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Society for Marketing
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Content Marketing: Solving the Audience Challenge

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE:

Factors That Will Shape Tomorrow's Marketing Department



BY NANCY EGAN,
FSMPS

Six years doesn't seem like the distant future, but so much can change in just a few short years. Remember 2008? Right before the recession hit when you didn't own an iPad? At the recent SMPS Pacific Regional Conference in Huntington Beach, California, Fellows Delegate and chief instigator Carla Thompson, FSMPS, gathered a group of FSMPSers for a Fellows Forum and asked them to look six years forward: How might the marketing department look in the year 2020?

To keep the experienced but diverse panel of marketers—Karleen Belmont, Holly Bolton, Mitch Levitt, Frank Lippert, Craig Park, Tom Smith, Marion Thatch with me as moderator—more or less on topic, we posed several questions that resonated with our Fellows and with the audience:

- What are the implications of the generational shift for marketing departments as boomers retire and Gen Xers and Millennials take on leadership responsibilities?
- How will we stay current with the demands of new technologies? Where will we go for training? Where will we find multi-skilled marketing staff?
- From social to Big Data, marketing's new best friend needs to be the IT department. How do we develop shared goals, a working relationship, and a vision of what's coming in tech?
- What kinds of surprising collaborations do you expect to see in the next few years? How might different collaborations or ensembles of talent change the way we structure our departments?
- How will we create and nurture healthy working environments that keep staff motivated and rewarded? How can marketing positively influence firm culture?

A summary of some of the discussions surrounding these questions follows.

Although boomers outnumbered other generations on the panel (thank you, Holly Bolton, for lowering the median age), the topic of changing demographics influenced nearly every question as the group discussed the differences in communication, leadership, and work/life styles among the generations. The need to build relationships of trust, whether inter-team or with clients, is clearly not going away. Recognizing our shared interests, teaching and learning to strengthen those bonds is part of everyone's job.

MARION

Client relationships are at risk due to the growing dependency on the digital world. Since face-to-face communication remains imperative to developing and maintaining trust, firms that train staff in effective communication methods (including digital etiquette), along with creating plans and accountability around maintaining client relationships will be best suited to bridge the generational differences.

KARLEEN

I think it's important to have team meetings to talk about each other's communication styles no matter what generation team members fall in, the implications can be very positive—it takes a village.

MITCH

Senior marketers will need to face the reality that they need to ask the younger generation to teach them the new technologies.

TOM

Senior marketers need to keep learning to stay current and recognize that Gen Xers and Millennials can provide training.

FRANK

We were cheerleaders or coaches. We must become motivating teachers and strength trainers.

HOLLY

We are already there with all of us on the team together, each with our talents and skills to contribute. It's happening now.

Thinking about new ways to team, collaborate, and innovate also elicited spirited responses, with strong calls to look outside our firms going forward if we want to succeed in a changing world.

CRAIG

I expect creative team structures will be presented that include non-traditional expert advisers.

CARLA

Partnering with firms like IDEO, or hosting high level focus groups with thought leaders and tastemakers from outside our industry will help us examine and test consumer behavior and identify “voids.”

KARLEEN

The most surprising collaborations I have seen are between competitors and I think we will see even more of this as firms merge and bigger firms get bigger—smaller medium-sized firms will need to collaborate to fill expertise holes.

FRANK

The investment in expertise will drive this. The firms that do R&D and spend the money to develop experts will triumph.

And about that future marketing department, what’s it going to take?

CARLA

Help build pride by targeting and winning great projects with best-of-class clients. Develop a firm brand that celebrates culture and builds a strong community. Help employees build their personal brand to market their talents, skills, and abilities.

KARLEEN

Empowerment, strategic annual goals, flex hours, good pay and benefits, and training/mentoring.

TOM

In the global economy, we need to be much more flexible in how, when, and where firm leaders and technicians provide their expertise.

For the next issue of *Marketer*, I will be talking to a number of past and current SMPS leaders about the evolution of our society over the last 40 years. Among my questions: what did they see as the future of the marketing profession when they joined and what do they see for 2020? Expect some surprises. [m](#)

Panelists pictured on page 19, top row, left to right:

Karleen Belmont, FSMPS, Director of Business Development, PACE Engineers Inc.

Holly R. Bolton, FSMPS, CPSM, Director of Marketing, CE Solutions Inc.

Mitchel R. Levitt, FSMPS, Senior Vice President, FKP Architects

Frank J. Lippert, FSMPS, CPSM, Business Development Manager, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Bottom row, left to right:

Craig E. Park, FSMPS, Assoc. AIA, Principal Consultant, The Sextant Group

Thomas E. Smith, Jr., AICP, FSMPS, CPSM, Principal Strategy Advisor, Tesco, Inc.

Marion T. Thatch, FSMPS, President, Distinction in Marketing

Carla D. Thompson, FSMPS, Global Marketing Director, MulvannyG2 Architecture

About the Author



Contributing editor Nancy Egan, FSMPS, focuses on image and content development for firms in the design community. A regular contributor to several professional publications, she writes on workplace issues, urban design and architecture, and professional services marketing. A past president of SMPS, she can be contacted at egan@newvoodou.com. She contributed the cover story on talent and leadership in the business cycle to the December 2013 *Marketer*. Other recent articles for *Marketer* (June and August 2012) have focused on preactive strategy to create new market space and achieve unconventional outcomes.