

What's the difference between a head of marketing and a head of growth?

You've probably heard of a Head of Growth, the new kid on the block that is being compared to the Head of Marketing. Chances are you might also wonder what the actual difference is between them because it almost seems that they do the same things.

I'm regularly asked by startup founders what these roles are, what they do, and what profile to look out for. As an on-demand growth marketing team, when clients want to internalise a head of marketing, I'm often the one they ask for help.

I understand where the confusion lies in understanding the type of profile startups should look for. So here's a breakdown of the key differences between both, more information on what a head of growth is and when you should look to hire one.

The Head of Marketing

It is undeniable that a shift is taking place between traditional marketing and growth marketing. The approach remains quite different even if they share

similar methods, a good example of this is Performance Marketing.

Growth has its data, and marketing has its creativity. Compared to the growth approach, the traditional marketing approach has a larger focus on brand development. A Head of Marketing will hone in on developing your top of the funnel exclusively.

Typical projects are everything from PR (print, radio, podcasts etc...) to referrals and anything offline (print advertising). A more digital approach to marketing are projects focused on content creation and distribution through social media and blogs. Depending on your industry, business and objectives, a Head of Marketing might also manage a certain level of analytics. This person could also be responsible for projects involving email marketing, SEO etc...

In an ideal world, a Head of Marketing will both create and implement the strategy. But it's not always possible or ideal for one person to do everything that's required.

The Head of Growth

Growth marketing is a marketing methodology that places a high value on goal-setting, data analytics, as well as testing and experimentation.

This approach is entirely data-driven. It is the fundamental element that will drive any project from its inception to its continuous optimisation. So this methodology is very much focused on testing and experimenting. At first glance, one can be sceptical but rest assured, as with any growth marketing project, they should always be scoped with clearly-defined objectives.

Indeed, a key differentiator between growth marketing and the traditional approach is the funnel focus. Growth marketing prioritises projects to meet revenue-oriented KPIs. It works to optimise the most significant growth levers throughout the entire funnel. There's no point in optimising the top of the funnel if leads aren't converting into buying customers down the funnel.

A Head of Growth can understand the challenges throughout the funnel and plan strategies accordingly. A Head of Growth will be a generalist who can therefore create strategies and lead implementation. There's no point in looking for a profile that can do everything from marketing automation to SEO to meet your lead generation objectives.

A Head of Growth's primary concerns will be customer acquisition, activation, and retention. Depending on what you're looking to achieve, it's essential to determine the responsibility they'll need to undertake. Essentially, they'll be able to track, report and optimise key growth metrics across your entire

organisation.

When should you hire a Head of Growth?

A Head of Growth should only be hired once you've reached a sufficient product-market fit.

Different kinds of Heads of Growth are worth considering depending on the stage of your solution's journey. A product-oriented profile is naturally more relevant if you need some support in reaching product-market fit.

Suppose you're ready to go to market. In that case, a profile with solid experience in creating go-to-market strategies and growth forecasts would be a potential avenue to explore.

Additionally, it is essential to understand that a Head of Growth will have the most impact when focused on creating the overarching growth strategy and identifying growth levers. Each Growth profile you will come across will have some channel-specific expertise. In the future, your best investment is to work with channel-specific experts that the Head of Growth can manage.

When should you recruit a Head of marketing?

Now that we have clarified what a Head of Marketing is, the follow-up question to answer is when to actually hire one. As with a Head of Growth, the first part of deciding if it's the right time is to have achieved a certain level of product-market fit.

Naturally, as with any hiring decision, the budget aspect is essential. Suppose you hire a Head of Marketing too early without the budget to invest in their projects. As a result, they cannot leverage their skills in Performance Marketing or PR campaigns. In that case, the chances of losing this person will be significant.

If you have the budget and are in need of a C-level position (slightly different to a Head of) to help you finetune your strategy, a CMO could support you in understanding how to market your product. Having an experienced CMO can be beneficial to building the foundations of marketing further down the line and pushing your startup forward. Bear in mind that you will need to hire more members for this person to execute their missions. It brings us back to the question of affordability. Is this something you will be able to manage?

As such, the best time to recruit a CMO is usually following a series A., when you will be in a position to invest in your startup further to scale faster.

A Head of Marketing and a Head of Growth have fundamentally different approaches, one is brand-focused and the other data-driven. They complement one another as your growth team's research and data-driven work can support the more exhaustive brand awareness projects.

So both teams can work hand in hand together. But suppose you're looking to hire a Head of Growth. In that case, I strongly recommend understanding the mechanics of your business, your starting point, where you want to go and what you can afford to do at this stage.

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