

CMOism: *Identity and image are not the same. Image can be illusions. But identity states who you are and what you value. It is a visual reality.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Someone to Lean On

The CEO doesn't want to hear your problems. Your lieutenants look to you for guidance, not the other way around. So where does the lonely CMO go for trusted advice?

If you're at the top of your profession, you pony up \$50,000 a year to join the Marketing 50 (M50) group, assuming you're invited to join, of course. This ultraexclusive assemblage of top marketing talent, founded in January 2004 by former Spencer Stuart director Rick Smith, caters to the cream of today's marketing crop. The 50 current members collectively oversee more than \$35 billion in annual marketing spend and represent companies with more than \$1 trillion in market capitalization, according to David Wilkie, managing director of M50.

To keep the mood noncompetitive, only one member per discrete industry is allowed to join. Despite (or perhaps because of) the invitation-only setup, recruitment hasn't been a problem; the charter list was essentially full within the first six months of M50's existence. New invitees will be recommended



primarily by existing members. According to Smith and Wilkie, M50 members value the chance to discuss common challenges in a confidential setting. "We provide our members access to true peers with whom they can collaborate in a safe, intimate environment," says Wilkie. "We save them time by connecting them with peers who have already solved the problems they are struggling with, often those who they would have never known were working through the same issues."

General Electric CMO and M50 member Beth Comstock agrees. "M50 has created something special where marketing leaders can share their highs and lows," she says. "It's a great forum for kindred spirits in marketing."

The next group mind-meld is scheduled for June in New York. Between the biannual summits, M50 advisers host a series of regional dinners to keep the discussion going. A private website houses exclusive content, research and ongoing member collaboration.

"Members do not view this as an event, but rather a facilitated year-round conversation, effectively creating a peer-to-peer consulting network," says Wilkie.

To this point, Smith has kept the buzz around M50 to a minimum, a strategy that he says is meant to preserve the confidentiality of the peer discussions, not the organization itself.

"We're not a secret group," he contends. "We're a group of secrets." Do tell.

—Rob O'Regan

TRIVIA

Q. Which luxury brand had high-society endorsements from Queen Victoria and Louis XIV?

A. Moët & Chandon. A Moët & Chandon cork pops somewhere on Earth every single second.

Q. What, according to Interbrand, are the three most valuable brands in the world?

A. Coca-Cola, Microsoft and IBM.

Q. What publication, promoted originally as "a magazine for the whole family" in 1886, moved to sex-based content in 1965?

A. Cosmopolitan. When Helen Gurley Brown became the magazine's chief editor, she opted for a glossy format, an inspirational message, good writing "and telling the truth."

SOURCE: BRAND ROYALTY BY MATT HAIG

"Market share, unlike body weight, is very difficult to gain and very easy to lose." —Anonymous

SOURCE: WWW.QUOTEWORLD.ORG