

Effective Face Time A Key To Enhancing Teamwork

By Steve Maul

There are few areas in corporate life today that require more teamwork than the Marketing function. Marketing has so many areas of discipline: Market Segmentation, Product Planning, Pricing, Product Launch, MarCom, Sales Support and the list goes on. These areas of specialization require an additional level of teamwork that more difficult to achieve than in many other areas of the organization.

An additional pressure on achieving maximum teamwork in Marketing is that most organizations are working with leaner staffs than they did just a few years ago. Today's battle cry in most organizations is "Do More With Less". While technology can help us accomplish this in some areas, much of what marketers do involves brainstorming, idea sharing – activities that often involve a higher degree of interaction with others – in other words, face time.

But face time for the mere sake of getting together is often wasteful and non-productive. It's important to remember that each of us only gets 168 hours each week and in those hours, we need to find the optimal balance amongst competing pressures - work, family, social activities, recreation and sleep. By necessity, time management has become one of the most important skills we can bring to work each day.

A recent nationwide survey of more than 600 workers reported that that the number one (with 27%) time wasting activity was meetings*. Because Marketing, by definition has interactions with so many other areas of the business, we must take a look at how we can either reduce the time needed for meetings or make them less wasteful of the most limited resource each of us has – time.

While entire volumes have been written on time management and effective meetings, this article is going to focus on the few things that each of us can do immediately to improve the effectiveness of our face time with others and reduce any time waste when we meet with others. Consider the following when you are arranging or attending your next meeting:

Objectives Clearly state the topic and purpose of the meeting, who else will be attending and the overall expected outcome of the meeting. If there are particular materials or information needed or expected, notify the appropriate attendees in advance.

- Invitations** Keep the list as short as is absolutely necessary. Are people being invited due to necessity or out of politeness or politics? A lengthy invitation list often indicates that the leader doesn't want to exclude anyone, not that each attendees presence is actually needed.
- Leadership** Every meeting should have one individual who is leading it, keeping everyone on track. If the meeting starts to go off course, the leader should bring it back quickly and firmly. There's no end to what we *could* talk about – let's remember what we're *here* to talk about.
- Minutes** It sounds old fashion, but it works. Someone should be responsible for taking note of the decisions made and assignments agreed to. These should be communicated soon after each meeting so everyone has a reminder and you'll spend less time rehashing old issues in subsequent meetings.
- Necessity** Don't have standing meetings unless they're absolutely necessary (e.g. for project status sessions, etc.). Call a meeting when it's needed, but if you're meeting more out of routine than necessity, you're wasting time.
- Commitment** If the meeting is scheduled for an hour, keep it to an hour. It's ultimately the leader's responsibility to manage the expectations, content and time for each meeting.

Remember, just because everyone's already in the office and the conference room is empty, meetings aren't free. From a hard currency perspective, they can cost thousands of dollars in salary alone for every meeting you call, but more importantly, if they're not relevant and perceived as valuable by those who attend, the bigger cost is that they affect employee morale and team performance – and the reduce productivity, eating unnecessarily into that 168 hours we each have every week. With today's leaner organizations, teamwork is often the saving grace to actually meeting deadlines and achieving the objectives set forth for a marketer. Use the team effectively and their time wisely and they'll be ready to attend your meetings gladly.

* The other most mentioned causes of wasted time at work were unnecessary interruptions, socializing too much with coworkers and disorganized work area.