

Why Fractional to Full-Time is Better Than Hiring a Full-Time CMO





INTRODUCTION

Does this sound familiar? You're managing a tight budget and juggling multiple roles, perhaps because your company is still too small or young to afford a full-scale marketing team. Or maybe you do have a marketing team, but it needs fresh perspectives and strategies to keep the momentum going.

Many small and medium-sized businesses—and plenty of start-ups—have valid reasons for not having a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) in their C-suite. But the reality is that by leaving out this strategic leader, they're often undermining

their own growth potential. A CMO is the key to aligning your brand, sales, and customer experience, and they are responsible for connecting your product or service with the right audience—driving engagement and, ultimately, sales.

Sure, adding a CMO to the payroll can feel like a luxury when you're trying to control expenses. But can you afford not to? According to McKinsey & Company, businesses whose CEOs prioritize marketing as a strategic focus are **more than twice as likely to see annual growth rates exceeding 5% compared to their peers.**

CMO? YES. FULL-TIME? NOT NECESSARILY.

A Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) is pivotal in shaping a company's marketing strategy and driving growth. They define and set the overall marketing vision, align it with broader business objectives, and ensure marketing efforts deliver the desired impact. But do you really need a full-time CMO to reap these benefits?

CMOs develop comprehensive marketing plans, outline budgets, and allocate resources to maximize return on investment (ROI). They establish key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure effectiveness and make data-driven decisions using consumer behavior and market research insights. Additionally, these marketing professionals foster innovation by exploring new channels and technologies, all while collaborating with other departments to ensure marketing efforts are aligned with the entire organization. In short, a savvy CMO can be the difference between a company just getting by and one dominating the market. But here's the good news: you don't always need a full-time CMO to

gain these advantages. A fractional CMO can deliver all this and more—without the long-term commitment or hefty price tag.

Here's why having a CMO (even a fractional one) is essential to your business:

- **Boost your bottom line:** CMOs are directly responsible for driving sales and revenue through effective marketing strategies.
- **Build a brand people love:** They're the guardians of your brand identity, making sure your brand resonates and stands out.
- **Keep your customers happy:** CMOs prioritize customer satisfaction by tailoring campaigns to the needs of your audience.
- **Stay ahead of the competition:** They help identify new opportunities, manage risks, and leverage trends to keep your business on top.
- **Lead your marketing team to victory:** CMOs foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and high performance.





CHALLENGES OF FINDING A BEST-FIT CMO

Hiring—and retaining—the “perfect” fit for any executive role is tough, but finding the right Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) can prove particularly challenging. According to SpencerStuart’s [April 2024 report](#), the [average tenure for other C-suite roles](#) lasts just over four years. Compare that number with the average tenures of other C-suite roles, which range from 2.9 years for Chief Inclusion and Diversity Officers to 7 years for CEOs, and it’s clear that CMOs are often on the move.

The reality is that hiring for any C-suite role, including a CMO, is a time- and cost-intensive process. While adding a CMO represents a strategic investment, the costs—factoring in compensation, benefits, bonuses, and even stock options—can quickly climb into the upper six figures. And even if you’re willing to make that investment, finding the right match isn’t as simple as posting an ad on LinkedIn.

Many companies struggle to identify the right CMO, and relying on in-house HR or even the CEO to lead the search can complicate matters further. While [25% of CEOs have a marketing or sales background](#), that leaves a significant number of CEOs without the experience needed to assess a candidate’s fit for the role.

Interviewing and evaluating CMO candidates requires knowing the right questions to ask and having the expertise to interpret the answers. Understanding the difference between a good CMO and a great one means distinguishing between superficial marketing jargon and genuine, results-driven experience.

But the challenge doesn’t end with hiring. What happens if, after a few months, you realize that your new CMO isn’t the right fit? Not only have you invested time and resources, but now you’re back to square one.

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF A POOR CMO HIRING DECISION

Making the wrong hire at the executive level is a costly mistake—one that's rarely one single person's fault. According to [McKinsey](#), over 30% of new CEO hires are considered “failing” after just 18 months. It's even worse for other executives: 11:11 Partners reports that up to **50% of newly hired executives fail within two years**, costing companies an average of \$1.5 million in missed opportunities, poor leadership, and damaged stakeholder relationships.

Several key factors contribute to these failures:

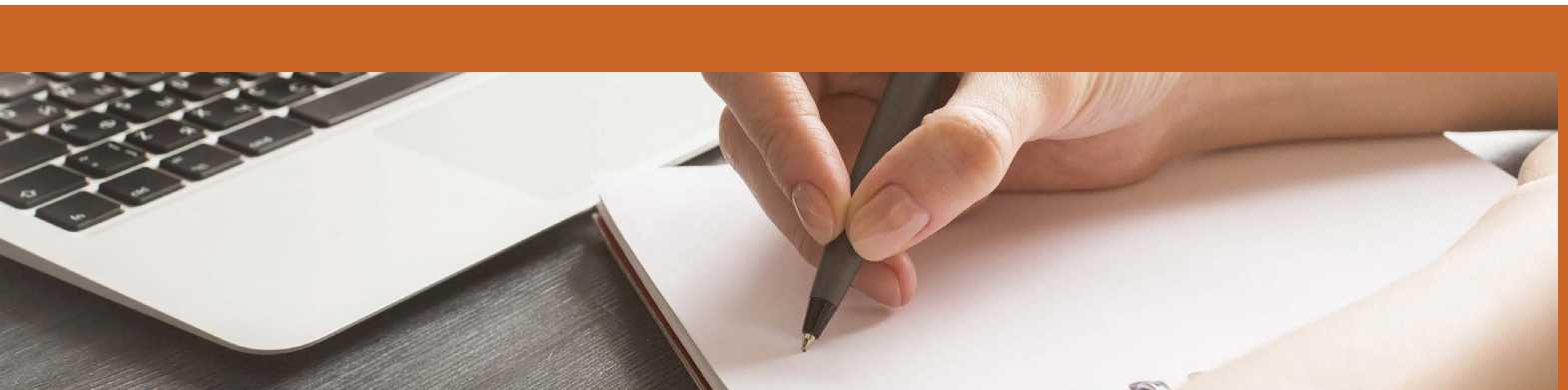
- **Poorly defined roles and expectations:**
When the CMO's responsibilities are unclear or poorly communicated, it's easy for the new hire to feel lost or unsure about what success looks like. Without clear key performance indicators (KPIs), it becomes difficult to measure their effectiveness.
- **Mismatch of roles and responsibilities:**
Assigning tasks outside a CMO's core role—such as managing day-to-day social media or handling copywriting—can lead to burnout and frustration. A lack of support or proper delegation often results in mismanagement of time and resources.

- **Focus on the wrong metrics:** Misaligned expectations, such as emphasizing operational KPIs over strategic marketing metrics like customer acquisition cost (CAC) or customer lifetime value (CLV), can prevent a CMO from focusing on long-term growth.
- **Cultural misalignment:** If the company's core values and culture aren't properly communicated during the hiring process, the new CMO may struggle to fit in. This misalignment can lead to friction and lower overall team morale.
- **Lack of long-term vision:** Pressured to hit immediate KPIs, some new CMOs overlook the company's long-term goals. Without a clear understanding of the broader vision, their strategies may fail to deliver sustainable results.

These risks can arise not because of a shortage of qualified candidates, but because those responsible for the hiring often lack the marketing expertise to properly assess potential candidates.

This limited pool of candidates and inadequate understanding of the role can lead to mismatches that are costly to both morale and the bottom line.

But here's the thing: making a poor CMO hire doesn't have to be a risk you take. You can access top-tier marketing leadership without the long-term commitment or heavy price tag of a full-time hire. Enter the fractional CMO.



TRY BEFORE YOU BUY: fCMOs AS A SMART SOLUTION

One of the best strategies for finding your “dream” CMO is to test the waters with a fractional CMO (fCMO)—or even two—to lead different aspects of your marketing strategy. The benefit? You get the chance to evaluate their skills, cultural fit, and leadership style before committing to a full-time hire. After working together for a few weeks or months, you may find that your fCMO is the right person for the job and offer them a full-time position.

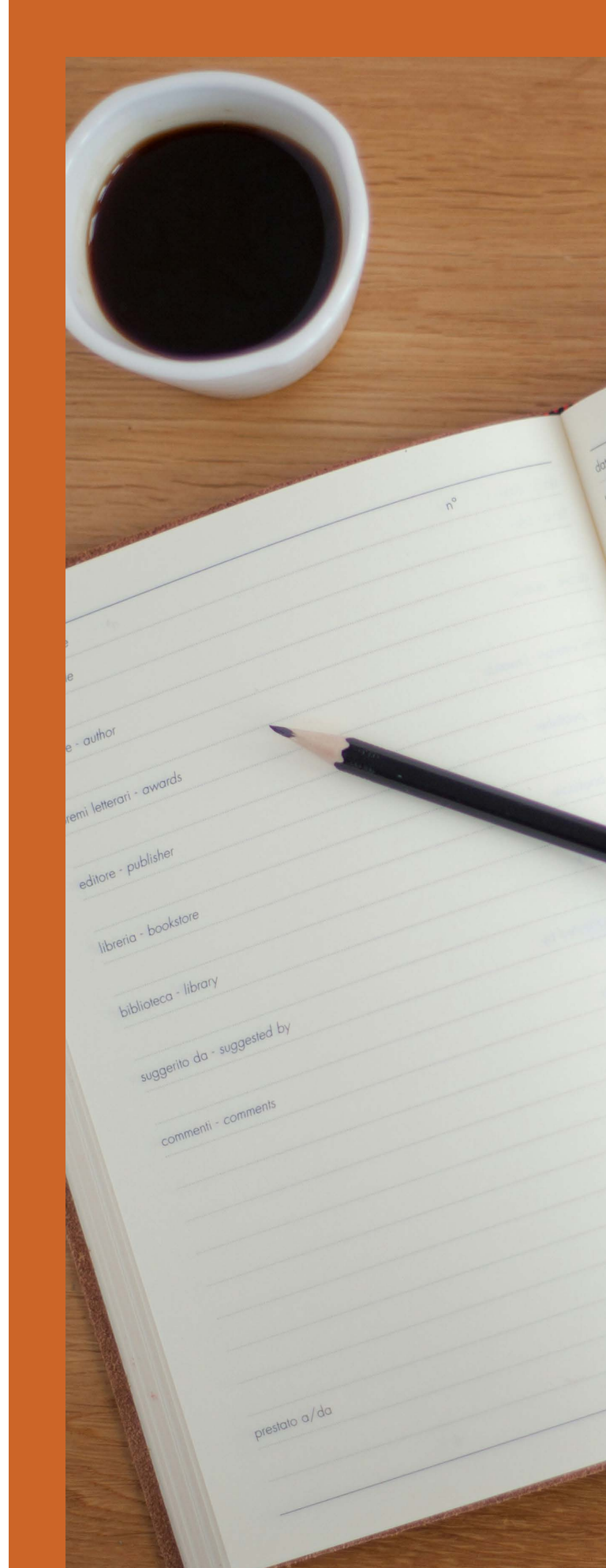
The advantage of contracting with an fCMO is simple: you get their expertise and strategic vision at a fraction of the cost and commitment of hiring a full-time CMO.

Let's get a bit more granular with the benefits.

Cost Savings

We've already discussed the financial risks of a poor hiring decision, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars—or more—when you factor in the time and resources spent on hiring and onboarding. Hiring a full-time CMO often takes months, delaying key marketing initiatives and stalling company growth.

With an fCMO, you mitigate much of that financial risk. Instead of a hefty six-figure salary, you're looking at a manageable monthly cost, usually between \$2K and \$5K. If the fit isn't right, resolving the issue is far less expensive and time-consuming than with a full-time hire.





Immediate Expertise

fCMOs come equipped with the knowledge and experience to hit the ground running. Their expertise allows them to quickly assess your company's marketing strategy, identify areas for improvement, and streamline processes to drive results.

What's more, you can tailor your selection to match your company's specific needs. Whether you need a B2B marketing expert, a brand-building strategist, or a digital marketing specialist, you can find the right fCMO with the exact skill set required. And if your marketing needs are particularly complex (aka you think you need a marketing "unicorn"), you can even hire two fCMOs, each with a specialized focus, to ensure all areas are covered.

A Fresh Perspective

Sometimes, internal teams get bogged down in day-to-day operations, losing sight of the bigger picture. An fCMO brings a fresh, outsider's perspective, which is invaluable when tackling your company's marketing challenges. They're not afraid to ask tough questions, challenge the status quo, and propose innovative solutions.

Because fCMOs are not embedded in the company's internal politics or biases, they can offer objective insights and identify new opportunities that internal teams might overlook. Their broad industry experience allows them to apply best practices and introduce creative strategies that drive growth.

Faster Results

When you're facing tight deadlines or have a stalled marketing strategy, you can't afford to wait for a full-time hire to ramp up. The traditional onboarding process for a C-suite role can take **three months** or more. But with an fCMO, the onboarding time is significantly reduced, meaning they can start driving results almost immediately.

For example, if you need to launch an email marketing campaign to engage a new audience, an fCMO with expertise in email strategy can step in, develop the plan, oversee execution, and analyze the results—all in a fraction of the time it would take to hire and onboard a full-time CMO.

Mentorship and Team Development

An added benefit of working with an fCMO is the opportunity for your internal marketing team to learn and grow. fCMOs often serve as mentors and coaches, helping to develop future marketing leaders within your organization. By sharing best practices, encouraging innovation, and offering hands-on guidance in strategy and execution, they can improve morale and productivity while nurturing the skills of your team.

When the fCMO's tenure ends, your team will be better equipped to continue moving your marketing initiatives forward, having gained invaluable knowledge and confidence.



FIND YOUR PERFECT fCMO MATCH WITH &MARKETING

At &Marketing, we work with over 55 experienced fCMOs who can quickly integrate into diverse business environments and drive results. Our streamlined process ensures that you're matched with the right marketing leader to meet your company's specific needs.

Here's how it works:

1. Define Your Goals

We begin by meeting with you to clearly define your marketing goals, identify the challenges you need to solve, and establish specific requirements for your fCMO. Whether you're looking for strategic leadership (like brand management or positioning) or hands-on execution (such as setting up ad campaigns or driving lead generation), having a clear vision from the start helps us find the best fit for your business.



Pro tip: Clearly define your goals upfront—whether they are strategic, such as brand management, or tactical, like attracting qualified leads. The more specific you are, the easier it is to find your perfect CMO match.

2. Create the Job Description

Next, we collaborate with you to craft a job description based on your needs. This description is then shared with our pool of fCMOs, who apply for the role. You'll review a selection of candidates and choose two or three to interview.



Pro tip: Consider what your company values in a CMO—whether it's leadership, creativity, or data-driven decision-making—and make sure to include those attributes in the job description to help ensure the right cultural fit.

3. Finalize the Match

Once you've interviewed the top candidates, we work with you to finalize the contract terms and ensure all expectations align. After that, it's time to get started!



4. Kickoff and Delivery

After the contract is signed, your new fCMO hits the ground running. They'll meet your team, get up to speed on your business, and either create a marketing strategy or refine your existing one. From there, they'll set clear milestones, define key objectives, and establish KPIs to measure success.



FROM FRACTIONAL TO FULL-TIME

One of the greatest advantages of hiring a fractional CMO (fCMO) is the ability to see how well they integrate before committing to a full-time hire. This approach allows you to evaluate the fCMO's effectiveness, leadership style, and cultural fit over time, without the financial or operational risk of bringing on a permanent CMO immediately.

As your business grows and marketing needs evolve, you might find that your fCMO becomes an indispensable part of your team. Many companies that start with an fCMO eventually transition to a full-time hire because the relationship has already proven successful.

Here's how to make that transition seamless:

1. Assess Long-Term Needs

Once your fCMO has demonstrated their ability to drive results and align with your company's goals, assess whether your long-term needs require a full-time CMO. Do you need their expertise and leadership permanently? Are your marketing challenges growing in complexity, requiring ongoing, day-to-day oversight?

2. Evaluate Performance

By the time you consider transitioning your fCMO to a full-time role, you'll already have several months' worth of performance data. Use this period to evaluate how well they've delivered on key objectives and KPIs, how effectively they've collaborated with your team, and whether they've helped your company achieve sustainable growth.

3. Cultural Fit and Leadership

A fractional CMO allows you to see how well a marketing leader meshes with your company culture. Before making the transition, consider whether they've become a key player in your leadership team and whether their vision aligns with the long-term direction of the business.

4. Discuss Expectations and Next Steps

If you've decided that transitioning your fCMO to a full-time CMO is the right move, have open discussions about expectations for the new role. How will their responsibilities shift? What new initiatives will they lead? These conversations ensure alignment between both sides before committing.

By starting with a fractional CMO, you can build a foundation of trust, proven performance, and a deeper understanding of your company's needs. Should you decide to make the jump to full-time, you'll know you're making an informed decision backed by real-world results.



fCMO Impact: Proven Results

Not sure if hiring a fractional CMO (fCMO) is the right choice for your business?

Check out these two case studies, where fCMOs delivered impressive results—faster and at a lower cost.

PREMIER ROOFING COMPANY



Challenge

- The new CEO, Luke Marklin, needed to scale operations and increase revenue fast.
- No CMO in place, and traditional hiring would take too long.



Solution

- Hired two fCMOs through &Marketing within one month.
- Andrea: Built the marketing team.
- Bruce: Created the digital marketing foundation.



Results

- \$3-5 million increase in revenue in the first year.
- Smooth integration into the leadership team.
- Sales and operations teams successfully adapted new marketing-generated leads.

MODEL MATCH



Challenge

- A mortgage industry talent acquisition company needed to adapt to rapid industry changes.
- No in-house marketing expertise or full-time CMO.



Solution

- Partnered with &Marketing to bring in Katie, an experienced fCMO.
- Updated branding, launched a new digital ad campaign, and developed a strategy to target individual loan officers.



Results

- 56% increase in e-commerce revenue within 60 days.
- Expanded customer base and increased market penetration.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution for finding the right CMO, but it's clear that CMOs play a critical role in driving revenue, building brands, and leading marketing teams. Fractional CMOs offer a flexible, lower-risk alternative to hiring a full-time CMO, giving you access to specialized marketing expertise when you need it most.

The best part? If you find that your fractional CMO becomes an invaluable part of your team, you have the option to transition them to a full-time role—making the shift seamless and ensuring continuity in your marketing efforts. It's the perfect way to test the waters without diving into a full-time hire from day one.



READY TO EXPLORE THE BENEFITS OF A FRACTIONAL CMO?

At &Marketing, we specialize in helping businesses find their perfect marketing leader—whether it's fractional or leads to a full-time role. Reach out today to learn how a fractional CMO can help you drive growth now, with the flexibility to evolve into a long-term fit for your business.

GET STARTED TODAY—contact us to discuss how we can help you find the right fractional CMO to meet your needs.



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