

CMO Conversations

IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 | JUNE 2020



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INTRODUCTION

We engaged in these conversations because we wanted to be useful to our clients. We have a unique position in the market, working with a range of professional services firms across the APAC region. We saw this as a good opportunity to use our network for the benefit of our clients, pulling together the collective experiences of CMOs in one place.

METHODOLOGY

Over a period of 5 weeks, between April and May 2020, we had structured conversations with 32 of our clients who spanned legal, accounting and advisory, and large engineering firms. The CMOs taking part were based in Brisbane, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Singapore and Sydney and held a mixture of Asia-wide, Asia-Pacific and Australia-wide roles.

Percentages provided in this report are rounded figures.

OVERALL MARKET SENTIMENT

There was a sense of optimism coming from CMOs. Most firms were coming off the back of a very good year financially and so the impact of the economic crisis has not yet been felt. Most firms are displaying caution and a ‘wait and see’ approach.

Generally, CMOs were not planning immediate large-scale overhauling of the BD&MC team and strategy due to COVID-19; but the crisis has had an impact. We heard the below phrases time and again:

“it sped up the business model”

“it was affirming of the forward-thinking plan for my team already in place”

“COVID-19 was a catalyst for change I believe would have eventually come”

“an accelerator of our aspirations for the business and BD&MC team”

“COVID-19 held up a microscope to what was already there – strengths, problems and opportunities”.

These conversations were a positive experience for Seldon Rosser as the mood was mainly upbeat; CMOs talked of this moment being BD&MC specialists’ *“time to shine”*.

This report pulls out key themes and insights, as well as the opportunities and challenges.

10 Key Takeaways

1

Simplified budgets tied more closely to pipeline

2

Very few CMOs could point to actual fee-income metrics to demonstrate ROI

3

Stakeholder access has improved and decision making is faster

4

Increase in collegiality, teamwork and skills sharing

5

Some roles will be location agnostic

6

Lack of 2IC evident for many CMOs

7

Digital strategy not sufficient in most cases

8

Long standing vacant roles negatively impact future resourcing strategy

9

Increased shift to commercial BD and client focused activities

10

Move away from broad brush profile raising marketing activities



Budgets & ROI

It was encouraging that in over 90% of cases the CMO was given autonomy and responsibility for budget control with only a few saying their budget was in the hands of a CFO or COO.

Setting budgets and forecasting has shifted for most firms, moving from annual to quarterly or in some cases monthly. Interestingly, virtually all the CMOs we spoke to said that, whilst their budgets had been reduced, this was due to necessary cuts in travel, entertainment, events and discretionary spending. Less than 10% said they had been asked to cut their budget with some actually saying their budgets were in surplus for the first time.

Those who cut their budget looked in the first instance at headcount reduction via reduced hours (between 15-20%) or in very few cases, redundancies and investment in projects such as new MarTech / CRM system acquisitions. Only one CMO is predicting an increase in their global budget but qualified this by saying “*the budget has grown but the priorities have shifted*” later clarifying a major rebrand was being fast tracked.

A big loser in the budgets has been sponsorships and large-scale client entertaining with most predicting that this year’s client Christmas party would be unlikely to go ahead to the same scale it has in the past. Gone too are the stakeholder/fee earner retreats, in-house client conferences and tables at awards ceremonies.

In most cases, these simplified rolling budgets are tied more closely to income pipeline with some CMOs commenting that for once their budgets were prioritised towards clients, sales and where the link between BD&MC activity and revenue generation was more transparent than before. It was generally agreed that there had been an acceleration in “*true business development*” i.e. more strategic and “*less broad-brush profile raising*”.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

We asked all participants to self-assess how their business would rate the current return on investment (ROI) of their function. The majority (over 70%) felt their work was more highly regarded than ever and this manifested itself in their teams being in constant demand for BD&MC services, especially in areas such as client development, pitches & bids, digital communications and content generation.

Most of the ROI ratings were subjective and based on anecdotal feedback and a general sense that the businesses can “see how hard we work”, “they can see the logistics of what we do more clearly”.

Tellingly very few participants were able to point to real metrics for ROI – with many acknowledging there were insufficient frameworks and analytics in place to quantify this more accurately.

Only a few respondents were able to give examples of the exact fee income generated as a result of BD&MC campaigns. In these examples, it was because the business had invested heavily in MarTech and lead generating software. “Marketing automation is delivering qualified leads to the Partnership.”

Workplace Culture



Not surprisingly, every CMO we spoke with said that culture had been changed in some way – and mostly positive.

Perhaps the most interesting dynamic resulting from the working from home / virtual meeting phenomena has been the CMOs' 'screen' view of their team which has resulted in a change of management behaviour, resource allocation and future resourcing strategy. Put simply one CMO said *"I now see my team all in a row and suddenly I understand our combined capability and potential"* another commented *"this has held up a microscope to the weaknesses in my team"*.

However a high proportion of CMOs are also seeing their working day get longer as high demand from the business along with increased team management meetings and a lot more 1:1 'checking in', wellbeing interactions eat-into their time. *"This is the hardest I have ever worked in my life"* said one whilst another said *"it's a punishing schedule"*. Spirits are high though with many CMOs expressing sentiments such as *"now is our time to shine"*, *"barriers are breaking down"*, *"BD sceptics have moved more in a month than in the last 3 years"*.

Some CMOs were surprised by how much they needed to change their management style *"I've had to slow down and listen to my team more"* said one, whilst another said *"I have softened my style which I probably needed to"*. On the reverse managing up seems to have gotten easier for some *"I can be more direct now"*; another said *"I am braver in my suggestions"*. A few made the uneasy comment that because they couldn't easily take the temperature of the leadership they were worried about their own position *"I am expensive – they say all the right things, but who knows if my position will be seen as critical if things don't improve"*.

The wave of empathy, authenticity and 'human to human' communication has affected all business relationships and had an immediate impact on the culture of doing business internally and externally. Many CMOs commented on the positive affect this would have on business development strategies, breaking down hierarchies internally (that previously prevented cross-selling and the sharing of intel) and quashing some previously held sceptical attitudes to investing in long-term client relationship strategies. Some CMOs went so far as to say stakeholder openness to BD having direct client contact was improving because of the current working model.

Another positive impact of this crisis has been the speeding up of decision making around BD & Marketing activity and client communications. This was summed up by one CMO who said *"I have much better access to stakeholders so can get sign off quickly"*. This experience was shared by another who said *"I can get hold of stakeholders quicker now (WFH) than when they were 6 feet away from me in a closed office"*.

Increased collegiality, improved team working and skills sharing was a common theme for most CMOs but it also highlighted the gaps in their structure and areas where some job functions needed to change quickly. Also, several reflected that more junior or introverted team members have learnt to speak up more in team meetings via Zoom as they can no longer stop by the CMO or their manager's door to share an idea after the fact.

Some global firm CMOs with APAC regional responsibilities pointed out that a by-product of this crisis was the increased attention Asia was getting, especially as pipelines in Australia are being eroded. *"Finally the UK understands the potential of Asia"* and *"my firm deployed the US team to help us with the sudden increase in pitches we were getting from China – and now they appreciate how much we do here"*.

There are drawbacks though to this current state of business as unusual. Many CMOs discussed that WFH prevented serendipitous engagement with stakeholders and a lack of spontaneity. Information collection is a great tool in a BD professional's arsenal – and it's proving harder to have that 2 minute conversation about a client or a matter/project. Instead many are finding the "incessant agenda filled zoom meetings" are stifling creativity "I never get pulled into a meeting on the fly".

Overwhelmingly every CMO felt that there had been a major shift in their firm's attitude to flexible working and WFH. "The last vestiges of presenteeism have been swept away" which was also true of fee-earners and their clients. In Australia, many believe their firms will never move back completely to working in the office and, given this may also be true of their clients, the shift we have seen towards online events and meetings could be here to stay – which will present a permanent shift in the way CMOs have to think about client and stakeholder engagement.

CMOs in Asia see a more likely return to BAU given for most people WFH is difficult due to availability of space "I have team members working on their beds as it's the only space they have" and team structures "I have too many juniors in my team to WFH without daily guidance". Though Asia based CMOs agreed that stakeholders would likely be more open to some WFH when it was requested (depending on the role).

OPPORTUNITY The vast majority of CMOs agreed that they could be more location agnostic in their recruitment strategy when going to market for a new resource. There were some sensible constraints to this such as similar time zones, and, being in a location where they did have an office. One CMO described how a highly critical vacant BD role in Canberra was now being managed from Perth and several other CMOs have been reallocating team members to oversee projects in different locations.

The Role of the CMO

CMOs all sounded energised and invigorated with the challenges, projects and initiatives they were working on.

Many CMOs are a core part of a COVID-19 response team. Particularly those with APAC roles had been leading the way in advising global COVID-19 responses. Those in global firms felt more connected with global counterparts.

Some CMOs had been very intentional in placing themselves in the centre of things at the start – in part to reaffirm and demonstrate their own value to the business; though most firms seem to have naturally pulled CMOs into this role. Some CMOs went so far as to talk about the broadening of the commercial reach of their role across other business functions. There is no doubt that this will have been a learning curve, new challenge and opportunity to build new skills for CMOs which they will take forwards in their careers.

The pressures of the CMO role are evident however, with many recognising that they do not have an effective 2IC or succession

plans in place. Others with generalist skillsets saw themselves wearing several hats like Internal Communications, Brand Manager, PR and Digital Marketer – whilst doing their day job. This is clearly not sustainable.

CHALLENGE What would firms' have done if their CMO had left immediately prior to COVID-19 if there was no obvious 2IC in place?

? What does this mean for recruitment?

As we reflected back on the structures of each team we noticed a trend that more than 50% of the CMOs we spoke to don't have a natural successor in their team. This will have an impact on the need for firms to go external with recruitment when there is change at the CMO level.

As CMOs with more generalist backgrounds felt more able to step into any gaps in the team, it also highlighted the need for CMOs with more specialist backgrounds (eg Sales/Strategic BD) to have a 2IC with expertise in the areas where they are not experienced (eg Strategic MarComms).



Technology & Digital

Over 50% of firms who spoke to us about Marketing Technology (including CRM) felt that the firm had invested enough previously to hold them in good stead during COVID-19.

Most firms are now technically competent, there are just those moving more quickly ahead, particularly on account based MarTech and pitch automation tools.

As with team structure – and how they held up under the strain, there was a little bit of luck involved about where the firm was at the moment COVID-19 hit. For example, one CMO talked about the technology being a key challenge because they were in the middle of rolling-out a new system.

When talking about future spend on MarTech there seemed little correlation between those who felt the firm had invested sufficiently already, or not, and future spend predictions. Over 50% of firms responding to this question predicted an increase in spend, however, the reason for this varied – whether fixing a problem or continuing to commit to being market leading.

Outside of MarTech, there was a real appreciation of IT teams and the smooth transition (at most firms) to the WFH model. It almost went without saying that COVID-19 had brought about swift implementation of video meeting tools such as MST and Zoom as well as improved connection capability.

DIGITAL STRATEGY

Approximately 75% of CMOs who responded to this question reflected that their Digital Strategy was not sufficient when COVID-19 hit. There was suddenly a huge demand for webinars, podcasts, videos, ideas for content creation and for digital / remote client engagement. Many BD&MC teams had to quickly hustle to deliver – upskilling team members; learning on the job; and in some cases (smaller firms / teams) bringing in external consultants. CMOs relished telling us about this – *“We have been pushing webinars and podcasts with stakeholders for 2 years and it was like being up against a brick wall – now suddenly they all want it!”* This is another example of COVID-19 accelerating a future we were already moving towards.

This *“flight to virtual”* was rapid and on the whole seems to have been very successful. Certainly there was plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that online seminars, originally seen as an alternative to existing physical seminars, had in fact opened up a whole new audience meaning an amazing opportunity to reach more clients and prospective clients regardless of location.

Many reflected on the trend continuing even when people are able to attend events in person again as the ROI is so strong. One CMO told us they promoted a webinar which resulted in over 5000 registrations leading to 8 new matters for the firm. There were many other examples like this catapulting online events to being seen as a major engagement strategy that could be tracked better and faster than traditional events. *“I cannot see us going back to expensive and time consuming Boardroom breakfasts.”*

Some reflected on the need for balance - *“as humans we need personal contact and so ultimately some in-person events will come back, but there will be a balance and they won’t be the assumption.”*

A key theme on client engagement was reflecting on the initial “noise” clients were inundated with and the need for targeted communications and 1:1 client engagement. *“The knee-jerk quickly became strategic”*. This of course highlighted the need for the data to allow segmented and targeted messaging.

OPPORTUNITY Client engagement is no longer limited by geographic location, cost and/or size of Boardroom. There are great examples of fee-earners seeing potential to bring client groups together regardless of location *“One engineer set up a Zoom meeting for 6 clients from all over Australia and produced 6 thought leadership pieces for each of them”*.

CHALLENGE Where 5000 people attend a webinar, how do you prioritise the follow up with these clients and prospects?

SHIFT IN MINDSET?

CMOs were unanimous in describing the stakeholders’ collective shift in their view on technology. *“We have moved 2 years in 2 weeks.”*

It is likely that true digital transformation needed a major scale catalyst to really become embedded in stakeholder mindset and firm strategy. All CMOs predicted further investment and commitment to this digital strategy moving forwards. Stakeholders were described as having greater clarity on the need for better data to make the technology work with some CMOs describing positive signs of behaviour change.

“Digital strategy helps focus on clients as well as stakeholders’ understanding that every marketing activity is about attracting and winning work from a client. This has always been understood on some level, but it is harder to focus stakeholders on this with in-person events than it is with digital events. The tech allows us to track lead generation and so I anticipate much less resistance to investing in marketing automation and instead a hunger for using it to convert and prioritise and post event targeting.”

Some respondents who had access to sophisticated systems admitted they had no-one in their team who could really use it properly or analyse results. This was seen as a resourcing issue or knowledge gap for many we spoke to.

? What does this mean for recruitment?

- Several CMOs, particularly those in Asia or with APAC roles, reflected on their reliance on centralised digital resources based outside the APAC region (eg UK / US) and the inherent difficulty in getting what they needed. In an ideal world, when they are able, many see great benefit in building a resource into their teams in the APAC region. *“We have the digital technology, but not the people who understand how to drive it to get ideas, innovations and products to market quickly based on the information.”* *“There is no one looking at marketing tech from a client experience standpoint.”*
- Those firms who spoke about their market leading pitch automation tools are likely to have an edge when seeking to attract the best quality Bids professionals into their business.



Team Structures & Job Functions

Structure

Almost 60% of all firms believed their structure was set up for success in delivering what the business needed during COVID-19.

As a group, Engineering differed with a lower 40% of CMOs believing their team structures were set up for success. Interestingly, all Engineering firm CMOs who said yes also referenced having recently gone through a restructure; while the 60% who said no were mostly either in the middle of, or planning, a re-structure.

It became clear in the discussion, that CMOs' answers to this were a reflection of where their team was in its lifecycle. **For firms who had completed a restructure in the last 2/3 years and with complete head-count, the team was set up for success.**

By far the most common reason given for those saying 'no' was being caught with multiple (and business critical) vacancies in the team. *"If I'd had a full team the structure would have been absolutely adequate; as it was I just didn't have enough manpower."*

There was certainly more strain on teams that were under-resourced. Areas where CMOs felt there was a 'gap' in the structure (separately to vacant roles), were Strategic External Communications; Digital expertise; Content Writers; Internal Communications (regardless of whether it sat in the CMO's team or HR); Graphic Design; strategic level BD.

Another interesting theme was the additional challenge for teams where there were a lot of new joiners in the 3-6 months prior to COVID-19, particularly in new structures, as they were still getting used to working with each other and 'who does what'.

GENERALIST VERSUS SPECIALIST

There was some difference of opinion with CMOs on the benefits of Generalist versus Specialist which we found correlated to firm (and BD&MC team) size.

- CMO of national team, 15-20 people: *"We didn't have digital specialists but we did have a team of highly adaptable generalists."*
- CMO of regional team, circa 50 people: *"It's no longer enough for Digital to be something a BD&M professional picks up on the side – we need real career Digital specialists in our business."*

CHALLENGE: Firms with long term vacancies that have sat open for more than 2 months now have a double challenge – firstly being under-resourced in the relevant area; secondly sharing with us that it can be challenging to keep the head-count when the stakeholders are seeing the team deliver under pressure without someone in that role.

This is a risk to team retention as invariably the best performers in the team are asked to take on more. Being 'spread too thin' and given 'more responsibility with no more reward' are regular reasons BD&MC professionals start seeking a new role.

We would suggest that if you are ever in a position where you have not secured a candidate within 8 weeks of starting the recruitment process you should be asking Seldon Rosser what is going wrong and working with us to escalate finding a solution.

SIZE: WILL TEAM SIZES INCREASE, DECREASE, STAY THE SAME?



One key positive message coming from the market is that only 10% predict a decrease, 50% predict an increase and 40% predict teams will stay the same.

It is heartening to see firms retaining and supporting their BD&MC teams. **This is not a contracting market.** Unlike the GFC where we had seen a lot of redundancies by now, there has been very little of this in the market. Teams have never been busier or so heavily relied upon by stakeholders – it really has been our industry's time to shine.

"Our teams are so lean already in the APAC region, that it would have significant business impact to decrease numbers."

Interestingly, over 70% of engineering firms predicted an increase in team sizes.

? What does this mean for recruitment?

- Very few respondents indicated a complete over-hauling of their teams with those few discussing restructures focused on investing in specific areas or nuanced changes in how the functions interact and roles are split. Any more substantial restructures had been on the cards prior to COVID-19.
- From 32 firms, a total of almost 80 potential roles were described to us when we asked what "business critical" roles the CMOs had identified they needed to hire.
- Some firms have recruitment freezes, but the majority used language like recruitment "pause" or "hold". Whilst no one could commit to an exact timeframe of when they would get approval to hire, it was clear that 'business critical' was a sliding scale and would govern what could be recruited first. From our experience, affirmed by these discussions, sometimes even during a 'freeze' business cases to hire key roles will be approved.
- **When the time comes, we predict that many of these roles will come to market at the same time. This will make for a competitive market for talent. Differentiating roles in the market and having a focused campaign around messaging and targeting will be important.**
- Unlike after the GFC, there will not be a large abundance of people out of work in this industry – whilst these candidates exist, the pool is small.
- **Several firms mentioned the need to have a discreet recruitment strategy** – particularly those who will be hiring whilst employees are still on reduces hours &/or pay and 'freezes' are still officially in place. Partnering with Seldon Rosser exclusively to manage the messaging and discreet targeting will achieve this.

OPPORTUNITY: CMOs might consider a more opportunistic approach to recruitment which is talent-led, needs-based, client-led and so more organic that firming up a new org chart and recruiting say 5 roles at once (which takes longer than hiring one at a time).

A close relationship with Seldon Rosser means you can ask us to keep you regularly updated on who is discreetly on

the market, what talent exists and what talent is seeking – reducing the chances of spending several months seeking to recruit a specific role.

To build the best team, you should always be recruiting and meeting the best talent – whether you have a vacancy or not.

Job Functions

Job Functions CMOs predict will be more / less in demand post COVID-19

↑ MORE DEMAND

- Strategic BD:
 - commerciality, opportunity spotting, alternative revenue sources, prospecting
- Sophisticated sales skills, lead generation
- Client development:
 - value prop, engagement, targeting, insights, CX
- Product / sector initiatives
- Digital
 - channels, webinars, videos, podcasts, landing pages, micro-sites, SEO, PPC
- Data analytics & market research
- Pitching & pursuits
- Content-led, account-based marketing
- Strategic communications
- Project management
- Innovation
- Brand
- In Asia, Mandarin language skills and Mainland China locations (additional roles, rather than relocating roles from HK)

↓ LESS DEMAND

- Client events (in person)
- Conferences
- Sponsorships
- Large scale stakeholder retreats
- Legal directories

Skills CMOs predict will be more in demand post COVID-19

↑ MORE DEMAND

“It’s more mindset than skillset” – the below soft skills also came up with many CMOs:

- Facilitation
- Influencing
- Internal Consulting
- Advising
- Coaching
- Scoping
- Qualification
- Commerciality
- Prioritisation
- Change Management
- WFH efficiency

“Change management skills are so important as there is such a big gap between existing BD teams and Strategic BD.”

Many CMOs were pleased to see some activities on the decline and felt this was a catalyst which led to a future long overdue. Directories and league tables are “a total waste of my team’s time and the firm’s money” and sponsorships “there is a legacy of sponsoring events that goes back years, with no relevance to our business goals today, but seen as being politically untouchable – this is a great time to cut the cord on things like this”.

Without having to focus on those activities on the decline, BD&MC teams now have much more time to focus on client initiatives and marketing campaigns focused on winning work and profiling the business capabilities strategically. This was a big theme coming out of the conversations and is further demonstrated in the types of newly created positions being slated as critical hires.

OPPORTUNITY: “This is our chance to recalibrate the mix of BD & Marketing towards a more go to market approach”.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF TEAMS AND RECRUITMENT?

Strategic BD / Client / Sector

The shift from BD operations to more commercial, strategic client development and BD is not new but COVID-19 has brought this to the forefront.

Some CMOs believe they can upskill their current BD teams on these soft skills and the mindset/positioning of taking a more front-line and advisory role on BD. *“Team members are energised and thinking about clients in a different way.”*

However several expressed concern about the disconnect between skills and positioning of BD professionals who had spent their entire careers in law/mid-tier accounting in particular, and what the firms and CMOs now require of them. COVID-19 held this under the spotlight and showed CMOs clearly the skills and growth potential of each BD member of their team. *“My team structure won’t change, but the make-up of the BD professionals within it may have to.”*

It will be very important for BD team members to understand these expectations – and for CMOs to invest properly in training and development to help those who are capable of it to grow and adjust.

There is no doubt that there will continue to be firms looking to other sectors to bring in more externally focused BD professionals skilled in revenue generation. This is something Seldon Rosser has been engaged to deliver on several successful occasions.

“Having a BD person who really understands the stakeholders’ business has been imperative in helping them pivot to new and different revenue streams and services during COVID-19.”

Marketing & Communications

A key theme coming from most CMOs was content and the recognising of a gap in skillset in their team for developing high quality content in the voice of the stakeholder/firm, particularly for digital channels. There is a *“flight to quality”* and targeted content, aligned to Client plans.

The majority of CMOs also have account-based marketing high on their agenda. With speed being a key consideration - *“we need to go from idea to roll-out in no more than a week – digital focus has sped up the business model”*.

Strategic external communications is an area *“where stakeholders really see the ROI in a crisis”*. This is a business critical area – with one CMO working with Seldon Rosser to rush through hiring a new Senior Comms professional at the start of lockdown as it was critical to have someone in this role. *“This was an investment area pre COVID and will remain so – we recruited during the lockdown.”*

Digital

We heard from many CMOs that this will be a growth area. In anticipation of our clients’ needs, Seldon Rosser has talent mapped this market in the APAC region.

The best digital talent for professional services usually comes from a mix of Big 4 accounting firms, management consultancies and in some cases Financial Services and Property (though salary expectations and siloed experience are barriers to watch out for in the latter two). There are also some very strong people in the Legal space – particularly those who were brought into the industry from other sectors 3-5 years ago. Historically some Law firms in particular have given generalist Marketers the opportunity to move into a Digital role. Most CMOs do not consider this ideal and spoke of these being a compromise position during COVID-19 and a desire to bring in dedicated specialist when possible.

Bids

With some recent slow-down in bid activity, many CMOs talked about a likely flurry predicted from July ’20 onwards, with potential for client buyer behaviour to affect quicker bid/tender turnaround times. Those firms who are under-resourced on the Bids side are talking about the potential need to find talent fast as soon as recruitment restrictions allow.

OPPORTUNITY: We predict that in the short term, some firms may need to plug gaps with interim solutions until any recruitment restrictions are lifted. We have ensured we are well connected to: (1) BD&MC professionals immediately available to take up contract work, and (2) Consultants able to come in on a daily rate to complete a project – and are set up to place someone on either model into your business.

REDEPLOYING TEAM MEMBERS

The vast majority of firms have been doing this – only the smaller teams made up of generalists did not need to.

One of the first structural changes most CMOs made was to reallocate events and junior marketers to higher priority areas such as online events, database clean-up activities or seconded into BD/Bid roles. When moving into BD/Bids it tended to be into the more administrative and support activities. The general consensus was that this had been really successful. Team members had quickly adapted, learnt new skills and were delivering.

There was also a common theme of redeploying people to different geographic regions, e.g. from national to global teams, as well as from one practice or sector to another, busier group. This seems to have been aided by a remote working model where location and psychology about where someone sits in an org chart have become more flexible.

OPPORTUNITY Will make CMOs and stakeholders more open to considering talent with transferable skills who have not had prior experience in a specific role? We suggest that this could be a great outcome for Consultant/Advisor/Executive level recruitment (across all role types) – given the decreasing number of Marketing/BD/Bid Coordinators being trained in the market to step up into these roles when they come to market. Finding great talent for BD/Bid/Marketing Exec roles has long been one of the toughest areas to recruit well and so a more open-minded approach to talent could be a good thing.



Salaries, Out-sourcing & Recruitment

SALARIES

Having shared our recent salary benchmark tables with CMOs the majority agreed they were in line with their current budgets. Anomalies were mostly caused by a different classification of job titles or a difference in the way total remuneration was calculated.

Very few CMOs feel that salary bands will change in the next 12 months but there was a recognition by some that as the BD&MC team is seen to add more value and be recognised as a more business critical function; this could lead to added pressure being put on salaries when the recruitment market opens up. One CMO said *“I have no doubt that we will need to pay top of the band, perhaps higher, to attract the best candidates”*.

As WFH and reduced hours become normalised there is a sense that CMOs will offer greater flexibility to candidates when hiring (easier and likely to be more common in Australia than Asia). It might be that some candidates will trade salary for part time or more WFH days, though if this quickly becomes ‘the norm’, we believe it is more likely that candidates will expect this as standard rather than as a trade off with salary.

Some firms who moved quickly to reduce the salaries by 15-20% may be negatively impacted when the job market opens up, unless back pay arrangements are introduced. One accounting firm has already agreed to pay the shortfall by the end of the calendar year.

CHALLENGE: If this happens how will this affect candidates wanting to move – and will signing on bonuses start to make a comeback?

Across the Asia-Pacific, CMOs were almost unanimous that team members would not receive salary increases in the next review; but that increases they committed to pre-COVID-19 (most often

connected to promotions) will be honoured. The vast majority also confirmed that bonuses would still be honoured, though the bonus pool itself may be smaller.

OUTSOURCING

The use of external consultants or the outsourcing of specialist functions (like graphic design, media & content development) was a resourcing tactic used by just over 50% of CMOs. For many it was deemed too early to say if the utilisation of independent consultants was going to increase in the future to plug a resources gap.

Some CMOs had to cancel existing consultant contracts early *“it’s an easy tap to turn off”* whilst others used this as an opportunity to engage specialists, commonly in communications to patch under-investment in this function.

Most of the independent consultants we spoke to, who specialise in training & development, facilitation and coaching reported a downturn in their business as offices closed and group meetings were cancelled. However, we predict an uptake of these services as fee-earners get more confident and comfortable with online – and also firms recognise the benefits of being able to have attendees take part from different locations.

OPPORTUNITY: We also see a potential market for candidates at Manager / Senior Manager level taking up portfolio type careers where they consult to 2-3 firms who require interim/ part-time specialists skills.

RECRUITMENT

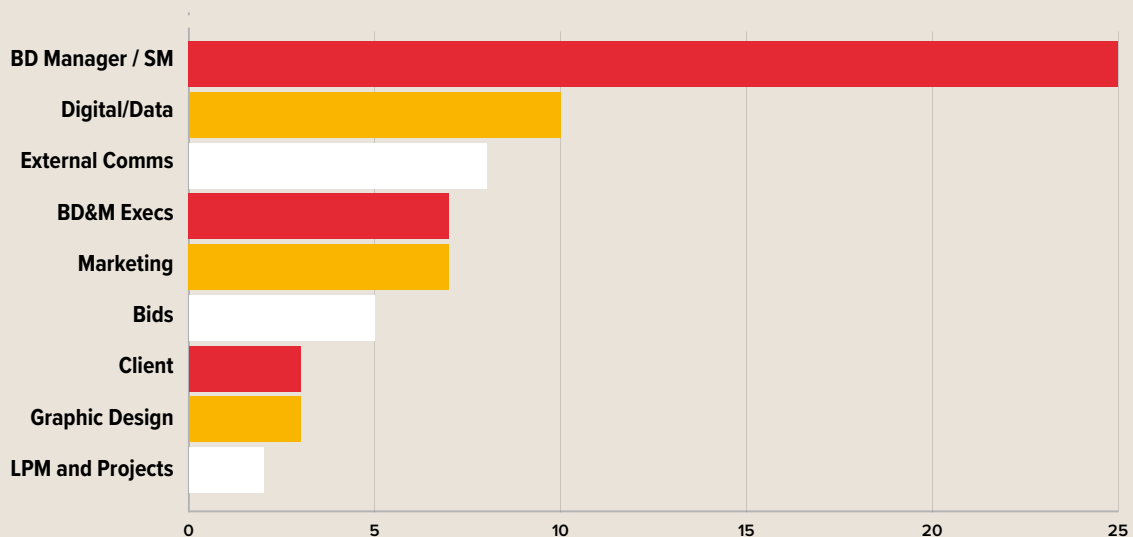
How much recruitment activity can we predict?

Of the almost 80 roles we discussed across 32 firms:

- 9% are live and Seldon Rosser is actively recruiting.
- 29% are “on hold” – i.e. there was a business case signed off and the firm started / was about to go to market when COVID-19 hit.
- 20% are roles CMOs expect to recruit as soon as they can get the business case.
- 42% are roles which CMOs would ideally like to hire within the next 12 months, though are not as ‘business critical’ as the 20% above – and, whilst timing is hard to predict, CMOs believe could be on the agenda in the first half of 2021.

Of course, this doesn’t include any recruitment where a current team member leaves, goes on mat leave etc. Things can also change quickly and in one case a CMO with no business critical roles on the horizon, called us a few days after the survey with a couple of roles about to come to market.

ROLES IN THE PIPELINE



WHAT ABOUT CANDIDATES?

Many CMOs asked us for a picture of the talent market – what potential candidates are thinking and whether many people are open to opportunities for a career move.

Ambition does not slow down just because the market has.

Many candidates are asking us to call them about roles in 2020.

There has also been an increase in talent self-identifying as “Open to Opportunities” on the LinkedIn Recruiter tool. However, many of these people are “Open” rather than “Active” and will still only move for the absolute right opportunity.

What do candidates want?

- step up in level (often associated with job title)
- new challenges and progression – fear of stagnating. *“I’m concerned with how COVID-19 affects my career progression. Will firms be hesitant to promote?”*
- a firm that is investing and doing something interesting in BD&MC
- convincing firm messaging on job security and commitment to BD&MC.
- step up in salary – many have realised they may not get a salary increase in-house for 1-2 years and are open to moving to secure this.

CHALLENGE: the cost of losing people this way and needing to recruit is higher than retaining them with a salary increase. However, firm policy, parity and similar issues may mean this is not possible.

OPPORTUNITY: on the flip-side, if you have the budget and business case to recruit, there is good quality talent open to being tempted away.

Interestingly, even those who are active and highly motivated to secure their next role asap are incredibly busy in their current roles and do not have time to scour job ads, instead relying on a phone call from a trusted source to tell them about available roles.

The relative quality of internal communications during this time is impacting how happy people are at their firm. *“There has been more internal comms coming through, it has been crucial during this time”.*

In response to reduced hours, most team members get it. *“Whilst we are busy the firm have imposed a 4-day work week across the business. I understand and know it’s a smart move. I just hope it doesn’t last for too long.”* In instances where people have been asked to reduce salary but not hours there is some resentment which has the danger of affecting retention later when the market picks up.

And on WFH? *“I’ve been waiting for my firm to be more supportive when it comes to working from home / flexible working. Now that WFH has been forced, I hope my firm will be more encouraging of doing it post-COVID-19.”*

? What does this mean for recruitment?

Despite the increase in people being “open” it will take a strategic approach and the right messaging to engage them in a process.

Recruitment Market

Key Challenges & Opportunities for CMOs

Challenges

- Attracting talent in a likely competitive market where many candidates are “open” but few are highly motivated and most are cautious.
- Identifying the right talent in a discreet & focused way.
- For under-resourced and stretched teams, retaining quality talent when the recruitment market picks up.
- More rigorous business case requirement for all spend (including hiring).

Opportunities

- Start preparing now - review your firm’s “why join us” proposition so you are ready to engage talent.
- Conduct an audit to ensure your BD&MC structure and resources in 2021 are 100%.
- How do you know you have the best resources? “Make do & mend” may not be the best strategy for your team.
- Use this time when the business is more open to ideas to build business cases for new roles.
- Use interim resources to build new capabilities, test change or if there are barriers to permanent headcount.
- Meet the best quality candidates in the market – benchmark your own resources and be ready to fill any surprise roles.
- Create new JDs for all team members with more commercial, client-focused KPIs – may help demonstrate ROI when it’s time to recruit.

HOW SELDON ROSSER CAN HELP YOU

- Start talking to Seldon Rosser early about your plans so that we can help inform the business case on talent – type, location, cost, availability, expectations and motivation.
- We have expertise in identifying the right talent in discreet & focused campaigns; including shaping targeted marketing messaging around opportunities to differentiate your opportunity.

Talent

We started this report by saying that we wanted to be useful to our clients during this quieter time in recruitment. We have also been working on engaging with and extending our candidate networks to perfectly position us to help CMOs to hire future talent for their teams.

- **BD/Client/Sector:** we have proven capability in sourcing talent from other sectors with more front-line BD experience (eg Property, Financial Services). During COVID-19, we have also reconnected with every BD/Client/Sector professional in our professional services network.

- **Digital:** predicting this as a growth area – we have mapped the market in the APAC region for talent from traditional professional services as well as broader industries, particularly Property & Financial Services. We are able to work quickly to engage and introduce you to this talent.
- **Graphic Design:** hearing this future need from some clients, we have formed a strategic alliance with a specialist Graphic Design recruitment agency and can provide talent to you, working with them to ensure cultural fit given our understanding of your business.
- **Account based marketing:** we have now extended our candidate database to include account based marketing talent from Financial Services and other matrix services businesses – predicting a likely trend in CMOs looking beyond professional services for this talent. We have also reconnected with our network within traditional professional services.
- **Communications:** we are similarly confident we have the best talent ready to go in every major APAC market when these roles come to market.



About Seldon Rosser

We are a specialist recruitment agency and have been at the forefront of helping professional services firms build their marketing, communication, sales & BD function since 2000. We are highly regarded in the industry for having an expansive domestic and international candidate network and can offer a tailored, campaign based end to end recruitment service.

Partner with us to recruit business critical roles such as:

- CMO
- Industry Sector BD Lead
- Head of Internal Communications
- Director of BD
- Senior Client Manager
- Senior Marketing Campaigns Manager
- Head of Marketing
- Senior Bid/Pursuit Manager
- Senior Digital Marketing Manager
- Director of Communications
- Senior BD Manager
- Practice Development Manager

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