

# B-to-B Research Is Making a Comeback

Marketing research connects the marketer to the customer, prospect, channel and public through information – information that is used to:

- Identify and define marketing opportunities and problems
- Discover and illuminate customer needs and perceptions
- Analyze competitive strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions
- Monitor marketing performance

Thanks to the revolution in digital marketing, media and Web 2.0, this area of marketing is enjoying resurgence. Some would say it has always been important, and it has. But B-to-B marketers that may have been able to get away with saying, “We know who our customers are, what they want and where to find them,” are discovering that things have changed.

Job functions and titles aren't enough. In the media fragmented web 2.0 world, B-to-B marketers need to understand their customers' demographic data, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Emotional drivers, on the job and in their lives. How they work. Where they like to get information. What web sites do they use? Do they still go to trade shows? Do they like Webcasts? Podcasts? Do they watch online

video? Do they blog? How much work do they do at home? How do they commute?

## **B-to-B Customers are People, Too**

And, what do they do when they aren't working? With the influence of the Internet, and the blurring of “work” and “home” boundaries, lifestyle information is becoming more relevant to B-to-B marketers. Business customers are also “consumers” and they interact daily with media and messages vying for attention. No company can separate the two as neatly as before.

For example, if a customer has a great online experience buying a book, booking a flight, or watching a video on a consumer site, that customer will bring these experiences and the resulting expectations to your B-to-B website. Is your website ready to provide the same kind of experience? Or will it be a letdown, similar to watching a B-to-B video pretending to be a commercial on cable TV in the hotel during trade show week?

## **The Role of Research in the Marketing Mix**

Creating a vibrant, differentiated, relevant brand begins with knowing the customer as thoroughly as possible. This knowledge usually involves research on a macro scale, supplemented by targeted research, focus groups and surveys. In order

to have a differentiated brand, it is also necessary to understand the competitive landscape and the marketing environment in general.

At its core, B-to-B marketing communications is the practice of identifying and reaching prospective customers and building in them the awareness, interest and desire for your products that leads to increased revenues and profits. The time-tested AIDA model is relevant here: it says that buyers go through a defined set of steps before they buy – Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action. And being successful requires a level of knowledge that only comes through research.

## **Awareness = Presence**

Building awareness in today's environment of media fragmentation is more complex than ever. It requires the integration of messaging through many channels using a variety of tactics. Developing a keen understanding of the target audience allows marketers to plan a multi-faceted strategy, including online and offline media, for a better return on investment. You have to place the message to reach audiences where they are...not where you want them to be. It starts with research into customers' habits and preferences.

## **Interest = Relevance**

To turn awareness into interest, you must be relevant. If you establish relevance with your audience,

potential customers will be interested and will associate value of some kind with your brand. And that is an all-important link between simply knowing about you (awareness) and actually wanting to purchase what you have to offer. It starts with research into customers' industry, applications and challenges so you can show relevance. It requires knowing what attributes the customer values, and what kinds of products or services the customer can use.

### **Desire = Alignment**

Moving beyond interest to desire requires that the customer believe that your company can address their needs; your solution can solve their problem. Since most B-to-B purchasing involves buying teams, this means understanding the needs of a diverse group of individuals. It starts with research into customers' business problems and drivers. In

the B-to-B world, these may include saving money, saving time, reducing downtime, and improving productivity. Emotional drivers may include being a hero in their company, using the latest technology, advancing their careers or, sometimes, not getting fired for doing something that hurts the business.

### **Action = Desire + Need**

If you have established awareness, interest and desire at the time the customer's need materializes, then you should be in the selection set when the customer takes action. How do you make sure you're in the game when that happens? It starts with research into the buying cycles and habits of entire industries, geographical areas or specific customers. You can't wait for the buying cycle to start building awareness, but you can align your action-generating communications

and media with key buying cycles if you know what they are.

### **Research and Measurement**

Research is also a key tool in measuring the effectiveness of a marketing and communications program. Marketers can use various forms of research, studies and other measurement techniques to determine whether branding and marketing messages were delivered effectively and whether the program met stated objectives.

To evaluate a marketing program completely, it makes sense to use the AIDA model and measure the impact of the marketing program at each stage—Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action. This helps ensure that appropriate metrics and measurement tools evaluate the right things in a program.

1. New technologies, media and expectations in the 2.0 world make marketing research more important than ever before.
2. Interactive media and the blurring of traditional boundaries require B-to-B marketers to learn more about “lifestyle” information.
3. Experiences with consumer messaging and media affect expectations in the B-to-B world.
4. In order to build awareness, interest and desire among customers and prospects, you must have a level of knowledge that only comes through research.
5. The predominance of corporate buying teams requires an understanding of the business and emotional drivers of a diverse group of individuals.
6. Research is a key tool in measuring effectiveness at every stage of the buying process.



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