

The
BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS
Marketing
HANDBOOK



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B2B Marketing: 1978 vs. 2008

I started my career in business-to-business (B2B) marketing in the late 1970s, and by the early 1980s, I thought I had a pretty good handle on the basics of B2B.

I also didn't see where B2B was likely to change much. So I believed I could continue to use the methods I'd learned during my first few years for the rest of my life.

Boy was I wrong!

First came along the fax machine...then the personal computer...then cell phones...then white papers...then the Internet...then search engines...then blogging...then Webinars...then social networks...and suddenly, B2B marketing had become a brave new world, one that few fully grasped and most of us struggle to keep up with.

Here, as I see it, are some of the biggest changes that have taken place in B2B marketing during the past three decades—and also, what has stayed relatively the same.

1—The death of “industrial marketing.” It used to be called industrial marketing, and the trade publication serving the industry was called *Industrial Marketing*.

Gradually, *Industrial Marketing* changed its name to *Business Marketing* and then to *BtoB*. And today, those of us who market products and services to businesses are “business-to-business” marketers.

2—From tactical to strategic. Before the Internet, B2B marketing had relatively few choices. So planning campaigns was simple and straightforward. You'd create a sales brochure, run a trade ad, send out a few press releases, and try to get a feature article written about it in the industry trade pubs.

Today, there are dozens of other marketing methods, and a number of the early communications tools have, in many instances, fallen out of favor and been supplanted by new media—everything from e-newsletters and Webinars, to podcasts and vertical search engines.

As a result, you have to decide how to divide your limited budget and time among these new communications vehicles. So planning a B2B marcom campaign is more complex.

3—The end of the “industrial film,” slide shows, and 35mm photography.

When I worked at Westinghouse Aerospace in the late 1970s, I actually produced my first A/V promotion on 16mm film. Soon after, film died, and everything was shot in video.

We also had an entire department that did nothing but produce slides for presentations. Managers who wanted to speak with slides had to go to the slide department to get them produced. Now, everyone has PowerPoint and can produce their own slide shows on their PCs.

Also at Westinghouse, we had a full-time photographer, Pete, a skilled professional who took photos of products, processes, and installations with a 35mm camera. Today, film has largely disappeared, replaced by digital photography...and everyone who owns a digital camera thinks he’s as good a photographer as Pete.

4—The dethroning of trade journals. The primary means of marketing business-to-business products was through the major trade journals targeting the industry or market niche you wanted to reach.

Today, trade magazines still exist, but are hardly flourishing. They struggle to compete with the Internet, and play less of a central role—though are still important—in educating members of a particular industry or trade about new technologies, products, and developments.

5—The decline of print advertising. Whenever we wanted to promote a product, doing an ad for the product was a no-brainer. It was automatically assumed you'd advertise. The question was where, when, what size, how frequently, and with what budget.

Today, print advertising is rarely the primary B2B marketing medium. For many B2B marketers, it's not even on the radar. More likely to be considered: paid search, SEO, and e-mail marketing.

6—The effectiveness of planted feature articles. Writing articles for industry publications was such an effective marketing strategy, I knew a guy who had a boutique PR agency that did nothing but ghostwrite and place such feature stories for clients. Typically the articles were bylined by an engineer.

Today, despite the supposed decline of the printed word, writing articles for trade publications remains one of the most potent B2B marketing tactics.

Writing online articles for Websites and e-zines may generate more clicks and traffic, but in many markets, a bylined article in the leading industry magazine still has more credibility and clout—and the reprints make terrific sales literature.

7—The shrinking of PR. In the heyday of print, each industry was covered globally

by too many trade publications and newsletters for most marcom managers to count. So they hired a B2B PR firm to make sure their products got as much coverage as possible.

But in the 1990s and 2000s, publishing underwent a consolidation, with the number of publications serving each industry declining by 50 to 75 percent or more. When marcom managers saw there were only a few publications in their market, many decided they could do PR in-house, and numerous small B2B PR firms either folded or saw billings decline.

8—The demise of the sales brochure. For many years, I made my living primarily writing sales brochures. These were slick, glossy affairs with expensive photography and high-end graphic design. It was not unusual for a client with a new product to want multiple brochures for a new product covering different applications or markets, each ranging from 4 to 16 pages or longer.

Today sales literature primarily resides on the Web as pages accessible through the company's Website and through search. Fewer and fewer print brochures are published, and they are shrinking in size, with the most common format the two-sided 8½ by 11-inch "sell sheet."

9—The rise of the white paper. The primary sales collateral today is the white paper, not the brochure. While the sales brochure focused on the product, and looked and read like sales copy, the white paper focuses on educating prospects about a problem and how to solve it—and looks and reads like a how-to article or tutorial.

10—The critical importance of keywords and search. In the old days, the most important sales channel to cultivate was your inside sales force and your reps: the primary means by which prospects approached your company about buying your product.

In 2008, the primary means of finding products is through Internet search. Therefore, the most important knowledge for the B2B marketer to acquire is not how to recruit reps (though that's still important). It's finding out the keywords and phrases prospects search when looking for your type of product or for help solving one of the problems it addresses...and along with that, making sure your site comes up on the search engine's first page when prospects type in those keywords and phrases.

I've only covered the tip of the iceberg as far as the differences between business-to-business marketing in 2010 vs. 1978. There's a lot I left out because of space limitations: e-mail marketing campaigns, e-newsletters, blogs, vertical portals, tele-seminars, social networks—you name it.

And that, I think, is the point: I was wrong in 1978 to view B2B marketing as static and set. It's dynamic and fast-changing, and for today's B2B marketing professional, it's a full-time job just to keep up. My objective in this new e-book is to help make keeping up a little easier, and bring you a steady stream of profitable new ideas for generating more B2B leads and sales.

10 Tips for Increasing Landing Page Conversion Rates

There's lots of buzz about blogging, viral marketing, social networking, and other new methods of generating eyeballs and traffic online. But all that traffic won't make you any money unless you can convert those unique visitors to leads or customers.

Depending on whether you are selling a product directly from your landing page, asking visitors to download a free white paper, or promoting a Webinar or demonstration, conversion rates can range from as low as one percent or less to as much as 50 percent or more. Here are 10 keys to writing landing pages that maximize online conversion rates:

1—Build credibility early. People have always been skeptical of advertising, and with the proliferation of SPAM and shady operators, they are even more skeptical of what they read online. Therefore, your landing page copy must immediately overcome that skepticism.

One way to do that is to make sure one or more “credibility builders” are clearly displayed on the first screen the visitor sees. In the banner at the top of the page, use your logo and company name if you are well known; universities, associations, and other institutions can place their official seal in the upper left of the screen.

Within or immediately under the banner, put a strong testimonial or three above the headline on the first screen. Consider adding a pre-head or subhead which summarizes the company’s mission statement or credentials. At www.bnasoftware.com, the positioning statement is: “Expert Software for a New Level of Efficiency and Control”.

2—Capture the e-mail addresses of non-buyers. There are a number of mechanisms available for capturing the e-mail address of visitors who click on your landing page but do not buy the product. One is to use a window with copy offering a free report or e-course in exchange for submitting an e-mail address. This window can be served to the visitor as a pop-up (it appears when the visitor arrives at the landing page) or a pop-under (a window that appears when the visitor attempts to leave the landing page without

making an inquiry or purchase). These are both blocked by pop-up blockers. A “floater” is a window that slides onto the screen from the side or top. Unlike the pop-up and pop-under, the floater is part of the Website HTML code, so it is not stopped by the pop-up blocker.

3—Use lots of testimonials. Testimonials build credibility and overcome skepticism, as do case studies and white papers posted on the Website. If you invite customers to a live event, ask if they would be willing to give you a brief testimonial recorded on video. Have a professional videographer tape it, get a signed release from the customer, and post the testimonial on your Website as streaming video. Require the customer to click a button to hear the testimonial, rather than have the video play automatically when the visitor clicks on the page.

For written testimonials, customers may suggest that you write what you want them to say and just run it by them for approval. Politely ask that they give you their opinion of your product in their own words instead of having you do it. Reason: what they come up with will likely be more specific, believable, and detailed than your version, which might smack of puffery and promotion.

4—Use lots of bullets. Highlight key features and benefits in a list of short, easy-to-read bulleted items. I often use a format where the first part of the bullet is the feature, and after a dash comes the benefit; e.g., “**Quick-release adhesive system** – your graphics stay clean and don’t stick together.” Online buyers like to think they are getting a lot for their money, so when selling a product directly from your landing page, be sure all major

features and important benefits are covered in a comprehensive bullet list appearing on your landing page.

When generating leads by giving away white papers, you don't need a huge list of bulleted features and benefits. But using bullets to describe the contents of the paper and the benefits that information delivers can raise conversion rates for download requests.

5—Arouse curiosity in the headline. The headline should arouse curiosity, make a powerful promise, or otherwise grab the reader's attention so he has no choice but to keep reading. The headline for a landing page selling a training program on how to become a professional property locator makes a big promise: "Become a Property Locator Today – and Make \$100,000 a Year in the Greatest Real Estate Career That Only a Few Insiders Know About."

6—Use a conversational copy style. Most corporate Websites are unemotional and sterile: just "information." But a landing page is a letter from one human being to another. Make it sound that way. Even if your product is highly technical and you are selling it to techies, remember that they are still human beings, and you cannot sell something by boring people to death.

7—Incorporate an emotional hook in the headline and lead paragraph. Logical selling can work, but tapping into the prospect's emotions is much stronger—especially when you correctly assess how the prospect is feeling about your product or the problem it solves right now.

Another effective tactic for lead-generation landing pages is to stress your free offer in the headline and lead. Example: Kaydon's landing page shows a picture of its catalog with the bold heading above it reading, "FREE Ceramic Bearings Product Selection Guide."

8—Solve the reader's problem. Once you hook the reader with emotional copy dramatizing her problem or a powerful free offer, show how your product—or your free information—can help solve their problem. For example: "Now there is a better, easier, and more effective solution to wobbly restaurant tables that can irritate customers and ruin their dining experience: Table Shox, the world's smallest shock absorber."

To maximize landing page conversion rates, you have to convince the visitor that the quickest route to solving his problem is taking the action indicated on the landing page, and not—as you might be tempted to let him do—surfing your site. That's why I prefer landing pages to appear with no navigation, so the reader's only choice is to respond or not respond; there's no menu of click buttons and hyperlinks to other interesting pages to distract him.

9—Make it timely and current. The more your online copy ties in with current events and news, the higher your response rates. This is especially critical when selling financial and investment information as well as regulatory compliance products in fields where laws and rules change frequently. Periodically update your landing page copy to reflect current business and economic conditions, challenges, and trends. This shows your visitor that your company is current with and on top of what's happening in your industry today.

10—Stress the money-back guarantee or lack of commitment on the part of the user. If you allow customers to order products directly from the landing page, make sure you have a money-back guarantee clearly stated on that page. All your competitors give strong money-back guarantees. So you can't get away without doing the same. If your product is good and your copy truthful, your refund rates can be as low as one percent or even less.

If you are generating leads, stress that your offer—which might be a white paper, online demonstration, or Webinar—is free. Say there is no obligation to buy and that no salesperson will visit.

Are White Papers Dead?

It's often the case that when a marketing technique is overused, it gradually loses its effectiveness over time. When that happens, usage drops off, and prospects are consequently no longer bombarded by the technique. Example: the AOL CD mailings.

A year or so later, some smart marketer remembers the old technique, realizes it hasn't been used for a while, and decides to test it again. Sure enough, it works, because the market hasn't seen it for some time. Other marketers who use it also start getting good results, and the marketing tool becomes popular once more.

In the consumer sector, sweepstakes is a direct marketing technique that varies in effectiveness over time. Now, in business-to-business, some direct marketers question whether white papers are running out of steam. The concern is that there are too many

white papers—so that the offer of yet another one has lost its appeal. As one white paper skeptic told me, “Prospects already have too much to read; why would they ask for more?”

Yet the numbers tell a different story: namely, that white paper marketing is alive and well and working. “The demand for white papers has never been higher,” says Michael A. Stelzner, executive editor of WhitePaperSource.com. “During business downturns, corporations rely more on marketing to help them acquire leads and establish thought leadership. White papers are the secret weapon for companies. Our organization has seen a major increase in white paper use among businesses of all sizes, but especially those selling costly or complex products.”

In a survey of nearly 1,400 IT professionals, the majority said they were more likely to download and read white papers than product literature. Over the years, I’ve seen a number of direct mail and e-mail tests in which offering a free white paper or other free content increased response rates 10% to 100% or more.

White papers work; more than half of IT professionals say white papers influence their buying decision. I do think, however, that we have to broaden our notion of how to use free content offers, which is essentially what a white paper is: free information designed to educate our prospects and motivate them to inquire about our product or service.

To begin with, I think it’s not white papers themselves that are tiring but the name itself. “White paper” signals to some prospects a document that is an obvious selling tool. And with virtually every white paper in the world available for free, white papers have a low perceived value as a giveaway.

The solution is to keep using white papers in your marketing but to call them something else. The mailing list broker Edith Roman used to publish a print catalog of mailing lists. But instead of calling it a catalog, they called it the “Direct Mail Encyclopedia.” Offering a free Direct Mail Encyclopedia helped generate more inquiries for their brokerage services.

Copywriter Ivan Levison calls his white papers “guides.” Marketer David Yale uses “executive briefing.” I’m partial to “special report.” For consumer marketing, marketing expert Joe Polish suggests “consumer awareness guide,” and for a B2B white paper giving product selection tips, I’d change this to “buyer’s guide” or “selection guide.” For a white paper giving tips or instructions on a process, I might call it a “manual.” If you publish a print version that fits in a #10 envelope and is saddle stitched, you can call it a “free booklet.”

All of the above are variations on the free content offer. Direct marketers refer to free content offers as “bait pieces,” because they are used to “bait your hook” when you go “fishing” for sales leads. Does what you call your bait piece really matter? I think it does, because calling it a report or guide creates a perception of greater value—after all, thousands of publishers actually *sell* special reports and booklets for prices ranging from \$3 to \$40 or more. I often put a dollar price for the guide or report in the upper right corner of the front cover, which strengthens the perception that the freebie has value; I don’t think this would be credible on a document labeled as a white paper.

What about the complaint that prospects already have too much to read? I am reminded of a quotation from Rutherford Rogers: “We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.” There is more information on the Internet than you could process

in a thousand lifetimes. But good white papers don't merely present information; they offer solutions to business and technical problems. Virtually every B2B sale you make is because someone thinks your product or service is the solution to their problem. A white paper can help clarify the problem as well as convince the reader that your idea or method is the best of many options for addressing it.

Every marketing campaign has an objective, yet if you ask most managers what the objective of their white paper is, they probably couldn't tell you. Too many see white papers as an opportunity to merely collect and publish a pile of research material they found on the Web using Google. To make your white paper successful, you must define the marketing objective before writing a single word.

For example, a manufacturer found that consumers were not buying their do-it-yourself (DIY) underground sprinkler kits, because homeowners perceived installing the irrigation system by themselves as too difficult. Solution: a free DIY manual on how to install an underground sprinkler system in a single weekend. Clearly written and illustrated, the manual overcame the perception that this was a tough project, making it look easy.

In the pre-Internet era, bait pieces were mainly paper and ink. Thanks to the PC and the Internet, bait pieces can now be produced as PDF files and instantly downloaded online. But at the receiving end, they are usually printed by the prospect and read on paper.

It may be that what's wearing out is not free content, but the standard white paper format: pages of black ink on 8½ by 11-inch sheets of paper. To make your bait piece stand out, consider using alternative formats: DVDs, CDs, audio cassettes, podcasts, Webinars,

tele-seminars, flash cards, stickers, posters, software, games, and slide guides. A slide guide is a cardboard promotional item with a moving slide or wheel that allows the prospect to perform some simple calculation, e.g., convert inches to centimeters or determine the monthly payments on a mortgage.

Most white papers are 6 to 10 pages—about 3,000 to 4,000 words—but you are not locked into that length. You can go shorter or longer, depending on the content you want to present and the marketing objective of the bait piece. The bait piece can be as short and simple as a list of tips printed on one side of a sheet of paper. Or it can be as long as a self-published paperback book.

Free content offers have been used effectively in marketing for decades, and rather than tiring, they have been given new life, thanks in part to the information-oriented culture spawned by the Internet. “Every organization possesses particular expertise that has value in the new e-marketplace of ideas,” writes David Meerman Scott in his book *Cashing In With Content* (Information Today, 2005, p. 8). “Organizations gain credibility and loyalty with customers, employees, the media, investors, and suppliers through content.”

The 6 Key Components of Effective B2B Offers

How important is the offer in business-to-business marketing?

Answer: very. I have seen numerous tests in which a simple change of offer has increased the response rate by 25% to 900%—dramatically improving ROMD (return on

marketing dollars) for the advertiser. The best of these winning B2B offers share six common characteristics...and to lift your response rates, your offers should, too.

Winning offers:

1—Are different or unique. The best offers are fresh and new. When copywriter Bill Jayme wrote the direct mail packaged that launched *New York* magazine, he proposed a sweepstakes. Sweepstakes have long been used to sell magazine subscriptions, but none has ever offered the prize Jayme dreamed up: dinner at Gracie Mansion with New York City's mayor.

Most investment newsletters offer free special reports as premiums. *The Sovereign Society*, a newsletter on offshore investing, offered something different: a free Swiss bank account—a gift not given by any other investment newsletter.

Most business magazines offer either discounted subscription rates or standard premiums like special reports, tote bags, or calculators. *Advertising Age* had a successful control where the premium was a ceramic coffee mug. Coffee mugs are nothing special. But this one was imprinted with a mock-up of an *Ad Age* cover. If the subscriber was Jan Smith, the headline on the mock issue of *Ad Age* was personalized to read: "Jan Smith Chosen as Marketing Genius of the Year."

2—Have a high degree of desirability. An unusual offer only works if it's something people really want.

A publisher was selling a loose-leaf service on how to manage Novell NetWare local area networks. Response rates doubled when a new direct mail promotion offered a disk with free software—a collection of utilities for Novell networks.

The 100% increase in orders confirmed that these software programs were tools network administrators obviously wanted to get their hands on. The outer envelope teaser read: “Yours FREE! – 5 Powerful Programs to Help You Manage Your Novell NetWare Network More Efficiently and Easily – See Inside for Details on This Special Time-Limited Offer.”

On the other hand, a financial newsletter mailed a renewal promotion that offered as a premium a pack of playing cards with the editor’s picture on them. Not surprisingly, it flopped: who would want that?

3—Have a high perceived value, especially in relation to fulfillment cost. Free software has traditionally worked well as a premium. Software has a high perceived value in relation to the cost of goods. You know that purchased in a store or online, software packages can easily sell for \$49 to \$300 or more. Yet a CD with code on it can be duplicated for about a dollar.

But how much do you pay for a deck of playing cards at your local stationery store? About a dollar, right? Therefore, the perceived value of the playing cards given as a renewal promotion by the financial publisher mentioned earlier is only a dollar—hardly a financial motivator to renew a newsletter subscription that costs \$79 a year.

In a promotion tied in with their sponsorship of the Olympics, IBM offered a special IBM Olympic pin as a premium. In reality, the item probably only cost and was worth a buck or so. But the mailer copy hinted that the item could become a collectible, creating an impression of potentially high value.

4—Dramatize the brand or USP. *The Sovereign Society* is a newsletter about offshore investing. The symbol for offshore investing has long been Swiss bank accounts. Therefore, the offer of a free Swiss bank account with a subscription to *The Sovereign Society* supports and dramatizes the newsletter's USP (unique selling proposition): making money and increasing privacy by investing offshore in things like Swiss bank accounts.

Even when the offer does not at first glance seem closely related to the product, a clever copywriter can find a connection. Example: years ago, *Newsweek* offered a free radio as a premium for new subscribers.

It would seem that, on the surface, a radio is a poor choice of premium: in the news area, radio and magazines compete with one another. But copywriter Milt Pierce used the differences between these media to make a logical connection between the premium and the product:

Dear Reader:

What's the fastest way to get the news?

It's on the radio. That's why Newsweek wants you to have - as an introductory gift for new subscribers - this superb AM/FM radio.

But what's the best way to get the news?

You won't get just headlines and a rough outline of the news, with Newsweek, you'll get the news in depth

5—Are easy to take advantage of. You should make it as easy and convenient as possible for the prospect to accept your offer.

How? To begin with, offer multiple response mechanisms: toll-free phone number...fax number...a hyperlink to a landing page (see

www.thelandingpageguru.com)...e-mail ... even (gasp!) a postal address. Different prospects respond in different ways.

Create response mechanisms. In a direct mail package, enclose a fax-back form or business reply card (BRC) with your letter. If you want customers to enclose payment with their order, or privacy is a concern, also include a business reply envelope (BRE).

In a print ad, consider including a coupon or a bind-in BRC opposite the advertisement. On the Web, landing pages should ask for the minimum information from the prospect when collecting leads. If you are building your opt-in e-list, ask for name and e-mail address only. When you have multiple fields for the user to complete, use an asterisk (*) to indicate which are mandatory, and make as many fields as possible optional. Conversion rates decline incrementally for each additional field you force the prospect to fill out.

The ease and convenience of accepting the offer can even be highlighted in the copy as a benefit. In a letter selling the *Board Report*, a newsletter for graphic designers, copywriter Sig Rosenblum makes a benefit out of the fact that the reply element is a BRC:

Please complete the card enclosed and drop it in the mail today. It's already addressed. And the postage is paid.

6—Minimize the buyer's risk and obligation. Do whatever you can to minimize sales pressure on the prospect. If you follow up leads by phone instead of with the field sales force, say in your copy "No salesperson will visit." If you do not follow up leads by phone, say "No salesperson will call."

When offering anything free—a white paper, a Webinar, even a brochure—say that it is free. Do not substitute the weaker “complimentary” when writing to a high-level business audience because you think “free” is not professional or will offend them. It won’t.

Everybody wants free stuff, and businesspeople and professionals are no exception. A health care agency sent a direct mail piece inviting doctors to attend a symposium. They did an A/B split test of two versions; the only difference was that B offered a free pocket diary as a gift for attendance. Version B, offering the free gift, out-pulled version A—with no free gift—six-fold. Busy doctors were persuaded to give up an afternoon by a free pocket diary that costs about a dollar!

Does the buyer have to agree to sit through a presentation or demonstration, or complete a survey? If he is not required to take further action once he accepts the offer, note this in your copy by saying: “There’s no obligation...nothing to buy...and no commitment of any kind.”

Should B2B Copywriters Avoid Jargon?

Almost universally, the great writing teachers tell us to avoid jargon, and to use small words instead of big words.

“We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon,” writes William Zinsser in *On Writing Well: 25th edition* (Quill, 2001, p. 7). And in *The Art of Readable Writing* (Harper & Row, 1991, p. 127), Rudolph Flesch warns: “keep away from fancy words because you never can tell what they mean.”

But in copywriting, there are certainly exceptions to this rule—times when a bigger or fancier word, or jargon, can command the reader’s attention and persuade him more effectively than everyday prose.

The first exception is the use of big words to create a perception of enhanced value. For example, Mont Blanc doesn’t call their product a “pen” in their catalog. They sell “writing instruments.” Reason: people will pay \$150 for a writing instrument. But they can buy a perfectly functional pen at CVS for a dollar.

In a similar vein, almost no one sells used cars any more. Today a used car is called a “certified pre-owned vehicle.” *Vehicle* sounds more impressive than *car*. *Pre-owned* removes the stigma of *used*. And who certified your pre-owned BMW or Lexus? BMW and Lexus, of course.

Direct marketers know that the words you use do matter. Consultant Gary Hennerberg says that when Collin Street Bakery changed the name of its main product from “fruitcake” to “Native Texas Pecan Cake,” mail order sales increased 60 percent.

Another reason to use jargon is to create a sense of affinity between the writer and the reader. You want the prospect to feel that you are part of his group, or at least know and understand him and his kind. But don’t use insider jargon when writing to non-specialists.

Sociologist Susan Brownmiller defines jargon as “language more complex than the word it serves to communicate.” Similarly, when editing the massive *Oxford English Dictionary*, James Murray’s rule was that a definition could not contain a word more complex than the word being defined.

For example, a pilot may tell a flight attendant to instruct the passengers to *deplane*. But when the flight attendant passes this information on to passengers, she should just say “get off the plane.”

The third application of jargon is in writing about technical topics, and a huge number of business-to-business marketers sell technical products to technical audiences. Is it safe—even advisable—to use jargon in these situations?

“Have you ever listened to two computer programmers talk to each other? Or two engineers? Or two doctors?” asks copywriter Bob McCarthy. “They all have their own language—or so it seems. Their conversations are peppered with technical terms, abbreviations, codes and acronyms that make sense for the people involved.”

These jargon-filled conversations are not for show either, says McCarthy. They are for expediency. They provide useful shortcuts that move the conversations along more quickly and more efficiently. “In short, it’s the way they talk,” concludes McCarthy, “and it’s the way we need to write if we are writing on their behalf.”

When writing about technical products or marketing to a technical audience, it’s important to note the difference between technical terms and jargon.

Technical terms are words that precisely describe the technology, process, or idea we want to convey. “Operating system” is a technical term, as is “broadband network.” We should use them. They are familiar to our readers. And to avoid them would require substituting lengthy and unnecessary descriptions. Technical terms were invented to concisely and clearly communicate technical information to audiences with varying degrees of education and experience.

Jargon, on the other hand, is language that is unnecessarily complex—more so than the idea it is meant to convey. The advantage of using jargon is that with some audiences (e.g., IT professionals), it creates an affinity with the reader.

The disadvantage of jargon is that, aside from sounding pompous, it is not as clear or direct as simpler substitutes. And therefore, your reader may wonder what you really mean.

Years ago, in a brochure describing a material handling system, I wrote that the equipment dumped the material from a storage silo into a bin. The product manager crossed out “dumped” and changed it to “gravimetrically conveyed.” When his boss read this, he asked, puzzled, “What’s a gravimetric conveyer?”

A health care ad agency showed their client, a manufacturer of dental products, a Web page for a new splint. The splint is a metal band attached to the back of the teeth; the strong, healthy teeth in the mouth help keep the loose ones from moving. The agency had written that the splint “keeps loose teeth in place.” The client changed this to say that the splint “stabilizes mobile dentition.” Self-important jargon? Or appropriate use of a legitimate technical term? You tell me.

What about acronyms, an insidious subcategory of jargon particularly rampant in certain industries, such as telecommunications? The rule is to write out the term in the first use, with its acronym following in parentheses; e.g., short messaging service (SMS), electronic data interchange (EDI).

However, this rule is typically not applied when using acronyms that have become so commonplace, the initials communicate your idea more quickly and clearly than the

term spelled out. Examples include DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), EST (eastern standard time), scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), laser (light amplification through stimulated emission of radiation), cop (constable on patrol), and tip (to insure promptness).

You can minimize confusion when using acronyms by being consistent in your usage. Don't randomly jump from USA to US to U.S.A. to US of A; pick one and stick with it throughout your document.

Even when using legitimate technical terms and acronyms, don't overdo it. A sentence packed with too many acronyms and technical terms seems cold, inhuman, and almost unreadable. The optimal ratio is no more than one technical term for every ten words in the sentence.

Spell checkers valiantly attempt to keep up with ever-changing industry jargon, and fail miserably. Therefore, when writing B2B copy, keep a dictionary covering your industry close at hand. For telecommunications, the standard is *Newton's Telecom Dictionary*; for medical copywriting, it's *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*.

B2B marketers worry about the level of technical language in their copy as follows: "If the copy is too technical, some readers won't be able to understand it; but if the copy is too simple, some readers will feel we are talking down to them, and we will insult them."

This may be accurate, but here's another rule of thumb to guide you: if you have to make a choice between making your copy too simple or too sophisticated, err on the side of making it too simple. Reason: in my nearly 30 years of writing business-to-business copy

aimed at engineers, scientists, programmers, and other techies, I have never once heard a prospect complain, “This brochure is too easy to read.”

5 Steps to Building a Large and Responsive Opt-In E-List of Qualified B2B Prospects

Many B2B marketers want to cut marketing costs by shifting more of their marcom budgets from traditional direct mail and paper newsletters to e-mail marketing and e-newsletters. But if you want to ramp up your online marketing program, you should start building a large opt-in e-list of customers and prospects now.

Why? Because without a significant online “house file” (list of opt-in subscribers), you can only reach prospects in your niche by renting other marketers’ opt-in e-lists, which is hardly cost-effective: each time you want to send another message to your industry, you have to rent the list again—at a cost that can easily reach into the hundreds of dollars per thousand names.

Some marketers buy databases containing e-mail addresses of business prospects in their niche market. This can work if you are sending highly targeted e-mails on extremely relevant topics and offers to narrow vertical e-lists.

But when you send e-mail messages to non opt-in lists, you are mostly asking for trouble. CAN/SPAM does not prohibit e-mailing to people who have not opted in. But people on non-opt-in e-lists are much more likely to register SPAM complaints than those on legitimate opt-in e-lists—and far less likely to buy from you.

So the best online strategy for B2B marketers is to build your own opt-in e-list of subscribers. Doing so eliminates the cost of renting opt-in lists while preventing the SPAM complaints and lower response rates typical of non opt-in purchased or rented lists.

When you own an opt-in e-list covering a sizeable percentage of your target market, you can communicate with your prospects and customers as often as you desire or think is appropriate at minimal cost. Being able to send an e-mail to your target market with a few mouse clicks makes you less dependent on costly direct mail, print newsletters, and other paper promotions.

By using a double opt-in process that requires new subscribers to verify their identity before being added to your e-list, you help minimize SPAM complaints and bounce-backs. Owning a large opt-in e-list of target prospects also decreases marketing costs and improves lead flow and revenues.

So how do you build a large and profitable opt-in e-list of qualified B2B prospects in your field? Here are five ideas:

1—Dedicate a portion of your online marketing budget exclusively to list-building. Most B2B marketers drive traffic either to their Website home page or landing pages relating to specific offers (e.g., free Webinar registration, free white paper download, purchase a product). And a lot of the traffic they drive to these pages is existing customers and prospects who are already on their e-list.

You should spend a minimum of 20 percent of your online marketing budget on building your house opt-in e-list. That means getting qualified prospects in your industry who have not yet opted into your online subscriber list to do so.

There are many online marketing options that work well for e-list building programs. These include pay-per-click advertising, postcard marketing, banner advertising, online ads in other marketer's e-newsletters, B2B co-registration deals, video marketing, viral marketing, editorial mentions in trade publications, online article marketing, affiliate marketing, and social media—to name just a few.

2—Calculate your maximum acceptable cost per new subscriber. When evaluating marketing methods for e-list building, you have to weigh the cost of acquiring the new name vs. the value that new name has for your business.

To determine value, divide total annual revenues generated by your online subscriber list by the number of names on that list. Example: If your 20,000 online subscribers account for \$600,000 in annual sales, your subscriber value is \$30 per name per year.

You decide how much you are willing to spend to acquire a subscriber worth \$30 per year. If uncertain, use this rule of thumb: list building campaigns should ideally pay back their cost within three to six months. Therefore, if your names are worth \$30 per year each, you can afford to spend up to \$15 per subscriber to acquire new names.

Say you drive traffic to a landing page where people can sign up to your e-list. The conversion rate is 50 percent, so for every two unique visitors you drive to your registration page, you get one new opt-in subscriber.

Using Google Ad Words, you can drive traffic at a cost of \$7 per click. Can you afford that? Yes, because that means you get one new subscriber for every two clicks you buy, which works out to \$14 per subscriber—within your \$15 per new name limit.

Would it make more sense to base the allowable acquisition cost per new name on the *lifetime customer value* (LCV) of online subscribers rather than just the average one-year revenue per name? Theoretically, yes. But you can only do that if you've been marketing online long enough to have reliable numbers on which to base LCV estimates. Until you do, stick with the revenue per year per name figure as the baseline.

3—Publish a free e-newsletter. The best way to build and regularly communicate with an opt-in list of B2B prospects is to publish and distribute a free e-newsletter on a specialized topic related to your product line and of interest to your target prospects.

Publishing a free e-zine gives you two important benefits for your online marketing efforts. First, it gives you a standing free offer—a free subscription to your e-letter—you can use in your e-list building efforts. Second, having the e-newsletter insures that you communicate with your opt-in subscribers on a regular basis. This regular communication builds your relationship with your online prospects while increasing the frequency of branding messages and online marketing opportunities.

4—Build a “free-on-free name squeeze page.” With a staggering number of free e-newsletters on the Internet competing for attention, it's not enough to have a simple sign-up box on your home page for your free e-newsletter. You should offer a bribe as an incentive for visitors to subscribe. The best bribe is a free special report the visitor can download as a PDF file in exchange for opting in to your e-list.

For instance, if you sell supply chain management software, and publish an e-zine called “The Strategic SCM Partner,” offer a short bonus report “7 Steps to Improving Supply Chain Management in Your Enterprise” as a premium for new subscribers.

Drive traffic not to your home page or standard subscription form, but to a special “free-on-free name squeeze page”—a landing page highlighting this offer. We call it a “name squeeze page” because it extracts or “squeezes” new names for your list from Web traffic. “Free on free” means you are offering free content (the report) as a bribe to get the visitor to accept your primary free offer (the e-newsletter subscription). For an example of a free-on-free squeeze page see: www.bly.com/reports.

5—Capture the e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not buy, subscribe, or register. Put in place one or more mechanisms for capturing the e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not buy a product, download a demo, subscribe to your free online newsletter, or take other actions that opt them into your e-list.

Going back to our example for supply chain management, when the visitor attempts to leave the site without purchasing or registering, have a window pop-up to capture his e-mail address. The headline says, “Wait! Don’t leave without claiming your free special SCM report!”

Short copy explains they can get a free copy of your special report “7 Steps to Improving Supply Chain Management in Your Enterprise” by typing in their e-mail address in the blank space and clicking submit. If you are not proactively making an effort to capture e-mail addresses of site visitors who do not otherwise register, you are leaving money on the table.

For more ideas on building your e-list and capturing the e-mail addresses of site visitors, go to www.thelandingpageguru.com.

5 Modern Myths of B2B Marketing

There's a lot of misinformation out there about what works in B2B marketing—much of it spread by highly paid consultants with a new technology or channel to hype and an axe to grind.

With that in mind, here are five of the biggest lies being told about B2B marketing today and the truth about each:

The myth: The Web has made print obsolete.

The reality: Many people still prefer to read words on paper instead of on a screen, and many marketers are still heavy users of catalogs, brochures, and other print collateral.

“We still market our various niche services with brochures,” says Norman Freeman, President of Associated Global Systems. “Since we have been around for 50 years, we tend to favor print. Young professionals may agree, however, that print is not now needed if the information is available online.”

“I don't believe print media will die,” says B2B copywriter and consultant Joan Damico. “Instead, it has been downsized to serve as a complement to electronic media.

“There's also been a shift as to who's doing the printing. The consumer is doing a larger share of the printing from the PDF files they download from your Website. It's still easier for many people to print and then read and annotate later, than it is to boot up a laptop and do the same electronically. But that will change too as more print pieces are designed for mobile electronic devices such as PDAs and cell phones.”

The myth: Social networks are the most important and most widely used B2B marketing tools of our time, and have overtaken Websites in importance.

The reality: Millions of people have embraced social networks—and millions of others don't use them at all.

Yes, social networking—along with mobile marketing and SEO—is clearly one of the “hot” marketing methods, gaining a disproportionate share of media attention.

But the truth is that many of your customers don't participate in these social sites, and have to be reached through conventional Websites and other traditional B2B marketing methods.

“Social media has yet to prove itself as a medium that can out-monetize a Website,” says copywriter April Parcher. “When prospects are searching for something specific, they don't turn to LinkedIn or MySpace first. They Google it and hunt up the Websites in that category that seem to be most relevant to their search—and that provide the most valuable content.”

“Your Website is your office, the formal place of your business,” says copywriter Susanna K. Hutcheson. “Your blog, Facebook, Twitter—these are the water cooler and the lunch room. Informal places where you make contacts much like the golf courses and country clubs of the 1950s.”

“Social networking sites are certainly a new ‘feather in the cap’ of many business operators and marketing professionals,” says marketing consultant Fiona Fell. “But I do not think at this point in time that they outweigh the power of a Website for a business. A Website provides a place of solidarity and ‘permanency’ to an online business. It gives your

‘tribe’ and ‘raving fans’ a place to call home, and to drop in to find out about you and your offerings.”

The myth: Direct mail is dead as a B2B lead generation tool.

The reality: Direct mail is still very much alive.

Despite the prediction that e-mail would make snail mail obsolete, the Winterberry Group reports that spending for direct mail marketing in the U.S. was \$58.4 billion in 2007, a five percent increase over the previous year.

“Although much B2B lead gen has moved online, direct mail is still very effective,” says copywriter Ed Gandia. “In fact, in working with clients on lead generation strategy and campaigns, I’ve found that response to direct mail campaigns can sometimes be higher than that of e-mail. Also, I find direct mail to be extremely effective in lead nurturing efforts—often much more so than e-mail.”

How could this be so? According to Gandia, with so many B2B marketers rushing online over the last five years, a strong, personalized direct mail piece actually stands out. And pieces that stand out often get read, which leads to greater response and high return on marketing investment—even higher than many e-mail and social media efforts in some cases.

“In the end, you need a little of everything. Direct mail alone won’t save you,” Gandia admits. “But DM can be a crucial part of a successful B2B marketing mix, regardless of what might be more fashionable or hip at the moment.”

The myth: E-mail marketing is an old-school online marketing channel and, with SPAM filters and firewalls, doesn't work anymore.

The reality: It does, despite the challenges of e-mail deliverability.

Marketing theorists dismiss e-mail marketing as outmoded push or interruption technology. Their belief is that prospects shun communications sent to them, and instead respond only to communications they initiate and control, like social media, blogs, and online search.

But research shows that people still pay attention and respond to their e-mail. A study at Loughborough University found that users take action on average in less than two minutes upon being notified that a new e-mail is waiting for them.

The most effective e-mail marketing, however, may *not* be renting outside e-lists of B2B prospects. Two reasons why it doesn't work so well: it's expensive, and people tend not to buy from strangers online.

A better strategy is to build your own opt-in e-list, typically by offering a free e-newsletter subscription or other valuable free content. According to a report by Forrester Research, opt-in lists (such as e-newsletter subscriber lists) retain 49 percent of their subscribers over time—more than double the retention rate of compiled or harvested e-lists.

Myth: White papers are old hat—a transparent marketing ploy masquerading as real content that today's sophisticated B2B prospects see right through.

Reality: Free content—and that includes white papers—has never been a more effective marketing tool than it is today.

Web 2.0 evangelists champion blogs over white papers, presumably because blogs are user-generated content and therefore more unbiased, while white papers are company-generated content and therefore promotional.

However, in my view, when it comes to quality and value of content, white papers often trump blogs. Many blogs are unfocused ramblings of an individual whose credentials are unknown or unproven. White papers, though they may have a marketing objective, are carefully crafted to deliver valuable content—because without good content, they won't achieve their marketing goals.

“Social media, blogs, and user-generated content are of great value yet have one major shortcoming,” says white paper writer Michael Stelzner. “They require constant innovation and fresh content to transform lookers to prospects. Alternatively, the single well-crafted white paper can deliver a steady stream of quality leads for literally years.

“Given shrinking marketing budgets and greater pressure to perform, I would stick with what we know works.” Stelzner notes that a recent study by TechTarget places white papers number one among buyers, more so than other marketing materials.

Are Businesspeople Devoid of Emotion When Making Buying Decisions?

There are two schools of thought concerning marketing to business and technical buyers.

The first school says, “Copy should be as short as possible, direct, and to the point. Bullet lists are better than sentences and paragraphs. Don’t do any selling. Just give business buyers the facts, data, and specifications they need to make an intelligent decision about buying your product. No need to state the benefits. They already know they need the product and why. You just have to convince them that your brand is superior to other products in the category you compete against, and that your product satisfies their application’s requirements.”

Advocates of this “rational” school of B2B marketing believe that business prospects, at work, are largely rational beings that make logical decisions based on facts. They strive to keep written communications as short as possible, in the belief that all businesspeople are extremely busy with no time to read.

“Business-to-business copy should be completely fact-based,” says LT, a veteran B2B marketer. “And the less there is to read in your copy, the greater your response rates will be. Long copy in B2B gets tossed in the trash.” LT also advises that copy written for B2B audiences should sound professional rather than conversational. “These are educated people,” he says, “and you must talk to them on their own level, which is high.”

The other school of B2B marketing is the “emotional” school. Their philosophy was articulated to me by HF, who owned a successful industrial ad agency in the 1980s. HF said: “The business prospect doesn’t stop being a person when he sets foot in the office. He is a human being first, and an executive or engineer second. Therefore, the same psychological factors motivate him as a human being whether he is at work or at home.”

The emotional school of B2B marketing uses copy and design that reads and looks more like consumer advertising than technical writing. The copy style is personal and conversational, tapping into the prospect's needs, concerns, fears, and desires.

“Because business customers are persons, communications to them should try to connect on a personal level,” says B2B copywriter Ken Norkin. “That means starting out by conveying an understanding of the customer's situation and in particular the problem that your product is going to solve. You not only need to present the data but tell your readers what it means to them.”

Now, most marketers divide the marketing world into two segments: business-to-business marketing and business-to-consumer marketing. The “rational” school of B2B marketing says business and consumer not at all the same. The “emotional” school says that B2B and B2C marketing are more alike than they are different.

But I actually think there is a third segment, real but rarely recognized: hybrid marketing (see Fig. 1). Hybrid markets are those that exhibit characteristics of both business prospects and consumers. Hybrid prospects are consumers who exhibit many of the behaviors shared by business prospects or vice versa.

An example of a classic hybrid market is SOHOs—small office/home office businesses. These are for the most part self-employed people working at home or a small rented office. Typically they work alone. Some have a small staff.

Technically, since they are business owners, selling to SOHOs is B2B marketing. But SOHOs often behave more like individual consumers than corporate executives, engineers, or IT professionals.

For a corporate middle manager, the purchase of an expensive color digital printer may indeed be a largely dispassionate decision: one of my tasks she must contend with that week.

The SOHO is more likely to agonize over this purchase decision. The expense of the equipment is much more of an emotional issue, since it is coming out of the SOHO's pocket: he may have to decide between buying the printer vs. sending his kid to camp that summer. In addition, the SOHO may cultivate a personal excitement from this purchase (having coveted but never owning office equipment this high-tech or costly before) that the corporate employee does not feel.

Farmers are another hybrid market. The family farm is their legacy and livelihood, and there are few issues more emotionally charged than keeping it as a growing concern and passing it on to the children. Yet, a farm is a business, and therefore farmers are, strictly speaking, a B2B and not a consumer market.

I am unaware of any authoritative study on whether business-to-business marketing (and marketing to hybrid markets that exhibit some B2B characteristics) works better when it is reduced to the bare essential facts or written on a personal and emotional level. So I can only relate what I have found during my three decades as a B2B copywriter. And based on that long experience, here is what I believe works in B2B copy as a rule:

>> Business-to-business prospects are far less dispassionate about their jobs and industries than is often imagined. For example, I attended a technical seminar years ago where two telecommunications managers both turned red in the face and nearly came to

blows in a heated argument about whether TDMA or CDMA was the better platform for wireless communications.

>> The business prospect buys not only for his company but for his own personal benefit, and the two are sometimes at odds. Often a prospect will specify a product that may not be the optimum solution for his company's problem if he believes it will personally make his life easier or his employment more secure. This is why for years the maxim in IT was *no IT manager ever got fired for buying an IBM product that didn't work*. Even if another brand had superior features or better price/performance, IBM was the safer choice for IT buyers who answered to senior management.

>> While B2B prospects can be engaged and sold emotionally, once that engagement takes place, B2B prospects require much more rational evidence to support their buying decisions than consumers.

So the answer to our question "Are B2B prospects devoid of emotion?" is decidedly "no." On the contrary, and despite what they themselves may say, much of B2B buying is motivated by emotional reasons rather than logical facts.

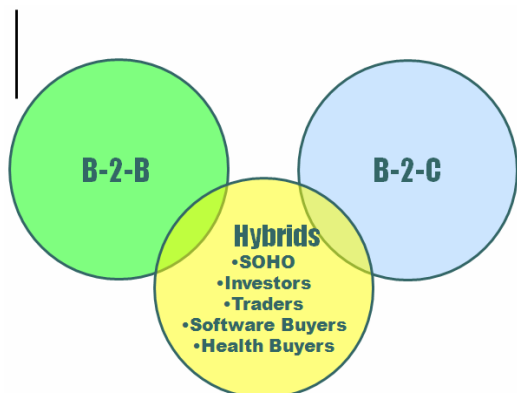
However, the emotion in B2B marketing typically comes in the front-end of the sale, which involves attention-getting and engagement. This is the place in the B2B sales cycle where emotion-driven consumer advertising techniques maximize marketing effectiveness. An example is the current TV campaign for Macintosh vs. Microsoft, where Apple computers are positioned as cooler, friendlier, and problem-free.

Once emotion hooks the B2B prospect, and he begins a serious evaluation of your product, logic and intellect take over. He gradually shifts from an emotional buyer (though

residue of his emotional reaction to your marketing stays with him throughout the sales cycle) and increasingly toward a rational mode of decision-making.

At this stage, the prospect is performing due diligence. He has to make sure the product can perform the functions required, fits the application’s requirements, is compatible with his current infrastructure, has the proper specifications, and can handle the buyer’s application. Here is where traditional informational, fact-based, content-rich B2B marketing—data sheets, brochures, white papers, podcasts, and Webinars—are most useful to buyers, because they contain answers to the buyer’s due-diligence research questions.

Fig. 1. The three markets: B2B, B2C, hybrid.



Marketing with Case Studies

According to copywriter Heather Sloan, case studies are often more effective than brochures and traditional sales collateral. Why?

“Everyone loves a story,” explains Heather. “An old adage says, ‘A picture is worth a thousand words.’ Never did this wisdom ring truer than in sales conversations and

marketing pieces. Stories paint pictures. Stories evoke emotions. Stories are memorable. Stories give your presentations sticking power. The easiest way to tell a marketing story is by case study.”

A case study is a product success story. It tells how a company solved a problem using a specific product, process, method, or idea. As with other marketing techniques, case studies fluctuate in popularity: while almost any company can profitably market with case studies, an informal survey of B2B Websites shows that most companies don't take full advantage of the power of case study marketing.

While case studies need not adhere to any one formula, here are some guidelines. The average case study is relatively brief: one or two sides of an 8½ by 11-inch page, or approximately 800 to 1,500 words. More complex or in-depth case studies can run 2,000 to 2,500 words.

An effective case study makes the reader want to learn more about the product it features. It's a soft-sell proposition designed to compel your prospects to request more detailed information. If you've mirrored the reader's problem successfully, the case study will propel them deeper into the sales funnel and closer to buying.

For the most part, case studies are not overly technical: they are written in a style similar to that of a magazine feature article. The intent of a case study is not to present in-depth minutia and analytical data, but to briefly describe how a product or service can effectively address and solve a particular problem.

You needn't be creative or reinvent the wheel when creating a case study. Most case studies follow some variation of this time-tested outline:

1. Who is the customer?
2. What was the problem? How was it hurting the customer's business?
3. What solutions did they look at and ultimately reject, and why?
4. Why did they choose our product as the solution?
5. Describe the implementation of the product, including any problems and how they were solved.
6. How and where does the customer use the product?
7. What are the results and benefits they are getting?
8. Would they recommend it to others and why?

"We don't have formal guidelines for case studies," says Mark Rosenzweig, editor-in-chief of *Chemical Processing*, a trade publication that has been running case study articles for decades. "Generally we're looking for a relatively recent installation, say within the last two years, of innovative technology. What issues prompted the installation? What did it involve? What results have been achieved? We're generally looking for 1,500-2,000 words."

Because case studies are presented in a story format, readers are naturally more inclined to take interest—especially if the story has some sort of benefit to them. Unlike sales presentations, case studies are all about showing how a product or service works, rather than telling. Since the product benefits are extolled by an actual user—and not the manufacturer—the claims are more believable.

By using a satisfied customer as an example, a case study essentially demonstrates how well your product works. Rather than present a pile of facts and figures, you tell an engaging story that vividly shows your product's effectiveness.

An equally strong selling point is the level of empathy a case study creates between your prospects and your satisfied customers. People tend to identify with people like themselves. Prospects feel far more at ease listening to their peers. They relate better, because they often share the same issues and problems.

The reader also believes case studies more than other sales literature. They are skeptical of ads and find brochures full of puffery, and even podcasts and company blogs self-serving. But in a case study, a customer who has no motive or financial incentive to praise the product does so, creating instant credibility.

What makes case studies so attractive to marketers and B2B prospects alike is that they're based on real-life experiences. Case studies are viewed as credible, third-party endorsements that carry a high degree of believability. That gives case studies a big advantage over traditional advertising, which consumers often view with skepticism.

A survey by Forrester Research Inc. shows that 71 percent of buyers base their decisions on trust and believability. Relating your customers' positive experiences with your product is one of the best ways to establish credibility in the marketplace. Giving your customers confidence in what you're offering dramatically increases the likelihood they'll do business with you.

One of the best sources of candidates for case studies is the sales force. However, salespeople prefer to spend their time selling. They are often indifferent to marketing communications and view participating in case studies as an aggravation with no direct reward to them.

You can get salespeople excited about finding case study candidates by offering them tangible incentives: the sales rep gets cash, merchandise, or a travel incentive if her candidate is chosen and profiled in a case study. When offered a nice incentive, the sales force suddenly gets excited about the case study candidate search. The incentive does not have to be huge, but it should be desirable—a new iPod, for example.

To prepare the case study, a writer interviews the person in the customer organization who is most involved in the application. For a small business, this may be the owner; for a larger company, it could be a plant manager or engineer. Before the writer calls, the vendor salesperson or account manager handling that customer should call and make sure the customer is willing and even eager to participate. Case studies written about reluctant or hostile users are difficult to create and rarely successful.

During the interview, get as many good quotations as possible. Use these quotations in the case study text and attribute them to the person being interviewed. Reason: the quotations in published case studies can do double duty as testimonials. Tip: If the subject is not saying exactly what you want him to say, use the “So are you saying” technique. Say to the subject, “So are you saying that...” followed by the statement you want him to make. If he answers “yes, that’s what I am saying” you can attribute your phrasing to the subject.

Often prospects are vague with their answers, and it is up to the interviewer/writer to wring the specifics out of the interview. Whenever possible, get the subject to give you numbers, so claims and results can be specific.

For instance, if the subject says the product reduces energy costs, but can't say by how much, pin him down: "Did it reduce energy consumption more than 10 percent? More than 100 percent?" He will give you a guesstimate, which you can use as an approximate figure; i.e., "The XYZ system reduced plant energy consumption by over 10%."

Before the case study can be released, the subject of the case study—the person you interviewed—must approve and sign off on the case study. Keep these releases on file. If the subject takes a job with a different company, you may lose track of him. So you can't afford to lose track of his signed permission form. Otherwise, if your authorization to use the case study is questioned, and you can't produce a signed release, you may have to remove that case study from your site.

Ask subjects of case studies whether they are willing to serve as reference accounts. That way, a prospect whose needs relate to a particular case study can in fact speak with the product user featured in that case study. Check your reference account list periodically to make sure names and numbers are current, and update as needed.

4 Simple Steps to Writing SEO Copy That Both Your Prospects and the Search Engines Love

It's ironic: SEO/SEM consultants are springing up all over the place, like dandelions in spring. Yet none of them seem to agree much on the best practices, methods, and standards for optimizing Websites.

As a result, I've found that the worst thing about optimizing my Website for search engines, which I am doing now, is the often conflicting and even contradictory advice I get from the various SEO specialists I hire or talk with.

For instance, one SEO consultant who looked at the Website for my freelance copywriting business, www.bly.com, gave me these very specific guidelines for writing a page about my freelance copywriting services optimized for the keyword phrase "freelance copywriter."

Specifically, his instructions were:

- Freelance copywriter should be the first words on the page.
- Freelance copywriter should be included near the beginning of the first sentence.
- Freelance copywriter should be near the end of the second paragraph.
- Freelance copywriter should be in a subhead between the second and third paragraph.
- Freelance copywriter should be near the end of the third paragraph.
- Freelance copywriter should be in a subhead between the third and fourth paragraph.
- Freelance copywriter should be in the fourth paragraph.
- In the last paragraph, freelance copywriter is in the first sentence and at the very end of the last sentence.

The SEO consultant told me that to follow these specifications would result in a home page that search engines would like. But as a copywriter, I could easily see that any copy written to fully conform to these rigid guidelines would sound incredibly

stilted and awkward, making me look incompetent. So I asked a few of my colleagues whether the above guidelines are in fact right or as nutty as I believed them to be.

“My advice is always to write for people, not search engines,” says copywriter Dianna Huff. “Yes, it's good to place the correct keywords in the body copy, and yes, it's correct to place your most important keyword at the beginning of the title tag and in the headline of the page.

“However, you don't *have* to do this to achieve high rankings. And you certainly should not do it if your copy ends up sounding spammy. If you want a site to rank well, you do have to optimize it, but not at the expense of the marketing objectives. Copy should be written for people, not search engines.”

“Over the years, the tactic I found that works best is to have the most targeted keywords towards the top of the page and work your way down, like a reverse pyramid,” says Internet marketing consultant Wendy Montesdeoca. “The entire page should be keyword dense, and there can be some repetition, but from my understanding of search engine spiders, they like more organic content.

“So what I found that works is to make a list of the top 10-15 keywords and use that naturally, organically, and reader friendly in the content. And of course use your top five keywords in the alt, meta, and title tags. For instance, if there's a picture of Bob, don't just have ‘Bob Bly’—have ‘Bob Bly, freelance copywriter.’”

Adds Montesdeoca: “There are many variables that affect SEO, and keyword density is just one. There's also infrastructure (i.e. site maps, robots.txt, etc.), proper and unique tagging with relevant keywords, relevant content, relevant inbound and

outbound links, internal links, link variety (i.e. Websites, blogs, forums), videos on Website, special tags (H1, bold), and registering the site with directories.

On Wendy's advice, we just added a site map to www.bly.com. She says that Google ranks glossaries high, so we also posted a new glossary of Internet marketing terms to my site specifically for SEO purposes.

"In my opinion, although algorithms change, it will most likely always be the same core elements," says Wendy. "Just the weight the search engines place on each element will vary. For instance, sites using WordPress get spidered by search engines more quickly."

Do you want to write Web pages that sparkle with style, persuade your prospects, and please search engine spiders all at the same time? Let me share with you a simple 4-step SEO copywriting process that has worked for me:

1—Keyword research. The first step is to come up with a list of keywords and phrases for which you want to optimize the page you are writing. These should be the keywords and phrases people use when searching for your product or service on the Internet.

You can brainstorm what these words might be, then use any number of online tools to find out which ones are the most popular. I use www.wordtracker.com. For detailed instructions on how to conduct keyword research and discovery visit www.thekeywordmoneymachine.com.

2—Write the best copy you can, for the human reader. Just sit down and write the best damn copy you can about the topic. Don't even think about keywords as

you write. Concentrate 100 percent on sounding like one human being talking to another about a subject he is enthusiastic about and wants to share.

3—Insert keywords from your keyword list. Now go back and insert keywords from your list into the copy, wherever and as frequently as you can, without disturbing the style, tone, meaning, and persuasiveness of the copy. If forcing a keyword in disrupts the flow of the copy, don't do it.

For instance, on www.bly.com, one line of the original home page copy read: "Call on freelance copywriter and Internet marketing strategist Bob Bly." I like the sound of strategist. But our keywords research showed that people search for Internet marketing consultants, not strategists. So we changed the copy to read "Internet marketing consultant."

In another paragraph, we talked about my experience as a copywriter, saying that I know "how to craft landing pages that drive conversions through the roof." Once again, I like the variety of using "craft" as a verb. But to optimize the sentence with the keyword "copy," I changed it to "how to write potent, compelling copy for landing pages that drive conversions through the roof." Another keyword phrase that came up in our research was "make money online," and so we added that to the sentence: "landing pages that drive conversions through the roof—and make more money online."

One of the keyword phrases that ranked highly in our research was "online copywriting." Anytime you can replace a non-keyword phrase with a keyword phrase, with no harm to the copy, you should. So we changed "they call on Bob Bly to write their

most important online marketing campaigns” (people were not searching for “campaigns”) to “they call on Bob Bly when they need online copywriting that sells.”

4—Write keyword rich meta tags for each Web page. The most important meta tags are the title and description tags. The title tag is what your visitors see at the top of their browser windows when they visit your site, as well as what they see in their bookmark lists. Failure to put strategic keywords in the title tag can result in pages being poorly ranked.

When your Website comes up in a Google search, the description tag is what the user sees on the search engine results page (SERP). It should incorporate strategic keywords and clearly communicate what you offer, who it is for, and the key benefit. Your major keywords should also be placed in the keywords meta tag, though Google pays less attention to the keyword meta tag than to the title and description tags.

When you go to www.bly.com, you will see that I violated the rules of SEO copywriting by not having the keyword “copywriting” in the headline. But not revealing what you are selling in the headline can be an effective way to engage the reader, so in this case I chose the human reader over the search engine spider. You can visit the site and decide whether it works.

What Works Best for B2B Lead Generation: Inbound or Outbound Marketing?

Which works best for business-to-business lead generation—inbound or outbound marketing? By *inbound*, we basically mean prospects contact us “out of the

blue,” as it were, because they somehow know about us or find us. *Outbound* marketing requires us to actively reach out and touch prospects proactively; e.g., with a postcard, telemarketing call, e-mail, or magazine advertisement.

The question of which marketing—inbound or outbound—generates the best leads can’t really be answered authoritatively, because it’s too broad. If we say the winner is “inbound,” does that mean *every* type of inbound communication produces better leads than every type of outbound communication? Such is not the case.

A better way to approach the question is to examine each inbound and outbound marketing channel, and evaluate the quality of leads produced on a case by case basis.

In table 1, I list the major marcom methods of business-to-business lead generation, indicate which I consider inbound vs. outbound, and rate them on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 = low, 5 = high) for quality of leads and ROI (you may disagree with some of my choices and ratings). “Quality of leads” mainly measures whether the marketing communication attracts prospects that fit your customer profile, have a need for your product or service, and are predisposed to buy from you instead of your competitors.

“ROI” measures whether the leads turn into orders, generating revenues far in excess of the time and money spent to obtain them. Note: these ratings are my own and are to a degree subjective, based on three decades of experience in B2B marketing; they are not based on statistically valid research.

The biggest controversy in lead generation is traffic generated by organic search. Some marketing writers erroneously tell us that organic search leads are the best leads. They reason that prospects would not be searching your keyword unless they were

researching a product purchase. Therefore, organic search brings you good prospects: those in shopping mode.

The quality of organic search leads depends, however, on the keywords being searched. We find that searches performed on broad keyword terms (e.g., “limousines”) attract visitors who are in the early stages of product research, and therefore not hot leads. When a search is performed on highly specific keywords (e.g., “used Lincoln Continental limousine for sale in New York area”), the prospect is most likely farther along in the research process and closer to making a buying decision.

The reason I do not rate organic search leads higher in Table 1 is that, while these prospects may be predisposed to buying, they are in no way predisposed to buying from *you*. Indeed, the very fact that they are doing a Google search on a generic keyword probably means they have little brand loyalty. As a freelance copywriter, some of the worst leads I get are people searching for freelance copywriters on Google. These prospects often view copywriting as a commodity service and are likely to choose low price over experience and quality, as many Internet shoppers do in numerous categories.

Conversely, the best leads service professionals get are typically people who call or e-mail us because they know us by reputation and may even be fans of our work. By far the most qualified leads I get are prospects who have read my books and articles, or heard me speak at a seminar, conference, or workshop.

Creating and disseminating content related to your product or industry is a proven technique for establishing yourself as a thought leader in your field or niche.

Therefore, a prospect who is an avid reader or student of your writings and talks is predisposed to doing business with you, because they consider you a guru or expert.

I rated social networking a 4 in lead quality. Networking has always produced good leads, and social networks are basically networking moved online. So far, however, most B2B marketers have been unsuccessful in establishing hard metrics to measure social media ROI. Some argue that the ROI has to be high because social networking is virtually free. But they neglect ROTI, return on time invested. A survey by Michael Stelzner of White Paper Source found that experienced social media users spend two to four hours per day using it, which means an investment of up to half their work week.

Direct mail has long been considered the “work horse” of lead-generating B2B marketing communications. Ten years ago, I would have rated the lead quality a 4, because postal list selects enable narrow targeting, so you can mail only to prospects who fit your ideal customer’s profile. I downgraded direct mail lead quality from a 4 to a 3, because lately in B2B, I find prospects with more urgent needs respond to electronic or phone marketing, while those whose need is not as immediate are more likely to mail back a business reply card requesting your catalog, brochure, or white paper.

ROI of direct-mail generated leads is a 4, because the leads you do close often make significant purchases in the multiple thousands of dollars. You can as a rule get from 10 to 25 percent or more of DM leads to take the next step in your buying cycle, whether agreeing to see your rep or sending you a purchase order. Direct mail that’s working usually generates a positive and significant ROI, producing revenues many times greater than the campaign cost.

E-mail gets a 3 in lead quality. You can target the right prospects. But Internet users have an element of distrust for e-mail, so a single e-mail isn't going to move prospects very far forward in the buying cycle.

ROI is a 5. That's because e-mail marketing is so cheap, even a few orders can give us an ROI equal to many multiples of the promotion cost. When you are renting opt-in e-lists, your cost per thousand can be \$200 or more. E-mailing your own list, depending on what service you use, is a fraction of a cent per name.

I also gave public relations an ROI rating of 5 because the cost is so minimal that any business generated usually pays for the PR campaign many times over. Lead quality of PR is a 4, because people believe and trust editorial content more so than marketing copy.

The point is that in the debate of outbound vs. inbound marketing, you simply cannot make a sweeping generalization about which is better. You must evaluate the lead quality and ROI of each marketing channel individually. Table 1 is a starting point. But the quality and ROI for each medium can vary greatly from industry to industry, even from company to company. My recommendation: test them, track results, do not repeat those that fail, and do more of the ones that do work.

Table 1. Marketing channel lead quality and ROI.

Key: 1 = low, 5 = high

Marketing channel	Category	Lead quality	ROI
Articles	Inbound	4	4

Blogs	Inbound	4	3
Books	Inbound	5	4
Direct mail	Outbound	3	4
E-mail marketing	Outbound	3	5
Organic search	Inbound	3	3
Pay-per-click advertising	Outbound*	4	3
PR	Inbound	4	5
Print advertising	Outbound	4	2
Seminars, live	Outbound	5	3
Social networking	Inbound	4	2
Telemarketing, inbound	Inbound	5	4
Telemarketing, outbound	Outbound	2	3
Tele-seminars	Outbound	4	4
Trade show exhibits	Outbound	2	2
Yellow Pages	Outbound	5	3
Webinars	Outbound	4	4
Websites	Inbound	3	3
White papers	Inbound	4	3

**I rank pay per click and other advertising as outbound because you are proactively placing advertisements to attract new business.*

Using Web Analytics to Drive Online Sales

Here is a conversation I have at least twice a month:

Client: “I want you to write copy to generate more orders on my Website.”

Me: “What’s the conversion rate of the page?”

Client: “We aren’t really sure.”

Me: “Why not?”

Client: “We don’t really measure it.”

Me: “Then how will you know whether our new copy has improved it?”

Client: [Dead silence]

Lord Kelvin, inventor of the Kelvin temperature scale, said: “When you can measure something and can express it in numbers, you know something about it.” Web metrics are the numbers that let you know something about your Website’s performance and ROI, and Web analytics are the software that lets you measure those numbers.

In the early days of the Internet, Websites were the online equivalent of sales brochures or general advertising: pages posted online to disseminate product information, establish an online presence, and help position the company in the marketplace.

Today's most successful Websites are the online equivalent of direct response marketing. They have specific marketing objectives and business goals, and their performance and sales can be precisely measured.

Measuring Web metrics is a critical step in determining whether a Website is producing a positive return on investment (ROI) and serving users in the manner intended. Web analytics is the study of user interaction with a Website by collecting information about what the visitor does. This data is tabulated and refined into reports and visual presentations to help analysts understand whether a Website is achieving a set of desired results.

There are dozens of different ways to measure Website performance by tracking metrics. Here are just a few of the key metrics marketers and Webmasters routinely measure using analytics tools:

- ▶ **Unique Visits**—how many people visit the Website per month, and not the total number of hits or clicks.
- ▶ **Page Views**—a measure of what pages on a site were seen the most. A large number of views indicates that the content on a page is of greater interest to visitors than content in other parts of the site.
- ▶ **Pages**—tells us which pages cause visitors to abandon the site. A high exit rate indicates the content on the page was of little interest to visitors.
- ▶ **Bounce rate**—how many people driven to the site from an external traffic source (organic search, pay-per-click, banner ads) viewed just one page of the site and then left—an indication of poor search optimization and lack of compelling content.

- ▶ **Stickiness**— how long people stay on a particular page or Website when they arrive. The longer they stay, the greater your chance of making a brand impression or sale.
- ▶ **Site Entry Points**—this metric tells you how people get into your site, and also the pathway they travel to reach your landing or transaction pages.
- ▶ **Keywords and Phrases** —tracking the source of traffic to determine which keywords and phrases people searched to find your site.
- ▶ **Conversion Rate**—percentage of visitors to a transaction page who take the indicated action, whether it's downloading a white paper or purchasing merchandise.
- ▶ **Click Density**—measures the amount of clicks on each area or “zone” of the Web page (including links, images, text, and white space) to show which spots users are active viewing and clicking, and which zones they ignore.

Analytics software can help Web developers determine where changes are needed, what content isn't effective, and whether the organization and navigation of the site is optimal. Some of the more popular analytics applications include Google Analytics, Omniture, and Web Trends Analytics.

Marketers and analysts who are responsible for using analytical data to make marketing and business decisions can also benefit from Web analytics. Reports on Web metrics generated by the analytics tool can help you understand how users are coming to the site, which segments of the site are driving revenues, and whether business objectives for the site are being met. For example, marketers need to know whether the

dollars being spent for Internet search keywords are increasing traffic, or how effectively recent site changes are driving visitors to an event registration.

Without analytics, online marketers can only guess what site visitors are looking for, what they read, and what drives them to action. By installing an analytics package to track Web metrics, you can measure user activity and learn what actually works on your site vs. what you *think* should work.

In addition, most analytics packages allow you to split traffic and test multiple versions of a landing page or other Web page. By doing A/B split or multi-variate tests, you can determine how each change on a given page affects important metrics. You then adopt the “winner” of the test as the new version of your Web page, thereby increasing site performance.

Analytics are of little value, however, unless you look at your analytics reports and also take appropriate action based on what they tell you. With stand-alone analytics, there is a lag, recently dubbed the “action chasm” by Forrester Research, between when the metrics are measured and when the analytics reports are read and acted upon. The longer the action chasm, the longer your Website continues to perform at subpar levels.

A relatively recent innovation in Web best practices, “integrated analytics”—fully integrating your analytics package with your content management system (CMS) and other Web applications—can help reduce the action chasm and implement analytics-based Web performance improvements faster. By integrating analytics with the CMS, content can be updated dynamically to optimize performance levels based on accurate reporting of actual user behavior and actions tracked by the analytics package.

“Seamless integration between analytics reports and the CMS enable performance-enhancing changes to be made to Web pages in real time,” says Brett Zucker, Chief Technology Officer of Bridgeline Software. “Because the content revisions are made based on actual user behavior they can significantly improve Website performance and ROI.”

Zucker’s software company uses Webinars as a lead-generation method, and depends on integrated analytics to improve Webinar registration page conversion rates, which is tracked using an analytics package integrated with the company’s CMS.

The CMS database records which employee authored each page on Bridgeline’s Website. If the analytics package determines that a Webinar landing page is not performing well, the CMS notifies the page author that changes are needed, and with the integrated CMS, he can make those improvements in real time.

The analytics chart can be time-stamped with the time and date the changes to the page were implemented, allowing Zucker and his team to compare the conversion rate before and after that date, enabling them to see on the analytics report whether the improvements to the landing page in fact boosted the conversion rate.

Many analytics packages are available today as applications served over the Web and accessed with a browser. While this is convenient, you subscribe to rather than own outright the Web-based analytics application.

Should you stop using the analytics package, you may lose all or most of your analytics data. Can’t you just export your data from one Web-based analytics package to

another? Theoretically yes, though Zucker says in reality “it is difficult if not impossible in many instances.”

An alternative is to license an analytics application for which you can buy a perpetual license. That way, you own the analytics package and all of your data residing within it.

5 Ways to Boost B2B Direct Mail Response Rates

I’m somewhat of an anomaly in the freelance copywriting business. I say this because I am one of a small group of copywriters who write a significant amount of direct mail for two distinct and different markets: consumer mail order marketers and business-to-business lead generation.

From this perspective, I’ve learned that the most knowledgeable direct mail practitioners are, by far, the large-volume consumer mail order marketers. There are two reasons why the Boardrooms and Agoras of the world know so much more than their B2B counterparts about what sends response rates through the roof.

First, when you mail millions of pieces a year, you can do a lot more testing. Only through testing do we learn what works—and what doesn’t.

Second, the consumer mail order marketers live and die by the power of their direct mail and online promotions. For their businesses to make money, they must perfect their copy, design, list selection, and offers.

By comparison, many B2B marketers do direct mail campaigns of only a few thousand pieces—and in narrow niche markets, only a few hundred pieces. With these

small quantities, the number of variables you can test is severely limited. And these small-volume B2B mailers typically rely on multiple marketing channels, of which direct mail is usually not the most significant.

Also, while lead-generation requires a definite skill set and knowledge base, it is somewhat less difficult than one-step promotions. With lead generation, the mailing just gets the prospect to express interest, but the sale is closed by a salesperson. In mail order, your direct mail package has to do the entire selling job.

To help improve your B2B direct mail results, here are five important direct mail lessons you can learn from your B2C direct marketing brethren:

1. Use a list broker. A surprising number of B2B marketing directors tell me they rent mailing lists directly from trade publications and other list owners, and do not use a list broker. A significant minority were either not aware of the existence of list brokers or did not know what list brokers did or why to use them instead of renting lists directly from owners.

You should always use a list broker. They do the list research for you for free, because you do not pay them unless you rent from them. Even then, their service costs nothing, because the list owner, not the list user, pays the broker's commission. It costs you the same to rent a list from the broker as it would to rent it directly from the owner.

When you want to do a mailing to a particular industry or market segment, resist the temptation to simply call the leading trade journal in that industry and rent their subscriber list. Instead, call a list broker and ask for mailing list recommendations.

You might feel certain that the trade journal subscriber list is the best and only list you should use, but more often than not, this assumption is wrong. List brokers can find lists reaching your market that you didn't know existed, and often, these outperform the subscriber list you were certain would work best.

2. Test multiple lists. Lists that seemingly reach the same group of prospects can vary wildly in response rates. Once, for a B2B software publisher, we tested the top two trade journals in their niche market—two publications that, to me, looked and read almost identical. Yet when the mail results came back, one publication's subscriber list had generated three times the response of the other—proving that you can't assume you know which list is best and that you must test.

For most B2B offers, assuming an average response rate of one percent, you can get a statistically valid test result mailing to a minimum of 1,500 names in each list. Response devices must be key-coded so you can track results.

3. The importance of the offers. When I first started in B2B marketing 30 years ago, the majority of ads and mailers I saw didn't even have an offer—just the advertiser's address and phone number. Today B2B marketers know the importance of offers. That's a good thing, since I have seen one offer out-pull another offer for the same product at much as tenfold.

The most effective method of increasing the response rate of a lead generation campaign is to use a "bait piece." The term *bait piece* refers to free information the advertiser offers in its mailing piece or e-mail to generate a higher number of inquiries. The word *bait* is used because the free content is given not just to educate the reader (as

the reader is led to believe) but to "hook" the reader by generating a response or inquiry, which can then be followed up by telephone or field sales personnel.

4. Emphasize your offer, not your brand. Many B2B marketers, especially marcom managers at large corporations, focus—perhaps excessively so—on branding and messaging in their communications.

But according to a study by the Kern Organization, reported in the April 2008 issue of this magazine, marketing campaigns that emphasize the offer instead of the brand generate approximately 10 times more orders and sales than those focusing on brand.

Performance Degradation as Brand Content Increases and Offer Content Decreases			
Copy Platform	Brand Content	Offer Content	Approximate Cost Per Sale
Primarily Offer-Driven	10%	90%	\$50 - \$100
Offer Leads—Brand Follows	25%	75%	\$200 - \$250
Brand Leads—Offer Follows	75%	25%	\$400 - \$600
Primarily Brand-Driven	90%	10%	\$800 - \$1,000

The wisdom of stressing the offer in advertisements has been known for well over a century. In 1902, three years before he wrote his ground-breaking paper on the theory of relativity, a young Albert Einstein ran newspaper ads offering his services as a tutor in math and physics. The ads prominently offered a “free trial lesson”—showing that free offers really are a smart marketing tactic.

5. Develop a powerful USP. The idea of the unique selling proposition or USP was originated by Rosser Reeves in his book *Reality in Advertising*.

Reeves said that to sell your product, you had to clearly differentiate it from other products in its category, and the best way to do this was with a strong USP.

According to Reeves, a winning USP has to show how your product is different or better than the competition, and how this advantage benefits the buyer. In addition, the advantage and its benefit must be significant, not trivial—strong enough to get prospects to buy your product over others.

I heard a great story the other day about a USP for auto insurance. An insurance agent told parents of teen drivers that, if they bought auto insurance from him, he would give them his home phone number. If the teen ever was too drunk to drive, he could call the agent at home, and the agent would come pick him up and drive him home to ensure his safety. No other agent offered this advantage in his market, so it was the major selling point, or USP, of buying auto insurance from this agent.

A New Copywriting Formula: the 4 C's

I confess: I love copywriting formulas!

Why? For two reasons.

First, the best formulas are simple, easy to remember, and rapidly mastered. Knowing them can enable you to create copy that's twice as effective—in half the time.

Second, the reason that they became formulas in the first place is that—they work!

Old-timers like me know there are literally dozens of time-tested copywriting formulas out there.

Yet most of today's newbie copywriters have only heard of a handful...and have truly mastered even fewer.

Why is that bad? Because if you...or your copywriter...don't know all the copywriting formulas, you could unnecessarily be wasting your time reinventing the wheel with each promotion you write. You could also be writing inferior copy that diminishes your sales.

In my day, no self-respecting copywriter or marketer worth his salt wrote copy without first studying the classic copywriting formulas and committing them to memory. What are some of the most useful of these formulas?

One of the oldest copywriting formulas—and perhaps the most famous—is AIDA. AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. It says persuasive copy must first grab the reader's attention...get him interested in what you are selling...create a desire to own the product...and ask for action.

AIDA is one of my absolute favorite formulas, and I've been using it to write winning promotions for three decades. Yet in seminars today, when I ask attendees whether they know the AIDA formula, not one in ten people raise their hand.

Less well-known than AIDA...but in its way almost as powerful...is the largely forgotten SELWAB formula. SELWAB is a mnemonic device to remind marketers what's most important to the prospect. It stands for "start every letter with a benefit."

Another useful and little-known copywriting formula is Star, Chain, Hook. The formula says every letter needs a "Star" to capture attention...a "Chain" to pull them

along through the sales presentation without losing interest...and a “Hook” that holds them until they are ready to take action.

Another copywriting formula I use—one of my own invention and never before published—is the “Secret of the 4 C’s.” It says that every good piece of copy is: clear, concise, compelling, and credible. Let’s take a look at each element of the 4 C’s formula in a bit more detail.

The first C is **clarity**. What you write must be clear. Not just to you or the client or the marketing director or the product manager. But to the prospects you hope to sell the product to.

Ralph Waldo Emerson defines clarity this way: “It is not enough to write so that you can be understood. You must write so that you cannot be misunderstood.”

The typical advice given in writing classes about clarity is to use small words, short sentences, and short paragraphs, and this is sensible advice. Breaking long documents up into sensibly organized sections—each with their own heading—also helps.

But clear writing stems primarily from clear thinking, and the converse is also true. If you don’t really understand what you are talking about, your writing will be weak, rambling, and obtuse. On the other hand, when you understand your subject matter, know your audience, and have a useful and important idea you want to convey, the clarity of your writing will inevitably reflect your well-thought-out idea.

The second C is **concise**. Now, you may be thinking that “concise” might apply to other types of writing, but not to direct marketing, because direct response favors long copy.

But concise and brief are not synonyms. “Brief” means “short.” If you want to be brief, you simply cut words until you reduce the composition to the word count desired.

“Concise” means telling the complete story in the fewest possible words. Direct response copy is long because, to make a sale or generate a qualified lead, we often have to convey a lot of information. But in good direct response copy, we convey that information in the fewest possible words—no rambling, no redundancy, no needless repetition, no using three words when one will do.

The third C is **compelling**. It is not enough that the copy is easy to read. It must be so interesting, engaging, and informative that the reader cannot put it down—or at minimum, feels compelled to at least skim the document to glean the important points.

A major reason why so much copy is not compelling is that it is written about things that interest the marketer, not the prospect.

The marketer is interested in his product, his organization, and in particular his “messaging”—key points he wants to get across to the reader.

Unfortunately, the reader is not interested in any of these things. The reader is more interested in the reader—his problems, needs, fears, concerns, worries, challenges, and desires.

As copywriter Don Hauptman has often said, the more your copy focuses on the prospect instead of the product, the more compelling it will be. The product is only relevant insofar as it addresses one of the reader's core concerns or desires.

The fourth C is **credible**. Copywriter Herschel Gordon Lewis has noted that we live in an age of skepticism: simply put, prospects are disinclined to believe what you say precisely because you are trying to sell them something.

Fortunately, there are a number of useful tools at your disposal for building your credibility and overcoming the reader's skepticism.

Your prospects are skeptical of salespeople but are more inclined to trust advice from recognized experts in a given field or industry. Therefore, you can overcome skepticism by establishing yourself or your organization as a thought leader in your market.

One way to do this is by publishing a lot of content. Prospects are distrustful of advertising, but are somewhat more trusting of information sources such as Websites, white papers, and magazine articles.

Become an active publisher of valuable content in your niche. Communicate your key messages in documents that do not look like sales promotions, but are published in editorial formats such as Webcasts and white papers. Not only will your prospects find the messages more credible when they are presented as content rather than sales copy. But these publications accelerate your ascent to guru status in your niche.

The most obvious way to build credibility is with customer testimonials, and if you are not using them widely and proactively in your marketing, you are missing an easy and effective means of overcoming skepticism. Also, don't overlook the opportunity

to have customers give you video testimonials at your events, especially seminars you are videotaping. Post customer video testimonials on your Website and landing pages.

Another obvious but often overlooked means of building credibility is to offer a strong money-back guarantee and then, when customers ask for refunds, to grant them quickly and with a smile, without question or argument. Rude, slow, or non-responsive customer service can quickly destroy any credibility you have gained with your customer. In fact, you should take steps to resolve customer problems beyond what is required, so that the customer feels you personally care about him and that he is getting more for his money than he has any right to expect.

What's Working in B2B Marketing

At my request, Editor Hallie Mummert conducted an online survey of Target Marketing's readership. The goal: to find out what the best practices are in business-to-business marketing today. Here's what we found...

To begin with, 94 percent of Target Marketing (TM) readers are involved with B2B market. Fifty-three percent do B2B onlonly, while 41 percent do a mix of B2B and B2C.

*** Brochures are not dead.* New media pundits like to observe that print is dead in general and in particular, brochures are an antiquated marketing medium. But 9 out of 10 TM readers use brochures in some form. Seventy-three percent still have traditional printed brochures for their products and services. Eleven percent use white papers

instead of brochures to communicate product information. Six percent have brochures that are available for download only but are not print documents. Only one in ten TM readers agreed with the statement “brochures are old hat and we don’t produce them much anymore.”

What this means is that your competitors more than likely have sales brochures. These brochures are used in inquiry fulfillment and by salespeople. Without a solid brochure for your company, product, or service, you are at a disadvantage in your inquiry fulfillment and sales efforts.

*** Blogs do not rule.* Wherever you turn, you read another story about the increasing influence of blogs in our society. Yet in business-to-business marketing, blogs are underused.

According to our survey of TM subscribers, less than one in three B2B companies sponsor official corporate blogs that the marketing department or other areas are responsible for. Only eight percent say that employees who have their own blogs may blog on company time.

A hefty 57 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement “We don’t operate company blogs or worry much about blogs in our marketing.” Only 16 percent of PR departments targeted important blogs with special public relations efforts. And only 18 percent of marketers surveyed said they monitor other people’s blogs to see what is said about them and respond accordingly to correct erroneous information and misperceptions.

According to this admittedly limited survey (we had 131 respondents), most B2B marketers don't view blogs as being terribly significant in the scheme of things. That's surprising, given all the hoopla about blogs in the business press.

*** Dualpurpose Websites.* The majority of marketers surveyed said that both branding and conversion are important goals of their Websites.

Sixty-nine percent said that "branding our products and organization online" is an important consideration when creating and maintaining the company Website. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed said an important goal was "increasing conversion rates to generate more leads and sales."

I was shocked by the answer to the question concerning SEO. Only 60 percent of the marketers surveyed said optimizing their Website to increase search engine rankings was an important consideration when creating the site. I would have thought the figure closer to 100 percent. This suggests that a significant number of B2B marketers (4 out of 10) generate new business primarily other than through Web search.

Content marketing is another hot topic on the marketing lecture circuit, and TM subscribers are sold on its value: 65 percent of those surveyed agreed that it was important to "create value-added content to establish us as thought leaders in our market." Only 53 percent agreed with the statement that "having great copy and design on our Web pages is an important consideration when creating a Website."

*** Videos underused.* Another area where TM readers seem to be behind the leading edge is online video. Fully 57 percent of those surveyed said they do not do

much with video. Only 23 percent post videos on YouTube, and only 11 percent do viral video marketing. Fewer than one in three is responsible for “creating marketing videos for our Website.”

This strikes me as odd, because videos have been a popular B2B marketing tool for decades. Before the invention of the video camera, we would shoot them in 16 millimeter and call them “industrial films.”

My point is that your company may already have an archive of perfectly usable footage. It’s a waste to let them sit in a file drawer. Instead, get more mileage out of your video archives by putting them up on your Website and directing visitors to them. If they are too dated, reshoot.

*** The truth about social networking.* Judging by the amount of coverage social networking gets in the media; you’d think it was the greatest thing since sliced bread. But TM readers don’t think so.

Only 18 percent of marketers surveyed agreed with the statement “social media is an integral and active part of our overall marketing,” and only 24 percent said they are “planning to become very active in social networking.” Four out of ten marketers said they do some social networking but it is only an ancillary part of their marketing program, and eight percent felt it was a waste of time and effort.

Which social networking site is most important to B2B marketers? Of those surveyed, 42 percent network on LinkedIn, 39 percent have a Facebook page, 30 percent use Twitter, and only five percent have a MySpace page.

The survey seems to indicate that social networking, while potentially valuable, is not the marketing “silver bullet” that new media evangelists have made it out to be. **

Content is king. Another trend the business media love reporting on is the rise of content marketing. In this case, their emphasis seems congruent with the activities of TM subscribers.

Eighty-three percent of those surveyed said either that content marketing compliments and works in tandem with traditional marketing communications (71 percent) or that content is replacing traditional marketing as the primary selling tool (12 percent). Only 15 percent of marketers said they don’t really do content marketing. None of those surveyed agreed with the statement “content is a waste of time.”

** *What marketers value most.* We asked marketers which marketing skills and knowledge areas are the most highly valued by their organization. The answers: content marketing (68 percent), copywriting (59 percent), search engine optimization (50 percent), graphic design (49 percent), analytics (42 percent), keyword research and discovery (37 percent), and HTML design (27 percent).

The two most valued skills were content marketing and copywriting. This finding is contrary to those who say we live in an age where “no one reads copy” anymore.

Finally, we asked TM subscribers how they see the role of marketing viewed in their organization today. Ninety-two percent said either marketing has grown in importance (69 percent) or has not changed in importance (23 percent). Only four percent felt that marketing has less status and prestige than it used to.

7 Rules for Content Marketers

If you asked me to name the two biggest trends in business-to-business marketing today, I'd have to say social media and content marketing. And social media seems to work best when it's based on content.

In a recent survey of *Target Marketing* readers, 83 percent said either that content marketing compliments and works in tandem with traditional marketing communications (71 percent) or that content is replacing traditional marketing as the primary selling tool (12 percent). Only 15 percent of marketers said they don't really do content marketing. None of those surveyed agreed with the statement "content is a waste of time." Joe Pulizzi, chief content officer of Junta42, says that the average business marketer spends 30 percent of their marketing budget on the creation and execution of content, and that 56 percent of marketers increased their content marketing spending last year.

But content marketing isn't just "publishing information." There's way too much information available today. Your prospects are drowning in information. But they are starved for knowledge: ideas on how to solve problems and methods for doing their jobs better.

In addition, you're not in business to publish and give away content; you're in business to sell your products and services. Unless publishing content helps you achieve that goal, it's a waste of your time and money.

Here are 7 guidelines that can help make your content marketing efforts more productive and effective:

1—Narrow the topic. There is no benefit to cramming every last fact and bit of information about a subject into your white paper or other content marketing piece; the prospect can get all of the same data and sources using Google.

Content marketing works best when you narrow the topic. The narrower the topic, the more in-depth and useful your content can be.

For instance, let's say you are an industrial gas manufacturer creating a 10-page white paper on safety for plant managers. If the title is "Plant Safety," you cannot hope to cover that topic in even the most superficial way; entire books have been written on that subject.

On the other hand, you could produce a very useful white paper on "Safety Tips for Handling Compressed Gas Cylinders." It's a topic plant personnel want and need to know more about. And with your vast experience, you can probably offer some tips and methods that are new to the reader.

2—Target the prospect. The more narrowly you target the audience for your white paper or other content marketing piece, the better able you are to deliver content that is truly useful to them.

For our example of the white paper on tips for handling compressed cylinder gas, are you targeting plant managers or plant operators? Plant managers might be more interested in cylinder inventory and control, while plant operators want nuts-and-bolts

tips for handling the cylinders. A CFO would want to look at reducing costly gas cylinder accidents, while the CEO might be concerned about liability.

3—Determine the objective. Remember, we are not in the business of giving away free information for our health. There has to be a purpose for the content we are spending time and money to produce – content no one pays us for.

For instance, a software publisher found that when he lost sales, it wasn't because prospects bought a competitor's products with better features and benefits. It was because the software in that category is expensive, and prospects, even though they wanted the functionality the software delivers, couldn't cost-justify its purchase.

To solve this problem, the marketer published a white paper titled "Calculating Return on Investment for Purchase of XYZ Software." It demonstrated that, even though the software was expensive, the time and labor savings it provided could pay back its cost in 6 to 8 months. Salespeople used the white paper to overcome the objection of "it costs too much."

4—Educate the reader. Years ago, Duncan Hines ran an ad in women's magazines about its chocolate cake mix. The headline was, "The secret to moisture, richer chocolate cake." Why was that headline so effective? Because it implied you would learn something useful just by reading the ad, regardless of whether you bought the product.

Generic advice won't cut it in content marketing today. The prospect does not want to read the same old tips he's seen a dozen times before repeated in your white paper.

Chances are, you possess proprietary knowledge about your products and its applications. Share some of this knowledge in your white papers. Give your reader specific advice and ideas that everyone else isn't already telling him.

Don't be afraid that by telling too much, you'll eliminate the prospect's need for your product or service. Quite the opposite: when they learn the effort that solving their problem entails, and see that you clearly have the needed expertise, they will turn to you for help.

5—Deliver value. When you can, include some highly practical, actionable tips the prospect can implement immediately. The more valuable your content is to prospects, the more readily your content marketing program will achieve its stated objective. It's like fast food stands giving away food samples at the mall: the better the free food tastes, the more likely the consumer is to purchase a snack or meal.

6—Set the specs. Outline the characteristics, features, and specifications the prospect should look for when shopping for products in your category. If you do this credibly, the prospect will turn your white paper into a shopping list. And of course, the requirements you outline fit your product to a tee. For example, if your white paper title is "10 things to look for when buying a static mixer," your mixer naturally will have all 10 characteristics, while the competition won't.

7—Generate action or change belief. Content marketing is successful when it gets prospects to take action or changes their opinion, attitude, or beliefs about you and your product as it relates to their needs.

When writing white papers, I always ask my client, “What do you want to happen after the prospect is finished reading our white paper?” I often end the white paper with a final section titled “The next step” that tells the reader what to do and how to do it. For more information on content marketing, visit the Content Marketing Institute online at www.contentmarketinginstitute.com.

Business-to-Business Headline Writing Clinic

It’s true that consumer direct response headlines can get pretty clever, daring, and even outrageous. But powerful headline writing is just as important in business-to-business marketing communications. So let’s look at some successful headlines you can add to your swipe file and apply to your own product or client:

1—The headline: *“Imagine Harry and me advertising our pears in Fortune.”*

The story: Brothers Harry and David Rosenberg launched an unprecedented marketing ploy: advertising gift packages of their pears to business executives through a full-page space ad in Fortune magazine. Within 4 years, sales of the Royal Riviera pears soared to 87,000 boxes, and Harry and David had to double the acreage in their pear orchards, at a time when other pear growers were struggling to survive. Today they are the most recognizable brand in the “fruit by mail” business.

2—The headline: *“How to keep your products pure.”*

The story: Filterite made filtration cartridges used in pharmaceutical manufacturing, an industry where the primary concern is purity above all else.

Why the headline works: Instead of focusing on the brand, it focuses on the prospect and his needs (“How to keep your product pure”).

In addition, it sounds like you will learn something – the secret to product purity in pharmaceutical manufacturing – just by reading the ad. The secret, of course, is to use Filterite cartridges.

This ad was modeled after an ad running in women’s magazines for Duncan Hines Chocolate Cake Mix, with the headline “The Secret to Richer, Moisture Chocolate Cake.” The headline sounds like you will learn something just by reading the ad. What you learn, of course, is that the richest and moistest chocolate cakes are made with Duncan Hines mix.

3—Headline: *“7 reasons why production houses and ad agencies nationwide prefer Unilux strobe lighting when shooting important TV commercials.”*

The story: Unilux rented strobe lighting equipment to video production studios and advertising agencies for shooting TV commercials (the lights were also used in shooting films). Unilux had a combination of features and benefits that most others did not offer.

Reason-why copy is as old as the hills, but it’s still around today because it works. To begin with, Unilux presents product features and benefits in a list format, and people love to read lists. Second, they create a clear differentiation between their product and the competition. In this ad, Unilux gave seven specific reasons why its strobe lighting was superior.

4—Headline: *“Now you can create a breakthrough marketing plan within the next 30 days ... for FREE!”*

The story: Prentice Hall used direct mail packages to sell books with soft offers. You would return the reply card, and the publisher would ship the book. If you liked it, you’d pay the invoice that came with the book. If you did not want the book, you returned it within 30 days and owed nothing.

That way, you could theoretically read the book, follow its instructions, achieve its objective (e.g., write a marketing plan), and then return it, essentially getting the knowledge and results for nothing. The headline “Now you can create a breakthrough marketing plan within the next 30 days ... for FREE” used this ploy to sell the book *How to Write a Successful Marketing Plan*. The 30-day time limit, which is really the guarantee period, adds a nice sense of urgency to the headline.

5—Headline: *“How can you stop the 5 biggest problems that wreck productivity and performance in your mainframe TCP/IP network?”*

The story: This company has a software product that monitors the performance of mainframe networks. Rather than focus on the product, the ad focuses on the performance problems that the monitoring software helps you detect and fix. The five top problems are listed in the lead paragraph.

Question headlines are effective as long as you don’t ask a question that the prospect can easily answer. This headline arouses curiosity, because the reader wants to know what the five biggest problems are.

6—Headline: *“How to solve your emissions problems at half the energy cost of conventional venture scrubbers.”*

The story: This ad succeeds for several reasons. First, there is a picture of the free brochure being offered. Second, there is an eye-catching cut-away diagram of the product, a wet scrubber (a type of pollution control device).

Third, the marketer coins a term, “Hydro-Kinetic Design,” which makes the device sound unique. “Hydro” means water and “kinetic” refers to movement, and ALL wet scrubbers have moving water. But only this one advertises the Hydro-Kinetic design.

How-to headlines work well. This one offers two benefits. The product will solve your emissions problems. And it will cut your energy costs in half.

This ad was the #1 inquiry generator in six consecutive issues of the chemical trade magazine in which it ran.

7—Headline: *“Surgical tables rebuilt; free loaners available.”*

The story: Surgical table manufacturers discouraged repair and rebuilding (although they offered it), preferring instead to sell the hospital a new table. This company was the only independent firm specializing in surgical table repair for all makes and models. To prevent operating room down-time, they would give you a free loaner while your table was being repaired in their shop.

When you have something with little or no competition, a straightforward headline, making clear exactly what you are offering, usually works best: “Surgical tables rebuilt; free loaners available” isn’t creative, but it got the job done.

8—Headline: *“What do Japanese managers have that American managers sometimes lack”?*

The story: This was the headline for a direct mail promotion selling subscriptions to Bits & Pieces, a little magazine on business aimed at managers. The headline works because it arouses curiosity: don’t you want to know what Japanese managers have that American managers sometimes lack?

9—Headline: *“Why most trading systems don’t work ... and never will.”*

The story: Most marketers of trading systems use bombastic, hype-filled copy with outrageous claims of huge profits.

Instead of following in their footsteps, this trading system publisher took a different approach, acknowledging the reader’s built-in skepticism about all the outrageous claims being made. The headline resonated with readers, and the mailing generated three times more sales than the control.

10—Headline: *“Try burning this coupon.”*

The story: This promotion, for an industrial fire-proofing compound, is my favorite business-to-business ad of all time. The headline dares the reader to burn the advertisement! The visual is a photo of a hand holding a match. The ad is actually a bound-in insert printed on paper treated with the fireproofing compound.

When you take a lit match to the ad, it does indeed burn. But the instant you remove the match, the flame goes out – a dramatic demonstration of the fireproofing compound in action.

We always talk about and look for ways to demonstrate our product in our marketing. Relatively easy to do on TV; much harder to accomplish in a print ad. “Try burning this coupon” is the best production demonstration in print I’ve ever seen, bar none.

The More You Tell, the More You Sell

My colleague David Meerman Scott recently wrote a second edition of his best-selling book *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*.

In an e-mail, I asked David what are the top 3 new rules of marketing and PR today. His answer:

1—Nobody cares about your products and services. What they are about care themselves and solving their problems.

2—All organizations need to be real-time publishers. A brand journalism approach of creating blogs, videos, podcasts, photos, and the like drives action.

3—Have fun. People do business with those they like.

Thinking back over my 30-plus years of business-to-business marketing, I would say that in the old days, we followed a couple of these rules only lightly, and violated the spirit of most of them most of the time – as many marketers continue to do today.

Let’s start with #1: *Nobody cares about your products and services. What they care about are themselves and solving their problems.* Everybody gives lip service to this truism, but how many companies stick with it in their communications? Precious few. Most people are me-oriented and most companies seem us-oriented. For instance, in its

annual report, one software company featured the same image every year: a nice picture of its building.

As David says, the prospect cares about his needs, wants, fears, and desires. He cares about your product only insofar as it can address those needs. Remember the old saying: don't tell the prospect about your grass seed; tell him about his lawn.

Let's skip over #2 and come back to it in a minute. Point #3 says: *Have fun. People do business with those they like.* Virtually all successful salespeople know the importance of building a relationship with the customer and making him like you. In his book *The Likability Factor* (Crown Publishers), Tim Sanders writes: "When people like the source of a message, they tend to trust the message or, at least, try to find a way to believe it."

As for "Have fun," to me it's less clear that having fun is a core component of the "new" marketing Scott talks about. Yes, people who are having fun are generally more pleasant to be around, which in turn raises their likeability and therefore their effectiveness in selling. But I've seen no major study that says companies where employees have lots of fun outperform those with more somber workplaces.

Now, let's circle back to David Meerman Scott's point #2: *All organizations need to be real-time publishers. A brand journalism approach of creating blogs, videos, podcasts, photos, and the like drives action.*

To me this is the sea change affecting business-to-business marketing today: the relentless pressure to turn out a never-ending stream of valuable content to establish your company as the authoritative provider in its niche.

In the “good old days,” marketing communications departments would create a product ad highlighting features and benefits. They would then insert it into a few trade publications. The creation and scheduling of promotions was simple and straightforward, at an undemanding pace.

Today instead of one big central medium (the trade publications) there are dozens if not hundreds of little media, each giving us an opportunity to promote, however modestly, our businesses to an often surprisingly large audience. The creation of content for these different media – blogs, videos, audios, podcasts, postings on LinkedIn and Facebook, tweets – is real-time and time-consuming.

Content is king

The major trend in B2B marcom today is to market with useful information – information of the problem-solving, how-to variety – rather than product benefits, features, facts, and specs.

No one, it seems to me, has a handle on how much content you must publish, and at what frequency, to gain visibility and credibility among your core audience. But it sometimes seems as if the need to churn out fresh content for your readership is unceasing. As blogger Robert Scoble says, “Your output is what people follow.”

Some of the more traditional methods of content dissemination include:

** Brochures.

** Catalogs.

** Technical manuals.

** White papers.

** PowerPoint presentations.

** Trade shows.

** Print ads.

** Public relations.

Each of these is still around but varies in importance. White papers are still actively used, but they must present real and valuable content, not just thinly disguised sales puffery. The number and size of brochures has shrunk dramatically as more marketers put product information on the web instead.

When I started in corporate marcom in the late 1970s, sales and marketing were not equal. The salesperson was king, because he was the one who made the sale. All we communicators supposedly did was help out with lead generation and support materials. Our stuff was nice to look at, but the salesperson always got the credit when a new account was landed. And perhaps he deserved it.

The Internet has ended the supremacy of the salesperson. Buyers don't need salespeople today to get the product information they seek; they can find virtually any information they want on the Internet in general and your company's web site in particular. And who controls the content and design of the web site? Why, marketing, of course. So the tables are somewhat turned.

Some of the new methods of content dissemination, which seemed to be preferred by today's buyers, especially the younger ones, include:

Blogs.

Podcasts.

LinkedIn.

Facebook.

Twitter.

YouTube.

Online video.

E-newsletters.

E-mail marketing.

Mobile communications.

Content-rich web sites.

My old colleague Jim Hansberger once told me, “Everyone has to be a salesperson at least part of the time.” Today, every business-to-business marketer has to be a publisher/content provider at least part of the time.

One of the objections to a content-based marketing strategy is “we don’t have specialized knowledge; everyone in our industry knows what we know.” To which I answer: you would be surprised. You in fact possess knowledge of your product, technology, or application that very few people know and which would be valuable to them. Strategic dissemination of that knowledge positions you as an expert and creates demand for your advice, products, and services.

The other objection to content-based marketing is the fear that the marketer will risk giving away proprietary knowledge which their competitors will get their hands on. I have news for you: the salesperson who left you this summer has already given all your secrets to your competitor that hired him. Don’t worry about bean spilling. The old

saying in direct mail is just as true in content marketing: the more you tell, the more you sell.

The Trouble with B2B Marketing

It's not easy being the marcom manager of a B2B company.

In addition to the usual marketing communications challenges you must deal with, there are several other issues B2B marcom managers face.

One is marketing products that are inherently technical and complex, which means they are often difficult to understand.

B2B agency owner Joe Lane once commented, "Consumer marketing is simple thoughts for simple folks."

When you are advertising a bar of soap or a chocolate cake mix, neither you nor your agency has a difficult time grasping the features and advantages of your product.

But when the product is a semiconductor or a spectrophotometer, marketing that product involves achieving a degree of understanding that is not always easy to attain.

One shortcut I've discovered to understanding technology: buy and read a children's book on the subject. If an explanation is intended for a child, a lay adult can certainly understand it. If there is no children's book available, buy a nontechnical book on the subject intended for a lay audience.

For example, I once had the assignment to write a brochure for a company that bought and sold gold and silver bullion, a topic which at the time I knew nothing about. I

bought a popular book about gold written for teenagers and quickly got up to speed with a basic education on the subject.

You might also take a course to get up to speed. One ad agency account executive was assigned a welding account, and found that he could not understand the terminology the client used. Nor could he empathize with the needs and concerns of their target market, professional welders.

His solution was to take a course in welding 101, which eventually turned into a series of classes that led to his becoming a certified welder.

Two benefits resulted. First, he could speak the client's language – in fact, speak it better than they could. And second, he understood his target audience better, because he had become one of them.

A science or engineering background is a definite plus when you are assigned the task of marketing technical products. You simply have the knowledge to quickly get up to speed on any new technology you encounter.

The second challenge of B2B marketing is to understand not only the product but also the prospect – his needs, concerns, desires, and fears.

Getting inside the mind of a B2B prospect is typically more difficult than understanding how a consumer target market thinks.

After all, when I am hired to write a direct mail package to sell a stock market newsletter, the target audience is investors. And I, like millions of other Americans, am an investor. So it's easy for me to think like the prospect, because I am one.

But some time ago I was hired to write a direct mail package to sell a publication aimed at pediatricians.

I am not a pediatrician. I am not even a doctor. So I have very little insight into what worries, issues, and problems are important to pediatricians.

Clearly, a big challenge when marketing a B2B product to an audience of which you are not a member is getting inside the minds of your target prospects.

There are several things you can do to go about it.

First, subscribe to and read the trade publications covering the target prospect's industry.

Pay particular attention to the "letters to the editor" column. It is here you can see what's on your prospects' minds.

Similarly, find and frequent the major blogs covering your prospect's industry. Read not just the blog posts but study the comments. They can reveal hot button issues and where people stand on them.

Not always easy to do, but if you can, interview a few of your customers. You can learn not only what's important to them but which features of your product they value.

If customers are not available for interviews, attend events where your prospects hang out. Eavesdrop on their conversations to get a sense of the language they use. When I first did this at a meeting of IT professionals, I was shocked to discover how much they relied on jargon in their conversations and eschewed plain speaking. This reduced my compulsion to always write copy to them in the simplest language possible,

and I began to embrace the special terminology they used, so as to sound more like one of them.

Another challenge B2B marketers face is figuring out how and why their customers make buying decisions.

According to copywriter Steve Slaunwhite, here are some of the questions to ask the product manager and sales manager about the prospect's buying habits:

“How do your customers buy? Is there a typical process?”

“Why do they buy instead of doing nothing?”

“What prompts them to make the decision to talk with you in the first place?”

“What do they need to know to make a buying decision?”

“Who else is typically involved in making the buying decision?”

“Why do they choose your product over the competition's?”

Says Slaunwhite: “Unless you have answers to these questions, your copy is just going to skim the surface or, worse, be completely off target.”

Copywriter Ed Gandia agrees. He says one of the biggest frustrations B2B marcom managers have with their agencies and writers is not having a solid understanding of the clients' business drivers and industry challenges, as well as the challenges the client's prospective customers are facing.

“B2B clients aren't just looking for clear and persuasive copy,” says Gandia. “They need someone who ‘gets it.’ Someone who understands the bigger picture and how their clients fit into the competitive landscape.”

The last requirement, how a B2B marketer fits into the competitive landscape, is – thanks to the Internet -- much easier to ascertain than in the past.

In the good old days, the only way to learn what your competitors were up to, short of industrial espionage, was to steal their brochures at trade shows.

Now, a simple Google search of industry keywords (e.g., “widget manufacturers”) will bring you a list of most of your competitors. Clicking on the URL links to their web sites brings you the details you need on their products, markets, and operations; and you can find the rest in their annual reports.

Which B2B Medium is Right for You?

Today we are faced with a bewildering variety of choices when it comes to choosing how we will communicate with our prospects. Let me tell you what I know about making that decision.

Although print advertising has fallen out of favor, it can still be effective, especially when targeted to niche audiences. So should you consider advertising in a magazine?

Let's say we were selling valves and our target audience was chemical engineers. There are at least two major trade publications serving that field, *Chemical Engineering* and *Chemical Engineering Progress*. Most chemical engineers read at least one of these two publications. So a space ad running in both would make sense.

The rule of thumb is this: if a target market has its own trade publication, that's probably a cost-efficient and effective way to reach them. So trade publication

advertising is a medium worth testing. Start with a quarter-page ad, and if it works, try a half or full-page advertisement.

On the other hand, say you wanted to advertise valves for sulfuric acid plants. Only a tiny fraction of the readers of *Chemical Engineering* and *Chemical Engineering Progress* work in sulfuric acid plants. So advertising in those publications would give us a huge amount of wasted circulation: most people who read the ad are not prospects.

What's the solution? See if *Chemical Engineering* or *Chemical Engineering Progress* can identify subscribers by type of plant or operation they work in. If the magazine will rent you a list of subscribers working at sulfuric acid plants, you can reach them through direct mail.

Should the mailing be plain and simple or expensive and elaborate? That depends on how many names are on the list. The rules of thumb here are as follows: the higher up the prospect is on the corporate ladder, the more impactful the mailer has to be. And the smaller the target market, the more you can afford to spend on each mail piece.

Let's say your target audience is the CEOs of the 200 largest automobile industry companies. If you spend \$10 per unit for a dimensional mailing, your total mailing cost is only \$2,000. Generally expensive dimensional mailings (i.e., bulky envelopes that contain an object) are within the marketer's budget if the size of the list is a few thousand names or fewer.

If the list has tens of thousands of names and postal addresses for them, a more standard direct mail package – either a #10 envelope package or a self-mailer – is probably your best choice for reaching them with impact and affordably.

If the list has a hundred thousand names or more, there is probably at least one magazine serving that market, and an ad may be the most cost-effective way to reach them.

Don't forget associations when targeting niche markets. If you market is worldwide or nationwide, you can market to the association on the national level. This marketing could include exhibiting at their annual meeting, running an ad in the members-only newsletter, or getting the membership directory and mailing to that list (check with the association to make sure that is not prohibited).

If you sell more on a local or regional level, the best way to reach members may be through the local chapters. Some local association chapters publish membership lists you can mail to or hold nearby meetings at which you can volunteer to be the speaker.

When marketing through trade publications or associations, don't forget the PR approach. Send press releases on your products and other news. Offer to write an article for the magazine or newsletter.

In many industries, there are a few influential bloggers who hold sway over surprisingly large and active audiences. Assemble a list of the top bloggers in your field and make sure they receive your press releases. More important, read and participate in these blogs, and alert them first when you have an interesting new story to tell.

Another good place online to subtly promote yourself, your products, and your company is LinkedIn discussion groups. Find and join the discussion groups in your niche. LinkedIn shows you which discussions on the group are the most active. Participate in multiple discussions and in more than one group.

What about e-mail marketing? There are only two types of lists you should e-mail to: (1) outside opt-in e-lists, which are typically rented by list brokers, and (b) your house file of opt-in names.

Presumably you have a box on your web site where visitors can opt in to receive a free online newsletter or other content. This list will likely give you the best response to e-mail marketing, because they already know you and agreed to get messages from you.

E-mailing to rented lists is a little tougher, because they don't know you, although they know the publication, web site, or other resource that owns the e-list (the e-mail message *from* line identifies that source). You have to bribe them into responding with an attractive offer such as a free webinar or white paper.

Often the decision as to whether to use e-mail marketing boils down to the availability of lists. In some niche markets, both postal and e-lists reaching a sizable chunk of the market are available. In some other markets, the e-mail lists are incomplete, with far fewer names than postal lists, so direct mail is the way to go.

Take a look at the industry e-newsletters you probably receive on a frequent basis. Many of them accept advertising. If there is an e-zine reaching your market, try them for an ad or two. The ads let you reach their subscriber list at a fraction of the cost of a stand-alone e-mail marketing message to that same audience.

How much online marketing to use in your media mix depends to some extent on whether your target audience spends a lot of time at their PC. Also, do they tend to

search for products and suppliers online? If so, both organic search as well as pay-per-click advertising might work well for your business.

10 Ways to Improve Your B-to-B Catalog

Sensible organization, crisp photography, bold graphics, and powerful copywriting are a few of the keys to a successful business-to-business catalog. But experienced catalog marketers also use dozens of sales-boosting gimmicks that have little to do with the basics of salesmanship or good copywriting. All we know is that these tricks of the trade work -- and that's reason enough to use them. Here are ten that may be helpful to you:

1-Include a letter. To add a personal touch to your product catalog, write a "personal letter" to your customers from the president of your firm. The letter can be printed inside the front cover or run off on letterhead and mailed along with the catalog. You can use this type of letter to introduce the catalog, explain your ordering system, state a company "philosophy," stress your dedication to service and quality, or alert the reader to new, discounted, and other special offerings. Whatever your message, adding a letter to a catalog often increases readership and sales.

2-Bursts. Often used by cereal-makers to alert children to the prize inside the box, the "burst" (a star-shaped graphic with a copy line inside) also can draw a reader to special items within a catalog. Bursts can highlight "price-off" deals, free trials, guarantees, and quantity discounts. Use bursts and other special graphic techniques

(such as underlining, color or boldface type, fake handwriting) sparingly. Overuse dilutes their effect.

3-Last-minute specials. Insert into your catalog a sheet featuring items added to your product line or discounted at the last minute. This can be a pull-out or panel on the order form. Tell the customer these bargains were included just in time for mailing, but too late to print in the catalog. This insert generates additional sales because people like to be “in” on the latest developments.

4-Give technical information and tips. The usefulness of this information will encourage buyers to keep your catalog. And the longer they have it, the more often they’ll order from it. For instance, a hardware catalog might include an article or table titled, “A Guide to Screw Selection.” A filtration catalog could include tips on “How to Clean and Care for Filters.”

5-Put your catalog in a three-ring binder. Expensive, but people won’t throw out a hardback binder as readily as they would an ordinary paperback catalog. Your customer also is more likely to keep your binder on his shelf because it’s too bulky for the filing cabinet.

6-Include product samples. You get two advantages. First, mailings which have three-dimensional objects inside are more likely to be opened than flat envelopes. Second, engineers and other technical buyers often like to play with product samples, keeping them handy on their desks or shelves.

A fine example of this technique was used in a brochure for Gore-Tex, a sealant that prevents leaks in pipe sections when you bolt them together. The sample sealant

was stuck to a photo of a pipe flange in the exact position it would be used in real life. The copy told the reader to remove the sample and put it through a series of simple tests (accomplished in 5 minutes at his desk) to demonstrate its effectiveness.

7-List Your Customers. Include a complete list of all the firms that have bought from you, whether you have 300 or 3,000 names. Seeing such a list in print makes a powerful impression on your customers. They'll think, "How can I go wrong buying from these guys? Everybody in the world does business with them."

8-Include an order form. Yes, you can drive catalog readers to your web site where they can order online. But many still prefer to order the old-fashioned way, by mail or phone. So include an order form. Make it easy to fill out. Leave enough space for customers to write in needed information. Bind it into the catalog so it won't be lost or misplaced.

If your products can't be ordered by mail, include a "spec sheet." The spec sheet asks the prospect to provide key information on his applications (such as, size of plant, hours of operation, type of process, and so on). With this information in hand, you can specify the equipment the prospect needs and tell him what it will cost.

9-Include a business reply envelope (BRE). The BRE is a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope the prospect can use to mail the order form or spec sheet back to you. Practically every consumer catalog has a BRE.

Most business catalogs don't. Business-to-business marketers think, "My prospect works in an office; he has a supply of envelopes and a postage meter handy. He doesn't care about the cost of postage, and he can have his secretary take care of

addressing the envelope.” This may be true, but BREs still boost the response rate in business catalogs. Why? Not because they save the buyer a few cents, but because they flag readers to notice you’d like them to respond to your catalog.

In the same way, a coupon in an ad increases the number of people who phone or write letters. The coupon says, “This is a direct-response ad. A response is the appropriate next step if you’re interested in the product.”

10-Make it an event. Industrial buyers get a lot of catalogs in the mail, so the boredom factor is high. Anything you can do to make your catalog mailing special, to stand out from the crowd, will boost sales and inquiries.

One manufacturer of big-ticket industrial equipment sent a tin with a pound of chili powder with each catalog, along with a cover letter proclaiming, “The Hottest Catalog in the Industry.” With a little imagination, you’ll come up with an approach that fits your catalog and customers.

The Power of Proof

I’ve noticed a dangerous trend in business-to-business marketing: a lack of proof in the copy for product claims made in advertising.

In the IT marketplace, for example, the most pervasive marketing document is the white paper. Many white papers are great at explaining *how* products work. But because they are educational, and not sales oriented, they do not bother to prove the performance claims made.

Don't make this mistake in your business-to-business marketing communications. When you say your product is the fastest or most reliable, prospects are instantly skeptical, because everybody claims the same thing.

All product claims in marketing copy and content should be backed by proof. Here are some ways to convince wary buyers that what you say is in fact true:

1—Comparisons. Comparison – showing how your product is different and better than others – engages the reader's attention. You can do a before-and-after comparison showing the change before and after the product was used; e.g., the dirty wastewater discharge vs. the clean water that has been treated with your filtration cartridge. You can also do a side-by-side comparison showing how your product outperforms the competition.

A very effective technique is to have a table listing all the features that your category of product could have. One column shows your product with a YES or checkmark indicating you have all the features. The other columns have competitor products with only a few checkmarks and the majority of spaces left blank or marked NO to indicate that they are lacking the feature.

2—Tests. An extremely compelling way to prove performance is to allow the customer to test your product, especially on their premises. For instance, a pelletizer is a machine that presses powdered material into pellets. The main question is how well the pelletizer will work with the customer's material. Mars Mineral solves this problem, telling potential buyers, "We'll be glad to take a look at a random 5 gallon sample of your material. We'll evaluate it and get back to you with our equipment recommendations.

From there we can do an exploratory pelletizing test, a full day's test run, or rent you a production machine with an option to purchase."

3—Samples. Let the prospect sample your product. This is an old tactic. Eateries in shopping mall food courts often have a person standing in front of the counter with a tray of free samples of one of their dishes, whether Chinese food or chicken nuggets. Tempur-Pedic offers a free kit in its commercials; the kit includes a sample of their mattress material. By squeezing and pressing it, you can prove to yourself their claim that the mattress material comfortably fits the contour of your body.

One company manufactures mist eliminators, which remove entrained liquids in gases exiting an industrial smoke stack. Their mist eliminator is a wire mesh that bends and twists much like a Slinky. In a direct mail campaign, they mailed small samples of wire mesh to process engineers. The sales letter was printed on off-white card stock and affixed to the wire mesh so it looked like a shipping label.

4—Visualization. When prospects can see how something works, they are more inclined to believe that it does work. The mist eliminator company described above also made trays that enhanced efficiency in distillation towers. Part of what takes place is the liquid rises through capped holes in the tray and bubbles on its surface.

Normally distillation towers are made from brick or metal, so you cannot see the trays operate. For their trade show booth, the company made a simple model of a distillation tower out of Plexiglas so process engineers visiting the booth could see the bubbling action.

Gore-Tex manufactures (among other things) a putty-like sealant that is used to prevent leakage piping connections. The front cover of their sales brochure showed a picture of a pipe flange. Attached to the flange was an actual sample of the Gore-Tex sealant. Not only could prospects visualize how to apply it properly, but they could also remove it from the brochure to touch, feel, and play with.

5—Dramatization. Years ago, to promote sales of its disaster recovery systems and services, U.S. West mailed an audio cassette to telecommunications managers. When the recipient played the cassette, they heard the background noise of a busy telecom center. Then suddenly, the CD went blank and the noise disappeared. A voice-over narrator said, “This is the sound of a telecommunications disaster waiting to happen.” They dramatized the danger in a meaningful way without actually cutting off the prospect’s telecom system.

6—Description. A manufacturer of digital switches for wireless networks wanted to convince telecom managers that their switch was highly reliable. Here is what they wrote in their product brochure: “The XYZ Switch is one of the most reliable digital switches available for wireless systems today. According to the FCC’s ARMIS report, the XYZ switch has the least down-time of any switch used in U.S. networks, exceeding Bellcore’s reliability standards by 200%. With an installed base of more than 2,300 switches, the XYZ switch currently serves over 72 million lines in 49 countries.

7—Demonstration. We know from all those direct response TV advertisers for cleaning products that demonstration work. And they work in B2B, too.

My favorite ad of all time was from a company manufacturing a fireproofing compound. The ad was printed on paper treated with the compound, bound into the magazine, and had a coupon for requesting a brochure. The headline of the ad was, “Try Burning This Coupon!” The cop told the reader to remove the ad from the magazine, and hold a lighted match to it. The paper burned as long as the match was there. But when the match was removed, the flame went out.

Let's Get Physical

In the good old days before CDs, I used to record speeches I gave on marketing and duplicate them audio cassettes.

Whenever a prospect asked for information on my copywriting services, I'd send a brochure, client list, and samples of my work. But I'd also enclose one of the audio cassettes.

This inquiry fulfillment trick was amazingly effective. Often prospects would tell me, “I listened to your cassette on the way home from work, and it convinced me to hire you.”

Why was enclosing an audio cassette such a powerful marketing technique?

My competitors were all sending potential clients envelopes with nothing but paper in them. When prospects got my envelope with a 3-dimensional object enclosed, it got their attention. The audio cassette added bulk to the envelope, which made it stand out.

What's my point? Giving the prospect something tangible is a field-tested marketing technique that we know works. When you go to the pet store to look for a dog for your kids, for example, the store clerk takes the puppy out of the cage and puts it on the floor for your children to play with. Why? The salesperson knows that petting, touching, and handling the "product" is more likely to result in a sale than just looking at it in its cage.

Yet in today's digital age, prospects receive fewer and fewer physical communications, instead getting the bulk of their marketing messages via web sites, e-mail, online ads, and social media. Therefore, adding physical marketing communications to your mix can help you gain attention and leap ahead of the pack.

Here are some recommendations on how to improve marketing results by making your communications more tangible:

1—Direct mail. Because of the low cost and quick turnaround times on campaigns, marketers are flocking to e-mail as a favorite online direct response medium. Mailing to rented opt-in e-lists can cost \$150 or more, while the cost to e-mail your house file can be a tenth of a cent per name or less. That compares favorably with direct mail's cost of hundreds of dollars per thousand.

In many instances, direct mail can generate more and better qualified leads than e-mail marketing (thought not always, of course). In addition, some industries, like insurance, find direct mail, not electronic marketing, to be the workhorse of their direct response campaigns.

2—*Reply forms.* A growing trend for direct mail is to omit the response device and drive recipients to either a toll-free phone number or a URL. But a recent test by a conference promoter suggests this may be a mistake.

The conference promoter intended to offer the web and phone as the only response options. But at the last minute, they decided to add a paper registration form to the mailing. Result: Of the 793 registrants, 320 mailed back handwritten registration forms.¹

I have found that adding an order form to a direct mail piece or a coupon to an ad can actually lift online and phone response. Reason: the order form or coupon is a visual indicator that tells the reader to respond.

3—*Dimensional mail.* Also known as structural graphics, dimensional mailers are paper mailings that unfold into three-dimensional shapes. The response rates are sometimes multiples of conventional 2D control mailings.

For instance, John Deere sent a mailing that unfolded into a paper replica of a tractor. The paper tractor was folded up inside a box along with a USB memory sticks containing photos of the tractor.

Iggesund Paperboard, a manufacturer of virgin fiber paperboard used in packaging, sent a structural mailing to promote its Invercote, a high-end grade of paper. The dimensional mailing generated 400 percent more replies than a previous marketing campaign.

¹ Target Marketing, 7/11, p. 7.

4—*Physical mail.* One of the most famous physical mailings was the free CD mailed in enormous quantities by AOL to sign up new customers. All the mailings contained the CD, though AOL experimented with the outer carrier, testing (among other things) a metal CD box.

According to MarketingSherpa, a company promoting a web-conferencing platform used direct mail to generate leads. The mailing, which included a pair of 3D glasses, generated a 31.11 percent response rate.

5—*Print brochures.* Paper brochures are out of vogue. Today product information is increasingly found on marketer's web sites and in PowerPoint presentations residing on salespeople's laptops.

But don't underestimate the persuasive power of a well-designed, attractively printed capabilities or product brochure. The brochure says to that prospect that your firm is "real" in a way a web site cannot. It also highlights key information about your products and services; the reader can be directed to your web site for product specs and other details. Plus, many prospects will keep your brochure on file in case a need for your solution occurs.

6—*Sampling.* A particularly impactful form of physical marketing is to put a product sample in the prospect's hands.

A manufacturer of pollution control equipment marketed a device made from knitted wire mesh. It had the flexibility of a Slinky and the appearance of thin chain mail. The company mailed a sample to prospects with a faux shipping tag that was in fact a

sales letter with a reply card. Sales reps found that many prospects kept the mesh on their desks and played around with it frequently.

7—*Freemiums*. A freemium is a premium, a free gift or incentive, enclosed with your cold direct mailing.

In consumer fundraising, address labels are the most frequently used freemium, followed by (for Christian charities) small crucifixes and rosaries. The freemium's effectiveness is based on the principle of reciprocity: giving the prospect a gift makes him feel compelled to reciprocate by giving a little more attention to your promotion.

In an inquiry fulfillment package going to chemical engineers, we included as the freemium a custom-made slide guide for converting between the metric and English systems of measurement. A mortgage broker used a free mortgage table as a freemium and a bank selling foreign exchange services used a currency converter slide-guide.

What's Working in E-Mail Marketing?

We hear how e-mail is becoming obsolete and social networking is morphing into the medium of choice for online communication. But in the business-to-business community, it hasn't happened yet. Seventy one percent of B2B firms use e-mail marketing.² And e-mail is the method of commercial communication preferred by 74 percent of all online adults.³

² Forrester, "How U.S. Marketers Use E-Mail," 2011.

³ Merkle "View From the Digital Inbox," 2011.

What are the best practices in e-mail marketing today? To begin with, instead of renting lists and sending your e-mails to cold prospects, get people to opt-in to your e-list. Then concentrate on e-mail marketing to your house file. E-mails to house file lists generate two to three times the click-through rates (CTR) or higher than outside lists. And e-mailing to your own e-list eliminates list rental charges of \$100 to \$250 or more per thousand names.

How do you build your own opt-in e-list? The most popular method is offering a free subscription to an online newsletter. You can also offer a free webinar or special report. To get your free offer, the prospect must submit his or e-mail address and name, thus opting into your e-list.

How often should you e-mail your subscriber list? The biggest worry among marketers is offending people on the e-list by e-mailing to them too frequently. But consultant Amy Africa says the biggest mistake marketers make is not e-mailing their lists enough.

Here's a method of determining the optimal e-mail frequency for your e-list: Measure the opt-out rate, which is the percentage of subscribers who unsubscribe after an e-mail is distributed to the list. If your list has 10,000 names and your opt-out rate is half a percent, you will lose 50 subscribers for every e-mail you send out. As a rule of thumb, your opt-out rate should be 0.1 percent or less.

To increase e-mail frequency, add one more e-mail to your weekly or monthly schedule. Then keep a close eye on your opt-out rate. If it stays the same, you can safely increase your e-mail frequency to the new level. If it spikes, cut back to the old frequency.

One reason for opt-outs other than frequency is the quality of your e-mails. When you send useful content, your subscribers will thank you by remaining loyal subscribers and

opening, reading, and responding to your e-mails. On the other hand, if all you send are sales pitches, they will unsubscribe – and even those who don't will stop opening and reading.

A good rule of thumb is that at least 50 percent of your e-mail messages should be content. If the ratio of content to sales falls below 50 percent, your opt-out rate will increase and your open rates will decrease.

What about the content and copy of your e-mail messages? Here are a few guidelines and tips:

**** Begin with an engaging headline or lead-in sentence. You need to get a terrific benefit right up front.**

For instance, Orleans Coffee Exchange provides coffee by mail. They sent an e-mail to past customers who once subscribed to their coffee service but had dropped off the list. The headline: "You Still Drink Coffee, Right?" It struck a chord because of course, in almost every instance, the recipient still drank coffee. The open rate was 52.3 percent and the click-through rate was 34.6%. Dozens of old accounts were reactivated.

**** In the first paragraph, deliver a mini-version of your complete message. The reader should know who you are, what you are selling, and why he should be interested.**

**** Within the first couple of paragraphs, state the offer and provide a hyperlink to a landing page or another immediate response mechanism.**

**** After the first paragraph, present expanded copy that covers features, benefits, proof, and other relevant information.**

**** The offer and response mechanism should be repeated in the close of the e-mail. But they should almost always appear at the very beginning, too.**

**** Use wide margins. Limit yourself to about 60 characters width per line.**

** Take it easy on the ALL CAPS. Words in all caps give the impression that you are shouting.

** The tone should be helpful, friendly, informative, and educational, not promotional or hard-sell. Information is gold on the Internet.

** Be concise. Readers are quickly sorting through a bunch of messages and aren't disposed to stick with you for a long time.

** Regardless of length, get the important points across quickly.

An effective way to organize your e-mail copy is to use the motivating sequence, a formula for persuasive writing that works in all media. The motivating sequence is (1) get attention, (2) state the problem your prospect has, (3) position your product as the solution to that problem, (4) offer proof that your product is indeed a superior solution, and (5) ask for action.

A company distributed an HTML e-mail with a picture of its new hand-held 7530 computer designed for rugged service, especially at cold temperatures. The problem statement read: "Do you need a hand-held computer that operates at the same temperature as cherry berry fudge chunk ice cream ... -22° F?"

Keep in mind that you need not fit all or your product copy and sales points within the e-mail itself. You can tell part of the story in your e-mail and let them click through to a landing page or other web page for the balance.

What's the ideal length for an e-mail? In most instances, shorter is better than longer. So if you have a lot of information to communicate, place most of it on a landing page and hyperlink to this page in your e-mail.

As stated earlier, have a hyperlink at the beginning of your e-mail, one at the close, and preferably one or more in the body. Testing shows that the more hyperlinks there are in your e-mail, the higher the click-through rate.

One of the biggest influences on open rates and click-through rates is the subject line. Split tests of subject lines have shown click-through rate differences of 25 to 50 percent and in some cases higher. Keep subject lines short. Craig Stouffer of PinPointe says that subject lines 40 to 50 characters in length significantly outperform subject lines of 70 to 80 characters.

Tactics and Tips for Marketing B2B Services

The best piece of advice I ever got on marketing services was one word from the head of an IT consulting firm who said: “Productize.”

Products are tangible and services are intangibles. Tangibles are easier to sell than intangibles. Therefore, the more you can make your service look like a product, the more tangible it will seem, and the easier it will be to sell.

If you are a consultant, don’t just sell “consulting,” which seems nebulous and open ended.

Most likely, you consult on the same 5 or 6 problems over and over again. Package these as consulting “products.” For instance, one of my clients offers a service where he helps facilitate IT “retrospectives,” a technique used in IT project management.

Instead of just offering “consulting” which could include retrospective, he offers “IT retrospectives” as a specific “product.”

When you face the same problem, need, or application repeatedly, you develop your own procedures for solving that problem. Package these as a product with both a clear title and a written description of what the service entails. This description, which you will use in e-mail and other promotions, can be written as narrative paragraphs or in bullets (you can of course combine the two). In my descriptions of my training programs, I have a headline (the course title), a paragraph or two explaining how the reader will benefit by taking the program, followed by 5 to 6 or so bullets listing the contents of the seminar.

In many service businesses, there is a need to present your services and also ask questions to determine whether your service can solve the client’s problem. Only after this initial assessment can you quote an accurate price and have the client engage you. So the question arises as to when you should “put the meter down”; i.e. when you should stop spending time with the prospect for free and start charging.

Many service providers give away free time and advice in the pursuit of new contracts, so why not treat this as a marketing tool? Call it a free consultation, free evaluation, or free needs assessment and assign a dollar value to it. This way, the client perceives that he is getting something of value before he even hired you.

Services with any degree of complexity and a significant price tag cannot generally be sold with one-step direct marketing. Exceptions? Of course. Therefore, most

marketing of services is two-step or more, with the initial promotion generating the lead which is then nurtured and closed in subsequent steps.

What offer works best in lead generation for selling services? Best practices call for dual offers, one hard and one soft. The hard offer in lead generation for services is typically to arrange a meeting or conference between the service provider and prospect for purposes of discussing the prospect's needs and how the services can address them.

The soft offer in lead generation for service marketing is typically the offer of a free brochure, white paper, or other content related to the services and the problems they solve. Reply mechanisms for both soft and hard offers include a reply card, phone, fax, e-mail, and web.

Are reply cards outdated in the Internet age? I think not. Even if the prospect ultimately replies online, the reply card is a visual indicator that a response is called for; the web site URL may be added at the bottom of the reply element.

Prospects who have a pending need for the services will want to meet with the service provider and therefore choose the hard offer. Prospects who might be interested down the road but have no need now or in the near future are more likely to choose the soft offer. Typically 90 percent of respondents will choose the software offer, so without the soft offer, these valuable leads would be lost.

"Lead nurturing" is an old concept with a new name. As a rule of thumb, and this varies widely from marketer to marketer, ten percent of the leads received will turn into sales after an initial response and perhaps a follow-up or two. By comparison, with ongoing nurturing of leads, thirty percent or more will turn into sales.

Lead nurturing means continuing to market to a prospect once they have responded to a promotion and been entered into your database. Marketing to existing leads usually produces several times greater response rates than marketing to a cold list.

In the “good old days,” we talked about lead nurturing but seldom followed through because it was too cumbersome, labor-intensive, and expensive. The Internet has eliminated these obstacles to lead nurturing. At the very least, the prospect is added, with her permission, to your opt-in e-list, so she received either sporadic or regular e-mails from you. Several steps up from that is a customer relationship management system that distributes e-mails according to trigger events such as a birthday or transaction (e.g., download of a white paper).

Your company web site should be designed to provide visitors with what they need to know to make a decision about using your services. This can include services offered, benefits, your client list, client testimonials, bios of principals, and an “About the company” page.

Two questions service providers hear a lot from prospects is “How do you work?” and “What is your process?” This should be written out as a step-by-step process and posted on your site as a “Methodology” page. This will save you from having to repeat these details in every sales conversation and document you produce.

The longer prospects stay on your web site once they visit, the more they learn about you. Add features that increase the stickiness of your site. On bly.com, for example, there is an online tool visitors can use to calculate break-even points for

mailings. Other sites have successfully increased stickiness with devices including games, quizzes, puzzles, cartoons, and animation.

In addition to information the prospect needs to know, your web site should present information you want *him* to know – content that would make him look more favorably upon hiring you. This might include a press room, articles page, awards page, white paper library, videos, audios ... anything that shows off your accomplishments, credentials, and advantages.

The Evolution of B2B Marketing

One of the worst things about growing older is that you risk becoming obsolete. I'm in that quandary right now.

You would think the older you get, the more experience you have and therefore the more you know. It's true you do know more about and get better at the things you already do – in my case, copywriting. But at the same time, there is an increasing number of things you don't do – and therefore don't know much about – in my case, mobile marketing and social networking.

I can see this, and perhaps you can too, when you trace the evolution of B2B selling and marketing over, say, the past 5 decades....

Stage one: features selling. In the early days of advertising, ads concentrated on the features, the physical facts, about a product. The belief was that the buyer already

knows the benefit. To take a contemporary example, if your printer has a small footprint, then obviously it takes less space in your office.

Feature selling has gotten a bad rap, but sometimes it can work, mostly when the competition is limited and your product has a narrow market. For instance, an ad for Borsig has the headline, “Transfer Line Exchangers for Ethylene Cracking Furnaces.” If you have an ethylene cracking furnace and need an exchanger for the transfer line, I don’t think you need a headline more creative than that.

Feature selling is used primarily for selling products rather than services. To do it effectively, you should visually inspect the product. If you see a feature that the engineers haven’t told you about, ask what it’s there for. Also request a demonstration of the product.

Feature selling works best when your prospects are experts or professionals in the application for which the product is designed. A builder, for instance, doesn’t need to be told that the benefit of insulation is keeping the house warmer and lowering the electric bill; he just wants to know the R value and other features; for instance, does the design make it easier to install?

Stage two: Features and benefits selling. In the case of Borsig, this would mean adding a benefits phrase to the headline. (Keep in mind that I know nothing about the product): “Transfer Line Exchangers for Ethylene Cracking Furnaces Cut Operating Costs 25%.”

In features and benefits selling, which was the standard approach for decades, sales and marketing staff compiled a list of product features and then uncovered the

benefits offered by each. These features and benefits were used in print ads as well as sales presentations.

They could be presented in a table or integrated into the copy with a features/benefit statement. Such a statement gave the benefit and attributed its existence to a feature. For instance, “Self-lubricating gears virtually eliminate maintenance.”

Features and benefits selling is still practiced today and many marketing and sales professionals have not gone beyond it. The risk: by reciting a long list of features and benefits without knowing what’s important to the prospect, you risk boring your potential buyer and turning him off.

Stage three: Solution selling. This was all the rage starting, as I recall, in the 1980s. Suddenly we didn’t say we were selling products; we told prospects we were offering them solutions.

Solution selling meant more than just substituting the word “solution” for “product.” The marketer’s job focused more intently on understanding exactly what problems were most important for the customer to solve. Then the marketing and sales efforts would focus on positioning the product as the solution to those problems.

Another trend that took place around this time was “systems selling,” which was a subset of “solutions selling.” Suddenly no one sold a product or a service anymore; everyone was selling “systems.” It worked because system was a value-added word; you could charge more for a system than a product. An example from consumer marketing:

the Hair Club for Men didn't sell weaves or toupees; they sold "hair replacement systems."

Stage four: Consultative selling. In this evolution of solution selling, salespeople positioned themselves (and marketing people positioned the company) as not salespeople but consultants. The idea was that the salesperson would work with you to solve your problem, except unlike a conventional consultant, there would be no charge for this advice. The salesperson gave the consulting away in the hopes of selling the solution his consultation recommended.

An example of consultative selling was Ascom/Timeplex's "network topology map." The salesperson would visit with a laptop and piece of software that configured networks for optimal routing. She would input the client's network configuration, and with a few keystrokes the software would reconfigure the network with fewer costly T1 lines and less equipment, saving the customer money. Of course, to implement the reconfigured network, the customer needed Timeplex hubs and multiplexers.

Stage five: Content selling. "Content selling" means persuading your customer to buy from you not by making sales pitches but by providing useful information for problem solving and decision making. The shift from traditional marketing to content marketing is epitomized by the decline of sales brochures, clearly a selling tool, and the rise of white papers – sales brochures rewritten and redesigned to look like and contain useful information.

Content marketing assumes prospects have become more sophisticated today and reject outdated approaches of selling with traditional sales talk and promotional

copy. The prospect is seen as an information seeker (specifically seeking information with which to solve his problem) and the marketer's role is to win his confidence and business by providing that information. Of course, the content provided by Company X makes clear that the best way to implement the ideas and solutions is with Company X's equipment.

Stage six: Social networking. Marketing is seen not as selling; the marketer and the prospect are "having a conversation" with each other. The platforms for these conversations include LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and Google+.

I'll go out on a limb and say that social networking has proven itself anecdotally but not universally. Some companies have examples of campaigns generating solid, measureable results. Others say it is a lot of hot air and find that it cannot be monetized.

About the Author

BOB BLY is a freelance copywriter and the author of 75 books including *Persuasive Presentation for Business* (Entrepreneur Press) and *The Copywriter's Handbook* (Henry Holt). McGraw-Hill calls Bob "America's top copywriter." He was voted Copywriter of the Year in 2007 by AWAI. His main Website is www.bly.com.