

10 Secrets to B2B

1. THEY ARE NOT CONSUMERS

Yes, of course they are consumers but that's outside of work. In work people have a different perspective in decision making. To all but owner/managers people aren't spending their own money and thus attack decisions in a different manner.

A lot hangs on making the right decision, or at the very least, not making the wrong one. So they tend to take things quite seriously, which is why humour and light-heartedness is very rarely effective in B2B communications (as opposed to a 'wry smile' which can work). Ultimately businesses buy products or services to enhance the profitability of their company or improve on efficiencies, neither of these things sit with trying to be funny, more often than not it falls flat on its face.

Decisions therefore are often made or influenced by a group of disparate people. And with so many involved, the decision making process is longer than in consumer markets.

Furthermore, these individuals within the organisation will have different objectives, for example:

Finance Director: Price, budget

Managing Director: Quality, cost effectiveness, strategic importance

Staff end user: Ease of use

If the group process plays an important for your product or service you may want to consider developing bespoke propositions by department/individual to maximise impact and relevance.

2. NOTHING WORKS IN AN INSTANT

Consumers often buy on impulse, Businesses rarely can (with the exception of sole traders). Any communications need to highlight the benefits upfront and make it easy to digest. Multiple hits are often necessary, merely because people are so busy they need to see your brand again and again.

This isn't to say we should create an intricate teaser campaign, because people just won't find the time or energy to keep up with it. A database company sent out a 5 part direct mail teaser campaign over 5 weeks - unnecessarily over complicated.

What it does mean is the most effective campaigns employ a range of media to ensure awareness is maintained, while more targeted media are used to generate business directly. Direct Mail remains the key medium to gain the most impact in B2B, but is at its most effective when used alongside phone and email as support.

The length of time a decision can take is another reason why budget is often well invested in follow-ups, whether that's over the phone or by email. In both cases, enhanced personalisation will increase effectiveness.

As a tool for cold prospecting, email is all but a waste of time, as cold email has quickly become the new junk (in both consumer and B2B marketing).

3. TRY TO DO MORE THAN JUST “SAVE TIME AND MONEY”

One issue with much B2B marketing is the uniformity of proposition. So many business propositions are based on “save the time and money with our service”.

While this may be the case, it's not a particularly unique proposition and lacks impact and cut through.

There are two ways round this problem. The first is to revisit your product and look at the secondary benefits. There may be something that is unique, interesting, exclusive, that sets your product apart. Service and reliability are important factors to many decision makers, as is price.

If you really have no alternative to “save the time and money with our service” then you need to search for a dynamic, creative and original way to bring it to life. That might mean briefing your agency in a new and different way so that you encourage them to consider a new ways of presenting yourself.

4. EMAIL FIT FOR PURPOSE

If our email work with BT has taught us anything it's that using animation and imagery isn't always the right approach in terms of boosting click through rates. It's easy to feel the need to maximise what the media has to offer (as we would in direct mail, press etc) but many results show that text only often out pulls animation.

The reasons are twofold, spam filters often push emails out before the user has even seen them, and if they do reach them they are often filtered by the user as spam because of the use of imagery and animation. Each sector is different, testing is crucial here.

The correct choice of subject header can make a significant difference to open rates. Try and play it fairly straight and let the recipient know immediately from whom the email comes. It really is quite simple to test different subject lines to find the one that works best for you.

And remember few people scroll below the fold. So ensure everything critical is on the first screen. Don't write too much. Make sure you have plenty of 'find out more' links so readers can drill down to the level of information that suits them.

Unlike print media, where the call to action is commonly at the bottom (right) of the page, email response tends to come from links or buttons in the upper (left) portion. Not many people realise that.

5. TARGETING OUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY

Targeting the right individuals in an organisation has long been a B2B challenge, not only do people move companies regularly they change jobs internally even more often. Too often budget is wasted as communications are delivered to or aimed at the wrong people

Validating prospects via the phone can be costly but it is the only way to ensure list quality. Prospect pools are often smaller so it's less of a challenge from both a time and cost perspective. The better we understand individuals within an organisation the more relevant our creative message can be.

6. BUILD THE CASE IN BUSINESS TERMS

Ultimately the decision making process is longer and more complex than in consumer marketing. Similarly, the end purchase decision will be more of an investment than any consumer purchase.

In the majority of cases our target individual(s) will have to sell your story on to many internal contacts so providing clear proof to satisfy the different

needs of their audience is crucial. We can help them do this by building the business case for your product or service. Provide them with the facts, figures, statistics and research to support our case.

For example, we can help them:

Cut costs by X%

Increase efficiency by Y%

24 hour, 364 days a year service

Most businesses focus on FIVE key business issues. These are; winning new customers; servicing existing customers; managing change; handling suppliers and reducing costs. We ought to see how our brand, product or service addresses or provides solutions to these issues individually. That may help us find appropriate propositions, and suggest changes in propositions we may want to make according to our target. It will certainly help your prospect understand the role your product has to play in his business.

7. BUILDING LONG TERM STRATEGIES

We often write 3-5 year marketing plans for consumer brands, but these seem far rarer in B2B marketing. Arguably the marketing and business landscape changes quicker in B2B but that doesn't mean we shouldn't apply good marketing practice and build long term (yet flexible) plans.

Where do we want the business to go in 3 years? What will the competitive landscape look like? Will our audience change? How can we stay ahead of the competition? How is the organisation changing? There are more complexities and variables in B2B marketing which point to building solid plans, but too few do it in marketing terms.

8. DRAMATISE YOUR POINT (RELEVANTLY).

All too often B2B communications fall in to the truly unforgettable 'letter and a leaflet' bin or are instantly deleted as 'blanket non targeted email'. Not only are these missed opportunities to raised awareness of your brand, they are a less than satisfactory device for even the finest sales consultant to follow up on.

Memorability and impact are critical to success, particularly in cold lead generation. Any campaign has a far higher chance of success if the follow-up sales call can be based upon a piece of work that the recipient actually recalls. Even if they do not remember all the salient points, it doesn't matter, at least it initiates a conversation that the person on the phone can lead.

With all work we do, be it on or offline, B2B or consumer we try to dramatise our point, rather than simply say it. Never is this more important than in B2B, where your audience won't give your brand more than a cursory glance, especially if there is no personal gain in it. Captivating people whilst at their place of work is one of DM's hardest challenges, but it's not to say it's impossible. This isn't licence to send nonsensical and irrelevant devices to be seen (paper aeroplanes, complex cardboard engineering) but it is licence to dramatise the benefit of what you are selling in a relevant manner.

A recent campaign for Scottish Widows Investments focused on the age and experience of our bond team, we dramatised this point by sending Pension Fun Managers a 15 year old bottle of malt alongside information on new products and the team. The mailing was responsible for generating a lead that went on to generate over £50m worth of income.

9. MAKE RESPONSE EASY

We need to make it as easy as possible for people to respond, and delivering multiple response channels at least reminds them they are expected to respond to. This could mean employing a combination of coupon, phone, email, web, even sms. And the ease of responding, or difficulty, WILL affect the response you achieve.

And take the customer journey yourself. Imagine you are responding to your own campaign and see how easy it is. For instance, if you're featuring your url on the communication will the customer know what to do when they land? Is there a link between your marketing campaign and the home page? For instance, if the call to action on the marketing says "Find out how we could save your business money" then there should be a button on the landing page that tells them that.

Even these days a coupon or order form will always uplift a press ad or mail pack even if all the response comes back through the phone or via the url. Your audience are unlikely to be spending a great deal of time on what you've sent so ease of response is all the more important. We should be

following all communications up anyway, within 2 weeks maximum of the first element reaching the target – any further lag and we're in danger of being forgotten – if we've not been already.

10. BUILD THE BRAND

Not many advertising agencies would agree but direct marketing has often done a brand job, and no more so in B2B marketing where perhaps your brand doesn't have the enormous budgets for TV or Outdoor advertising.

Direct Mail especially can deliver brand messages and raise awareness, something we achieved very successfully with Scottish Widows Investments.

Relatively small in Investment Banking circles, and with a sales process that didn't allow direct selling to Pension Fund Managers we could only present the brand (and products) to this audience. They had to come to us, so a constant presence through mail, email and phone kept us front of mind throughout the year.

Think about using email differently. Rather than always using it to overtly 'sell', why not use it to build the brand? You can simply produce something that simply says, "Dear So-and-so, I thought you might be interested in reading this..." And you provide a link to (or embed) a relevant piece of research about their industry sector.

Consider also the role that your website plays. Does it just tell the story of your brand or does it actually provide information that might help customers in their business? You may be surprised at how much of this information and research you actually have 'lying around' the office. It might just need a little repackaging and then you have a really powerful brand building tool.

