realize the expected return on investment (ROI) from investments on data, analytics, technology, processes, and talent resources.

Many organizations are using their marketing ops to help the CMO run marketing like a business and to transform and maintain Marketing as a center of excellence.

Organizations invest in marketing operations to help...

- Ensure marketing strategies are executed seamlessly
- Create, manage, and track marketing processes
- Analyze and develop metrics to improve effectiveness and reduce inefficiencies

The vision, scope, and charter of a marketing ops function can vary:

- For some organizations, the marketing ops function is responsible for strategic planning and alignment, financial management and reporting, workflow definition and management, performance measurement and management, change management and innovation adoption, and marketing technology.
- In other organizations the role may be different, in some case primarily serving in a tactical way, for example supporting campaign automation and tracking, or budget tracking.

- And, finally, in some organizations, marketing ops is a dump station—the place where things are done that no one else wants to do.

No one wants to be a dump station, so perhaps a better way to think about your marketing operations function is whether it will operate more like a pit crew or a service station. Both maintain and support a car's performance, so what's the difference?

The Pit Crew

In automotive racing, pit strategy is critical to success. When a car is running at over 100 miles per hour, it travels approximately 150 feet per second. That means, during a ten-second pit stop, a car's competitors will gain approximately one-quarter mile over the stopped car.

Now consider the speed at which Marketing must operate in today's environment. We need to run faster and be more agile than ever. Marketing Operations can serve as the marketing team's pit crew, carefully orchestrating the pit strategy to balance out efficiency (time lost in the pit) with effectiveness (ground gained on the track).

Similar to the pit crew, Marketing and the Ops team must plan the strategy before the race:

- Pit crews consider important metrics, such as the rate of fuel consumption, fuel weight, cornering speed, rate of tire wear, the effect of tire wear on cornering speed, the pit road length, and road speed limit, and even unexpected changes in weather conditions.
- Marketing Ops enables Marketing to use metrics in the same way, for example which levers deliver the greatest results in terms of qualified opportunities, accelerated product adoption.

Pit crews work offensively and defensively. And Marketing Ops, resembling a pit crew, would be proactively managing data, analytics, processes, planning, and tools that help identify customer wants and needs, decide on which markets and customers to pursue, what messages and channels to use and when these will occur, what service and

adjustments are needed throughout program execution or how to modify the strategy due to unexpected changes in conditions.

Just as the pit crew needs to be prepared and equipped to perform any service from the simple to complex on the car during the race, Marketing Ops needs to be prepared and equipped to perform any service or adjustment to support the marketing team and its internal stakeholders in Product, Sales, Service, and Delivery.

Marketing Ops functions that operate similar to a pit crew need strength, agility, and speed.

The Service Station

A service station crew, and a Marketing Ops that reflect this model, behaves in a much different fashion.

As a service center, the emphasis is on the word service. In addition to pumping gas (refueling), the service station attendant performs basic car services such as washing the customer's windows and checking the oil and water levels. In some instances, these centers might provide oil changes, tire repair services, engine repair, and parts service and replacement.

A service station typically has little visibility into which customers and cars they will service that day or what kind of services they will be asked to perform. Similarly, marketing ops organizations behaving as a service station work on-demand, supporting whatever requests come their way with little opportunity to strategize or plan.

As a result, ops organizations that operate similar to service stations are better served with skills and tools that provide basic turnkey services on demand. Successful service stations and like-minded marketing ops organizations need exceptional customer service, supply/inventory management, financial management, and general maintenance skills- very different skills from the pit crew's.

In general, the service station is reacting to problems, and to specific requests made by the customer, as they arise. The service station team rarely has the opportunity to be proactive.

Ten Questions to Ask

As you and your team consider the marketing ops function, deciding whether you are a pit crew or a service station may provide some guidance. Once you make that fundamental decision, you can build your framework accordingly.

The framework should include the function's mission, scope, charter, role, and milestones. These 10 questions will help you outline the framework:

1. What is the purpose of the marketing ops function in our organization? Why do we need this?
2. What will be better or different as a result of this function?
3. What is the umbrella philosophy of the function?
4. What areas/processes will be covered/delivered by the function—planning, financial management and oversight, marketing technology, workflow management, data and analytics, performance management and reporting, talent development, marketing culture?
5. Which of those areas/processes will the function own? Drive? Support?
6. Who are the stakeholders and customers: Internal to Marketing? External to Marketing (IT, Finance, Sales)? External to the organization (suppliers, customers, etc.)?
7. What will the specific measurable objectives for the organization be?
8. What essential skills, characteristics, capabilities, and resources are required to achieve those objectives?
9. What are the tasks and associated milestones that will enable the organization to achieve its purpose?

10. How will the success of the function be measured?

Once you have a framework for your marketing ops function, develop a plan for communicating this information to the rest of the marketing team and other stakeholders. This step will help the organization understand where and how the function fits.

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