

# Marketing & HR: The Partnership That Powers Hootsuite

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In today's marketplace where customers trust customer reviews and the word of mouth about brands far more than traditional marketing, customer experience (CX) has become a company's most influential marketing. And CX excellence depends on CX alignment and engagement of everyone in the organization. As such, Chief Marketing Officers and other marketing executives must ensure that the people throughout their companies are educated, equipped, and empowered to design and deliver extraordinary CX.

All employees must:

- Know who are the company's customers and what is the desired CX so they can align their attitudes and decisions to support them
- Be motivated to move from a product-centric or financial target-driven approach toward putting the customer at the center of everything they do – and they must feel it's important to work together on CX
- Make decisions and take actions that deliver on your desired CX

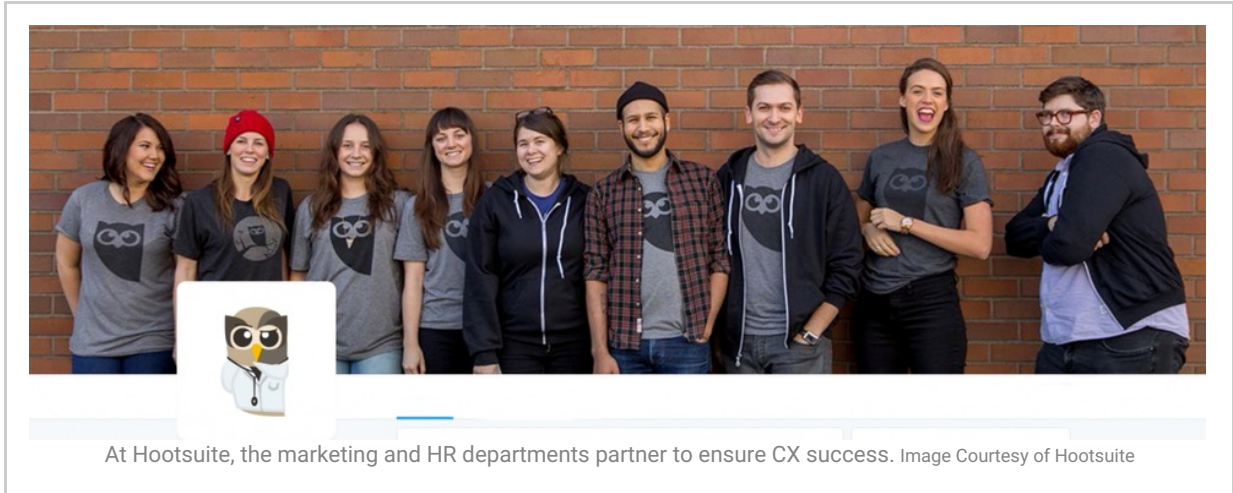
Marketers can achieve these outcomes by working with their colleagues responsible for functions such as talent acquisition, learning and development, performance management, and internal communications. That usually means Chief Human Resources Officer and other HR managers. Unfortunately at most organizations, though, marketing and HR tend to diverge, with the former focusing externally and the latter, internally. Often the two groups compete for resources that have been flagged as discretionary and for top executive attention and support. So collaboration between marketing and HR is usually non-existent.

## **Marketers Must Pursue a Partnership with HR**

Since a robust, mutually supportive partnership between marketing and HR is absolutely critical for CX success, marketers must proactively pursue it. Marketers must break down the silos between the two groups, use their influencing and communications skills to affect change in HR efforts, and sometimes even reallocate some of their marketing budget toward HR programs and tactics. In other words, marketers must think and act beyond the narrow scope of marketing and assume a bigger, broader role as a change agent for their organizations.

Kirsty Traill, VP Customer at Hootsuite, the social media management platform, has done just that. As part of the marketing department, Traill heads up the Voice of the Customer effort, the Customer Support organization, and the Customer Marketing team. In her role, she has

learned that “CX is a role that succeeds through others,” and, in an interview with me, she described how she partners with the “People team” (the term Hootsuite uses for those in HR functions) to produce CX excellence.



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She told me that their combined efforts start with the Hootsuite’s “Customer Standards,” the guiding principles in how employees show up for customers day to day. The Customer Standards include “Our Customers are #1: we prioritize work that positively impacts customers,” and “Our customer's problem is our problem: We identify it. Own it. Solve it. One and done.” With these as the foundation for everything the company does, it’s clear that every employee must be engaged in CX and that Traill must work with the HR executives to ensure they do.

### **Partnership Throughout the Employee Experience**

“Given the integral importance of employees in delivering the brand experience,” Traill said, “we’ve found it best to partner with key stakeholders in our People team early in the process. That way, they are involved in the co-creation of the key employee touch points which are critical to bringing the Brand Experience to life.”

Therefore, she and her People team counterparts have developed a high-level employee experience map that helps them understand the employee journey, including the recruitment process, onboarding, daily work, and learning and growth. With the map as a guide, she helps her HR colleagues inform, inspire, and instruct employees about CX throughout the employee experience.

**Recruiting.** She described how they work together to ensure they are attracting employees who understand and value CX. “You have to be actively and consciously recruiting for that,” she said. “It has to be conscious choice.” Every prospective employee is asked at least one CX-related question during the interview process, regardless of role. She explained this

standard ensures that everyone in the company is aligned to customer-centric thinking by qualifying the candidates, as well as by sending a clear message to new employees and hiring managers alike about the importance of CX at the company.

**Onboarding.** Traill helps the People team orient people to CX during the new employee onboarding process by taking everyone, again regardless of role, through content such as customer personas, buyer and user needs, and how Hootsuite solves customer problems. They will be introducing into onboarding sessions a pocket guide that contains all that customer insight along with the Hootsuite purpose, brand promise and attributes, values, customer standards and more, as well as a new video featuring interviews with customers about why they use Hootsuite.

**Training.** The two groups partner on learning and development initiatives so employees get training on the skills and capabilities necessary to excel at CX. They've co-developed courses focused on customer skills such as building a business case and collaborating cross functionally, and they're in the process of developing role-based training specifically on customer experience.

### **Cultivating a CX Company Ethos**

Traill includes in the marketing and HR partnership making CX a part of the ethos of the company. Some of these efforts are more programmatic.

For example, they've just implemented a peer-to-peer mentorship program, whereby people are matched together not only to learn from each other in terms of career advice, but they are also given three months to work on a customer pain point and develop a solution to it. At the end of the three months, each team is given 10 minutes to present their idea to the company's executive leaders and the top impact proposals are implemented. Also employees are encouraged to use the customer focused areas of Hootsuite's internal collaboration platform, Workplace by Facebook, to publish suggestions on how CX can be improved. Both of these initiatives align with the solutions mindset that characterizes the orientation at the company and helps break down silos to put the focus on customers.

The groups promote CX in more subtle ways by ensuring that a customer story is a part of every town hall meeting and the weekly emails that Ryan Holmes, Hootsuite's CEO, sends to employees. They also have designed the office environment with decorative messages that remind employees about the company's mission of solving customers' problems.

Traill summarized the success of the marketing and HR partnership at Hootsuite by explaining that to ensure the company lives up to customer's expectations across their journey, they put "a heavy focus on key touch-point optimization and employee engagement as enablers."