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THE NEW RULES OF OUTSOURCING B2B MARKETING

What Marketing Directors Need In a B2B Marketing Consultant Today

Rebekah E. Donaldson | Cris L. Rominger

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And thanks to my husband for his curious mind, care of our kids, and belief in me.

-- Red



Thanks for [downloading](#) this e-book. I've started a forum to [discuss it](#), and welcome you to visit. You can share any thoughts or questions directly by emailing me at Red@b2bcommunications.com.

Rebekah E. Donaldson (Red)
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1. Checklist for finding the best B2B marketing consultant

Let's get right down to it. Here are 10 questions you could use to steer a telling conversation with a marketing consultant.

Questions to help you rank candidates

- Do you see special issues around marketing products and services to businesses?
- How would you get to know our niche and target audience?
- Could you help us compare different ways of marketing?
- Do you have an inbound marketing approach, or more of an outbound approach?
- Could you help us use social media like blogging, Twitter, and LinkedIn for business?
- Could you help us rank higher than our competitor in search engine results?
- Could you help us get emails to clients and prospects opened and read more often?
- How should we gauge success in this engagement with your firm?
- Who will I be working with day to day? Who will be supporting that person?
- Could you share examples of your work that communicate your track record?

Profile of a strong partner

Higher B2B marketing ROI comes from outsourcing to an inbound B2B marketing consultant who sees all the available pieces and how they fit together. Here are the essentials; the rest of this guide tells why these qualities are 'must haves.'

Must-have qualities of a B2B marketing consultant

A team focused on **B2B marketing**. Because buying committees expect a powerfully built business case.

A team that's **methodical**. Because a systematic marketing approach is the only sane, reliable way to project and get results.

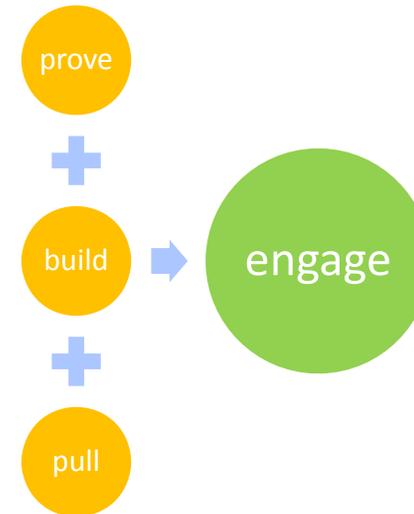
A team that covers **all major marketing disciplines**. Because you need the right tool for each job.

A team led by **internet marketers**. Because [92% of B2B buyers use online resources](#) when looking for products and services.¹

A team of **testers**. Because you need help to show others and steadily improve your marketing ROI.

Profile of an even stronger partner

There are other important traits. For example, I think your B2B marketing consultant should be a trainer, because you need to **build capacity**. Also they should be able to bury you in **proof of performance**, because you need consultants to back up their fabulous claims. They're not on the list of 'musts' because building capacity is not job one, and one always vets potential hires. It's hard enough to find companies that fit the profile outlined in the bullets above. Let's not make this mission impossible.



To engage decision makers today, B2B companies need to prove their value through a strong business case, build sites and other communications vehicles in a way that fosters trust, and pull in prospects. Helping companies get that done requires special skills.

¹ In a recent survey of 1,000 business decision makers by marketing research firm [Enquiro](#) examining how business to business (B2B) purchasers buy, 92 percent of respondents said they turn to online resources in the early stages of the buying cycle. And 77 percent named Google as their first choice among all search engines. See [B2B Survey 2007](#) (registration required by Enquiro for free download).

2. When you need a B2B marketer in your corner

Business to consumer versus business to business – is there really any difference? It’s a question I hear a lot. And for good reason. Either way, you’re still marketing to a human being – right?

Business to business marketing

Yes and no. In business to business (B2B) marketing, you’re dealing with multiple individuals – often **buying committees** – during a decision making process. Each person has a role in the decision making process and a responsibility to judiciously compare all the options. That makes sense when a purchase of professional services may impact the company’s customer service, productivity, operations, legal issues, reputation, sales, and/or the **bottom line**. The selling proposition is complex and the perceived risk of a wrong decision is high. Your target market can number in the hundreds or thousands.

Business to consumer marketing

In business to consumer (B2C) marketing, you’re convincing an individual – the same individual who considers the options, makes the decision, and pays the bill. The decision is often emotionally based, driven by impulse, status, or price. The level of **perceived risk** is typically low; most consumer purchases can be returned or exchanged. And your target market can number in the millions.



In business to consumer (B2C) marketing, the level of perceived risk is typically low. Most consumer purchases can be returned or exchanged.

B2B buyers expect a strong business case

When a purchase affects a company's operations, productivity and bottom line, the **risk of a wrong decision** is high. Buying committees look to Google and service providers' websites for information first and repeatedly, according to Enquiro.²

Because buying committees expect a powerfully built business case, smart B2B marketers focus on building relationships through credibility and trust and offering multiple opportunities to engage. After all, B2B purchasers are **buying the supplier** along with the product or service.

From generating awareness to educating and influencing, success depends upon addressing each prospect's unique motivations and needs – in the places they are looking and in the ways they prefer.

Why should B2B buyers trust you?

Prospects are looking to educate themselves, do their own comparisons, and create their own **short lists**. What content can you offer to help in their decision making process? Charts comparing solutions, suggested decision criteria, ROI calculator tools, case studies, testimonials, research highlights, certifications, awards, affiliations, and executive profiles all help diffuse fear of making a wrong decision.



Business decision makers are savvy and moving fast. They need good reasons for trusting and picking a service provider.

² From the "B2B Survey 2007" whitepaper by Enquiro reporting the results of surveying 1,000 B2B buyers in 2007 to learn what the top influencers are in the purchase decision.

Inbound marketing is essential

I promise not to belabor the obvious – but let’s start with what’s commonly thought to work – and doesn’t.

Say your prospect, a business decision maker, is headed to work early one cold Monday morning. She’s parked her car and is headed in to grab a hot drink at the coffee shop on the corner.

In this example you’ll play the consultant who is **marketing his professional services**. Say you are standing outside the coffee shop. You step in front of your prospect as she approaches, extending your hand to introduce yourself. You describe your company – its innovative approach, its hassle-free solutions – and ask her to complete a short survey.

She avoids eye contact and politely excuses herself. “Well, are you happy with your [insert problem you solve]?” you ask, hoping to extend the conversation. “I’ll give you a coffee card if you’ll complete my survey,” you add.

The next morning, you do the same thing. And the next morning. Your marketing agency prepared you for this.

“It may take seven tries or more before she responds,” they warned, “don’t throw in the towel too early.” So you **grit your teeth** and pitch her each day. On the third day, she’s not at the coffee shop. So you email. Leave voicemail. Send a letter.

Is this approach working?

B2B buyers are empowered and savvy

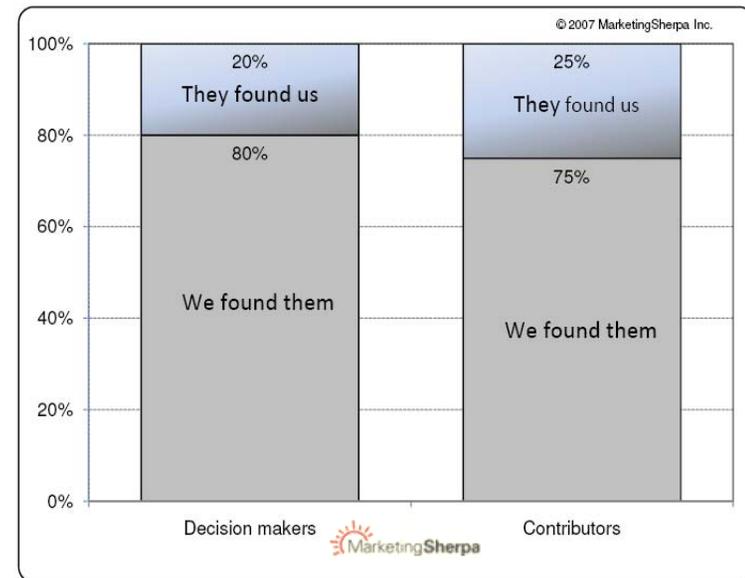
If you said no, you're not alone. When MarketingSherpa asked 4,000 B2B decision makers how they chose a new vendor, 80% said that they **go find the service provider they need** – as opposed to hiring vendors who pitch them.³ This chart illustrates their findings.

B2B buyers are out there online, researching potential providers long before you even get wind that they're looking.

Let's repeat that important point: Today, not only are you, the Marketing Director, looking for desirable clients; **they're looking for you**. And they believe that they take an active role in vendor selection.

The example I gave above is meant to represent direct marketing – the quintessential “push” or “outbound” marketing. Cold calling, blast emails, splash ads and direct mail work only when the marketer gets past **barriers erected by decision makers** to prevent interruptions (call screening, administrative assistants, pop-up blockers, email filters, and the like).

What's the take-away? That decision makers don't like being interrupted.



MarketingSherpa asked 4,000 B2B decision makers how they chose a new vendor: 80% said they found the vendor; 20% said the vendor found them.

³ [MarketingSherpa](#) Business Technology Marketing Benchmark Guide 2007-2008.

3. How the shift to inbound marketing affects you

Today, racing to nab prospects through cold calling has questionable ROI. Far from being sitting ducks, B2B buyers are reaching out to service providers who look good.

So many B2B marketers have shifted their approach. Today, B2B marketers talk about “pull” or “inbound” marketing – that is, **attracting** prospects rather than cornering them.

What does all this mean for a Marketing Director? At one level, it means shifting budget from traditional marketing techniques to inbound marketing efforts. At a deeper level, it means examining how your company engages with the outside world.

You can see why your B2B marketing consultant should be committed to inbound marketing. With a fundamentally outbound approach, they may guide you in the **nuances of successfully interrupting** and pitching busy executives. Instead, they need to guide you in being visible and helpful when prospects are looking for companies and guidance: facilitating comparisons, providing all the elements of a strong business case, and being authentic.

Expert comments on B2B marketing's future

HubSpot on the role of B2B marketing departments

Here is how Pete Caputa of [HubSpot](#) responded to an article about the future of B2B marketing:

*"I think that the B2B marketing department's role in a company is actually becoming much more important than it ever has been," "[and,] with the web (SEO, blogging, social media, PPC), collecting leads earlier in buyer's sales process with great offers, calls to action and well optimized landing pages, then integrating that lead source data with CRM data to create a closed loop marketing system.... **marketing groups can PROVE their value** more than they ever could."⁴*

And, in a comment on an excellent post "[Dawn of an Inbound Marketing Agency](#)," by Paul Roetzer, Caputa wrote:

*"...Not only are **traditional PR agencies going to have trouble adapting** to the new ROI driven online inbound PR business model, so are web design firms, marketing agencies, etc."*

Forrester Research on the future of B2B marketing

[Laura Ramos](#), Vice President at Forrester Research, sees changes afoot in B2B marketing. In [How To Avoid Becoming Obsolete](#) she writes,

*"Focusing simply on new campaigns, **clever advertising**, and delving into social media will only paper over problems. Turning up the heat on conventional marketing activities won't spur the profound changes required."*

As new software and other tools make it easier to enter a market, it will get harder for a company to differentiate itself from its competition. Buyers are more likely to rely on associates than on advertising or salespeople when purchasing.⁵ We're already

⁴ From his comments on my post [B2B Marketing's Future](#) at the Red On Marketing Blog, 11/20/2008.

⁵ See [B2B Marketing Obsolete, Really? \(Part III\)](#) at the Forrester Blog for Interactive Marketing Professionals, 11/14/08.

seeing social media platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter becoming popular with businesspeople. We're at a tipping point for business participation in social media.⁶

David Meerman Scott on the new rules of marketing

This opens up a whole new world for B2B marketing. Give people compelling videos, blogs, podcasts, white papers, e-books and webinars, and they'll be eager to bring it to the attention of friends. David Meerman Scott, author of "[The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#)," calls it "**word-of-mouse marketing**." Instead of buying expensive advertising or begging the media to do a story about you, you can go straight to your audience with great content.

To market themselves effectively in this new environment, companies need more acknowledgement of the contributions made by others, and more engagement in two-way conversations.

It makes sense to approach B2B marketing's future with the help of a marketing partner who already knows the new tools and how to effectively use them. There's **no real shortcut** when it comes to holding authentic personal dialogues.^{7 8}

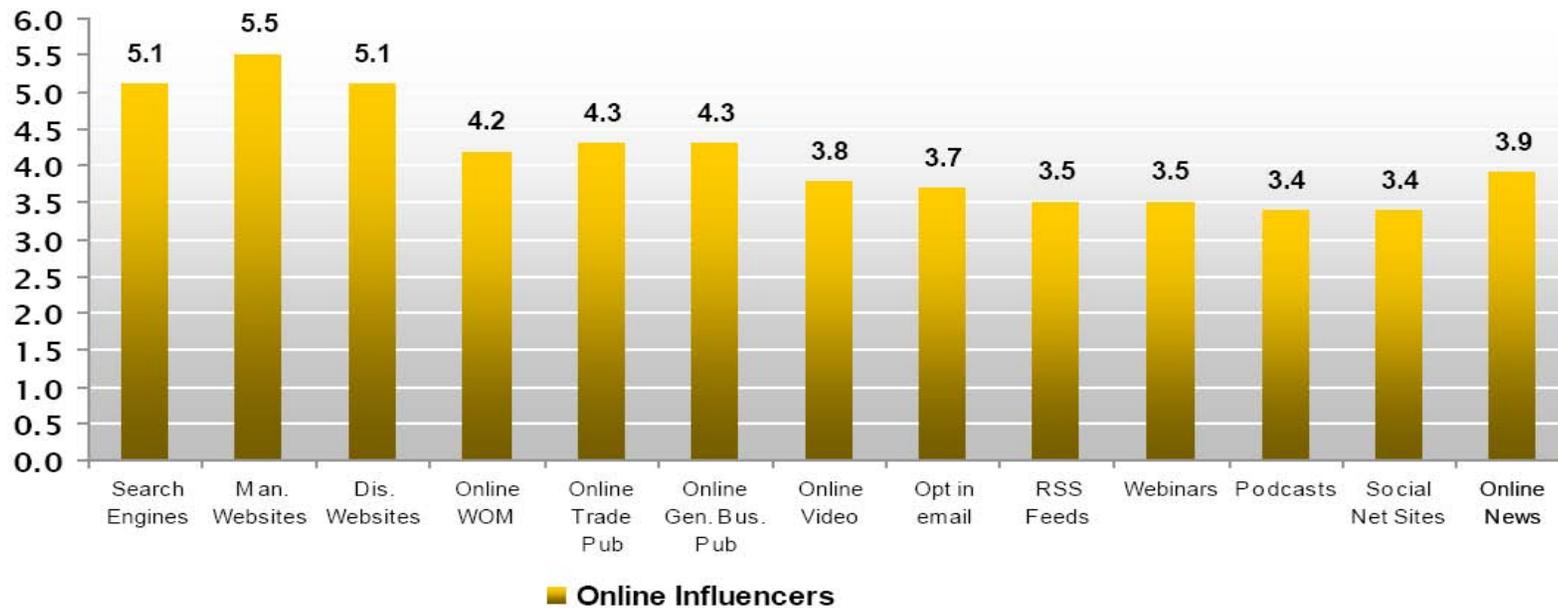
⁶ More discussion of this at [A Tipping Point for Business Participation in Social Media](#) at the Red On Marketing Blog, 10/13/08.

⁷ See [The need for services in social technology](#) at the Being Peter Kim blog, 1/26/09.

⁸ See [Social media marketing's scalability problem](#), 8/22/08.

4. Your site is more important than you might realize

Top Online Influences - Total (All Phases)



On a scale of 1 to 7

Enquiro surveyed 1,000 B2B buyers and found that “respondents across all phases indicated that the website of the vendor” was the top influence on buying decisions.

[Enquiro](#) is a search marketing research company that surveyed 1,000 B2B buyers in 2007 to learn what the top influencers are in the purchase decision. Their resulting "[B2B Survey](#)" [whitepaper](#) is "a high level overview of how business to business search behavior is influenced by role of the buyer and phase of the buying cycle."

I've included here one chart from their paper. It shows the top **overall influences in all phases of the buying cycle** and among both offline and online sources, on a scale from 1 to 7.

Enquiro's report authors write:

"When asked what the top influences were on the purchase decision, respondents across all phases indicated that the website of the vendor, followed by distributor websites and search engines were the most important influencers.

"... Another significant finding was where this research tends to happen online. General search engines are often the first place people turn to begin their online research session and among the general search engines, Google holds a dominant position, being the first choice of 77.7% of respondents. As researchers begin to research their purchase, they rely heavily on information from the vendor's own website."

The upshot: if you're a B2B company, get it right when it comes to your online presence.

5. Importance of integrating all major marketing disciplines

Broad competency as a prerequisite

For effective B2B marketing today, you need to leverage several proven tactics that get you noticed, such as search engine marketing so more prospects find you; keynotes, awards, blogs, and published articles so you appear where prospects are looking and learning; and tailored communications to nurture prospects and clients.

To be an **effective B2B marketing consultant**, a person or agency needs to be competent in each of these areas.

Not all marketing consultants have all these competencies. Some are superb at getting your firm to the top of organic search engine results. Some will help you earn valuable press coverage, speaking engagements, and awards. Some excel at mail, email, and calling campaigns. Some design inspiring ads. Some write stellar content, like white papers. Some make appealing, user-friendly websites. And each of these experts is part of the solution you need.

To be extra clear: each type of expert has mission-critical skills.

However, it often takes a combination of business case building, website conversion optimization, SEO, PR, email nurturing, creative, business writing, and constant testing and tweaking to **get**

consistently found and favored when executives go looking for information. So your B2B marketing partner needs at least five sorts of strengths to make it 'whole'.

Must-have qualities of a B2B marketing partner



Being an effective B2B marketing partner requires strength in at least five areas.

6. How can Marketing Directors prove marketing ROI?

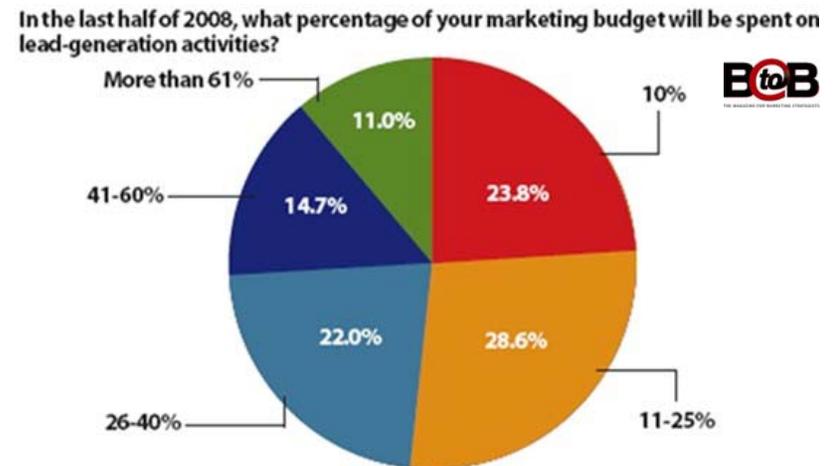
If you have been concerned about your B2B marketing return on investment (ROI), you're not alone. Many B2B marketers are struggling with two key issues:

- Diminishing results from conventional marketing campaigns
- The inability to **prove returns on marketing** dollars spent

The concern gets even more important as the stakes get higher. According to a 2008 study presented by *BtoB Magazine* and the Sales Lead Management Association, marketers were planning to invest more in lead generation to drive sales. Nearly half of 273 corporate marketers surveyed planned to spend more on lead generation programs in the second half of 2008. And half said their top priority is to increase lead generation activities. About a quarter said their top priority is proving the ROI of marketing expenditures.

What's most interesting is that the largest group of respondents (47%) reported that the biggest obstacle to spending more is lack of reports to **show the ROI** for what they are spending. It seems marketers don't know how to prove ROI at a time when it's never been more critical to do so.

You can't fight diminishing returns and get the best results for your marketing dollar without knowing what works and what doesn't. Yet, with so many ways of interacting with prospects, it's increasingly hard to **close the loop**.



Source: *BtoB* and the Sales Lead Management Association survey, May 2008

According to a 2008 study, about half of B2B marketers said the biggest obstacle to spending more on lead generation is lack of clear marketing ROI reports.

7. Cutting ROI guesswork with a methodical approach

Marketers have been saying for decades that the most successful companies see things from their customers' perspective.

What's *new* is the groundwork required to be visible, trustworthy, and interesting to your best prospects.

What's new is the marketing environment, and the **need for a methodical approach** to ensure that all the moving parts of an inbound marketing program are working together.

How does an experienced B2B marketing consultant help you reach business decision makers in the places they are looking and in the ways that they prefer?

They help you ensure that, before you launch new efforts aimed at affecting prospects' perceptions, your **value proposition** and supporting messages are compelling in the context of your specific market niche; and your marketing plan includes the tactics that are most likely to work with your audience.

The diagram shows our methodology.



This is our methodology: To get leads rolling, complete the wheel.

Recognizing tactics-talk

An experienced marketer builds a **foundation for sound decision making** before diving into tactics. They help link marketing goals with business goals, and ensure marketing planning is grounded in real client and prospect perceptions. They suggest benchmarks for success and report against them. For example, look for something along the lines of:

“We should see X amount of progress by March and a Z return for the programs implemented. Success depends on A, B, C.”

There’s disagreement these days about whether benchmarks for success must be quantitative. Many experts say, for example, that increased conversation with clients and prospects through social media is intrinsically valuable.⁹

The point is that the best B2B marketing partner will help you understand the **pros and cons of all the tactics available**. They won’t reply to, “what’s the best way to generate more business?” with a pronouncement like:

“What you need is a new website design.”

“What you need is a Google Adwords campaign.”

“What you need is a newsletter.”

In short, the initial focus should be on **methodically preparing your firm** to attract and quickly capitalize on a moment’s attention from a prospect. A focus on a particular tactic right out of the gate can make you wonder: does this B2B marketing consultant see all the options? How can they confidently recommend this over the others at this point?

⁹ David Meerman Scott recommends that if one’s CEO asks ‘what is the marketing ROI?’ you reply, “what is the ROI on putting on your pants in the morning?” If you take his advice and get thrown out on your ear, take it up with David.

Seeing and seizing opportunities

You also need a **partner who will speak up** when you're missing something important, and suggest re-allocations as needed. Can a specialist be expected to do that? For example, can your media relations consultant be expected to say:

“Google just announced a major search algorithm change. We need to act now. Take the next couple of months’ investment in landing new press coverage and put that toward adding properly tagged images and videos to your site. That will get you to the top of Google rankings faster and at less expense.”

It would be unreasonable to expect a specialist in one discipline to keep you abreast of other disciplines. Being at the top of one's game in media relations requires **sustained focus** on relationship building; it means investment in exchanging real value with the right contacts in the analyst, traditional media, and blog worlds. It doesn't require knowing all the other marketing disciplines.

Your B2B marketing partner sure as heck better know how to make all the major marketing disciplines work in your favor, though.

It's their job is to help you **move the needle at your business for the fewest possible dollars** – and that means seeing all the options and how they can work together. In the process, they should help you build your capacity for savvy marketing decisions.

8. Finding the right consultant – ditch the RFPs?

Many companies struggle when it comes to shopping around for a potential service provider. How formal should your process be? Do you need an RFP to evaluate suppliers?

While a well thought-out evaluation process is critical to uncovering the best solution for your needs, don't mistake effort for results. A lengthy RFP process forces you to wait, by default, for the best candidate to emerge from the process. It may be more efficient to **nailed down the right evaluation criteria**, identify the best candidate, and then get started.

I'm not talking about sacrificing quality for speed. You can still ask the questions on page 3 to learn about approach, breadth of expertise, and results — as well as ROI-specific information like how a consultant will project progress and results, test efforts and learn from their findings, **report marketing ROI to you**, and help you connect marketing progress to business goals.

When evaluating marketing ROI reports, these are important tracking metrics:

- Response rates and sources
- **Percent responses becoming leads**
- Patterns in email click-through rates
- Patterns in subscribe/unsubscribe rates
- Subscriber comments
- Publicity value of published articles
- **Links from respected websites**

9. The need for services in B2B marketing

[Peter Kim](#) recently reviewed two Forrester reports that point to a need for companies to **work with an agency** to leverage brand monitoring and social networks for business. He writes:

“To fully understand these technologies and capture value, you're going to need some help. In the future, this won't be the case when companies integrate social technologies naturally into process and mindset. During the long transformative transition in the meantime, companies will need help getting there.”¹⁰

The same can be said of inbound B2B marketing. To fully understand what to do – and to do the doing – you’re going to need some help. Just make sure you pick a first-rate B2B marketing consultant.

Let’s recap the qualities you need in your partner:

- A team focused on B2B marketing. Because buying committees expect a powerfully built business case.
- A team that’s methodical. Because a systematic approach is the only sane, reliable way to project and get results.
- A team that covers all major marketing disciplines. Because you need the right tool for each job.
- A team led by Internet marketers. Because [92% of B2B buyers use online resources](#) when looking for products and services.¹¹
- A team of testers. Because you need your marketing consultant to scrutinize results and steadily boost ROI.

¹⁰ See [The need for services in social technology](#) at the Being Peter Kim blog, 1/26/2009.

¹¹ In a recent survey of 1,000 business decision makers by marketing research firm [Enquiro](#) examining how business to business (B2B) purchasers buy, 92 percent of respondents said they turn to online resources in the early stages of the buying cycle. And 77 percent named Google as their first choice among all search engines. See [B2B Survey 2007](#) (registration required by Enquiro for free download).

10. Recommended Resources

[David Meerman Scott](#) on “[The New Rules of PR](#)” – an e-book that motivated so much more than the title of this guide.

[Laura Ramos](#) of Forrester Research – a thought leader on the future of B2B marketing.

[HubSpot](#) – generators of a staggering quantity of high quality articles about inbound marketing.¹²

[MarketingSherpa](#) – my top resource for original analysis on what works and what doesn’t on the major disciplines of B2B marketing

[Peter Kim](#) – a thought leader on business transformation in the digital age.

Contact Us

Get in touch with the B2B marketing consultants at Business Communications Group LLC:

Contact: Rebekah Donaldson

Tel: 530-231-5397

Email: ask@b2bcommunications.com

Web: www.b2bcommunications.com

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Thanks for [downloading](#) this e-book. I’ve started a forum to [discuss it](#), and welcome you to visit. You can share any thoughts or questions directly by emailing me at Red@b2bcommunications.com.

Rebekah E. Donaldson (Red)

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¹² After writing the ‘Inbound Marketing is Essential’ section I found a Hubspot Internet Marketing Blog video that expresses this scenario really well. See “The Power of Interruption Marketing” under [Thanksgiving-Day Special: The Best of HubSpot Films](#), 11/27/2008.