

# B2B Marketing: Reaching your buyers on their digital journey



A thought paper for B2B Marketing and Business Leaders  
2018

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# Introduction

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Marketers need to convince the boss of the need for bigger digital marketing budgets and the business value of the benefits. Those of us who describe ourselves as digital specialists clearly have a vested interest in shouting about digital. Because we believe in it, we love it and we want to do more with it.

But with so many tools, techniques and opportunities at our disposal, it's easy to get lost in the maze of options, to prioritise what we're instinctively comfortable with, to lose control of the overall plan or to overspend on tactics and channels that don't meet our business goals.

What's more, every firm is different and there's no definitive set of activities that will meet everyone's business goals equally and effectively. Setting and meeting realistic expectations is crucial.

Our experience working with and within B2B organisations has taught us some lessons over the last year or two. In supporting forward-looking businesses to develop and deploy an effective digital strategy, we reveal our insight into the art of digital marketing.

In this practical, action-focused paper, we share our thoughts about what buyers want, need and expect from digital marketing campaigns. We'll explore marketing investments and policies that can give access to the most fruitful pipeline opportunities. We'll describe some key techniques and tactics that in our everyday experience have delivered the best ROI and competitive advantage in B2B marketing.

The purpose of this thought paper is to help direct business leaders and marketers on the journey to digital marketing success.



# The buyer's journey: it's no longer a straight path

Once upon a time, it was relatively easy to recognise key points on the journey and intercept buyers and prospects with our marketing messages. That straight path has now been superseded by an iterative route that's constantly influenced by new information. Buyers seek insight according to immediate priorities and respond to incentives from both trusted and new sources. They hop between channels to pick and choose the information that most resonates.

When the required information is complete and available, the process may still be linear but that's unlikely to happen. Because in the digital ecosphere, new information can be re-shaped every second of the day and everyone wants to take advantage of the latest insights.

Often, a buyer believes they are finished with the evaluation process. Then, suddenly they find new tweets, user reviews, technical assessments or YouTube videos about their planned purchase. They may become aware of new suppliers and take a step back, to re-evaluate their previous options in light of this new information.

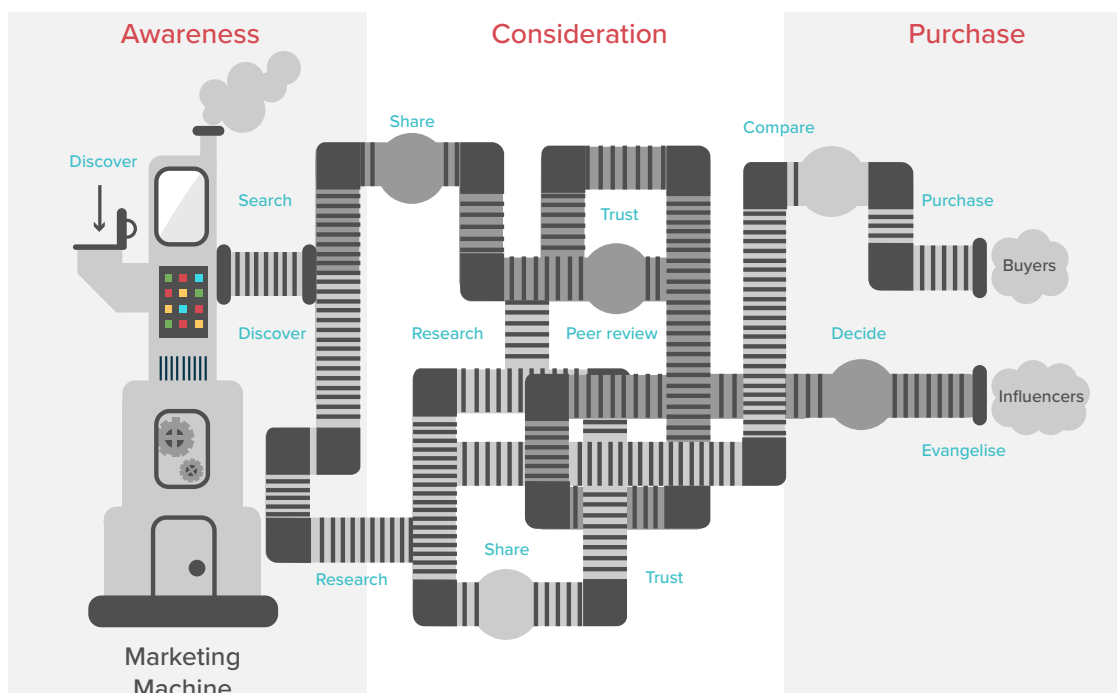
What's the impact? Because buyers can step easily (and sporadically) between diverse points on their journey, B2B marketers need to make sure they provide content frequently and consistently, through all the channels and touchpoints where customers may be pausing on their journey. We must also recognise that purchase decisions can take longer than before and plan sales and revenue forecasts accordingly.

74% of business buyers conduct more than 50% of their research online before making an offline purchase.

Forrester Research

By 2020, customers will manage 85% of their relationships without talking to a human.

Gartner Research

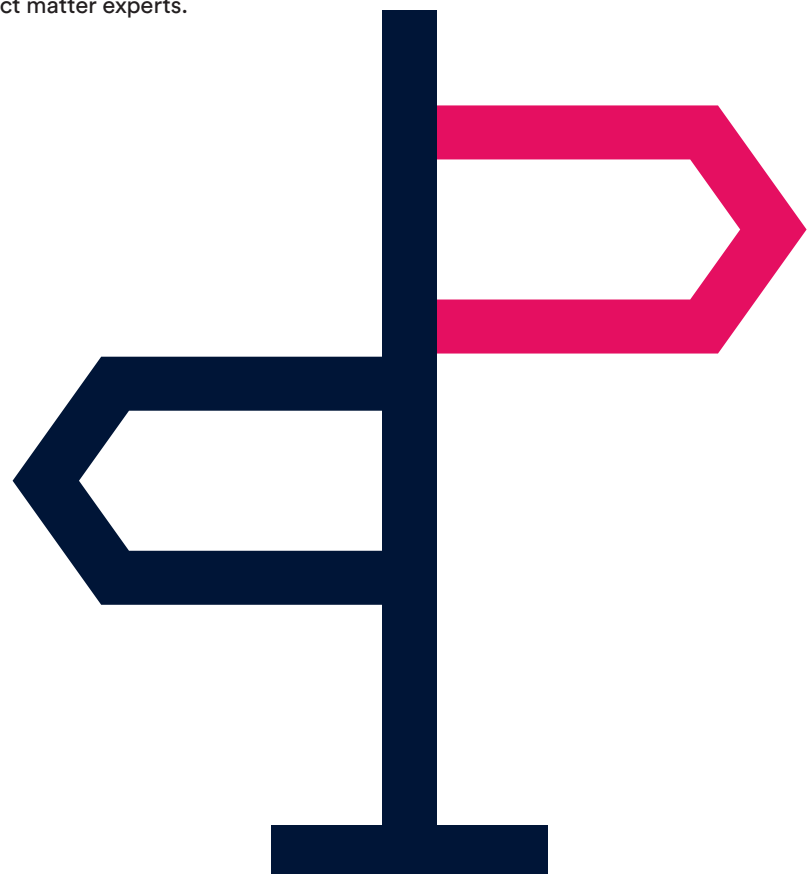


# Social buying factors: integrating social media interaction

According to The CMO Club's report, "Marketing Is a (Buyer) Journey, Not a Destination" – 2015, social media channels are the most popular marketing channels used by CMOs at every stage of the purchase process except the 'buying' stage.

Social media has a powerful influencing and relationship nurturing role. Apart from at the point of conversion to pipeline, it is the leading channel nominated by B2B marketeers at all stages of the buyer journey. This is evidence of how social media has changed from a medium for individual networking and status updates to a key means of content communication and approval. To reinforce credibility and bring users to your website, you need to be up-to-date, engaging and personalised on social media. But don't forget to keep it relevant to your business as you want to attract the right audience who will share content and influence sales!

Thought leadership is important in helping influence the customer's perception. Social media offers a great opportunity to create and disseminate content that's thought provoking and leading edge. Popular techniques include referencing credible external research and industry developments, or co-creation, working with established subject matter experts.



# The buyer persona: visualise your target segments



So you've decided to include content marketing as part of your overall marketing strategy. You write blogs. You release white papers. You use Twitter and LinkedIn faithfully. Your analytics show that you are getting traffic, but there's no corresponding increase in the pipeline. So what's wrong?

The reason you're not seeing results probably has less to do with the quality of your content and more to do with what you're actually saying and to whom.

First, you need to understand what's important to your customers and prospects, based on what you know from their dealings with your business. Many organisations are good at gathering data on their users. But data alone often fails to communicate the real experiences and frustrations of customers. You need to tell the customer's story by putting the data into its real life context.

One of the best storytelling tools in business is the customer journey map. Customer journey mapping is about documenting your customer's experience from their viewpoint, so you know how they interact with you today through the sales process. This allows you to identify opportunities to improve what you offer and enhance the experience.

Your customer journey maps can be simple flow charts, complex spreadsheets or diagrams. It's likely that you'll use digital and account data as well as market information and customer research to create them.

Clearly, you haven't the resources to create unique customer journey maps for every individual prospect. The solution is to identify and prioritise your key customer profiles and create customer journey maps for these personas.

Behavioural segmentation is a useful tool for many businesses. But it's not enough to explore and target job roles. You need to collect data and react to changes in customer behaviour. For example, if a dormant customer returns to your

website, initiate an outbound call to them. If they sign up to an event, follow up with more information about speakers or topics.

The buyer persona takes the next step, taking an even more holistic approach to creating relevant campaigns for defined groups of customers. It's about understanding how buyers interact with your business directly and indirectly, so you can improve value, repeat business and longevity of relationships. You can then create a communication strategy that builds a conversation with your customers along their most likely journey.



# Stages of the buyer journey: in the funnel

A prospective buyer is not always seeking a purchase. It's important to bear this in mind when you measure the effectiveness of your communications at touchpoints along the lifecycle. Different communication tactics will work well at different stages. Another way to think about customer journeys and needs is in terms of where they are in a sales funnel.

**Top of funnel (TOFU):** visitors are typically in a research stage of the purchase cycle. The marketing goal is to be discovered where prospects are researching: for example, through search engines, blogging, social, review sites, directories. You need to move them along their journey with educational topics "how-to" guides or an explanation of a key process.

**Middle of funnel (MOFU):** future buyers who have yet to be swayed but have identified you in their research. At this stage you want to offer content and related calls-to-actions to drive them deeper into the purchase cycle. You can keep them moving in the right direction with information on core activities, solution comparisons and completing a business case.

**Bottom of funnel (BOFU):** buyers. This is where outbound marketing and direct engagement with your sales team comes in. There's still a role for targeted communication to help move them to the end goal: support with completing a business case, for example.

People use search in different ways, depending on where they are in the funnel.

In TOFU, they search for generic needs to improve their overall knowledge of what's in the market.

In MOFU, their searches are more refined, seeking category level information with terms like "event spaces" or "function rooms".

At BOFU, searches are closely specified, such as "London's best event spaces" and could include brand or product names the searcher is now informed about. There's a particular opportunity in the MOFU space to make sure you have automatic retargeting campaigns in place, so that you prioritise engagement with potential buyers who are still considering a range of options. It's still all to play for at this stage so it's important to keep your business and services at the front of mind. eu mauris bibendum tincidunt.



# The buyer's touchpoints: placing valuable content

At each touchpoint on their evaluation journey, the customer will likely complete one or more activities. They'll vary by industry and purchase type, but often include:

1. Investigation
2. Awareness
3. Engagement
4. Purchase
5. Use of product and/or service.

Once you've considered what touchpoints are to be included as part of your overall digital strategy, you can then align activities making sure that the content you offer at each point is designed to help the customer achieve what they want.

It's important to be responsive rather than pushing information out according to internal systems and schedules. Shift to an inbound marketing approach and place valuable, useful content strategically, so your customers will find it in the places where they are. Then, you listen and interact accordingly.

You need to think about what data you are able to capture and how it could feed in to the customer experience at each touchpoint. Behavioural data is particularly important, because engagement directly triggered by customer activities tends to get the best conversion rates. For example if a customer clicks, downloads or views a video, you can assume that they are actively seeking more information and insight on that topic.

The approach will need to be tailored to your particular business and goals. There's no guaranteed one-size-fits-all solution – you need to build a realistic plan that incorporates other integrated marketing activities.

**“...measurement and adaptability of digital channels means we need to evaluate where digital or a hybrid digital/traditional approach will create a better experience.”**

Marketing is a (Buyer) Journey, Not a Destination 2015 – The CMO Club





# Be easy to find: SEO techniques for digital content

Your carefully targeted and placed content needs to be easy to find. Given that buyers are driving the sales process by selectively seeking information, when you have what they want, you need to make sure they can find it.

SEO rules are changing all the time as online behaviour and capabilities develop. It's not about just seizing as much traffic as possible. You want to attract the attention of those potential customers who are genuinely interested in what you have to offer. Think about what your buyers may search for, the sites they most visit, the language they use and key terms and topics for their industry.

Having a good shop window is crucial. That means focusing on your website landing pages. Populate them with relevant keyword themes for your customers and up-to-date, original, useful content.

Certain keywords may get many hits – but are they from buyers and prospects who have a genuine interest in and need for what you offer? Research is key! Conversions, revenue and profitability are far more important than big numbers of initial hits. Don't forget your keyword anchor text – the highlighted, clickable words on the web page – as they play a key role in search indexing.

Author Chris Anderson talks about the theory of the Long-Tail Keyword in his book. Generic keywords like “software” get high volume, but low conversion, while highly specific “long tail” keywords like “document management software for HR” will get low volume but high conversion.

Quality external links count from relevant sites and will bring in referral traffic through a genuine connection with users from your target groups. (Be careful about the sites you target, remember: quality over quantity!) Mobile optimisation is also key: Google now prioritises such sites, reflecting the fact that the majority of Google searches are now launched from a mobile device.

Good SEO will help your website domain authority, bringing your site closer to the top of the first page of search results (SERPs) and creating higher overall brand exposure and more opportunities to convert.

A vital element of SEO strategy is tracking and evaluation. Marketing automation tools and web master tools can provide valuable data for understanding what's driving your traffic and conversions and enable you to quickly and effectively adapt if a method is not working.

You can pay to promote your site on Google (PPC) – tracking results using marketing automation tools is a must, so you can make sure you're spending wisely on the most effective terms. But optimising for natural search is the holy grail of SEO.



# Nurture a long-term relationship: buying is only the start

A decade ago the traditional linear buyer's journey pointed to one end goal. When a buyer had made a purchase and was happy with their products or services, they recommended your company directly. If they were not happy, they did not, and took their custom elsewhere.

Digital has expanded the options. Now, when buyers have made a purchase, they might share their good or bad experiences on social media – not just once the purchase is complete but at any point before, during or after their engagement with you.

Sentiment tracking has become increasingly important, so you know who's saying what about you and can take steps to support or repair customer experiences that are being shared in the public domain. It's a way of listening systematically to what's being said about you in a wide range of social media settings, captured by a CRM or automated marketing tool, because the range of channels is too vast for any individual to hope to keep track of manually.

Before, the purchase itself was the end game. But now it's all about the ongoing relationship afterwards. A positive report via digital communication channels can lead to wide referrals, noticeably affecting the bottom line.

We need to apply marketing energy not just to one-time conversions but to nurturing as well. Sustained relationship marketing will have a positive impact on your Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) activities.



# Making conversions: the balance of inbound and outbound

In our experience a well-executed, balanced range of integrated marketing tactics is an efficient and successful way to build an expanded pipeline. Balance is key.

We need to continually strive for a balance between inbound and outbound to identify and acquire new customers. Lead nurturing is crucial to turn prospects into customers. Lead scoring is paramount to be able to prioritise which prospects to focus on. While these activities may reside within the sales team, they'll benefit from using the content developed for inbound marketing strategies.

Ideally you should foster some form of personal contact. For example, follow up downloads with an automated email from a named individual asking if their paper was helpful and offering a link to a blog posting with more insights. This prepares the ground for a first inbound call from the subject matter expert, because the prospect feels they have a pre-existing relationship with them.

Account-based marketing is a hot topic in B2B at the moment. It's a means of engagement that mostly relies on outbound tactics. But even here, tracking inbound activity and using this data to inform predictive models, develop target account lists and personalise media messaging can drive more targeted outbound engagement.

Pushing one strategy (inbound or outbound) over the other limits the quality and diversity of your pipeline. A good integrated marketing approach takes an inclusive view of all channels and tactics to maximise reach. It can appeal to the full range of personas, whose engagement preferences and buying perspectives are determined by their different roles, industries, geographies, buying stages and personalities.



# Conclusion



To succeed you need to constantly challenge your models of marketing. Keep your eyes open to new opportunities and ways of achieving your customer acquisition and revenue goals by researching, testing and incorporating a wide range of perspectives, touchpoints and trends. It's the only way for your campaigns to keep pace with buyers' priorities and preferences.

There's so much data and so much content – it's potentially a daunting prospect to manage and control it effectively, and extract all the insights we need to continually optimise our campaigns. Digital marketing tools are essential to this.

Offering useful, tailored, well-optimised content that absorbs your audience and pulls them back towards your company will help speed up the buying process. Thought leadership and reputation-building are crucial in B2B marketing: buyers and prospects will judge your credibility on the quality and relevance of your original content, and the sources and partners you choose to build it with. If what you create is truly insightful, it will be shared and endorsed, generating trusted, independent referrals between peers.

There's no doubt that the buying process will continue to evolve, with new technologies replacing our current ones and new paths for customers to follow. But if you truly know your customer and can identify and integrate genuinely valuable information into their buying journey, you will be able to progress ahead of your competition.

Here are the 9 steps we've identified to creating a successful integrated, digital campaign strategy:

1. Set clear objectives and identify the outcomes in terms of sales pipeline, customer engagement and brand perceptions.
2. Assemble your customer journey maps for each persona.
3. List campaign elements at each touchpoint.
4. Identify opportunities for campaign alignment between personas.
5. Decide on the right content mix and flow.
6. Research and content optimisation.
7. Overlay reactive marketing, via social media and inbound channels.
8. Continually analyse results, re-evaluate and refine.
9. Monitor and respond to market intelligence on new channels, buyer influences, perspectives and touchpoints.

# A simple digital marketing glossary

There is a lot of jargon used on the web, in this thought paper and especially in the world of digital marketing, here are some of the important ones.

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**B2B** – Business to business – companies that sell to other businesses.

**B2C** – Business to consumer – companies that sell directly to consumers.

**BOFU** – Bottom of the Funnel – the stage of the buying process where a lead is about to close as a new customer. They've identified a problem, shopped around for possible solutions and are close to buying.

**CLV** – Customer Lifetime Value – a prediction of the net profit attributed to the entire future relationship with a customer.

**CRM** – Customer Relationship Management – CRM is an application and “business strategy with outcomes that optimise profitability, revenue and customer satisfaction by organising around customer segments, fostering customer-satisfying behaviours and implementing customer-centric processes.” Gartner

**DA** – Domain Authority – a score (on a 100-point scale) that predicts how well a website will rank on search engines.

**GA/BA** – Google Analytics/Bing Analytics – free web analytics services that track and report website traffic.

**Long-Tail Keyword** – Three or more keyword phrases which are very specific to what you are selling.

**MOFU** – Middle of the Funnel – the stage of the buying process where a lead enters after identifying a problem. Looking to conduct further research to find a solution to the problem.

**PPC** – Pay Per Click – the amount of money spent with search engines when a digital advertisement is clicked.

**ROI** – Return on Investment – a performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency and profitability of an investment or to compare the efficiency and profitability of multiple investments.


**SERPs** – Search Engine Results Page – listing of results in response to a search query.

**SEO** – Search Engine Optimisation – the practice of enhancing where a webpage appears in search results. Search engines look for relevant titles, keywords, images and links.

**TOFU** – Top of the Funnel – the first stage of the buying process. Leads at this stage are identifying a problem they have and are looking for more information.

# Your digital toolbox

The tools you need to be successful.



We recommend these seven tools to help acquire a better understanding of the ‘digital body language’ of clients and prospects

1. CRM – ‘Microsoft Dynamics 365’
2. Marketing Automation – ‘ClickDimensions’
3. Analytics ‘Bing’/‘Google’
4. SEO Tools – ‘Moz’/‘SEMrush’
5. Keyword Research – ‘Bing’/‘Google’
6. Webmaster Tools – ‘Bing’/‘Google’
7. Content Discovery Analytics – ‘BuzzSumo’ – Analytics on industry trending content and the competition

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Previously known as TouchstoneCRM, we offer so much more than CRM and business software. We deliver real business value through expert consultancy. We're known for our questioning nature and for challenging the status quo.

We succeed when you succeed, inspiring clients with insight led guidance. Our market leading expertise and industry knowledge will help your business to reach its goals.

We understand your industry. Our experts are passionate about sharing their knowledge, revitalising client experiences and improving operational efficiency. At Xpedition, we'll show you the way.

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