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B2B Marketing Trends And Predictions For 2012

by Jeff Ernst
for CMO & Marketing Leadership Professionals



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with David M. Cooperstein and Matthew Dernoga

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last year, B2B CMOs were challenged with increasing marketing's impact on revenue, adapting to rapidly changing buyer behaviors, and delivering exceptional customer experiences. In 2012, they will go from experimenting with new tools, devices, and channels to applying them to deliver real customer value. Read this report to better understand the trends you need to be tracking and how they will affect your strategic decisions this year.

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Forrester interviewed agency and user companies, including B2B Fusion Group, Babcock & Jenkins, BGT Partners, Doremus, Left Brain DGA, Renaissance OPTI, Sigma Marketing Group, The Annuitas Group, VisionEdge Marketing, VML, and Xerox.

Related Research Documents

["CMO Imperatives For 2012"](#)

January 18, 2012

NEW TECHNOLOGIES GO FROM COOL TO CRITICAL IN 2012

It has never been more exciting — or more challenging — to be a B2B CMO than it is right now. Digital, social, and mobile channels open up all kinds of new opportunities for how you attract and interact with customers. At the same time, CEOs and CFOs have woken up to the realization that everything is measurable, and they are holding CMOs more accountable for the money they spend.

From our conversations with more than 200 marketing leaders in 2011, we saw several major trends pick up steam. We have combined these insights with input from executives at 10 marketing agencies that work with B2B clients to predict which trends will have the greatest impact on the decisions B2B CMOs make in 2012.

New Tools Will Empower B2B CMOs To Have Greater Impact On Revenue Growth

In 2011, CMOs had higher budgets, but they came with a catch: more scrutiny from the CEO and CFO on how the funds were allocated and greater expectations for their impact.¹ Proving marketing's impact has always been an elusive goal, but new revenue-cycle analytics and dashboard capabilities from marketing technology vendors such as Eloqua, Marketo, Pardot, and Adobe have closed this gap. In 2012, we expect that:

- **Marketing automation will hit a tipping point.** The confluence of several factors will cause automation technology to tip in 2012. Our surveys show that 19% of B2B organizations are planning to implement marketing automation in 2012, and another 17% are expanding their usage.² Why? Price tags have come down due to intense competition; user interfaces have greatly improved in the past year; sales force automation has reached a saturation point, and companies want to get more from it; and dismal results from cold calling and unsolicited emails are pushing marketing and sales teams to adopt a lead nurturing approach.
- **Adoption will expand beyond technology companies.** Tech vendors have been the primary adopters of marketing automation due to their aggressive plans and comfort with technology solutions. In 2011, every vendor increased its marketing focus on companies outside of the tech industry. In 2012, 20% of manufacturers, 20% of financial services firms, and 18% of business and professional services firms plan to implement automation.³ For example, Toro is deploying marketing automation after three years of using salesforce.com because it recognizes that it needs stronger lead management capabilities to deepen relationships with golf courses, rental agencies, and landscape contractors.
- **Use of marketing automation will go beyond email.** Most of the marketing automation users we talk with are using the systems for operational needs such as sending email blasts and customer newsletters. In 2012, CMOs will finally recognize that these platforms allow you to build a revenue growth engine and will allocate time and budget to the process work required to realize the true value of marketing automation and ensure strategic adoption. They will work

closely with their sales and finance counterparts to define an integrated lead-to-revenue process for the system to automate, identify the right success metrics, hire people with a revenue-enablement rather than activity mindset, and tie incentive compensation of team members to revenue metrics rather than output.

Marketers Will Quest After Mobile Due To Smartphone And Tablet Explosion

Use of mobile devices went mainstream in 2011, with smartphone penetration in the US, many European countries racing past 25%, and corporate IT departments figuring out how to satisfy business user demand for tablets. As business buyers consume more of their information on mobile, it will become a vehicle to the buyer that B2B marketers can't ignore. In 2012, CMOs will resist the temptation to build gimmicky applications to entertain and amuse users like their B2C counterparts do and instead focus on the elusive goal of finding ways to deliver real value to customers as they purchase and use their offerings. We'll see that:

- **Campaign effectiveness will be the starting point for mobile.** B2B marketers saw a decline in campaign performance in 2011, since a larger portion of their audience used mobile devices to open emails and access web pages that were optimized for web browsers. In 2012, marketers will use technologies like Litmus that detect which device the prospect is using and render an experience optimized for that device.
- **Sales teams continue to be the biggest target for mobile applications.** Technology and pharma companies have led the way in deploying tablets for their sales representatives to use in giving face-to-face presentations and demonstrations to customers. Roche has deployed 31,000 tablets in North America and intends to continue the rollout internationally in 2012.⁴ These firms will develop more apps for these tablets to make sales reps more efficient and customer meetings more interactive.
- **Customer-facing mobile apps take hold for content delivery and service.** Since tablets are designed for content consumption, B2B marketers will build mobile apps for delivering more personalized content, as KPMG has done with its iPhone app that gives access to its large library of thought leadership articles, reports, and surveys. B2B firms will also deploy apps to provide premium-level service, such as apps for easy ordering and helping attendees to their events.

Social Media Focus Will Shift From The Media To The Social

LinkedIn surpassed 100 million users and 1 million groups in 2011.⁵ Forrester's B2B Social Technographics[®] showed that 86% of decision-makers use social media for business purposes. Business buyers are social, but when it comes to social media marketing, B2B marketers have been more focused on the media than the social part, using it primarily as another outbound channel for pushing content to the marketplace. As a result, social marketing has been focused on listening and creating awareness. In 2012, CMOs will no longer have to convince their fellow executives that

their prospects and customers are connected to the people and things they care about, but they will recognize that the commitment to social marketing is greater than a Twitter account, Facebook page, and occasional blog. We expect that:

- **Social marketing will finally tie directly to lead generation.** Eloqua now enables marketers to put social widgets on landing pages so visitors can see which of their friends like the offer. Neolane lets marketers deliver targeted offers to their fans to entice them to opt in and get into their marketing database. Marketers will use emerging social capabilities like these to tap into the power of peer influence to increase conversion rates and generate leads.
- **Marketers will amplify the customer's voice.** B2B marketers will augment customer case studies and testimonials with the voice of the customer. This will include putting programs in place to identify the biggest social influencers in their market and get them to tell the company's story, and to turn loyal customers into brand advocates who share their experiences and opinions with their social connections. Intuit energizes small business owners who use its payroll software to write reviews of what they like about Intuit's service.
- **Marketers will go beyond Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.** Our B2B Social Technographics show that while 39% of business decision-makers visit the big three social networks for business purposes, 64% read other online forums and discussion groups. Marketers need to be where the buyers are and will participate in a larger variety of professional and industry-specific forums, such as Sermo for physicians and Construction Connection for builders.

Marketers Will Find Creative Ways To Meet Demand For Thought Leadership And Content

Marketers embraced content in 2011. According to a survey conducted by the Content Marketing Institute, B2B marketers spent more than one-quarter of their marketing budget on content marketing.⁶ The explosive adoption of mobile and social, along with the expanded use of marketing automation, will greatly increase the volume and variety of content that marketing teams must create. As a result:

- **Thought leadership becomes the core marketing platform.** In 2011, the desire to demonstrate thought leadership was a big goal for B2B marketers, but most were practicing what we call "random acts of thought leadership." Just as political candidates capture their big ideas and positions in a political platform, CMOs will guide their organizations to a more structured approach in developing a thought leadership platform, and the big ideas and provocative positions of this platform will be a major part of what companies share through digital, social, and mobile channels.
- **Marketers will act more like publishers.** Keeping up with content demands takes a more organized approach to content development. Taking their cue from publishers, marketing leaders will create editorial calendars to plan their content creation needs and use tools like

Kapost to manage the editorial process. Many will hire or contract with people with journalism backgrounds to provide more dedicated attention to content creation as Kaspersky Lab has done to create fresh content for Threatpost.

- **Companies create more short-form content.** White papers and reports have been a staple of content marketing, but buyers in 2012 prefer to consume information in smaller chunks that are easier to digest. Marketers will move away from the long white papers to more frequent and timely content vehicles like blog posts. Xerox has a content engine in which any new content topic or idea is captured once and then follows a process in which it is repurposed into many different vehicles, such as blog posts, social media posts, email campaigns, byline articles, and conference presentations.

WHAT IT MEANS

CONSUMERIZATION WILL RESHAPE BUSINESS BUYER EXPECTATIONS

Your customers are also consumers. They go to Starbucks for a morning coffee, vacation at Club Med, fly JetBlue, and shop at Amazon.com. Firms like these are obsessed with customers, and in the past two years, they have gotten a lot of recognition for the exceptional experiences they deliver at every digital touchpoint. These experiences shape the expectations of your business buyers, and in 2012 and beyond, they will expect just as good an experience with any company they deal with, for business or personal reasons. Thus, CMOs will:

- **Move marketing resources closer to the customer.** Most B2B marketing organizations are aligned by functional role, with teams for PR, events, Web, field marketing, product marketing, and marketing operations. The need for a better customer experience will shake the walls of the marketing silos and cause CMOs to look at the customer and prospect in the same way. CMOs will then push more marketing resources closer to the industries, geographies, and product lines they serve and to staff these positions with people from other disciplines who have intimate knowledge of the customers' needs.⁷ To reduce redundancies and ensure high quality in the work these people do, CMOs will establish centralized centers of excellence for core functions like analytics, marketing automation, and digital marketing to provide expertise, best practices, and systems to the decentralized resources.
- **Become data and analytics geeks.** Delivering an exceptional customer experience requires a lot of insight into the needs of your customers. The volume of data will continue to explode, and most marketing organizations are not prepared when it comes to data management and analytics. In 2012, CMOs will finally stop finding data and analytics boring and realize it has become mission critical. More and more CMOs will partner with their finance people, become data geeks, and establish a center of excellence for capturing data and turning it into business insights. This will require new skills and talent in areas such as data management, data modeling, quantitative decision analysis, and predictive analytics.

- **Embrace IT as a business partner.** It may sound counterintuitive, but customers want less. They want to spend less effort researching solutions, endure less hassle placing orders, and have less need for support. Technology is enabling companies to give customers what they want, and 2012 will be the year that marketing stops circumventing IT professionals and instead invites them to the table as a partner in selecting and deploying technologies to deliver a better customer experience. Smart CMOs will involve IT in understanding the customers' needs and designing the touchpoints, just as Caterpillar has done in having marketing and IT define a unified customer-experience life cycle to deliver a great experience at every touchpoint that drives loyalty.⁸

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Companies Interviewed For This Document

B2B Fusion Group	Sigma Marketing Group
Babcock & Jenkins	The Annuitas Group
BGT Partners	VisionEdge Marketing
Doremus	VML
Left Brain DGA	Xerox
Renaissance OPTI	

ENDNOTES

- ¹ After several years of making cuts, B2B marketing leaders had larger budgets in 2011, but they came with a catch: more scrutiny and greater expectations for results. Budgeting is no longer an annual event; it is an ongoing opportunity for marketing leaders to shift investment to the highest-performing activities. See the March 22, 2011, "[Bigger B2B Marketing Budgets Come With Great Expectations](#)" report.
- ² Source: Q4 2011 B2B Marketing Organizations And Investments Survey.
- ³ Source: Q4 2011 B2B Marketing Organizations And Investments Survey.
- ⁴ Source: Steven Lang, "Steven Lang: In the enterprise, tablets are opening eyes and furrowing eyebrows," *TabTimes*, December 9, 2011 (<http://tabtimes.com/analysis/enterprise/2011/12/09/steven-lang-enterprise-tablets-are-opening-eyes-and-furrowing-eyebrows/>).
- ⁵ Source: Jeff Weiner, "100 million members and counting," *The LinkedIn Blog*, March 22, 2011 (<http://blog.linkedin.com/2011/03/22/linkedin-100-million/>).
- ⁶ Source: Joe Pulizzi, "2012 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends [Research Report]," *Joe Pulizzi's Blog*, Content Marketing Institute, December 5, 2011 (<http://www.contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/12/2012-b2b-content-marketing-research/>).

- ⁷ When thinking about how to organize their marketing departments, B2B CMOs face a constant tension between the decision to put marketing resources closer to the customers and markets they serve — whether segmented by geography, industry, or product lines — versus building core centralized marketing capabilities and teams. CMOs must figure out what work needs to get done and where it should be performed while providing the right level of corporate support for decentralized resources and ensuring they are best aligned with the go-to-market strategy of each business unit. See the February 6, 2012, [“Drivers Of B2B Marketing Organizational Design”](#) report.
- ⁸ Caterpillar has encountered a dramatic shift in the buying process as its customers move to digital channels to learn about and support construction equipment. While reinforcing its traditional business model built around dealers, it is using digital technologies to improve the customer experience and drive loyalty at every customer touchpoint. This has required marketing and IT to join forces to align their efforts around a common vision of the customer experience life cycle. See the December 20, 2011, [“Case Study: Caterpillar Aligns Business And IT To Build Customer Value And Power Growth”](#) report.

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