

Is ecomm director a dying role?

As retail becomes digitised, the number of dedicated ecommerce positions is shrinking

Words by KEELY STOCKER

In the last 12 months we have seen shifts in internal team structures within retail businesses to better incorporate the responsibilities of online and offline channels.

While some businesses have only just introduced the role of ecommerce director – men’s lifestyle brand Hackett hired Kristine Kirby, who formerly held ecommerce positions at Monsoon and Fat Face, as its first ecommerce director in November – there is speculation by some in the sector that this role will cease to exist as the digital expertise required is scattered throughout the entire company.

A report by recruiter Oresa outlines the current digital talent requirements into six roles (see boxes below). However, Oresa founder Orlando Martins believes there is an argument that the responsibilities of current ecommerce or multichannel directors will fall back into the hands of sales and marketing directors over the next few years.

“Because the operating channels are now colliding there is a need to keep a synoptic view overall,” says Martins. “In order to have a functioning executive board it needs to be streamlined and by having a sales and marketing director overseeing all channels this could be done.”

But Martins emphasises that this does not mean the ecommerce skillset will disappear. He says: “It could just be a case of having somebody with a wider commercial base in the sales and marketing role directing somebody with an ecommerce skillset.”

At the other end of the spectrum, those currently in ecommerce and multichannel roles are looking

at where their current positions might lead them in the future. Jonathan Hall, founder of recruiter Cranberry Panda, believes there are still plenty of director roles to go into: “As multichannel retailers integrate their channels to a greater depth, the move from ecommerce director to multichannel director grows in popularity. So for current senior ecommerce managers and heads of ecommerce there is still a clear path to being a director.”

Martins and Hall agree there is a strong possibility of current ecommerce and multichannel directors

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Liam Humphreys, regional director, Michael Page Design & Development

moving into managing director positions. Once this starts to happen, it could be another step in the demise of the ecommerce director. Hall says: “The obvious next step is to be managing director of a retailer. When this does happen then maybe the ecommerce director role might go as there is an ecommerce person at the helm. If the managing director of a retailer is not from an ecommerce background then the need for an ecommerce/multichannel director remains.”

Liam Humphreys, regional director at recruitment firm Michael Page Design & Development, thinks this stage is still a way off and businesses remain short of digital expertise. He says: “Although managing directors now have much greater awareness and understanding of the digital space, the global opportunities combined with a continuing evolution of consumer habits and ever progressing technology mean that having key specialists is a must. I anticipate a continued shortage of digital specialists in the UK for the foreseeable future exacerbated by the growing demand for this expertise on the continent.”

Whether it’s in a clearly defined ecommerce role, or part of managing director’s overall responsibility, what is clear is that this pool of talent is still relatively small and the industry remains stretched in finding enough people with the required skills. While those at the forefront of the industry may be looking at multichannel directors moving into managing director roles, it is still important for many businesses to recruit an ecommerce or multichannel director to bring the technical knowledge and expertise into the business and integrate strategies and channels as well as team structures.

As Martins concludes: “This is a recurring issue that is not likely to go away. Whether the title is ecommerce director, multichannel director, sales and marketing director or managing director, the challenge is to have a unified sales and marketing process to ultimately get to the customer in the most efficient way across every channel.” ●

HEAD OF ALL-ROUNDER

Salary range £60,000 to £90,000

Responsibilities In a smaller company the candidate may have full profit and loss responsibility for the website. In larger ones the candidate will report into an ecommerce director

Skillset Online trading, merchandising, SEO, user experience, technical and logistics

Background Either a technical or marketing/trading ecommerce background

TRADING ECOMMERCE DIRECTOR

Salary range £90,000 to £150,000

Responsibilities Optimising day-to-day trading of the site, own the profit and loss and drive growth

Skillset Strong on the strategy for digital trading and marketing – covering customer relationship management, search engine marketing, digital content and merchandising

Background Traditional marketing or commercial function before moving to ecommerce

TECHNICAL ECOMMERCE DIRECTOR

Salary range £90,000 to £150,000

Responsibilities Development of the web/mobile channel, working alongside a more commercially-focused ecommerce director

Skillset Web replatforming experience and managing the most technical members of the web team. Highly analytical and data-driven

Background May have come from a systems or user-experience background

MULTICHANNEL DIRECTOR

Salary range £150,000 to £200,000

Responsibilities Oversee the trading and technical development of digital channels, often including stores

Skillset Strategic focus matched by commerciality

Background More than a decade of digital experience including previous roles as trading or technical-type ecommerce directors

MULTICHANNEL DIRECTOR PLUS

Salary range £150,000 to £500,000

Responsibilities Marketing, customer analytics and store operations in addition to traditional remit

Skillset Able to communicate multichannel strategy at the highest levels through the business

Background Experience as an ecommerce director/multichannel director. Additional experience of other functions such as marketing, IT or stores

DIGITAL MANAGING DIRECTOR

Salary range £300,000-plus

Responsibilities Running an online-only business or in an executive board position with a major retailer

Skillset Strategic understanding of the business and a competent grasp of technical issues

Background Likely to have been early into ecommerce, seen the potential and delivered substantial results