MARKETING LEADERSHIP

How the strongest CMOs in India actually lead

No honest ranking of names exists. Ten habits seen across retail, telecom, media and healthcare, and how to hire for them.

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WHY NO LIST

What circulates as a ranking

- An award people paid to enter
- A sponsored feature or a conference line-up
- No comparable outcome exists across companies
- The work that matters is rarely seen

  A pricing fix that stopped a leak. A position held for five years.

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HABITS 1 TO 5

Customer, selling, number, budget, position

1. Define the business from the customer's side, and go and see it
2. Make selling easier, not louder: remove friction before buying reach
3. Sign for one commercial number at board level
4. Run the budget as a portfolio: brand, demand, experiments
5. Choose a position and hold it, even when called boring

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HABITS 6 TO 10

Availability, influence, team, markets, honesty

1. Build availability before cleverness: be on every counter
2. Win influence across the executive table, not authority
3. Hire people better than you, and protect them
4. Treat India as many markets; build regionally first
5. Open every review with what did not work

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What strong leaders bring to the board

NUMBER	Against plan, measured the way the CFO agreed
VARIANCE	The reason, in plain language, good quarters and bad
DECISION	What they need from the board
CUTS	A list of what they would cut first

Volunteering cuts is the fastest way to make a CFO trust the rest of the ask.

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WHAT DID NOT MATTER

Traits that never predicted success

- Awards: proof of a good case-film agency
- Follower counts: visibility and effectiveness are different skills
- Budget size: ask what they cut, not what they ran
- Sector pedigree: says where someone sat, not what they changed

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Ask about consequences, not campaigns

- What number did you report, and what did you do when it fell?
- What did you stop spending on, and what happened?
- Which decision in another function did you change? How?
- Who on your team could step into your job tomorrow?
- Tell me about a positioning you got wrong

Put the CFO on the panel and a sales or operations peer in the final round.

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WHERE THE ROLE GOES

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A leader who owns a number, can defend it and has built a team that outlasts them is the one boards now consider for bigger roles.

The CMO title increasingly sits inside a growth or commercial role with a P&L attached.

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NEXT QUARTER

Build the habits in this order

1. Replace reach and leads with the nearest booked or paid outcome
2. Rebuild the budget as a portfolio, with a list of cuts
3. Write your position in one sentence
4. Join another function's review and name a successor
5. Open your next review with what failed

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READ THE FULL GUIDE

Top marketing leaders in India, in full

- All ten habits with examples from four sectors
- Why the sector matters less than people think
- Hiring questions that separate operators from presenters
- gauravphogat.com/top-marketing-leaders-india

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