

Understanding B2B Online Marketing

Let's face it: business-to-business (B2B) marketing is different. It is certainly different than those deal-of-the-day sites that popped up in 2010, multiplied like rabbits, and lurked around every corner in 2011. If you are tired of listening to case studies showing you how easy it is to increase sales on some ecommerce site or exhausted by going to webinars endlessly hawking some vendor's wares while promising the moon, then this is the book for you.

We will cover what is crucial for today's successful B2B marketer. We will show you how to market your business—a business with a complex and considered sales cycle—online. Say good-bye to irrelevant case studies and hello to practical information and real strategies you can apply to your business today, tomorrow, and one year from now.

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Why Online?

You are a B2B marketer. Your sales happen over the course of months, not minutes, so you can just scrap this whole online marketing thing, right? Just segment your list, send off emails for lead nurturing, write killer collateral material for sales, attend some events, let your agency put together some dimensional mailer campaigns, and your job is done and your company makes money. Other books may tell you that, but if you follow their advice, then over time your competitors will be happy, but your bosses won't be. The world of traditional lead generation (direct mail, email plus teleprospecting) is dead; it is time to embrace the changing, integrated marketing landscape, or you will be left behind.

Everyone—from the guy in the facilities management office to the CEO—uses the Internet to read, browse, surf, chat, and socialize, and online marketing is the tool to get in front of your audience. You want to get in front of them before they look for your product, while they are actively searching, and then when they need customer support.

We are here to tell you that not only is online marketing the most effective channel for B2B lead generation strategies at the top of your sales funnel: it applies to every stage of the prospect-to-customer life cycle, from establishing a brand to maintaining customer loyalty. Online marketing is also a great way to enhance and extend some of your more effective traditional marketing channels, such as events and PR.

Still not convinced you need online marketing? According to a recent study by AMR International, B2B online marketing spend is nearly double the percentage of budget from 2010 to 2012 (www.amrinternational.com/reports/b2b_online_marketing_in_the_united_states_assessment_and_forecast_to_2013). Although online marketing still may not take the lion's share of most B2B organizations' marketing budgets, it is quickly becoming a powerful force that complements traditional marketing and events and stands alone as an independent marketing vehicle for driving awareness, leading sales, and increasing the lifetime value of a customer. As marketing budgets tighten, executives are increasingly looking for better ways to measure returns on their spends and find ways to scale what works.

The value of online marketing isn't just about the dollars in the market; it is about reaching business decision makers where they spend their time. First LinkedIn and now Facebook and Twitter have become prominent professional networking vehicles and places businesspeople look to their peers for best practices and advice. Social networks are no longer for your niece or your employees; your customers use social to research your product and to look for help. Imagine if you can use online marketing to connect with those customers at the moment they are researching or inquiring in social media. Now imagine that you can tie that tweet or Facebook status with a contact record in your CRM system. Not only is this possible, but it is increasingly the way your B2B peers are marketing their businesses.

Your Current Marketing Mix

So, now you're convinced you need online marketing. You need to figure out where online marketing fits into your current marketing program. For optimal results, you must integrate and overlay online with the rest of your marketing. Far too many folks just add online marketing piecemeal into their mix like some sort of red-headed step-child. Your online program shouldn't be a separate channel. Online needs to be integrated into all facets of your marketing program, with everything you do to market your products: events, lead generation, advertising, PR, corporate communications, community, campaigns, and brand.

Does that sound goofy? Let's think about events. A B2B company's participation in large industry events is one of the most traditional forms of marketing and, if done right, can be very useful on its own. Large events can be the single biggest piece of many B2B companies' marketing budgets. How do you inform people about your booth, interact with your salespeople, and turn the mediocre trade show experience into a home run? The answer (drum roll, please...) is to combine your events with an online strategy. Run a paid search campaign (we'll get to the details in a few chapters) with keywords about the event, bid on the event's brand name, and use online to generate awareness and interest in your show presence and drive people to stop by the actual booth.

During the event, run a mobile campaign geotargeting a five-mile radius around the event and further build awareness of your presence at the event and promote your cool giveaway. You want to encourage people to take action at an event, and online marketing can be that extra boost your event presence needs to hit your forecast numbers.

With the decline in attendance at many industry trade shows combined with the increase in competition, combining online with events is necessary; it is the first of many things you need to do to reach your prospects. Later in the book we'll go more into detail about how online can increase the effectiveness of events, but for now we'll give you a taste of what's to come.

We all know the B2B sales cycle is long and complex, with many touches. We know marketing is often seen as a way to nurture people down that sales funnel. For larger deals, online marketing usually isn't even a thought in the back of anyone's head, let alone part of the overall mix. Field marketing is often the only group called in to help close those whales. They can go to a lead's office, arrange peer dinners, and put a face on the company while augmenting sales.

Now, think of what can happen when you add online into the mix. Imagine a world where you can use retargeting to tag all of the key influencers of those top accounts and message those influencers as they browse third-party sites on the Web.

Suddenly your company looks bigger; the influencers are now warmed up and introduced to your key features and benefits through a series of well-sequenced ads. Imagine you can offer them content, customer testimonials, and demo videos in these ads as well. Imagine when these key influencers ask questions about your products on social media; the sales team is alerted and immediately responds via the social web. All of this and much more is possible.

Online marketing can be a great complement to existing efforts within your marketing department. It's time to bring the online team to the strategy sessions and the go-to marketing meetings.

Assessing the Value Proposition of Online

One less than charming characteristic of traditional B2B marketing is that historically many practitioners could be blissfully unaware of their own failures. The ROI of a brochure was never measurable, its impression count was delightfully never registered, and its engagement level was obscured. Low booth recruitment could be blamed on low overall event attendance, crappy exhibit organization, or even the skirt length of the booth staff.

However, every attribute of online marketing is becoming more measurable. You can calculate how much it cost to put something together, if it's the bill of materials to construct a booth or the total print and translation costs of a brochure. Each of these costs can be measured against its goals, whether those goals are selling a product or getting more leads.

Yet attribution is a funny world. And tracking, though improving every quarter, is still a leaky bucket. A single event presence, brochure, or print ad could always be the very thing that stuck in someone's memory and led to a paid search ad click, which led to a completed lead form and then the whole pipeline of measurable activity. Social media mentions and search engine terms prove that TV ads spur online activity.

That's why the best form of attribution sets a value on each of these interactions, as opposed to valuing only the first or last click. When you set these values, you can also identify patterns—patterns against which you can refine your content and advertising. We'll explore attribution modeling and metrics in more detail later in the book, but we want to get you thinking about assigning a monetary value to milestones through the buying cycle.

With all of this said, the effectiveness of online marketing is often discounted because it is so measurable and trackable. We give value to online only when we can directly quantify results, whereas we chalk up the impact of traditional marketing to so-called branding as if that is a way to justify countless spends. What if online marketing was more than just immediate clicks and short-term lead generation? What if

you could use it to build brands and change the very infrastructure of the world we live in? Ask yourself this: if social media can take down governments, why can't it create value for a B2B brand?

B2B Is Different

In B2B, we frequently like to wear our complexities on our sleeves. We make complex stuff for complexity-trained workers in complicated industries. It takes more than a little training to use what we sell. And to add to the mix, we as marketers often have no idea what in the hell we're actually shilling. Our core competency is, after all, in marketing and not in product development or sales. Our customers, at the core, are never really as obtuse and inscrutable as they seem, either. They want something that functions well to make their job easier. They don't like the complications any more than we do. But their necks are on the line. Their career is riding on the purchase decisions that they make. So, like the human sheep that we are, our customers, the B2B decision makers, hide in the herd, often because of fear of being wrong.

Trying a new frozen food for dinner carries a small degree of risk. If you don't like your choice, you just wasted \$3.99. Filling out a lead form for a million-dollar business product could mean success, or it could mean countless calls from salespeople, endless emails from marketers, or—even worse—a failed product launch costing you your reputation or even your job. As B2B marketers, a large part of our jobs is to alleviate fear.

Building B2B Confidence

To minimize the my-neck-is-on-the-line factor, business decisions in the B2B universe are usually made by small-to-medium-sized groups, rather than by a solo decision maker, which is most common in B2C. These groups can be as few as four people or more than a baker's dozen, with the average varying by up to six to seven people from country to country. This decision-making committee comprises people who know how to use the product at hand and those who will never interact with it. The users and the nonusers often have equal weight in the decision, and in some cases the nonusers actually are the decision makers.

You will need different messaging to persuade the different members of this decision-making committee that your product is the best choice for their needs. At the core of this persuasion is establishing a strong brand, which you can do through various tactics online; we detail online branding heavily in Chapter 2, "Building a B2B Brand Online."

Note: Never underestimate the power of a strong brand.



This lumbering committee takes months if not years to come to a business decision. In the meantime, they will research. They will diagram. They will create flowcharts. A seemingly endless tome of PowerPoint and Excel documents must be created and circulated. Rounds of RFPs and evaluations may take place. Criteria, both sensible and irrelevant, will be constructed and reconstructed. Plus, you'll be attempting to reach to the emotions and rationales of an inconsistent group as they slow-motion their way to a multimillion-dollar decision that will apply to their business for two to ten years.

How you address these groups also varies by the type of company. Catering to a small tribe of global enterprise-level customers is quite different from catering to a small band that runs a small business. Business size and industry sector can strongly affect the makeup, and evaluation process, of a B2B decision committee.

Using Online to Build Trust

At the core of any business decision is trust. Regardless of the size of the company, industry, or function, the B2B decision-making committee must trust the company they are buying from. Online marketing is a great way to establish that level of trust, starting at the top of the funnel throughout the purchase path to lifetime value. While evaluating your business, the lead will start by researching both your company and your industry online. If you claim to be the leader in supply chain management and your lead can't find you anywhere when they search for *supply chain management*, you better believe you just took a credibility hit and your sales team will suffer.

Search isn't the only tactic you can use to build confidence, but it is vital. Do a search for your brand online and see what appears in the first page of the search results. Are all of these results positive? Does your brand own all of the organic listings? If you said yes, then congratulations—you sit at the top of the pack. If you said no, then your work has just begun. A negative result on the first page of Google can be detrimental. That negative result, be it by an angry customer, disgruntled employee, or consumer affairs report, will damage credibility in a way that no amount of C-level or executive (CXO) ass-kissing can fix. If your brand has this issue, get to work immediately.

You can establish brand confidence digitally through positive online public relations, through articles in industry trade publications and blogs, and through social media. Strong thought leadership and customer service in social media can also increase your credibility because prospects perceive your brand as more trustworthy and communicative. HubSpot, a B2B marketing software company, does a great job of building brand confidence in various social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. With hundreds of thousands of fans and followers, HubSpot uses social media to push out relevant content, respond to customer inquiries, and prospect for new leads (Figure 1.1).



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60% of marketers have fewer than 10 landing pages on their site. Even the busiest marketer can have more. The question is, how?

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Asif Anwar posted about HubSpot in his link on Bangladesh Internet Marketing Professional Association (BIMPA).
 October 13, 2011 near Dhaka, Bangladesh

Nice collection of various resources you need.

99 Tools to Help You Generate Leads with Social Media
blog.hubspot.com

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Figure 1.1 HubSpot's branding is consistent across social media channels.

Developing Individual Relationships with Decision Makers

Another complex area you must address is how to reach out to the individuals in a decision-making committee. Are they loyal to their company, or are they loyal to themselves? The answer to that question will determine whether you should appeal to them as an individual or play into their role within the business where they currently work. Getting the answer wrong can have consequences fatal to a given purchase decision.

Whether you play to the individual or the group depends on the culture of the company, the style of the approach, and to some degree pure chance. This decision influences how you approach your marketing because you can use enormous reserves of data to profile and personalize the research you make available. You must then choose between marketing to the individual as an entity whose loyalty might transfer to similar companies in the industry or marketing to the cog in the larger wheel of the B2B organization.

Unfortunately, neither the individual nor the cog necessarily cares about your brand, your product, or you. That should be inspiring if you're new to market with a pivotal new view into the world order, and it should be absolutely terrifying if you live in a marketing world temporarily carried by an all-too ephemeral brand name.

After you determine the key influencers and decision makers, you can use several online marketing tactics to influence them and build brand favorability. This is where marketing automation, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 10, "Managing Your Leads: Automation and Nurturing," can play a role. Automated content distribution lets you message the key decision makers and adapt the strategy to the content that these individuals respond to best.

Social media marketing is also increasingly important for influence. Products like salesforce.com's Social Hub let salespeople integrate social data in their CRM system (see Figure 1.2). Now your sales team can track what key influencers are saying about your brand in social media and tie that information into the lead or contact record, gaining that extra level of visibility. Marketers can set up social media command centers and monitoring teams to build lists around key leads and customers to ensure timely replies to all related inquiries. The influencers will feel that your company isn't just about making a quick buck off of them, but really cares about their success and the overall relationship.

Mitigating the Decline of Brand Loyalty

Over the past 50 years, the brand loyalty that the greatest generation and baby boomers kazooed down the street is no longer king. While customers have fewer emotional relationships with specific brands, the B2B world still sees some brand dominance based on the weight of B2B purchase decision making. If a department or sourcing team feels at risk and on the line for their decision, they will follow the trends of the larger industry and try to play it safe with an established brand.

Action	Avatar	Contact	Channel	Disposition	Klout Score	Followers
Edit Del		Foodista		Advocate	59.82	178,074
Edit Del		Rich Mason		Advocate	34.2	189
Edit Del		Top Tech Tweets		Advocate	30.84	192,539
Edit Del		eclectic		Advocate	29.06	68
Edit Del		Shazah Ayub		Advocate	15.94	60
Edit Del		Julius P2		Advocate	0	11
Edit Del		André Lombardy		Advocate	0	373
Edit Del		liker_YILDIRIM		Advocate	0	12

Figure 1.2 Integrating social data with Social Hub

However, even this safety-in-numbers type of brand affinity has cracked in the economic downturn. Google research shows that prospects do more research now before they make a B2B purchase decision. Decision makers research on both the brand and nonbrand levels—that is to say, search keywords apply to both the task at hand and the companies that offer a solution to that task.

The easiest, most obvious way to combat decline in the power of brand is to orient your marketing to the customer. This goes back to the fundamental relationship between well-functioning marketing and sales: we profile the very people that sales needs to talk to and provide the materials to have the most effective conversation.

To sensibly market to the customer without horrifically missing the mark, we need to learn everything we can about our prospective customers and then gradually and appropriately feed them the information and build the confidence they need to plow through and complete the inevitably complex purchase and implementation steps.

The Power of Personalization

It boils down to “How do we give customers what they need when they need it, and make their lives easier?” Your website is a great place to start. With products like Test&Target and Offermatica, you can give your website visitors a more personalized experience by showing targeted content and offers. Although Chapter 4, “Using Paid Online Media in the B2B Marketplace,” gets into targeting in glorious detail, we’d like to share some ideas right now on the power of personalization and testing.

Let’s assume your business has five core products and a visitor to your website is interested in product B. Thanks to website personalization and the power of cookies,

when that visitor returns to your website, your home page now reflects messaging around product B, rather than your generic offer. The purchase path on your website, including pricing, white papers, and video assets, now revolves around how product B can save this person time and money.

Marketers need to find a way to combat the slow death of brand loyalists, and the answer isn't just to create great content. The answer is to provide targeted content and offers to the right person, at the right time, in the right vehicle. Through on-site targeting platforms, you can customize websites based on visitor information, but targeting doesn't stop there. Retargeting, which we will cover later in this book, can create personalized content distribution off-site as well.

Let's revisit our earlier example: the website visitor interested in product B. Since we know how many pages the visitor browsed, what offers the visitor did or did not take, and potentially information about the industry they work in or their role, we can build retargeting strategies that are customized around these clues. After the prospect visits pages about product B, we can then message this person with an ad on a third-party website that leads to details on the benefits and features of product B. We can use retargeting to distribute white papers, customer testimonials, and videos in the form of rich media (see Figure 1.3). We can adjust strategies automatically based on this prospect's actions such as filling out a form, engaging with an ad, or revisiting the website. If brand loyalists are dead, engaged and informed prospects are the next best thing.

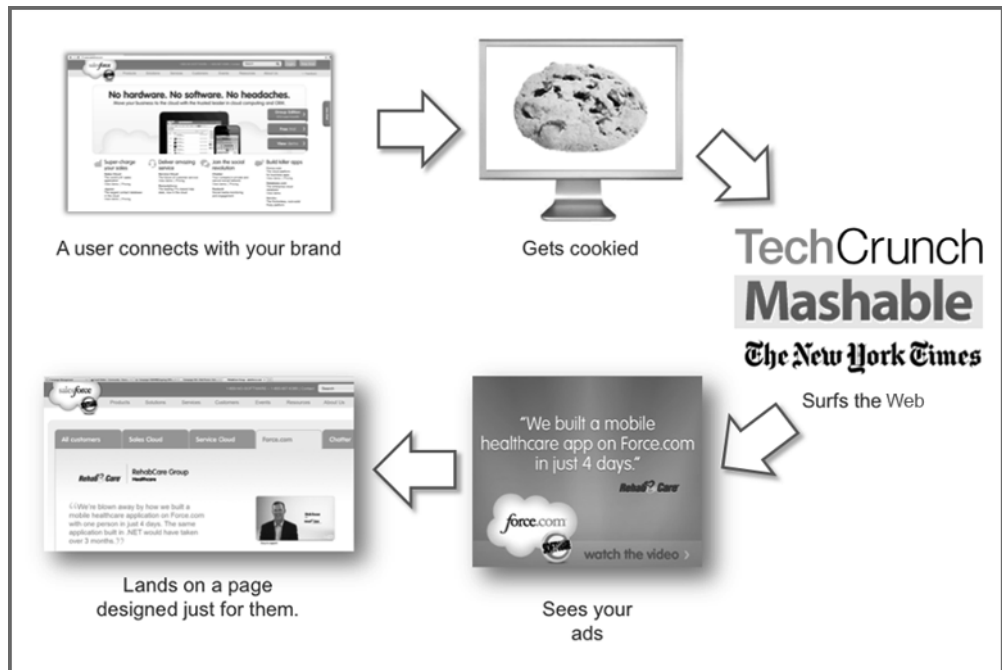


Figure 1.3 How retargeting works

Developing Your Strategy

You should get excited about online marketing for no other reason than to better eavesdrop, profile, stalk, and armchair-psychoanalyze your customers in bulk. The amount of data you can now collect can be detailed, and it can also be broad; it can be challenging to use all the numbers in a meaningful way. The right analysis and action can have a profound impact on your direct and indirect sales.

As with any innovation, good marketing happens through trial and error. However, most of us still approach it prehistorically—as if every line were chiseled in stone, never to be rejiggered or even moved. Online marketing provides you with a series of veritable beakers, tubes, and Bunsen burners so you can discover the best understanding of your most valuable customers and craft messages that resonate with them. In traditional marketing, you spend tens of thousands of dollars on small focus groups, customer interviews, and market research. Now, with online marketing, you can scale that insight into the thousands or millions.

How Online Marketing Can Solve Your Organization's Pain Points

People go online to solve problems, gather information, socialize, buy something, or make something. All of these activities affect your buyer's view into content and marketing. And they may not read your glossy collateral in the order you assume. Views also vary by country, company size and industry, function within a company, urgency of pain and need, and persona type of the individual.

Many traditional B2B marketers insist that the only way to reach business decision makers is through field marketing, events, or traditional marketing like direct mailers or print. This book is designed to halt that way of thinking in its tracks and arm you with the tools and tactics to make your B2B online marketing program a raving success. Let's start with how to reach your audience online.

Being Alert to Your Audience

When we work online, our activity creates virtual profiles of who we are; our interests; and data like our profession, industry, and decision-making power. As a digital marketer, you can leverage that data to create highly effective forms of marketing and advertising that can reach your target audience at the exact moment they think about your industry or product.

With marketing automation, you tie site visits and interaction into your CRM system. Think of how powerful a well-timed call from a salesperson can be to your business. With marketing automation and CRM integrations, you set up alerts so whenever a key contact visits your website, the activity is recorded and the salesperson on the account is notified. Suddenly that call from the salesperson seems serendipitous and incredibly relevant, much more so than a cold call at random.

Traditional marketing can't enable your sales team to make the perfect call, and it can't provide your visitors with personalized content that is optimized to where they are in the purchase cycle. When you use website testing and -optimization tools, you can dynamically display content based on the visitor's profile data, industry, online ads viewed, or purchase data. Your salespeople can reach leads at the perfect moment, and your website can show leads the right message at the right time based on their individual needs.

You can mirror this level of targeting off-site through ad sequencing and display retargeting. Imagine showing your key prospects a series of sequential ads on relevant third-party websites that walk them through all of your key differentiators. Online marketing allows granular levels of targeting both off-site and on-site and makes your sales team more informed and empowered.

Building a Strategy for Targeted Content

After you determine who you are trying to reach—by establishing the main points of contact when your sales team is trying to close the deal—you can look online and research where these people hang out. You learn what type of content these people read, which may vary by person, and cultivate a strategy to engage them.

Look to your web analytics platform to come up with your content strategy: start with statistics like time on site, downloads, and videos watched to ensure you provide the most relevant content to your audience. Based on these trends of when buyers are looking for certain content, you can move to the next steps:

- Determine how you provide the desired content to your target audience.
- Establish how you test that these assumptions apply to your industry and business model.
- Figure out how you build the rungs for the complete DNA ladder from their thought process to your sales funnel.

Supercharging Content and Messaging with Online

We B2B marketers can often drum up an elevator pitch, if not several, before breakfast. We can recite a vision statement. We know the analysts who cover our space, the two or three shows that are worth their salt, and the two trade rags that focus on our space. And we can produce reams of buzzword-laden impressive-sounding gobbledygook from a content creation perspective. But what's far harder (and why so many of us stay vague) is to help a prospect figure out exactly how your complex whats-it fixes the way that their complex whats-it runs. Unfortunately, when we shy away from a simply articulated value proposition, we alienate customers because we haven't made any attempt to solve their problem.

To discover your prospects' problem statements, start online. Look at competitors. Look at search keywords. Look at your most satisfied current customers. How do

they explain to their peers how you help them succeed? How does the trade industry explain the problem?

The answers to these questions can range from social media listening to forcing an engineer to explain it to your fluffiest marketer. Test all variations of these answers online. You will typically find that many customers describe what they need and want far differently than do the industry experts, insiders, and professionals. Take this information about what your audience really wants to hear and use it when planning your content strategy, and start communicating with customers and prospects in the way they want to be talked to.

How Online Reflects the Funnel: Objectives and Measurement

Once you know what your customers are looking for and how that journey lines up to your own sales funnel, you need to check your website against these understandings and adjust it accordingly. To start this process, think of the typical sales funnel (see Figure 1.4).

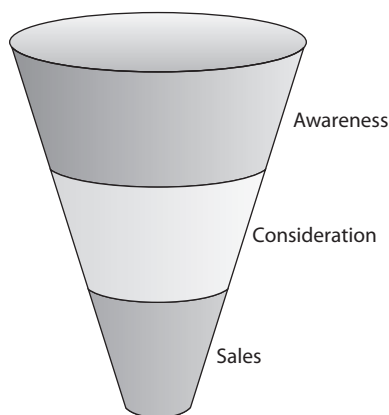


Figure 1.4 Simplified sales funnel

Each step of the sales funnel will have its own length of time: a prospect could be in awareness for a short span of time but dwell in preferences for ages while budgets are approved. They may test demos for months while contracts are being adjusted, making it look on paper like a sales lead has weakened considerably.

Customers are relying on company websites as the single most important stop a prospect makes. Increasingly, smaller companies are doing their own research first. The first half of the funnel might be invisible to the company's marketing department while the prospect forms their own preconceived notions on what problems the product or service solves. Your job is to pick them up at any point in the process using their

points of reference—not by using your standby jargon—and put them in the right stage of the funnel (see Figure 1.5).

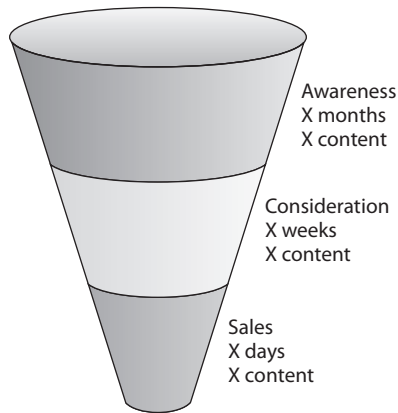


Figure 1.5 Sales funnel adjusted for a prospect

Yes, you want to generate leads. And it's useful for an overall website goal to look at historical data to set benchmarks and targets for what percentage of the total traffic should convert. But your home page serves many purposes and will not primarily be a form, so you must think of the steps between someone landing on your website and then filling out an inquiry.

Consider these questions:

- How would a customer describe their user task or process pain point, in five words or less?

Look to your search engine marketing program, search keyword research, and social media listening to find these answers. The keywords customers and prospects type into search engines or tweet about should provide you with real insight into their pain points. What PR pieces typically get the most press and social pickup?

This might not answer your “What content do I need on my website?” question, but it hints at industry appeal and how your products are commonly seen and found.

- For web visitors who read more than one or two pages on your site, what pages are they reading?

For example, is there a series of pages that visitors typically follow when they read five or more pages or download a few marketing assets in one session?

- What pages are visitors most commonly sharing with their peers?

Assuming that share options are available on the site, you can see what the most viral pages might be through RSS and social sharing–functionality data.

- How do you help customers compare your products to competitors or select the best product from your own line?

Get over your fear of limiting the appeal of a single product by honestly comparing products, and have fun wrestling with company lawyers over external competitor comparisons.

- What assets does the sales team typically find most useful?

For the sales team, assets that make their jobs easier and help them sell more effectively are seen as the most valuable. Sales may tell you what they want, but listen for what they actually need. What prospect questions does customer service get asked?

You'll hear a lot from customer service agents on how they think the site should be, and that's not the same thing as what the customers may actually need.

Every one of these steps represents information that someone found useful before they finally completed a lead generation form. They are indicators on the way to comfort—a comfort that can be disrupted or interrupted at any given moment. Look wherever you can for these confidence boosters.

Over the course of the rest of this book, we will give you data on how to use online marketing to build brand awareness, how to capture people at the top of the sales funnel, how to target your prospects effectively to generate more better-quality leads, how to move leads through the sales funnel as quickly as possible, and how to optimize the entire process from start to finish.

Not only is online marketing relevant in every stage of the funnel, but it also drives and influences deals of all sizes. Online marketing drives a real, measurable, and profound impact for the B2B bottom line. Open your mind, put on your helmet, and let's get started.

In the following chapters, we'll guide you through all the different ways that online marketing can help you know your customer and what to say to them. We will teach you how to use online marketing to build your brand with tactics such as content marketing, social media, search and display advertising, search engine optimization, and more. Then the book will focus on the meat and potatoes of B2B marketing: lead generation. We will show you how to use every online marketing tactic available to generate new leads and close deals. From there, we will explain how to find and optimize your efforts to the right metrics and how to better understand your prospects to increase leads through conversion and usability testing and optimization.

We all know that B2B marketing isn't just about leads; it is really about sales. We will explain what to do with your leads once you have captured their information and how to use online marketing to help close them faster. We will discuss using online marketing to influence larger accounts and bigger deals and ultimately how to keep your customers longer and increase lifetime value.

