

THE SLICE // FRACTIONAL MARKETING SERIES

Hiring Your First FCMO

9 Questions Every Leadership Team
Must Ask Before They Hire

Why This Guide Exists

The fractional executive model has matured significantly over the past decade. What was once viewed as a stopgap measure - a part-time hire while you find the 'real' CMO - is now recognised by sophisticated leadership teams as a structural advantage. Providing access to senior marketing leadership, without the cost, commitment, or organisational weight of a full-time C-suite hire.

But the model only works when the hiring decision is made with clarity. Too many businesses treat the FCMO search the same way they treat any other hire: write a job description, post it, interview, select. That process, applied to a fractional role, produces disappointing results at best and expensive missteps at worst.

This guide is built around nine questions. They are not interview questions - they are questions leadership teams must answer before they bring anyone in to interview. The businesses that answer them honestly, in advance, consistently get better outcomes from their FCMO engagements. Those that skip them rarely do.

This guide is written for leadership teams across the commercial spectrum - from £1M SMEs hiring their first senior marketer, to enterprise businesses bringing in fractional expertise for interim cover, category creation, or specialist capability. The nine questions apply in both contexts. Where the answers differ by stage, we have flagged it.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Work through each question as a leadership team before you engage any candidate or agency. Where you find disagreement between your own leaders, treat that as a priority problem to solve first. A FCMO cannot resolve internal misalignment - they can only expose it, usually at cost. We've also included a readiness checklist at the end as well and also a couple of use cases.

THE NINE QUESTIONS AT A GLANCE

- 01 Are we ready for a FCMO - or just a marketing manager?
- 02 What commercial outcomes are we actually hiring for? Plus, commercial considerations
- 03 Does this person have experience in businesses like ours?
- 04 How will we structure the engagement and are we set up for it to work?
- 05 What does their network and ecosystem look like?
- 06 How do they approach strategy - and can they show us?
- 07 How will they work with our sales team - and have they done it before?
- 08 What does good governance and accountability look like for this role?
- 09 Are we genuinely prepared to act on what they tell us?

QUESTION 01 OF 09

Are we ready for a FCMO - or just a marketing manager?

This is the question most businesses skip. They move straight to hiring because growth has stalled or a competitor looks slicker. That is the wrong starting point.

A Fractional CMO operates at board level. They set strategy, challenge the leadership team, and take accountability for commercial outcomes. If your business needs someone to execute campaigns, manage agencies, or post on LinkedIn - that is not a FCMO. Confusing the two roles leads to misaligned expectations, wasted budget, and rapid attrition.

Ask yourself: do we have a strategy problem or an execution problem?

- If you cannot articulate your ICP, positioning, or growth thesis - you need a FCMO.
- If you have a clear strategy but no one to run campaigns - hire execution resource first.
- If you have both gaps - hire the FCMO first, let them define the team you need.

THE SLICE BENCHMARK

SMEs with a minimum annual revenue of c. £1M are typically the right profile for a first FCMO engagement. Below that, a senior marketing consultant may suffice. Enterprise businesses tend to hire FCMOs for different reasons - interim cover, category creation, pre-IPO positioning, or specialist capability gaps - rather than building a function from scratch.

• RED FLAG

If your board says 'we need marketing to do more' without being able to specify what 'more' means - solve that ambiguity before any hire.

QUESTION 02 OF 09

What commercial outcomes are we actually hiring for?

Vague mandates produce vague results. Before interviewing a single candidate, your leadership team must agree on what success looks like - in numbers, not adjectives.

FCMOs are not hired to 'improve brand awareness' or 'get us out there more.' They are hired to drive pipeline, reduce CAC, accelerate revenue, or open new markets. Each objective demands a different kind of operator with a different background.

Define your primary commercial objective before you write the brief:

- **Pipeline growth** : consider someone with demand generation and/or ABM experience.
- **Market entry**: consider category expertise and go-to-market rigour.
- **Brand repositioning**: consider strategic brand experience, not performance marketing.
- **Retention and expansion**: consider lifecycle marketing and customer insight capability.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A strong FCMO engagement starts with a diagnostic over 2 - 4 weeks, depending on business size & complexity. They should be able to tell you, within that window, exactly what is broken, what to prioritise, and what it will cost to fix. If they cannot, the engagement should not continue.

• RED FLAG

Beware candidates who promise results before they have seen your data. Credibility comes from asking hard questions, not making bold claims.

COMMERCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

What it costs - a framework for budgeting

Most first-time buyers underestimate the commercial commitment of a FCMO engagement. Day rates alone are not the right way to think about it. The useful lens is total monthly investment relative to the commercial outcome you are hiring for.

How to frame the budget conversation:

- **Day rate range:** Experienced FCMOs in the UK market sit within a broad band. The range reflects sector complexity, seniority, and whether the individual is operating through their own consultancy or via a network. Expect material variance - a specialist category operator commands more than a generalist.
- **Typical monthly commitment:** 6–12 days per month is the operating norm. Fewer than 6 rarely produces momentum. More than 12 and you should be asking whether a full-time hire is more efficient.
- **Pilot budget:** In addition to the FCMO fee, allow for a discretionary pilot budget they can deploy within the first 90 days - on research, testing, or specialist support. Without this, they are an advisor, not an operator.
- **Ecosystem costs:** Factor in the agencies, freelancers, and tools the FCMO will recommend. A good FCMO will help you spend this budget well; they are not a substitute for it.

THE RIGHT BENCHMARK

Total annual FCMO investment should be materially less than the fully-loaded cost of a full-time CMO - but meaningful enough to secure senior attention and continuity. If you are trying to hire a FCMO on the cheapest possible terms, you will get what you pay for.

•RED FLAG

Candidates who quote a day rate without asking about scope, outcomes, or internal resource are pricing their time, not your outcome. The best operators price the engagement, not the hour.

QUESTION 03 OF 09

Does this person have experience in businesses like ours?

Sector experience matters less than commercial stage experience. A FCMO who has scaled a SeriesB SaaS business brings more relevant capability to your £5M professional services firm than one who spent fifteen years in a FTSE 100 marketing department.

The skills required to build a marketing function from scratch - with limited budget, no brand recognition, and a sceptical sales team - are distinct from those required to manage an established one. Look for pattern recognition at your stage, not prestige at a different one.

One caveat: in regulated or technically complex categories - financial services, healthcare, cybersecurity - sector fluency becomes a hard requirement, not a nice-to-have. Stage-fit still matters, but sector-fit is the gatekeeper.

Screen for stage-fit, not just sector-fit:

- Have they operated in a business of your size and complexity?
- Have they built or restructured a marketing function rather than inherited one?
- Have they worked alongside a sales team and managed that relationship?
- Have they reported to a founder or owner-manager, not a corporate CMO?

THE SLICE OBSERVATION

The biggest failure mode we see is hiring a corporate marketer into an SME context. They arrive expecting resource, process, and data infrastructure that does not exist. Six months later, nothing has moved.

• RED FLAG

If their CV is all enterprise brands push hard in interview on what they personally delivered, versus what their team delivered, if you're needing a candidate who can roll up their sleeves.

QUESTION 04 OF 09

How will we structure the engagement? And are we set up for it to work?

A FCMO is only as effective as the conditions you create for them. If they are fighting for access to data, leadership time, or execution resource, the engagement will fail regardless of their ability.

Before you hire, decide: how many days per month? Who do they report to? What budget do they control? What does the first 90 days look like? These are not details to figure out later - they determine whether the hire will work at all.

Structural decisions to make before day one:

- **Days per month:** typically 6–12 days per month; fewer than 6 rarely produces momentum.
- **Reporting line:** directly to CEO or founder is optimal. Reporting to a sales director creates conflict.
- **Budget authority:** they must control at least a pilot budget. Advisory-only roles rarely deliver.
- **Internal support:** do they have someone to work with, or are they operating in a vacuum?

ENGAGEMENT DESIGN

The most effective FCMO engagements are structured as a 3-month diagnostic and strategy phase, often followed by a 6–12 month execution phase with clear quarterly milestones. Avoid open-ended retainers with no defined deliverables and accept every engagement is unique.

• RED FLAG

If your leadership team cannot commit to a monthly 1:1 and a quarterly review - do not hire a FCMO. You will not get the output you are paying for.

QUESTION 05 OF 09

What does their network and ecosystem look like?

A FCMO does not just bring their own capability. They bring an ecosystem - agencies, specialists, platforms, and talent pools they trust and can activate quickly. This multiplier effect is the difference between fast progress and slow.

Ask them directly: who would you bring in for paid media? Who is your go-to for content strategy? Which PR agency would you recommend for a business like ours? The quality and specificity of their answers tells you more than their CV.

What a strong FCMO network looks like:

- Trusted relationships with 2–3 specialist agencies they have worked with previously.
- A network of freelance talent for execution: designers, copywriters, SEO specialists.
- Peer FCMO relationships they use for sense-checking and problem-solving.
- Existing relationships with relevant media, communities, or industry bodies.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Businesses cannot afford to learn on the job with new suppliers. An experienced FCMO compresses the time to value by deploying a pre-vetted network rather than starting from scratch. This is precisely the infrastructure The Slice provides - our FCMO members operate within a vetted, high-signal community of specialists they can draw on.

• RED FLAG

A candidate who cannot name specific agencies or individuals they trust is either new to the fractional model or has been operating in a very narrow niche. Neither is ideal.

QUESTION 06 OF 09

How do they approach strategy - and can they show us?

Strategy is not a slide deck. It is a set of decisions about where to compete, how to win, and what to stop doing. Ask to see examples of strategic work, not just campaigns they ran or results they delivered.

The strongest FCMOs think in frameworks but communicate in plain language. They can explain your competitive position in two sentences. They can tell you what your ICP really wants, and why your current messaging is not connecting. Ask them to do exactly that - in the room, with your real business.

Interview technique: use a live diagnostic exercise.

- Share your website, a competitor's, and your last 12 months of marketing activity.
- Give them 30 minutes to review, then ask: what would you do differently and why? •

Listen for rigour, honesty, and commercial logic - not flattery.

- The best candidates will identify problems you have not seen. That is the signal.

THE SLICE METHOD

We support our FCMO members with access to a peer network and we capture detailed background and profile information. We also meet our members to assess strategic thinking, and whether they are operating at the standard clients expect.

• RED FLAG

If their strategy answer sounds like it could apply to any business in any sector, it is not strategy. It is positioning-speak. Push harder.

QUESTION 07 OF 09

How will they work with our sales team - and have they done it before?

In most growth-stage businesses, marketing and sales are either fused into one person or exist in a state of low-level hostility. A FCMO who cannot navigate this dynamic will fail. Full stop.

The best FCMOs have operated as the bridge between demand generation and revenue conversion. They speak the language of pipeline and quota, not just impressions and click-through rates. They know that the sales team's buy-in is not optional - it is the precondition for everything.

Questions to probe this in interview:

- Describe a time marketing and sales disagreed. What happened?
- How do you define a qualified lead - and who gets to decide?
- What does a good sales and marketing alignment process look like at your scale?
- Have you ever killed a marketing channel because sales told you the leads were poor quality?

ALIGNMENT ARCHITECTURE

A good FCMO will establish a shared revenue dashboard within their first 30 days - one number that marketing and sales both own. If they do not propose this, suggest it and watch how they respond.

• RED FLAG

Candidates who blame sales for poor results, or who position marketing as separate from revenue, are not the right fit. Marketing in this context is a commercial function, not a creative one.

QUESTION 08 OF 09

What does good governance and accountability look like for this role?

Fractional engagements fail most often not because the FCMO lacks ability, but because the governance structure is too loose. Monthly check-ins and a vague remit produce vague outcomes.

Treat this engagement with the rigour you would apply to any senior commercial hire. Set quarterly objectives. Agree a measurement framework in week one. Build in a formal 90-day review. Create the conditions for honest challenge - including the ability to exit if the engagement is not working.

Governance framework for a FCMO engagement:

- **90-day review:** formal assessment of strategic output and early indicators.
- **Quarterly OKRs:** three to five objectives with measurable key results, agreed with the board.
- **Monthly reporting:** a one-page dashboard reviewed in a structured meeting, not an email.
- **Annual reset:** strategy refresh, budget reallocation, and engagement renewal decision.

ON MEASUREMENT

The FCMO should define their own success metrics in the first 30 days, validated by you. If they cannot tell you what good looks like and how to measure it, they are not yet operating at CMO level.

RED FLAG

Avoid engagements where the FCMO controls all reporting with no independent verification. Accountability requires transparency on both sides.

QUESTION 09 OF 09

Are we genuinely prepared to act on what they tell us?

This is the question no one wants to ask - and the one that matters most. A FCMO will, if they are doing their job, tell you things you do not want to hear. About your pricing. Your product. Your sales process. Your positioning. Your leadership team.

The businesses that get the most from a FCMO engagement are those with founders and leaders who are genuinely open to being challenged. Not performatively. Not in theory. In practice, when the feedback is uncomfortable and the recommendation is expensive or disruptive.

The honest internal test:

- Have we acted on difficult feedback before - from advisers, investors, or customers?
- Is our leadership team aligned on the need for marketing to drive commercial change?
- Are we prepared to give this person real authority, not just a title?
- If they recommend we stop doing something we have done for years - will we listen?

THE REAL ROI

The return on a FCMO engagement is not measured in brand awareness or social media followers. It is measured in pipeline generated, deals closed, markets entered, and positioning sharpened. If you are not ready to measure it that way, reconsider the timing of this hire.

• RED FLAG

If your instinct is to hire a FCMO who will validate your existing approach rather than challenge it - save the money. You are hiring a mirror, not a strategist.

THE SLICE FCMO READINESS CHECKLIST

Are you ready to hire?

Work through this as a leadership team. Answer honestly. The value is in the conversation, not the score

STRATEGY & CLARITY

Yes No We can articulate our ICP, positioning, and growth thesis in plain language.

Yes No We have agreed the primary commercial outcome we are hiring for - in numbers.

Yes No Our leadership team is aligned on what 'success' looks like i.e. in 12 months.

STRUCTURE & SUPPORT

Yes No We have agreed the reporting line, day commitment, and budget authority before hiring.

Yes No We can commit to a monthly 1:1 and a quarterly strategic review.

Yes No We have internal execution resource - or are prepared to fund it.

GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Yes No We have a measurement framework - or are willing to let the FCMO design one.

Yes No We have built in a formal 90-day review with the option to exit.

Yes No We are prepared to measure success in pipeline, revenue, or market outcomes - not activity.

READINESS TO ACT

Yes No We have acted on difficult feedback from advisers, investors, or customers before.

Yes No We are prepared to give this person real authority, not just a title.

Yes No If they recommend we stop doing something we have done for years, we will listen.

YOUR TRAFFIC LIGHT

- **10–12 Yes:** You are ready. Brief the engagement with confidence.
- **6–9 Yes:** You are close. Address the gaps before you hire - not after.
- **0–5 Yes:** You are not ready for a FCMO. A senior consultant or advisor may serve you better in the short term while you resolve the readiness gaps.

USE CASE 01

A B2C Retailer Finds Its Growth Lever

SCENARIO: A UK-based premium homeware brand, £8M revenue, 14 staff. Strong product, loyal customer base, but flat revenue for two years.

The situation

The founder had been running marketing personally - posting on Instagram, sending occasional newsletters, briefing a web agency. She knew it was not working but did not know why. A board advisor recommended a FCMO. Her instinct was to hire a social media agency instead.

What made the hire work

Before engaging anyone, the leadership team worked through the nine questions in this guide. The honest answer to Question 01 - do we have a strategy problem or an execution problem? - was clear: they had no ICP, no channel strategy, and no understanding of what was driving their best customers. That was a strategy problem. A social media agency would have made the noise louder. It would not have fixed the underlying issue.

The FCMO's first 90 days

The FCMO ran a customer diagnostic - interviews, purchase data analysis, and a competitor audit. The finding was uncomfortable: the brand's most profitable customers were 45–60 year-old women buying as gifts.

All the marketing was targeting 28–35 year-old women buying for themselves. The brand's Instagram aesthetic was misaligned with the people actually spending money.

What changed

Positioning was refined. The channel mix shifted from organic Instagram to email, gifting partnerships, and a loyalty programme. The founder's own LinkedIn became an unexpected acquisition channel for corporate gifting clients. Twelve months later, revenue had grown 34%. The FCMO remained engaged on four days per month.

What this illustrates

In B2C, the FCMO's most valuable early contribution is often not a campaign - it is a clear-eyed read of who the real customer is. The businesses that act on that finding grow. Those that defend their existing assumptions do not.



The founder's initial instinct - hire an agency, not a strategist - is the most common mistake we see in B2C. Agencies execute. A FCMO decides what is worth executing. The sequence matters.

Composite case study drawn from The Slice Network's experience across multiple FCMO engagements

USE CASE 02

A B2B Technology Business Enters a New Market

SCENARIO: A UK-based SaaS business, £4M ARR, 22 staff. Strong retention, weak new business pipeline. The CEO believed the product was ready for enterprise clients but had no idea how to reach them.

The situation

The business had been growing through referrals and a small outbound sales team. Marketing was one junior person managing the website and writing blog posts. The CEO wanted to move upmarket - from SME clients to mid-market and enterprise — but had no positioning, no enterprise sales narrative, and no marketing infrastructure to support a longer sales cycle.

What made the hire work

The leadership team was clear on the commercial objective before the FCMO started: market entry into the mid-market segment within 12 months, measured by qualified pipeline. This clarity - the answer to Question 02 - meant the FCMO could move immediately without spending the first month trying to understand what success looked like.

The FCMO's first 90 days

The FCMO identified 3 problems immediately. First, the website spoke to SME buyers - the language, the pricing page, and the case studies all signalled 'small business software.' Second, the sales team had no enterprise collateral and was losing deals at the business case stage. Third, there was no ABM infrastructure and no way to identify and engage target accounts systematically.

What changed

The FCMO restructured the messaging architecture, maintaining an SME proposition while building a parallel enterprise narrative. A target account list of 150 firms was built and an ABM programme launched across LinkedIn and direct outreach. Sales enablement materials, including ROI calculators and a competitive battlecard, were produced within 60 days. The FCMO also rebuilt the shared reporting between marketing sales, so both were tracking the same pipeline metrics.

What this illustrates

In B2B, the FCMO's leverage is in aligning marketing to the sales motion - not in running campaigns in isolation. The shift upmarket required strategy, sales enablement, and a new measurement model. None of that is agency work. All of it required a senior operator with commercial accountability.



This business had the product to compete in the mid-market. What it lacked was the commercial infrastructure to get there. The FCMO built that infrastructure in parallel with the existing business - without disrupting what was already working.

Composite case study drawn from The Slice Network's experience across multiple FCMO engagements

The Right FCMO Changes Everything.

The nine questions in this guide are designed to do one thing: give your leadership team the clarity to hire well. Not every business is ready for a FCMO. But the ones that are, and who approach the hire with rigour, consistently report that it is one of the highest-leverage commercial decisions they make.

Who are The Slice Network?

The Slice was created around a simple idea: fractional marketing is going mainstream - but the way people build portfolio careers and how companies access fractional marketers hasn't caught up.

Too many experienced fractional marketers are navigating complex client work, business development, and personal growth alone. We built The Slice to change that; connecting seasoned fractional marketers to opportunities, collaboration, and real peer support, all within a vetted, high-signal marketing community. Whilst ensuring companies are also fully prepared.

Our Purpose

To help fractional marketers connect, collaborate, and create stronger, more sustainable portfolios. And businesses hire the right fCMO for their needs.



SPEAK TO THE SLICE

If you are ready to brief your first FCMO engagement, or want an independent assessment of whether your business is ready, get in touch.

Share your scorecard with us for an independent view.

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A NOTE ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

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Jeremy is a London-based CMO and founder of The Slice and also RocketJam, a fractional marketing services agency that helps ambitious businesses accelerate growth without the overhead of a full-time marketing team.

With over 20 years' experience, he has transformed brands and built high-performance marketing capabilities across blue-chip corporations (Nationwide, NatWest), global enterprises (Bupa, Crown Worldwide) and founder-led scale-ups.

He is recognised among the top 2% of LinkedIn creators worldwide (Favikon), where he shares insights on marketing, leadership, and the future of work, including fractional marketing.

Jeremy is also a regular contributor to podcasts and industry events, bringing a global perspective and straight-talking approach to marketing and growth, and fractional working.



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Slice Co-Founder : Catherine Nichols

Catherine is a Surrey-based CMO, co-founder of The Slice and founder of MAGGIE specialising in providing expert fractional CMO services on a retainer or project basis.

With more than 20 years' experience as a B2B marketing leader helping SaaS and tech companies - from start-ups and scale-ups to global enterprises - to grow pipeline, revenue, and brand, Catherine's expertise spans B2B, Professional Services, and Tech (Ed/Climate/FinServ/HR).

She is a regular contributor in the marketing and fractional space, sharing insights and as a strong advocate for flexible working and supporting women in the workplace - having created three tiny humans herself, she believes in making work, work and has a no-nonsense, pragmatic approach which is all about getting things done.



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