

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

Executive summary

Marketing expertise is widespread across Britain's largest companies — even though the traditional Board Marketing Director has disappeared.

New research by The Marketing Directors finds that **70% of FTSE 100 companies have meaningful marketing, customer or brand expertise at Board or senior-management level.**

In the most customer-led sectors the incidence is even higher: **all 16 Consumer/brand-led companies have marketing expertise within senior leadership**, as do all three companies in Travel/Hospitality.

In addition, 47% FTSE 100 PLC Boards have marketing representation with 11% of CEOs having substantial marketing expertise, and 45% having representatives beyond the CEO. Within senior management, 30% have a senior marketing/customer leader outside the PLC Board and a further 38% have other substantial marketing, brand or customer expertise (56% FTSE 100 senior management).

The picture that emerges is that **marketing leadership has become more widely distributed through the corporate leadership structure** rather than one of marketing losing influence as suggested in 2007 (1).

This diffusion is particularly apparent by looking at the differences within industry sectors. In customer-led and brand-intensive businesses, **all 16 companies have identifiable marketing/customer/brand expertise somewhere in their Board or senior-management structure.** Travel/hospitality and technology, media and digital businesses also show a high incidence of marketing expertise.

So today, ***where does marketing expertise sit within the leadership of the business, and how far does it influence corporate decision-making?***

That is the question this benchmark attempts to answer.

Six headline findings

1. Marketing expertise is everywhere — but the traditional Board Marketing Director has disappeared

The strongest finding from the research is that **70 of the 100 FTSE companies have meaningful marketing, customer or brand expertise either at PLC Board or senior-management level.**

This is considerably more revealing than the headline finding of zero Board Marketing Directors.

The research identifies three overlapping forms of senior marketing influence:

- marketing/customer experience within the PLC Board;

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- a senior executive whose principal role is marketing or an equivalent substantial marketing function;
- other senior executives with meaningful marketing, customer or brand expertise.

The picture is that marketing capability is not necessarily concentrated in a single "Marketing Director" but can be distributed between the CEO, Board, Chief Marketing Officer/Chief Customer Officer/Chief Growth Officer and other senior commercial or business leaders.

The absence of a Board Marketing Director should therefore not be interpreted as the absence of marketing capability or influence.

2. Zero Marketing Directors sit on FTSE 100 PLC Boards

Our analysis identifies **0 of 100** current FTSE 100 companies with a Marketing Director, CMO or equivalent whose formal role places them on the main PLC Board.

This contrasts with the **14/100 reported** in Professor Malcom McDonald's research in 2007 (1).

The comparison is striking — and raises the question — *why?*

The answer lies partly in how corporate leadership has changed.

The statutory Board is no longer a complete map of corporate influence.

The marketing leadership function has not disappeared; it has increasingly moved into broader executive and commercial roles.

3. Marketing experience reaches the CEO

Our research identifies **11 CEOs with substantial marketing, consumer, customer or marketing-led commercial backgrounds.**

The routes are diverse. At Tesco, CEO Ken Murphy's career includes substantial commercial, marketing and brand experience, including global product brand management. At Reckitt, CEO Kris Licht previously served as President, Health and Chief Customer Officer. At Burberry, CEO Joshua Schulman's career spans senior brand, merchandising, luxury retail and chief executive roles.

This is significant because it demonstrates that marketing expertise can be a career route to general management and ultimately the chief executive role.

While it does **not**, of course, demonstrate that marketing experience causes someone to become CEO, rather it shows that marketing is more integrated into broader commercial and customer responsibilities.

Some modern CEOs started in marketing, brand, customer or commercial roles and subsequently accumulated broader operational and financial responsibilities. Marketing expertise has therefore become part of a broader general-management skillset.

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4. Customer-led businesses are the strongest adopters of marketing leadership

The sector analysis is perhaps the strongest corroborating evidence for the overall finding.

The FTSE100 comprises 16 companies classified as **consumer/brand-led**. 16 (100%) have senior-management marketing/customer expertise; 15 (94%) have Board-level marketing/customer expertise; and 100% have expertise at one or other level. This is an unusually strong concentration.

The result is intuitively credible: in businesses where brands, consumer choice, customer experience, loyalty, pricing, product proposition and competitive differentiation are fundamental business drivers, marketing capability is much more significantly represented within senior leadership.

The travel/hospitality and technology/media/information/digital sectors show a similarly high incidence of senior-management expertise.

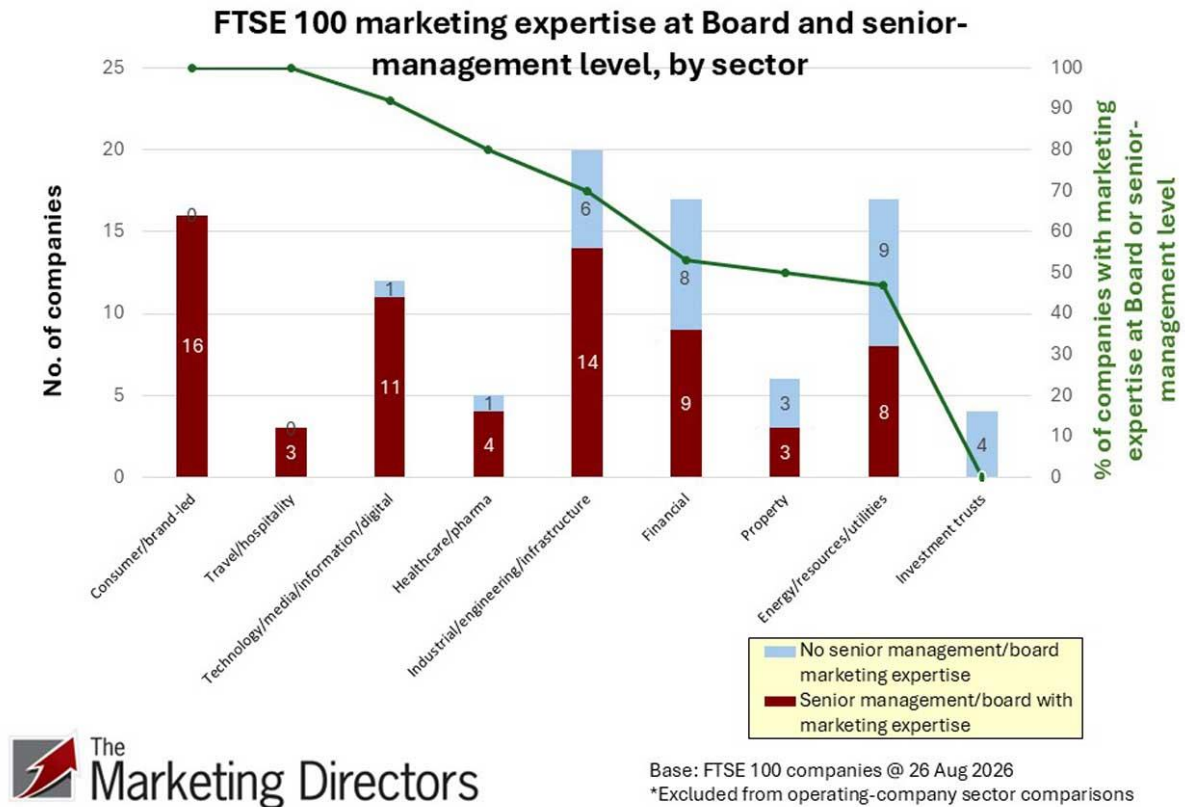
At the other end of the spectrum, the incidence is substantially lower in sectors such as energy/resources and financial services.

Marketing leadership is most deeply embedded where customers, brands and competitive differentiation are most central to the business model.

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Figure 1: FTSE 100 marketing expertise at Board and senior-management level, by sector



5. The Marketing Director is becoming a broader business leader

Our research set out to establish the incidence of senior management leading a substantial marketing function or equivalent marketing activity and revealed 30 senior marketing leaders (not on main Boards) rather than focus on a narrow definition of job titles. Some have familiar titles:

- Chief Marketing Officer;
- Marketing Director;
- Chief Customer & Marketing Officer.

Others operate under broader titles incorporating:

- customer;
- commercial;
- growth;
- data;

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- markets;
- technology;
- corporate affairs.

This matters because a title-based survey would increasingly underestimate marketing's influence.

This reveals the changing nature of the discipline. **Marketing appears increasingly embedded in broader commercial and customer leadership rather than always operating as a discrete or siloed corporate function.**

6. Why has the traditional Board Marketing Director disappeared?

There is no single explanation, and our research does not establish a direct causal link. However, the structure and responsibilities of corporate leadership have changed substantially since Professor Malcolm McDonald's study in 2007.

Boards and management have become more clearly differentiated

The UK Corporate Governance Code now distinguishes the Board's governance and oversight responsibilities from the management of the business. The FRC's current guidance emphasises that Boards should determine matters reserved to them while obtaining the information, expertise and advice needed to make effective decisions. The 2024 Code applies from financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2025, with the new Provision 29 applying from 1 January 2026.

This matters because a senior executive does not need to be a statutory director to have substantial influence over corporate strategy and performance.

Executive leadership has become an important layer between the Board and the business

Our research found a recognisable Executive, Management or Operating Board — or equivalent — in 86% of companies.

This is where many of today's senior functional leaders sit.

A CMO, Chief Customer Officer or Chief Growth Officer can therefore have significant responsibility for strategy, investment, customer experience, brand and commercial performance without being a statutory director of the PLC.

The Board's responsibilities have also broadened

Under Section 172 of the Companies Act 2006, directors must promote the success of the company while having regard to, among other things, long-term consequences, relationships with customers and suppliers, and the company's reputation.

This means that several issues traditionally associated with marketing — customers, relationships, reputation and long-term value — sit within the wider context of Board decision-making.

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There is no requirement per se to give marketing a statutory role on the Board.

Reporting and governance have become more explicit

Large companies have also had to explain, through Section 172 reporting, how directors consider these factors in their decision-making.

Taken together, these developments help explain why the absence of a specialist Marketing Director from the statutory Board does not necessarily indicate the absence of marketing influence.

Conclusions

The traditional Board Marketing Director may have disappeared, but marketing itself has not. What appears to have changed is where marketing expertise sits — increasingly distributed across CEOs, PLC Boards and senior executive management.

In 2007, the presence of a Marketing Director on the PLC Board was an important indicator of marketing's corporate standing. In 2026, that single measure tells only part of the story.

The evidence suggests that marketing has evolved from a discrete corporate function into a more widely distributed business capability.

The challenge for today's Marketing Director is therefore not simply to gain a seat at the table, but to demonstrate the customer, commercial, technological and strategic capability to influence the decisions being made around it.

Says Guy Tomlinson, co-author of *The Marketing Director's Handbook*:

"Three decades ago, marketing was often viewed primarily as a creative or promotional department, and its contribution to business value was frequently misunderstood and under-appreciated. Our experience is that increasing competition and digital disruption have changed that. As markets and products become more commoditised, the ability to understand customer intent, use data and technology intelligently, build distinctive customer experiences and drive growth has made marketing capability increasingly important at executive level."

"The modern Marketing Director is no longer simply a brand steward. They need to be a commercially minded business leader who can connect customer understanding, marketing expertise, technology and data to business performance."

Says Tim Arnold:

"There is a growing body of research into the relationship between marketing experience at Board level and business performance. We would expect the influence of marketing expertise to extend further as businesses and sectors become more competitive."

"That is particularly relevant in B2B markets, where marketing has sometimes been less prominent than in consumer-facing businesses. Companies operating with strong sales functions, for example,

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can add significant value by bringing marketing skills into the wider commercial organisation — developing a deeper understanding of customer needs, markets and demand rather than relying on sales activity alone.”

EDITOR'S NOTES

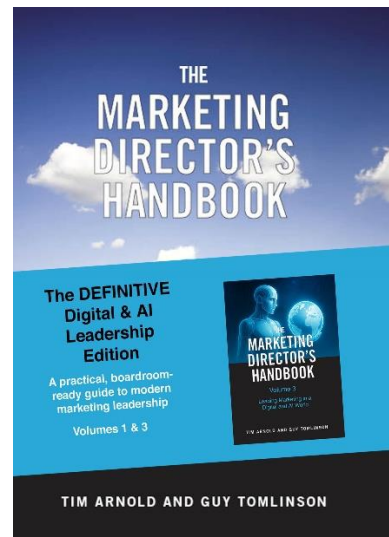
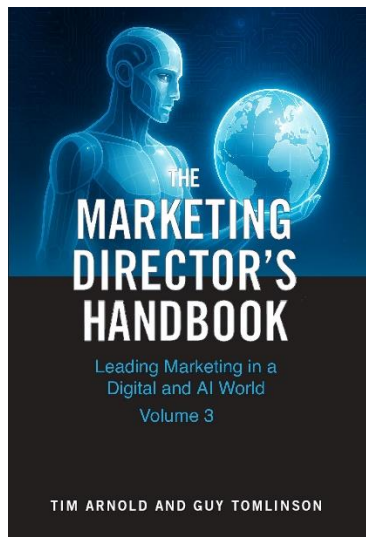
About The Authors and The Marketing Director's Handbook

The Marketing Directors is a customer-research-led and strategic marketing consultancy specialising in building businesses, products and services as brands.

The company publishes **The Marketing Director's Handbook** Volume 1 (ISBN 9780955886003 and 9780955886010, £49.99). This covers fundamental marketing principles and how to run a successful marketing team.

New The Marketing Director's Handbook Volume 3 – Leading Marketing in a Digital and AI World (ISBN 9780955886058, £19.99) publishes on September 21st.

The Marketing Director's Handbook – Definitive Leadership Edition Volumes 1 & 3 (ISBN 9780955886065, £59.99) also publishes on September 21st.



Co-authors, Guy Tomlinson and Tim Arnold are marketing directors and consultants who have worked with and helped grow some of the world's biggest companies and brands over the last 40 years.

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ANNEXE 1 - The numbers behind the findings

FTSE 100 — 2026

Measure	Companies %	
Marketing Director/equivalent on PLC Board (A1)	0	0%
CEO with substantial marketing/customer background (A2)	11	11%
Other PLC Board member with meaningful marketing/customer expertise (A3)	45	45%
No of companies with meaningful marketing/customer expertise on their Boards (A1 or A2 or A3)	47	47%
Senior marketing/customer leader outside PLC Board (B1)	30	30%
Other substantial marketing/brand/customer expertise in senior management (B3)	38	38%
Senior management expertise (B1 or B3)	56	56%
No of companies with Board OR senior management marketing representatives (A1 or A2 or A3 or B1 or B3)	70	70%

These figures are **company-level incidence**, not numbers of individual marketers. The categories overlap: for example, a company can have a CEO with marketing experience, a marketing-skilled NED and a CMO in its Executive Committee.

These findings clearly demonstrate the diffusion of marketing capability through companies.

A more revealing picture than "14 versus zero"

The 2007 and 2026 numbers are worth comparing but with the caveat that they are not identical measurements.

Question	2007	2026
Marketing Director on main PLC Board	14 reported in Prof McDonald's 2007 research	0
CEO with substantial marketing/customer background	Not measured in Prof McDonald's 2007 research	11
Other Board marketing/customer expertise	Not measured in Prof McDonald's 2007 research	45

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Question	2007	2026
Senior marketing leadership	Our retrospective research suggests incidence in numerous companies	30
Wider senior-management marketing/customer expertise	Not measured in Prof McDonald's 2007 research	38
Board or senior-management marketing expertise	Not measured in Prof McDonald's 2007 research	70

The key conclusion is therefore:

While the headline definition of a main Board Marketing Director shows a marked decline, this does injustice to the distribution of marketing expertise across today's corporate leadership.

What appears to have changed?

Several developments are likely to have contributed to the change.

1. The Board itself has changed

There is a fundamental distinction between a statutory PLC Board and the wider executive leadership of a company.

The UK Corporate Governance Code now explicitly emphasises the different responsibilities of the Board, the chair, executive directors and management. Its guidance describes the CEO as responsible for ensuring that the Board understands senior-management views and receives appropriate information from management.

The current Code applies to financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2025, with Provision 29 applying from 1 January 2026.

This makes it increasingly inappropriate to regard the statutory Board as a complete map of where executive influence resides.

2. Directors' responsibilities have become broader

The Companies Act 2006 codified directors' general duties, including the duty under Section 172 to promote the success of the company while having regard to long-term consequences, employees, relationships with suppliers and customers, community and environmental impacts, reputation and other matters.

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While Section 172 did **not** require companies to appoint a Marketing Director to their Board, the context within which directors exercise their responsibilities explicitly include **customer relationships, reputation and long-term value – all marketing considerations.**

This reinforces the broader responsibilities of the Board today, **while leaving the company free to determine how executive management and specialist expertise are organised.**

3. Reporting to the Board has become more extensive

Further, since 2019, large companies have been required to provide a Section 172 statement explaining how directors have had regard to the matters in Section 172(1) when making decisions.

The significance is not that "marketing is now legally represented" but more subtle.

The Board now operates in an environment in which customer, employee, supplier, environmental, reputational and other non-financial considerations form an explicit part of corporate reporting and decision-making.

That potentially reduces the significance of whether a specialist marketing executive personally occupies a statutory Board seat.

4. Executive management has become more important

Our research suggests that 86 of the 100 companies have a recognisable Executive, Management, Operating Board or equivalent senior-management body.

This is the layer in which many senior functional leaders now exercise their influence.

The FRC's governance guidance makes the distinction particularly clear: the Board governs and monitors, while management supplies information and carries out the business within the framework established by the Board.

This helps explain how a CMO can wield considerable influence over strategy, investment, customer experience, brand and commercial performance without being a statutory PLC director.

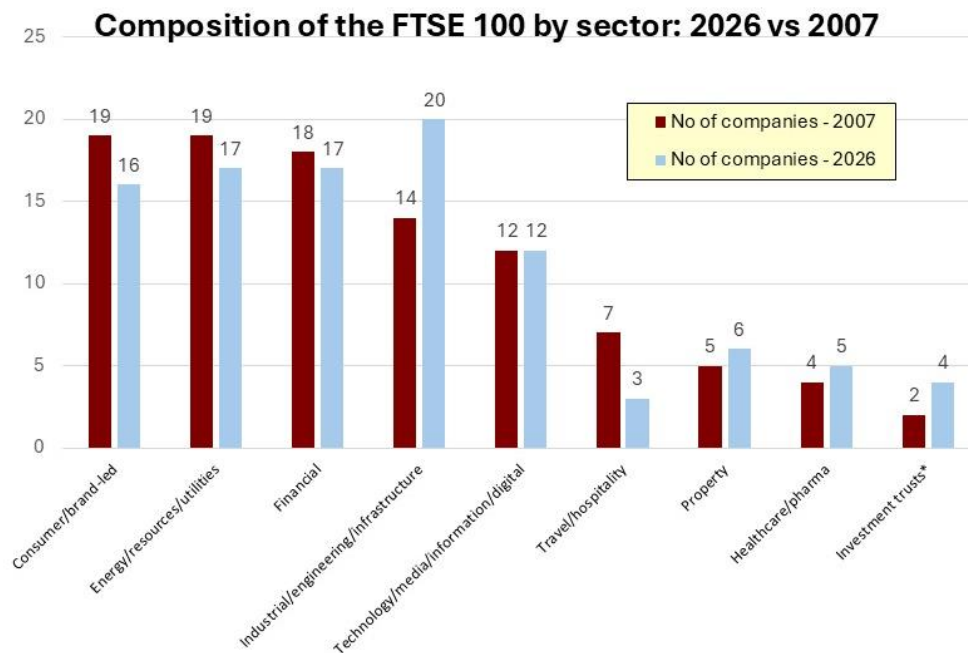
The FTSE 100 is a changing population, not a fixed panel of companies.

The composition of the FTSE 100 has changed materially since 2007. Our reconstructed sector classification shows fewer Consumer/brand-led companies and fewer Transport/Hospitality companies, alongside a larger Industrial/engineering/infrastructure representation.

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Figure 2: Composition of the FTSE 100 by sector: 2026 vs 2007



Base: FTSE 100 companies @ 26 Aug 2026
*Excluded from operating-company sector comparisons

The 2007 benchmark: what we can and cannot say

The widely reported 2007 figure of **14 FTSE 100 companies with a marketing director on the Board** remains useful historical context.

The historical material we reviewed also demonstrates why the terminology around "Board" was potentially confusing. A number of powerful marketing executives operated on Executive Committees or Management Boards while not being statutory directors. Our retrospective review found examples of senior marketers in a range of FTSE 100 companies operating within Executive Committees or equivalent senior-management structures, including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Unilever, Diageo, SABMiller, Cadbury Schweppes, Aviva, Barclays, ITV, IHG and Vodafone. Of the individuals we have been able to verify directly, two — Tim Mason at Tesco and Frank Rövekamp at Vodafone — were members of main PLC Boards.

The 14 figure is a published historical benchmark. Our research does not purport to replicate it. Instead, we have used it as the starting point for a broader 2026 investigation into where marketing expertise sits within FTSE 100 leadership.

What does the research really tell us?

The most interesting conclusion is arguably a paradox.



Widmere Barn, Widmere Lane, Marlow, SL7 3DF
www.themarketingdirectors.co.uk
E: hello@themarketingdirectors.co.uk T: 01628 473699

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In 2007:

Marketing Director → Board seat

was treated as an important measure of marketing's corporate standing.

In 2026:

Marketing expertise → distributed through Board, CEO and senior management

is a more realistic description of the situation.

It means that **the organisational location of marketing expertise has changed.**

And that leads to the central proposition emerging from this research:

Marketing may have moved from being primarily a discrete corporate function towards being a distributed business capability.

Implications for Marketing Directors

The findings have an obvious implication for today's marketing leader.

It suggests the successful marketing leader increasingly needs to demonstrate capability across:

customer → brand → data → digital → technology → commercial performance → growth → corporate strategy

The changing titles we found are symptomatic of that shift.

A Chief Customer & Marketing Officer, Chief Growth Officer or Chief Marketing & Data Officer may have a broader organisational remit than the traditional Marketing Director — and potentially greater day-to-day influence — despite not being a statutory PLC director.

ANNEX B — 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.

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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:

- 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)

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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)

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)

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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;
- 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:

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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:

- 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.

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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.
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.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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