

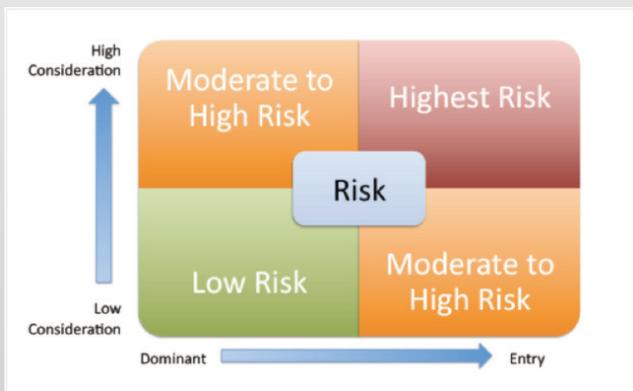
The Changing B2B Buyer

How has the B2B Buyer Changed?

The B2B buying process has changed, and so has the B2B buyer. Gone are the days when salespeople actively “sold” to prospects and marketers would participate in “interruption marketing” — doing their best to get in front of prospective customers regardless of their level of interest or qualification. Thanks to the Internet, social media and other major online influences, prospects are spending more time on the web doing independent research, obtaining information from their peers and other third parties. Companies are meeting prospective buyers earlier than ever, and they must avoid having sales engage with every early-stage lead that is not truly sales ready.

Why Marketers Must Reduce Risk in the B2B Buying Process

Research shows that the B2B buying process is a highly emotional one, one that lends itself to irrational behaviors and heuristics, or quick methods of coming to a solution that are, at best, educated guesses. The emotion that most impacts the B2B buyer is fear (e.g. job security, loss of professional credibility, monetary loss, etc.) B2B marketers must do their best to minimize this fear by eliminating risk, which can be done only through building trust with prospects. While there is organizational risk involved in the process (often stated in the procurement or RFP process), personal risk is what marketers must seek to understand best. This type of personal risk is often unstated, different for each person in the buying committee and a potential source of internal tensions and ineffective buying processes. Many qualified leads disappear because of personal risk, and when sales and marketing don’t acknowledge and tackle this fear, revenue suffers.



Glossary Terms

Buying Committee – Refers to all individuals involved in the B2B buying decision at an organization

Heuristics – Quick methods often involved in problem solving, such as gut instinct, educated guesses or “common sense”

Interruption Marketing – A type of outbound marketing that seeks to capture a prospect’s attention by forcing marketing communications in front of them; opposite of permission marketing

Lead Scoring – The process of determining the sales readiness of leads using a pre-determined scoring methodology and ranking them accordingly

Marketing Asset – A piece of marketing content (e.g. white papers, videos, newsletters, webinars, etc.) used to educate and generate interest for a company’s products or services

Permission Marketing – A type of marketing that seeks to first gain permission from prospects before marketing to them

Persona – A fictional person used to represent a specific target segment for a company; personas aid in marketing, product development, usability and other areas

Sales-Ready Lead (SRL) – A lead that has been qualified by marketing based upon criteria agreed upon by both sales and marketing

The Changing B2B Buyer - Analyst Facts

“Business buyers are people, not faceless companies. Rational decisions get clouded by emotions, motivations and desires. B2B marketers must stop pushing out communications and start listening to what buyers need. Customer research, segmentation, understanding the buying process and creating relevant information that engages prospects in conversations – and ultimately long-lasting relationships – all require marketers to understand their customers deeply.” – Laura Ramos, Will B2B Marketing Become Obsolete? (Part II), The Forrester Blog for Interactive Marketing Professionals, 2008

“Buying 2.0 is a better metaphor for the buying/selling interactions of today’s selling environment as the hunter has become the hunted. Buyers are more informed and seek information independent of sales. Buyers have access to overwhelming amounts of information, but seek intelligence they can trust to support their decision making process. How sales people want to sell has little impact on how buyers are choosing to buy. The knowledge-driven buyer has raised the bar for sales people to be more informed and better prepared to bring value to the interaction.” – Marketing Needed for Sales 2.1, SiriusDecisions, 2009

“The shift from product-led selling to relationship-led selling calls for a significant transformation of sales — enabled by a transformation of marketing.” – Sales Enablement 3.0: A Transformation of Sales Enabled by a Transformation of Marketing, IDC, 2009

Engaging the Changing B2B Buyer – Basic Techniques

- Pay attention to the emotional needs and cues of B2B buyers and have sales engage with only sales-ready leads.
- Provide prospects with sufficient amounts of relevant information to help guide and educate them during the buying process.
- Encourage sales to approach every meeting armed with as much knowledge about the prospects and their organization as possible.
- Leverage face-to-face sales meetings to help build trust and ongoing relationships with prospects.
- Be where the prospect wants to be – participate in social media.
- Make best use of marketing tools like marketing automation and CRM.

Engaging the Changing B2B Buyer – Adv. Techniques

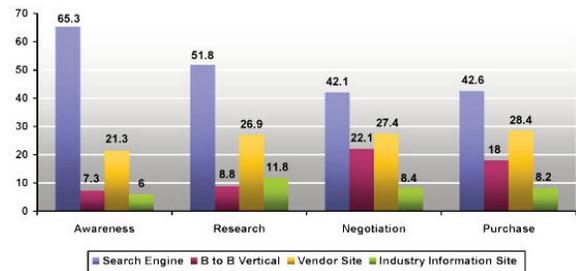
- Eliminate risk by developing thought leadership through relevant marketing assets, blog postings and more. By becoming a leader in your category, you build trust with prospective customers.
- Consider the various feelings of risk felt by every individual in the buying committee and how personal agendas and internal tension can affect decision-making.
- Create marketing personas for key decision makers to promote more relevant and consistent marketing and sales interactions with prospects.
- Strive to establish yourself as a “preferred vendor” in your industry by differentiating your product or service and building brand awareness.

Social Media and the Changing B2B Buyer

Social media plays a key role throughout the entire revenue cycle, beginning before prospects are even identified (while they research or follow thought leadership on social media sites), to after they become customers, (as they remain loyal customers through retention and cross-and up-sell opportunities). Marketers can use social media to reduce feelings of risk and build trust with prospects, and ultimately drive revenue and new business. Here's how:

- Listen to what unidentified prospects are saying through social media, in which valuable relationships are built through blogs, Twitter and other nontraditional marketing vehicles.
- Engage prospects with greater relevancy by using what they say on social media sites to enhance profiles, trigger more targeted nurturing flows and provide deeper insight into their conversations with sales.
- Continue to build profitable relationships with new customers through more informed retention marketing and cross- and up-sell activities.

Changing B2B Buyer Comparison



Buyer Stages – Different Perspectives

With the changing B2B buyer comes new ways of looking at the different buying stages involved in the B2B decision-making process. By evaluating these different approaches and perspectives, you'll be able to formulate the stages that make the most sense for your own organization.

- **Traditional Buying Stages**
 - **Stage 1:** Awareness – Identify a business need
 - **Stage 2:** Consideration – Determine possible solutions
 - **Stage 3:** Research – Evaluate different solutions
 - **Stage 4:** Purchase – Select a solution and negotiate the purchase
- **Buying Stage Framework** (according to analyst firm, SiriusDecisions)
 - **Stage 1:** Loosening of the Status Quo
 - **Stage 2:** Committing to Change
 - **Stage 3:** Exploring Possible Solutions
 - **Stage 4:** Committing to a Solution
 - **Stage 5:** Justifying the Decision
 - **Stage 6:** Making the Selection
- **The BuyerSphere** (according to research firm, Enquiro)

According to B2B research firm Enquiro, the buying process is not a simple logical, rational and linear process where a prospect moves neatly from one stage to the next; rather, prospects move chaotically forward and backward through the process as they balance rational decision making with the emotional impacts of fear and risk.

Top Resources

- Modern B2B Marketing Blog: www.emarkable.ie
- Enquiro: www.enquiro.com
- Funnelholic: www.funnelholic.com
- Lead Sloth: www.leadslotch.com
- BtoB Magazine: www.btobonline.com
- MarketingSherpa: www.marketingsherpa.com
- MarketingProfes: www.marketingprofes.com