

New Challenges for B2B Marketers

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Abstract

There is a real challenge in relation to B2B higher customers' engagement, B2B companies failing to engage a significant percentage of their customer base, organizational infrastructure and culture representing major weaknesses. Now it's time to rethink the B2B buyer's journey, better understanding the ways of communication, and the practical tips on what and how to segment, developing content with clear segments in mind, and using personalization as an embedded function within the marketing department. Each relevant interaction must be done at scale, capitalizing on the abundance of data in order to make B2B marketing relevant to the accounts, clarifying how and why B2B prospects choose to buy, and what can be done to facilitate prospects buying decision process. B2B sellers must provide consistent content on each channel, prioritizing leads from inbound channels, never separating leads and contacts, and aligning marketing and sales, building the content marketing strategy around business outcomes.

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and Sales Alignment

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The challenge of B2B higher customers' engagement

Five years ago, McKinsey's representatives showed that in order to orchestrate customer engagement (engagement being a conversation going beyond managing the experience at touch points to include all the ways companies motivate customers to invest in an ongoing relationship with a product or brand) for the entire organization the marketing function is best placed. But to act this way a company must be able to influence touch points it doesn't directly control, the spectrum of organizational choices being broader than ever within the context of the absence of solid return-on-investment data. Until the companies will evolve the full set of processes and structures needed to manage customer engagement across the whole organization, McKinsey's representatives recommended five steps to move in the right direction: hold a customer-engagement summit; create a customer-engagement council; appoint a "chief content officer"; create a "listening center"; challenge your total customer-engagement budget. (French, LaBerge, and Magill)

Two years ago, two writers and editors at Gallup reminded us that: customer engagement (described by Gallup as a customer's emotional or psychological attachment to a brand, product, or company) is the definitive predictor of business growth; as simply measuring customer engagement is not enough, leaders must take action by focusing on sustainable change management tactics, and blending customer and employee strategies for optimal performance. (Sorenson and Adkins) At the end of February 2016, the Managing Director of Bsquared Consulting (a company specialized in helping organizations improve their B2B customer engagement and loyalty) underlined that according to a recent Gallup report (conducted over five

years and based on responses from over one hundred thousand people), B2B companies are failing to engage 70% of their customer base, these findings completely harmonizes with the research conducted by Bsquared which showed that only 8% of B2B companies have reached full “maturity” in their customer engagement. (Brickle, 2016) Bsquared research also showed that the major weaknesses lie in the organizational infrastructure and culture. The above mentioned Gallup report also showed that B2B customers with high customer engagement achieve: 50% higher revenue/sales, 34% higher profitability, 55% higher share of wallet. Allow us to remember within this framework (896 comments) the very interesting comments made by the well-known Michael Lowenstein, who highlighted another factor contributing to low engagement, arguing that much of B2B customer decision-making is completed before the buyer and seller ever interact, and this because of: broad availability of content; time constraints on the purchaser; contact limitations and restrictions imposed by groups such as procurement department, purchasers controlling the buying and relationship processes. Brickle answered that it would be better that vendors talk to the end user, the decision maker and the budget holder.

A month before this last opinion expressed above, and in the same day, (Ryan, 2016) we find out that: according to three statistics (represented on a slide by a conference speaker as shown in the photo posted by Daniel Heimlich on his LinkedIn page), 74% of B2B buyers conduct more than half of their research online before talking to a salesperson (Forrester Research), 75% of B2B buyers use social media to research vendors (IDC), while 90% of B2B buyers say they never respond to cold outreach (Harvard Business Review); according to LinkedIn’s new eBook, “Rethink the B2B Buyer’s Journey”, marketers must rethink many of the ways they communicate with their customers and how they align with their colleagues in sales, six key takeaways being recommended: *prioritize delivering authentic and helpful knowledge your prospects crave; strive to reach the entire buying team, not just the key decision maker; deliver a full range of content, from product demos to case studies to thought leadership; leverage social media through the entire buying process; marketing and sales should align on a broader definition of nurturing – beyond classic relationship building; deploy sales technology to drive better sales and marketing alignment.* (Callahan, 2016)

B2B marketers and a key to demand generation

According to the opinion expressed by the founder and CEO of Openprise (a data automation SaaS company), segmentation is very important for B2B marketers whose companies already invested in CRM (customer relationship management) and MAP (marketing automation platform) and are capturing leads and running campaigns, (King, 2016) segmentation being the foundation of the company’s: ideal customer profile and target accounts lists; account-based marketing – ABM, by finding gaps in account penetration and coverage; targeted campaigns and personalized engagements, by good segmentation; easier suppression, by knowing whom not to target. Within this approach, there are *four practical tips on what and how to segment: job level*

segmentation (which reveals the role a lead plays in the buying process, a person's role in the buying process depending on how a job title translates to job level, and on the product sold), by creating customized segmentation logic that fits company's business; *job function*, by identifying the lead's job function (finance, sales, IT) and role in the buying process, and using fine-grain segmentation for targeted job functions; meaningful *company size* (which is typically measured using annual revenue or number of employees), size range definition being unique to company's business; *industry* (company's marketing strategy should always have an industry focus), by remapping the standard and third-party industry data to company's custom list. The founder and CEO of Openprise pledge for segmenting with a data automation tool (built for marketing and sales, not IT, and easy to customize), considering logic and reference data (job title, company revenue, number of employees, and industry), and transforming raw data into segmented data in a scalable and manageable manner.

B2B marketers and the challenge of personalization as an embedded function within the marketing department

Doing personalization is not simple, presupposing more highly targeted content and a well-examined buyer's journey, so as to drive prospects to convert faster. That is why many companies are using the Crawl Walk Run project methodology, (Eustace, 2016) beyond the fact that there are opinions considering it an antiquated approach. (Miller, 2016) There is a well-known mantra ("Let's crawl before we walk, let's walk before we run"), and also well-known evolutions (such as the "Crawl Walk Run Fly" approach used, for example, to social media by Edelman. (Kelley, 2015)

The founder and CEO of Get Smart Content - a software provider that enables brands to personalize content across channels – partnering with MarketingProfs on a poll to understand what B2B marketers are doing today around personalization – made reference to Harvard Business Review arguing that personalization can deliver 5X to 8X the ROI on marketing spend and lift sales by 10% or more. (Eustace, 2016) Poll findings showed that: 71% of B2B marketing organizations are personalizing emails based on audience; 32% consider the growing opportunity around personalizing content on the website; 29% have linked two marketing platforms and 24% have linked three marketing platforms to integrate data (in the general context of accessing audience data to segment it within marketing automation platforms, CRM platforms, website analytics platforms, data-management platforms, and content management platforms); the critical areas for a successful personalization program are: strategy, leadership, data, content personalization, measurement, and learning. And in order to help B2Bs understand the initiatives and deliverables in each phase of personalization maturity, a maturity model was developed showing where B2Bs are against their peers and what is needed to get to the next stage: awareness, connected, targeted, and optimized (when content is developed with clear segments in mind, personalization becoming an embedded function within the marketing department).

The new B2B marketing leaders, digitally savvy and understanding the new consumer.

Facing the fundamental challenge of any marketing organization

The Agenda of “B2B Engagement Fest”, June 30 2016 (a day of challenging upcoming webinars) announced a focus on sharing techniques – for driving engagement and building customer relationships at every stage of the buying cycle – by special invitees, such as Mitch Joel (“Algorhythm – The Pulse of Creativity, Data, and the Future of Brands”) Digital Marketing Expert, Bestselling Author of “Ctrl Alt Delete” and President at Mirum. The introduction to the delivery of the above mentioned topic underlines that today’s world is challenging marketing teams like never before (digital transformation is imperative, disruption being everywhere), and facing the new consumer (much more efficient at buying) the new B2B marketing leaders are both digitally savvy and understanding this new consumer. (pardot.com)

Allow us to remember some recommendations of the President at Mirum (Zalcmanis-Lai, 2016) made on different occasions: the biggest paradigm in marketing is to look at what data do you need to get the result you want; if you want to be agile, you have to be live in the present; as the real genuine community are more influencer-driven than mass-driven, don’t try to build community, build something shareable; to keep pace with digital marketing brands have to follow some steps of analysis: value, more life, more evergreen, then paid channels to push it out (really quality with a bit of quantity); the best business book to start thinking more progressively (Joel, 2016) is “Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?” by Seth Godin (Publisher: Portfolio; 1 edition, April 26, 2011). Within this framework let us remember “THE LINCHPIN MANIFESTO”: (sethgodin.typepad.com) *“I am an artist. • I take initiative • I do the work, not the job. • Without critics, there is no art. • I am a Linchpin. I am not easily replaced... I make it happen. Every day. • Every interaction is an opportunity to make a connection... The future depends on choices I make now. • I own the means of production - the system isn’t as important as my contribution to it... I know yesterday’s innovation is today’s standard... I donate energy and risk to the cause. • I turn charisma into leadership. • The work matters. • Go. Make something happen.”*

Other two special invitees at “B2B Engagement Fest” are Mathew Sweezey, Principal of Marketing Insights Salesforce Pardot (“How to Rock B2B Engagement in the Age of the Customer”), and Kyle Coleman, Sr. Product Manager Salesforce Pardot (“Discover the Power of Engagement Studio: Build. Visualize. Improve”). The introduction to the delivery of these topics shows that: in order to encourage engagement nurturing must be done correctly (playing a vital role), each interaction must be done at scale, being timely, personalized and relevant; only consistent, personalized, and relevant engagement builds lasting relationships with customers, that is why B2B marketers need a new solution (such as Pardot’s “Engagement Studio”) allowing to design, test, and measure engagement programs that adapt to buyer behavior.

We saw above that Mitch Joel argued that the biggest paradigm in marketing is to look at what data you need to get the result you want. Ten days after this, Everstring argued that with the new predictive marketing (the new generation of predictive marketing platforms help to do much more compared to the previous generation of predictive marketing solutions focused on scoring and prioritizing the database), leveraging data becomes an actionable way to look at the entire business of sales and marketing. (everstring.com) Everstring explained in the very interesting new eBook the three core impacts of predictive marketing (performance, growth, and alignment), and how to use data to activate the relationship between company and its addressable market, taking into account that the fundamental challenge of any marketing organization is how to identify and capture the right audience and how can the marketing organization effectively communicate to this audience. They explored the different strategies (segmented email nurturing, multi-channel demand acceleration, account-based marketing, personalization, new market expansion) that will be affected by these above mentioned core impacts, highlighting the opportunity (with new predictive marketing) of capitalizing on the abundance of data in order to make companies' marketing relevant to the accounts that matter at every stage of the funnel.

Understanding B2B prospect's decision process and criteria. The role of predictive lead scoring, and the habits of highly effective B2B marketing organizations

The founder of UK-based Inflexion-Point (which is applying a systematic, evidence-based approach to help B2B clients generate customer value, eliminate wasted effort and improve marketing and sales performance; its clients being involved in lengthy, high-value, complex B2B sales processes that involve multiple stakeholders) focused recently on understanding how and why B2B prospects choose to buy, and what can be done to facilitate prospects buying decision process. In his opinion, there is a real need to understand (even from a very early stage in the sales conversation): in the first place what caused the prospect to start searching for a solution; how would prospects characterize the issue (if this is it a tangible pain or opportunity, or are they simply curious), the symptoms of the issue, and the consequences of the issue; who else is affected and how; have prospects previously tried to address the issue and if so, how and with what results; whether prospects already have a vision of a solution, and if so what it looks like; whether prospects have already identified potential solution options, and if so, what they are; whether a formal budget has been established for the project and if so, how much and over what timeframe; how the issue under consideration ranks against the organizations "must do" priority list; how decisions like these are typically made in prospects' organization, and who typically gets involved (being necessary to identify the mobilisers within the decision team); how does B2B buyer organization go about choosing between projects and prioritizing which ones get funded first. He underlined the very high risk of failure if the sales people pursue opportunities and commit company resources without knowing the above mentioned things.

A recent research conducted by Forrester Consulting (and commissioned by Accenture and SAP Hybris) showed that the most popular channel for B2B purchases is online, some 38% of buyers using exclusively digital channels, and 32% mixing online and offline channels, while 44% of those buyers are making purchases via Web, mobile, or tablet more than half of the time. That is why B2B sellers must provide consistent content on each channel. (Fisher, 2016) It is also worth taking into account the opinion (Gray, 2016) expressed by the founder and CEO of LeadMD (a company with a vision to transform marketing via the use of marketing automation and CRM solutions): buyer life cycles don't have the same different lengths, and within the context of the new data revolution which has combined structured data with unstructured data (information you can't glean by combing through a company's website), cutting-edge B2Bs are scrapping linear prediction models in favor of real-time insights that start at a desired outcome and work backwards (considering all variables along the way). B2B technology marketers, according to a new Gartner research report, must have some form of predictive lead scoring to prioritize leads from inbound channels (predictive analytics being considered a must-employ tactic helping to cut down on wasteful content from company's marketing team and to find ideal prospects for company's product).

In the same time it is important to show that:

- according to a recent report (Nanji, 2016) from Altify and IDD Consult (based on data from a survey of 1245 buyers and sellers in 66 countries who work primarily for B2B companies), B2B Sales Meetings are a valuable part of the B2B purchase process – from the viewpoint of vendors (and 56% of them think they add value to the purchase process most of the time), while buyers say most meetings are not valuable (and a third of them say vendors rarely or never add value, just 14% of them saying vendors always add value);
- also recently, (DeMonte, 2016) the head of Marketing at Reflektive (a real-time employee engagement and performance platform built for the modern workforce), stated that as long as a company sells into companies (B2B) and not individuals (B2C), leads and contacts should never be separated, and every single person/lead/name/contact in company's database should be associated with an account (account-based marketing/ABM being a more focused and strategic method of both outbound and inbound marketing); to work together, marketing and sales need to talk in account-based language (having the same definition for an account); this kind of approach confirms the opinion expressed by Everstring that marketing and sales (their misalignment plaguing B2B organizations) really need to align so as to avoid impeding each other's and company's success (lack of alignment resulting in a disjointed buyer journey, losing track of leads when they're hot for company's business, and wasting time and effort for marketing team members and sales representatives), speaking in "accounts" being a fantastic place to start speaking the same language. (everstring.com)

Let's also remember that the habits of highly effective B2B marketing organizations – according to "The 2016 B2B Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends" report from Content Marketing

Institute and Marketing Profs – are strategy and communication. (Burney, 2015) On this point, B2B marketing organizations need: to build their content marketing strategy around business outcomes, lead generation (85%) and sales (84%) being the two most important goals for B2B marketers across 2016; to report on ROI-focused metrics, not marketing activity; to invest in the social media basics (social media being the most-used content marketing tactic among B2B marketers, LinkedIn usage being nearly universal). On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that according to a recent report (Nanji, 2016) from LinkedIn (based on data from a survey of 6000 buyers, marketers, and salespeople at mid-sized to enterprise-level B2B companies in seven countries: US, Canada, UK, Australia, India, France, and Germany), the department most often involved in B2B buying decisions is IT (32%), followed by finance (31%) and business development (26%). As the number of company's departments involved in B2B purchase decisions varies significantly by industry (for example, in the travel vertical 3,4 departments, in the manufacturing industry 4,6 departments, and so on), let us note that the respondents in the marketing and advertising industry say that the marketing department has the most influence on B2B purchase decisions, business development being second, followed by sales.

Conclusions: *How to better support B2B Buyer's Journey with Content*

We have seen that B2B companies must be able to influence touch points it doesn't directly control. As B2B buyer need to know what seller's product has to offer, it is essential to initiate proper conversations and develop relationships earlier in the buying process, by using educational, entertaining, and useful content. Content, as Everstring (everstring.com) pointed out recently, is the foundation of any ABM strategy, allowing convincing about the impact B2B supplier's product has beyond the technical implementation, and clarifying concerns about B2B supplier's product specifically.

On the other hand, at the level of the B2B supplier it has to be a clear picture of the alignment of marketing (marketers starting the conversation, marketing being responsible for one-to-many engagements with buyers) and sales (continuing that conversation within a one-to-few format). From the very beginning of the buyer's journey (emarketer.com) it is the marketing department's responsibility to build the two higher-funnel stages preceding purchase, awareness and consideration about a B2B supplier's product specifically, while salespeople also need to understand the value that comes from those marketing conversations at the beginning of the buyer's journey (salespeople owning purchasing, the bottom of the buyer's journey funnel).

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