



BRAND AWARENESS SERIES

Does your B2B marketing need to pivot to reflect these 3 trends?

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B2B marketing – like every other form of marketing today – is constantly in a state of flux and evolution. No longer is it just evolving to be more B2C-like, it's also facing changing technology and customer/prospect expectations.

Future B2B, a global publisher of specialist content for professionals across 15-plus industries, dives into three B2B marketing trends to uncover several particular challenges* B2B marketers are facing. These are:

- 1. A new view of upper-funnel activity**
- 2. Influence of millennials and Generation Z**
- 3. Evolution of data collection**

"In B2B and beyond, adaptation is the key to success," said Amanda Darman-Allen, senior vice president of Future B2B.

"Those who pivot effectively will thrive. Yet, providing genuine expertise, trust and value will always be paramount in B2B marketing. As the value of truthful, fact-based information rises, maintaining integrity with your audience is even more crucial," Darman-Allen said.



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Amanda Darman-Allen
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
FUTURE B2B

* Of course, AI is at the top of everyone's trends in marketing, not just B2B. AI in marketing is at its infancy stage and is evolving nearly daily. It's being used – tested – in generating content, improving processes and a host of other areas. For one look at AI in B2B, we direct you to this piece at [SmartBrief Marketing](#).

Getting the upper funnel right

A study from Bain and Google found that relationships are key in B2B marketing. At least 80% of survey respondents said they [already have a list of vendors in mind](#) (depending on the product and service) before they conduct any research. Even more important is that 90% will select their partner from that initial list.

That just makes goals like brand awareness, lead generation and other upper-funnel activities that much more important to generate new sales – and new relationships.

And, what are those top upper-funnel activities?

Your fellow B2B marketers, per a [survey from Ascend2 and Wpromote](#), indicated that social media (50% of those surveyed), email (43%) and in-person events (34%) were the most effective in achieving top-funnel goals. Video, interactive content and influencer marketing were also popular, with 30% of respondents saying those tactics were each among the most effective.

Of course, knowing who your audience is before starting any of the above tactics is vital. That starts with defining your audience segments by demographic and firmographic (i.e., characteristics of the organization a prospect works for) segments, said Scott Lowe, vice president of product and marketing at Future B2B.

MOST EFFECTIVE TOP-FUNNEL TACTICS



50%
Social Media



43%
Email



34%
In-person events

Defining firmographics of your target audiences' organizations enables creation of an ideal client profile (ICP), Lowe said.

NOTE: See "Growing importance of demand-gen" sidebar for a deep dive into demand generation.



Growing importance of demand-gen

Relationships and connections in marketing are the pathways to success. This is especially true in B2B marketing in light of the trend we pointed to earlier: At least 80% of B2B marketers already have a vendor list in mind before conducting research.

In an increasingly competitive landscape, starting relationships – that is, making a good first impression – is key.

Branding and demand-generation marketing go hand in hand, says Andrew Buchholz, head of product for Future B2B.

“Building brand awareness, familiarity and credibility is vital so that, when it’s time to generate leads, your target audience knows that your brand is one they can trust, including with their data,” Buchholz said.

As Future B2B’s Scott Lowe mentions, B2B marketers should be aware of two layers of data about their prospects before fully diving into a lead-gen campaign. These are knowing the demographic and firmographic information of your prospects.

Demographic information, Lowe said, is more in line with a persona: What are the roles being targeted? What are the key pain points faced by people in each of the roles? How does your solution address those pain points?

Then, there’s the firmographic data.

“This includes industry, company size (employees and/or revenue), geographical location and other details,” Lowe said, who added that this information gives marketers an ideal client profile (ICP).

“The combination of an ICP and persona allows B2B organizations to build marketing programs that address unique per-vertical challenges that they may face, as well as role-based challenges that people within the organizations may encounter every day,” Lowe added.

Beyond this data, Lowe said, marketers can benefit from knowing data points beyond ICP and the persona, such as prospects’ interests.

“This deeper level enables marketers to cut through the noise that a lot of B2B organizations can’t,” Lowe said. “The level is a key benefit of Future B2B’s SmartBrief platform, enabling marketers to demonstrate engagement beyond superficial data points that are so prevalent today.”

Gen Z and millennials making their mark

Did you notice how high social media and influencer marketing ranked in achieving upper-funnel results?

That's just part of the influence that those generations are having on B2B marketing as they age and become established in their careers. Millennials and Gen Z members are the most digitally savvy generations (until [Gen Alpha gets into the workplace](#) en masse). They expect a digital-first experience from the companies they deal with.

These new generational behaviors and expectations of organizations include the desire for self-service channels, the use of more third-party sources in research (i.e., reviews), an expectation for more personalized communications and a complete embrace of technology. (See [Forrester](#) and [MarketingProfs](#) for a deeper look into Gen Z and millennials.)

While Forrester research shows that, regardless of age, B2B buyers like a balance of personal and self-guided interactions, “younger buyers most value interactions that are outside of the provider’s control, including technology information websites, forums/message boards and industry websites,” write the research organization’s [Amy Hayes and Barbara Winters](#).



“Content is the gateway for brands. Advertising has shifted over the years to driving value for the audience brands are trying to reach.”



Andrew Buchholz
HEAD OF PRODUCT,
FUTURE B2B



What makes a good B2B partner?

A pandemic, regional conflicts around the world, social unrest and economic uncertainties have put unprecedented pressure on marketers in recent years. Those pressures and the uncertainty of many industries have caused the role of chief marketers to evolve.

Now, chief marketing officers are also known as the chief brand officer. Or, the chief operating and marketing officer. Or the chief commercial and strategy officer.

Despite the pressures and changes to the role, what is not changing is the need for reliable, effective, brand-safe marketing partners.

“Delivering strong ROI is paramount, making it essential for marketers to craft clear plans before investing,” Future B2B’s Amanda Darman-Allen said in describing what a sound B2B marketing plan must offer.

To achieve ROI, Darman-Allen said marketers should seek “digital marketing partners who are data-driven, equipped with robust reporting capabilities and offer a comprehensive suite of options to drive fully integrated campaigns.”

Future B2B’s Scott Lowe and Andrew Buchholz offer several questions that marketers should ask as they seek a partner:



Do you have a product set that encompasses everything I need to accomplish, rather than having to cobble together a series of point solutions?



How well do your programs perform, beyond the ability to drive simple metrics like webinar lead goals? How well does your audience engage versus just react?



What other organizations within my market (i.e., possible competitors) are advertising with you?



How well do you understand my industry? What are the challenges we face every day?



What is an example of a custom or out-of-the-box solution that you have provided to give a partner a competitive advantage?

The next phase of data gathering

The digitalization of marketing meant that every touch point could be measured, analyzed and used. That digitalization has shifted into a new phase: Protecting personal data and anonymizing it. While there are no national guidelines yet, several [states have sought to fill that gap](#), putting the onus on businesses to protect current and future customer information and make it easy for them to opt out.

There's also the deprecation of browser cookies, which, as Google has shown us, can be a moving target.

For B2B marketers, the best method of handling data is to [collect it ethically](#) and make it their own with users' permission. The end goal is for marketers to collect zero- and first-party data so they can maintain lines of communication and build that relationship. There are various ways to do this, such as via email newsletters, online contests, webinars and creating lead magnets.

Regardless of the tactic, "content is the gateway for brands," said Future B2B's Buchholz. "Advertising has shifted over the years to driving value for the audience brands are trying to reach."



"The combination of an ICP and persona allows B2B organizations to build marketing programs that address unique per-vertical challenges that they may face."



Scott Lowe

VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT
AND MARKETING, FUTURE B2B





As Darman-Allen said above, those B2B marketers who smartly adapt and pivot to reflect changing trends will thrive.

One last point about success that's often overlooked within marketing is that it truly takes everyone being on the same page to realize success.

"Even in a technology-driven world, the human element remains crucial," Darman-Allen said. "Involving other teams in the development of a marketing plan promotes alignment, harmonizes diverse expertise, facilitates integration and fosters a feedback loop.

"Optimizing all of these resources and relationships cultivates buy-in and support, which ultimately leads to more successful outcomes," Darman-Allen said.

ABOUT FUTURE B2B

[Future B2B](#) is a global platform connecting sellers with B2B buyers across 15+ industries through specialist-led content, events and advertising. Our brands – which include SmartBrief, ActualTech Media, ITPro, TV Technology, AV Technology and Tech & Learning, – inform and inspire nearly 10 million leaders daily. Future B2B delivers relevant news, webinars and content to a highly engaged global audience.

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