

B2B marketing: Time to catch a wake-up

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Scratch a bit on the surface of the current South African business-to-business (B2B) marketing landscape and it's easy to believe that you've found a portal into a pre-internet world.

For many, B2B marketing still revolves around golf days, remembering to send a card on a client's birthday, and making sure your ad is in the right trade publication.



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While these still have their place, the internet and the opportunities built around it has so dramatically changed the B2B marketing space that it might as well be seen as a different ballgame altogether. In fact, in this sphere, if B2B marketing is done right, the first time you will hear from a new customer is when he/she enquires about price.

B2B marketing, if done right

The most empowering, but also the most frightening thing that has happened to B2B marketing, is the advent of the internet. In the past when propositioning a new client, they would fire off a number of questions once you put a foot through the door. Who are you? What exactly does your company do? What are your major products? Plus, importantly, who are your clients and what do they have to say about you?

Now, your website as a primary point of contact should be able to answer all these questions beforehand. As mentioned above, if content on your website is managed correctly (and indexed properly through Google), the first time you hear from a potential new customer should be when asked, "How much?"

Who is involved?

For consumers, buying the wrong type of breakfast cereal might not be of major concern, but for companies, a business purchase can influence its continued existence. Therefore deciding on, for example, new servers, will involve not only the chief information officer, but also the CEO, CFO and chief security officer, if not the board. Who is each role player in the purchasing decision and what are the influences that drive them? If you can figure this out and then craft content on your website these answers these questions, half the battle is won.

Effective marketing content can come in the form of white papers to motivate why your product/service will give companies a competitive edge, information on trends in the industry to support why the client is making the correct decision, or opinion pieces written by key staff members that provide insight into the current market.

But in an age of hype, jargon and spin, to be truly authentic is to have your clients speak on your behalf. Nothing cuts through the marketing din as effectively as the voice of a satisfied client. What was their experience like working with you? Did the purchase have a solid return on investment? How did your product influence their day-to-day operation? Having all this on your site contributes to firmly establishing your company's credentials and can significantly speed up the B2B buying cycle.

Social can work, but Google is king

Even though your company website is of primary importance, you need to play where your customers are. If they are engaging through Twitter or articles on LinkedIn, make sure your messages go through there. Keep in mind though, in the context of Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, the social network has control, as can be seen in how few of your Facebook followers actually receive your posted messages. The same is not true of your website, which is an owned environment – your message, your visitors. Strong content on your website then becomes even more important when considering the value gained from having it index high on Google searches.

The significance of Google can simply not be overestimated. Google's search results ranking is king, and it is here where the correct content can provide a major boost in the B2B space. That's why running parallel to creating original content is an effective SEO strategy, or at least knowing what to keep in mind when writing articles. When advising Rogerwilco's clients on SEO, our underlying philosophy is to ask, who is the person you are trying to attract to your site and what is the action you want them to take? What is the information that you want them to find in order to take that action? Crack this and Google will deem your content important for higher indexing.

While a focus on content is important, it is by no means to say that other, more traditional methods will not help you gain traction in the B2B space. Speaking at conferences is a tremendous way for businesses to gain visibility and credibility. It's an offline method of connecting to people and bringing them to your online world. The same applies to media exposure, since the more place you can be the better. The caveat is to this is to not over-extend yourself – do what you can, but make sure you do it well.

Not your regular golf day

Local companies aiming to embrace B2B marketing in the age of the internet need to be cognisant of the potential of relevant content on their websites. Key to this is knowing your customers, including all the role players involved in the B2B purchasing decision, since they are essential in understanding how to tailor content to address their key concerns. Truly embracing a content-related marketing strategy will be more effort than organising your annual golf day, that's for sure, but if it is increased sales and continued future growth that you are after, you had better start writing.

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