The Emerging Role of Marketing Technologist

By Lindsay Diven, CPSM

Remember when A/E/C firms had separate marketing and IT departments? The former did the creative work while the latter kept our technology running. When they interacted, it was usually about software licenses and password resets.

Now, marketing is heavily data driven. Success is measured using marketing automation platforms, CRMs, big data analytics, social media analysis, and content personalization. Technology and creativity play key strategic roles in the marketing process.

Progressive firms realize this and are merging marketing and technology skillsets. I recently interviewed two A/E/C professionals who are leading technology strategies to streamline marketing and other business efforts for their firms.

Rebekah Casey (RC) is an IT manager - user experience for Brasfield & Gorrie in Orlando, FL. She has worked in multiple departments within the firm, including several years in marketing. She continues to support not only marketing, but all departments to improve user experience for all of the firm's technology.

Zirah McGrath (ZM) is the operations manager at England-Thims & Miller, Inc. Her role focuses on improving performance for the entire firm. However, for the last several years she supported the marketing and executive teams in providing data analytics, research, and information management related to marketing and sales.

I asked each about their specific roles and how they have evolved related to the convergence of marketing and technology.

What is your background and how did you get into the technology side?

RC: I majored in Industry and Technical Education in college. I started at Brasfield & Gorrie in the safety group. I had an opportunity to join the team that was implementing a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. I then moved to the marketing department and eventually supported their technology efforts.

ZM: I had a double major of Transportation Logistics and Business Administration. I began working for an A/E/C firm as an analyst in the transportation business unit. I spent over a decade working with project managers and the group's management team developing reports, doing research, and conducting analysis to help solve a variety of project and business questions. The last few years have been spent primarily with marketing and the executive teams.

What does a typical workday look like for you?

RC: I am currently on a team that is rolling out a new custom-built safety mobile app for our field users. I work with the team to formulate communications and implementation strategies for the app.

I am typically called in to assist any time there is an impact to the user (our employees). I am part of the conversations to determine how to communicate or lessen that. This means I often serve as part of the team in special projects like the new safety app or the new CRM our marketing team is transitioning to. I also help put together training materials, for example, to educate new employees on phishing schemes.

ZM: While no day is typical due to the amount of ad hoc research required, I generally prepare reports for company

Above: West Texas A&M University, Cayon, TX. Kirksey Architecture. © G. Lyon Photography, glyonphotography.com.

Below: The Treehouse at Memorial City, Houston, TX. Aerial drone shot for Metro National Development. Acumen Design, Studio RED Architects, Anslow Bryant Construction. © G. Lyon Photography, glyonphotography.com.

leadership, research information using Deltek, and work with a traditional developer in IT to customize and integrate our systems. A more specific effort this year has been formalizing our business intelligence program, which continues in my new operations role.

How do you balance the needs of and support for multiple departments?

RC: I focus on whatever is the highest priority right now. I am looking to grow my team to support the growing need.

ZM: My project list is heavily informed by the strategic direction of the business. As the company chooses to expand their technology and analysis capabilities, my assignments evolve to help meet those goals.

The tipping point: When did your firm realize they needed your specific role?

RC: I replaced someone in the marketing department who was doing mostly data entry. When I took over that role, I started focusing more on technology strategies. I was asking if we were using all our software to its fullest extent, what would be the best software to use, etc. When our IT group restructured, they realized that they needed a user experience role. I already was working with our IT group on some communication and implementation strategies, so it was a natural progression for me to move into the new role.

ZM: I have a natural talent in technology and started developing tools to answer business questions early in my career. When I started in the industry in 2003, it was just custom spreadsheets but evolved into more complex analysis requests. Eventually, I ended up supporting all five business units with these types of requests. Then I moved full-time to IT.

What are the characteristics, skills, and experience needed to be a successful technologist in our industry?

RC: I believe communication is very important. My marketing background helps me to communicate impacts or issues and how our users may respond to them. You must also have very strong problem-solving skills and be self-motivated. You must be able to see a problem and ask if we can do this better. Another skill is asking the right questions to get to the root of what you are trying to do. People know their process but may not know why they need to do it. I try to get them the best route to get where they want to be. Last, you must be able to talk to a variety of people and roles, from the C-suite down.

ZM: A technologist must have not only a good grasp of technology, but the ability to work in unfamiliar environments. I think you need to be comfortable being an early adopter of ideas that are new and different. You also have to be persuasive because you are trying to encourage people to adopt new tools and, often, disrupt how they tackle their daily work. I think communication is important, especially around new concepts.

How do marketing and technology interact in your firm? This emerging role in the A/E/C industries demonstrates how marketing and technology are merging to create new opportunities for career growth. ∎