

Marketing Career Primer

2017–2018



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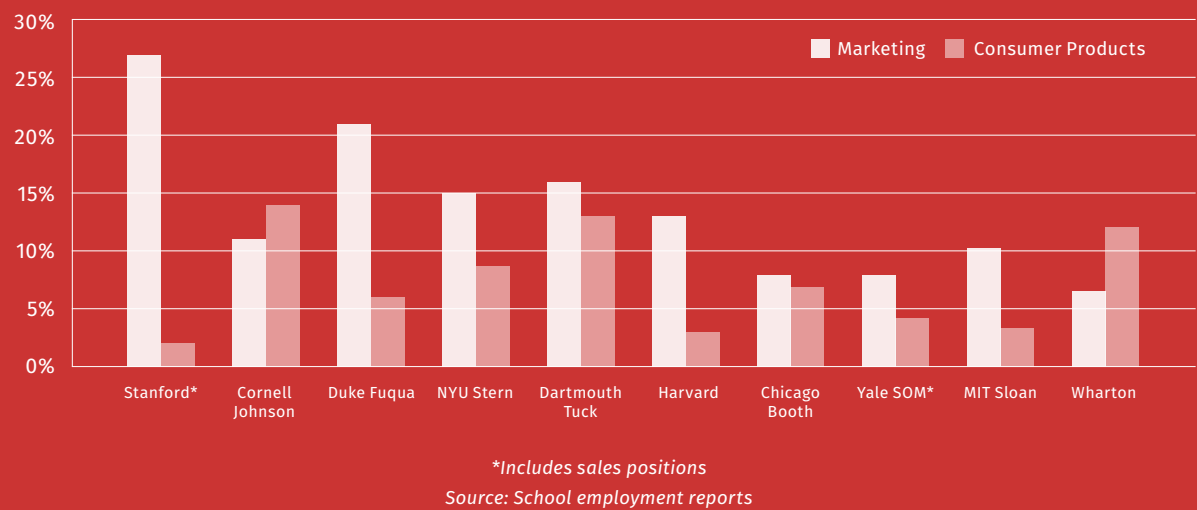
A brand (or a group of multiple brands) serves as the public face of a company, its employees, its strategies, its reputation, and—of course—its products. Brands can inspire, delight, or disappoint. They can be life changing, culture changing, or mind-set shifting. A brand will command loyalty—or not. It will command respect—or not. The strongest brands are often examples of marketing genius that have had a direct and measurable impact on people’s lives in the form of the products consumers use every day.



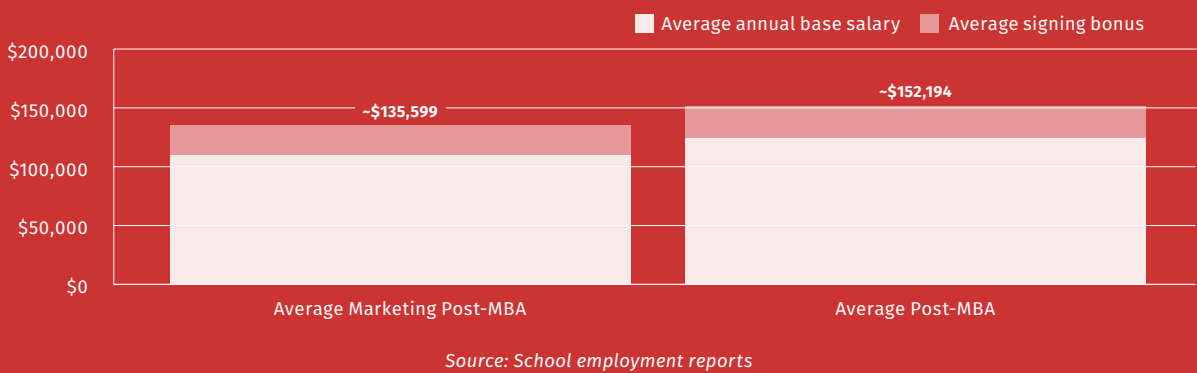
Marketers are ultimately responsible for the success of these brands and others like them. So, if you are interested in a career in marketing and brand management, you may one day be able to run or create brands that rival these for space in consumers’ hearts—and wallets!

What do the data say about marketing recruiting?

Percentage of the MBA Class of 2016
Taking Marketing and Brand Management Jobs



Compensation for Marketing Positions

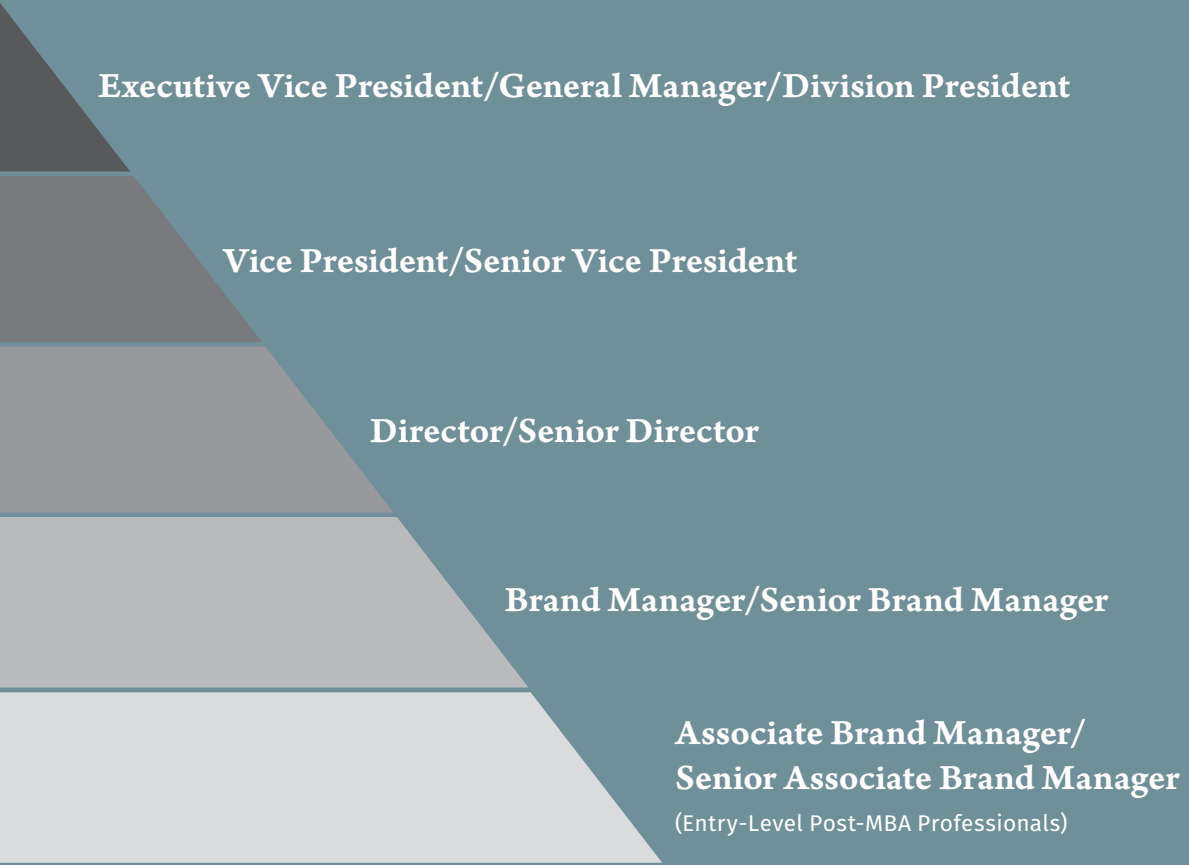


Although entry-level positions in marketing and brand management may not offer the base salary or bonus potential that some other industries do (e.g., banking or consulting), many other advantages make this career path a top choice among MBA graduates. In particular, those in the field appreciate the ability to make a meaningful and tangible difference in the everyday lives of consumers and to gain immediate opportunities for leadership, management, and strategic decision making. And, on the whole, those in this field can expect predictable work schedules and a better work/life balance than in most MBA “peer” careers.



The Org Chart

Although specific titles vary from company to company, brand management professionals progress through a number of roles over the course of a career in the industry, ultimately leading to executive management.



Associate Brand Manager (ABM)/Senior Associate Brand Manager:

As an ABM, you will probably be one of the most junior members of the marketing team and responsible for some of the less glamorous responsibilities. You will likely track sales, manage the brand’s budget, and gather consumer consumption data to create reports for senior leadership. However, you will also be able to make a meaningful impact on the business through such responsibilities as managing graphics changes on packaging, creating a promotional event, or developing a specific product design for a retailer. Although you may not have direct reports, you will begin to manage your cross-functional team members indirectly and possibly gain senior-level exposure even in this entry-level role.

Brand Manager (BM)/Senior Brand Manager:

A promotion to BM—the first “stripe” you can earn in the industry—typically occurs after you have worked as an ABM/senior ABM for approximately three to four years. As a BM, you will begin to truly flex your strategic muscles, often by developing long-term brand assessments and plans that include multiyear brand strategies, financials, innovation concepts, and customer partnerships. You will become the figurative CEO of your brand, but multiple executives in more senior roles will assess your work and provide a “cushion” for your judgment, because their buy-in is generally required for major decisions. Travel is a small component of this job; the BM’s attendance at ad/photo shoots, customer consultations, and meetings at the manufacturing plant is expected but somewhat infrequent.

Director/Senior Director:

At these levels, you will be responsible for a large team that typically consists of several brands or even a few categories. As a director, you may run three to five brands in a category (e.g., within the powdered beverages category at Kraft Foods Group, you may oversee the Crystal Light, Kool-Aid, and Country Time Lemonade brands). You will determine the overall category strategy and facilitate close communication and efficiencies among related teams and brands. You also will be responsible for efficient and effective upward communication to senior management regarding brand activities and ensuring the greater category P&L commitments are met.

Vice President (VP)/Senior Vice President (SVP) and Executive Vice President (EVP)/General Manager (GM)/Division President:

As you progress from director to VP/SVP to EVP/GM/division president, you will have ever-increasing financial responsibilities, decision authority, and team management requirements. As a VP/SVP, you may manage two to four categories (e.g., in the laundry and home care business unit at Henkel, you may manage businesses consisting of the air care, hard surface cleaners, and insecticides categories)—depending on the company, of course. As an EVP/GM/division president, you may run an entire division encompassing a range of business units and categories. In addition, you will be responsible for ensuring that the group’s strategy is closely aligned with the overall company’s financial and strategic goals. Travel is more common for individuals in senior positions, because attending customer meetings with executives to pitch entire categories of products or discuss division-influencing issues becomes even more critical in the marketing and sales process.



What is the job?

In the simplest terms, marketing consists of identifying a consumer’s needs, determining which products or services meet those needs, and uniquely positioning and communicating the value of a brand or product/service to promote sales. Although the marketing function exists at every company—from pharmaceuticals to financial services firms to technology firms and more—a particular culture and organization will significantly affect the role of a marketer.

The predominant recruitment opportunity for marketing-focused MBA candidates is in brand management. On the surface, brand management is all about communication—determining how, where, and in what ways to connect consumers with the company’s brand. A BM creates a marketing strategy by identifying the consumer target (i.e., the individual[s] who will consume or purchase the product), developing a message for the brand, and then managing communications with creative agencies to develop advertising, copy, and promotional events. Beneath the surface, however, brand management is also about project management and strategy. BMs develop strategies across finance, sales, operations, and communications to leverage or mitigate opportunities/threats; execute their strategies; and then, finally, deliver on their financial or volumetric goals. In fact, one reason many MBAs pursue a career in brand management is that it often provides the opportunity for them to “own” the entire life cycle of a product/brand. Think of a brand manager as the CEO of the product, often with profit and loss (P&L) responsibilities.

Specific responsibilities within the discipline certainly vary (which, in our opinion, results in a very exciting career!). On any given day, a BM regularly works with his/her cross-functional partners on multiple projects, such as the following:

- Planning focus groups with the market research department
- Revising product graphics with the packaging department
- Developing financials for the upcoming planning season with the finance department
- Working with the operations department to understand how to cut costs at a factory without compromising the brand's quality
- Forecasting demand with the logistics department
- Meeting with senior management to discuss portfolio strategy
- Consulting with the company's sales team to understand recent changes that might affect product placement

No, really, what is the job?

The work of a brand management professional is interesting, diversified, and reasonably fast paced. Individuals in this role typically encounter leadership opportunities at an early stage in their career. Post-MBA associate BMs regularly communicate with senior management about various assignments ranging from a product’s competitive landscape to a distribution channel strategy recommendation (i.e., where the product is sold) to a price change analysis.

To help you envision what a career in marketing and brand management is like, we asked individuals from a variety of companies to share some of their personal experiences on the job:

“One of my favorite responsibilities is developing a marketing brief: any time a brand manager needs to ask an agency to develop marketing materials, it starts with a brief. So I spend time building a memo that articulates exactly what is needed—it includes the project objective, the budget, known consumer insights, the single most important thing to communicate in the creative work, and the reason to believe the brand has the right to communicate that point!”
Brand Manager, Food Industry

“Within marketing in the pharma world, our efforts start with the patients in mind and understanding their “journey” as it relates to their health condition and experience with our product. Because the pharmaceutical industry is so regulated, each tactic is carefully reviewed by colleagues in medical, regulatory, and legal roles to ensure all messaging accurately communicates and is supported by our clinical trial data and is balanced with safety information.”
Director, Consumer-Pharmaceutical Industry

“Two years ago, I led the team responsible for getting our brand ready for its appearance on The Celebrity Apprentice! I needed to brief the entertainment team from the show on the brand itself so they could understand its key messages, work with the show’s team on the content of the episode, and manage all logistics for the taping—from product tastings to props to management team appearances.”
Senior Brand Manager, Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG)

“Every day is different with a brand management job, which is part of the appeal! In large strokes, my time is divided between managing the current-day business (i.e., making sure all of our ongoing deal promotions within Target are executed—and executed well!), managing my advertising agency partners to ensure our creatives will be ready to show our vice president for upcoming management meetings, and reviewing last week’s sales data and results—and thinking about and planning for the future during our annual planning process.

Brand Manager, CPG

“I worked to develop a strategy to target active health-conscious men for a new water/energy brand. It was essential that we launch quickly to beat our competition, so we gathered basic survey data, worked with a few key retailers for shelf placement, and launched a viral campaign to build awareness. We then developed an extensive promotional campaign, sampling the product at the right athletic events—and then just launched! Such a thrill to see something go from concept to shelf and in consumers’ hands in a few short months.

Senior Brand Manager, Beverage Industry

“The biggest project I am working on at the moment is developing new bottle structures and label designs for every variant within a global spirits brand in all markets around the world. Aside from the excitement of being at the forefront of determining the look and feel of a brand around the globe, it also requires leadership skills to manage the implementation within a highly complex logistical operation (i.e., multicountry, multilanguage, multiplant), which I personally find rewarding, challenging, and exciting.

VP, Spirits Industry

What is good about the job?

Brand management fuses creativity and commerce. However, a job in this area offers many additional benefits beyond satisfying both sides of your brain:

- The ability to create a tangible product's strategy and execute on it
- The opportunity to conduct market research with the consumers of the business's products, goods, or services (Focus groups can be incredibly interesting!)
- Exposure to many different levels of management and functions within an organization
- The opportunity to see the final product of your brainpower (Seeing your work on an advertising campaign come to life on television, in a magazine, or on an Internet home page is always a big thrill!)
- Direct impact on P&L outcomes (You will get the chance to execute the strategic campaign that you conceived and witness its direct impact on sales.)
- More limited and predictable hours and less travel compared to other prestigious employers of MBAs





But surely the job has pain points, right?

Marketing roles do involve some potential drawbacks:

- When working for some of the larger brands, senior management will likely make the final decision on your projects—even if you have invested many hours gathering and analyzing data and brainstorming ideas.
- If brand or even company sales are weaker than expected, creative campaign elements are sometimes deprioritized and budgets cut to optimize the brand’s financial position—after you have spent time developing and executing the marketing campaign.
- Because many aspects of the job are cross functional in nature and deliverables are a true team effort, it can be difficult to “shine” individually and thus gain suitable credit on some large-scale projects.
- Although brand management does not always involve “all-nighters,” this job is certainly not a 9-to-5 position. Late nights are required at times to tackle problems that arise and to manage the wide variety of projects under a BM’s responsibility.

What is the secret to success?

Strong analytical and leadership skills are critical success factors within brand management. You will need to analyze data to understand the brand’s competitive situation, sales position, and/or financial profitability. In addition, you must regularly persuade senior management to approve your ideas and recommendations and get buy-in across the organization. You will also lead your cross-functional team and direct reports, so your ability to collaborate with your staff and coworkers to grow the business will make or break your marketing career. Finally, you must possess strong communication skills because you will regularly deliver presentations to groups of all sizes—from sharing recommendations in a one-on-one meeting with a vice president to presenting a progress report in front of 500 people at the company’s annual sales meeting.

Success in brand management is highly correlated with strong strategic thinking and creative abilities. You will often be tasked with solving complex strategic problems (e.g., rescuing a rapidly failing but highly profitable business), so the capacity to understand a situation, create a plan to gather detailed information, and establish the brand’s strategic direction is critical. Finally, you will continually evaluate a brand’s marketing and communications campaigns and develop new messaging, so your aptitude for thinking creatively will provide opportunities to succeed.



Who are the big fish?

In general, the brand management world for most MBAs centers on CPG companies such as P&G, Unilever, PepsiCo, and Johnson & Johnson (J&J). One benefit of working for a large conglomerate like these companies is that as an ABM or BM, you will likely work on multiple brands on a rotating basis (not usually simultaneously), perhaps in different divisions across a company. Ultimately, you will also gain exposure to a variety of skill sets along the way, preparing you for greater success and impact later in your career—even if you switch to working for smaller, lesser-known brands. Brand size and budgets will differ, and your responsibility and focus will subsequently shift. The following snapshots provide insight into a few leading names in CPG.



J&J is a leading CPG company focused on health care. A J&J BM will leverage his/her marketing skills in an environment where the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) and other health product regulators are large stakeholders in the communication, innovation, and manufacturing of products, which is quite different from other CPG companies. This added component of the job provides an exciting challenge and, arguably, its own personal fulfillment; when one manages brands such as Tylenol, Sudafed, Band-Aid, and Johnson’s Baby, he/she has a direct impact on consumers’ health and well-being.



With significant spending in support of its flagship beverage brands in the entertainment and sports worlds, PepsiCo can provide BMs an exciting opportunity to gain exposure in these areas. Although this opportunity is neither unique to PepsiCo nor typical for every PepsiCo marketing professional, it remains a draw for the company. Without direct P&L ownership across the board (ownership level varies by division), PepsiCo BMs may spend less time on typical brand management tasks (e.g., sales) and instead become deeply involved in creative and promotional strategies and innovation.



The stalwart in the CPG world, P&G remains a predominant marketing employer for MBAs. The company is historically renowned for its extensive “classical” training of BMs, teaching its employees the foundation of brand management and imbuing them with reliably strong skills. Located in Cincinnati, Ohio, the company markets brands such as Pampers, Olay, and Bounty and is known for offering its employees a relatively good work/life balance.



With more than 400 brands, Unilever provides its BMs with a significant opportunity for a variety of experiences. ABMs and BMs can rotate within the company's multiple categories, from food (e.g., Ben & Jerry's) and beverages (e.g., Lipton) to home and personal care (e.g., Dove). With headquarters in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands, Unilever is a globally focused company; many of its brand professionals have the opportunity to work abroad for a period of time.

Who are other notable players in this space?

Although in-house or “client side” brand and marketing roles are most commonly recruited at business schools, a number of other specialized areas exist.

Marketing (Non-CPG)

Marketing positions in the tech industry (e.g., at Google, Apple, Facebook) are coveted by MBAs. In fact, given that four of the top five brands listed in [BrandZ™'s Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands 2017](#) are tech brands, interest in this area will likely only increase. In addition, the entertainment (e.g., Warner Bros., Disney), retail (e.g., Walmart, Amazon.com), financial services (e.g., American Express, Citi), and luxury (e.g., Gucci, Prada) industries offer excellent marketing opportunities. Some of these companies may not conduct on-campus recruiting at many business schools, however, so interested candidates must often take the initiative to identify and pursue available positions through an “off-campus” job search.

Agencies

Advertising and consumer promotions agency jobs are some of the more typical marketing positions not based in brand management. Conglomerates such as Publicis Groupe, Omnicom Group, and WPP are composed of subsidiaries that focus on everything from advertising, public relations, and research to segment-specific, digital, mobile, social, and Internet search marketing. Professionals may enter the industry in the consumer strategy (e.g., supporting client-side BMs on target and messaging strategy), creative development (e.g., creating the ads and related copy), or ad production side of an agency. However, we should note that agencies are not heavily laden with MBAs. Most professionals in this industry tend to enter an agency after college and work their way up or around different firms.

Market Research

Market researchers are based either within a company or at a research firm or agency. A good market researcher is an expert at using both quantitative tools (e.g., survey data, field trials) and qualitative tools (e.g., focus groups, interviews, in-home observation appointments called ethnographies) to uncover key consumer insights. These insights are the foundation for all consumer-facing work the BM will develop; the market researcher must know the consumer inside and out. In addition, the market researcher can dig deep into causes for a brand's recent successes or failures and help the BM identify the root issues involved using the data and information the researcher commands. Market researchers are both the consumer's champion and the brand's go-to repository of consumer data and knowledge.

How do I get **the job?**

No matter which brand management position you pursue, the qualifications necessary to land the role are often very similar. You will need to demonstrate to a company's recruiting team (often consisting of current brand management leaders in the company) that you possess the following:

- 1. An understanding of marketing's role in your target organization and how the function contributes to that organization's success**
- 2. The ability to communicate sound reasoning for decisions, ideas, plans, and processes to stakeholders (both senior and junior)**
- 3. Strong creative instincts and analytical ability**
- 4. A passion for understanding what motivates people to buy certain brands, products, or services**

Most brand management recruiters do not require a hard-and-fast minimum GMAT score or GPA. However, hiring managers will expect you to have a higher level of marketing and general management acumen than candidates for positions in other functions possess—and you will demonstrate this via your answers to marketing case questions during the recruiting process. The key to preparation is having a solid interest in and understanding of brand strategy (i.e., how to successfully target consumers and position a message to those consumers).

To this end, research specific products and messaging campaigns from prospective employers so you are familiar with the impact of their marketing efforts. Think about the audience the brand is targeting and what the company is trying to say. Also, consider recent product innovations as well as the consumer needs these new products have met. You could be asked to identify your favorite product (and why it is so), to discuss the worst product launch you have ever seen (and why it failed), and to describe a piece of advertising, its target consumer, and its messaging or positioning.

Networking with your target companies is also key. This includes attending company-sponsored events, befriending classmates who have worked at these companies, and capitalizing on every opportunity to meet representatives through informal and club offerings on campus, site visits, treks, and even informational interviews you schedule yourself by leveraging your personal network. Marketing is a team-based and collaborative discipline, where you may be working with the same team of people for a period of anywhere from six months to two years or more. Therefore, you should familiarize yourself with the brands and team members with whom you may be working to demonstrate knowledge about the company, its brands, and its people to pave the way for your success in interviews. (LinkedIn goes a long way!)

If marketing/brand management is your chosen field for a summer internship or post-MBA position, get started now building your network, conducting informational interviews with classmates and friends at target firms, creating a brand management-targeted resume, and preparing for case interviews. To learn more about how an MBA Career Coach can assist you in securing your desired position through elite training, targeted skill development, and expert guidance as you navigate the recruitment process, schedule a free consultation with us at www.mbamission.com.

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