Surprising Tactics B2B Marketers Can Learn from B2C Marketing

Combine these two worlds of big data strategies for your marketing success

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Introduction

Does this sound familiar to you? It should. In my career as a B2B marketer, I've worked for small organizations and large enterprises, but always focusing on the business buyer. From my discussions with my colleagues, I've learned that focusing on a type of marketing – either B2B or B2C – isn't abnormal or surprising.

For marketers, a career focused on either B2B or B2C marketing exclusively is quite common. Between B2B and B2C, these two types of marketing disciplines are mostly thought of as oil and water – not often easily mixed.

You as a B2B marketer can get situated in one lane, where you move smoothly and quickly. You understand how the B2B process works and make it work for you. You understand the needs of business buyers: How they have to sell the idea internally up the food chain to their boss and their boss' boss.

You begin to understand the nuances of how departments work together to make decisions and how you can position the same product appropriately to different corners of the business. You're on a first-name basis with your marketing personas. You spend time talking about business problems with real people that match those buyer and user personas. You are comfortable and confident that you know exactly what you're doing.

And then: A new competitor comes along. They have a new strategy, **and it is working**. They are doing things differently. They swim outside their lanes and use tactics that you haven't seen before in your B2B world. They emulate what they encounter in their own consumer experiences with brands that they prefer. They model their marketing not on that pinnacle B2B brand, but rather on a B2C model.

This gets you thinking. **Maybe there are tactics in the B2C world that would work for me in the B2B world. Maybe there is a new strategy out there that I haven't considered before.**

Then it dawns on you. **B2B marketers and B2C marketers are not that different.** This discovery could be very valuable to you as a B2B marketer looking for new tactics and strategies. Where better to look than your colleagues in the B2C space?

We are both cut from the same cloth. We're focused on getting our products and services into more hands. We're focused on increasing revenue and creating that raving fan of our products – that customer that is going to turn to Twitter to give us the "thumbs up" to all of their followers.

For all of our similarities, our experiences have been different. B2B marketers have gone to a different "school of hard knocks."

B2B marketers need some help to understand what's really going on in that shiny, slick B2C office so that we can start incorporating those tactics in our next big campaign and put that upstart competitor back in its place.

The goal of this paper is to bring some of those B2C tactics to light and to give you ideas that you can use to crush your competition. Will you be the new example that a B2C marketer will emulate?

Understand Your Data

Both B2B and B2C marketers have spent a lot of time over the last few years developing into more data centric roles. Both are leveraging data to better understand their markets. One 2014 survey by Adobe Systems found that 74% of marketers believe that acquiring and using data to make decisions about marketing activities is the new reality. Marketers are using this data to perfect their marketing efforts.

Rather than "spray and pray" their message, they have spent a lot of time, budget, and effort understanding what works and what doesn't. In fact, 72% of marketers seek help from outside providers when analyzing their data, according to a 2015 research report by the CMO Council.

However, one difference between B2B and B2C marketers is the scale of their data operations. In B2B, marketers are dealing with hundreds of customers, and thusly data about those hundreds of customers. In contrast, B2C marketers are dealing with thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of customers. This means the costs of their campaigns, and unfortunately the costs of their mistakes, are much higher.

These risks led B2C marketers to become very careful with how they use their data, where they acquire it, how they acquire it, and sensitivity about when they leverage this data. They have to pay extra attention to ensure that they succeed and not cause catastrophic damage to their brands.

Validate Your Data

The realization that an issue can escalate quickly due to the scale of the database has led B2C marketers to treat their contact data with white gloves. As an example, B2C marketers are incredibly careful when it comes to SPAM. The scale of their email campaigns is huge. If they have a large volume of spamtraps or invalid email addresses in their databases, a high bounce rate or emailing even one spamtrap can instantly land them on a blacklist.
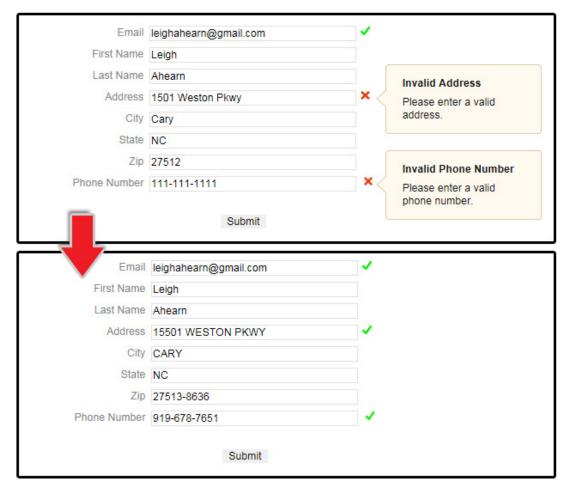
This threat could halt all email promotions, which are essential especially during major promotional seasons such as the holiday shopping season (known as peak season to retailers). Even customers themselves value the email you send – 33% said that email is the best way for building their loyalty to your brand, according to Salesforce Marketing Cloud research.

Of course it's equally important for B2B marketers to be focused on the quality of their contact data. While the scale might not be the same as B2C, it's still mission critical to avoid blacklists.

Think of what your organization uses contact data for. Do you connect with customers? Reach out to prospects? Deliver newsletters? Send promotions with your partners? Does your sales organization rely on contact data? Finance? Do you depend on accurate email addresses as your mode of communication? What about postal mail? Or even the telephone?

These are questions you have to ask yourself. Every company is different. Some communicate almost entirely via email. Others have built their sales organizations around the use of the telephone. Still others rely heavily on the postal mail system for everything from product delivery to invoicing. If you could head off issues with any one of these modes of communication, would you?

This is where data validation comes into play. Again, due to the scale of B2C operations, this is an area that they excel at. Many ensure that their data is accurate so that they can always effectively communicate. This is a great tip from our B2C colleagues that we, in the B2B world, can leverage.

Above: Both B2B and B2C organizations find great value in collecting data from customers on webforms, using various offers to the visitor. This example of a customer filling out a form on a website shows how a real-time data quality service can check the email address, postal address, and phone number of the customer as it is entered on the form. Any missing or incorrect information is then presented to the customer to correct. Invalid data is corrected in real-time while the customer is still engaged, while ensuring your data retention systems are free of data entry errors. These kinds of solutions can be easily implemented, with scalability and speed for any organization's requirements.

There are also great B2B brands that already think in this way. Take GuideSpark as an example. Having only valid contact data in the marketing automation and CRM systems is essential to their success. This is especially true when dealing with issues related to spamtraps and blacklists.

Jessica Kao, Senior Manager of Demand Generation and Marketing Operations at GuideSpark, said,

> "The threat of landing on a blacklist is something that we always keep in the back of our heads, because it is progressively getting harder to maneuver around these land mines. We cannot afford to be blacklisted, as that would halt our e-campaigns which would put marketing to a grinding halt – directly affecting pipeline and revenue for the company. These spam and blacklists aren't a matter of "if" you will hit them but "when," if you do not put procedures in place to combat data decay. Informatica's Email Verification Plus Hygiene is a critical and essential step in every marketing campaign that is executed to ensure that marketing does not get shut down."

Understand Your Customers

Now that you can connect with your customers with confidence, using data that you can rely on - do you know who your customers and prospects are? Just from the heading of this section alone, you're likely already prepared to defend the statement that you understand your customers. You sure do! And so do I. We all do.

It's a trait that all marketers share. We rifle through the data about our customers and, especially in B2B, we actually spend time with our customers. We get to know them personally. We travel to their offices. We visit with them at conferences. We correspond with them. We understand their pains, and we help them to solve their issues with our solutions.

Certainly B2C marketers do this as well. They also form a single view of their customers, which is something B2B marketers could learn from. Ensuring that we have a 360 degree view of our customers enables us as marketers to improve the relationship we have with our customers. It's this total customer relationship that can make the difference in our marketing results.

Without a total customer relationship strategy, we have conflicting data about our customers. Perhaps the CRM system says something different than your Marketing Automation system. Maybe what Finance has on file for the customer is also completely different.

Consolidating this data so that there is only one record for every customer lets you understand the corners of the organization that the customer interacts with.

Wouldn't it be great to know in marketing the second that a new customer signs up, so that you can send them a welcome email? Or even when they cancel a service or stop using a product, can you help to offer them something to stay?

Wouldn't it be great to know if they are having issues with your technology before you promote your newest version to them, or worse yet, promoting the exact product that they have complaints about?

This is something that B2B marketers are struggling with. Many times it is difficult to find out information about a prospect or customer and even more often, they report that they receive conflicting data.

That's what a 360 degree view is great at doing – giving you the complete view of who you are corresponding with and how they interact with your company.

Segmentation allows you to personalize your messaging - and in a 2014 survey, Adobe Systems found that the top priority for a company's marketing success is personalization.

The same survey found that 76% of marketers believe they need to be more data-focused to succeed in their roles.

Segment, Target, Personalize

Once you know who your customers are, how do you know what to say to them? Both B2B and B2C companies tackle this differently. For B2C, a lot of companies have already gotten to the real-time personalization level.

While many B2B companies may eventually get to this level of personalization, most make their messaging relevant to their buyer personas and targeted segments. Currently, only about 25% of marketers are using real-time data for segmentation purposes, according to The Relevancy Group.

The challenge for both B2B and B2C organizations is that their "big data" in this area simply isn't big enough. The data has gaps where information is missing, making it difficult for marketers to successfully profile customers.

Data enrichment can solve this issue. Filling in the missing blanks that you have about a company enables marketing teams to get very granular in their segmentation efforts. Marketers can take firmographic attributes from their data such as industry or annual revenue and marry it with details about their customers from other systems, such as sales totals.

Once your data is enriched with external insights, you can start to build your key segments. These key segments can be defined by several attributes. You may be interested in the customers that purchase the most from your company. You may be interested in the companies that continue to purchase more goods and services or maybe just those organizations that purchased once and never repeated.

Whatever your goal is, you can build a segment around it. For example, who are these companies, and what commonalities do they share? Are my customers more likely to be in the retail vertical or healthcare? Are my best customers from the highest-revenue organizations, or do we perform better with small / medium sized organizations? This process allows you to turn huge amounts of "big data" into massively relevant insights.

Now that you have learned a little more about your segments, you can begin to target those segments. B2C companies do this really well. Think about how many times, in your own life as a consumer, that you have visited an ecommerce website, checked out a product, and then, for days after, every advertisement that you see features that product?

By monitoring your segments in a B2B environment, you can start to predict when, what, how, and why someone may purchase your product or service. Perhaps you follow your data, and you notice that your retail customers purchase and on-board technology in the months leading up to the holidays. From your data, you'll be able to target those retail customers and will now have something to say.

Without them ever identifying themselves as a retail customer, you can start to talk to prospects about that upcoming peak season. Most importantly, you can craft content that is only relevant to retail customers. Your messaging will resonate, and you'll create an experience similar to what your B2C counterparts are doing.

The best part is: That data will even identify products that are relevant to your segments, ensuring that your personalized content will be accompanied with product offers that make sense to your audience.

Offer What is Relevant

Offering what is relevant is a cornerstone for B2C. Rather than "spray and pray" with their marketing messages, great B2C marketers will focus in on what will resonate with their segments. Rather than feature winter apparel to their customers in Hawaii, B2C companies will hone in on what products are relevant to their prospects based on the data that they have stored and acquired about each consumer.

B2B should be no different. If you are selling products geared toward the accounts receivable department, don't send out messaging about products that marketers will use, and don't offer them products that only marketers would use.

It seems simple, but so many are still just blasting messaging and products that don't resonate. Marketers who use data to personalize their messaging in this way receive 5-8 times the ROI on their marketing spending, according to Forbes.

On the flip side, there are many B2B companies that have categorized and itemized their products as if they were a B2C company. These organizations know what to offer and what to showcase. By providing detailed and thorough data about each and every product, companies can improve the journey for their customers – like a B2C brand can do – just by making it easier for their business customers to make an informed purchasing decision.

Saint-Gobain Distribution, a B2B organization that sells building materials to other businesses, is an example of an organization that is successfully improving customer data for better communication while improving the quality and access to their product data.

Saint-Gobain Distribution's building materials are innovative, such as their self-cleaning windows, and so was their approach to how customers should receive information about their products.

Not only are their product details robust, but they also spotlight relevant, related products that may be of interest to their existing customers. This B2C approach helped them to increase their sales conversion rates and lower return rates. Read more about their story here: https://www.informatica.com/about-us/customers/customer-success-stories/saint-gobain.html

Engage With Your Market

Finally, once you know who you should focus on, what to say to them, and what you can offer to them – it's time to engage. There are multiple ways to engage with a consumer or a business. We can choose to send an email, rely on direct mail, call the customer, or use any of the social channels that are now available to us as marketers.

B2B marketers are already really good at engagement. This is evident by the amount of emails, calls, and social interactions that we all receive in our professional lives from other businesses. One area that B2C marketers have perfected that B2B marketers have yet to whole-heartedly embrace is the mobile channel.

B2C marketers have already started to use mobile technology, such as SMS text messaging or even push notifications from apps. B2B marketers can likewise leverage this technology.

According to Portio Research, the world-wide leading authority on mobile messaging, nearly two trillion messages will be sent from business applications to mobile phones by the end of 2017. If you aren't taking a look at this channel, there is a good chance that your competitors are.

Some marketers are already embracing this technology. For example, in July 2015, Informatica presented a webinar with the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and Marketo on how mobile engagement improved their success rate with webinars that their customers and prospects attend (http://www.marketo.com/webinars/great-customer-engagement-requires-great-data).

This is exactly the kind of engagement that B2B marketers can leverage to reach more of their audience.

One Big B2C Example for Your B2B World

Let's imagine what all of this looks like in the real world. How would a B2C organization approach this task so that you can draw parallels to your own company?

Meet Michael. Michael is a writer. He's a sports enthusiast, is married, owns his home, and has two kids. Michael is married to Sally and is interested in purchasing a new television. He goes to his favorite website to research televisions and after reading several reviews, makes his purchase.

The retail company receives his order, confirms that all of his contact data is accurate by using a data validation service, and programmatically processes his order with their fulfillment center. In parallel, because the company values their customer's experience, they make note of the purchase and instantly become aware of Michael's other purchases with their brand. They explore his customer profile and discover his relation to Sally and see that she has also made similar purchases, including a Bluray player.

Michael's purchase is scheduled for delivery, and an SMS text message is sent to Michael containing his delivery information. His order arrives without fail.

After a few days, both Michael and Sally each receive email promotions in their respective inboxes from the company. Due to Sally's previous purchase of a Bluray player, Sally receives an email about a new streaming movie service to enjoy on their new home television. Michael receives an email about a new sound bar that will enhance the sound quality for their new television. Both emails feature additional, related products including pricing, accurate product descriptions related to their new television, and easy purchase options.

In our B2B world, imagine Michael is the Marketing department. The department purchases a new predictive marketing tool offered by your company. Sally is the Sales department. You know that Marketing has purchased the predictive marketing tool, so you offer Sales a plug-in to see the same data within their CRM. You also can go back to the Marketing department and offer them a similar plugin to their marketing automation system.

Just like in the B2C example, your messages make it to the various department heads using accurate data. You know about their department members from the single view that you have on the customer, and you're able to offer relevant products not only as an upsell but also as a cross-sell.

Achieve Success With Great Data

While several differences are outlined here that exist between the tactics that B2B and B2C marketers use, there is one big commonality between the two groups. Both parties rely on great data.

Whether the task is to segment our audience, personalize the message, or engage with our audience, the goal is always the same – to improve marketing effectiveness and increase sales, which all depend on great data. Great data is clean, connected, and consistent. It's safe to use, and it's accurate. It's thorough, and it's useful. Simply put – it's great.

Both B2B and B2C marketers know this. Both know that marketing isn't fueled properly without great data. Great data is the new resource that we can all leverage to propel our initiatives forward and race to success.

Key Takeaways

How do you get started?

What are a few items that you can take from reading this paper and implement in your own organization? As a way to get you started, here are three key takeaways for you to focus on:

1. **Understand the experience your customers have with your brand.** Study the customer experience. Take a look at it from every angle. Experience it as they do. Poke holes in the process. Study the data that you have on your customers. Is it complete, clean, and consistent? Do you have a complete view like your B2C counterparts do? Create a plan to take on what you learn.

2. **Offer the products that are relevant.** Once you've learned more about your customers, their experience, and journey with your organization, ensure that the only products that you offer are ones that will resonate. You know the B2C brands that do this well. They are the ones that, after you search for a related product or topic, put the right products in your path to ensure you are aware of them. Emulate this in your B2B world.

3. **Evaluate the quality of your contact data.** No matter how good your messaging is or how relevant your products are, you're not going to be successful if your customers and prospects never hear your message. Make sure that your messages make it to your customers, whether you email them about it, call them, or send them direct mail. Scrub your contact data and reach more of your audience, and increase revenue.

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