



B2B Marketing Trends for 2016

25 Thought Leaders Weigh In

Edited by Tom Pick and Tony Karrer

Executive Summary

B2B marketing practices are in the midst of profound change, driven by three powerful trends:

- **Changing expectations of buyers:** as Baby Boomers retire and Millennials move into and up within the ranks of B2B enterprises, buying processes are fundamentally changing. The first generation of digital natives expects to be able to complete most of their selection process through their own research, without talking to sales—until late in the journey. They expect content to be relevant, easy to find, and mobile-friendly. And they expect an optimized customer experience from end to end.
- **Pressure to demonstrate ROI:** the great recession and subsequent slow recovery have forced B2B marketers to do more with less, and do a better job of linking their efforts to measurable business results. Never flush with cash in the first place, B2B marketing groups have been forced to get even leaner and meaner over the past eight years.
- **New tech tools and big data:** long gone are the days when a marketing executive could say "Half my advertising is wasted, I just don't know which half." Everything is now measurable. B2B marketers are expected to use that data, in combination with new tools for content distribution and lead nurturing, to more effectively communicate with prospective buyers at each stage of funnel.

To get a more granular view of how B2B marketing professionals are adapting to these trends and pressures, we asked 25 leading influencers to answer the question:

"What do you expect to B2B marketers to be doing more of or differently in 2016?"

Themes for 2016

The responses fell into seven broad categories:

- Take content marketing to the next level: B2B content marketers will focus less on producing more material and more on producing better (relevant and carefully targeted) content.
- Demonstrate business results: the challenge to tie marketing efforts to measurable business results (e.g., website traffic, brand preference, lead generation) isn't new, just more intense.
- Align marketing with sales: as buyers complete more of their journey online and sales pros get involved only later in the process, close cooperation between these functions becomes more vital than ever.
- Encourage employee advocacy: a business's employees are (or at least should be) natural brand advocates. Marketers need to take the lead here in inspiring, guiding, and training employees, while maintaining space for authenticity.
- Collaborate with industry influencers: marketers must creatively build advocacy and content amplification outside the company as well.
- Embrace new technology: tools like predictive analytics and "marketing stacks" hold great promise but need to be better utilized.
- Manage the customer experience: great content alone won't save a lousy product or cumbersome experience. Marketing needs to expand its role beyond lead gen.

Read on to discover what 25 top B2B marketing thought leaders had to say about these themes, and what processes and practices successful B2B marketers will embrace in the coming year.

Take Content Marketing to the Next Level

There's no question content marketing is the hottest topic in B2B; fully a third of these marketing experts focused on this area. While their ideas vary, they could be summarized as:

- Produce better content by making it more focused on the needs of a specific group.
- Be more human—write for people, not segments or search engines.
- Use frameworks like ABM and ICE to help with these efforts.

Stop Trying to Win the Content Marketing War on Volume

2016 will be the year where B2B marketers finally realize that, while they can always make more content, their customers can't make any more time. They will be forced to value "fit" over "reach" where they target the customers that fit them the best rather than reaching for more eyeballs. Better targeting, retargeting, and website personalization will replace the omnivore approach where your idea of market segmentation is "anyone with a neck."

Mike Moran, Senior Strategist, Converseon,
www.converseon.com



Use ABM for Content Targeting

ABM (Account-based Marketing) will be hot, and not just for marketers selling to Fortune 100 corporations. There are already plenty of viable ABM channels (social advertising on LinkedIn, programmatic networks like Choozle) that provide a very low cost of entry for anyone looking to balance high-volume inbound lead generation with more targeted, proactive campaigns. Look for ABM to become a standard part of any B2B marketer's demand generation mix.

Howard J. Sewell, President, Spear Marketing Group
www.spearmarketing.com



Verticalize Content to Create Thought Leadership

If they have not done so already, we see three actions that should take place in B2B marketing in 2016 in order to become a dominant force: 1) Create “thought leadership” positioning with your market and 2) become “verticalwise.” Focus marketing and sales resources within chosen vertical markets, based upon opportunity and ABC Analysis. The third action we are recommending to our clients is messaging designed outside your normal point of sales/marketing contact. For example, if in the IT market you are calling on CIO’s or technical management, then additional marketing must be aimed, along with the appropriate messaging, to the CEO, CFO, and VP of Sales/Marketing. Broaden your points of contact.

Ken Thoreson, President, Acumen Management
www.AcumenManagement.com



Get Smarter About Investing Content Marketing Resources

I believe B2B marketers have finally realized that merely throwing content into the ether is both expensive and wasteful. They're adopting buyer personas, content targeting and matching content to stages of the buying cycle. I think content marketing will continue to be a huge growth area for B2B in the coming years but we're going to get a lot smarter about how we invest our resources. Marketers are beginning to realize the buyers are people, not demographic segments, and they are appealing more to the motivations that influence human behavior.

Paul Gillin, B2B Social Media Strategist, Senior Trainer, Profitecture
[www.http://profitecture.com/](http://profitecture.com/)



Create and Maintain Regularly Updated Reference Content

Every B2B site should produce cornerstone reference content that is comprehensive and authoritative; something that people link to and return to read again and again. A great example is *Moz's* [Web Developer's SEO Cheat Sheet](#), which has become a core piece of reference content and was the most shared content on the *Moz* site this year by some margin.

Another good example is *Top Rank's* [Social Media Marketing Management Tools](#) List. This content is effectively evergreen because it is updated and refreshed. Reference content can include research, surveys and guides.

Steve Rayson, Director, BuzzSumo
<http://buzzsumo.com/blog/author/steverayson/>



Personalize Marketing with the ICE Formula

Personalized marketing is going to be on steroids in 2016. Marketers should engage meaningfully with different target audiences. Easier said than done, right?

So, how do you personalize marketing? Follow the ICE Formula:

- I – Identify your Buyer Persona. A buyer persona is not a zombie—but a profile based on your understanding of a real customer and their real needs.
- C – Create Compelling Content. Don't just talk about your product or service. Instead, create an ebook, newsletter, video or podcast and educate your potential customer on how you can solve their burning problem.
- E – Engage Meaningfully via Social Media. Use every contact with a potential buyer as an opportunity to listen and learn. Engage and educate them.

Ambal Balakrishnan, Head of Marketing and Strategy, Click Documents
<http://clickdocuments.com>



Get Over Our Fear of Video

75% of executives watch work-related videos at least once a week, and video traffic accounts for more than half of mobile internet traffic, so it's time for B2B marketers to let go of their obsession with perfect production values and get on with just putting good content out there for customers and prospects. Video on a site adds more than two minutes of dwell time. But the real magic might (gasp!) be real-time video

Elizabeth Williams, Principal, Candler Chase Consulting
www.candlerchase.com



Use More Images in Content Marketing

It's been said "a picture is worth a thousand words," and nowhere is that more true, apparently, than in social media. Followers rank images, videos, and case studies as the most valued content from brands on social media. Yet 58% of marketers say written content is their most important form of social content; just 19% say that of original visual content.

Tom Pick, Digital Marketing Consultant
<http://webbiquity.com/>



Demonstrate Business Results

This is by no means a new challenge, but it is an evolving one. B2B marketers have gone from having too little data to having too much, leading to the rise of reporting "vanity metrics" such as Facebook "Likes" and Twitter followers. Marketing isn't sales, and in most cases shouldn't be held directly responsible for revenue. But marketers will have to do a better job of setting measurable business-oriented goals up front, then running campaigns and measuring results against those goals.

Ask “Why We Are Doing This?” More Often

If your CEO isn't already asking you that question, (s)he is always thinking it, whenever it involves marketing expense. Marketers with the longest job tenure design, execute and internally promote programs that have a direct (or very strong indirect) correlation with tangible business outcomes their CEO can understand, including revenue generation, client acquisition and retention, and market share.

Gordon G. Andrew, Partner Andrew + Selikoff Partners
<http://www.marketingcraftsmanship.com/>



Demonstrate Program Performance Across the Entire Spectrum of Marketing Initiatives

With so much advancement in vendor solutions designed to support and augment marketing program initiatives, it will be nearly impossible for marketers to ignore performance measurement moving forward. The challenge of course, is in finding the solutions that make the most sense for an organization's individual situation. So even though the promise of complete ROI measurement in marketing will be expected, the ability to truly obtain this, in a sea of an increasing number of vendor solutions, will make it that much more complex.

Derek Edmond, Managing Partner, KoMarketing
<http://www.komarketingassociates.com>



Reverse the Way They Work and Budget

True B2B marketing champions will not take current budgets into account nor how they are spent today. They will dare to challenge themselves and even rethink their organization. They will start by asking the right questions, all the way from the finish (goals) to the start. What are the business and customer/stakeholder goals of my company, and what do I need to make my business deliver upon them? They will pick a mix of known tactics and calculated risks to support these business goals, will not take budgets for granted, and will even build the case for higher budgets in function of achieving any particular goal, numbers by the hand. Channels and tactics will come last, not first anymore, at last.

J-P De Clerck, Founder, i-Scoop
<http://www.i-scoop.eu>



Find Marketing ROI

I predict a massive correction in B2B advertising and event budgets that will drive an increase in content marketing. This will require us to get pretty darn good at showing content marketing ROI. We'll also see more personalization, visual content and brand-produced entertaining content. Is 2016 the year of B2B brands finding a personality and sense of humor?

Michael Brenner, CEO of Marketing Inside Group, Head of Strategy for Newscred
<http://marketinginsidergroup.com/>



Be More Accountable for Driving Business Results

Marketing has to continue to become more accountable for driving business results, rather than just talking about it. B2B marketers will focus more on the right metrics that support business goals in 2016. It's not just vanity metrics that have slowed this down, but the availability of too much data has been the latest distraction.

Jeffrey L. Cohen, Director, Content Strategy, Oracle Marketing Cloud
blogs.oracle.com/marketingcloud
Author, The B2B Social Media
SocialMediaB2B.com





Align Marketing with Sales

As with demonstrating business results, aligning marketing more effectively with sales is hardly a new challenge in B2B. But as B2B buyers complete more of their journey before ever interacting with a company sales rep, it becomes even more vital that both groups understand the buying process from beginning to end and coordinate their efforts, each applying their unique strengths to maximize opportunities and revenue.

Align the Marketing and Sales Departments



There will be a much greater emphasis on the alignment of marketing and sales departments. The days of the two disciplines operating like islands are done. With marketing now responsible for helping to nurture and advance the buyer through 70% of the purchase cycle, there are monumental inefficiencies if the sales team is knocking on cold doors rather than closing sales-qualified, warm leads passed by the marketing team. There will be more companies developing SLAs between sales and marketing, joint meetings, and “growth” goals (as opposed to separate sales and marketing goals).

Debra Andrews, President, Marketri
<http://go.marketri.com/blog>

Adopt a Lead-to-Revenue Framework to Drive Marketing and Sales Alignment

The lead-to-revenue (L2R) framework will align your marketing and sales model, eliminate wasted motion and drive revenue and profits sooner by focusing you on the core structural and strategic activities needed to succeed.

There are five strategic steps:

1. Define your business strategy: products, prospects, distribution, sales and marketing, revenue.
2. Develop the processes that will facilitate your strategic goals.
3. Implement the technology infrastructure to optimize your processes.
4. Execute on the processes defined in step 2, using the people and technology implemented in step 3.
5. Monitor, refine and improve results.

Christopher Ryan, CEO and Founder, Fusion Marketing Partners
www.FusionMarketingPartners.com





Encourage Employee Advocacy

Engaged employees, whether in sales or any other function, have tremendous potential for increasing brand awareness, spreading the organization's messages, dramatically increasing content distribution, and engaging with influencers and potential customers. Realizing this potential requires a delicate balance of encouragement, education, and inspiration. Of course, every business needs to generate profits; but making money alone isn't much of a story. Focus on the larger value you provide to customers and society, which ultimately leads to profits.

Use Sales as a Content Distribution Channel

Marketers devote significant resources to content creation, marketing automation, persona development and mapping the customer journey. Yet, over 90% of sales reps say they can't find content they need when they need it. If you have 30 reps, each sharing just five pieces of content per week, that's an opportunity to get your message out 7,200 times!

Shannon Pham, VP Marketing, Genwi
www.genwi.com



Savvy B2B Marketers Will Embrace Social Selling

In 2016, I expect B2B marketers to better understand how an employee advocacy program aimed and fine-tuned for their sales department will help them amplify their B2B marketing and allow them to contribute even more to the success of their sales. B2B marketers will see how sales people can help them better achieve their marketing objectives, while at the same time savvy social sellers will understand that in doing so, it can only help contribute to their sales process regardless of where in the buying journey their prospect or current customer is.

Neal Schaffer, President, Maximize Your Social
<http://maximizeyoursocial.com>



Brand from The Inside Out

Fueled by millennials, leading B2B brands are investing resources to create a workforce of engaged brand ambassadors. The result is a win/win. The company benefits from more authentic communication, and employees build personal brands. At the core of this approach is trust, authenticity, and transparency—the cultural pillars essential for activating the workforce around social business best practices. The net result: “Branding from the inside out.”

Cheryl Burgess, CEO, Blue Focus Marketing
<http://bluefocusmarketing.com/>





Collaborate with Industry Influencers

Marketing messages are much more powerful when they come from a buyer's peers or trusted third-parties rather than from vendors directly. To be effective in the coming year, B2B marketers will identify, incentivize (creatively) and build relationships with the most influential voices in their industries.

Create More Collaborative Content

Interviewing external thought leaders from your industry and incorporating their commentary throughout your content simplifies your content creation process, adds credibility and new perspectives to your content, and will increase content distribution to new audiences as content contributors will be more likely to share those resources in which they're featured. All of this will result in higher quality content and more leads captured for B2B marketers in 2016.

Steve Peck, Cofounder, Docalytics & InsideContent Marketing
<http://www.docalytics.com/>



Use Influencers to Amplify Your Message

The average click through rate is 0.1%, banners don't work anymore, and people are much more likely to trust peer to peer recommendations than traditional advertising. Identify, listen and engage with influencers as they are experts in their fields. Build valuable and long-lasting relationships with them and they will help you spread and amplify your message.

Joe Fields, Digital Marketing Associate, Onalytica
<http://www.onalytica.com>



Embrace New Technology

New tools combined with the explosion of data give B2B marketers more powerful capabilities than ever to get granular with marketing tactics and messages, and plan tactics based on what is likely to work in the coming weeks and months—looking forward rather than backward. But B2B companies will need to invest in training to enable their teams to make the best use of these new capabilities.

Use Data to Plan Ahead, Not Just Assess Past Activities

Thirty percent of B2B marketers use data analytics to evaluate prior activities, such as campaign effectiveness. However, these insights only report on things that have already happened. With 87% of B2B marketing leaders expected to use predictive analytics in the next year, B2B marketers will begin harnessing data analytics to understand not only what happened, but also what is likely to happen—to drive more effective strategies and activities moving forward.

Shari Johnson, VP of Demand Generation, Radius
www.radius.com



Improve Personalization with Predictive Marketing

Segmenting audiences and marketing messages isn't new and will continue to have a strong emphasis in 2016. We're starting to see technology get smarter to increase the personalization of marketing. Marketers will begin using technology to leverage the vast amounts of marketing data they collect about their contacts. Technology will help marketers understand the demographic profile of individual contacts and automatically segment contacts into key interest groups.

In addition, technology will deliver the right message to the right person at the right time using the right medium. For example, no longer will marketers schedule an email campaign for Wednesday morning at 10 am. Rather, marketers will configure an email campaign and technology will determine the best time and day to deliver the message. The predictive technology that is already on the market doing this easily out-performs traditional marketing segmentation.

Brian Neufeld, CMO, ActiveDEMAND
<https://www.activedemand.com>



Invest in Training to Use Marketing Technology More Effectively

Organizations spend millions of dollars annually on sales enablement, yet we invest little, if any, in the training and marketing enablement for our marketing departments. The growing technology stack and the fact that most marketers are self-taught means we need to ensure effectiveness of our teams through marketing enablement. The 2015 ANNUITAS B2B Enterprise study found that only 7.5 % of respondents reported the skill set of marketing personnel was highly effective. Clearly, we need to do better, and help our marketing teams become more effective.

Erika Goldwater, CIPP/US, VP Marketing, ANNUITAS
www.annuitas.com



Manage the Customer Experience

It's been said that customers don't buy products—they buy experiences. While much of this focus has been on consumer marketing, the concept applies to B2B marketing as well. It starts with content (making it relevant, easy to find, and comprehensive) but doesn't stop there. Is the buying process seamless—are you easy to do business with? How accessible and effective is your post-sale support—is it an afterthought, or a delight that turns customers into brand advocates? B2B marketers will own more of the overall customer experience in the coming year.

Focus on the Experience, Not Just the Content

More and more customers judge B2B companies based on how they experience the brand. I anticipate that marketers will become more involved across the enterprise to ensure that the company is showing up in places and ways that are significantly different from marketing's traditional role. That's because if your marketing is great but your product is bad, that, ultimately, means your marketing is bad, too.

Carla Johnson, Strategist, Speaker and Storyteller, Type A Communications
www.TypeACommunications.com



Leverage Technology to Manage the Overall Customer Experience

Advanced B2B marketers will go beyond acquisition to include retention and expansion marketing. In the process, they will leverage marketing automation technology for more than lead to revenue and apply demand generation practices (scoring and nurturing) to influencer relations and customer relationships. As a result, marketing will become the department responsible for managing the overall customer experience.

Atri Chatterjee, Chief Marketing Officer, Act-On Software
www.act-on.com



Become Builders of Bridges

B2B marketers who want to succeed will understand their collaborative role within the broader transformational challenges in their organizations. They will become bridge builders, collaborating with and learning from everyone who is involved in these transformational evolutions that revolve around customer experience and delivering upon promises, from the call center agent and sales agent to the information manager and broader business ecosystem. Two keywords here: service and enablement.

J-P De Clerck, Founder, i-Scoop
<http://www.i-scoop.eu>



In Closing

There you have it: guidance on where successful B2B marketers will be focusing their efforts in content marketing, social media, alignment with sales, collaboration, metrics and more, from 25 top influencers. What are your plans for 2016?

This report was compiled by Tom Pick and Tony Karrer, co-founders of the B2B Marketing Zone and Social Media Informer content aggregation hubs. All of the contributors to this report are featured on the B2B Marketing Zone.

Tom Pick is an independent digital marketing consultant, focused on helping b2b technology clients improve their online visibility and business results. In his more than 20 years of b2b marketing experience on both the corporate and agency sides, Tom has won numerous awards and helped clients ranging from single-person businesses to \$1 billion+ corporations improve their online visibility, web traffic, visitor engagement, and lead generation. He writes about content and social media marketing topics on the Webbiquity blog. He's earned an MBA from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree in engineering from St. Cloud State University.

Dr. Tony Karrer is Founder and CTO of Aggregage – a fast growing B2B media company that helps B2B marketers reach their audience. Tony has been a CTO or technology advisor for more than 25 startups most notably as the original CTO of eHarmony. Tony's work has won awards and has led him into consulting engagements at companies including Credit Suisse, Royal Bank of Canada, Citibank, Lexus, Microsoft, Nissan, IBM and HP. Dr. Karrer was valedictorian at Loyola Marymount University, attended the University of Southern California as a Tau Beta Pi fellow, one of the top 30 engineers in the nation, and received a M.S. and Ph.D. in Computer Science.

Tom Pick

As an independent digital marketing consultant, working individually or part of select marketing agency teams, Tom helps B2B clients increase their visibility and business success online.. Through web presence optimization, SEO, search marketing, social media, content marketing and online advertising, he's helped clients ranging from single-person businesses to \$1 billion+ corporations. A few recent success stories:

- Doubled a large office products company's online footprint, launched a successful blog, increased organic search traffic to its main corporate site by 74% over a two-year period, and grew Web-generated leads by 79% in a challenging economic environment.
- Tripled AdWords average monthly conversion rates while slashing cost per lead 72% for an enterprise software vendor. Increased non-brand organic search visits by 124% and average monthly web lead conversions by 73% in two years.
- Acting as outsourced director of product marketing, helped an IT management software developer double revenue for three straight years. Developed, optimized and socially promoted content that tripled blog traffic and quadrupled the number of blog-referred lead conversions in one year.
- Coached the president of a small sales management training company to become a widely-known figure in social media, capture the #1 Google search spot, and develop a highly productive online lead generation system.

Tom also writes the Webbiquity blog, covering B2B lead generation, web presence optimization, social media, social PR, SEO and search engine marketing.

He's been named one of the 50 most influential B2B marketing thought leaders, written articles on web and social media marketing for various publications, been quoted in publications including *Fast Company*, *Forbes* and *Inc.* magazine, and presented at blogging and social media conferences. Tom has been published on leading industry blogs including Moz, HubSpot, MarketingSherpa, MarketingProfs, Social Media Examiner, and Ragan's PR Daily.

Prior to becoming an independent consultant in 2006, Tom worked in marketing leadership roles with supply-chain outsourcer Zomax, ERP vendor SoftBrands, and digital prepress supplier Printware. His education includes an MBA from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree in engineering from St. Cloud State University.

Tom Pick

tom@tompick.com

Digital Marketing Consultant

Aggregage / B2B Marketing Zone

Aggregage is building the next generation of B2B media, using a technology-based, audience-driven content aggregation and curation platform. Our solution delivers the following:

- A topic hub for each specific business segment,
- The widest set of relevant content from the best industry thought leaders in each of these industry sites,
- Hundreds of pieces of new high-quality content every week,
- Ranking of all content at any given time using the audience's collective social media signals,
- Personalization for each reader using reading activity and social media signals.

Currently, the Aggregage platform shows the following growth:

- Over 2.5 million newsletters/month generated
- Over 2 million articles archived from almost 4,000 content sources
- Over 10 billion social signals analyzed to rank content

B2B Marketing Zone is Aggregage's site that serves over 50,000 B2B marketing professionals. Over 190 industry thought leaders, including most of the contributors to this ebook, feed their content into B2B Marketing Zone, and provide their insight, analysis, and opinion about the issues important to B2B marketing professionals. Easy keyword search enables readers to easily access thousands of stories on issues such as lead generation, social media marketing, and content marketing; tools such as social media, data analytics and adwords; and companies such as Marketo and Hubspot.

With 35 other topic sites currently launched, and growing every day, Aggregage has a site for B2B marketers to find the exact targeted audience they need to access. Among other topics, current sites include: Human Resources Today, eLearningLearning, Supply Chain Brief, Customer Experience Update and Association Universe. These sites offer a full suite of marketing options, but specialize in meeting your demand generation needs by leveraging the content marketing assets you have already created.

Please contact john.moses@aggregage.com for more information.