



Out With the Old: B2B Marketing Strategies for Today

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What has changed in the way that companies communicate with prospects and customers? Pretty much everything! Successfully marketing your services to other businesses today requires a fundamental shift in mindset. No longer can companies rely solely upon interruption-type messaging to get noticed or to develop leads.

Simply repeating traditional marketing approaches in digital channels isn't the answer either. Response rates for non-contextual digital ads are no better than the performance of untargeted direct mail. Old-style mass marketing just isn't a sustainable strategy.

You already know that companies, including your prospective customers, do internet research before they decide to purchase goods and services. But you might not be aware of some of the details that can have a significant impact on attracting new business or retaining the customers you already have. Exploiting your knowledge of customer behavior and preferences increases your chances for success. Ignoring the facts can result in wasted time and money.

Shoppers in Stealth Mode

The financial woes of the USPS are widely reported, but often the information provided is limited to what can fit in 40 seconds on the local or national news broadcast. In truth, the situation is quite complex. Mailing professionals are keeping a close eye on changes affecting the USPS and will ensure that their customers' needs continue to be met.

A reasonable sales strategy therefore would be to:

1. Increase your chances of being included in the research of as many potential buyers as possible.
2. Make sure that the research results in favorable impressions that land your company on the short list more often.

In order to do those two things, you must be aware of how business buyers do their research and what they are looking for. A survey of B2B buyers by DemandGen Reports listed resources such as white papers, e-books, case studies, and webinars as the most valuable

places to get information in the early stages of the buying process, in addition to product information and demos. And a study by BaseOne listed web searches and word-of-mouth as the most useful channels over which that information could be obtained.

Companies must obviously establish a positive reputation and consistently stay top of mind if they are going to be included in the vendor search or be recommended to others when the opportunity arises. And they have to provide the resources that the buyers are seeking as prospects work through their vendor selection processes. Search engine optimization may help to drive prospects to your web pages. What they find when they get there is vitally important.

By the way, the preferred channel for sharing valuable information with others is still email. Facebook and Twitter get a lot of press attention, but they are far behind when it comes to sharing information within and among businesses. It pays to make it easy for recipients of your content to email it to their colleagues. The preference for email is consistent across demographic boundaries. In fact, BaseOne discovered that the only demographic group that didn't identify email as their primary channel for sharing information was 15–17 year-old consumers.

If Mass Marketing Doesn't Work Anymore, What Does?

Personalization and segmentation make a difference. Articles that interest the owner of a 100-person company are likely to be different from those that are relevant to the Chief Marketing Officer from a 10,000+ employee corporation. The messages delivered to each of these individuals should be different. Or you may have multiple contacts within a large organization that have very different perspectives on the services you provide. Adjusting the content to meet the perspective of the recipients will generate better results.

Another key factor to consider is the content itself. Product information is important of course, but you can't produce only marketing material and expect to retain readership in channels like newsletters, blogs, or magazine articles. Open rates will begin to drop or prospects will unsubscribe.



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Find out about the challenges your prospects face and what kind of information they need in order to do their jobs better. Those are the kinds of topics to cover in your content. Consistently publishing helpful and relevant information keeps readers engaged. This becomes a driver for top-of-mind awareness.

Generating New Leads

When it comes to contacting prospects with whom you have no existing relationship, direct mail can be the gateway. Direct mail is listed as the most acceptable channel for receiving unsolicited messages. It beats out email, text messaging, telephone solicitation and social media.

Besides the greater acceptance factor, there's another reason for using direct mail instead of email to get the attention of new prospects — competition. According to the USPS, the average consumer receives 157 emails per day but only 2 direct mail marketing pieces. With nothing but a 50-character subject line to grab the attention of the email recipient, getting emails opened is a tough job. A well-designed direct mail piece that includes eye-catching graphics or messaging has a much better chance.

Once a company has permission from their prospects, email becomes the channel of preference. A strategy that uses direct mail that encourages recipients to go online to take advantage of an offer or download some compelling content, while also granting permission to market to them via email can be effective. Continuing to use direct mail that links to specific landing pages on the web can be an effective way to bolster brand awareness and compile additional customer intelligence that can be used to further personalize future messaging. Paired with email messaging, direct mail can be an important part of the overall communications strategy.

Controlling the Message

B2B companies will generally benefit by establishing a permission-based outbound email program. Consistently getting their name in front of customers and prospects, and using e-newsletters or other communications to drive contacts to landing pages has a lot of benefits.

When supported with more in-depth informational content like case studies, white papers, guides and e-books, the email channel provides a versatile way to communicate with the targeted audience over a long period of time.

With an outbound email program you can cover topics that pertain to your own specific audience, tie editorial content to featured products, include links to customized landing pages or personalized URLs, and closely track the behavior of individual email recipients over time. Unlike channels where publishing is controlled by others or self-promotion is discouraged, outbound emails provide a great deal of flexibility.

Consistency and frequency are important when it comes to outbound email messaging. Many, many companies have started an email newsletter or some other publication only to find out that they don't have the resources to stick with it. They may mail the first few issues as planned, but eventually the schedule starts to slip and before they know it, several months have passed with no publication.

Emails, even those loaded with relevant and customer-focused content, rarely achieve open rates higher than 30%. Companies that resort to a quarterly publication plan when they can't sustain a more frequent effort reduce their chances of their messages being seen at all. The likelihood of a potential customer reading your email can shrink to once per year — clearly not good enough to be top-of-mind when prospects decide it is time to buy. A monthly publication schedule seems to be a manageable task for most organizations.

Publishing content in magazines, newsletters, social networking sites and blogs is important as well. These outlets provide the additional benefit of exposing previously untouched prospects to your brand. These efforts also help quite a bit with search engine ranking. Having thoughtful and relevant content that links back to your website can cause the search engines to list your site higher on the results pages. Once on your site, visitors can be presented with prominent and persuasive offers to subscribe to your mailing list.

A great move is to develop some valuable content to encourage prospective customers to register at your



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website and download the information. Some examples might be checklists or guides, white papers, product comparisons or videos. The availability of this content can be promoted through the regular newsletter, special email blasts, as part of a pre-defined sequence of messaging, in social networking site postings, and on your website. Promoting content such as this can be a more effective way to grow your email list. Lots of companies simply include a 'join our mailing list' button that communicates no obvious benefit to the potential subscriber. Promising something of value in exchange for a valid email address is a better strategy.

Added Benefit for Service Providers

If your company provides printing, mailing and marketing services to other businesses, then your own programs for customer retention and lead development serve as a built-in demonstration of what you can provide to your customers to help them achieve similar results. The same tools and techniques used to improve brand awareness and customer interaction for your own organization can be applied to the companies you serve.

Marketing products and services today requires more strategic thought, more planning, and some more work. Fortunately there are plenty of tools that can help even the smallest organizations put together a plan that produces results. Ditching the legacy mindset may be the hardest part. But once the newer methods are embraced, implementation can be easily accomplished.

