

The marketing director job doesn't exist any more. We keep advertising it anyway.

Oct, 2026

A brief for a marketing director arrived on my desk earlier this year. The successful candidate would own brand, lead digital and data, run customer experience, set the AI strategy, manage internal communications and deliver a pipeline target. They would have a team of four, a budget smaller than the previous year's and no seat on the board.

I asked the chief executive which of those things mattered most. No big surprise, he said all of them! Fortunately, this was a very realistic and pragmatic client. The discussion rolled into a resource planning exercise, to look at the shape and structure of the team, and where the deliverables linked into wider business units. We created an 18 month resource plan that would underpin the evolution of the delivery for which the new 'marketing director' would be accountable - we looked at drilling down on revenue targets and KPI's to give a realistic sense of how the team would evolve and what support would be provided, in terms of budget and runway.

I have placed marketing, sales and commercial leaders in Scotland for more than twenty years, and I recognise that brief. It describes five jobs, and the title on the front page stopped describing any of them some time ago.

More remit, same money, less time.

Ask most marketing leaders and they will tell you they are wearing multiple hats and absorbing increasing amounts of tactical growth delivery within their strategy... and also their budget! The reality of the role is becoming much more complex and many companies are shying away from deciding what the owner of these hats is actually called. [Spencer Stuart's 2026 tenure study](#) found that 31% of S&P 500 companies now have no enterprise chief marketing officer at all. The work has been handed to chief commercial officers, chief revenue officers and chief customer officers. Where the role survives, it lasts an average of 4.1 years against 5.0 for the executive team as a whole.

The remit keeps growing and the resources don't. [Gartner's 2026 CMO Spend Survey](#) puts marketing budgets at 7.8% of company revenue, barely moved from 7.7% a year earlier. Of that, 15.3% is now going on AI, a line that hardly existed three years ago and one that not all

organisations are in agreement on where it . More than half of the marketing leaders surveyed, 56%, say they lack the budget to deliver this year's strategy.

UK employers are rearranging the furniture in response. Marketing Week reported in April that 23.8% of brands are creating new positions to redefine what marketing does, most often after a restructure. Its 2024 survey found 42.6% of marketing directors and CMOs had taken on more responsibility without the pay to match. Nothing I have seen since suggests that has eased.

Why the old title survives.

Employers keep advertising for a marketing director because it is the title they have always used, and because writing an honest brief would force a decision they would prefer to avoid. Choosing between brand, growth, customer and technology means admitting which one the business needs most. It is easier to list all four and leave the new hire to work out which comes first.

The difficulty is not a shortage of people with range. Senior marketers routinely hold brand, growth, customer and commercial strategy in one head, and the best of them are at their strongest when they do. The difficulty is a brief with no order of priority and no resource to match its ambition. Good candidates read six equal priorities and conclude, correctly, that the business hasn't decided what it wants.

The cost shows up eighteen months later. The appointment is judged against the parts of the brief the candidate was never suited to, confidence drains away and the search begins again. Short tenure in marketing is usually blamed on the marketers. More often the role was set up to fail on the day the brief was signed off.

Hire for the problem, not the title

For employers

1. **Name the one problem.** If you can't say in a sentence what this person is being hired to fix, you may not be ready to go to market.
2. **Rank the rest.** Everything else in the brief is either a second priority or somebody else's job. Say which.
3. **Match the authority to the remit.** A leader accountable for growth needs a say in pricing, product and sales. Without that, the title is decoration.
4. **Build the team around the gaps.** No leader covers the whole field. Decide what you will buy in, what you will develop and what sits with an agency. Ensure the budget supports the plan,

5. **Choose a title that tells the truth.** If the job is growth, call it that. Candidates respond to clarity.

For marketing leaders

1. **Decide how you describe yourself.** The most ‘in-demand’ leaders I work with can speak with authority on brand, growth, customer and commercial strategy. The breadth is real. What matters is how you frame it, so that a chief executive hears a clear point of view and not a list.

2. **Lead with the thread that connects it.** Pricing, retention, go to market and brand are one argument about how a business grows. Tell it as one story and your range becomes the reason to hire you.

3. **Show where the depth is.** Strategic command of the whole field is the entry ticket at this level. Evidence of what you have personally delivered is what separates you from the next candidate.

4. **Interrogate the brief.** Ask what success looks like in twelve months and who else is accountable for it. The answer tells you whether the role has been thought through.

5. **Negotiate the remit before the salary.** Scope, budget and reporting line decide whether you succeed. They are far harder to change once you have started.

The job has changed. The brief should too.

Marketing has not shrunk. It has become several senior jobs, each of them more important to the business than the single role it replaced. The employers who see that are making better appointments and keeping them longer. The ones still searching for a marketing director (which is also at times almost indistinguishable from a ‘head of’) who can do everything will keep finding that the best candidates decline to apply. Or choose not to stay.

Leitmotif Partners helps employers shape senior marketing roles before they go to market, and helps marketing leaders find the ones worth taking. A conversation is the best place to begin. Email steph@leitmotifpartners.co.uk

