

the perfect orchestration

(whether business or football)

On March 3, 2005, a man named Rinus Michels died. Michels was credited with inventing something called “*totaalvoetbal*.” In translation (from Dutch), this means total football. In translation (from English!), this means total soccer.

Total football came to prominence in the World Cup of 1974 in which the Dutch team (while eventually losing the final to West Germany) thrilled the world with a range of individual skills and egos from which Michels orchestrated a perfect sporting symphony. Put simply he found the alchemy of teamwork and produced wonderful teams at Ajax of Amsterdam, Barcelona, and ultimately the Dutch team of 1988 which won the European Championship in a manner not seen before or since.

That same alchemy is constantly being searched for by marketers and the marketing services community that serves them and their brands. It would appear that our corner of the world is not overpopulated with managers of Michels’ skills although we have no shortage of egos and those capable of eloquent argument that supports their claim to primacy or at least *primus inter pares*.

If we listen to the siren voices of the extended agency community, the main beneficiary will be the furniture industry as it ups production of boardroom tables big enough to accommodate all those who believe they have an unarguable right to a seat. Depending on who you listen to, you will hear that marketing is channel-led, consumer-led, brand-led, or simply led by the big idea. The arguments are mostly cogent, and all have a point but all you can really conclude is that all these factors are ingredients of success and thus are co-dependent. The perceived disaggregation of the marketing services industry makes it hard for its clients to determine who or what should lead, and unless and until the holding companies reorganize themselves into horizontally integrated marketing consulting businesses it will ever be thus.

One thing is clear regardless

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of structure. Michels’ teams left the locker room with a plan that involved a pretty clear insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition and were thus well placed to exploit their vulnerabilities. Perhaps, more important still, they had a plan for what to do when things went wrong. This is a Darwinian approach to problem solving that has little to do with the survival of the fittest (words never written by Darwin) but everything to do with the ability to successfully adapt to change—a central premise of his thesis.

Translated into business, this becomes the art of briefing and making it clear throughout the supply chain who does what from the start,

understanding how roles need to evolve in response to micro and macro marketplace changes, and what to do when things go wrong. To imagine that any structure works better when the brief is both common and clear stops somewhat short of intimacy with nano technology.

So assuming that we get as far as one brief, one vision, where should the Rinus Michels of marketing really sit?

It seems that there are three choices. The first option is the marketing services holding company. A wise manager and a supporting cast. The internal power to build a tailored resource, cherry-picking the most appropriate assets and the



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permission to cut across the razor wire of profit and loss accounts. The skill and the will to package a flexible (both commercially and geographically) relevant resource that can be applied strategically and executionally to the business problem in hand. One throat to choke and one back to pat.

This model exists and it works; not perfectly, not all the time; but it works. It works best, of course, when the wise man is discipline neutral and recognizes that scoring the goals, stopping the shots, and keeping the score are all essential ingredients of a well-played game. How can you ever let a single channel or discipline lead? It also helps a lot when he has the foresight and permission to step beyond the company to buy and apply resource when what he has is simply not best-in-class. Even Rinus Michels did not have the world's best player in every position on the field although he did a pretty good job with what he had.

Choice two is the channel neutral, strategy only communications specialist. The argument goes that only he with no vested interest in the executional revenue stream can take a truly agnostic view of the problem and the range of applicable solutions. To borrow another soccer metaphor...it looks great on paper, it's just a shame we are playing on grass. There is no McKinsey of marketing with the range of skills and geographical reach to orchestrate major communication campaigns; and it's not just about scale and reach. There are almost no examples of consultancies that genuinely have the operational dirt under their fingernails to provide great counsel on the role and application of every channel. This is not to suggest that these businesses are incapable of adding value but it's reasonable to hypothesize that it is more relevant in the context of course correction and moment of time inspiration than in the area of continuous process management and delivery.

The third option is the marketer, her or himself, because what you really want is this; best-in-class strategy and perfect execution across every channel at the most competitive price, all the time, and everywhere. Your job is to apply the skills of marketing to the business opportunity and surely only you, as employee or owner, can truly connect the business goals to the marketing goals. To achieve this you need to create a team

and a way of playing the game that suits your ends and delivers the maximum competitive advantage for your business for this, of course, is *totaalvoetbal*.

Okay. You have done it. You have taken the first choice or the third or if you are really smart a combination of the two, with you and the other wise man controlling the game from center field with a clear vision of threat and opportunity and the game plan to deal with both. Together you conduct a productive battle of ideas that allows the best of everything to come to the surface.

Just one challenge remains, and this one did not keep Rinus Michels up at night. You have successfully integrated your marketing supply chain but have you done the same with the business it is going to supply?

Internal integration and goal alignment remain the single greatest challenge to great marketing. Matching your matrix to that of your suppliers may well make you wish you had not taken the green pill. Where do you hold your budgets? In the brands? The business units? In individual markets, maybe? Do you integrate your distribution channels? Are the goals the same for retail as for e-commerce and direct-to-consumer? Do these decisions meet in marketing or only at CEO or CFO level?

These fractures are so often the biggest barriers to integrated thought and action, and if there is one thing that's tough for suppliers, it is to be all the things you are not. Few of us have the relatively simple task of running single brand, single territory, single channel businesses. The fact is that reality demands good behaviors on both sides of the relationship. The most complex matrices can work with aligned goals and attitudes, and very often aligning compensation helps as well. Similarly, the opposite is just as true.

Perhaps it comes to this. Arie Haan, one of Michels' many gifted players, thought total football was a state-of-mind rather than a system: "As it is at any moment, so you play: in many teams only two or three play, and the rest are looking; in the Holland team, when you were 60 meters from the ball, you were playing." ●

Rob Norman, who says it is probably wise to include a disclaimer that the views in this article are solely the author's, is director, Interaction Worldwide, GroupM.

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Internal
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and goal
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greatest
challenge
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marketing.”