

SEEING EYE-TO-EYE WITH B2B

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To be successful in B2B marketing communications, there are three processes that you should understand: The marketing process, the selling process, and the buying process. If you don't reconcile all three and market accordingly, you're not going to get the results that you (or your boss) are looking for. So, how can you be more successful with your B2B marketing communications efforts? Just follow these six tips.

1. Cool Graphics Aren't the Only Graphics

Demographics and psychographics should precede the graphic design. Campaigns don't start with a creative brief; they start with research. If your client can't provide it, put on your sleuth hat, hire a research consultant, and go get it. Most marcom agencies and professionals assume that research is not their domain, but that's simply not true. Every marcom agency or department should dedicate some amount of its budget to research. If you want your marcom to hit the mark, it's got to be based on understanding your target audience, their needs, and their buying process.

2. Beware "Vertigo" Marketing

Speaking of the target audience, vertical marketing is a method of segmenting your marketplace so you can position your product to a specific B2B target audience. While I agree with the practice of vertical market segmentation, there is a pratfall with this approach; what I call Vertigo Marketing. Standing on the precipice of over a dozen vertical markets with a limited budget and infinite marcom opportunities can be dizzying. Not to mention expensive. Have you ever heard this old saying: the man who chases two rabbits catches neither? It's absolutely true. Have the discipline to concentrate on your top three vertical markets with your main marcom efforts, developing sales collateral or a web presence for the others.

3. Get the Message, Then Spread It

Most B2B messages are not only complicated, they're constantly evolving. This makes it difficult for marketing to accurately clarify a product, for marcom to articulate its benefits, and for sales people to...well, sell. Set a sales person loose on a prospect and I promise you they'll say that your product zigs when you say it zags. Part of the problem with the disconnect between sales and marketing is the prevalence of old messaging and collateral. Mostly, it's just that people are just going with what they know. So, get your brand or marcom story straight, then spread it - educate and train your executives and sales people so they can deliver a message that matches yours.

4. Change the Channel

Once your vertical market strategies are outlined, you've got to concentrate on the channel. Unless you sell direct, you have some sort of channel distribution system; distributors, resellers, partners, brokers, etc. Typically, the channel doesn't think that your company is doing enough marketing, product development, or golf outings, so you've got to change their perception. While most B2B companies dream of a purple-skied world where end users pull your product through the channel, the fact is that you've got to get the channel behind your marcom efforts. After your own employees, the channel is the next vital group of stakeholders to address.

5. Get Over Your Identity Crisis

Most B2B companies are similar in many respects. One of which is that they are often launching new products on a frequent, but irregular, basis. This usually results in marcom materials that are inconsistent in layout, image or message. I call this an identity crisis. To get over it, you are going to need corporate shock therapy. Always start with the top-level marketing or product marketing folks who can help you forecast product launches or other new corporate initiatives. Convince them that this is in their best interest because it will help bring employees together, establish credibility, and lower costs. You can now develop a consistent marcom plan within the framework of a comprehensive brand identity system. You end up looking like a genius because your system anticipates marketing's needs, and responds cost-effectively.

6. Communicate, Don't Educate

When advertising in trade publications, for Ogilvy's sake, don't try to educate business consumers. It's useless, and you'll burn through your budget before you ever see a lead. Unless you have an entirely new product in a new category, go for the lowest hanging fruit: those persons that are already users of products like yours. Convince them that yours does "it" better, cheaper, faster, easier, or more reliably.

Finally, Consider This

B2B purchases are not impulse, they're considered by multiple people with different needs and levels of skepticism. It's your job to figure out how to persuade these different people in different ways at different times. How will you know how to do this? Here's my last tip, reread tip number one.

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