WHAT'S WORKING IN DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

Leveraging Technology & AI To Craft
Personalized, Evocative Touchpoints

DEMAND GEN
REPORT®

INTRODUCTION

The best way to connect with buyers and prospects is to meet them where they are: And in 2023, that means online. In a world that's growing more digitized by the day — **Gartner research** found that 80% of B2B sales interactions will occur in digital channels by 2025 — practitioners need to evolve their online marketing strategies to keep up with buyers' needs, preferences and expectations.

"Customer expectations in B2B have far outpaced our ability to serve them, and those expectations come from their B2C experiences," said Phyllis Davidson, VP, Principal Analyst at **Forrester**, in her **B2B Marketing Exchange** session. "We all know that, but the gap is widening — not narrowing — on our ability to meet those needs. The technology has advanced beyond the ability of most marketers, and marketing organizations need to implement, adopt and use the solutions."

To increase personalized digital interactions, organizations must embrace technology and understand the crucial role of tailored assets. Additionally, practitioners need to adopt seamless integration across various touchpoints to facilitate buyer convenience and efficiency.

This special report will delve into the digital experiences preferred by B2B buyers, shedding light on the role of AI and the power of content. Backed by expert insights, specific topics of discussion will include:

- The tools and technologies businesses need to curate highly personalized experiences for prospects;

- The increasing importance social media and other customer-facing collateral are playing in shaping digital experiences;

- The best strategies for training chatbots to provide real-time, human-like customer support for customers;

- The growing role of AI and machine learning to automate tasks and create engaging content; and

- The increased importance on data-driven insights to better understand buyers and their needs.

PROGRAMMING AI; LEVERAGING TECH
FOR AUTOMATION & PERSONALIZATION

Digital experiences and technology are entirely codependent: Digital experiences wouldn't exist without technology, and technology wouldn't be useful if it wasn't experiential. But if these go hand-in-hand, then there's often not enough room for a practitioner to squeeze in.

"When we ask organizations if they're digitally advanced, a very low percentage label themselves as such: And we all know how critical it is to embrace digitization," explained Davidson. "A lot of the technology we used to call CMS or ABM platforms are now calling themselves digital experience platforms, which makes a lot of sense. But we've observed that there's a lack of expertise in marketing teams to adopt and use all the features."

Specifically, Forrester research found that the biggest challenges surrounding AI adoption include:

- **A lack of understanding,** whether it's regarding integration processes or the types of AI available;

- **Insufficient resources,** as AI is a costly investment in terms of time and money;

- **Challenges with data quality,** as AI requires high-quality data to function effectively — and **72% of B2B marketers** struggle with data quality; and

- **Fear of the unknown,** specifically regarding the growth of AI and how it could impact practitioners' jobs.

"This is not going to be about AI taking over the jobs of humans — it's just going to change our jobs," said Davidson. "We need to form a partnership with AI that will build the content intelligence needed to keep tuning and tuning those hyper-customized experiences. Right now, AI is about automating parts of the content engine."

She pointed to chatbots as an example: Almost every business uses one, but the conversations leave much to be desired. That disconnect is attributable to the humans who are monitoring or programming the chatbots, because it means they aren't providing the right parameters or reviewing the technology's work.

And that nuance isn't just limited to chatbots; instead, it stretches to all facets of programmatic AI.

"AI is garbage in, garbage out," said Jay Baer, Founder of **Convince & Convert**, a marketing consultancy, in his B2B Marketing Exchange keynote. "The reason we're scared of robots is because most of what we create is lacking in emotion, distinction, feeling and character that we can't tell the difference between human- and bot-generated content. That's not the bot's fault — that's our fault."

Proof Point

Proofpoint, a cybersecurity company, was operating with a chat solution that wasn't entirely meeting its needs. Despite its own chat shortcomings, the company still recognized the importance of offering a chatbot, so it turned to a **conversational marketing platform** for assistance. By implementing the company's chatbot services, Proofpoint was able to customize for different regions and time zones, as well as generate visibility into account activity, engagement and performance.

As a result, the company saw:

- 578% year-over-year increase in opportunities generated directly from chat; and

- 628% year-over-year increase in pipeline generated directly from chat.

CRAFTING DIGITAL EXPERIENCES
THAT EVOKE EMOTIONS

Content is the backbone of digital experiences, as it shapes everything from advertising and social media to messaging and outreach. And bot or not, Baer shared that the key element to consider when creating content is bravery.

"Marketing that creates emotions outperforms marketing that doesn't, and it often takes bravery to execute that," he explained. "Every single metric KPI report that we run — whether it's views, downloads, engagement, conversions, leads or pipeline — is driven by real people and their feelings. It's not a contest of quality; it's a contest of emotions."

Baer shared five elements that practitioners should tap into to create emotionally charged outreach:

1. Generosity

"Your role is to serve the customers' and prospects' needs first, and yours second," he noted, continuing that practitioners can create breakthrough content with generosity by giving away more information than they're comfortable with.

2. Usefulness

"It's not a quid-pro-quo" — i.e., fill out this gate for more information — "it's quid-quid-quid," Baer said, because practitioners should keep in mind that their target audience might not be entirely informed or knowledgeable about their area of expertise.

3. Speed

Customers only have so much time in a day, and they're unreceptive to companies that cost them their time. Speed equates to caring: The quicker a business can answer a prospect or customer inquiry, the more valued the individual feels.

4. Empathy

Practitioners need to understand what their prospects actually care about, because the product or solution they're purchasing is just a means to an end. Instead, the focus should be on the customer's end goal and how a certain solution can improve that process.

5. Personality

"Be wacky, feisty, brave and weird," Baer said, explaining that the ultimate goal is to have prospects and customers say, "Wow, I didn't expect to see that from a B2B organization!"

"Competency doesn't create conversations; if you're making marketing that doesn't create a feeling, ask yourself while you're doing that," said Baer. "Maybe you just shouldn't do that at all. Because if we know it doesn't create emotions, then we know it probably isn't going to break through."

Proof Point

Baer shared a story about an account-based marketing platform that wanted to promote its virtual event — but the caveat was that this event was taking place in 2021, when everyone was going virtual. To differentiate itself, the company branded the event with a provocative name and created a promotional video that featured a Sasquatch playing a saxophone. Through its nuttiness, the campaign served as the highest pipeline contributor.

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>
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TAKING A CONTENT-FOCUSED APPROACH TO DATA

If it's been said once, it's been said a million times: Data is the backbone of marketing, and it should inform all future actions. And with all the uncertainty surrounding the data landscape — specifically for **third-party cookies** — the experts recommended that practitioners increase their reliance on first-party data and review what strategies/campaigns are working.

"I believe that it is content metadata, that 'aboutness' of your content, that creates the core of the CX data model," said Davidson. "You rate and assess the customer experience through their actions with you. And where are those interactions coming from? Very consistently, it's coming from content — so, collecting metadata, analyzing what those experiences are and understanding where it's working is critical to building a better CX."

With that in mind, Davidson continued that marketers need to consider:

- Their process KPIs;

- What it takes to get content through approvals, and how to streamline that process; and

- Their content budget, and what they are getting out of their content.

She explained that that information will create a unified content data model, which will serve as the base for the content taxonomy and common language about content across systems. With that standardized baseline in place, it will ensure that all content is highly relevant to buyers and maintain a consistent experience across all assets and channels, as well as determine what's working and what's not.

Proof Point

Blue Yonder, a supply chain management company, was taking a hybrid approach to its annual ICON event and wanted to re-engage its customer base and prospects. To do so, the company crafted a multitouch campaign strategy that included direct mail; digital strategies, such as email invitations, blog posts, audience- and behavior-based digital ads, a registration page chat bot, an event app and virtual component; sales strategies that included Salesloft cadences; industry-specific happy hours; exclusive, invite-only events for senior leadership at the event; organic and paid social; media relations; and more.

As a result, the 2022 conference featured more than 1,400 people. Eight percent of direct mail recipients registered for the event; the emails featured an open rate of 10.1% and CTR of 21%; the 11 blog posts saw an average 470 page views and bounce rate of 57%.

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CONCLUSION

Understanding buyers' evolving preferences is vital for businesses to establish meaningful connections, drive engagement and maximize sales opportunities. As more practitioners turn to AI and technology to inform their experience creation, they're tasked with programming the software to accurately meet their customers' needs.

"The only algorithm that matters is the audience," said Baer. "If real people feel real emotions about whatever it is that you're putting in front of them, all the other things we care about will follow behind. Search engines will like it, you'll convert better and you'll retain more customers."
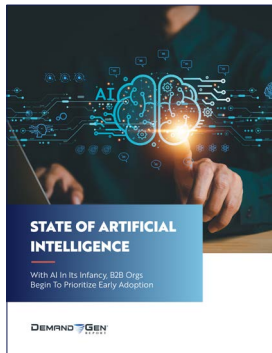
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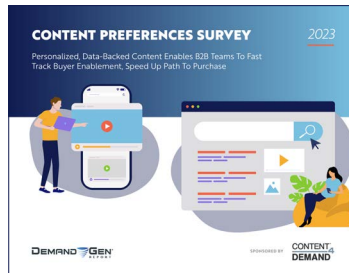
Content Preferences Survey

State Of GTM Strategies

Demand Gen Report is a targeted online publication that uncovers the strategies and solutions that help companies better align their sales and marketing organizations, and ultimately, drive growth. A key component of the publication's editorial coverage focuses on the sales and marketing automation tools that enable companies to better measure and manage their multichannel demand generation efforts.

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