



HOW TO HIRE A STANDOUT TECH/SAAS MARKETING LEADER...



INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR 2023

- A** CAN THEY DO THE JOB?
- B** WILL THEY DO THE JOB?
- C** WILL THEY FIT IN?

Requirements for being a high performing tech/SaaS marketing leader have grown dramatically in the past few years.

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*“Technical
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TODAY'S HIRING CHALLENGE

The marketing industry has done a disservice to many B2B companies.

A troubling reality is that anyone can call themselves a CMO. Marketing is full of folks who over-advertise themselves.

The requirements for being a high performing B2B marketing director, vice president or CMO have grown dramatically in the past few years.

Knowledge and efficient use of multiple technologies is now the baseline entry ticket. Add data analytics, AI, machine learning and metrics for a growing number of marketers.

More than a few B2B marketing candidates today are lacking in technical and technology skills needed to grow a brand, create effective strategy, or engage and deliver in-market sales qualified leads.

Of those, even fewer can work comfortably with the CEO and sales team to develop a shared marketing language and unified market strategy.

THE INTERVIEWER'S JOB

As the interviewer, it's your job to discover whether a candidate's skillsets and capabilities are a true fit for your company's culture, marketplace challenges and goals for growth.

Make the right hire and you will help your company's market performance tremendously.

Make a wrong choice and the consequences will be frustrating, time-consuming and expensive.

Use this guide to help increase the odds markedly in your favor.



MIKE HARRIS, FOUNDER

INTERVIEW GUIDE OVERVIEW

This article helps you ask the right questions, in a logical order to discover:



Interview Order	Interview Purpose	Interview Venue
1	Can they do the job?	Web Video or Telephone
2	Will they do the job?	Web Video, Telephone or On-Site
3	Will they fit in with my organization?	On-Site

Start with softer questions to help the candidate get comfortable. Remember, the candidate may be nervous; there's a lot on the line with this interview.

I always like to start casually, finding something in common with the candidate and to help the candidate relax. Location, schools, sports teams, 'how did you hear about us', and similar.

But remember, your job is to ask the hard questions and listen attentively for cues that the candidate is comfortable with the question...or uncomfortable.

For B2B marketers, every question in this guide addresses something they should know. This guide will help you discern whether the candidate's response is excellent, acceptable or a showstopper.



PART I: CAN THEY DO THE JOB? (WEB VIDEO OR TELEPHONE)

It's always easier and faster to use web video or the phone to discern a candidate's technical and technology skills. There's no point in bringing them on-site until you are satisfied that next steps are in order.

For marketers, technical skills include:

1. Strategic thinking
2. Creative thinking
3. Communication skills
4. Analytical skills
5. Technology

Remember to take careful notes and refer to them when making decisions about next steps.

Q1: TELL ME HOW YOU BECAME INTERESTED IN MARKETING AND HOW YOU GOT STARTED.

A: This is an easy question to help the candidate get comfortable with interviewing. Also, I like to know whether the candidate's training is formal or informal. I look for candidates who pursued an education in business, economics, marketing or similar and/or began in an entry level position in product management, sales, branding, advertising or product marketing.

Why? Early interest in sales and marketing can be a good indicator for motivation and career enthusiasm.

Q2: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE TOP THREE MARKETING CHALLENGES TODAY?



You are looking for answers that represent authentic thinking from the candidate. Be alert for rote or memorized answers, and always dive deeper if time permits.

If, for example, you ask ‘what is difficult about sales and marketing technology’? You want to hear answers that include metrics; user friendliness; time-to-results; team adoption; technical service and support; integrations; long-term contracts.

If, for example, you ask ‘what is difficult about internet and social marketing...’, you want to hear answers that include constantly changing algorithms; paid search cost increases ; creating enough quality content; privacy, identity and changes to cookies; choosing and managing agencies; training team members.

Ask about a specific example in a recent job. Listen for clues the candidate is fudging his/her responses.

Q3: WHAT PLATFORM DO YOU LIKE BEST FOR MARKETING AUTOMATION?

A3: Marketing automation is a must for all B2B marketers today, more so for higher level positions.

As there are easily more than 10,000 sales and marketing automation platforms on the market today, there can be no right or wrong answer.

The most popular platforms include Hubspot, Marketo, Pardot, Eloqua, Act-On, Sharp spring, and Keap/Infusionsoft. These are also the most expensive, by far.

I also like answers that include one of the lesser known, less expensive platforms. Many of them do 90% of what the legacy platforms do at less cost. If your company is an SMB, these may work just fine and save money too. A good example is [EngageBay](#).

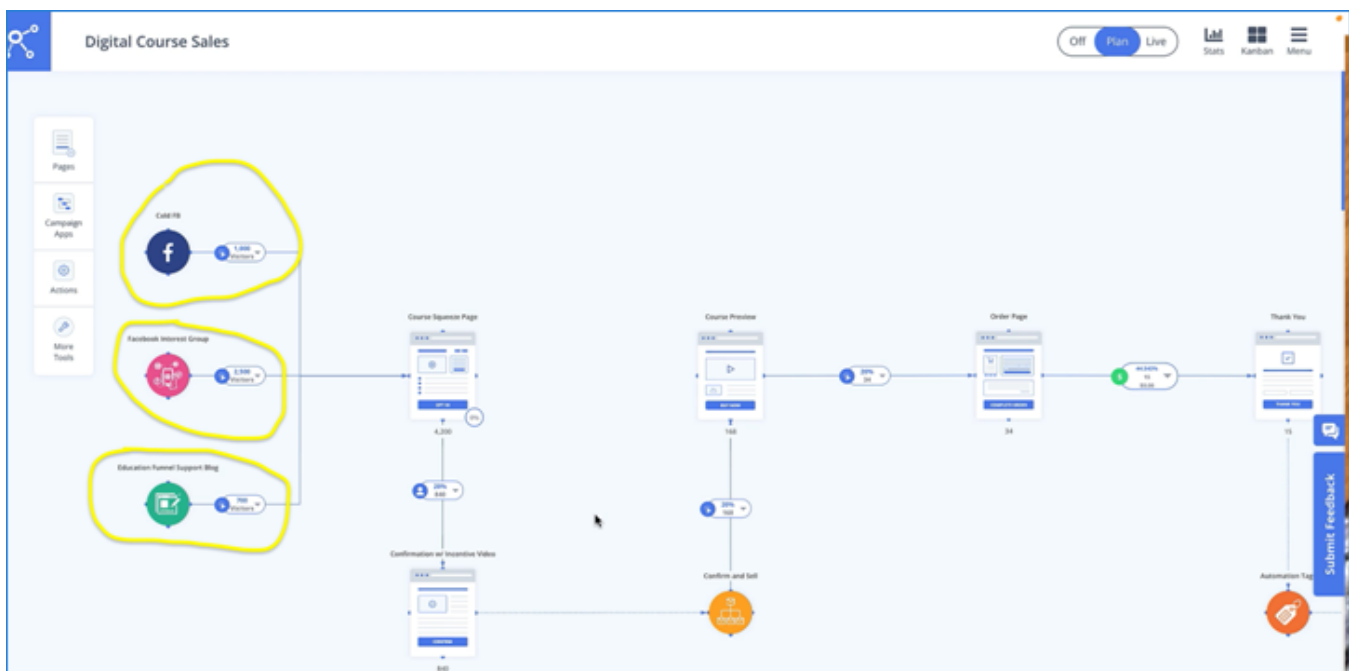
Follow on questions include:

1. Did you choose the platform or did someone else?
2. Are you certified in that platform?
3. What other applications have you integrated with that platform?
4. What is the monthly cost of that platform? (Red flag if they don't know the answer!)
5. Tell me about a particular success you had using it, including conversion rates?

Q4: HOW DO YOU PUT TOGETHER A MARKETING SEQUENCE WITH YOUR CURRENT AUTOMATION PLATFORM?

Below is an example of a marketing sequence showing the flow of a campaign intended to market a sales course. Familiarize yourself with this diagram before asking the question.

Note that the sources for leads are Facebook, Facebook Interest Group, and the seller's own blogsite. It shows a potential customer's journey with a specific marketing campaign. Each of the subsequent steps represents a conversion, which is the purpose of all marketing campaigns. There are many, many potential lead sources including email, LinkedIn, events, and much more. A marketing sequence defines the specific marketing journey a prospect will make from initial awareness to completed purchase.



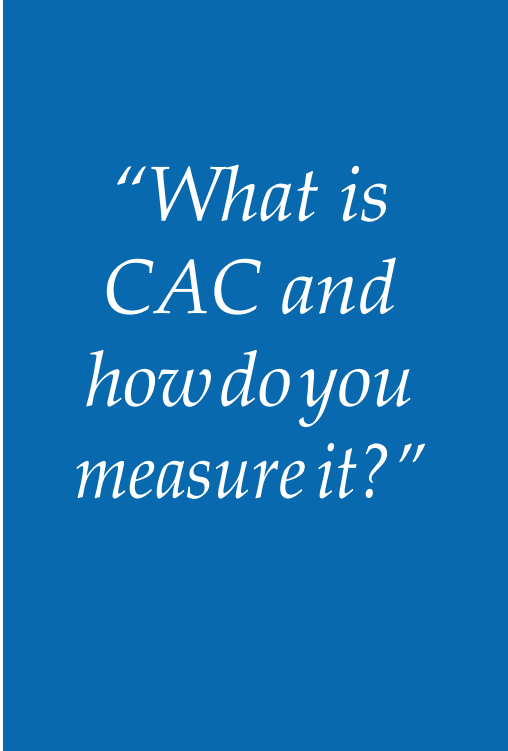
A4: I like answers that include:

- I start with identifying a strong target audience.
- I think through each conversion and how we will add value every step of the way.
- I place an 'ask' at multiple points in the journey.
- Marketing sequence steps typically include_____.

Q5: WHAT MARKETING METRICS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE?

A5: Marketing metrics are used to measure the effectiveness and ROI of marketing campaigns. Here are some of the top marketing metrics that businesses should track:

1. Return on investment (ROI): ROI is a measure of the revenue generated by a marketing campaign compared to the cost of running the campaign. It helps businesses understand whether their marketing efforts are profitable. [Click here for an example of a Marketing ROI calculator](#)
2. Customer acquisition cost (CAC): CAC is the cost of acquiring a new customer. It's calculated by dividing the total cost of sales and marketing by the number of new customers acquired during a specific period.
3. Time-to-Payback: Measures how much time it takes to recoup a particular marketing expense or investment.
4. Conversion rate: Conversion rate is the percentage of website visitors who complete a desired action, such as filling out a form or making a purchase. It helps businesses understand how effective their website is at converting visitors into customers.
5. Marketing Originated Customer (MOC): Measures the percent of all customers that originated with a lead generated from marketing outreach.
6. Customer lifetime value (CLV): CLV is the total amount of revenue that a customer is expected to generate for a business over their lifetime. It helps businesses understand the long-term value of their customers.
7. Click-through rate (CTR): CTR is the percentage of people who click on a link in an email or advertisement. It helps businesses understand how effective their messaging and creative is at driving engagement.
8. Net promoter score (NPS): NPS is a measure of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It's calculated by asking customers how likely they are to recommend a product or service to a friend or colleague.



*“What is
CAC and
how do you
measure it?”*

9. Social media engagement: Social media engagement measures the number of likes, shares, comments, and other interactions that a business's social media posts receive. It helps businesses understand how well their content resonates with their audience.

Q6: HOW WOULD YOU CREATE A MARKETING PLAN YOU KNOW OUR CEO WOULD READ?



A6: Look for answers that include the following:

- I ask the CEO and other colleagues what's important and what to avoid.
- I use a marketing plan software like Market Plan.IO to create interesting visuals of the plan.
- I start with all currently available market research from both primary and secondary resources. I look at important trends including what's driving them and what our competitors are doing to address them.
- I include a 1- or 2-page executive summary, company vision, budget, timeline, resources, use of sales/marketing automation and measurements.
- I focus on revenue, facts, numbers, market opportunities plus measurements that show us what's working and what's not.
- I ask the sales team and other knowledgeable colleagues for their input and opinions as I go along.

Q7: WHAT ARE THE BEST MARKETING CHANNELS FOR B2B IN 2023?

A7: Every higher-level marketing job candidate must be aware of what channels are working best in 2023. Here is our summary of what candidates should know.

THE BEST B2B MARKETING CHANNELS FOR 2023

Channel	Summary
Email	B2B email is facing challenges but it's still the top performing ROI.
Meetups & Industry Groups	Practical offline marketing: even better if you get their email list prior to engaging. Sponsorships are generally inexpensive and always help.
Organic Search (SEO)	Takes a lot of time, but well worth it if rankings continually improve. Prospects (especially in-market) must know that you exist and offer a viable solution to their challenge.
Social Media	Thought leadership, trusted authority. LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube lead the way for B2B.
Account Based Marketing (ABM)	ABM is beneficial for firms looking to secure a few large contracts per year, but it relies on a solid salesperson.
Podcast & Video Channels	Podcast popularity growing rapidly. Create your own or appear as a guest on other podcasts. Video done well is also very powerful, but more expensive than podcasts.
Conversational Marketing	Refers to engaging in real-time conversations with potential and current customers through live chats, chatbots, messaging apps, and social media. Most companies that use AI in conversational marketing find it valuable channel.
Partner or Affiliate Marketing	Partnering with a company in an adjacent vertical or with a complementary solution is very powerful. Most of these are accompanied by a formal agreement between parties.
Content Marketing	It's still the king when it comes to B2B. Prospects and customers must be able to see themselves using your solution before they'll ever agree to a sales call. Content marketing creates that visualization and places it where your prospects hang out. Remember, B2B marketing is all about explanation and ROI. B2C marketing is all about attractiveness and immediacy. Useful content that helps someone do their job better is highly valued by your market.
Word of Mouth (WOM)	These include online reviews, testimonials, referrals, unpaid endorsements and others. People tend to trust their peers more than advertising.

Q8: HOW WOULD YOU PRIORITIZE OUR COMPANY'S MARKETING BUDGET BASED ON THESE CHANNELS?

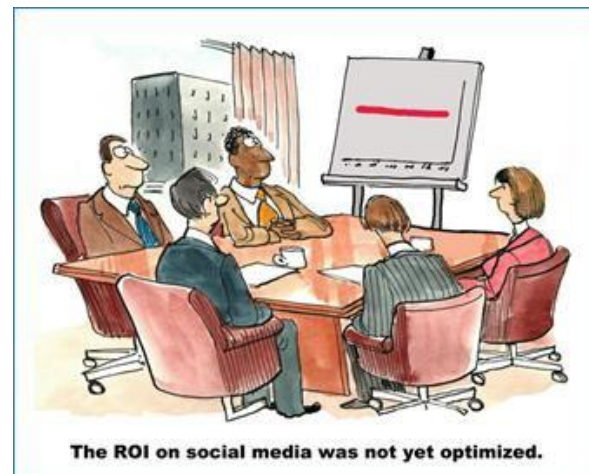
A8: Look for answers that demonstrate the candidate's current knowledge of what's working and what's not. For example, email is still the #1 most successful tactic for B2B marketers, but that is changing. Content is a critical success factor and podcasts are quickly becoming a valuable channel.

Be sure to ask the candidate to elaborate on his/her answers and apply them to your company.

Q9: HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE RESULTS OF MARKETING TACTICS AND LEAD GENERATION?

A9: Look for answers that address your CEO's and CFO's highest priorities:

- Revenue and customer growth
- Profit and ROI
- Marketing and sales metrics like CAC, MOP, Time-to-Payback



Q10: IT TAKES A LOT TO RUN MARKETING AT THIS COMPANY. WHAT CONTROLS WOULD YOU USE TO KEEP EVERYTHING MOVING AND YOUR TEAM ACCOUNTABLE?

A10: "Controls" always refers to numbers. In this case you're looking for marketing related items. Budget is always the number one answer. Other good answers include lead qualification scores, campaign effectiveness measurements, contributions by channel and campaign, conversion rates, lead generation results by week/month/quarter, KPIs, competitor benchmarks and other numbers-driven activities.

If a candidate answers with "meetings" or similar, it's time to move on.



Q11: WHAT IS REVENUE ATTRIBUTION AND HOW DO YOU MEASURE IT?

A11: Revenue attribution, or marketing attribution, is a method which connects different data sets to determine exactly which forms of marketing are resulting in revenue. It is the science behind understanding which marketing channels and campaigns are driving the most revenue.

Attribution will automatically credit influencing channels, campaigns, ads and keywords so that you can see which are working best to drive your bottom line.

In 2023 there is some controversy about how deep in the weeds attribution must go. For interview purposes, it is important that the candidate understand attribution and have at least some experiences implementing it, at whatever level of detail.

Q12: HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SALES AND MARKETING?

A12: The relationship between sales and marketing is often coarse. Sales is mostly interested in today, and marketing is mostly interested in tomorrow. Those differing worldviews are difficult to align.

It is important that you probe for answers that make sense intuitively for you and your company's culture.

I like answers that tilt towards:

1. I develop marketing plans in lockstep with the sales team.
2. I get together with sales leaders weekly to review recent results in both sales and marketing, and absorb suggestions for improvements.
3. I visit customers with the sales team and participate in sales calls to keep up with buyer sentiment and preferences.
4. I work with the marketing team to help them understand the challenges salespeople face, and brainstorm on ways to help them more.
5. I participate in activities with the sales team outside of office hours. (Not required but it helps.)

Above all, the candidate must be adept at getting buy-in from sales. That can only happen if the marketing plan is truly credible and grounded in facts and numbers. It is a tremendous asset if the marketer is good at building individual relationships with salespeople.



PART 2: WILL THEY DO THE JOB? (WEB VIDEO, TELEPHONE, ON SITE)

Q13: HOW DO YOU CREATE MARKET STRATEGY?

A13: This is a question that's best answered short and to the point. If the candidate starts rambling, then they likely do not have the necessary experience.

I like answers that include:

- I start with the trends in my industry.
- I research the trends to understand what's driving them.
- I research the competition to see what they're doing about the trends.
- I compare that to what we're doing about the trends.
- I ask myself what we could be doing about these trends to increase revenue and profits.

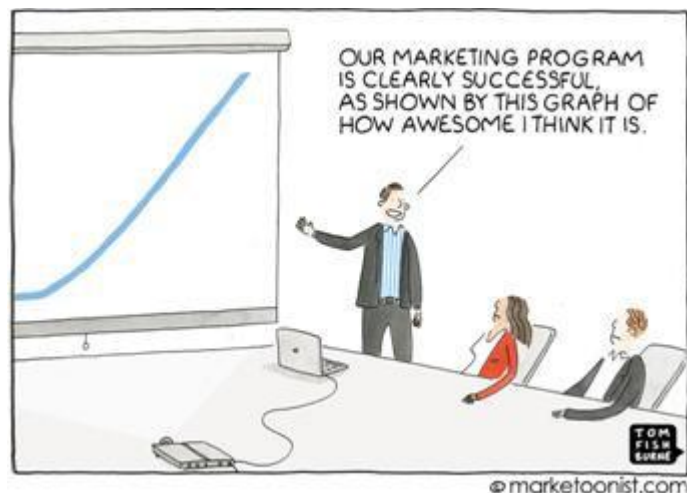
Q15: WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING YOU'VE DONE? WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

A15: This is a critical component of B2B marketing because content drives conversions in most marketing channels today. Look for specific campaign details and results that were measured by clicks, conversions and qualified leads.

The best content today solves a problem for someone.

Above all content must be original and show that your company is innovative and truly interested in helping people resolve challenges that are related to their job and/or their market space.

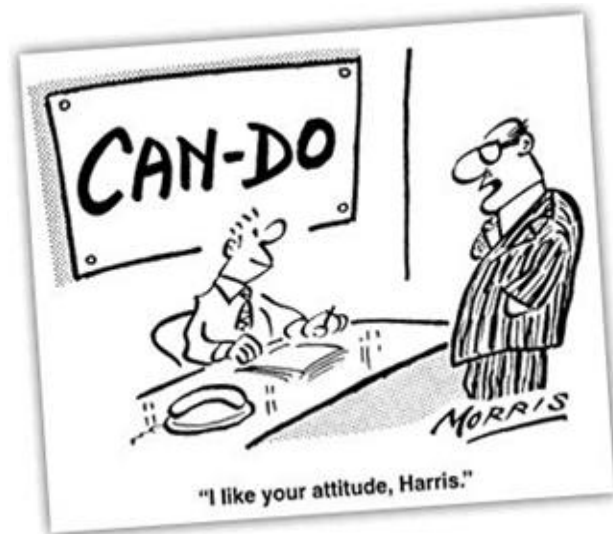
Today's B2B marketer must shine in creativity and innovation to break through the clutter and get conversions from an audience.



Q16: HOW DO YOU HANDLE LAST MINUTE REQUESTS FROM SALES OR THE CEO?

A16: Look for answers that show the candidate understands his/her role is one of service, not individual expression.

- “I respond quickly with questions to understand their needs and timing objectives.”
- “I work right away with the request- or to prioritize their request.”
- “I respond with a phone call or go to their office.”
- “I get it done quickly.”



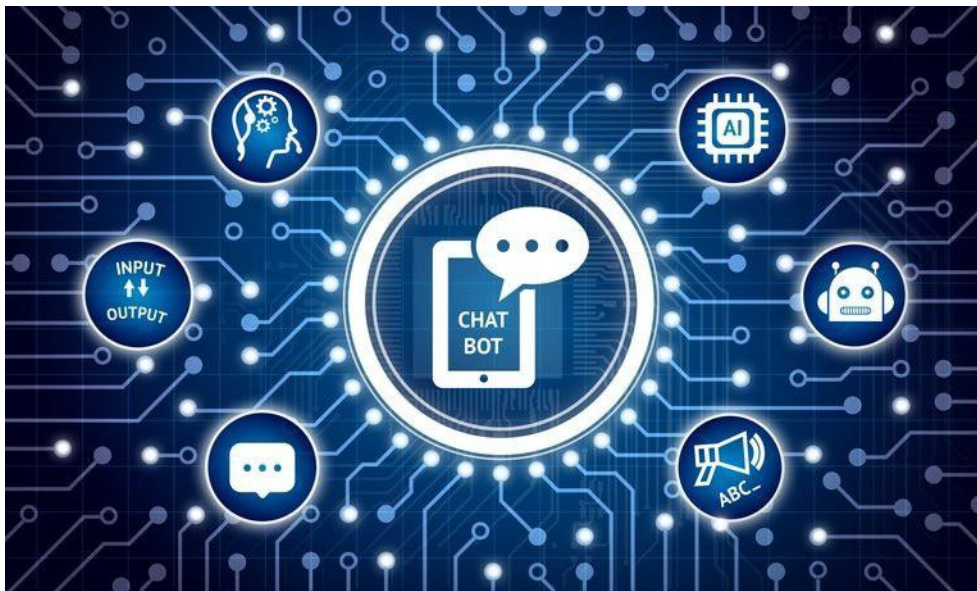
Q17: WHAT TOOLS DO YOU USE FOR PRODUCTIVITY AND SCHEDULING?

A17: Again, there are no right answers here.

However, good answers include are Monday.com, Todoist, Asana, Miro, Slack, Basecamp, and a host of similar platforms. If you are with the person, ask him/her to show you their productivity tool(s) on their mobile device.

*“What tools
do you use?”*

Q18: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING FOR MARKETING?



A18: AI and ML are already on track to contribute hugely to future marketing success. Adoption of chat bots is growing fast, and that's just the beginning.

The reason? Mountains and mountains of data exist and continue to grow. The recent advent of tools like ChatGPT will accelerate this trend dramatically.

Data can yield tremendous insight to buyer personas, timing of offers, improvements to conversions, and much more. It is already being used by marketers to create heavy personalization (shorten sales cycles) and intelligent automation of operations (cost savings).

This is a key reason why your new marketing executive must be tech savvy and on top of current trends. What we're using today pales in comparison to what we'll be using tomorrow.

PART 3: WILL THEY FIT IN? (ON-SITE)

Q19: HOW DO YOU LIKE TO COMMUNICATE WITH COLLEAGUES?

A19: This question reveals whether the candidate is more into productivity or protecting their own interests. Productive people are more proactive in engaging others, which is typically done in-person whether face-to-face, phone, web video or text/chat.

In my opinion, face-to-face is the top answer, followed by phone-to-phone. Although necessary, the least desirable answer is email.

Today's office environment includes many options for communicating via platforms like Monday.com, Asana, et. al. These are great for the bulk of communicating about specific tasks.

However, it's always best to hold more weighty discussions in person, on the phone, or in a video chat.

Q20: HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR, AND HOLD, MEETINGS?

A20: Unorganized meetings waste time and demotivate teams. The best answers show firmness and decisiveness about when, where and how to hold meetings.

I like answers that tilt toward:

- I try to avoid calling a meeting unless it's for a specific purpose and outcome.
- I send a discussion guide beforehand and ask that attendees come to the table with specific recommendations backed by evidence.
- Most meetings can be avoided by using productivity platforms that allow us to communicate, share files, show milestones, and so forth.
- All my meetings are 30 minutes or less.

Q21: HOW DO YOU MANAGE CREATIVES?

A21: Managing creatives is not the same as managing sales or finance people. Creatives can be temperamental and protective of their work and themselves. For many, it's important to know that they are liked. Trust is a big issue. Creatives are best led by inspiration, not authority. It is important that a marketing leader have an ability to think creatively to relate well to creative teams.

I like answers that tilt towards:

- I sit with them and go over some of their work. I ask questions around how they come up with their ideas.
- I create a detailed agency brief that shows what I'm thinking for the project.
- I critique deliverables softly. Creative work is an interactive, iterative process. It takes time to arrive at something that works well for our purposes.
- I hold myself accountable for all deliverables. That's my responsibility and if the deliverables are rejected by others, that's my fault.

Q22: HOW DO YOU BUILD A BOAT?

A22: You're looking for the candidate's poise in answering a blue-sky question. The best answer is 'I start asking questions'. In rapid order the candidate should show you how he/she tackles a challenge for which they may have no knowledge.

This is a great opportunity for the candidate to show you clear thinking, a high level of self-awareness, systematic problem solving and, hopefully, a good sense of humor.



Q23: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT INTERACTING WITH EMPLOYEES AS A GROUP AFTER WORK?

A23: Marketers must be people persons. They need to enjoy others, be able to engage comfortably with different points of view and socialize well...especially with people they see every day.



I like answers that tilt toward 'I enjoy it' versus answers that tilt toward 'I do it out of obligation'. A candidate doesn't have to love the annual holiday party but one who meets others for a beverage after work or, better yet, has his/her colleagues over for a ball game or barbecue is a good bet. This isn't a requirement by any means, but it helps.

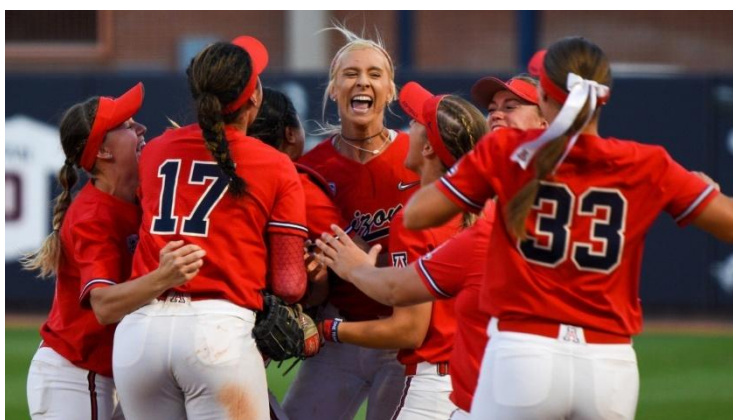
Q24: WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CONFLICT YOU'VE EVER HAD WITH SALES AND HOW DID YOU RESOLVE IT?

A24: A more senior marketer that's never had a conflict with sales is not yet mature enough in the profession. Look for answers that tilt toward 'I asked questions', and that demonstrate an ability to resolve conflict quickly and fairly without running to the CEO or causing collateral damage.

Conflicts between sales and marketing slow things down considerably. It helps a great deal if the candidate shows a tendency toward negotiation, but not submission.

Candidates who exhibit signs of defensiveness, combativeness and/or passive aggressive behavior, will not serve your company's purpose.

Q25: WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO OUTSIDE OF WORK?



A25: Here, you are looking for answers that show a decent awareness of work/life balance. Burnout is a big issue in modern corporate culture, and smart companies actively promote work/life balance.

Also, this is a chance to match your candidate's interests with other colleagues and your corporate culture. If your culture promotes exercise and outdoors activities, it's a plus if your candidate likes the same. If your culture promotes activism or a certain social cause, it's a plus if your candidate is also interested.

However, if a candidate doesn't show enthusiasm for at least one outside interest, think about what that could mean for both the candidate and their colleagues. In some cases, this is OK, but it typically does not bode well for a leadership role. This will vary from case to case so it's always best to discuss this with another colleague before reaching any conclusion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Mike's industry and consulting experience spans Fortune 100 companies to emerging and growth firms in manufacturing and technology. Many of his clients have been acquired.

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