The B2B Executive Playbook

By Sean Geehan

SEAN GEEHAN PRESENTS

B2B Executive Playbook

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Introduction

In my upcoming book, *The B2B Executive Playbook,* I have included a special chapter about leveraging the marketing arm of an organization to create true value to the company. My observation is that the balance of the leadership team struggles to find consistent value and credibility from the activities coming out of the marketing organization.

I believe that the concepts in this chapter will help executives across the organization, especially the CEO, CFO, Sales and R&D, understand the business value marketing brings to the table and the financial impact it can have. Additionally, it will bring clarity to business leaders as to how a true B2B marketing organization can be more effective. In it, you will find information on budgeting, maximizing margin yield, branding, ROI, positioning, and how oftentimes, activities get confused with results.

I am happy to share this chapter with you, and I look forward to discussing these concepts further. The completed book is due for release in late Spring.

Thank you,

Sean

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Leveraging Marketing to Drive Organizational Value

Successful B2C Practices Can Spell Doom for B2B

Michael Jordan could hit the winning shot under the most extreme pressure, soar like no other, put his team on his shoulders, and carry them to championships. He did that in high school, in college, in the Olympics, and a record five times in the NBA. But in baseball, he couldn't hit a change up or curve ball from a mediocre pitcher to earn him a spot on a minor league team. One person, two different games, two different outcomes: Domination and Failure!

Business books and conferences showcase and feature executives from high profile B2C companies like Starbucks, Apple, Victoria Secret, Coke, Disney, Facebook, and Amazon. The reason is simple: anyone can relate to them ***personally*** because most people have heard of them, and many have used these products. But most often the reality is that B2B leaders can't apply their stories and approaches in the same manner because it is a completely different experience for both the customer and the provider. I will provide more detail about these differences in the pages that follow.

And when you read these incredible stories or hear the case studies, how often have you known that it just wasn't applicable in your company? In many of those times, you were able to clearly articulate why, but in some areas, you couldn't quite put your finger on it but had that "instinctive feeling" that turned alarms on in your head.

Michael Jordan was the best basketball player ever to play the game; many believe the greatest athlete of all time. How did he do when he left basketball to play baseball? He lacked experience and he couldn't even make a minor league team in baseball. So why do B2B leaders recruit basketball players (B2C) to play baseball (B2B)?

There's a saying that warns business leaders from hiring people from high profile retailers and Consumer Package Goods companies (Coke, P&G, etc.): "Never be the first to hire someone from P&G." Why? Because the formula for success is completely different, yet they don't understand that. Often, they are typically hired to "save us," "get us back on track"…and because of the high profile company they came from, many executives give more authority to these people than normal. This ultimately makes the damage much greater, and clearly this is a formula for disastrous results.

Have you recruited your Michael Jordan from a different sport to win your game?

Gary Slack, President of one of the largest B2B associations, Business Marketing Association (BMA), believes that marketers need to take on a larger, more significant role in B2B organizations. This means moving from exclusively internal marketing activities (marketing communication and operation of marketing) to a much broader role which also includes organizational issues like profitable growth and widening margins. He calls it "Little m and Big M marketing." Slack says, "Marketing leaders must get out of the silos, connecting, contributing and adding value to other parts of the business and directly impacting revenue and profits."

The B2B Playbook provides marketing executives with the opportunity to become Big M marketers, have impact across the entire organization, and connect and strategically lead cross-functional initiatives. Doing so will solidify the relationship between Marketing and Sales as well as Marketing and Development.

There is a tremendous opportunity for marketing to earn a "seat at the table" and become a significant functional head in a B2B business unit or company. Earlier in the book we highlighted how marketing can drive organizational planning as well as guide the innovation roadmap and identify acquisition targets. In addition, marketing leaders can be the catalyst for the entire organization and be viewed by the CEO as a key driver of Sustainable, Predictable, Profitable Growth (SPPG). This goal helps you reach the endgame: maximizing shareholder wealth.

Samir Bagga, VP of Marketing at $3B Indian-based IT services company HCL, explained that the Playbook's framework has helped him plug into the parts of the organization where marketing can really make a difference to the entire organization's success.

The Great Marketing Divide

One of the biggest differences between B2B and B2C is marketing. Many extremely successful marketing leaders in B2C have a difficult time making the much needed adjustments to be successful.

I've witnessed dozens of successful B2C marketing executives who have been met with the same results as Jordan did when they crossed over from a B2B to a B2C organization.

Commonly, I run into high-profile executives much like the one I worked with who came from a major soft drink company. He is a great individual. He amassed all kinds of accolades and had great success at his former company as a brand leader of its flagship product. His honors included national advertising and marketing awards as well as several industry awards. The financials were incredible too…market share gains and profitable growth. Then he jumped to a B2B. He applied the B2C formula that made him a huge success at his old company.

His new company had 10,000 customers, but their top 50 customers comprised 50% of the company's revenue. The top 200 were around 75% of the revenue of this $4 billion company. He didn't fully understand the impact of this concentration of revenue and violated nearly every B2B success principle outlined in the book. Most of what he did was in the name of branding, (new look, logo, tagline, positioning, etc.). He committed millions to what made him wildly successful at his B2C company.

The results were brutal: sales went down, market share slid, margins tumbled, and because he also oversaw and shifted R&D dollars to marketing, their product started to become commoditized because they weren't reinvesting like the competition. In addition, many of their top customers were leaving them, signing exclusive long-term deals with the competition - never to return. The only thing that collapsed more than the financial results was the company morale.

According to Spencer Stuart, global executive search firm, the CMO position has been the shortest-tenured C-Level position for the last seven consecutive years at roughly 20 months. The individual mentioned above lasted three years. He has been gone for about three years now, and they still haven't fully recovered from the damage that the B2C applications caused to this great B2B company. It was like wearing a basketball uniform to a football game. It was ugly.

Critical Success Factors of B2B Marketing

In this chapter, I will illustrate five critical success factors that will elevate the role of marketing and support the success of the Playbook. The first of these success factors relates directly to the issues relevant to the CEO, CFO and Marketing leader. The second critical success factor will provide insight for the CFO, explaining how ROI can be increased. The final three success factors discuss the importance of obtaining relevant input and general marketing best practices.

In addition to these success factors, it's important to identify the three key differentiators that give B2B marketing a distinctly different focus:

- ***Weighting and prioritizing*** elements including personas, segments, demographics, etc.
- ***Domain knowledge*** – the expertise and overall sophistication of the prospect/customer
- ***Level of the customer*** – user, influencer, decision maker

Understanding these critical success factors and key differentiators will provide a mindset for the B2B marketing executive that will propel the organization toward *SPPG*.

Critical Success Factor: B2B Branding and Positioning go through the customer

While there is no universal agreement on the definition of brand, the core is simply how the market views your company - your reputation. It includes aspects such as what your firm is known for, where the market believes you have value or credibility, and your company's personality and culture.

Branding and positioning in B2B and B2C are a world apart. I'm a living case-in-point. I drink more Diet Coke than I do anything else. I have it stocked in my home fridge, in my work fridge and I order it every day at lunch. The image of the Coke brand, for me as the customer, is defined entirely by the advertising, package design, my friends' perceptions and my experience with the taste. I have no personal relationship or connection with the organization itself and yet I am entirely loyal to that brand. If the package is damaged I assume my local grocer dropped it while putting it out on the shelf. If it tastes bad when I order it at a restaurant, I blame the restaurant for not have the right mix of syrup and water. Coke has me pegged.

B2C companies invest millions to understand the various personas, segments, demographics, and geographical nuances that will help them determine how to position and manage their brands to appeal to the faceless masses. In the B2C retail category, (Starbucks, Disney, Target and others) the brand is also impacted by additional elements such as the store (look, experience, etc.) and the people (knowledge, culture, and interactions.).

In the B2B world, brand position is established with these same above-mentioned brand-building components. The major difference, however, is the ***priority and weighting*** these elements are assigned. The primary factor in determining this weighting is the impact that a very few customers can have on the fate of the business. As you can see on the chart below, Amazon and GE Aviation have roughly the same amount of revenue; however, GE Aviation has only 500 customers while Amazon has nearly 88 million customers. Taking this a step further, 80% of GE's sales come from only 50 customers, while the same percentage of sales at Amazon comes from 18 million customers. Getting this right—connecting with these few, key customers—can make the difference between Branding Nirvana and losing your job.

Exhibit 1

B2C	B2B
Amazon	**GE Aviation**
$19 Billion Revenue	**$17 Billion Revenue**
88,000,000 Total Customers	**500 Total Customers**
80% of sales comes from 18 Million Customers	**80% of sales comes from 50 Customers**

In the B2B world, the people you are selling to are industry veterans who are usually subject matter experts. Simply put, they are living what you are selling. When GE Aviation sells jet engines to Boeing, the people who are evaluating and making the decision are engineers who have been in the aviation industry for 15-25 years. When Harris Broadcast sells content distribution solutions to Disney, the people evaluating and making the decisions have 15 years in the media industry. The expertise, level of complexity, layers of customer contacts and overall sophistication of the prospect is exceptionally high.

In a blind taste test in the B2C world, 90% of the population can't tell a $10 bottle of wine from a $100 bottle. Nor can they tell the difference between free tap water and a $5 Fiji bottled water. A sophisticated and highly emotional marketing and branding program can yield premium results when you're marketing something for which the buyer honestly can't differentiate the product.

In the B2B world, it's just the opposite. While customers may not know your specific offering, they usually know their industry better than those who supply it and they know how to uniquely apply your product, solution or service. They will scrutinize, compare, benchmark, test, and go to third parties and associations for references and validation.

Think about the ***domain knowledge*** level of the CIO who has worked in the financial services industry for 22 years. If you have IT solutions to serve this market, your company better know his needs, priorities, his environment and requirements…and most of all, you better have peers (fellow CIOs) he can talk to about working with your firm. If you don't have this, a well-designed logo, powerful tagline, slick campaign, elaborate brochure or PPT presentation will not overcome the lack of credibility to support a premium position. Too much is at risk in his world: security of the bank assets, privacy issues, government compliance, the customer experience and the CIO's reputation and career. In fact, CIOs consistently rate peer input as the #1 credible and trusted source, primarily due to their domain knowledge.

As a result, the most effective way to build or reposition a strong credible brand in B2B is through your current customers. It's how they describe their experience working with your company; it's what they say you successfully delivered (or where you fell short), which will ultimately determine your corporate brand position. And the higher level they are (user, influencer, decision maker), the more impact they will have.

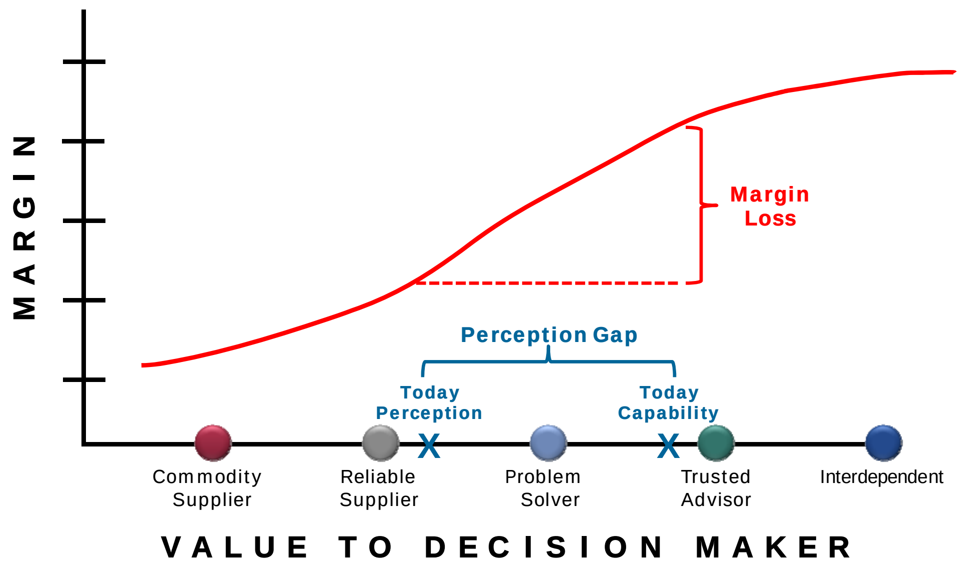
In the B2B arena, branding also has a ***three-level dimension,*** which is the third primary difference. It's important that the value of the brand is anchored as high as possible at decision maker level in order to maximize margin opportunity. Position must be earned independently at all levels. Ultimately, your margin value will be controlled by the decision makers' perception or position of your firm.

Tom Webster has been the marketing leader at several firms prior to becoming CEO at Intesource. Webster concludes that in the B2B world, "The customers are your brand managers. They establish it and significantly impact it. And if you earn it, they can accelerate its evolution more effectively than anything else. Nothing boosts our position like a CFO (Intesource's key decision maker) sharing and endorsing the benefits of our solution or working with Intesource. It's magic."

A little over a decade ago, Indian service provider, HCL, broke into the US market just like their Indian counterpart competitors—and all on the same "low cost" value proposition. Two things have changed since then. First, many of their US competitors (IBM, HP/EDS, CA, Accenture, etc.) have set up significant operations in India (thus making their own cost structures more competitive). The second is that HCL beefed up their capability to move up the value continuum…from the commodity positioning to that of a reliable supplier (a few years ago) to now being a problem solver. Here's their dilemma (brand gap): the companies who work with them are beginning to form their perception of HCL, but most *prospective* companies are either unaware of HCL (little or no awareness of their added value) or have bundled them with the traditional Indian provider value proposition (as a low cost provider).

Until perception catches reality, HCL will have discussions anchored at (and more importantly, margin expectations of) that of a Reliable Supplier vs. Problem Solver or Trusted Advisor, and it will have a financial impact on HCL's margins and revenue growth. This is where marketing and branding matters. HCL's global CMO Krishnan Chatterjee explained, "We have the proof points that can support our desired position as Trusted Advisor. In 2011, my responsibility is to move the perception of the market to the reality of what we are capable of delivering to IT leaders around the globe." The scorecard will be the pipeline, and sales and margin growth vs. the competition.

Exhibit 2



The good news is that it is easier to establish a brand if you have customers who can help effectively position the company by sharing their story and experience. Changing or transforming a brand is more difficult when you are trying to move up the value continuum.

For those who don't know HCL, a mix of marketing tactics to position the company in the desired higher position is required. The core marketing tactic must be customer-led references that definitively separates HCL from the traditional Indian low cost position and aligns them with the premium brands in their space. Secondly, there need to be credible third parties who will confirm this message (i. e. industry analysts like Forrester or Gartner). All this can then be supplemented by a messaging campaign that repeats and amplifies the position established by their most credible asset, their customers.

A logo, tagline, event sponsorship and/or sexy ad campaign will have little impact and success for B2B companies; and the higher you go up the value continuum, the more success becomes exponentially difficult unless you have willing and enthusiastic decision makers to actively share their story on your behalf and respected third parties validating it. This is where you'll have the most success branding or repositioning your company. It's also the fastest path.

For companies like Dell and Xerox, who established a strong brand position in the B2B space as reliable suppliers of hardware, the shift to becoming a credible brand as a higher value supplier was so difficult that they determined that buying brands with this higher brand position made more financial sense (Dell with Perot Systems and Xerox with ACS).

Bottom line: The few who control your fate in revenue and profitability — the decision makers within lead customers—also control the fate of your brand. This is not the case with branding in the B2C world. Actively engage these few parties; otherwise, branding and repositioning efforts will fail or, at best, take significantly longer.

Critical Success Factor: Maximize marketing's ROI

Part A: Move up the food chain - The decisions makers control your fate

One of the fastest-growing large companies in the world is Palo Alto-based VMware. VMware's sales have tripled over the last four years from $600M in 2006 to $2B in 2009, and they are expected to hit sales of $3B in 2010. This may be why they are Wall Street darlings. In addition to delivering high-growth, they are growing profitably and predictably relative to the competition. What can B2B marketers learn from VMware's success?

Most B2B companies spend marketing dollars targeting the wrong level of audience.

VMWare's head of Global Strategic Partners, Scott Musson, believes that starting at the top has been critical to their success in their high-growth space. He explained, "In our space, our competitors have been around for a long, long time (e.g. Microsoft). We don't have the luxury of branding ourselves to the entire planet. Nor do I believe it's even effective. We must maximize every marketing and sales dollar spent. And for VMware as in other outperforming firms I've been a part of, the investment starts with the decision makers."

First and foremost, 75% of marketing budgets are targeted at the user/purchasing levels. Only 15% is spent at the influencer level, and sadly, only 10% is spent at the decision maker level.

Let's examine this imbalance. The companies who have separated themselves from their benchmark competitors have a marketing budget spread that more closely resembles the following: 35% to the users/purchasing, 35% to influencers, and 30% to the decision makers. This shift is equivalent to approximately three times that of underperforming competitors. So clearly, rebalancing the marketing spend to hit the decision makers is important for success. B2B marketers who know and understand the breakdown of their spending can better allocate their budgets and make a huge difference in a short period of time.

Exhibit 3

B2B Marketing Time/Money Allocation

	Typical	Optimal
Decision Maker Final authority/signature	10%	30%
Influencer Evaluation and due diligence of any potential purchase	15%	35%
User Those directly using the product or service	60%	30%
Purchasing Facilitate and govern buying protocols	15%	5%

Explanation: This represents marketing and sales budgets allocated to programs and initiatives that support the related buying segment or persona. This does not include time spent in Training and/or Customer Support.

How do you think the sales organization would feel about marketing if the number of qualified leads at the decision maker level tripled? Penetrating at the decision maker level also shortens the sales cycle and more often shifts the discussions from cost to value (yielding higher margins).

The objective of rebalancing is not to spend more. It's shifting the marketing budget to places where it will yield greater returns. That is why it is so important to analyze where your marketing budgets are going and spend strategically. Taking this view on branding and positioning will provide insight to the CFO and provide a common reference point with regard to the financial impact branding and positioning can have. And when the number of customers that account for the majority of your revenue is small, it's important that you weight your budgets accordingly.

Marketers who can justify the ROI on every dollar spent are the ones who become true partners within the organization and who catapult their credibility among the entire leadership team.

The quick litmus test is, “How effectively does marketing target and engage decision makers?” or “How do you personally connect with your top customer’s decision makers?” An easy measure is to ask the sales team who they engage with at their top customers. If they don’t engage the decision maker, the gun is smoking.

Part B: Love the ones you’re with

Everyone gets excited when a major new customer is secured. There’s a celebration, bells are ringing, and lots of recognition and rewards are doled out. This may even merit a personal call or note from the president.

Yet, how much celebration happens when a long-standing customer renews for the sixth straight year? Forget that they haven’t bid out the work in three years (no competition=greater margin) and they are already in your system (low cost of support, faster payment = greater cash flow). What is marketing doing to celebrate and sustain these key wins?

It costs 3-5 times more to acquire a new account than it does to retain an existing customer. Getting your current customers buying more of your stuff means it’s harder for them to leave you (increased switching cost), and current customers are much less likely to bid out your work (increasing profitability).

In 2009, the IT industry was hit hard by the economic downturn. Indian outsourcer HCL managed a 24% growth rate that year. Only one of their competitors grew during the same period (4% growth) and the rest of their competition were flat or fell below their previous year’s sales. Over 70% of HCL’s sales growth came from their current customers. The outperformers like HCL, Oracle, Wells Fargo and Intesource invest more marketing dollars into existing account growth than new customer acquisition.

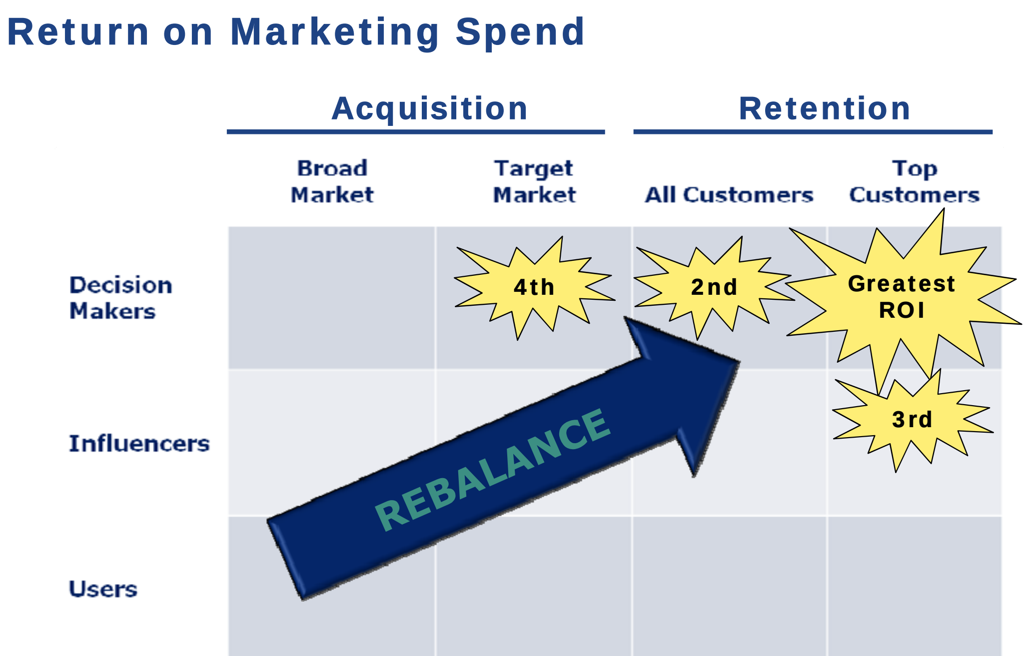
This is where marketing can help sales increase account penetration - aggressive marketing programs targeted at current customers. Too many companies miss this tremendous revenue opportunity. How many times have your customers said, “I wish I knew your company did that…I would have purchased from you.?” Marketing can change that.

By monitoring key metrics, you will increase your chances for success:

- What are your retention rates?
- What is your percentage of penetration by offering? By account?
- What is the ROI of the offerings your customers are buying?
- What is the level of awareness of each of your offerings?
- What is the level of awareness with regard to company acquisitions and/or partnerships?

Once you have this key information, it’s important that your area of the business focuses on and evaluates the marketing spend to support maintaining your current customers. At the aforementioned companies, this is marketing’s priority.

Exhibit 4



If you combine Parts A (*Target the Decision Maker*) and B (*Retain your current customers*), it quickly becomes apparent that your biggest opportunities lie within a few accounts and that a few specific people control your fate. This is true for companies like $3 billion HCL, where 70% of their revenue comes from just 60 customers or $20 billion GE Aviation, where 80% of their revenue comes from 50 customers, or a firm under $50 million like Intesource, where 80% of revenue comes from only 12 customers.

Start all your marketing plans there. It's where the greatest returns on investments are made.

Critical Success Factor: The voice of the User doesn't equal the Voice of the Customer

Getting the right input from the market and acting on it will determine your mid- and long-term success. Marketing needs to immerse itself in this goal with absolute commitment.

Recently, I met with the person who leads the "Voice of the Customer" (VOC) program for a $1.6B company in an industry that is in complete transformation. She proudly told me that they had received over 1,000 responses to their latest customer survey. And the numbers were great: over 85% of the respondents were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the services they offered. The problem here is that this firm only has a 68% retention rate. Most organizations try to predict retention rates based on customer satisfaction scores. The reality is in B2B, *user satisfaction does not equal customer retention*. Here's why…

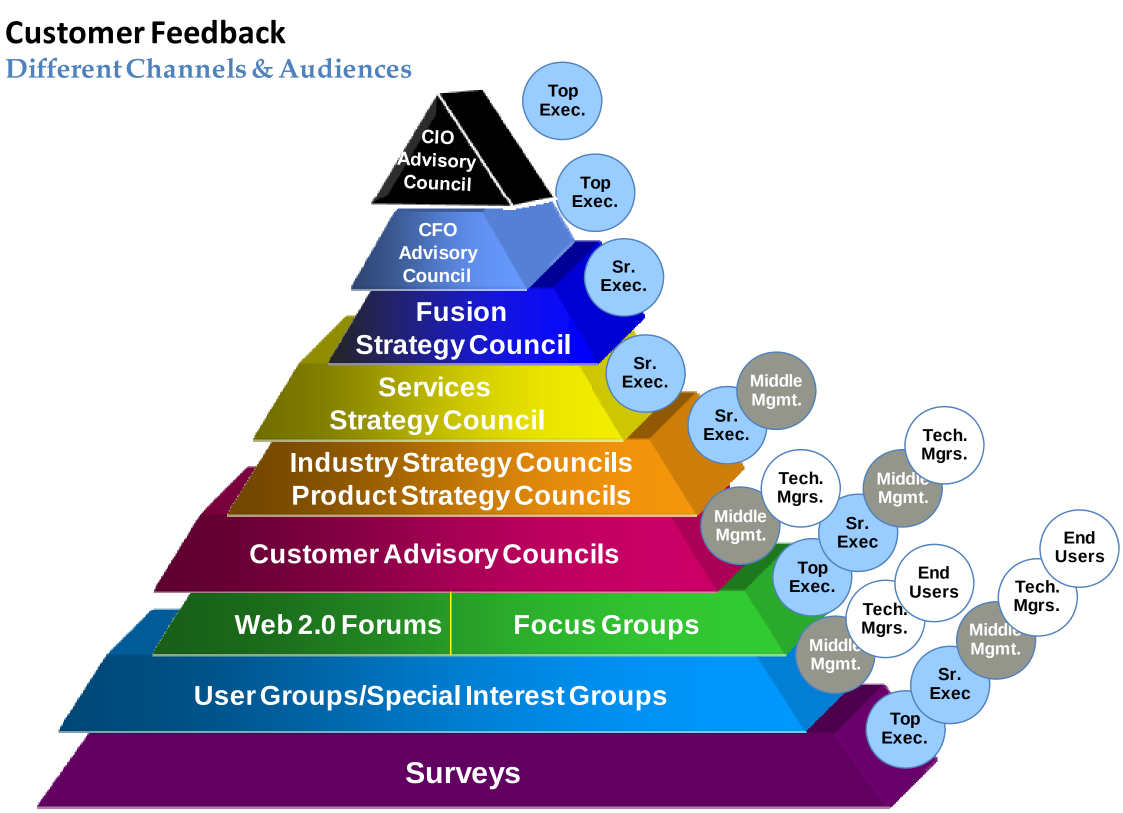
I asked her, "Of the 1,000+ respondents, how many were decision makers that completed and returned the survey?" Her response was, "Zero." There were only three responses from the influencer level. Virtually all the responses were from the user/purchasing level. Although these numbers are hard to believe, this is very common.

Key question: Is your program a holistic "Voice of the Customer" or simply a "Voice of the User?"

I rarely see over 20% weighting of decision makers and influencers combined in VOC programs. Due to this, many customer surveys and related programs are deceiving and misleading. Remember, most customers that leave a company, leave satisfied. (According to Bloomberg Businessweek, 60% of defecting customers describe themselves as "very satisfied" just before they leave - October, 2009) The truth, unfortunately, is that user satisfaction does not equal customer retention.

When we dug deeper, we learned that this company's margins, sales, and market share have been in decline for four straight years despite significant improvements in the User Satisfaction and NPS scores. While this balance may seem way out of line, the reality is that most executives don't fill out surveys and/or most companies don't have programs to get decision makers engaged in providing feedback.

Exhibit 5 – Oracle consolidated and then tiered their feedback groups—standardizing the behaviors/input across each of them and adopting a pyramid structure with each level.



Customer feedback must be separated by level to understand and align with the market needs to drive great retention, predictability, and insight.

A great example of how a company secures input from all levels within its customers' organizations is Oracle, led by SVP and Chief Customer Officer Jeb Dasteel. Oracle is committed to securing input and feedback from all levels.

When Oracle is directly engaged with the decision makers of a particular client, that client's retention rate is more than 20% greater than when Oracle does not have that level of relationship.

Oracle not only gauges the client's satisfaction but also includes the client in the key dialogues, ideation, and input opportunities. That gives decision makers a seat at the table to guide Oracle's direction. The partnership approach that Oracle launched in 2004 has significantly separated Oracle from its competitors.

Says Oracle's Dasteel, "While user relationships and their input are critical to our success, it is only one view. Without the engagement and insight of decision makers, we would be lacking whole categories of feedback and opportunities for collaboration."

User insight is wonderful for product or service improvement, but it will not guide long-term success or predictability. Firms must engage at all levels, but center on the decision maker to achieve sustainable, predictable, and profitable growth.

In the B2C arena, the user is usually the decision maker. I'm thirsty; I buy and drink a Coke. If I like the experience, I choose to buy another. Customer satisfaction is a very effective tool for repeat business in B2C. It's not that simple or straightforward in B2B, where there may be just hundreds of users, dozens of influencers, and perhaps a single decision maker--with whom many suppliers have little or no relationship.

Although it is comfortable to approach and engage users, they are just "table stakes." They cannot change the game. Most companies over-engineer their products to satisfy user requests but business minds cannot justify the added investments. Therefore, the new products do not get purchased. By approaching the decision makers, marketers can determine exactly what will be purchased.

Bottom line: Be sure to start all VOC programs with the decision maker. That's where the war is won. Separate and analyze all VOC numbers by three levels: user, influencer and decision maker. This will give you a much more accurate view of how you stand with each important group.

Critical Success Factor: Don't get activity confused with results

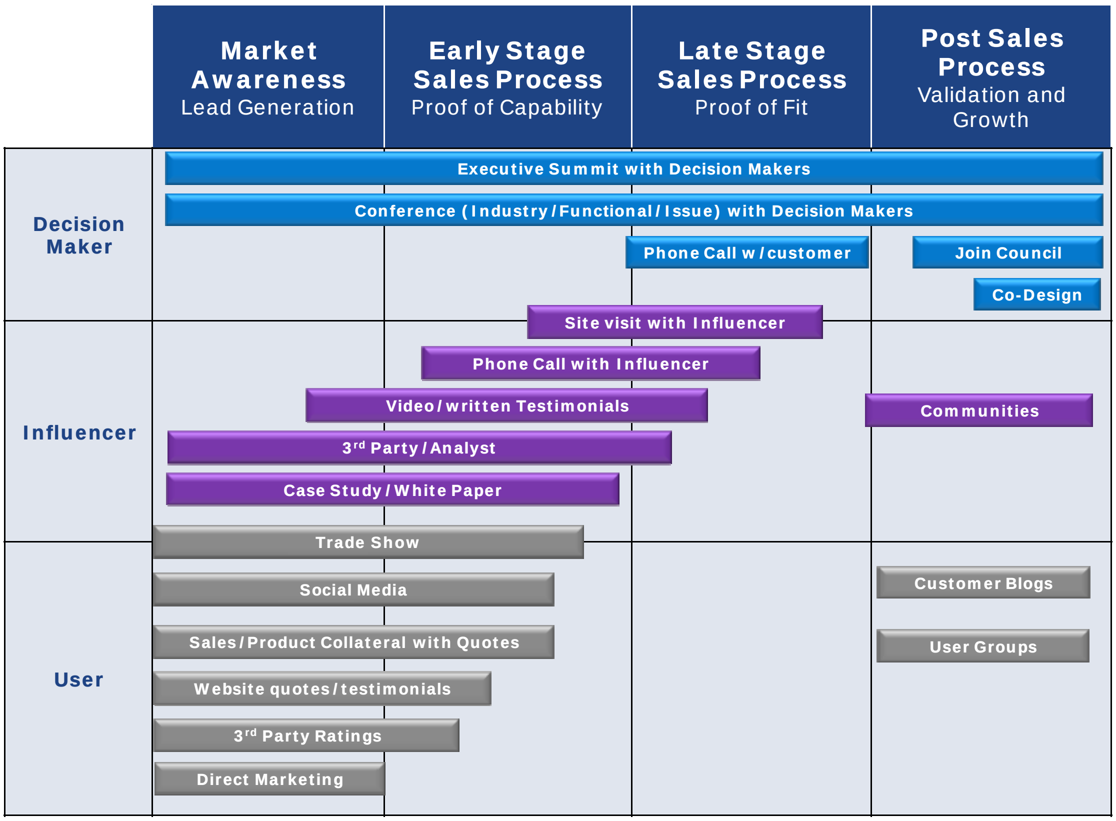
Marketers are open to new ideas and trying different approaches. This is a wonderful attribute. As the marketing leader, you need to make sure these activities have defined objectives and measureable success criteria.

Remember when direct mail was the "shiny new toy?" About fifteen years ago, a highly respected marketing executive sponsored a premium plan which had all the elements of an award winning direct mail campaign. The program won them several awards in marketing and industry circles. He was proud of the fact that it was an incredible success. Their original objective was to target their top 15 accounts and top 15 prospects in order to increase the number of "major accounts." Well, they went from 15 to 13 top accounts. In the end, the program lacked depth, substance and relevance. But because of the awards and buzz, he went ahead and approved a similar campaign for the following year. When the CEO and sales leader found this out, the program was immediately halted. This person's credibility plummeted, and it took him years to earn it back.

Examples of pricey campaigns with no ROI can found in many legacy programs. Within a $1B company, 25% of its marketing budget was allocated to booths and sponsorships at over 100 trade shows/conferences a year. The CEO recently asked for the ROI of these events. Not surprisingly, they were not able to associate a single deal with over 80 of these events. They couldn't even name one specific deal that had resulted from the trade shows at which they exhibited, although the objective of these events was to drive revenue and leads.

Naturally the CEO asked, "Why are we still going?" The answer: "Because we have always done them." The reality is that the attendees of these trade shows are predominantly end-users. Rarely were influencers and/or decision makers a part of these events. They now go only to the 10 conferences that include the influencers and decision makers--and they go with much more commitment, focus and investment. Quality in number of leads has been boosted significantly, along with much higher awareness among decision makers. There is now a strong ROI as well and a robust pipeline.

Exhibit 6



Today, there are so many shiny new toys - blogging, online communities, Twitter, webinars, mobile apps, etc. I'm a huge fan of these tools when applied strategically. Before allocating the time and money, it is imperative to make sure you do the homework – determine whether this is where your influencers and decision makers are landing and participating. The next new thing can create a lot of excitement, but in the end, you are the one who needs to make sure the team is first and foremost delivering the results (qualified leads, etc).

We find legacy programs within many companies that aren't delivering returns--programs that are highly redundant (surveys that ask the same questions from various parts of the organization, for example), or initiatives that are thrown together at the last minute (reactive). The result is usually a lot of activity, stress, errors, and very little impact on the original goal. The challenge for marketers is to truly take time to think about the few programs that will generate consistent results.

Bottom line: Evaluate all your programs. There should be no sacred cows. You should include sales leaders to work through this process to get their support. Keep it as simple as possible. Plan the work and then work the plan.

Critical Success Factor: Nix the marketing jargon

Let's face it: Marketers invent words to describe things that could be expressed simply. The only group that invents more words than marketers are consultants. (Now that's a self-inflicted wound. We have acronyms for everything.) While inventing and propagating novel phrases gives you street credibility in the marketing arena, industry and in the web 2.0 world, if you want to be taken seriously by your CEO and peers across the organization, speak in common-language business terminology.

This is one of the biggest complaints I hear from senior leaders about marketing. Does this sound familiar?

"We can drive share by leveraging our value proposition downstream to maximize our brand equity in the cloud. This will provide a boost in RSS and incentivized traffic and ultimately new logo acquisitions. We'll supplement this all with virtual eZine programs. We can also engage powerbloggers that follow netiquette protocols to boost our CTRs."

Here a few more terms to avoid whenever possible:

- SEO
- Web 2.0
- RSS
- Logo Acquisition
- CTR
- Netiquette
- eZine
- Permission marketing
- PowerBlogger
- Cloud
- Incentivized Traffic
- Impressions
- Low-hanging fruit
- (Add your favorites)

I guarantee that most of the heads of sales, service, strategy, finance, IT, and development do not - and have no desire to - translate, interpret or decipher jargon like this. It's like when you visit a foreign country. Everyone appreciates it when you make the effort to speak the language. The more you communicate in common business terminology, the more you'll be accepted and respected by your peers and your boss.

Bottom line: The great thing about this last critical success factor is that it's so simple to implement. Speak in a language that your colleagues and customers will understand and it will be easier to bring them on board with your initiatives. You'll be in a much better position to have real and effective conversations.

Summary

By applying these concepts and truly following the tenets that are specific to B2B, you will catapult your credibility, impact, and longevity. Additionally, you will solidify the leadership's understanding of the financial impact and value the marketing organization can bring to the B2B world. Following these principles will assist you in getting buy-in and team alignment, resulting in stronger cross-functional relationships. And again, these roads will ultimately lead to sustainable, predictable, profitable growth.