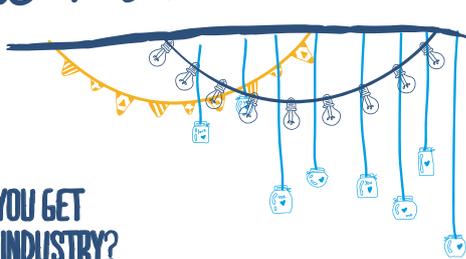


TALKING WITH

Anne-Marie McConnon

Anne-Marie McConnon, Head of Marketing at BNY Mellon Investments talks marketing, the industry's role in society and cutting through the jargon with Richard Romer-Lee, Managing Director at Square Mile.



HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE INDUSTRY?

I fell into the industry and fell in love with it. I went to Edinburgh (from Ireland) for the comedy festival and didn't go home. I got a job as a marketing assistant at Scottish Equitable – it was great training as I did lots of different roles in marketing including design and print, channel marketing – and even organised the post for the marketing department at one stage. I started at the bottom and worked my way up slowly which helped me later in my career when building teams, as I understood the functions from the ground up and I appreciate the value that every individual brings.

SO, WHAT DOES MARKETING MEAN?

I think the perception of marketing in asset management is somewhat outdated. It is not the colouring in department! Marketing strategies must be conceived with the digital nature of today's audiences in mind. It is less about digital marketing and more about marketing in a digital world. We need the systems, technologies and operations in place to enable personalised and on-the-fly communications.

This changes the role of marketing in the organisation as we can provide real insights into clients and their behaviour, and in turn nurture them and provide qualified leads to sales. This transforms the department into a revenue generating centre. Marketing in asset management has some catching up to do with other industries. In many businesses, the marketing department is an order-taking, tactical function that runs on the hamster wheel of demands – trying to keep up with orders for new collateral etc. Today it's about working within a networked organisation, integrated into the thinking and workings of a business.



WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF BEING A SUCCESSFUL MARKETER?

Getting a buzz out of it and wanting to make a difference. You need to be passionate, as you should be in whatever you do. Creativity is at the heart but there is so much more to marketing now, and you need the science to back it up. Good marketers need to understand products, distribution and clients. Today, successful Marketing departments need a range of skill sets; data analysts, operations, editorial teams, project managers, creative types, all seeking to tell the right stories to the right audiences.

What companies want is changing too. CEOs want marketing to report on board relevant metrics – are we helping to retain customers, or sell more. They want the marketing departments to spend their budgets more diligently and effectively and to reach more clients. They want profitable customers today and tomorrow and marketing should provide that insight.

WHAT CAN THE ASSET MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY DO TO GAIN MORE TRUST FROM INVESTORS?

There's a lot that can be done. Improve transparency for clients particularly around fees. But I also think we need to increase transparency around diversity - and look to pro-actively improve. Diversity of thought is also important - so we need to look beyond economics degrees. We should stop talking about products, using jargon, tell more stories and look at how we can help investors look after their financial lives.





What about how companies behave?

Businesses in our industry have an important role to play in society. We should understand our role in the world and do more good. We need to create more personality in our businesses. It is well documented that brands that have a clear social purpose actually perform better – helping to attract and retain the best talent, and leading to more engaged and satisfied customers.

AND WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO PEOPLE STARTING OUT?

Always put your hand up. Play to your strengths – don't be afraid to be yourself. Surround yourself with talented people who can do what you can't. Try to be truly 'present' in what you do. I give it my all when I am at work, but when I go home I leave the office behind and focus on my daughter 100% - no Blackberry surfing.



WHAT ARE YOU PROUD OF?

My family. Not just my husband, daughter and one on the way, but also my three brothers. We lost both our parents inside a year and I became a surrogate mum to them in some ways. I am now the one who does the parent speeches at weddings and gives advice on their girlfriends' Christmas presents.

I am also proud to be involved in Investment 2020. It's an industry initiative that gives apprenticeships to young people from backgrounds other than the usual hunting grounds. It targets the back office, such as marketing, operations, legal, financial etc. as opposed to the investment floor, where a lot of focus is already placed. It makes a real difference, with 75% of the young people going on to get a job with the companies where they do their apprenticeships, and nearly all of the remaining finding jobs within the industry. I had to work my way up and I love being able to give some of that back.

WHAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR CAREER?

I was in the team at M&G that launched Bond Vigilantes. It was Jim Leaviss' idea, but at the time there was great resistance, as some thought that the fund managers should focus solely on running their portfolios. We had great conviction in the idea and believed in it, and just to be part of something like that was amazing. Its success is down to the passion of the fund managers and how well they write. I am also hugely proud to be involved in some of the game-changing and award-winning work at BNY Mellon including initiatives such as our sponsorship of the boat race and achieving diversity for the women's race for the first time in over 150 years and our recent donation of our rights to CRUK – a world first in the field of corporate sponsorship.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU SEE FOR THE INDUSTRY?

One of the biggest challenges is attracting and retaining talent. Technology is perceived to be sexier than say, financial services, and by 2025, 70% of the workforce will be millennials. Perhaps the broader application of technology – fintech – will help attract more of this talent but we need to communicate what's great about this industry – its importance in the world and the fact that millions of everyday people rely on its expertise to achieve their life goals. It is dynamic, exciting, innovative, and most importantly friendly and full of great people.

WHAT'S THE KEY TO A BRAND?

A brand is not about the size of your logo. It's a person's gut feel about you as a company and how they describe it in one word or phrase. There are not many truly distinctive brands in asset management. We are very good at describing who and how but few of us explain why we do it.

DO YOU HAVE ANY BUGBEARS?

I hate bad customer service. There is no excuse not to treat people properly – particularly if they are paying for a service. I also despise the jargon used in our industry. Otherwise, I am a pretty happy person.



WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN?

It was from Simon Starmore, a leadership coach, who told me to be ruthless in my decision-making but humane in the execution. I interpret this to care about people, look after them and invest in them. If you can, find a good mentor whom you admire, recognise their qualities and mirror them.



WHAT VALUABLE LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Do something you enjoy and are passionate about and stick with it. Also the power of building relationships and networks. Skills and qualifications matter, but the relationships you build are often underappreciated. Keep humour at the heart of what you do. It will keep you grounded when times are tough and let you fly when things are going well.

HOW DO YOU RELAX?

My favourite thing to do is spend time with my family, socialise with friends and have a good laugh. I enjoy Bikram yoga, which is yoga at 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It detoxes the body and is good for the mind. As a busy working mum, I also sleep as much as I can so I can manage a hectic lifestyle.

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