



# MARKETING TO COMPLEX INDUSTRIES: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

WHAT EVERY B2B MARKETER NEEDS TO KNOW



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## INTRODUCTION

## MARATHONS, SPICY WINGS AND B2B MARKETING

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Nobody said this would be easy. And, as a 100% B2B marketing agency, we can assure you it's not. We've spent decades immersing ourselves in a multitude of complex industries and navigating some of the world's most intricate buying cycles. It's been tough, but we've never stopped loving it.

Like running marathons, climbing mountains and eating spicy wings, some of life's most rewarding experiences are not for the faint of heart. Sometimes the challenge is part of the thrill — and B2B marketing communications always offers a hearty challenge.

Perhaps the most pressing challenge B2B marketers face is the one posed by this e-book — marketing to complex B2B industries. It requires communicating with the decision makers and influencers, from engineers and architects to maintenance professionals and contractors, IT managers, designers and purchasing people. It requires including many who are joining the buying team as a result of the changes in how companies operate. It requires meeting new people, new learning styles and new communications channels.

## MARATHONS, SPICY WINGS AND B2B MARKETING

We've mastered this art of marketing to complex industries, marshaling a wide range of new resources to help our clients deal with today's new realities — and tomorrow's. We've boiled it all down to a few simple rules:

- Know the landscape
- Know the audience
- Know your strategy
- Know how to connect
- Know how to create great content
- Know the channels
- Know how to get results
- Know how to pull it all together

As a team of B2B superfans, we felt compelled to share this knowledge with our partners in the industry. So if you're new to B2B marketing or you'd like to look at your long-standing B2B profession with new eyes, this book is for you.



01

THE  
LANDSCAPE

## THE LANDSCAPE

## THE SELLING ENVIRONMENT

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**If you don't know how the product's sold, you're flying blind.** B2B marketing doesn't happen in a vacuum. On the contrary, context is everything. To launch a product, service or company successfully, you need to find out everything you can about the environment:

- **The dynamics within your industry:** Perhaps your market is saturated with competitors, all vying fiercely for the lowest price. Or maybe it's just a few companies with deeply entrenched market positions presenting a different set of problems. Understanding these forces in your industry may help you decide, for instance, how aggressive your marketing communications strategy should be.
- **The evolution of your technology:** In industry after industry, disruptive technologies have upended the competitive picture, especially when market leaders cling to their old ways for too long. You'll want to know where the technology is going and who is best positioned to benefit.

- **The competitive environment:** Understand the unique strengths and weaknesses of your competitors, along with their intended positioning in the market. Knowing how the players are arrayed on the field (and how they uniquely meet customer needs) will help you find your best "blue ocean" opportunities.

But this is a lot to master. So let's take it one step at a time. Getting a firm grasp on the industry is a great place to begin.

## THE LANDSCAPE

### THE INDUSTRY

Every industry is an ecosystem unto itself. No two are alike. You'll have to ask yourself a lot of questions to understand the unique makeup of yours.

**How long has the industry been around?** You might be dealing with a relatively mature industry like HVAC, or a newer one like cloud technology. More mature industries tend to be stable, while newer markets can be shaken by new players or entirely new technologies. Whatever the case, your industry's history will tell you where the dangers lurk and the opportunities hide.

**Who are the movers and shakers?** By "movers and shakers" we mean not just your competition but your larger customers and even suppliers. Are you contending with large multinational organizations or more regional players? Identifying these players is critical in any market setting, and especially important in settings where new technologies are emerging on a regular basis.

**What are the barriers to entry?** This classic understanding helps anticipate the likelihood that new competitors will crop up every few years, which has happened in the plastics industry. Or, on the contrary, it will indicate that the existing players who have been in place for decades may very well continue for the foreseeable future.

**What are the go-to sources of information?** To join the industry's conversation, you'll need to know where it's happening. It shouldn't be hard to identify which trade publications, websites and social channels have become the standard in your industry. Who are the most influential editors, writers, trade associations and social media influencers in that space?



## THE LANDSCAPE

# THE PRODUCT

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Years ago, B2B marketing was dominated by technology that changed at a glacial pace, if at all. Those days are long gone. Almost every major industrial technology is now being swept into the digital revolution, with connected devices interlinking your products and services more than ever before. The result: new technologies, new capabilities, new audiences and new competitors.

You'll want to know, not if, but how your products are connected. You'll want to know if larger competitors are coming into your market, especially from the software realm. You'll want to master the terminology and the technical language your company's subject matter experts use to describe the features and benefits of your products. (Salespeople and engineers can be a lifesaver here.) As much as possible, you'll want to master the science upon which your emerging technology is based.

## THE LANDSCAPE

### THE MARKET

This is perhaps the most critical element of your B2B landscape. But what exactly makes up your market? For starters, you'll need to know the competition and understand how your brand fits into the competitive set. You'll also need to know how you're going to market: Is your product sold directly to end users or original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)? If not, you most likely are selling through distributors, dealers, agents or online sales platforms like Amazon.

These distinctions are critical. Distributors, dealers and agents will generally support your efforts to promote and strengthen your brand. Online sales will require regular promotion and content maintenance from your team. OEMs, on the other hand, are more interested in promoting their own brand and will only promote yours if it's an industry standard. Think Intel Inside®.

And, of course, you'll need to know your audience and competitors (we'll get back to those). Knowing your market dynamics are critical because these structures will show the way forward, unlocking the key to identifying, establishing and sustaining competitive advantage.



02

THE  
AUDIENCE

## THE AUDIENCE

# CHANGING AUDIENCE DYNAMICS

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If there's one thing that's absolutely certain in B2B marketing today, it is that audiences are changing. Even 10 years ago, most B2B marketers could say with some confidence that they knew their audience. Today, not so much.

It's not just the fact that the buying team has grown bigger, though that certainly is a major factor. More importantly, that buying team has some distinctly new players who bring distinctly new perspectives and challenges. What matters to them is different. What will convince them to be favorably inclined toward your product or service has changed. And how these new players search for and consume marketing and technical information is much different than it was in the past.

But it's not just these new folks that matter. Many of the old players are still in the game, too. To market a product, we're finding ourselves communicating with multiple audiences at the same time. All of them are looking for different things. All this has left B2B marketers struggling to keep up.

But keep up we must. These audiences are always on the move — and you'll have to be too if you want to keep up.

**Learning styles are changing.** As the retirement of the Boomers continues, they are being replaced by the Millennials and Gen Z, whose learning styles, attitudes and skill sets are vastly different. In five years, half of the workforce will consist of these "digital natives" who access and consume content in a much different fashion than the previous generation. And now, as if the pace of change wasn't rapid enough, a global pandemic has moved nearly all of professional life into remote, digital environments. In the age of social distance, everyone has become an overnight digital native, regardless of their generation.

In today's B2B world, there is no such thing as a captive audience. Marketers have to target and attract new audiences every single day. Attraction tactics must be a constant fixture. Today's sales contact may change tomorrow. Or may be replaced by a team of experts who have an entirely different set of concerns.

## THE AUDIENCE

### THE BUYING TEAM

One of the biggest recent changes in B2B marketing came from the growth of the buying team. Where there was once a single buyer, or maybe a handful of people, there are now as many as 15 participants. If we had to identify a single development that's done the most to increase the complexity of B2B sales, this would be it.

In fact, in ["One Enterprise, Multiple Travelers on the Buyer's Journey,"](#) Godfrey's Brian Moore notes that it is the enterprise itself that is on a buyer's journey, not one or two individuals.

A bigger set of decision makers brings a bigger set of considerations. Here are just a few concerns now being raised as part of the B2B buying process:

- **Customer experience (CX):** CX touches everything from the packaging and operation of a product in industrial concerns to the patient experience that has become part of the compensation model for health care facilities. It's an expansive topic that indicates any number of subordinate

concerns. In fact, whenever a colleague or customer speaks about CX, make sure you're all working from the same definition.

- **Environmental impact:** If your product will have an environmental impact on your customer's operation, their Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) people will need to be involved in purchasing decisions. And for hospitals, that will mean the inclusion of the Environmental Services (EVS) team. For building materials, your product may help a customer achieve LEED certification. Know your environmental story, even if it's a limited one.
- **Safety:** What impact will a product or service have on safety for employees, customers, end users, patients, students or the general public?

## THE BUYING TEAM

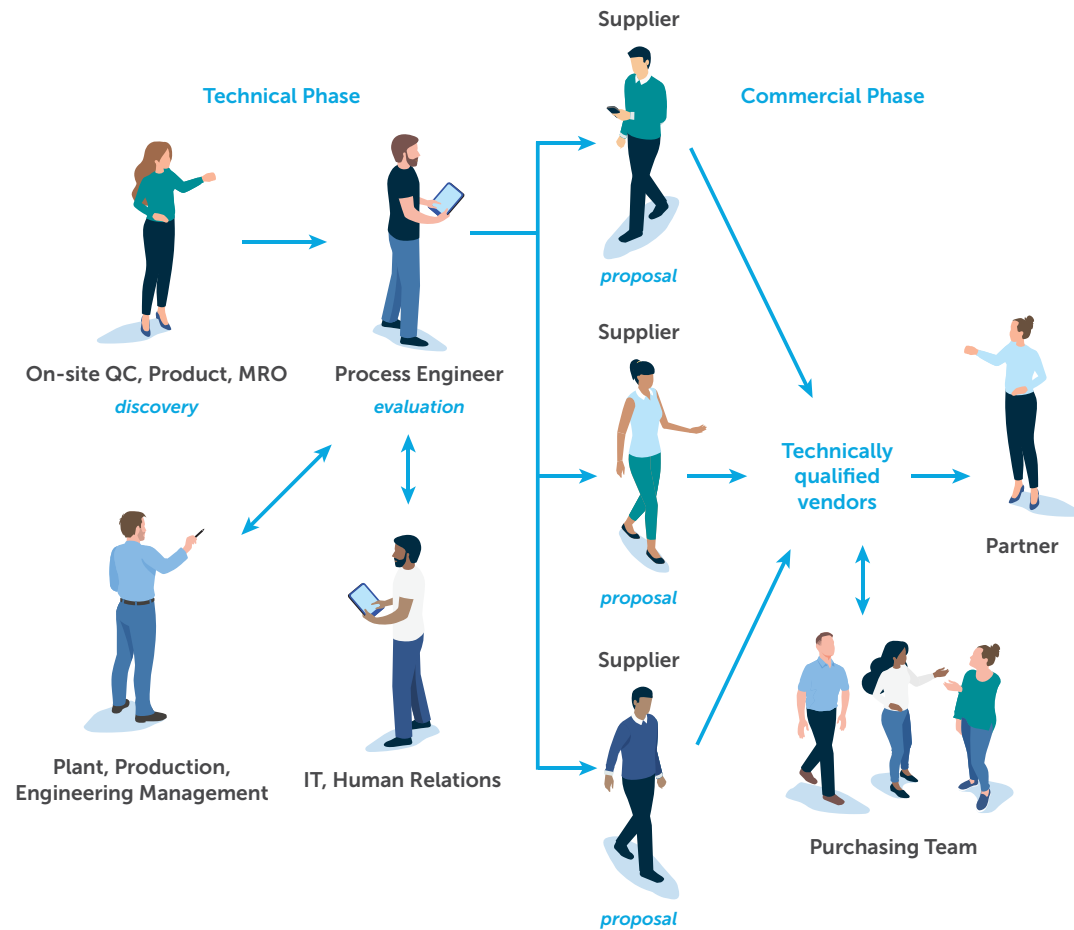
- **Information Technology:** Because more products include Internet of Things (IoT) functionality, such as diagnostics, it's not unusual for a buying team to loop in someone from Information Technology (IT) to make sure your product will be compatible with the buyer's infrastructure.
- **Training:** If your product will require extra training to install, operate or maintain, the head of HR or CEO may join the buying team.
- **Quality:** Look at your product through the lens of quality control. Will it require any additional procedures or processes? Will it be compatible with the existing equipment? Will it enhance the long-term reliability and value of the machine or building of which it is a part?
- **Maintenance:** Understand what new maintenance responsibilities your product will place on your customer's organization. That may mean the facilities in an educational setting, EVS in health care or the MRO function in an industrial plant.

All of these are in addition, of course, to the engineering, production, procurement/purchasing and financial influencers who have traditionally played a role in B2B purchases. All in all, you're now dealing with more characters than Game of Thrones season 8.





THE BUYING TEAM



*An example of a complex buying team.*

In short, B2B purchasing has increasingly become a team sport with lots of different players joining in at various stages of the process, as Todd Walter notes in his blog post, [“How Engineers Make a Purchase.”](#)

## THE AUDIENCE

### THE PEOPLE

The additional members of the buying team, of course, bring new complexity to B2B marketing. Each of these players has different needs to address. Managing them all requires a lot of different types of communications and, not to mention, a lot of resources.

One of the pain points for B2B marketers is the need to reach all these audiences at once, delivering high-quality content for highly specialized professionals, including engineering, financial, production and even trade editors. The messaging must be tailored to each. But it must be consistent across the board.

It can be incredibly intimidating, especially if you consider that each of the players may be at a different stage of the buying process. One way to cut through the confusion is to weigh what each person truly needs.

For instance, a CFO probably won't care about product specs, but they will want to know about long-term maintenance costs so they can estimate a total cost of ownership. Meanwhile, the IT director just wants to know the communications protocols and connections required. The main decision makers, of course, will need to know all of these things. And we can help them a lot by giving them tools to get the right information to each of their teammates.

## THE AUDIENCE

# ACCOUNTING FOR EVERYONE

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Addressing all of these audiences might sound like a big investment, but that's not necessarily the case. A multi-audience B2B marketing program can anticipate what information each buyer or influencer wants, and how to reach them as they move through the buying process. And all it takes is some thoughtful planning up front.

The first step in a multi-audience B2B marketing program is to **create the vision**. This simply means you have a clear picture of what you want to accomplish, have evidence of the success of similar efforts and understand the pain points of the target audiences.

The next step is to **build the plan**. This is where the messaging points you need to address with the audiences and channels are balanced with each other. The plan should include a structured content calendar that outlines what messages are going to each audience, as well as what channels you're going to use. But it's more than creating as much content as possible; it's a matter of determining how

each element is going to work together — how PR works with paid advertising and how a blog post might support a podcast. Your audience has become more demanding, with a need for intuitive, smooth communication. If that isn't possible, they'll start looking at your competitors.

Because of this demand, any multi-audience B2B marketing plan depends on **creating a seamless flow**. In this context, that means customers (who are coming from multiple touchpoints) are encountering elements of the program that are complementary to each other. If you've built a consistent messaging foundation, that consistency will extend across all touch points. The delivery, however, must be customized to whichever audience you're targeting on any given platform.

Finally, an often-overlooked point is **remembering your internal audiences**. By educating your own teammates, you'll make it easier for them to distribute information and answer questions. Improving your team's ability to respond to customers is essential to an effective program.

## ACCOUNTING FOR EVERYONE

All of this hinges on knowing who your audience is, and that's something you can't fake. Unless you understand the nuances of each role and think about what everyone needs, you'll probably miss the mark.

That's why we dive into each of the major roles in depth, creating at least one **persona** for each of them. A persona includes general background and observations on the person's goals, motivations, wants and challenges. It also lists influences, information resources, content preferences and communications practices. It's based on both empirical data like surveys as well as less structured research like interviews. These can include both primary and secondary research.

## ACCOUNTING FOR EVERYONE

### Two Kinds of Persona

Whereas the more traditional **marketing persona** provides a baseline understanding of your target audience, the **web persona** is focused on guiding your user experience, design and development decisions. Both are invaluable. Here's a quick look at what sets them apart:

Marketing Persona	Web Persona
<b>Backstory:</b> short description of the person and their role	<b>Backstory:</b> short description of the person and their role
<b>Profile Info:</b> education, job title, age	<b>Personality and Archetype:</b> brings the person to life and helps you understand their motivations
Wants/Frustrations of Job	Challenges/Frustrations of the Digital Product
<b>Goals:</b> high-level as it relates to their job	<b>Goals:</b> what they're trying to accomplish with the digital product
<b>Content Preferences:</b> not restricted to online (e.g., trade shows)	<b>Content Preferences:</b> strictly online
<b>Activities:</b> as they relate to job responsibilities	<b>Motivations:</b> as they relate to achieving work goals through personality traits
Influences	<b>Online Behaviors:</b> interest in specific digital platforms and tools
Information Resources	<b>Technology Expertise:</b> what programs they use
	<b>Key Features:</b> what they would like to see with the digital product
	<b>Ideal Experience:</b> with the digital product

ACCOUNTING FOR EVERYONE

## LEADERSHIP LEVEL ENGINEER



**Nick Smith**  
 Partner, Principle Engineer  
 50; BS, Civil Engineering, MS, Environmental Engineering  
 Mid-Atlantic, U.S.

### Goals

Develop designs that balance the reality of the site with the customer's budget and municipalities' regulatory requirements.

### Motivation

Finding solutions that meet requirements and preserve resources.

**"The right thing at the right place at the right time."**

### Backstory

Nick began his career more than 25 years ago at the firm where he is now a partner. He has worked hard, from the ground up. He's highly engaged in his work and has seen changes in his industry over time.

### Activities

- Works with clients, developers, land owners, public works officials and local governing body officials and contractors to see a project through from beginning to end.
- Oversees a group of project engineers who develop designs for customers.
- Oversees day-to-day.

### Wants

- Intellectual or skill-set peers who can make his work better.
- Responsive reps who can turn a request on a dime and add value.
- Partners who can easily navigate the complex regulatory environment.

### Challenges

- Increasingly difficult sites.
- Customers who do not value stormwater.
- Tightening regulations.
- Contractors who change his spec.

### Influences

- Customers: Property Owner, Developer
- Municipal Boards: Township Commissioner, etc.
- Contractor: Manages the hand-off

### Information Resources

- Search engines
- Manufacturer websites; reps
- Trade publications
- Tradeshows

### Content Preferences

- Personal contact; email, phone, face-to-face
- E-newsletters
- Seminars/webinars
- White papers, e-books, PDH articles
- Product videos

Even a single role may warrant in-depth exploration, as we note in our blog post, ["The Many Personas of the Automation and Controls Engineer."](#)





03

YOUR  
STRATEGY

## YOUR STRATEGY

## DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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**Strategy isn't just important. It's everything.** All that you've learned about the technology, the market, the audience — here's where it all comes together. But these disparate truths won't come together without some difficulty. The more complex the technology, the more challenging the environment and the harder it will be to connect all the dots and forge a strong strategy.

Challenging as it is, strategy couldn't be more important. Product launches, market initiatives and even entire companies succeed or fail based on the accuracy, clarity and skill of the marketing strategy. After all, great products can

and do fail because their selling advantages have not been fully articulated or their real connections to audience pain points have not been explained.

To form an effective strategy, you'll have to distill all the information about your company and its landscape into a short, compelling narrative that gives the creative team solid direction and a core message to convey.

## YOUR STRATEGY

# YOUR COMPETITOR'S STORY

Imagine playing a game of chess without ever watching your opponent's moves. It's no less futile for a marketer to build a strategy without considering the strategies staked out by their competitors. So keep close watch. What are your competitors' strengths and weaknesses? How do they go to market? Suppose Competitor A sells on price and delivery. Meanwhile, Competitor B positions itself as the technology and innovation leader. Unless you intend to challenge one of these entrenched competitors on their turf (certainly a viable, albeit expensive, option), your brand has a limited number of available positions.

You won't want to limit yourself to scouring a competitor's website. In fact, there is a wealth of information available for all public companies through services like Hoover's or First Research. A good sales rep can also tell you how they sell against any particular competitor. They can give you a good idea how much market share they own, an indication of their marketing strategy's success.

Don't just assume you know where your competitors are positioned. In many cases, the competitive set has changed, not just from mergers and acquisitions, but as a result of changing technologies that have brought in competitors from closely aligned product areas ... or from technologies that would never have been perceived as competitive just a few years before. In factory automation, for example, software companies have suddenly emerged as potential market entrants via the Internet of Things. And any company that relies on sales of parts or consumables for a large portion of its profit should keep an eye on Amazon.

## YOUR STRATEGY

### KNOWING YOURSELF

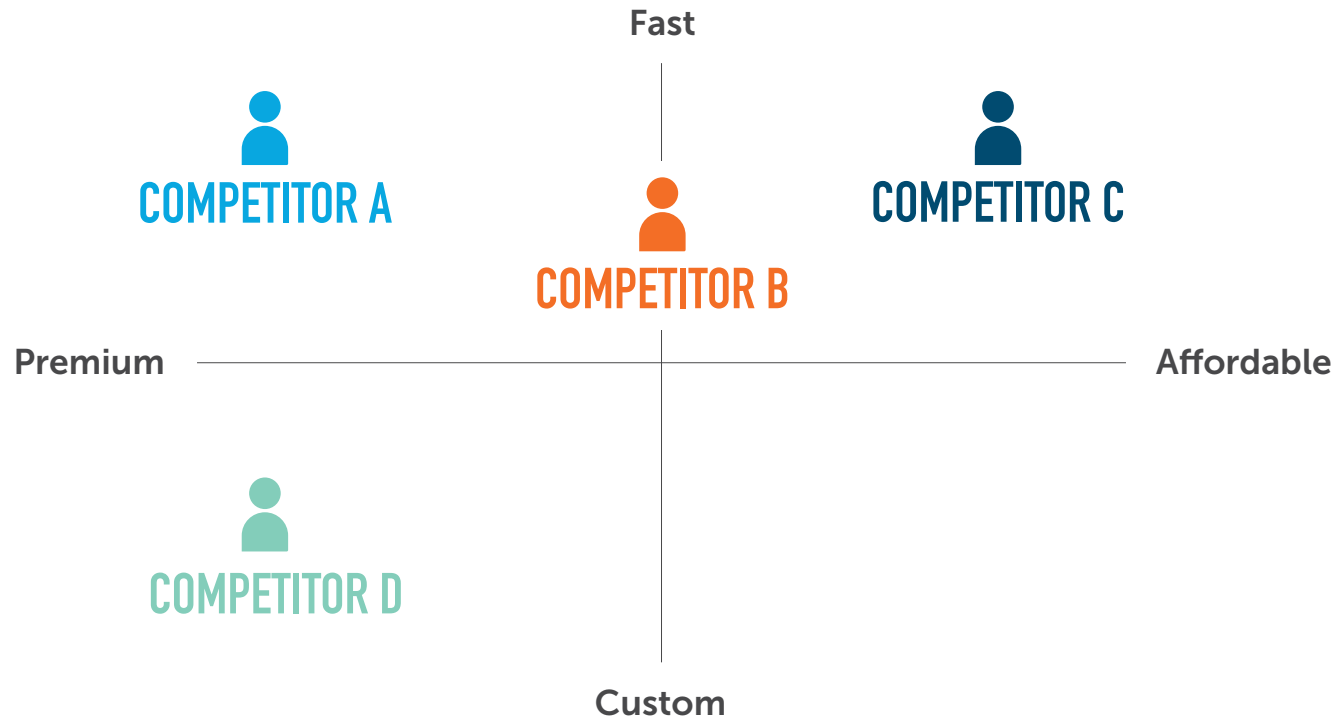
Almost like the ancient dictum “Know thyself,” knowing your company is foundational. You’ll want to know the differentials or selling advantages of the products or services you’re selling. What’s the one thing that makes you different? It helps if you look for patterns. In most cases, a company does not sell one product on price and another on high performance and a third on customer intimacy. The best way to identify this differential is to ask for the opinions of those that matter most: your customers. In their eyes, what makes your company stand out?

In our experience, most companies are consistent across their portfolios in one customer benefit, with occasional instances of a secondary selling point. Companies generally approach different problems with the same skill set, the same inherent strengths and sometimes even the same people.

To find more clues regarding your company’s unique strengths, take a look at your core values. You’ll often find a revolving door between the company’s values and the strengths that define a market position. These strengths usually bubble up to the surface as the company’s core values. A company, for instance, that delivers a high level of customization in its products or services usually immortalizes its strength in customer intimacy as one of its core values. Similarly, a company on a mission to provide the most innovative, cutting-edge products emerges (sooner or later) as a product leadership company.

The end goal of this investigation is to identify where you stand in comparison to your competitors. Once you’ve found it, here’s a useful chart to feel it out:

KNOWING YOURSELF



*High-level Positioning*

Mapping your key points of differentiation on a positioning grid with your other competitors makes it easy to visualize the positions of all the players — and helps you decide where you are and where you're going.

## YOUR STRATEGY

# YOUR CORE MESSAGE

The centerpiece of your strategy, whether you're creating a product launch, a branding program or a market initiative, is a core message — a short, succinct statement summarizing the most important things you want to say:

- It needs to be clear, simple and understandable with no ambiguity (e.g., "No one makes a better forklift").
- It needs to state the differential, preferably as a superlative (e.g., "The highest quality on the market").
- It needs to connect this effort to the corporate brand positioning (e.g., "The highest quality products, from the world leader in product quality").
- It needs to say nothing unnecessary.
- It needs to be short (12 words or less).

And we'll say this again because it bears repeating: Your core message needs to be short. With very few exceptions, less language means more focus.





04

MAKING A  
CONNECTION

## MAKING A CONNECTION

### CREATIVE WORK THAT EMBRACES THE COMPLEXITY OF B2B

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While creative implementation often gets a lot of attention (some might say it gets the most) in any discussion about marketing to complex audiences, good creative work cannot happen without the initial steps: understanding the landscape and audience and distilling that insight into an effective strategy. These are the foundations upon which great creative is built.

Creating remarkable B2B creative is a complex task, far more challenging than developing creative for business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing. It requires a special breed of creative person, someone who not only can focus on complex messages but also loves telling those complex stories.

### CHALLENGING THE PREVAILING WISDOM

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There's a myth that B2B marketing has to be serious because there is so much on the line. There's a tendency to feel that your statements have to be very safe, very clear and totally buttoned up. With no legal ramifications.

But we're dealing with a smart audience. In fact, it's a hyperintelligent audience. Some of them might be hyperliteral, but if we ask them to take a leap, that doesn't mean they won't get it or not appreciate what we're doing. It doesn't mean they won't get the joke. In fact, they may appreciate it because they know you respect them.



A blue-tinted photograph of an industrial facility, likely a water treatment plant or refinery. The image shows a complex network of pipes, valves, and machinery. In the foreground, a large horizontal pipe with a circular flange is prominent. The background features more industrial structures, including a staircase and various pipes extending into the distance. The overall scene is industrial and technical.

05

CREATING  
GREAT CONTENT

## CREATING GREAT CONTENT

### **TECHNICAL CONTENT**

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Many recent studies have shown that creating great technical content is one of the most serious challenges B2B marketers face. Whether it's getting bandwidth from their in-house subject matter experts (SMEs) or maintaining content consistently, simply producing the materials is often the biggest obstacle to implementing B2B content strategies.

### **SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR TECHNICAL AUDIENCE**

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Too often, B2B marketers let the complexity frighten them. They are concerned about trying to get all the proof points, all the features and all the benefits into one eight-word headline.

With the complexity of the technology or the solutions that they create, they find it difficult to create a hierarchy of the strongest messages, the most important reasons to believe. Plus, they believe that their audiences have a million questions and concerns. And they're trying to answer them all at one time rather than figure out critical pain points from a particular audience.

CREATING GREAT CONTENT

## **MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS**

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Subject matter experts are absolutely critical to B2B marketing — and for good reason. They hold a treasure trove of great information that can establish your company's credibility, attract industry attention, win placements in technical pubs and, ultimately, win new business.

But there's a catch-22 at work here: The stronger the expert, the harder they will be to pin down. A truly breakthrough expert has a lot of demands on his or her time — like their actual job functions in R&D, product development and testing and sales presentations. These other priorities will contend with marketing for their attention, so it's essential that you know how to make the most of the precious time your SMEs can carve out of their hectic schedules to help you achieve your objectives.



06

THE CHANNELS :  
REACHING YOUR AUDIENCE



## THE CHANNELS

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE MEDIA CHOICES AVAILABLE TO YOU

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Channels are the various methods we use to reach your audience. Trade pubs and websites are the obvious ones, both for public relations placements and paid advertising. But email, social media, trade shows and even your website? Those all count as channels, too.

Orchestrating all these channels is an art form unto itself. Choosing the right mix of placements and marketing communications activities is almost an art form, and it's another source of complexity in reaching technical audiences. Many B2B marketers have trouble deciding which media to choose. Often, they hear the claims of one media rep or another and are unsure which to select. When you're feeling torn, just remember this: There's no silver bullet.

You'll always need a mix: The right combination of choices will vary from one industry, one company and probably even one project to another. Of course, there's no shortage of

media in any market. Your selection will depend on several factors, including your position in the marketplace, the nature of your offer and — most importantly — where your audience goes for information.

Not all of the media available to you are equal. Some are better at attracting attention, while others might excel at providing good information. Your website, for instance, is a great place to present information on the specifications of a new product. But it's not an "if you build it, they will come" proposition. You need other media to entice your audience to visit your site. This requires a range of tactics to attract, educate and persuade your prospect to take the next step and start interacting with your company.

## THE CHANNELS

### SOCIAL MEDIA

In the COVID era, professionals in countless industries have faced a rapid blurring of the lines between their personal and professional lives. But this has been a mega-trend in B2B for more than a decade. Nothing better embodied this phenomenon than the rise of mobile computing — and the host of paid, earned and owned mobile marketing tactics that came with it. B2B marketers can now reach customers and prospects while they're on the couch watching Netflix at 9 p.m. As a result, the context of your content will be much different than you'd find in traditional marketing communications.

Social media has a different feel than anything else in the B2B marketing spectrum. Voice and tone are important. And writers and designers need to consider the unique environment in which the content will appear. It has to be hyper-relevant, meaningful, engaging ... and succinct. That's sometimes a challenge with the complex messages of B2B. But there's always the opportunity to include a link to the deep dive.

The first step in using social media for B2B is to define which platforms to use. Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube — the list can be overwhelming when you consider how much frequent, original content each requires. It's important to consider quality over quantity when it comes to the platform that will work best. By evaluating the landscape of each platform — for instance, limitations on video length or character count — you'll begin to better understand which platforms lend themselves to your overall goal. And remember, if a social media platform doesn't align with your goals, it's highly likely that there is another that will.

Regardless of the platforms you choose, it's important to ensure best practices are followed. This means staying in touch with the latest platform updates. Following best practices makes sure your brand appears sharp, contemporary and consistent.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Finding the right audience is, naturally, a large part of any social media effort. As social media has grown worldwide, targeting your intended audience is more important than ever. One way to make your social media efforts more visible is through hashtags. Hashtags help niche audiences on platforms like Instagram or LinkedIn find posts or conversations they are interested in. Plus, hashtags allow those audiences to find your posts even if they don't follow your company page or account.

Finally, keep it personal. Despite being B2B, the same B2C rules of approachability and conversation apply. As these platforms were designed to facilitate interaction, every post should not only market to complex industries, but also connect and engage with individuals.

## THE CHANNELS

### PAID ADVERTISING

Paid media placement is alive and well, and still an important tool for B2B marketers. With total control and instant results, it's a critical tool for time-sensitive programs like product launches.

The advantages of paid advertising are now being enhanced by technology. With recent advances in microtargeting, however, you can connect with much more difficult-to-reach audience segments. It's now possible to target granular audience segments, like VPs of engineering, medical device design engineers and even millennial architects designing imaging centers at suburban health campuses.

Programmatic advertising, or the buying and selling of ad space through an automated platform, has become a way to have your ads appear only to those audience segments that you've decided to reach. And the specificity of defining those audience segments is precise. It means advertisers can ensure a highly-qualified audience is seeing their ads.

A key advantage of a programmatic campaign is how it's not limited to a single publisher or page. Ads can run next to the most relevant content anywhere on the web. While some trade publications don't accept programmatic ads, these exceptions are rare. Programmatic allows for a focus on the content and the people, perfecting the ad to appeal to the unique needs of our micro-targeted audience.

With programmatic on social media, you get even closer to your audience. Here, instead of working with networks that are buying and selling advertisements constantly, the programmatic advertising happens directly within the platform. Social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter have more data about their user bases than anyone else. Since it's their own data from users who have personally identified themselves, the quality of social media programmatic advertising is often much higher.

## PAID ADVERTISING

While typically you're using someone else's data, it's possible to use your own lists, creating an audience segment and advertising to them. The most common scenario for this is account-based marketing (ABM), where marketers tailor a highly targeted campaign to a very small selection of potential buyers. You can create a "look-alike" extension of your target audience. Testing this extension will reveal how effective it is and allows you to modify and optimize how that list was created.

Finally, considering the customer intent of your target audience, rather than just pulling a list of industry codes, is a key element of a successful programmatic advertising campaign. It's important to remember that, ultimately, you're advertising to real people in the real world, and programmatic advertising, when done correctly, can help you do that effectively.

## THE CHANNELS

### PUBLIC RELATIONS

When talking about audiences in B2B industries, everyone thinks immediately of customers, prospects, end users and in some cases IT directors. Those are, of course, the mainstays in many B2B marketing efforts. But you shouldn't forget an extremely important segment of your audience: influencers. An influencer is any person who can direct the preferences of potential buyers. The world of B2B is full of influencers, and your public relations efforts are all about reaching them.

Let's introduce ourselves to the two core B2B influencers, starting with trade editors.

Trade editors are the unbiased gatekeepers of information that appears in their online and print media outlets, as well as social media channels. Their success in meeting the informational needs of their readers can spell the difference between success and failure of their media outlets and even the larger publishing company they're a part of. The informational needs of their audience are demanding in the extreme. That's good news for marketers like you:

These editors have every reason to tune into your message. They need strong, informative, nonpromotional content they can count on.

You can help trade editors by offering a complete understanding, even an immersion, in your industry. This is where your company's executives and subject matter experts come into play. Editors, like all journalists, rely on subject matter experts to help them understand how and why things work a certain way.

According to a recent Godfrey survey, editors also want to receive pitches and content that are newsworthy while addressing trends and challenges facing your industry. You can provide these stories, free of overt self-promotion, and yet still support your marketing efforts by delivering content that is fully optimized to drive readers to your website for more information. You can also support your social media efforts by providing editors with content that is "social ready," with suggested posts for their LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter pages.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

Industry experts are the second type of B2B influencer. Like trade editors, they want to know what's new in your company and how it's impacting the industry. They're part of the 24/7 world of digital communications, constantly looking for ways to beat their competitors — even trade editors — to the punch with the latest news, commentary and insights. Unlike trade editors, though, industry experts don't need to maintain a tone of journalistic impartiality. They're not afraid to praise, bash or shrug off new products.

Industry experts can have a tremendous influence on your customers and prospects, who seek third-party validation and unbiased information throughout the buying and decision-making process. According to findings from Demand Gen Report's 2019 B2B Buyers Survey, nearly one third of today's buyers turn to such analysts for insight when making a purchase.

To reach these experts, you'll need to identify and build relationships through media relations as well as social listening and engagement. You'll need to know where your customers and prospects are looking for information and

why so you can plan your strategy accordingly. And you'll need to execute and measure the results of the program to maximize effectiveness.

According to a recent report from B2B Marketing, the majority of these influencers (79%) are willing to do free work if they believe in a brand's product or cause, 68% of them enjoy speaking at events and 58% like participating in panels and online chats. They also enjoy writing articles and posting social media content. Needless to say, that's a lot of free promotion if you've earned their praise.

When you're doing it right, B2B public relations is a win-win for all parties involved. Your brand wins when you can provide those influencers with killer content that reaches their audience. And those influencers win, too, when they can provide your customers and prospects with timely, useful information. It's a world of push and pull, give and take. But when everybody does their job, everyone benefits. It all begins with thinking of influencers as a critical piece of your B2B audience.

## THE CHANNELS

### EMAIL

Sure, email is about as old as the internet itself. The first email marketing blast hit inboxes in 1978, so by now the format may appear dated. But email is reliable. It's everywhere. Even though experts predicted other technologies would've replaced email by now, over half of the world still uses it. And, what's more, email has a higher return on investment (ROI) than most channels.

When done right, email manages to keep up with the newest technology while still considering the old. Email platforms are probably the best example of this balancing act. On desktop devices, Microsoft Outlook is less versatile than consumer-drive services like Gmail. But the Outlook mobile app can do more than its desktop counterpart, such as allowing dark mode, animated GIFs and other interactive elements. As long as you produce emails with older desktop-friendly defaults, you can freely explore the enhanced functionality that the mobile experience allows. Email compels us to balance the old with the new.

Since most professionals send and receive scores of emails each day, you'd think that sending them would be pretty easy. But, as the email platform balancing act demonstrates, marketing emails can be easier said than done. There's even more to it than the technology — there's the message.

B2B marketing emails in the not-too-distant past were long and dense, as if brands were squeezing all the information they could into a single communication. Today, some of the most effective B2B marketing emails use a few sentences (or very small copy blocks) to deliver one focused message. With such limited real estate, it's essential that what you say speaks directly to your audience. But what do you say when those audience members have different needs and interests?

While a single batch-and-blast email for everyone on your list is certainly quicker, the most effective way to get your audience's attention is to recognize the different priorities your audience members bring to the table. Segment your audience based on these priorities and create email content

## EMAIL

variations for each. Usually, the variation doesn't have to be huge. An audience-specific image, headline or email subject can go a long way.

This level of personalization has helped email evolve into a conversation between your audience and your brand. It's not enough to send one email with the same message one time. When you send an email, you expect recipients to interact, to follow your call-to-action or even to reply. When they've engaged with your content, recipients expect to hear from you again.

Each individual email you send is just one touchpoint in a much larger interaction. This means you don't have to fit everything you want to share into a single blast. In fact, shorter messages are usually more effective. That's why today's emails are tighter, cleaner and more focused than ever. You can even synchronize these focused messages with your recipient's customer journey.

Nurturing email campaigns are one common approach to creating these strategic email conversations. Also

known as drip campaigns, these programs use a sequence of targeted emails to guide each of your users along a trackable, measurable journey. Each email has a message that corresponds to their position in the buying process. This gradual series of communications meets your audience members where they are, independent from one another, and eases them into a conversion at their own pace.

But who exactly is receiving all of these emails? This is a question your team should never stop asking. Whether you've organically collected your own first party list or obtained one through a legitimate third party, smart companies carefully update and maintain their email lists. You can do this either through customer relationship management (CRM) software or other list management tools. But be careful: Regulations like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) circumscribe precisely how you should be compiling, using and maintaining that list.



## THE CHANNELS

### WEB

The corporate website remains B2B marketing's fulfillment vehicle of choice. Your digital environment allows customers and prospects to do their own research anonymously, without human intervention. This kind of always-on, global access has thus altered the sales and market dynamic forever. Because of its universal nature, your website is the channel that all your other channels should ultimately lead back to. Even if every other channel is totally nailing it, a weak website can cost you your audience.

Once upon a time, your website was a relatively static library of information that users searched and scrolled. Eventually they'd find what they needed. But today, concierge websites like Amazon have changed the way users experience the web. These new experiences set new expectations. (Remember: Your website isn't just judged against your competitors' websites — it's judged against the last best site your user visited.) When they come to your site, users now expect a simple, intuitive, customized experience that anticipates their needs.

No waiting. No digging. This level of personalization provides users with a richer, more fulfilling experience.

Users are increasingly willing to exchange some of their personal information for such ease-of-use, but they want to know that their information is secure. Data privacy has never been a bigger concern than it is today. This doesn't mean that personalized experiences won't remain at the cutting edge of web marketing technology, but it does mean that marketers will have to adhere to ever-growing standards and legal requirements as they put those technologies to work. Marketers will be responsible for more maintenance than ever before. If user information is mishandled, organizations can face legal issues, fines, and lost user trust.

It's a lot of responsibility. And while the website is often the responsibility of marketers, it represents a lot more than marketing. For one thing, it's potentially the most powerful tool your sales team has ever wielded. So your sales team should have a voice in any major website changes. Mine for their insights: How can your site better connect the dots between a lead and a sale?

## WEB

Your site will also require IT involvement. The IT department has likely established policies and procedures that will influence which platforms you should choose. A good relationship between your marketing and IT teams will help reveal the information your organization needs to make the best decisions it can.

Before embarking on a major website investment, get all of your internal stakeholders around the table and determine what, precisely, your organization needs the website to accomplish. And, with equal importance, consider how much time and attention these stakeholders can invest in your site long term. Make sure that, as an organization, your reach does not exceed your grasp. A digital maturity model will help you assess your readiness. Such a framework describes what your company is capable of doing digitally right now, just as it is, and helps determine how its capabilities can grow in the future. Most large enterprise platforms offer tools to help you conduct this assessment.

Once you've determined your organization's digital maturity, you can make some informed decisions. One big one is

which content management system (CMS) to use. There are hundreds upon hundreds of CMS platforms, and no two are alike. Some offer more user friendliness but less built-in marketing automation or analytics. Others offer more robust functionalities at a much higher cost. That said, don't stop at the sticker shock without looking at the big picture: A robust CMS platform may seem expensive, but the right infrastructure can help your team make website updates quickly and easily, which can yield big savings in long-term web development costs. This is where a good relationship with IT comes into play. Once you know what you want to accomplish with your site, they can help you find the right CMS.

Building the right website can take a lot of collaboration, discussion and compromise. But it's worth the effort. These conversations allow a more three-dimensional view of your customer's experience and, in turn, help you create a website that better meets each customer with exactly what they need. In other words, if your team deals with the hard conversations, you'll end up giving your customers the easiest experience.

## THE CHANNELS

### SEARCH

Almost all consumer product discovery starts with Google. Technical audiences are no different. It's just that their search terms are more complex and hyperspecific. Welcome to the farthest reaches of the long-tail keyword. Aligning your digital presence with these search terms can require a substantial investment in optimization and content, but it's an investment worth making. Some of these highly specific B2B searches can lead to a million-dollar sale.

The value of search continues to grow. Under the constraints of a global pandemic, people can't go to trade shows to discover new solutions, so they're turning to Google more than ever. Your search visibility will determine how many of these potential customers will find you before they find one of your competitors.

While the right search terms can help improve your ranking, there's more to B2B search marketing than keywords. True search engine optimization (SEO) will require you to optimize your website user experience, content marketing, technical compliance, advertising and even public relations.

To bolster your search rankings through content development, you can create everything from infographics to case studies for your site — any relevant resource that provides valuable knowledge, includes organic search terms and distinguishes your company as a thought leader. As for public relations, your name and the names of your products and services appear in more search results when your PR team places articles and press releases. When it comes to UX, regular website maintenance helps, but there's even more you can do. Improving the user experience (UX) of your site can provide great gains as well — but it demands great care.

For starters, take a look at the fundamentals of your site. Do you see any gaps that new, compelling content could fill? Do you see any opportunities to incorporate new keywords on existing pages? Can you make your site more intuitive for user navigation? Successful companies let their search partners (internal or agency) make any updates that need to be made — and fast. These simple-yet-essential changes can deliver massive results.

## SEARCH

Finally, let's talk about the paid side of search: Search engine marketing (SEM). While SEO and SEM serve the same ultimate purpose, their approaches are quite different. In the simplest terms, SEO uses organic tactics to get folks to your website, while SEM uses paid formats like Google Ads.

So how do you know when to use SEO and when to use SEM? If you can optimize your own website and generate traffic without paid search, that's usually best. This works if you have a big site and a big pool of customers. The high traffic potential plus the right SEO could mean thousands of new users. But if you need immediate results, SEM is the way to go (it can take six to twelve months to see the benefits of organic SEO). Paid search also allows timely campaign-specific promotions and a degree of messaging control that organic cannot.

The good news is that you don't have to choose between SEO and SEM. Most marketers opt for a blend of both.

B2B search marketing is highly valuable, widely varied and always changing. There's a lot to keep in mind to get the results you're looking for without falling short. Because of its

ever-changing nature, search isn't once and done. It requires continual optimization. For the greatest success, B2B search marketing needs to be updated regularly based on the data you collect.

Once you collect that data, trust it and use it. It's about as close as you can get to reading users' minds. The words that users type into their searches can be pretty surprising. They'll use language that describes their problem or what they think their solution could look like. Finding creative ways to leverage those exact search terms is what's going to reach them — and increase your site traffic.

When dealing with search, it's important to remember that you won't always have all the answers. But the answers are out there. That's why one of the greatest keys to search success is knowing when to bring in an expert. When it comes to B2B search marketing, there's so much to know and do. Instead of trying to keep up with everything on your own, you will likely find it more cost-effective (and lucrative) to bring in a specialist.

## THE CHANNELS

# TRADE SHOWS AND VIRTUAL EVENTS

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Which came first, B2B or the trade show? We'll let the historians work that one out, but there's one thing we know for sure: B2B marketing and in-person industry events have been a package deal for as long as any living marketer can remember. So, when a global pandemic cancels all major trade shows, B2B marketers have to think outside the status quo. In the wake of 2020, marketers have made great strides in building remote experiences like live (or prerecorded) product demos, interactive 3D models and mass virtual gatherings.

B2B event marketing has come a long way in a short time. But don't assume that these innovations will eclipse the trade show in the post-pandemic world to come. No digital technology will ever replace direct human interaction. That's why, even after the many digital revolutions of the early 21st century, many companies have still considered trade shows

to be their best source of qualified leads. Their appeal is the personal contact, which is the key to turning so many casual observers into live prospects. But remember: Those conversations alone won't cut it. Companies who view their shows as an opportunity to shape a complete customer experience — and promote their events before, during and after the show on all relevant channels — are always the most successful.

In the years to come, B2B marketers will continue to invest in trade show experiences. But those experiences will evolve along with the rest of the world. Expect a fusion of digital and physical innovations as marketers invent new forms of hybrid experiences, carrying the lessons of 2020 into the decade ahead.

## THE CHANNELS

### COLLATERAL

Collateral materials are great for product fulfillment, education and sales support. And not just printed materials, but videos, specifying tools and animations that show how a product works. And B2B marketers have always had great success in packaging a variety of materials into “kits” that are distributed as electronic media or downloads.

## THE CHANNELS

### SALES REPS

It may seem odd to think of sales reps as a marketing medium. But companies who view their reps as a walking, talking presentation of their brand do better in the long run. In many ways, that distinction reflects the changing role of the sales organization, which in pre-internet times served as the gatekeeper for a company's information assets. Customers received the information the rep wanted them to have and saw a company's product line and even its corporate positioning through that lens.

Now, however, information is power. And that power has shifted to the buyer. B2B prospects complete a large percentage of their journey before they talk to sales reps —

largely because they can find all the relevant information online. So, sales enters the picture much later in the process, with the role of the sales rep shifting from power broker to guide or consultant. Rather than controlling access to information, sales reps need to focus on helping the buyer through the process, pointing them to the right resources and making sure they have what they need.

Advanced techniques like account-based marketing (ABM) could also enhance the relationship between marketing and sales, allowing marketing to craft materials sales reps can use to target specific buyers, like IT managers or purchasing people.



A blue-tinted photograph of an industrial facility, likely a refinery or chemical plant, featuring complex piping, scaffolding, and large cylindrical tanks. The image is used as a background for the text.

07

GETTING  
RESULTS

## GETTING RESULTS

### OPTIMIZING YOUR PROGRAM

Marketing has all too often suffered from a “fix-it-and-forget-it” approach, as if our end goal was measured in tweets, posts, ads and clicks. It’s not. The end goal of all marketing communications, of course, is measured in profitable sales. These campaigns exist to heat up interest, kindle demand and ignite the sales process. Meanwhile, B2B marketers are getting pressure from top management to show more results. And while digital media are infinitely more measurable than the print media of the past, many companies still struggle with the process of evaluating the success of their marketing programs.

It’s never been more important to measure results and optimize your programs to address those important questions about marketing effectiveness and return on investment (ROI). Most B2B marketers recognize this. Unfortunately, many companies remain saddled with an antiquated tech stack that inhibits this kind of thorough tracking. But that doesn’t mean tracking and optimization are entirely off the table. Even if the so-called “vanity” metrics of clicks and impressions are the best tracking you can do, some optimization is always better than none at all.

## GETTING RESULTS

### MAKING MEASUREMENT COUNT

Almost every B2B industry is being impacted by the tumultuous change of digitalization. New products, new communications capabilities and new buyers are emerging and changing the way people think, act and buy.

It's never been more important to measure the effectiveness of your marketing communications. Measurement starts, in the case of online marketing efforts, through setting up analytics. That almost universally means using Google Analytics, but oftentimes those analytics aren't set up correctly, or effectively.

Making measurement count also plays a big role in understanding how your potential buyers are moving through the sale. By mapping the path you'd like them to take (and what should happen when the process stalls), you can determine what parts of your campaign need to be modified and which are working well. Campaign mapping includes a clear understanding of where links are sending buyers and what to do if they don't respond. What are the next steps after you've moved a buyer to a landing page?

It'll be different based on which target audience you're creating the campaign map for, but this work helps show what's working and what's not.

But even before that, marketers must decide on clear goals for their campaign. These marketing goals should be tied to business goals, so you're not measuring clicks or visits, but rather conversions, marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) or even sales. In other words, your goals should matter to the C-suite. The plan should also account for the time or budget you'll need to set up, measure and optimize the analytics and results for any created campaigns.

Once your campaign is running and analytics are continually being collected, it's time for testing and optimization. Having the right measurements in place will allow for test performance based on audience mix, creative and messaging. That means you'll be able to create multiple creative concepts and not simply pick the one you like the best, but test all of them and determine which are most effective. Testing, alongside optimization that boosts the quality of click throughs, means your campaign doesn't go stale.

## GETTING RESULTS

### SELECTING THE RIGHT KPIS

It's important to track the performance of your marketing using key indicators of that performance. This helps you figure out what's doing well and where you need to improve.

It's important for all of these key performance indicators (KPIs) to be aligned with your goals and objectives, which should be unique to your business. But what's the best way to figure out what those are? Our recommendation: Start with your benchmarks of past performance, set your goals and then work backward to establish what those indicators of success should be.

Read more on ["How to Select the Right KPIs for Your Marketing Program."](#)



08

| PULLING IT  
ALL TOGETHER



## PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

### UPPING YOUR GAME AND ESCAPING THE TACTICAL

The answer to the question advanced in a previous section — identifying the silver bullet for B2B marketers — is probably not social, paid, PR, email or search. In fact, it may be “all of the above.” Especially if those tactics are integrated into a program that includes some or all of those social media channels, as well as paid advertising, public relations, email and web.

B2B marketers benefit from intelligent campaigns that capitalize on the strengths of each medium, deploying tactics in a well-thought-out approach with clear, measurable objectives. Add to that a built-in evaluation process that lends itself to easy optimization, and you’ve pulled together a powerful marketing force.

By adding multiple players and complex buyers’ journeys to the mix, the challenge of marketing to complex audiences makes an integrated approach even more important.

### USING ALL THE TOOLS IN YOUR B2B TOOLBOX

As marketers, we have many choices for getting the word out about our latest B2B products and services. There are so many tools, it can be challenging to know where to start. Make it easy on yourself by having a standard list of marketing tactics that you know you need to include. Then build upon that, based on the specific nuances of the campaign.

Bridey Orth reviews the choices in her blog post on [the components of a successful B2B marketing campaign](#).

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

## **EMBRACING THE COMPLEXITY**

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As we've outlined in these pages, marketing to complex industries is challenging. But, as a B2B marketer, you've got what it takes. You can increase leads, boost sales and improve brand awareness. But most importantly, you can tell your company's story in a compelling yet authentic way. You can achieve your business goals, turn customers into partners and establish your company as a major player in your markets.

All of that is within your reach — as long as you're ready to dive into the sometimes-difficult, always-interesting realities of your industry. Go deep or go home. You can find all the energy and inspiration you need by looking at the awesome world your B2B company is helping to create.

Of course, it's not easy. But when you've built a career in the gloriously complex world of B2B, you'll see what we learned a long time ago: Easy is overrated.





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