B2B Marketing Strategy by 2020:  
6 Predictions for Manufacturers

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Four years ago, B2B marketing was in a state of flux. Content marketing was on the rise, but marketers were still trying to convince their bosses that it could work as well as – or better than – traditional marketing at a fraction of the price. Mobile devices were just beginning to be factored into marketing strategy. And no one was quite sure how to measure the results of a successful (or not so successful) marketing campaign in the new media environment.

Four years later, it’s clear that content marketing and mobile are integral to today’s marketing strategy. But the marketing landscape hasn’t settled down. In fact, B2B marketing is still undergoing a seismic shift – especially in the manufacturing industry. It’s evolved from trade shows, print media and direct mail to personalized content and connected devices. Four years from now, B2B marketing will look even more different.

So how do you plan for the future when you’re not sure what’s coming next? Nobody has a crystal ball, but based on our research for clients, welcome to a glimpse of what the B2B marketing landscape will look like by 2020.
B2B Marketing Today: 3 Current Challenges

In a Salesforce.com survey of over 2,100 B2B marketers, respondents identified their top three most pressing business challenges today.

1. **New business development.** How do you attract new customers and partners when the marketing environment is constantly changing?

2. **Quality of leads.** Your marketing team is getting leads, but are they strong leads? Is your sales department happy with the leads they’re getting from marketing?

3. **Staying current.** Keeping up-to-date with current marketing technology and trends isn’t easy when the pace of change is rapid—and accelerating.

B2B Marketing Challenges

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B2B Marketing Tomorrow: 3 Future Challenges

In some ways, the challenges of the future aren’t all that different from those of the past. We’ve always needed to understand a customer’s point of view, so we can give them what they need. But in the coming years, how we approach these challenges will continue to evolve.

1. **Understanding your customer.** Define your brand, customer experience and value proposition by understanding your customer personas and buying journeys.

2. **Delivering value.** Drive top-line growth by delivering value to empowered customers. Even if you sell through indirect sales channels, your customers are demanding a seamless and personalized experience. Give them the personalized experience they have come to expect from their favorite consumer brands.

3. **Knowing what works.** Understand and capture customer value by connecting content to insights. When you find out what works for your customers, you can do more of it. And you can learn what isn’t working, so you can stop spending resources on ineffective strategies.

How will you formulate a strategy to face these challenges? We have six predictions for what B2B marketing strategy will look like for manufacturers by 2020.

40% of all revenue for the top 1,000 companies in the U.S. is derived through channel sales.”

- Association for Strategic Alliance Professionals Research
6 Predictions for Marketing Strategy by 2020

PREDICTION 1:
Understanding your customer personas and their buying journey will be the core of your marketing strategy.

Marketing isn’t about selling, it’s about problem solving. Your customer has a problem. It’s your job to let them know that you understand that problem – and that you have the solution. But how do you do that when you don’t understand who your customer is?

+ **Use personas and segmentation to engage customers as individuals.** By 2020, the most successful companies will be basing their marketing strategy on the buyer journey, and customizing it through persona and customer segmentation strategies.

“Marketing isn't about selling. It's about problem solving.”
Key Definitions

+ **Customer segmentation** is the practice of grouping individual customers into segments based on similar characteristics, such as demographic profile or past purchasing behavior.

+ **Buyer personas** are fictionalized representations of individual customers based on market research and data about a company’s current customers. They typically include not only demographic data, such as age and location, but also a typical customer’s interests, challenges and goals.

+ **Analytics vs. insights:** Analytics measure what the customer did (email opens, clickthrough rate, conversion rate). Insights attempt to answer the question of why the customer made those choices.

While customer journeys and personas are already becoming part of high-level marketing strategy today, by 2020 they’ll become the core to your marketing team’s holistic approach across your organization. Your marketing and sales teams will be accountable for ensuring a seamless customer experience – all the way from the first introduction to your brand to your channel partners.

+ **Capture, measure and adjust to interactions.** Your marketing strategy will need to be intelligent – constantly learning from a customer’s interactions and adjusting as needed to support them on their buying journey. This will give your marketing team the context, measurement and insights to understand how your strategy is really performing and what to do next.

**PREDICTION 2:**

**Marketers will organize around the customer, not the product or channel.**

Manufacturers who are using a traditional channel-based marketing model today are increasingly out of step with the way their customers find and use information. The old model is at odds with today’s customer’s multifaceted view of your brand.

“Before even talking to a salesperson, your customer has already made 63% of the buying decision by looking at reviews, viewing your website, checking out your social network, and comparing your information to what your competitors offer.”
By 2020, marketing teams will have moved away from organizational silos and toward customer-defined, interconnected teams. This also means that your digital marketing strategy will shift from tactical messaging to relationship-building communications. The more your customers are engaged with – and connected to – your brand, the more likely they’ll be to keep doing business with you.

PREDICTION 3:
Content will be the consistent link through the buying journey that keeps customers engaged with your brand and value proposition.

B2B companies will focus on telling more compelling and interesting stories in a much more humanistic and entertaining way.

+ Focus on research and storytelling. Research what is valuable to your customer, and then give them relatable stories and content that demonstrate the value you can offer. Why? Because people identify with and remember stories.

When you give your customers engaging content, you’ll be able to carry on a genuine conversation – sharing what’s most meaningful and relevant to them. Understand the value your audience is looking for and where they look for it, and create content that delivers that value.

+ Offer convenient options. Don’t require your customers to find information in one particular format. Identify how they want it – whether it’s video, white papers, blog posts, podcasts, brochures, or anything else you can think of – and deliver.

PREDICTION 4:
Analytics and insights will be the foundation for your marketing strategy.

By 2020, you will be able to capture, measure and adjust to interactions in near real-time. Even brand messaging will be measured like a type of engagement. Engagement will be so important that Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) will make it one of their top success metrics and hold their marketing and sales teams accountable to it.

In fact, analytics will be so key to your marketing strategy that by 2020 your organization will move from doing everything in digital marketing to being confident and data-driven enough in your decisions to do what’s best for your business, regardless of what worked in the past.

“After a presentation, 63% of people remember stories. Only 5% remember statistics.”
PREDICTION 5:
Marketing technology will mature and be mainstream, allowing organizations to scale marketing and sales activities.

Marketing automation and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) are hot topics these days. By 2020, your digital marketing, marketing automation and CRM will be integrated and delivering more value to your organization. The B2B manufacturers who haven’t already started using marketing automation and CRM will get on board. And as new technologies and simple solutions allow marketing technology to handle the buying journey, personalization will become a best practice throughout the entire customer lifecycle.

“Analytics will continue to make all the difference between doing what’s possible and doing what’s best for your business.”

Your marketing technology strategy will be designed to meet your business where it is – with the end in mind.

+ What tools will help you create meaningful communication and individual relationships at scale?
+ What data and analytics do you need to create the experiences and outcomes you want?

Marketing automation platforms will start to optimize more heavily for multi-channel marketing and will include more mobile, social and connected machine capabilities. Mobile, in particular, will continue to be a key part of your strategy. Today’s customers and employees are making what’s known as the “mobile mind shift.” Forrester defines it as “the expectation that you can get what you want in your immediate context and moments of need.” The good news? You have the opportunity to get your customers’ attention every time they reach for the phone.

PREDICTION 6:
The fusion of automation, digital and physical experience will span the buying journey through sensors, wearables and personalization technologies.

Sensors and wearable devices will continue to give marketers access to new communication methods in the buying journey. Even better? They’ll bring in information from connected machines unlike anything we have seen before. The buying journey will include information from the products they own and the locations they visit, so you can better personalize every interaction using content, social, SMS and more.

Because buyers will be interacting with brands on the go, your marketing strategy must include ways to streamline and scale communication – meeting your customers wherever they are.

By 2020, your marketing team will support multiple channels and devices at the speed of digital. Digital and mobile content will continue to allow consumers to engage with your brand on their own time, on their own terms. That means your marketing strategy needs to support multiple channels and devices – and your content needs to support your customers, wherever, whenever and however they choose.
4 Ways to Get Ready for 2020

These changes in the B2B marketing world are coming fast. The good news? It’s not too late for manufacturers to start getting ready for them. Here are four things you can do now to be prepared for the way successful marketing will work by 2020.

1. **Design your marketing strategy around personas and their buying journeys.** Your strategy must encompass your customer, partners and employees. After all, your entire organization engages with – or at very least impacts – your customer. That means your strategy needs to support a personalized and seamless experience.

2. **Align your content strategy with your marketing automation strategy and architecture.** Content is the common thread that makes marketing automation work. And the more you can personalize it, the better. Just make sure your content, marketing strategy and your marketing automation work together.

3. **Make analytics and insights the foundation for your marketing strategy decisions.** Use data, not gut feelings or past history, to drive how you make decisions.

4. **Evaluate your marketing strategy based on current and future business requirements.** All technology platforms are evolving and will continue to innovate and consolidate. As you are planning for the future, factor the connected machine and Internet of Things into your technology roadmap. The pace of innovation in sensors and devices is staggering. You need to be ahead of the curve.

“Content is the common thread that makes marketing automation work. And the more you can personalize it, the better.”

**Facts about Internet of Things (IoT)**

1. **2015:** There are 5 billion connected IoT devices. Mobile web views surpass desktop views for the first time. Leading-edge companies define their brand through their customer experience.

2. **2017:** Approximately 175 IoT devices will connect to the Internet per second, doubling the number of connected devices to 10 billion.

3. **2020:** There will be 50 billion connected devices, and 90% of the world population over the age of six will use a mobile device.

**Now What?**

There is no question that marketing in 2020 is going to be considerably different than it was a few years ago, or even today. But with a data-driven and customer-focused strategy, your marketing efforts will ultimately be more productive and more profitable. 2020 isn’t as far away as it seems.

Get ahead of your competitors by making changes to your marketing strategy now. And if you need a hand, we’re here to help.