
A Concise Overview of Seven Business-to-Business Trends in Strategies and Spending

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While each business-to-business marketer must consider its unique situation – from the products it produces to purchasers and sales cycle – there is ample evidence – derived from a range of resources – of a shift from traditional media to digital tactics to facilitate growth for business marketers.

In fact, it starts with the Internet, which has become 1) the premier resource of information amongst C-Suite executives with search engine first for information. While the common belief is that senior executives are not online – and there are indeed generational variances – in the joint Forbes and Google proprietary research study – “Rise of the Digital C-Suite” – released last year it became apparent that this belief is mistaken. In fact, Forbes and Google surveyed 354 executives at U.S. companies with annual sales exceeding \$1 billion and learned that most often senior executives turn to the Internet, starting with search engines – e.g., Google, Yahoo, Bing – to personally gather information and to aid decision-making before conferring with a colleague. The study also revealed that executives are online 6+ times per day. This finding thus helps demonstrate the importance of search engine marketing – from SEO to improve SERP to PPC campaigns to reach decision-makers and influencers with the information they are seeking.

Then there’s 2) digital marketing – in its myriad forms – along with email marketing, which form an important part of B2B marketing outreach to generate leads and facilitate sales growth – conversion. Obviously, because of the measurability of digital marketing, B2B companies are funneling more and more of their resources to digital campaigns, which provide real-time results in record time. No more waiting or guessing. So budgets are up and expected to increase – more than double – through 2014 – from approximately \$2.3 billion in 2009 to \$4.8 billion in 2014.

Online social networking is 3) emerging as an important tool in business-to-business marketing. In fact, some experts believe that B2B companies have more to gain through Facebook “Fan Pages” and other online social networking web sites. Whether it’s brand affinity, disseminating news, or simply encouraging interaction – from soliciting customer feedback to simple exchanges – online social networking web sites are becoming an important part of holistic strategy to reach both prospects and customers.

Usage of 4) blogs, microblogs, and RSS Feeds – currently segregated by generation – may eventually become essential contact points in maintaining B2B brands. Blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), and RSS Feeds, while utilized by some B2B marketers, tend to be age-dependent with moderate usage for executives between 40-49, according to the joint Forbes-Google proprietary study, and considerably less usage amongst executives in excess of 50. So depending on your target audience profile, blogging, microblogging, and RSS feeds might be logical parts of an integrated marketing plan for business-to-business marketers.

Mobile marketing or 5) the “mobile web” seems to be in its genesis amongst B2B marketers. While the usage of mobile devices – BlackBerry, iPhone, etc. – to connect to web-based business content online is commonplace for some executives, some B2B marketers are still unsure about how to use mobile marketing to cultivate business. According to a report in Northwestern University’s Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications, “Siemens [is] using mobile ads to highlight its solutions for infrastructure in the U.S. amidst interest in the stimulus package.” IBM, on the other hand, “... is using mobile ads to drive attention to upcoming events and trade shows where the company is participating.” Making mobile marketing, then, part of a business-to-business marketer’s tradeshow strategy will help companies reach an acceptable ROI while concurrently building a new opt-in list for mobile marketing.

Business-to-business 6) branding is growing in importance. While B2B companies need not become consumer brands, they should, says James Gregory and Donald Sexton in an issue of Harvard Business Review, “... seek to attain the maximum value possible within their industry.” And that’s because there is a direct correlation with revenue growth and increases in market capitalization, which the authors have, in fact, quantified. Therefore, with scrupulous brand management, brand equity for B2B companies could translate into considerable monetary gains – both in revenue and market cap – so B2B branding should not be ignored or neglected but managed well like any other asset.

Finally, 7) accountability is predominant and increasingly normative in business-to-business marketing. B2B companies – like their B2C counterparts – are becoming more cognizant of the importance of establishing a closed-loop system – from front-end analysis and tracking to back-end lead nurturing. In fact, nearly 66% of business-to-business marketers do not have formalized lead nurturing programs in place. But nurturing leads and moving prospective customers along the buying continuum through relevant communication – at appropriate intervals – is just as important as the outbound marketing campaign itself – and especially necessary now in a hypercompetitive world.