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Building a B2B Brand Strategy? Consider Your Sales Cycle

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In the competition for budget and resources within a B2B company, brand promotion is often a tough sell. ROI can be hard to prove, and you won't get funding for efforts the CEO sees as simply plastering your logo everywhere. Plus, sales wants leads that convert—now.

It's the job of leaders in marketing to communicate the importance of ongoing brand strategy, especially given the unique nature of B2B purchasing. An emphasis on measurement and the early stages of the sales cycle can be the best way to make that case.

Metrics for B2B Brand Strategy

It can seem hard to generate useful accountability benchmarks when you're promoting a brand, rather than advertising a product. This is especially true across the multiple customer interactions that make up the B2B sales cycle.

Nonetheless, there are several activities you can track to monitor brand awareness and interaction:

- **Net promoter scores:** These measure the likelihood of an existing customer recommending your product or service. There are many tools you can use to calculate and track these scores, including functionality available in [Salesforce](#).
- **Leads from referrals:** If your sales and marketing teams are diligent in tracking the source of leads, then measuring business from referrals is a reliable indicator of a positive brand experience.
- **Online engagement:** Statistics from digital ads, social media, website analytics, content downloads and sharing can help determine if brand awareness is growing in your market.
- **Case study participation:** When customers are eager to share their experience with your organization, it suggests they're also sharing positive word-of-mouth in the industry.
- **Event attendance:** If your marketing mix includes user conferences, customer days or road shows, track the success of those activities. They can reflect how eager your customers are to engage with your brand.

These metrics won't capture all of the revenue generated by effective branding. But they can reassure company leadership and sales teams of the value that brand building brings to the overall sales cycle.

Critical Components of a B2B Brand Strategy

In fact, the resources spent to build brand trust and awareness are just as important as your efforts to promote specific products. For long-term success, potential customers need to see your expertise align with their business problems throughout the sales process.

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build a complete brand. Branding is more than a logo, tagline and color scheme. It's ultimately the perception your market has of your company. Brand strategy is how you shape that perception. Every customer interaction, visual cue and piece of content represents an opportunity to help define who you are and what value you bring to the table. Maximizing your reach requires continuous improvement to the way your company presents itself.



Live and promote your brand values. In B2B, your customers' experience can be shaped as much by your employees as by the products you offer. Your organization needs to embody your brand. Promote your values inside the business with as much energy as you promote them to customers. Then use your team members' enthusiasm, integrity and customer service as part of the brand story you present to the public.

Have a consistent [content marketing strategy](#). This is more than talking about your company and your products: Speak to your wider market and its key issues. Address concerns and trends as they emerge. Content, particularly thought leadership, creates a brand narrative in a prospect's mind that will inform purchasing decisions. As you weave key branding elements into an editorial calendar, don't forget your origin story. How did your organization get started? What built its success? Why do employees wake up every day eager to contribute? Never pass up a chance to put a human touch on your offerings and what sets them apart.

Encourage existing customers to tell the story of your brand. Because brand is shaped by experience, there's no substitute for customers sharing their stories. Detailed case studies and testimonials can carry more credibility than nearly anything else you promote.

(Want to see these brand strategy components in action? Check out this [brand campaign](#) PMG developed for a financial services company.)

B2B Sales: A Marathon, Not a Sprint

Just a reminder: B2B purchasing decisions happen less often and at a much slower pace than in the world of B2C. Products like enterprise software and technology tend to be expensive, business-critical tools that organizations rely on heavily for long periods of time.

As a result, solutions like these take time to acquire. Prospects typically spend months defining their needs, researching their options, writing RFPs and justifying the cost to stakeholders. They then face an additional layer of complexity when incorporating a new solution into existing IT infrastructure, inventory and business processes.

Businesses also need time to integrate a new tool into their team's workflow. Just because a product is installed successfully doesn't mean end users will use it correctly, or even at all. Success with complex B2B products requires long-term partnerships with vendors, making their trustworthiness and credibility just as important as the solutions they sell.

All of this adds up to transactions that can easily take six months to a year to complete. During much of that time, prospects won't be engaging with bottom-of-the-funnel marketing efforts, let alone conversations with sales. Instead, they'll be scrutinizing your reputation, industry position and leadership in the field. In other words, they'll engage with your brand.

While the final buying stage is important, brand strategy influences the earlier research and discovery process where your organization must stand out to be considered at all. Given the long life of most B2B relationships, mishandling the beginning of the sales cycle could mean missing the window of opportunity with a potential customer for years.

Start Today For Long-Term Success

B2B is a long game. It's difficult to build success on the back of a single product release or advertising alone. At the same time, a long sales cycle means potential customers will have frequent interactions with your brand before they make a buying decision. A strong brand strategy is essential for supporting this process, and it pays off by building the credibility your sales team will depend on when the time comes to close the deal.

Does your brand generate the awareness it deserves? [Contact PMG](#) to build a strategy that creates the online presence and industry trust critical to B2B sales.