

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

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

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

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.

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

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.

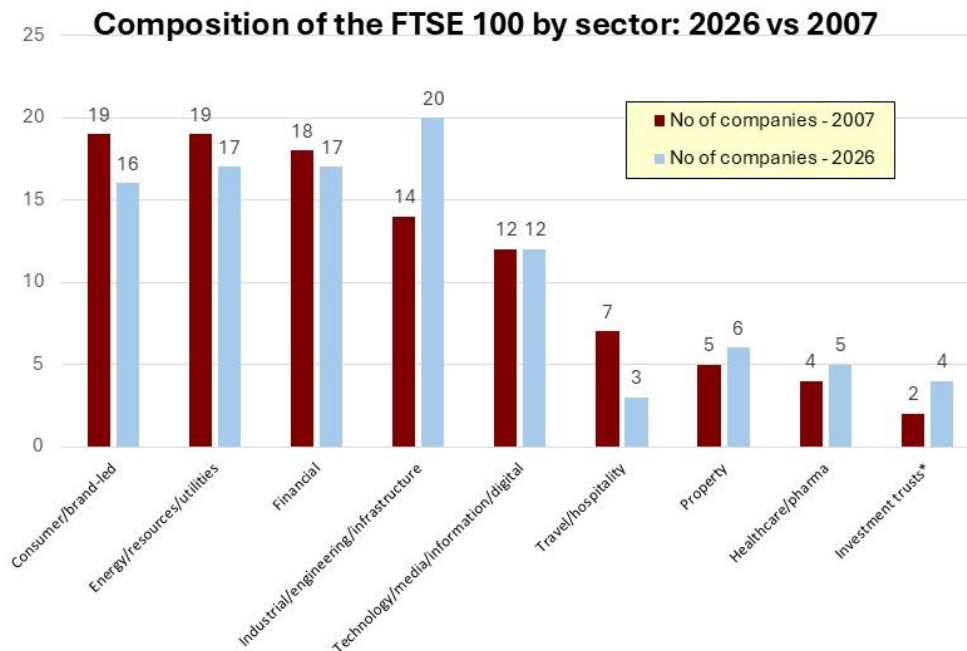
The FTSE 100 is a changing population, not a fixed panel of companies.

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.

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

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

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

A 2026 FTSE 100 Marketing Leadership Benchmark

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.

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