

The Changing Influence of Marketing Expertise in Britain's Largest Companies

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

Research methodology and definitions

Purpose

To assess **where marketing expertise sits within the leadership of FTSE 100 companies in 2026.**

Not to simply replicate Prof. Malcolm McDonald's 2007 research which reported 14 Marketing Directors on FTSE 100 Boards in 2007.

Universe

The research covers **all companies in the FTSE 100 as at August 2026.**

Four Investment Trusts are identified separately because their governance and operating models differ materially from those of operating companies.

Where percentages relating to operating-company governance are presented separately, the denominator is therefore 96.

The FTSE 100 itself is regularly rebalanced; consequently, the research represents a defined 2026 snapshot rather than a permanent population.

Methodology

Primary research was conducted by reviewing company websites and Board biographies, and where appropriate secondary checks involved reviewing Companies House records and LinkedIn.

Secondary research also briefly examined the relationship between marketing expertise at Board level and business performance (2, 3, 4 and 5).

For the purpose of this report, "Marketing expertise" encompasses substantive experience or responsibility in marketing, customer or brand-related activity. Specifically:

Marketing Director on PLC Board (A1)

A company is classified as having a Marketing Director on the PLC board (A1 = Yes) only where:

- the individual is a current statutory member of the main PLC Board;
- their formal role has marketing or an explicitly combined marketing/customer/brand remit;
- the evidence relates to the listed parent company rather than a subsidiary.

This deliberately strict definition produces **A1 = 0/100.**

CEO with substantial marketing/customer background (A2)

A company is classified as A2 = Yes when having a current CEO with a substantial career background in:

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- marketing;
- consumer marketing;
- customer leadership;
- brand;
- or a closely related marketing-led commercial discipline.

Generic commercial experience alone does not qualify. **A2 = 11/100.**

A2 is delineated from A1 because CEO marketing experience is evidence of marketing capability at the top of the organisation but does not mean that the CEO is a Marketing Director.

Other PLC Board with meaningful marketing/customer expertise (A3)

A company is classified as A3 = Yes through the presence of other current PLC Board members a Board member with substantive experience in marketing, brand, customer or closely related activity.

The measure is based on substantive career evidence rather than job title alone. **A3 = 45/100.**

A1, A2 and A3 are combined to provide the broader measure:

Total Board marketing/customer expertise = 47/100.

Senior marketing/customer leader outside the PLC Board (B1)

A person qualifies (B1 = Yes) where they lead the marketing function or an equivalent substantial marketing function within senior management, even if their title is not "Marketing Director" or "CMO".

Examples of relevant titles can include combinations of:

- Marketing;
- Customer;
- Commercial & Marketing;
- Growth;
- Marketing & Data;
- Customer & Marketing.

A generic commercial or growth title does **not** qualify automatically. Substantive evidence of marketing leadership is required. **B1 = 30/100.**

Senior executive management body (B2)

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This category (B2 = Yes) records whether the company has a recognisable senior management body, and also the name of the body, such as:

- Executive Committee;
- Executive Board;
- Management Board;
- Operating Board;
- or equivalent.

B2 = 86/100. This is principally structural information rather than a measure of marketing influence.

Other senior-management with meaningful marketing/customer expertise (B3)

This category (B3 = Yes) captures the presence of additional substantial marketing, brand or customer expertise elsewhere within the company's senior-management body, **beyond any marketing leader (B1).**

This can include senior executives whose career backgrounds include substantial marketing expertise even though their current role is broader — for example:

- divisional CEOs;
- Presidents;
- Chief Customer Officers;
- Chief Commercial Officers;
- growth leaders;
- senior business executives with substantial previous marketing responsibility.

B3 = 38/100.

Methodology for calculations and combined measures

The measures are deliberately not additive.

A company can, for example, have:

- a CEO with marketing experience;
- two Board members with marketing expertise;
- a CMO on the Executive Committee;

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- and a divisional CEO with a marketing background.

However, when calculating incidence, this still counts **once**, not four times.

The principal combined measures are:

Board expertise: A1 OR A2 OR A3 i.e. any one of A1, A2 or A3 = 47/100

Senior- management marketing expertise: B1 OR B3 i.e. any one of B1 or B3 = 56/100

Board OR senior-management marketing expertise = i.e. any one of A1, A2, A3, B1 or B3 = 70/100

This is a company-level measure of diffusion.

Sector classification

Companies were assigned to nine principal sectors:

1. Consumer/brand-led
2. Technology/media/information/digital
3. Healthcare/pharmaceuticals
4. Industrial/engineering/infrastructure
5. Financial
6. Property
7. Energy/resources/utilities
8. Travel/Hospitality
9. Investment Trusts

The sector analysis is intended to identify patterns of association, not to establish causal relationships (Figure 1). For example:

The Consumer/brand-led category comprises **16 companies**.

Our review identifies meaningful marketing/customer/brand expertise somewhere in the Board or senior-management structure of **all 16**. Therefore:

Consumer/brand-led: 16/16 = 100% with marketing/customer/brand expertise at Board or senior-management level.

Sources and verification

The principal evidence sources were:

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- company websites;
- current Board biographies;
- Executive/Management Committee information;
- company annual reports and governance reports;
- documented career biographies;
- Companies House officer records where statutory directorship required independent confirmation.

Companies House was used principally to **double-check statutory Board status**, rather than to determine whether someone was a member of a company's operational senior-management team.

This distinction is essential because a senior executive may exercise substantial organisational influence without being a statutory director of the listed PLC.

Historical comparison

The 2007 benchmark of 14 Marketing Directors on FTSE 100 Boards is treated as a **published historical reference**, not as a dataset reproduced by this research.

Our historical review found substantial evidence of senior marketing leaders operating below the statutory PLC Board in Executive Committees and Management Boards.

Limitations of research

The principal limitations are:

1. **The 2007 research is not replicated.** We do not possess the original underlying dataset.
2. **FTSE 100 composition has changed substantially**, so 2007 and 2026 are not like-for-like company populations.
3. **Job titles have broadened**, making title-based comparisons increasingly unreliable.
4. **Senior-management structures differ between companies**, so definitions (B2/B3) require judgement. Some companies may also not publish this governance information on their websites.
5. **Marketing expertise is not binary in reality.** The research uses explicit classification rules to make the comparison possible.
6. **The research measures leadership representation, and roles, not actual influence per se.** A Board seat or Executive Committee position does not automatically tell us how much influence an individual exercises.

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7. **The 70% finding is therefore best described as evidence of the diffusion of marketing expertise**, rather than proof that marketing has a particular degree of power.

Final methodological proposition

The research deliberately moves beyond a narrow test of whether a company employs a person called a "Marketing Director".

In modern corporations, marketing influence may be exercised through a combination of specialist marketing leadership, customer and commercial leadership, CEO experience and broader business management roles.

That is why **diffusion**, rather than simply **Board representation**, is the central concept of the 2026 benchmark.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

1. **McDonald, M. Professor** (2007) *Marketing on the Boards of FTSE Companies* (researched using Companies House information), Cranfield School of Management

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Guy Tomlinson E: hello@themarketingdirectors.co.uk, T: 01628 473699. W: www.themarketingdirectors.co.uk