



Profile

What Are the Characteristics of the Ideal Loyalty Marketing Professional?

Mike Capizzi, Dean, The Loyalty Academy

As part of our work at The Loyalty Academy we are often asked by clients on the verge of launching a new or enhanced loyalty initiative to assist them in identifying marketing talent who can take over the on-going management of the program. Whether assessing the skills and abilities of inside associates already working for the client, or seeking to fill the position from the outside, questions often emerge about the ideal profile of a candidate for the position.

These clients are smart. First, they recognize the importance of having a dedicated staff member to run the loyalty initiative. Many clients skip this part and simply try to heap more work onto a current Marketing associate who already has departmental responsibilities. Second, clients asking for profile help have likely budgeted for the incremental payroll and benefits expense associated with the dedicated "Loyalty Manager." This expense is incremental to the program and must be part of the projected program ROI or business case evaluation.

Whether the program requires one person or more largely depends upon the program itself. The role of outside loyalty marketing service providers, the involvement of agency or communications specialists and the relationship between Marketing and IT for program operations and technical enablement will all play a pivotal role in assessing incremental head count needs. Regardless of the variables involved, someone in the client Marketing function must still be assigned loyalty program management responsibility.

And this someone can't be just anyone.

The ideal profile of a client-side Loyalty Program Manager - regardless of title and HR classification - is unique. We have seen many MarCom people who were excellent in their communications and promotional capacities fail miserably when it came to manage a loyalty initiative. We have also seen a host of technically inclined Project Management types struggle with the strategy, dynamics and consumer behavior attributes associated with these programs. We have seen Product Managers try, PR Managers give-it-a-go and Brand Managers attempt to make the transition from a single customer franchise to enterprise marketing. Most don't make it.

LOYALTY | ACADEMY

EDUCATION BY LOYALTY MARKETERS, FOR LOYALTY MARKETERS

The ideal candidate usually comes from prior experience in running a loyalty program. Hard to find and come by, these people may not be on the inside, but they may have vendor side experience in running a program. Multiple programs across a variety of clients and industries is ideal. Both strategic and tactical.

The perfect candidate is clearly a Marketing type - someone who has demonstrated understanding of category and brand dynamics with the unique ability to glean insight from measured customer behaviors. The understanding of customer behavior change - whether intuitive or data-driven - is probably the most important characteristic for loyalty program management success. This is clearly a strategic thinking skill.

Thus, the perfect candidate is analytical. This doesn't necessarily equate to statistical or mathematical prowess, although both skills help. It really equates to experience examining large volumes of customer data, setting relevant measurement plans and standards, extrapolating findings, reading/writing or interpreting data-rich reports that are the lifeblood of loyalty program evolution.

As a corollary skill, those comfortable with data analysis are often comfortable with technical disciplines. The loyalty director must be able to interpret, understand, sympathize with and help direct complicated technical processes associated with data capture, transaction processing, databases, rules engines, POS systems, web technologies, mobile platforms and customer care or redemption management systems.

Financial disciplines and understanding of business drivers is required. The good news - this skill can be improved with training and access to financial information. The bad news - some people just don't get it or shake whenever a financial report hits their desk.

So where does a client look for the ideal candidate?

Try the experience route first - preferably at a top rung loyalty marketing services provider. You may also find a client-side loyalty manager from another industry or one of your competitors. Use the free jobs board at www.wisemarketer.com to post your position and immediately reach 15,000 global professionals connected to the loyalty, CRM and data-driven marketing industry.

Marketing Research types are a surprising source for inside associates. Many are well versed in understanding customer behavior and can think strategically. Most are very good with data, comfortable with technology, and used to timelines. They can get MarCom help easily and they learn Marketing Finance a lot faster than most.

LOYALTY | ACADEMY

EDUCATION BY LOYALTY MARKETERS, FOR LOYALTY MARKETERS

Customer Care types are an even more surprising find, provided the Marketing skills and education are there. They have a strong customer centric view, understand behaviors, work well with both people and technology and can be analytical. They carry a strong sense of urgency and typically do not get flustered with problem solving tasks. They listen before they talk. They will likely need MarCom and Finance support at first, but you are probably well skilled in both of those areas already.

Field Operations Management associates should not be overlooked. They deal with customers every day and understand the drivers of satisfaction, meeting expectations and delivering on a positive customer experience. They are typically quite familiar with POS and payment systems technology, comfortable in both generating and using operational and revenue/profitability reports, know the competitive landscape and totally get the whole financial picture – at least at their field level. And they can manage people. While they may need some MarCom assistance, or may not have had much experience in digital technologies, those assets are likely available elsewhere in the firm.

Finally, the total lack of formalized loyalty marketing education is what led us to the formation of The Loyalty Academy. If you find someone with the distinction of *Certified Loyalty Marketing Professional™* (CLMP) attached to their credentials you'll know that they have a solid foundation in the behavioral, analytical, technical and financial disciplines required to be successful. If you find someone who needs to bolster their skills in a specific area of loyalty, we have the courses, tools and faculty to help them on their journey.

Michael T. Capizzi is the Director of Education and a Member of the Board of Regents at The Loyalty Academy. He is a Certified Loyalty Marketing Professional and directs the Academy's educational programs, faculty, certification standards and research efforts. A 45 year veteran of the Marketing Services industry with deep background in consumer behavior, CRM and loyalty marketing, Mike also operates Marketing Strategists LLC, an independent marketing consulting firm.