

Do You Know Where Your B-to-B Audience Is?

There's no better way to describe the changing business-to-business marketing communications landscape than to consider what that landscape actually is. It's your audience—the people who make critical buying decisions—and the techniques and technology they use to stay informed.

Where B-to-B marketers traditionally focused on *knowing your audience*, then crafting a campaign to reach them, today's imperative is as much to find your audience as to know them. Reaching them is an evolving challenge too, because the audience is reaching out, searching for new information and solutions. You need to use media that meets your audience's needs—media that the audience uses to reach out to you as you reach out to them.

In Search of Your Audience: Charting the Course

Connecting with your audience is a process that flows naturally out of the four key questions of media channel planning: What are you trying to do? Who is your audience? How do you reach them? And, what do they want and need?

Once you have established your marketing goals, understanding who your audience is begins by determining where, within the organizations you're marketing to, your audience might reside. Does the market segment you're targeting feature large corporations with many departments—or smaller organizations where individuals wear many hats? Are decisions made by 1–2 individuals or is there a buying team? Do the users of your product have the final say, or is that decision made at a higher level?

When answering the question of how to reach the audience, keep in mind that, in today's media world, you need to consider how they are most likely to reach you. Interactive media can allow potential buyers to identify themselves and ask questions, much like live discussion participants raising their hands. With the rise of social media like blogs, wikis, discussion rooms, Twitter and more, *reaching* is a two-way street. And these media, like the Internet, are always *open*. No one has to wait for a newsletter or piece of mail to arrive—they can simply reach out and grab key pieces of information.

After you understand who your audience is and how to reach them, it is important to address the question, "What do they want and need?" The answers go beyond the traditional concepts of low cost or high quality. Some want to meet a specific professional challenge. Others may want the best product selection, a downloadable catalog, or simply to talk to "a real person." These goals haven't changed much over the years. What's changed is the landscape—and chances are, your customers are participating in actively changing it. That's because new media outlets can meet traditional needs—for information or help, and also meet new needs that audiences have come to expect: interactivity, progressive engagement.

The Human Face of B-to-B Marketing

Understanding potential customers' media preferences and research habits is essential for reaching your audience and creating a message that fits in smoothly. Here's an example: Frank, a design engineer, needs to find help in building a better machine, fast. He faces deadline pressure with few internal resources. He has a T-1 line at work and a cell phone for personal use.

We may not know Frank personally. But we know a great deal about his online research habits, and where he is likely to be in the media landscape. According to research into engineers' media usage habits, 55% of engineers do at least 80% of their research online. They use search,

primarily Google, and they dig deep—47% go beyond the first page of search results and 37% go beyond the second page. Sixty-one percent of engineers find white papers through a search engine, and 48% find them through E-newsletters. Similar profiles have been created for a wide range of other professions.

Some audiences can be in two places at once. For example, some executives combine RSS feeds and E-newsletter use, downloading video when necessary. Studies of American mid-level business executives show shifting media habits: 70% received a daily E-mail alert or newsletter in the previous month, while 49% streamed or watched a broadband video from a computer. Even individuals that view themselves as *traditionalists* are actively participating in a changing landscape. Among investors, 33% have a blog, 74% use investment research web sites regularly, and 77% say web sites have an impact on their perceptions of a company.

For B-to-B marketers, the impact of all this change has been profound, requiring them to sift through numerous new media options in search of an audience. Strategic media programming helps maximize marketers' opportunities by incorporating the most popular media among prospects in various market segments. Strategic media programs incorporate the idea that today's prospects like to shape their own marketing experiences.

Reaching your audience is a participatory process. Your audience is reaching out to organizations like yours to find information and solutions that meet their needs. These needs are the starting point for journeys towards their objectives—giving you the opportunity to help them get there. The key to discovering where your audience *lives* in an ever-changing media landscape lies in understanding the ways in which various individual professionals prefer to participate in shaping and developing that landscape.

**WHERE
DO YOU START?
EIGHT IDEAS FOR
FINDING
YOUR AUDIENCE
ONLINE**

1. Check site analytics to determine the top referring sources to your web site.
2. Utilize sites like [Technorati](#) or [BlogPulse](#) to search your company name and keywords, to find out if you are being mentioned in blogs.
3. Sign up for [Google news alerts](#) for your company name and keywords.
4. Ask your own technical staff where they go to follow your industry and get information.
5. Search social network sites like [LinkedIn](#) for groups related to your industry, then join and participate.
6. Identify your industry's opinion leaders, conduct a Google search to determine if they are blogging, and sign up for RSS feeds.
7. Identify your industry's lead generation sites, and evaluate the presence of your competitors.
8. Survey your current customers and prospects.

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