

The Changing MO of CCOs and CMOs

By MaryLee Sachs

Editor's note: This article first appeared on the PRSAY blog on June 3. The quotes included here are from Sachs' new book, "The Changing MO of the CMO — How the Convergence of Brand and Reputation Is Affecting Marketers" (Gower, 2011).

Can chief communication officers become chief marketing officers? Would they want to act as CMOs?

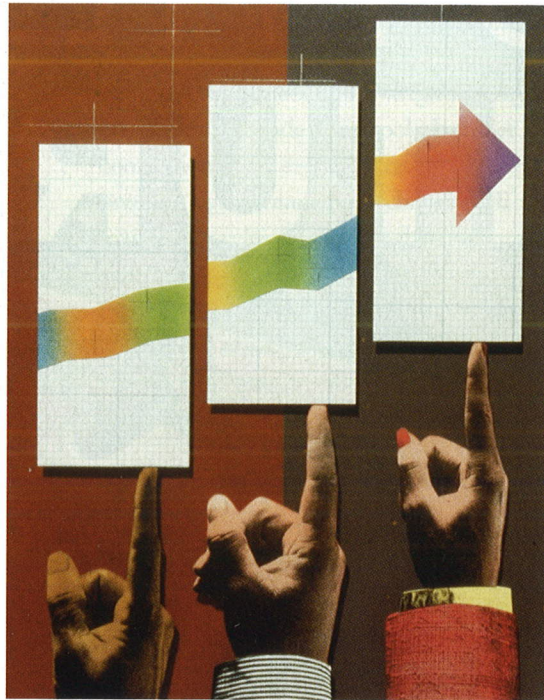
Many have already crossed over. They are rare, but those who have made the transition thrive in a world of silo-busting integration. Some are well-known: Jon Iwata of IBM, Beth Comstock of GE, Christa Carone of Xerox and Anne Finucane of Bank of America. Last September, the Renault-Nissan Alliance promoted Simon Sproule from director of communications to corporate vice president of global marketing communications — effectively the CMO of Nissan.

After interviewing Sproule on his new role, a UK-based PR trade publication asked several PR people for their thoughts on the job change. The comments were almost all negative.

"They felt that PR needs to be independent, that PR is different [from] marketing," Sproule told me. "This is the classic kind of silo mentality that we don't need. I suggested that [the reporter]

ring up each one of those skeptics and ask them if

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the CEO walked into their office and said, 'I want you to become the head of marketing and PR for my company, would you do it?'"

Becoming integrationists

Sproule firmly believes that integration is the wave of the future.

He says that this is neither public relations nor marketing coming into each other. It is a third discipline or, as Iwata calls it, a new profession.

This won't eliminate public relations or marketing. Some people will still have specialized skills and operate solely in one area.

However, "We have a need for a third type of individual who ultimately will become the norm rather than the exception," Sproule said. "People who are much more comfortable thinking in

terms of integration and 360-degree communications as opposed to just thinking about marketing and PR."

It's a lofty goal. But Sproule believes that if we want to rise to the top of our profession, then we need to become integrationists. We must be comfortable leading a broader mix of functions with an array of tools and analytics.

Accepting a new role

PR professionals are in a strong position, ready to take on even more important roles in their organizations. We can comfortably engage with a wide variety of audiences, encourage dialogue, navigate unknown territories and manage issues. But we are less-versed in traditional marketing disciplines and terminology.

When asked if there are disadvantages coming to a marketing leadership role from a communications background, Iwata noted that the challenges include a lack of familiarity with the marketing vocabulary.

But today, everything from the purchase funnel to traditional advertising is breaking down. CEOs and boards of directors are more open to new ideas and approaches than they've been in the past. The question is: Are we ready to take on a bigger role in our organizations? Do we want to? ■



MaryLee Sachs was most recently U.S. chair and worldwide director of consumer marketing at Hill & Knowlton.

