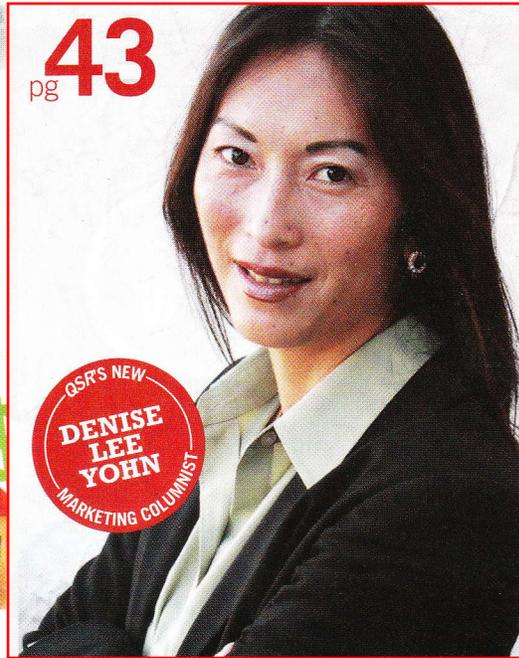


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PAGE 44: Amy Alarcón is Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen's director of culinary innovation.

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That's the CMO's Job

Author Peter Drucker's adage that a business enterprise has two basic functions—marketing and innovation—certainly resonates in the quick-service industry today. Marketing and innovation serve as critical drivers of growth at a time when the limits of cost cutting have been reached. While the innovation function is steady across all chains, marketing strategies vary greatly.

I've worked with a broad range of companies and have found a lot of variation in how marketing is defined and what impact it has on the organization and business as a whole. At some quick serves, the *marketing* function is merely *creative services*—establishing and maintaining a look and feel throughout the units and in communications. For others, marketing may have responsibility for optimizing and managing the marketing mix of advertising, promotions, or point-of-purchase.

More and more, quick serves are appointing a chief marketing officer and looking to him or her to drive an agenda that, in today's environment of streamlined business, is expanding to include several more responsibilities than the role traditionally held.

They have responsibilities that extend beyond marketing strategies and programs. In a recent Forbes.com article, David Cooperstein, vice president at Forrester Research, suggested that the CMO's responsibility "isn't just aggressive advertising and promotion . . . The CMO is the one who must connect the dots—the touch points with the customer—to make every experience with the brand consistent and positive."

Dick Lynch of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen is a CMO who fulfills such an expansive role. He's in charge of "unlocking the brand DNA and exploding that into everything the brand does." He led the chain's recent repositioning, applying the new Popeyes brand identity across the enterprise. Menu initiatives, new product development, and even the chain's Louisiana Culinary Heritage Institute, a program to reward top operators, all fall under Lynch's watch.

Pricing, franchisee relations, service standards, development—many functions that fall outside of a traditional marketing role are areas where CMOs get involved because they impact the customer experience and brand perceptions. Expanding the Popeyes brand into international markets, for example, is yet another of Lynch's responsibilities at the fast feeder.

They contribute a business mindset, not just marketing. All marketers need to exert strong right-brain thinking in order to drive creative marketing programs, but CMOs also demonstrate proficiency in left-brain skills. They develop a detailed knowledge of the company's financials, which not only gives them insight into what changes in the marketing mix need to be made in order to drive sales and profits, but also gives them credibility during management and board meetings.

"Having a general breadth of knowledge is important, not just the marketing side," says Jason Smylie, CMO of Capriotti's Sandwich Shop.

They are held to a higher level of accountability. Results of particular marketing programs are important performance metrics for all marketing personnel, but as an officer of the corporation, **a CMO's performance is usually measured by same-store sales and profitability.** Popeyes' Lynch says the chain's weekly business results serve as his report card.

The CMO role is not a position for large chains only. Capriotti's, for example, is a 60-unit concept. Even though Capriotti's CMO, Smylie, only has three people on his marketing team, he says he approaches his role "from a strategic mindset, with a focus on measurement and return on investment." And he works "intimately with the rest of the executive team directing the strategic vision of the company," playing a lead role in the chain's plans for nearly 50 percent growth in 2010.

Whether or not a CMO exists at a company is usually an indication of the value the organization places on the marketing function. According to marketing luminary David Aaker in his book *Spanning Silos: The New CMO Imperative*, a CMO can assume one or more of several prototypical management roles: facilitator, consultant, service provider, strategic partner, or strategic captain, each reflecting different levels of influence and authority.

At the least impacting end of the continuum, the CMO acts as a facilitator. By "setting up formal and informal cross-silo communication channels and establishing a common planning framework and knowledge base," Aaker writes, facilitative CMOs can encourage synergy across different business units and functions.

On the other end of the impact continuum, a CMO can act as a "strategic captain" for the company. Interpreting trends, providing insights about customers and competitors, and developing enterprise strategies are some of the ways "strategic captain" CMOs exert their influence.

Which role the CMO plays depends not only on the skills and experience of the individual, but also how the position is viewed by the company leader. The "strategic captain" model succeeds "only when the CMO team has the highest level of competence and credibility and when the company's CEO places a priority on marketing synergy and branding consistency, provides the CMO with resources, and visibly backs the CMO's authority," Aaker says.

Quick serves looking to take their marketing to the next level might consider expanding the role of the CMO. With the right talent and the right support, a CMO can drive growth and produce results beyond the traditional marketing function.

As many quick serves have discovered, the CMO title sets higher expectations—and it also empowers its owner to fulfill them. ☑

"With the right talent and the right support, a CMO can drive growth and produce results beyond the traditional marketing function."