

Forum

Goodbye, B2B Brand Marketing: Developing Content-Based Marketing Programs for the Post-Marketing Era

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In a previous article in this journal, we described the end of B2B marketing as we know it, the ways prospects will access information on products and applications in the post-marketing era, and the critical role played by content in this new environment.

Goodbye, B2B Brand Marketing. Hello, Content-Based Marketing

Prospects in B2B don't notice and don't care about most of the conventional "marketing" they see around them, when they now have access to all the product information they need just a few keyword searches away. In this new post-marketing world, content-based marketing programs will be the key to lead generation and lead development.

Content used in content-based marketing programs is defined as a base of substantive, reasonably objective, information, developed by or for your company, that:

- Informs prospects on the unique knowledge, processes, and skills possessed by your company and used to conceive, develop, and manufacture its products;
- Addresses the needs of your prospects, by showing them how your product solves their business problem or applications issue;
- Positions your company as a unique and preferred player in its market, relative to your competition

Once developed, content forms the basis of your new marketing programs in the post-marketing era, driving your choice of the presentation, sales benefits, copy, and offers used in every marketing deliverable. In content-based marketing, your content comes first: Developing a content-based marketing program is more than offering a free white paper in the call-to-action tagline of a conventional promotional space ad, mailing, or banner ad. It means first discovering and developing the content that most effectively sells your product by most uniquely positioning your product, and your company, and then placing content into vehicles and methods to engage potential prospects in, as marketing content and engagement expert Ardath Albee puts it, the conversations that lead to sales and new business for your company. When content becomes the core of your marketing program, the quality of this content, and its usefulness, desirability, and relevance to the prospects in your market, determines the level of measurable response you will generate from the marketing programs based on this content.

The Key to Developing High-Quality Content: "Show What You Know"

"Show what you know" is the essence of using content to market and sell your company's product: By showing what you (your company) knows—the unique, special, and often proprietary information and knowledge held by your company, infused in your manufacturing and business processes, demonstrated by your company's track record, experience, and longevity in its field, and held by your company's key team members—you can uniquely position your company against your competition, and build a favorable, lasting impression in the minds of your prospects that is far more powerful than any impression created by brand advertising or other conventional marketing approaches.

Developing Content-Based Marketing Programs

Developing content-based lead generation and development programs is a process of:

- Discovering what your company knows that makes it, and its product, truly unique in its market;
- Developing this content into easily communicated forms;

- Building measurable, response-generating marketing programs around this content for lead generation, using both new and conventional marketing media;
- Producing additional, specialized follow-on content programs for use in lead development programs, once leads are generated, qualified, and passed through to your sales process

Goals for Content-Based B2B Marketing Programs

Here's what you want to achieve by implementing content-based marketing programs: 1) Create measurable interest for lead generation: To influence and motivate potential prospects to respond directly or indirectly (i.e., virally) to the various marketing media you are using to generate leads, to generate measurable response; 2) Establish thought leadership in lead development, to convert leads into sales: To position your company as a thought leader in its field—a company whose valuable and proprietary knowledge makes it uniquely qualified to serve the prospect's needs

Discovering “Show What You Know” Content: Where to Begin

To begin the process of content discovery, start with sources inside your company:

Senior executives. Your Company's senior executives are usually plugged in to the issues and trends shaping your industry, and can be a valuable background source for your new content-based marketing programs.

Experienced managers in your company. they are well aware of the pressures they face from their changing business environment. They know, and are likely to have strong opinions and insights on, many important topics that you can turn into valuable content of interest to prospects;

Technical and product development staff. Your Company's technical and product development staff is, of course, closely tied to your product, and can provide you with valuable background related to your product that adds tremendous depth to your product's “story” for potential buyers in your lead development pipeline:

- Product applications-related information, such as insight on product features, capabilities, and problem-solving features and benefits of your product;

- Insider viewpoints of key new product features: User or customer needs that sparked their development, the challenges or obstacles they had to overcome to develop the new features, and other interesting facts relating to the “story” of these features;

- Insight and further details on the technologies and processes underlying your product, such as new manufacturing capabilities required to exploit these new processes

Sales, service, and customer support: Your Company's sales, customer service, and support teams can provide you with valuable information on how your current customers are using your product:

- Background research for case studies showing how customers in various businesses and industries are using your product or service to solve their problems, and the generalized advice your prospects can draw from these examples to help their own buying process;

- Profiles showing the specialized business or technical issues faced by your customers in a single, specific industry, and how using your product helps them improve their operations by addressing these issues;

- Instances where customers adopted your product after using a competitor's product, with details on reasons why the customer switched from the competitor's product to yours

Editorial Examples for Content-Based Marketing Programs

Here are some industry-specific examples of editorial content topics and content formats used as the basis for content-based marketing programs:

- To offset plant managers' concerns over costs and implementation of their breakthrough technology, a manufacturer of adhesive coatings application systems publishes a series of case studies, including actual production reports documenting installation, efficiencies, and savings gained from implementation of its new coatings application process;

- A company providing online pre-employment background screening services to HR managers in large corporations publishes a four-part white paper series documenting steps to take to avoid potential legal liability when making hiring decisions;
- A company selling corrosion-proof highway sign fixtures to Federal, state, and municipal prospects commissions an independent research report (with an attached executive summary) on the effects of long-term sun, wind, rain, snow, salt, and weather effects on highway signage, support structures, and other steel traffic products;
- A national chain of commercial auto body collision repair centers serving the insurance market produces a five-part Web video tutorial, accompanied by printed instruction manuals sent free to qualified corporate insurance prospects, outlining a new, systematic visual method for vehicle inspection techniques for collision and accident damage estimators

Highly relevant editorial content, focused on the needs and problem-solving aspects needed by your prospects, helps you generate measurable sales leads from your marketing program, and is an invaluable aid to your company's sales team for lead development in their ongoing communications with their prospects. By influencing prospects over time, your content-based marketing program works to help prospects see your company less as just another potential vendor trying to sell to them, and more as a provider of the solution to their problem. Most important, your content-based marketing program also helps prospects discover useful new issues that help them in their buying process, which also helps to move your product to the forefront in the prospect's final purchase decision.

Examples of Formats for Content Delivery

Once you have evaluated the best content sources for your messaging program, and identified the most useful topics for your prospects, give thought to the format for the deliverable you'll be using in your program. Your final decision on which format to use and how to present and communicate these messages is based on the length of your content, its value and, of course, the content you are delivering to your prospects.

We all know about white papers, the most common format used for content delivery in many marketing programs. However, content-based marketing programs require developing a deep base of widely varied content utilized in many formats, with each format used in either lead generation or ongoing lead development. Here are some additional examples:

- Case studies and reports
- Applications briefs
- Books
- Trade publication articles
- Articles (self-published)
- Video presentations
- Executive speeches
- FAQ files
- Software, mobile, and iPhone apps

The Best Content is Your Best Company and Product “Positioning”

Apart from its definition as the process of establishing a firm view in the mind of your prospect of your company's standing in its market relative to your competition, “positioning” gives your company and its products a unique, strategic advantage in your marketplace. While positioning, like branding, depends mostly on your company's reputation and its ability to produce and sell great products, the content you create and utilize in your marketing program goes a long way to helping you reinforce your company's positioning in its market.

For example, if your company sells a high-quality product at a higher-end price in its market, quality and long-term durability are your positioning attributes relative to competitors. At the other end, a low-priced competitor would use affordability and sufficiency to the task as positioning attributes for their

product. In each extreme, content can be utilized to support these positioning attributes, and marketing programs can be built around this content.

For example, the high-quality manufacturer can produce content documenting the advanced manufacturing processes and durability of their product and the low-priced competitor can use content that builds the financial case on their product's easier buy-in and faster payback. Unique positioning is critical for distinguishing your company from its competitors in many crowded B2B markets. For today's prospects who are using the Internet to search for products, developing and distributing this content positions your company far better than any clever "branding" advertising campaign or PR program.