



Marketing 101

Do You Wanna B2B or B2C?

by
Michelle Merlo, Managing Partner
Michelle Merlo Communications, LLC

Do you B2B? Maybe you prefer to B2C?

It's vital for a business professional to not only understand the question but also to differentiate which is more effective for the survival of their company.

Whether your product is designed for the business community or directly for the consumer, marketing strategies should play a fundamental role in your business operations. And at the basic level, marketing for either is the same: Identify your audience, establish and refine your service or product to meet that audience's needs, and then convince the audience to buy your product.

But, let's take a step beyond the obvious and really dive into what can help your product stand out even more. At this point, marketing strategy does depend on whether you are in the business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) market. There are distinct differences, and understanding the basics of those variations can propel your service or product ahead of your competitors.

Picture a rifle. Now think of a shotgun. Congratulations – you've mastered the basics of the difference between B2B and B2C!

Business-to-business marketing is similar to shooting a rifle. Pick a target (audience), load the gun (your message), and fire (launch the marketing strategy to specific targets). B2B marketing relies on pinpoint accuracy to get detailed messages to a narrow field of targets. On the other hand, business-to-consumer marketing is like discharging a shotgun. It's still important to identify the target(s), load your gun and fire, but this time, the spray of pellets will hit a large number of targets – which is essential “saturation” that's needed to create customers from the mass general public who receives the message.

Common B2B marketing strategies are ads in industry publications, technical sheets, detailed brochures, direct mail to specific people (as opposed to “resident”), special events, guest speaker presentations, case studies, and specialized web sites. General B2C marketing strategies include radio, TV, or newspaper ads, retail displays, billboards, coupons in consumer circulars, and Internet search engine ads.

For example, attempting to reach a company's purchasing agent (B2B target) via television ads may work, but you also just spent that money to reach retirees, high school students and homemakers. The “shotgun” was wasted on targets that can't help your bottom line. Conversely, trying to reach the public for a consumer-based product through a guest speaker presentation may reach some targets, but that “rifle” effect sure did take a lot of time and effort for a minimal payoff.

So, if marketing isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, how does a business professional establish a logical plan of attack? The secret lies in understanding the characteristics of B2B and B2C and then using the strengths of each to maximize performance.

B2B best practices are more subjective than B2C. Business clients are not impulsive buyers, and they are interested in value and the bottom line. Do they really need it? Will it help their own sales? Is there a relationship attached to this purchase, in case of service or repair or upgrades? Meeting these needs require that focused, "rifle" approach, and it will need to be developed over time in order to win your audience's trust. For that reason, B2B businesses should deliver data and detailed information about your product. Use your marketing to build credibility and trustworthiness. Plan a marketing strategy that builds upon itself (think overlapping fireworks), thinking first about plain awareness of your product, followed by educating your targets and finally seeking the purchase.

For those of you in the consumer industry, your biggest bang for the buck will play on the customers' tendency to react with emotion. Impulse buying, quick savings or sales, and "jumping on the bandwagon" are the hallmarks of B2C targets. Good consumer campaigns will be short, action-packed, and will go for the sale much more quickly by giving the consumer something to do right away (call now, redeem this coupon, etc.). The "shotgun" visual works for this – a single burst that reaches as many people as possible.

Of the two, B2C marketing is usually more costly to implement, because you're purchasing the ability to hit lots of targets at one time. B2B can be more cost-effective, but it takes more time and effort to implement because it's more about building relationships.

The bottom line is this: Whether you B2B or B2C, take the time to understand your customer. Nothing replaces human interaction, and the more you get to know your audience, the better you can tailor your marketing to meet their needs...and sell your product!

About the Author

A two decade, award-winning veteran of marketing and communications, Michelle works with organizations and companies of all shapes and sizes to help them implement marketing strategies to further their businesses. She can be reached at michelle@michellemerlo.com or 412-475-0425.