

B2B Strategies

Top 10 B2B Internet Marketing Strategies

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1 Educate Your Prospects

If you can help your prospect feel like an expert, claim authors Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, they are more likely to buy than if they feel confused. Mark and Pearson's book, *The Hero and the Outlaw: Harnessing the Power of Archetypes to Create a Winning Brand*, discusses how successful brands correspond to fundamental patterns in the unconscious mind known as archetypes. Many business prospects fit the role of an archetype that uses intelligence and analysis to understand the world.

A strategy based on fear, uncertainty and doubt is at odds with what motivates this prospect. Instead, Mark and Pearson suggest never talking down to clients or using a hard sell. Business professionals want to feel smart, competent and in charge of the transaction. They like to collect all the data to make informed decisions, and enjoy complicated products (like PCs) that demand a learning curve and are difficult to master. And if the prospect feels like they are being pushed, they are likely to walk away, because they view a purchase as a rational decision based on information. One of the most precious commodities for the business professional is their time. So embrace time-saving technologies like email or web meetings (instead of trying to set up golf outings).

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2 Create a New Framework

Good marketing doesn't merely attempt to influence what people think about a particular company's product or service - good marketing instead focuses on creating a favorable framework through which people can evaluate your product or service. The traditional approach to selling a product or service is to focus on the particular features and benefits of the solution, and why it is better/faster/cheaper than the competition. Instead, create a new framework for business professionals to apply their specific industry experience, customer feedback and financial analysis to your solution. Rather than focus on price, your conceptual framework allows prospective clients to better understand the forces that shape their business and how your solution is an integral part of their success.

3 Create Opportunities to Communicate

But how do you both educate your prospects and envelop them in a framework that places your business in a favorable light? The answer is to balance persistence against communication overload. When you first meet a potential customer, you typically ask for a business card and try to learn more about their company. Implied in the exchange of business cards is the opportunity to follow-up with more information.

But once you have sent more information, and politely asked if they have further questions, how do you stay top-of-mind without coming across as nagging? Create reasons to communicate high-value ideas and information to your business prospects, and balance persistence against overload. Create industry-specific email distribution lists and forward relevant articles and upcoming events to both your clients and sales prospects. Forward the latest whitepaper or research study that may help them do their job more effectively. Reinforce through this communication that part of the 'value-add' of purchasing from your company is the added attention you will bring to the relationship.

4 Speak Their Language

When it comes to communicating to prospects that have different functional positions, a one-size-fits-all approach won't work. The CFO of a company will often focus on price, capital expenditures and measurable return on investment (ROI). If you are a company that offers an outsourced product, for example, your email message to the CFO should explain how your solution avoids hefty up-front costs and has a built-in system for measuring the effectiveness of marketing expenditures.

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To the CTO, however, the pressing issue may be how the product may abscond scarce IT resources, or how well the product integrates with the company's existing technology. And the Chief Marketing Officer may have altogether different issues - concerns with getting timely reporting from the IT staff on the effectiveness of the last marketing campaign may be top of mind. Begin by creating a laundry list of bullet points that examine your product or service from the viewpoint of each of your constituents. Then personalize your email communications, segmented by job function. Make sure you also give the marketer the financial and technical ammunition necessary to convince their respective counterparts.

5 Email Training Series

One of the best ways to educate your prospects and stay top-of mind is with an email-based training series. Allow the experts within your company the opportunity to help prospects and customers learn more about your industry. When prospects sign up, they receive a series of email messages at a regular interval. Inside the email is a mini-summary of the individual topic and a short case study that examines the practical application of your solution. A quiz after each lesson can provide immediate feedback on what they've learned.

6 Product Discussion List

An effective way to get feedback on your product or service is to engage your customers in the product development process by using an email discussion list. Allow your engineers, designers and customer service representatives to interact with your customers in a discussion forum. After all, your customers are the ones who are using your solution to accomplish their business goals and have a vested effort in shaping the future of your offering. A moderated list allows control over what information is posted and who is able to send to the list.

7 Additional Information by Email

Give your prospects a way to receive additional information from your company. Give prospects access to a password-protected area of your website where they can select what documents they would like to receive via email. An email-based approach can work better than simply giving prospects access to an online directory of files, because many professionals use their email inbox (and subfolders) to organize their content. Instead of relying on prospects to open a document from your website only to print it and forget it, email is a way to reach out to prospect's inbox and deliver the information directly to them. Plus, you've just created an additional reason to contact them with a personalized message.

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8 Web Meetings & Presentations

While face-to-face meetings are indeed essential, PowerPoint presentations and informational meetings often take place in a dark room. A web meeting usually consists of an audio conference call and a PowerPoint presentation that the recipient views by going to a special website and signing in with a username and password. Use web meetings to communicate product-specific information or to better prospect different customers. Plane tickets are expensive, and waiting in line at the airport behind other weary travelers only to find out that the flight is delayed does little to promote productivity. Web meetings are especially cost effective if the potential client is in a geographically remote location where few other potential sales prospects exist.

9 Teach the Gatekeeper, Too!

Many hard-to-reach business prospects have excellent administrative assistants that don't always see the value of your offering. One way to break through to these 'gatekeepers' is to demonstrate how one facet of your product or service can help them do their job better. Because gatekeepers are frequently interrupted, avoid using scheduled web seminars. Instead, use an email training series delivered right to their email inbox. Offer, for example, an email-based tutorial that demonstrates how to better use email filters to prioritize incoming messages.

10 Sequenced Communications

According to author Seth Godin, permission marketing is like dating: "It turns strangers into friends and friends into lifetime customers." Treat your sales process as a series of interactions that will grow into a long-term, profitable customer relationship. Develop a series of sequenced communications, designed to inform, educate and convert prospects into paying customers. If a prospect downloads a whitepaper, for example, have your system automatically send a personalized email message a couple of days later, asking if they have any additional questions or need further information.



About Customer Paradigm:

Customer Paradigm is a website development and email marketing company located in Boulder, Colorado, and is a proud sponsor of the RMDMA. Want to build stronger customer relationships and market with more accurate data? We can help put the strategies outlined above into practice, and make your business more profitable. For more information, please contact Mark Wood, mark@customerparadigm.com, or call 303.473.4400 x 22.