



B2B Becoming B2C: The Changing Sales Cycle

CREATING THE NEW B2B USER EXPERIENCE



The 2019 B2B Marketing Mix Report identified a common thread among the top tactics and goals of today's B2B professionals: the trend toward implementing customer-centric strategies that were historically reserved for the B2C marketplace. But riding this wave of change is more than adding new tactics to your marketing plan. It requires building a whole new ship—restructuring the way you market and sell to remove friction from the B2B sales cycle.

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The changing B2B sales cycle

The long, complex B2B sales cycles is no more

This isn't the B2B industry's first warning, but it's worth mentioning until we make a change: lengthy and involved B2B sales cycles won't fly in 2019 and beyond. Everyday consumers are now used to the simplicity and convenience of online shopping, streaming services, freemium subscription models, smart phones and other digital experiences that offer immediacy and instant gratification with the click of a button or swipe of the finger... And while B2B companies don't always operate at the same streamlined level as those in B2C, their business leaders are beginning to realize that the way they sell products and services needs to mimic the fast purchasing models and ease of use that people are conditioned to expect.

Because B2B buyers are just like you and me

The people who pile items in their virtual carts, keep up with their favorite brands on social media and scroll through product reviews before buying are the same people who make purchases for their company when they're in the office. Learning that it will take anywhere from a few months to a year to research, approve, purchase, implement and support a new B2B product, service or partner is frustrating. Overseeing such a large and involved purchase can even deter professionals from setting aside the time and budget to start looking.

So B2B is taking the hint from B2C to stay relevant

This is a pivotal moment in B2B. The choice to adjust marketing and sales techniques to fit customers' new demands or to ignore their needs and revert to traditional—and slow—sales cycles will determine the long-term success of a business. Let's discuss how the industry is changing and what you can do to keep up.

The preferred user experience

Frictionless. The best way to describe today's preferred purchasing experience for both B2B and B2C is frictionless. Eliminating all possible points of friction from the B2B sales cycle and business model is crucial to offering the most optimal experience for leads and clients. But it means more than just tweaking tired sales tactics; wrapped up in this challenging goal is cutting out the people and processes that still carry the potential to obstruct a customer's ability to say yes or no to a product or service.

The perfect path to purchase is an easy one, and it requires reframing client-facing and internal touchpoints to form a **single, user-friendly source** for finding, considering and purchasing products from your organization. By addressing the **convenience and immediacy** needs of your prospects and current clientele and by offering **education and support** from beginning to end, you're effectively weathering change in the B2B industry.



**A SINGLE
SOURCE**



**CONVENIENCE
& IMMEDIACY**



**EDUCATION
& SUPPORT**

A single source

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Connecting with leads, preparing to make a sale and continuing to delight customers in B2B is typically a fragmented process with touchpoints scattered across multiple channels, weaving in all directions to hold together a shapeshifting mass of stakeholders and decision-makers. But coming at leads from all directions doesn't work anymore.

Simplifying how a B2B organization's team is linked to its leads and customers brings **a logical flow to developing and nurturing relationships** and creates an **easy, stress-free experience** for everyone that comes into contact with the brand.

Tidy up your touchpoints to **offer a single source for discovering, considering and purchasing products** from your business.

TIPS

Provide a one-stop shop for product info, including pricing, sales sheets, demos and FAQs

Make it easy for leads and current customers to get in touch with customer support

Implement a product or service search function, recommendations and online ordering

Offer visibility for customers through reporting and product or service statuses

Implement self-service portals, mobile apps or dashboards if your business allows

Convenience and immediacy

Convenience and immediacy are two of the most important aspects of the new preferred user experience and must be present even if buyers are still on their journey after weeks or months. This is why it's important to make digital marketing a core component of your strategy.

Whether through retargeting, email marketing, website development or SEO, digital has the power to shape the customer journey around the needs of individuals at all stages. Meeting their queries and pain points with digital will present your organization as the convenient and easy choice.

The number of companies placing top priority on digital has risen by 10% from 2017 to represent the majority of companies for the first time.¹

But satisfying these new demands means adding even more into the mix: adopting tools and technologies, introducing automation and chat bots, adding e-commerce and supporting data collection. Each new marketing tactic gaining traction in B2B underscores the trend toward personalization and interactive experiences that build unique connections with users.

Conversational marketing can help eliminate friction in B2B and fuel lead capture. Buyers reluctant to fill out forms are opting to chat with sales directly for help, and through new intelligence tools like Drift Intel, companies can then obtain real-time lead profiles, personalize messages and route leads to the right team member to speed up sales.

74% of B2B buyers say that purchasing from a website is more convenient than buying from a sales representative.³

The B2B e-commerce industry is projected to be worth \$1.1 trillion by 2020.³

TIPS

Provide an accessible self-service option that makes one-click purchases easy

Encourage reviews and collect testimonials to aid customers' research processes

Use heat maps and analyze the flow of bounces and drop-offs to improve website ease of use

Start with a mobile-first design to offer better functionality and intuitiveness on smart phones

Create optional pricing plans, dynamic pricing, add-on purchase suggestions and live demos

Education and support

The rise and steady traction of content marketing has proven that customers value education, advice and support and that providing these is essential to reeling in leads and building long-term trust and brand loyalty.

The level of research that B2B buyers conduct before selecting new products and services now mirrors that of B2C purchasers, which makes sense given the high cost and commitment that B2B purchases typically require.

Pushing the agenda of your B2B sales team too far and forgetting to provide adequate information about the industry, viable solutions to prospects' pain points and available options can alienate audiences who will quickly turn to more transparent brands that act as trusted business partners.

The dense, technical and complex nature of many B2B offerings makes **education prior to purchasing** a necessity, and the industry's heavy reliance on customer relationships makes **post-purchase support** an important factor in satisfying and retaining clients.

Content that performs well should feature interactive copy and design elements, such as pull quotes, spotlight boxes, quick facts and quizzes. Consider crafting explainer and demo videos, eBooks and guides, ROI calculators and other convenient tools for customers doing homework before their next B2B buy.

TIPS

Track the happiness of current clients and make an effort to suit their changing needs

Offer thoughtful commentary and actionable insights to solve prospects' challenges

Keep your sales and marketing teams aligned to develop assets that customers ask for

Develop interactive content that engages readers and addresses key pain points

The most-used strategies

Providing a single source for decision-making, offering convenience and immediacy and incorporating education and ongoing support in your marketing plan will help reshape your sales cycle, but you still need clear strategies in place to support your effort.

B2B marketers working to become more customer-centric and meet new demands are using these three strategies to move their businesses forward.



**REFERRAL
MARKETING & ABM**



**MOBILE-FIRST
FOCUS**



**BRANDING
BOOST**

Referral marketing and ABM

B2B is a traditionally relationship-driven industry because of its long sales cycle, so referral marketing and account-based marketing (ABM) continue to be effective strategies for **connecting with qualified leads and closing deals.**

With these two longstanding B2B favorites, your marketing and sales teams can **engage only the relevant businesses that fit your ideal customer profile** and directly target the stakeholders influencing company purchase decisions.

Use personalization to enhance your ABM strategy and develop an easy and irresistible way for existing clients to recommend you to others.

Referrals bring in the most qualified leads for 86% of today's B2B marketers.²

TIPS

Examine your referral strategy by approaching your brand and website from a prospect's POV

Develop case studies, reveal your top clientele and leverage existing relationships

Perfect your decision stage offer, whether trial, demo or consultation, to be truly useful

Determine when to engage the sales team to send personalized content and messages

Use LinkedIn paid social campaigns to connect directly with key decision-makers

Mobile-first focus

B2C companies put great effort toward optimizing their websites and ads for mobile, increasing their social media reach and adapting their products for mobile use—and it's not surprising that B2B companies are slow to catch up. A mobile-first focus is good fuel for the sales pipeline and is one of the first steps in creating a **user-friendly experience**.

If **Google's move to a mobile-first index** isn't enough for your organization to make this a core focus, then consider the needs of your target market as you develop content, update your website and manage your brand's perception online.

Big B2B players in the health and biotech industries are already starting to embrace mobile for electronic health records and customer relationship management systems, so take the time to **consider mobile solutions** that would benefit your own customers and help you stand out in the marketplace.

53% of people will abandon a site if it takes too long to load.⁴

TIPS

Optimize the functionality, appearance and accessibility of your mobile website pages

Take advantage of accelerated mobile pages (AMP) to improve website speed and UX

Place a greater emphasis on social media by keeping your profiles updated and using paid tools

Design content marketing assets for mobile viewing and create responsive landing pages

Hold a focus group or conduct research to find out if you need mobile products and services

Branding boost

Refreshing a brand's look and feel can drastically improve its performance among leads and signify to an existing customer base that it's ready for the future, more than capable of weathering change and fully equipped to deliver innovative products and services.

Does your organization look like one that people want to do business with? Does your messaging help your differentiators shine? Bring your brand up to speed to round out your new and improved B2B sales cycle. By giving your branding a boost, you can appear more modern and professional, improve your customer experience, **compete more successfully in your market** and motivate your team.

Leading with an outdated or inconsistent image is likely to push away potential customers and business partners who want to invest their time and money in a company that cares about staying relevant.

REMEMBER: Customers unfamiliar with your brand only have the surface to judge when they come across your website, view your digital ads, consult your business cards and read your emails.

Small businesses will always reach a point at which they can't grow without giving their brand the attention it deserves. Review yours now to stay on track and achieve your ultimate business vision.

Step 1

Establish a clear personality and tone of voice to set the standard for how your company appears, sounds and acts in all marketing communications

Step 2

Create a messaging platform that shares your business approach, the impressive qualities of what you sell and the unique things you contribute to the industry

Step 3

Design a visual identity system to define your brand's appearance through logos, color palettes, typography sets and imagery styles

The future of B2B

Some say the future is still the funnel. Others say the new path forward is the flywheel. However you choose to view the way we sell in B2B, understand that the customer should always stay in the center. With the user as your constant inspiration and muse, you can adopt new strategies and tactics with confidence because you're putting your best foot forward to meet customers in a changing market.

If there's one thing we can be certain about, it's that placing the customer in the center of a process that's constantly nurtured by marketing, sales and service is how B2B companies can stay afloat in the years to come. Aim to perfect each and every touchpoint to connect with qualified leads, power targeted marketing and build an enjoyable user experience that sparks a stream of delighted brand advocates.

Stay customer-centric and you'll succeed.

Take Action Now

Are you ready to face the big changes happening in the B2B industry? Show the world that you're prepared by reviewing your marketing efforts or partnering with an experienced marketing agency to discuss your biggest areas for improvement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR HELP GETTING STARTED,
CONTACT US AT: (215) 230.9024 | success@sagefrog.com

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