



WHAT'S WORKING IN BUYER ENGAGEMENT?

Crafting Narratives That Weave Together Multiple Touchpoints



INTRODUCTION

Despite all the turbulence taking place in the B2B industry, the one constant is practitioners' desire to buy new products, technologies and solutions. As buyers navigate through a stormy economy, it appears they're at a crossroads: 31% of marketers indicated that they had to delay potential purchases due to budget freezes, while 29% said they actually escalated some purchases due to changing business needs, according to [new research](#).

But it's not just the economic climate that's erected a roadblock for organizations, as modern businesses are also contending with steeper levels of competition. Specifically, [research](#) found that:

- 70% of B2B marketers said their competition is becoming more aggressive;
- 52% said their competitors are more innovative than before; and
- 43% indicated that their competition is more focused on customer experience than ever before.

“The reality is we need to understand individual behavior better and apply that understanding to our engagement techniques,” said Peter Prodromou, President of AI marketing agency **Boathouse Group**, in his **#B2BSMX** keynote. “You need to know your target audience’s general preferences, as well as their content and messaging preferences. Most people have a short attention span, and you need something to capture their attention in 10 seconds.”

Amidst tight economic times and heightened rivalries, marketing teams must be savvier than ever when engaging buyers, who are laser-focused on adopting solutions that generate tangible results. Tapping into insights from *Demand Gen Report’s* recently released “**2023 B2B Buyer’s Survey**,” this special report will outline:

- How organizations can increase their digital presence to help prospects and customers seamlessly navigate through online channels;
- How to use data and analytics to understand buyers’ needs and preferences, and then deliver personalized content and offers;
- The power of providing omnichannel engagement for buyers, so they can interact with companies on their own terms, whether it’s online, offline or on social media; and
- Real-world examples of how successful companies are working to engage buyers.

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PETER PRODROMOU, BOATHOUSE GROUP



CREATING CONTENT THAT WEAVES A NARRATIVE

Content remains one of the most influential pieces in buying decisions — **84% of prospects** rely on content throughout their purchasing process — but simply ensuring content is relevant is no longer enough. Instead, modern marketers are tapping into buyers' sentiments to formulate narratives across all assets that directly speak to prospects' needs.

"We look at the narratives that audiences are shaping individually and figure out how those can be interrelated to create a tapestry that gives our organization control of the dialogue," said Prodromou. "Whether you're selling a product, in charge of marketing or developing creative, everything needs to be tailored specifically to the needs of those constituents."

With **86% of buyers** demanding content that caters to their specific pain points and needs, Brooke Duffy, Chief Revenue Officer of digital asset management platform **Pickit**, shared that tapping into grievances about pricing information generally won't move the decision-making needle. Instead, practitioners need to focus on building relationships with buyers.

"For a long time, the industry sentiment was, 'We're selling to businesses; they don't care about our brand or what we stand for,'" continued Duffy. "In reality, buyers buy when they've built trust with you and your brand, so you need to focus on nurturing them across the customer lifecycle."

To help build that trust throughout the buyer's journey, organizations need to cater to prospects' wants and needs. According to the "[2023 B2B Buyer's Survey](#)," those needs include:

- Curbing sales pitches in favor of objective content (51%); and
- Creating copy that's relevant and caters to buyers' needs (39%); and
- Ensuring assets are informative and entertaining (37%).

Proof Point:

Keyfactor, an identity-first security platform, launched a campaign called "[#PKIProblems](#)" and explored Reddit to find real examples of common problems PKI (public key infrastructure) creates when it isn't managed properly. The company then partnered with a comic artist to turn its findings into a compelling story about the seven most common PKI problems with creative narratives. Following the initial release of an E-book, the company also rolled out a webinar where the comic artist live sketched the PKI problems outlined in the comic and created hard copies, which were given out at trade shows and folded into direct mail campaigns.



The E-book received 1,024 impressions, 822 views, 400 downloads and an average view time of nine minutes within the first six months.

The company also handed out more than 500 copies at tradeshow alongside T-shirts that included graphics and quotes from the comic book, while the webinar collectively had 225 registrants and 159 live viewers.

SCALING CONTENT NARRATIVES ACROSS MULTIPLE TOUCHPOINTS

Despite content's influence, it's only one-third of the battle (by our estimates, at least). Once practitioners are confident that their content explicitly addresses prospect and customer problems, they then need to scale those assets across as many touchpoints as possible. With most of those channels existing in the digital realm (with the occasional direct mail piece), social media is taking center stage for buyer engagement.

"Buyer engagement fundamentally changed with the advent of social media and the placement of these little devices in our hands that are constantly being pelted with information," said Prodromou. "This presented an opportunity to really engage with people."

Specifically, **nearly one-fourth of marketers** spend more time using social media to research vendors and solutions, while **38% want content** that's mobile-friendly. But given the casual nature of social media, the engagement game becomes less about company-led conversations and more around influencer and thought leadership insights, as **71% of buyers** value thought leadership content presented by experts and their peers.

"There are all these small communities — Twitter, Glassdoor, etc. — that are shaping narratives," said Prodromou. "Every one of these individual platforms can shape your narrative, because you have seven or eight constituent groups having seven or eight related (or unrelated) discussions about your organization in real time. And if you don't get in front of that to control and shape the narrative you want, your competitor will."

Specifically, the social media channels that practitioners should prioritize include:

- LinkedIn (73%)
- Facebook (23%)
- Email (72%)
- Twitter (22%)
- Internal collaboration platforms (53%)
- Instagram (12%)

The caveat is to ensure messaging remains consistent across all these touchpoints, noted Daniel Englebretson, Chief Customer Officer of B2B marketing agency **Khronos**. He continued that once practitioners define their narrative and messaging, they need to carry it throughout the entire buying journey.

“When prospects and buyers engage with that messaging, it needs to pop up in all their additional brand interactions,” said Englebretson. “Whether you’re engaging them through email, putting up a chatbot, driving them to a landing page or dropping direct mail, it must all be aligned to the same messaging.”

With that in mind, one or two relevant assets won’t have much of an influence over buyers’ decisions. With C-level microscopes analyzing all buying decisions, **19% of decision-makers** are increasing the length of their purchase cycles to perform more research.

“Often, people aren’t ready to buy what you’re selling right away, but they will be over time,” said Duffy. “It’s important to stay in front of them so when that time comes, they think of you. It comes back to the importance of narrative and sticking out from the noise.”

Proof Point:

Decent, a health insurance provider for small businesses, wanted to demonstrate how it solved common problems that small businesses face, so it created six “**Small Business Monsters**” that were physically sculpted and turned into animated illustrations with individual biography pages. To introduce these monsters, Decent launched 13 billboards; Instagram, Facebook and Google display network ads; and a series of blog posts.



In Texas, the company drove 17.8 million relevant, distinct impressions.



ANALYZING MULTICHANNEL INSIGHTS TO INFORM FUTURE ACTIONS

According to [Gartner](#), B2B buyers use an average of 10 channels when making a buying decision. With prospects sharing information in more places than ever, practitioners need to ensure that they're analyzing buyers' actions on each network or platform to change course as needed.

"When you leverage omnichannel strategies, you learn what prospects are clicking on and engaging with, so you can determine what points are sticking with your audience and what's not," said Englebretson. "This will help you refine and iterate what you say to that individual over time, so it's important you get that data."

To centralize all those insights, the "duh" answer is tools and technologies that assist in collection and analytics. But according to Duffy, the market's split: While there are many "incredible" platforms out there, there are also a lot of "shiny new toys."

"When you're evaluating what you need, I have two pieces of advice," said Duffy. "No. 1: Don't knock the Excel spreadsheet — at the end of the day, if you can easily pull the data that you need to continue to optimize engagement, it's okay to lean into some old-fashioned ways. And No. 2, you need a platform that will help you view the entire customer lifecycle and help you put them at the center."

Proof Point:

JLL, a professional services firm that specializes in real estate and investment management, wanted to answer key questions about the post-pandemic world, as well as provide practical advice and educate prospects on its solutions. **The campaign** featured high-value gated content, SEO-optimized ungated content, a digital landing page optimized for organic search, a bi-weekly email, virtual events, proactive PR (where possible), sponsored content/promotion in industry publications, organic and paid social and paid search.



As a result, 73% of unique visitors scrolled over 50% of the page on long-form content.

Twelve emails were sent as part of phase-one of the campaign, and JLL saw an average open rate of 28.5%, average CTR of 5.03% and average CTOR of 16.94%. Organic social saw a LinkedIn engagement rate of 2.83% and the virtual event engagement rate was 39.54% during the event.

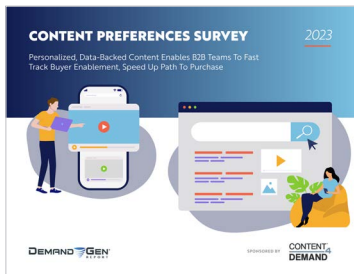


CONCLUSION

For **68% of buyers**, their overall purchasing experience was positive. For the 32% of respondents who were only somewhat positive or neutral, write-in responses indicated that they wanted vendors who “advertised more,” “were more personable,” “provided a clear competitive analysis of vendors in the field” and “were more feature-driven than product-led.”

When organizations can take prospects’ wants and needs into account and weave a cohesive story surrounding their offerings, they can successfully engage buyers and build stronger relationships.

“The nice thing about framing things in the context of narratives is that you can better articulate your value,” said Prodromou. “If you can demonstrate it through the lens of value creation, it gives you a lot of power in your business to make the kind of change that organizations need to compete.”



2023 Content Preferences
Survey Report



What's Working in
Digital Experiences?



2023 B2B Buyer's Survey



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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