



WHAT'S WORKING IN BUYER ENGAGEMENT?

'Stripping The Fluff' & Focusing Content On
Buyers' Pain Points & Needs

INTRODUCTION

Engaging buyers is the crux of all marketing efforts, but practitioners are tasked with climbing a slippery slope to meet buyers' needs in the ever-evolving engagement landscape. While **87% of buyers** want the ability to self-serve part or all of their buying journey, **67% want more** communication and reassurance while making a purchase.

It's clear that "spray and pray" strategies are a thing of the past as companies move toward highly personalized, hyper-targeted outreach to meet buyers where they are with the information that's most relevant to them and their needs in palatable delivery formats. In fact, **more than one-third of marketers** (37%) are planning to increase their investment in engaging personalization strategies. However, practitioners must allocate these investments strategically to ensure the changes are meeting buyers' needs.

"There are trends and conversations happening now where people are feeling like they aren't the primary focus anymore; they feel companies are just trying to reach as many eyes as possible," explained Hannah Shain, VP of Marketing for **SmartBug Media**, an inbound marketing agency. "Companies need to react to that sentiment and utilize a more human-centered design in their marketing and advertising campaigns. No matter what a buyer's preference is — whether it's ease-of-purchase or a simplified online experience — they want to be treated like a human, not a bot or widget."

This report will examine what's working — and what's not — in modern buyer engagement strategies by providing insights into:

- The most effective content formats for engaging buyers across all stages of the funnel;
- The role intent plays in identifying buyers' topics of interest to enable hyper-personalization strategies;
- How to navigate the preferences for self-service buying journeys and the evolving role of AI-powered technology;
- Leveraging more customized, data-driven strategies, such as account-based advertising and web/content personalization.



UNDERSTANDING THE CONTENT EXPERIENCES PROSPECTS DEMAND

One of the most critical components to buyer engagement is content, which encompasses everything from design and messaging to delivery and relevance. As **55% of buyers** rely on more content to make purchasing decisions than they did a year ago and **73% engage** with more than three pieces of content before connecting with a sales rep, organizations are responding by churning out more assets to meet these needs.

However, this process creates a troubling paradox: Despite buyers relying on more content, finding an asset that speaks to their specific needs is akin to finding a needle in a haystack.

"To stand out with buyers, content has to explicitly address how your solution can answer your audience's problem(s)," said Daniel Englebretson, Founder of **Khronos Group**, during his session at the **B2B Sales & Marketing Exchange**. "It's better to have 'lo-fi content,' which might just be a 30-second video from a sales rep speaking directly to the account and its needs. That's so much better than a flashy \$100,000 brand video on your home page that features generic selling points. It's not that the video doesn't have a time or place, it's just not actually tailored to specific audiences."

Backing up Englebretson's claims is research that found **nearly half of B2B buyers** (49%) want content that tells a strong story that resonates with the buying committee, with 41% indicating that the content should utilize shareable stats and quick-hitting insights to do so.

"Our focus on content has been less about the right format and more on how it can be found, consumed and understood," said Andrea Eaton, Head of Marketing, NA at **Wagestream**, a financial wellbeing app for frontline workers. "We look at the buyer journey to ensure we have relevant content for the stages of the journey and for each persona in our buying committee. We want buyers to understand really quickly that we understand their challenges, we have a solution that will solve their challenges and that we've already helped customers like them achieve these similar goals."

Proof Point

ProfitWell, a subscription revenue business intelligence platform, struggled with explaining its benefits and value to one of its most valuable business segments. The team needed a more customized and human approach to reach decision-makers at its target accounts, so they created a video series that analyzed and provided insights about the strategies of select target accounts. The team extended the reach of this content by converting it into various formats and sharing it across social, email, web and other channels.

As a result of its efforts, Profitwell saw:

- 70% lift in E-commerce industry leads (a target industry);
- 23% increase in banner CTAs;
- 67% of target accounts converted; and
- 111% increase in enterprise deals won.



GOING BACK TO BRAND: WHY BUILDING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES WINS HEARTS & MINDS IN B2B

By Nirosha Methananda, Infl2

Business expectations for both sales and marketing are always to do more, more, more! However, with an economic downturn looming, often this comes with less budget, resources and time, putting pressure on sales and marketing teams to meet set targets.

Unless you're in a recession-proof industry, your prospects and customers are going through a similar experience. Under pressure to perform, making their time count is more important than ever. Especially in B2B, solutions and/or services need to cater to their immediate concerns and offer quick and tangible results.

Torn between two masters and with increasing pressure, sales and marketing — or “smarketing” — need to ensure that their activity is efficient and engages not just the right accounts, but those individuals within that account who will use, implement, influence or ultimately make the purchase.

Volume Vs. Value?

Acutely aware of the need to do more, every sales team is... doing more of the same.

According to the [B2B State of Sales for 2022](#) report by LinkedIn, 91% of sellers use sales tech once a week. While not super surprising (bloody Covid-19), this means that from the convoluted sequences, contact and intent data sources, everyone has the same tools and approach! Essentially resulting in prospects getting bombarded and fatigued from excessive, impersonal outreach.

While there is always a temptation to “spray and pray,” the question becomes: Will these volume plays be fruitful?



With Salesforce reporting that **86% of B2B buyers expect sales reps to be a “trusted advisor” but 73% feel that interactions are transactional**, getting to know prospects, building trust and fostering relationships is what buyers who “choose” to interact crave. Therefore, experience and engagement are a significant differentiator that is key to winning customers.

Herein lies the challenge for sales teams: How do you focus efforts, build a personal experience and relationships while continuing to hustle?

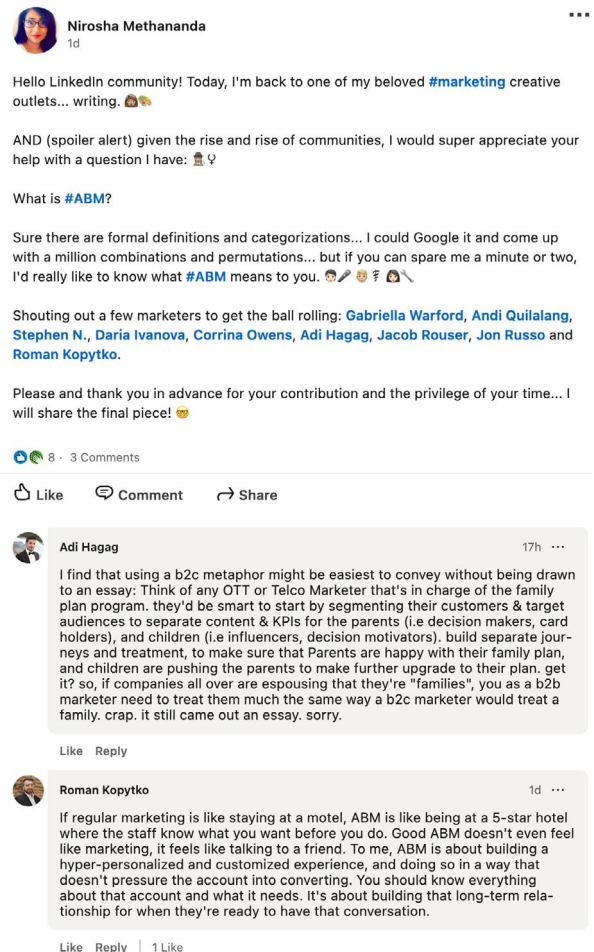
ABM = Smar-keting

With 80% of B2B purchase decisions influenced by a buyer’s direct or indirect customer experience and just 20% based on price or specific product, how a business engages with a prospect and what value it offers them — passively and actively — during their journey can carry more weight than simply giving them a great deal.

While there are many definitions, categorizations and technologies that claim to be ABM, here’s my perspective: Account-based strategies allow businesses to cohesively focus their efforts on coordinating meaningful and mindful activity around ideal potential customers that represent the greatest commercial value to their business.

In addition to this, Gartner reported earlier this year that **“buyers who experience a self-driven learning path are 147% more likely to buy more than initially planned.”**

Keeping this in mind, businesses would be remiss in overlooking activities that are typically relegated as low-value and passive (e.g., brand, advertising, SEO, public relations and social media, to name a few). The task for marketing is to connect the dots and tie value from brand and demand across the holistic prospect and customer journey. When brand, advertising, social and public relations work as intended, it provides coverage for sales in terms of awareness, ability to leverage content and build connections.



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Stepping Out Of The Box For Buyer Engagement

While strategy and alignment are foundational to buyer engagement, if the execution isn't exciting, engaging, ethical, empathetic or generally doesn't drive some sort of emotion, it may be wasted. [Salesforce reports](#) that:

- 66% of business buyers feel an emotional connection to brands they buy from the most; and
- 80% of business buyers place emphasis on "flawless engagement" as they do on product quality.



Nick Bennett • 1st

Director of Evangelism & Customer Marketing @ Alyce | Rep Your Brand ...

1w • 🌐

Everyone thinks retaining your customers is priority number one.

But who's helping retain those customers?

Your employees.

Make sure you're doing your best to make them feel valued and an important part of your org; otherwise, your customers are gonna be headed out with them.



Nick Bennett and 160 others

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Comment



Share



Send

In other words, prospects may know what a product is, but they want to know who the business is, who you are and connect... human-to-human.

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Beyond this — depending on how you see the glass — the proliferation of spaces and places to engage with buyers can be a blessing or a curse. Here are a few that have come to attention:

1. The rise of communities: From Slack and LinkedIn groups to exclusive clubs (paid and unpaid), belonging to a group of like-minded peers to crowd source promotion or support, celebrate wins, learn new things and get unfiltered reviews and recommendations provides individuals with an invaluable resource and outlet.

2. Tic, tack -Tok? While new social media channels — such as TikTok — may not always (immediately) have the right audience, they offer new ways to create content.

3. Gift with authenticity — put thought, context and care into what you are gifting.

There is no right or wrong answer or approach. Depending on what stage a business is at, who the buyer is and what the goals are, the answer will always be different.

Having a firm understanding of business goals with sales and marketing working collaboratively to share insights, intel and ideas, refreshing buyer personas and programs will help to stay focused on the best ways to engage.



Nirosha Methananda · You
VP of Marketing at Influo2
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What's in this bowl? A tale about [#care](#) and [#b2bsales](#).

I was sick last week and offline. And while I managed to cancel most of my meetings, I forgot to cancel one... I stood up [Chris Belli](#) from [Studio Science](#). I apologised to him when I realised and we rescheduled for this week. However turns out - due to the wrong meds 🤒 - i'm still sick. So had to reschedule again.

Chris is super understanding. What turns up in my inbox? A voucher for me to get dinner on Chris and the team.

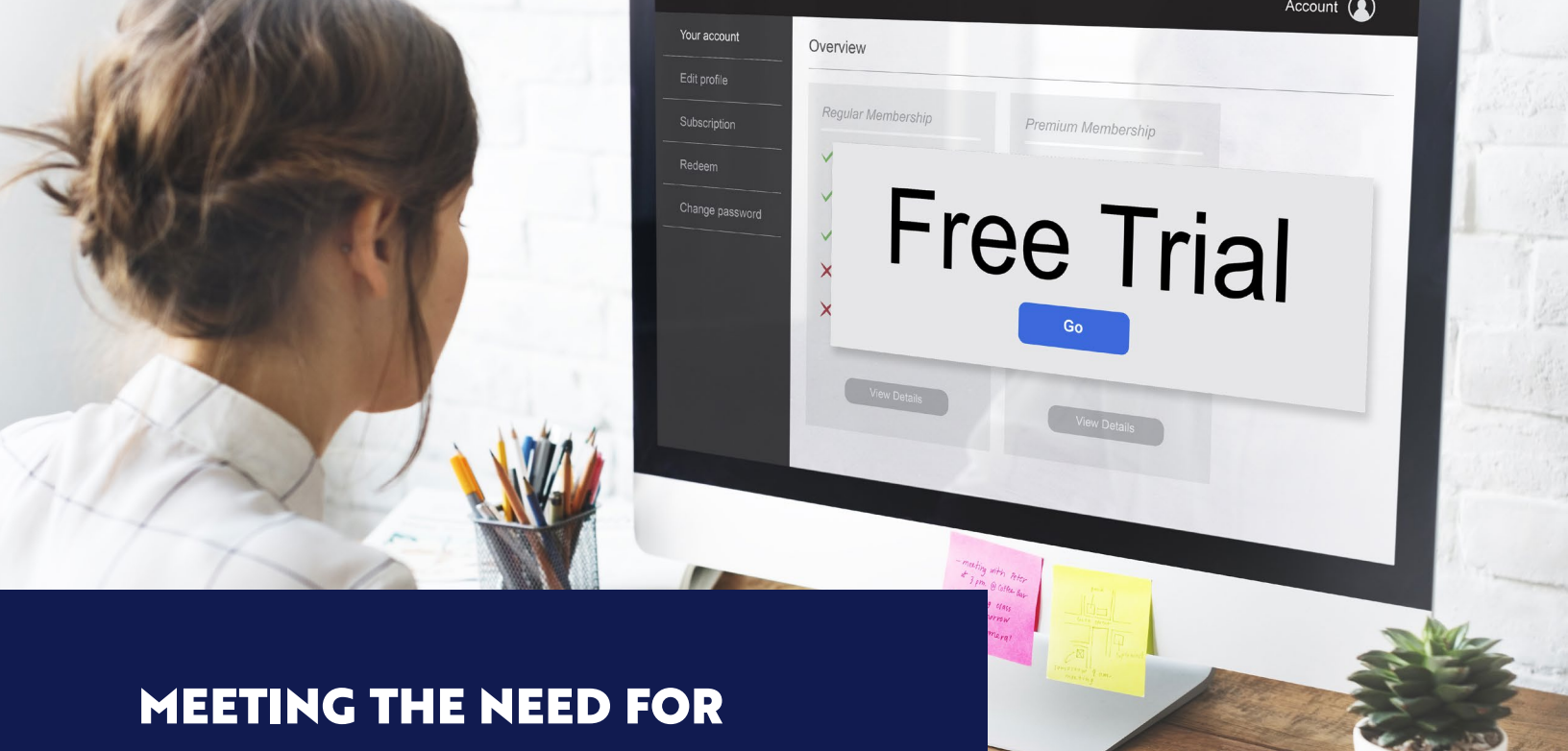
Chris and I have been chatting for over a year. I haven't locked in any work with him. But he still keeps in touch. Makes the effort. And most importantly - to me - shows empathy and care for not only me, but [Influ2](#).

Chris you rave about my beautiful accent... well it's my turn to rave about your beautiful soul and the classy way you approach business. Priceless. Thank you.

[#salesexcellence](#) [#brandexperiences](#)



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MEETING THE NEED FOR SELF-SERVICE PREFERENCES

Due to several outside factors, such as a global pandemic and technological advances, buyers' slow jog to self-service journeys turned into an all-out sprint. Prospects and clients embraced the digital age head-on as all the information they needed was right at their fingertips, leading to the growing preference for independent buying experiences.

"Harvard Business Review reported that B2B buyers now only spend about 17% of their overall purchase process in talks with potential vendors, meaning the other 83% is dedicated to research and gathering information on their own," said Eaton. "And oftentimes, it's to the point of overload. To keep up, sales really needs to meet the educated customer where they are and help them make sense of the information that they've gathered."

To help meet buyers' desires for self-guided journeys, the experts explained that many companies are making the internal tools they use to pitch buyers on their solution — such as ROI calculators — available to prospects to let potential customers draw their own conclusions. Additionally, Shain explained that she's seen companies expanding the scope of their free trials and allowing prospects to offer access to more of the solution for free.

“Companies are putting thoughtful gates along the way that acknowledge and encourage growth within the platform,” she explained. “When the prospect reaches the end of their free trial, a salesperson can reach out and double-down on the value proposition, because the prospect has already experienced it first-hand.”

Proof Point

SS&C Intralinks, a financial technology provider, wanted to show investors what they were missing by not using Intralinks’ InvestorVision technology. The company partnered with **Content4Demand** to create a self-guided experience that introduced users to the product and demonstrated the value of switching portals. As part of the experience, Intralinks developed an interactive assessment to help determine the fitness of users’ current investor portals, allowing them to rate the success of their current investor portal against Intralinks’ to uncover relevant feedback and learn about new capabilities.

Within the first five weeks of the InvestorVisions launch:

- 775 visitors were attracted to this asset — averaging 22 visitors per day;
- 1,331 page views; and
- 928 interaction clicks — 17% of visitors clicking an action.

“Sales really needs to meet the educated customer where they are and help them make sense of the information that they’ve gathered.”

ANDREA EATON, WAGESTREAM



LEVERAGING INTENT TO ENGAGE BUYERS THROUGH ABM & ADVERTISING

Perhaps there's nothing more apt to help generate engaging content and meet buyers' needs than intent data, as research shows that **47% of marketers** are using it to better assess the prospects that are actively researching a buying decision.

"Intent data should be driving your ABM campaign and fueling account targeting," said SmartBug's Shain. "Rather than saying, 'These are our best clients, let's find lookalikes,' or trying to identify your top 10 logos, you should leverage intent data to tell you who's actively in a buying cycle and showing intent to purchase. While it might not always be a 1:1 match, an account could be showing interest in something that's complementary to your offerings and you can educate them on."

Once they have that intent, Shain continued, practitioners must move it from their database and feed it into their CRM. From there, she explained companies can then deploy that information out to advertising platforms and continually update them by changing out topics and changing headlines to resonate with the most recent topic someone searched.

Marketers should leverage intent to create a thread of content that engages buyers — especially in the era of self-service journeys — and use strategic advertisements as their metaphoric ground zero to get started.

“Nobody likes the pre-roll ad before their YouTube video or a Spotify commercial mid-playlist,” added Kronos’ Englebretson. “The more you can make your ad messaging and marketing materials address pain points and discuss how you solve a particular problem, the more people will feel valued and less spammed.”

Proof Point

Influ2, a person-based advertising platform, launched its “New Reality” campaign to highlight how practitioners could leverage its technology to reach target accounts at home in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The top-of-funnel campaign focused on showing the work-from-home reality with ad creative complemented by a landing page, which was delivered via various display and social media channels.

The person-based advertising report showed which targeted individuals engaged with the campaign and, when the engagement threshold was reached, the lead was passed from the ABM team to SDRs for outreach. From there, the accounts were moved to a bottom-of-funnel campaign, which focused on covering their specific pain points and supported the account executive working on closing the deal.

As a result of its efforts, Influ2:

- Generated 580% ROI;
- Engaged 183 accounts and reached 7,000 decision makers, with 60% of those at Director-level and above;
- Booked 25 demo calls; and
- Directly converted eight accounts.



CONCLUSION

It's clear that marketing and sales can no longer dictate how a buying journey will progress. Instead, buyers are taking the responsibility into their own hands by forming groups, conducting independent, anonymous research, reaching out to peers for advice and keeping an eye on social media. To keep up with the modern B2B buyer, organizations must be agile, omnipresent and technologically advanced in their marketing strategies.

"Content must be well-built, smart and personalized," said Shain. "Buyers want a clean user interface that's easy to get through and serves them up content that's most relevant to them. Practitioners need to strip out the excess fluff surrounding content and make it as simple, informative and easy-to-digest as possible. Buyers want to quickly get to the bottom of the problem they're trying to solve.

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Influ2 is the first person-based advertising platform—the foundation of high-resolution account-based marketing. The unique person-based ad technology allows full control over digital advertising: show ads to selected decision-makers, track the engagement of each person, and predict who is ready to speak about your product or service.

With Influ2, marketers can open any door and get access to troves of engagement data for each person targeted, making advertising truly work for B2B. Cisco, Sage Intacct, Paddle, and more than 50 customers are already using Influ2 to build relationships with large enterprises.

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