

# B2B Marketing

A Business-to-Business Blueprint for Driving Sales

## Mars and Venus? 10 Lessons B2B Can Learn from B2C

by [Nancy Pekala](#)

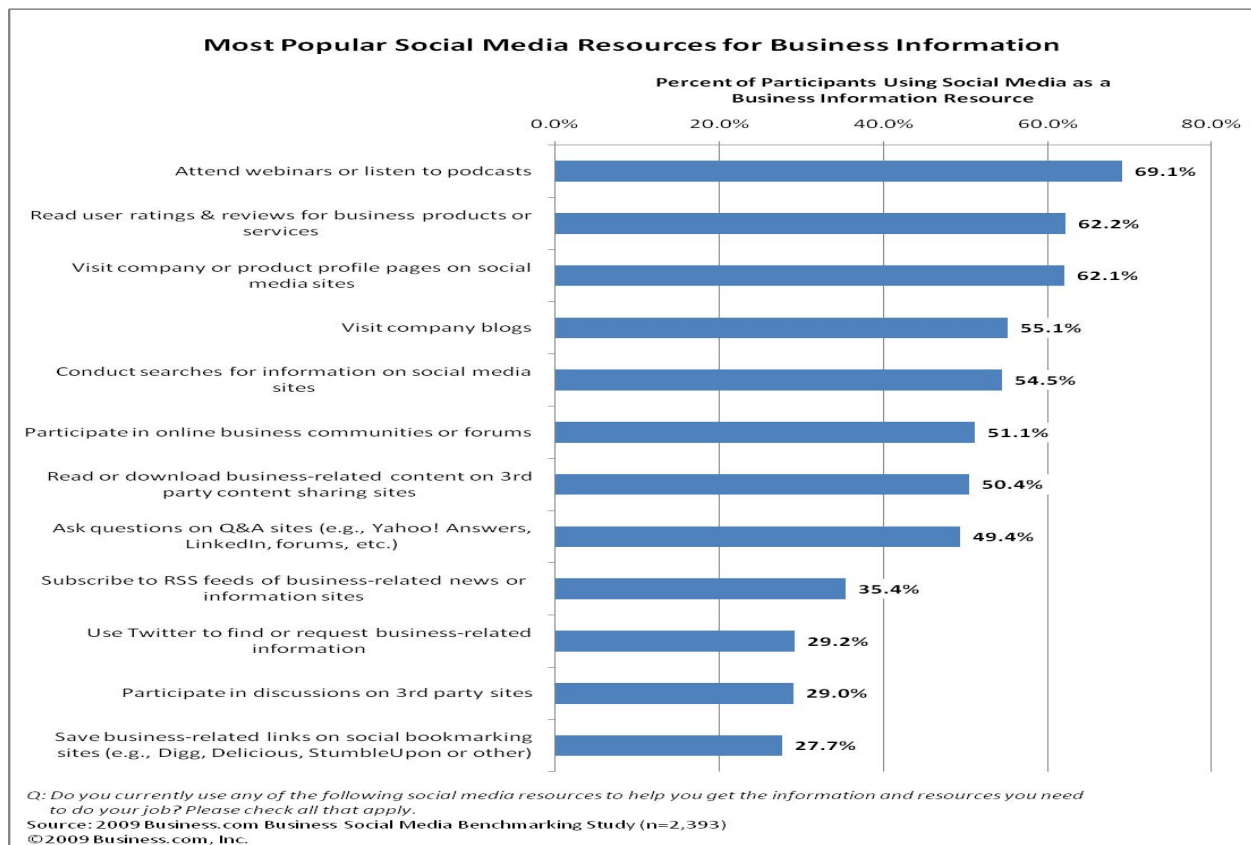
It might seem that B2B marketers are from Mars and B2C marketers are from Venus. Ask a marketer in each of those segments about the challenges and marketing approaches of the other, and no doubt they'll say their counterparts exist on a different planet. But in truth marketers in both segments have much to learn from each other as they have more in common than they might think. Their target audiences may differ, but there are a number of real-world lessons B2B marketers can learn from their consumer counterparts.

### 1. Marry online and offline marketing efforts.

"There's a huge gap between online and offline marketing in B2B," said Bill Barnes, [Enquiro](#) EVP, Business Development during a recent [webinar](#). "In B2B, we tend to promote differently online and offline but buyers don't think of them separately; they relate them together."

### 2. Understand buyers' purchasing patterns.

B2B marketers would do well to take a page from their B2C peers in learning how their target audience prefers to make buying decisions. Barnes noted in a recent Enquiro research study, the [BuyerSphere Project](#) that focused on how businesses buy from businesses, 58% of respondents said they preferred to purchase online.



Source: Business.com's 2009 [Social Media Benchmarking Study](#)

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“In B2B, we seem to be fighting that,” Barnes said. “Our marketing efforts are ignoring the online channel. B2B marketers need to make sure their business model is set up to market to the 58% who want to buy online.”

### **3. Craft a search marketing campaign to mirror buyers’ search behaviors.**

B2B also needs to pay more attention to how buyers and prospects search for products and services. “B2C really excels at understanding what their target market is looking for,” Barnes said. “It’s more cloudy with B2B where multiple individuals within an organization are looking for the same thing but with different intentions.”

While the BuyerSphere research indicated 45% actually enter a specific URL to find business product or service providers, another 33% search through a tool bar and 22% search via an engine. “Make sure you’re there,” Barnes suggested. “Customers still look for you on search engines.”

To maximize online touch points, Barnes also suggested that B2B marketers consider the following search marketing guidelines:

- Front load ad copy with primary keywords.
- Identify hidden keywords which your target audience may be thinking about but not querying.
- Construct titles carefully. Insert primary keywords which highlight the most important features of your product or service.
- Break up text patterns to drive the user’s eye into the ad copy. Using numbers is an effective way to break up text patterns.

### **4. Be bold about building your brand.**

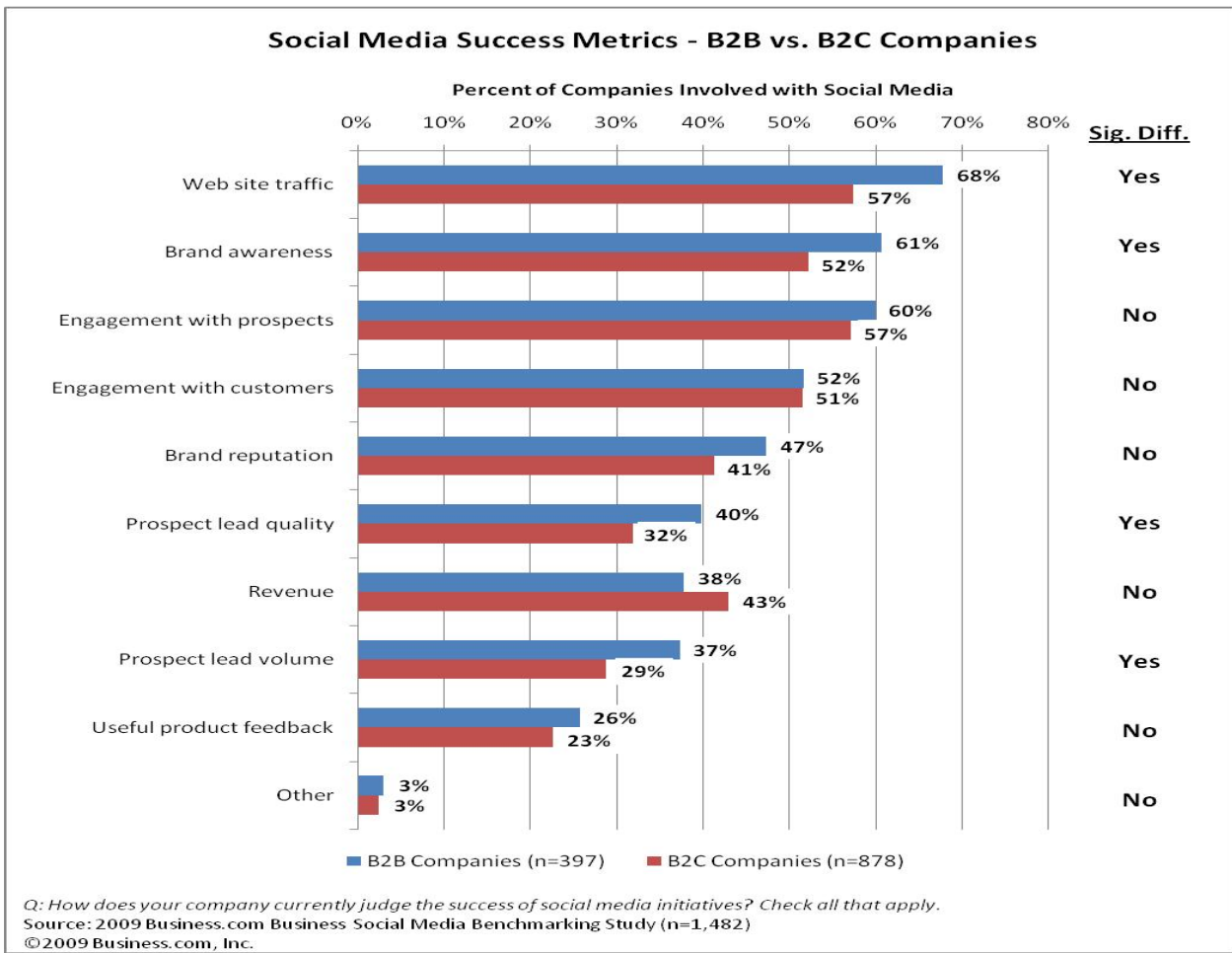
Brand marketing is one significant area in which B2B can and should look to its B2C counterpart for inspiration, suggests Ben Hanna, Vice President, Marketing, Dex One Interactive. “It’s true that brand marketing can be difficult to measure and that B2B tends to spend less on marketing as a percentage of revenue when compared to B2C,” he said. “But while the impact of brand marketing is indirect, it’s very real and important. Research indicates that just being exposed to brand marketing, whether it’s a logo or a brand name, can boost the number of searchers for a specific brand or product.”

Hanna added, “Business buyers are people too. They have a natural affinity for things they see more often. They have a choice in most business buying situations. If they don’t, they’ll try to reduce that dependency on that vendor in the future.”

It’s important that B2B marketers take into account the risk and reward factors associated with business buying. Unlike their consumer counterparts, business buyers experience more risk in their purchasing choices. As a result, many times business buyers will look to their safer bets, those brands that are more visible and recognizable. “Brand marketing can be subtle and difficult to measure but it’s very important to maintain awareness with your target market as you try to build your sales, whether it’s online or offline.”

### **5. Craft a strategic social media program.**

When it comes to social media channels, the question still being asked is: “How relevant is social media for B2B?” According to Hanna, “We’re done with that question. Social media is definitely relevant for B2B.” The [B2B Social Media Benchmark Study](#) found that business buyers turn to social media for business relevant information and do so across multiple sources. In fact, more than three quarters (77%) use four or more social media channels. Social media is increasingly becoming an important way for B2B marketers to engage their target audience.



Source: Business.com's 2009 [Social Media Benchmarking Study](#)

"B2B companies engaging in social media, in some ways, are tackling much more than their B2C counterparts," Hanna said. The Benchmark study indicated that B2B is involved in more social media initiatives and channels than B2C. However, 78% spent less than 30% of their time on social media and 2/3 have less than 2 years' experience.

"B2B is taking on way too much relative to what they can do well in the social media landscape," Hanna suggested. "Instead, B2B marketers need to learn the value of focus in social media from B2C. While we hear about all these fantastic social media opportunities, there really is a head and a tail when you're talking about the social media world."

He added that because of the fast pace at which the world of social media is advancing, best practices are temporary. "Focus on the head, the best opportunities to reach your specific target business buyer," Hanna suggested. "Pick a couple of those channels and get very good at those. Find and follow your B2B competitors in different channels. You'll learn some things from their efforts."

**6. Measure, monitor and measure some more.**

B2B also needs to get past the notion that social media efforts are not measurable. "At the end of the day social media is just as measurable as search marketing or display advertising," Hanna stressed.

Becoming engaged in social media will become more important than ever as B2B buyers increasingly turn to a variety of online channels to help in the decision-making process. A recent study by [DemandGen Report](#) indicates that B2B buyers have changed the way they research and engage in the buying process. The budget creation, solution criteria and RFP distribution phases

are being supplemented with a more peer-oriented approach that's occurring through the use of social media and networking.

According to the study, underwritten by [Genius.com](#), a marketing automation services company, 78% of respondents who were involved in a purchase in the last 12 months said the process did not follow a “traditional path.” Almost 60% said they engaged with peers who had already “addressed the challenge and learned more.”

While vendor Web sites and search (70 percent each) are significant sources of influence for product research and selection, buyers are also counting Webinars (43 percent), whitepapers (54 percent), and social media (26 percent) as heavily-used resources.

Among those using social media, discussion threads are a significant source (43 percent) of education. Respondents also indicated that they post questions on social networking groups (38 percent) and like to connect directly with vendors via social networking (21 percent).

#### **7. Get creative.**

Another B2C characteristic B2B marketers would do well to adopt is the ability to be creative, personal and engaging in their communications with would-be buyers. While it's true B2B buyers are making purchasing decisions on behalf of their companies, they are still individuals who respond to consumer-like appeals. Messaging which is personal, friendly and compelling can help appeal to B2B individual decision makers, specifiers and end users.

Just because the target audience consists of business buyers doesn't mean B2B marketers can't think out of the box and experiment with attention-getting techniques as their B2C counterparts do. Engaging calls to action, free gifts or contests can all be tested in the B2B world.

#### **8. Go mainstream; go mobile.**

Mobile is not just for B2C. With the emergence of the iPhone, location-based services, mobile apps and other technologies, mobile offers B2B marketers a critical channel in which to engage with its audience. To reach them, make sure your web site and emails are configured to be accessible via mobile devices. Consider developing a mobile app or experiment with mobile-based campaigns.

#### **9. Realign your website.**

A number of recent studies bear out that B2B buyers are increasingly visiting providers' websites to obtain information and conduct research about products and services. B2B marketers would do well to mimic their B2C counterparts by designing a website that engages its visitors. This includes making sure a variety of content is available and refreshed regularly, offering features such as a weekly poll or white papers that can be downloaded and creating a website design that is user-friendly and easy to navigate.

#### **10. Don't forget the research.**

Except for the very largest companies, research tends to be forgotten by B2B marketers. Conducting research and testing are disciplines that B2C marketers do well and which B2B marketers could benefit from learning.

“It's very important to know the impact to know the impact of all kinds of marketing on the end purchase in the overall funnel,” Hanna explained. “There's a big quantitative challenge on the B2B side. Look for metrics in the future that will demonstrate that more effectively.”

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