

# Tell, Then Show:

Lead with Knowledge to  
Strategically Market Your  
B2B Tech Company



# Introduction

What makes marketing a B2B tech company different from, say, a manufacturing company? Buyers often need to understand your product before they can even begin to consider it. The selling process will always require a bit of show and tell, but in the case of technology, you need to reverse it. Basically, tell what you know, then show what you do. You need to share your knowledge of your field and niche to assist prospects along their learning curve, as well as their buying journey.

Establish yourself as a helpful thought leader, then show prospective customers how they will benefit from your particular products. Strategic marketing can help any B2B company build their brand, raise awareness, attract customers and beat competitors. If small to midsize tech companies take a tell then show approach to strategic marketing, they will grow their reputation, form deeper connections with potential customers, differentiate themselves in their marketplace and maximize revenues.





A photograph of three business professionals walking in a modern office hallway. On the left is a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a grey blazer over a patterned scarf and carrying a black and white tote bag. In the center is a man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. On the right is a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red and white checkered shirt and dark trousers, holding a white folder. They are all smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows a bright, modern office interior with large windows and glass railings.

# B2B Tech Companies Need Strategic Marketing

A CMO/Deloitte survey showed that technology companies allocate 15% of their overall budget to marketing, well ahead of the 11% average across all industries.<sup>1</sup> As an SME, your marketing budget may not yet be at 15%, but it needs to be allocated and adhered to. In companies where dedicated marketing budgets are highest, close to 40% say that marketing<sup>1</sup> – not sales, not product improvements, not aftersales support, but marketing – is responsible for leading their revenue growth. High praise, indeed.

Customers can't buy what they haven't heard of. And they won't buy what they don't understand. B2B tech companies need to market strategically to get their product front and center in the minds of prospective buyers. And the real challenge lies in reaching and engaging not just one buyer per sale, but more than a handful. On average, 6.8 people are involved in B2B purchasing decisions.<sup>2</sup> This brings with it an added layer of difficulty for technology sales:

1. Educating buyers on the technology;
2. Informing buyers about your particular solution and its benefits;
3. Delivering the right information to multiple personas with varying levels of tech knowledge.

Marketing and selling B2B technology is, therefore, daunting. And with increasingly lower barriers to entry, the competition in the tech industry can be fierce. Strategic marketing is a game changer. But if you have no skin in the game, you'll never succeed.



# The New Selling Landscape

The world of B2B buying and selling has shifted dramatically. Today, 94% of B2B buyers are doing their own research online before they want to engage with your salespeople.<sup>3</sup> Marketing has become the new customer-facing offensive line, and forward thinking tech companies know they need to market strategically if they want to survive.

## EDUCATE BUYERS AND SELL YOUR BENEFITS

The biggest challenge lies in the types of stakeholders involved in each purchase, and the fact that each stakeholder will have varying levels of tech familiarity. To get the sale, you will likely be appealing to the IT people or engineers who understand your type of offering but will want to know how you're better; representatives from the user groups who want proof of the benefits/usability of the product; the finance people who may look at whether the purchase should be structured to hit the P & L statement or the balance sheet; and the CEO who is looking at ROI and time to value.

If you're lucky, your buyers will all have sophisticated knowledge in your particular tech field and will simply want to know how they will benefit from your product over your competitors'. But if you're selling technology with broad interdepartmental reach, chances are your marketing will need to educate many levels of stakeholders, as well as clearly spell out how your product will benefit multiple departments with multiple agendas.

## DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MILLENNIAL BUYERS AND INFLUENCERS

Gone are the days when buyers were all pretty similar in your channels. You may have had 2-3 personas, and you knew how to sell to each one, but tech buyers are changing rapidly. Today, 1/3 of millennials report having budget and/or sign-off on enterprise technology purchases of \$10,000 or more.<sup>4</sup> Compare this to 23% of baby boomers and 27% of Gen Xers.<sup>4</sup>

Millennials are the largest generation in the US and Canadian labour forces. Many of your prospects are millennials, whether in the role of decision maker or researcher/influencer, so it's crucial that B2B tech companies understand how to market to them.

For the powerful and influential millennial demographic, your marketing needs to:

- Focus on product benefits rather than features
- Be mobile first – they are never without their mobiles
- Use social media so they can engage with your brand
- Align with their values, and speak to their convictions about corporate social responsibility
- Include peer reviews, recommendations and testimonials
- Deliver thought leadership so they can educate themselves – at their own convenience – about your product

It's time to embrace the fact that millennials will have a big impact on your business. Start marketing to them on their terms.

# Strategy Before Tactics

Strategic marketing starts with laying a foundation. You need to carve out your niche with strong positioning, messaging, a unique value proposition and clearly defined buyer personas. Before you even consider implementing tactics, such as updating your website or publishing a blog series, you need to get your marketing strategy right in 3 ways:

## 1. DEFINE YOUR TARGET MARKET

Since you're likely selling into a particular niche, you need to clearly define who you're selling to. Consider the locations you operate in, the industry or industries you sell to and the types of companies that need your particular products. Then define your buyer personas – the individuals by role, responsibility and needs – that you sell to. Your marketing should be completely focused on a scant handful of key buyer personas. Any marketing that doesn't speak to them should be eliminated from your plan.

## 2. DETERMINE YOUR POSITIONING

Are you the only company that does what you do? Is yours the premium product among a few competitors? Is it the low-cost player or the as-a-service offering with low upfront commitment? No business can be all things to all people. You'll be a much stronger company if you identify how you want to be differentiated and make all of your marketing line up to that position.

## 3. ESTABLISH YOUR KEY MESSAGING

Why should customers buy from you? This is your chance to articulate why yours is the best product in your niche. Your messaging should convey your position to your target market. These are the statements or phrases that will capture their attention and illustrate your company's ability to solve their problems. Develop messaging that is specific, honest, accurate and measurable. Especially if you're selling to engineers and tech experts who live and breathe by numbers, metrics that show why you're the best at what you do will really speak to them. Consider including data like time to ROI, person hours saved or even how quickly you respond to a tech request. B2B tech companies with strong, data-driven messages that resonate with their target customers are always more successful at generating sales.

Your strategy doesn't have to be complicated or take days to devise. For most small to midsize B2B tech companies, establishing your strategy is about confirming your place in your niche market. The 'strategic' part of a strategic marketing plan is very important, but it doesn't require a cumbersome process or reinventing the wheel. It's about capturing what's already in the heads of your executives, distilling and refining that knowledge and doing some external research, if necessary. The toughest aspect of strategy is that it requires a company to do a little soul searching and to say 'no' to some lesser options that don't serve its goals.

Once your foundation is in place, then you can move on to tactics like content marketing, digital marketing, social marketing and the like.

# Tactics That Deliver the Highest ROI for Tech Marketers



## Be a Thought Leader

Unlike with many industries your maturity in the marketplace is less important than your being perceived as a thought leader and trailblazer. Technology is fast-paced, so you need to be able to show you meet buyer needs before they even know they have those needs. Thought leadership is crucial in the technology space – especially for those that are trying to dominate in a niche market. And remember: you don't have to be the biggest company to be the biggest expert!

## The 'Tell' Part of Show and Tell

As mentioned before, with the long tech selling cycle and multiple touches come multiple buyers. Your content, such as blogs, articles and whitepapers, need to inform and engage each different buyer along the sales pipeline. In 2018, 91% of the top tech companies said they were extremely/very committed to content marketing.<sup>5</sup> Why? If it does its job, it will help increase leads, shorten the selling cycle and even help improve the size of the deal.

When more than half (55%)<sup>5</sup> of tech companies say they are in the first steps/young/adolescent phase of content marketing, there is a lot of work to be done here – and a lot to be gained. If you don't have the in-house staff to tackle content marketing, and do it well, consider outsourcing it rather than letting your competitors educate the buying pool. Last year, 67% of technology marketers outsourced at least one content creation activity, and 28% outsourced its promotion/distribution.<sup>5</sup> Reach out for help if you need it.

One valuable content marketing practice that many tech companies overlook is researching buyers for insights that they would want throughout the funnel. Your content should be informed by buyer needs at each phase of the selling cycle. But how do you know what their needs are? Ask them. Issue surveys, poll your reps, ask your channel partners and their reps, to learn what questions repeatedly arise, and answer those questions in your content. The analytics available today are enabling marketers to deliver targeted, relevant and timely content. In fact, 78% of top tech companies say they make delivering the right content to the right person at the right time a priority.<sup>5</sup> A large part of delivering the right content is anticipating what your buyers want to know and giving it to them in a clear and easy-to-digest format on a platform they prefer.



## Aim Lower

When creating content, don't necessarily look for technical writers with engineering backgrounds. Odds are your buyers need content that is crafted to their level of understanding, which would be much lower than yours or your engineers'. Your content should be educational, approachable and inclusive. Remember, you're writing for people who may have to explain your technology to others in the company, in order to get buy-in. They're likely speaking to stakeholders with even less technical knowledge than they have, so keep it professional yet simple. And don't make prospective buyers hunt through your website and sales copy for your unique benefits. Spell them out! It will make their internal sell much easier.

## Tech Loves Infographics

Infographics are shareable, easily digestible, data-packed content. Infographics are liked and shared on social media three times more than any other type of content.<sup>6</sup> They're particularly helpful for tech companies to visually explain their offerings and convey all the product data that's too cumbersome for a written piece. And best of all, infographics help people better grasp your information because visuals are processed 60,000 times faster in the brain than text.<sup>7</sup> That's why video marketing is also such an effective tactic.



## Digital Marketing

## Websites

As a tech company, you don't need to be told how important your online presence is – especially your website. But many tech companies are so busy building and innovating their products that they put off critical marketing tasks like updating their website, performing SEO audits and making sure their site is optimized for mobile.

Millennial buyers and influencers, especially, live on their mobile devices. Google reports that if a page takes more than 3 seconds to load on a mobile device, 53% of visitors will abandon it.<sup>8</sup> Make sure you use a responsive design and that your content loads quickly. Your website is often the first point of contact a prospect has with your brand. It should portray you as the tech-forward innovators that you are. And don't forget to include peer reviews, recommendations and testimonials – relied upon by millennials and in fact, all generations.

If your conversion rates are low, you might be making the #1 mistake that tech companies make in their web content – describing the features of their technology and not highlighting customer benefits. Low conversion numbers are an indication that your website isn't providing enough value. It could also indicate that the information is poorly organized or not easily accessible. Don't make prospective customers perform extra work just to find the information they need.

## Email Campaigns

Email marketing may be old-school, but marketing automation (MA) has made it more dynamic, actionable and measurable. In fact, 75% of technology companies already use MA.<sup>5</sup> These tools are not just for large companies, they are especially useful in supporting the marketing of SMEs. And don't just think lead gathering – think how email can nurture leads through every step of the path to purchase in drip campaigns that draw the customer into forming a relationship with you.

Even if you don't use MA, you can still target and time your emails to reach the right buyers with the right content at the right time, but it won't be simple. The good news is that there are many affordable and easy-to-use marketing automation solutions that are designed for small to midsized businesses. They offer much of the same functionality as larger platforms, but on a modular basis so that you can deploy (and pay for) what you need, as you need it.

While many MA platforms started off as email only, most of them now encompass email, blogging, social media, paid advertising, video and a host of other functions that are good for the top, middle and bottom of the funnel. They give marketing the ability to send automated trigger emails based on prospect activity. They can track website visitors and give insight into their content interest areas. Web forms can be created to capture information about prospects when downloading value-add content, which pushes contact data into your CRM for sales. Sales can also see prospect activity and the content areas they've engaged with, to create more personalized conversations.

## Advertising

The tech industry already lends itself to online ads, but it's important to look beyond industry publications to social platforms. Social media ads have the power to influence prospective buyers both at work and at home. Since the B2B path to purchase for technology involves many different personas along the way, use everything you can to build awareness of your products and positively influence prospects. Facebook is a good example of a platform that can reach buyers and researchers/influencers outside of work hours. And Facebook ads can reach specific companies, company sizes, as well as your own CRM list, so it can be highly targeted. Remember to also promote your content. You want to be seen as the industry thought leader, so use some of your ad spend to drive content downloads and capture lead information through simple form fills.

## Social Media

According to a LinkedIn study, 49% of B2B buyers research vendors by looking at their LinkedIn profiles, and 44% have found potential vendors by looking at shared connections on LinkedIn.<sup>9</sup> Make sure your social profiles are professional, accurate and up-to-date. Twitter is also a strong platform for tech companies. Like LinkedIn, it's great for disseminating up-to-the minute news on both internal and external innovations, and it shows that you're working to educate and inform your industry – as all thought leaders should. Use platforms like Facebook and Instagram to show your lighter side, like the company puppy or chats around the espresso machine. Establish a YouTube channel for product and how-to videos. Keeping your social media presence updated is a big job, but for tech companies, you can't afford to be seen as outdated or not on board with platforms appropriate to your market.



## Webinars

Over 65% of B2B marketers consistently rank webinars as one of their top content marketing tools.<sup>10</sup> They are great for bringing in high quality leads. Webinars are online, so they're convenient and cost-effective for all participants. You can collect contact information from registrants and follow up with them directly. Plus, webinar registration indicates strong interest, so you know these individuals really care about what you're saying.

As thought leadership and knowledge sharing content, webinars have a long life. They should become a permanent gated asset on your website. You can use them at any point for your social media or other promotional channels to generate leads. But here's something to remember, webinars must be designed to provide needed information to the audience. If you must include a big product push, save it for the end. Mention in your agenda that you will be holding a product demo after the webinar for those who wish to stay on the line. If you lead with product, you make the webinar about you, which may discourage attendance or alienate your audience.

## Videos

Video marketing gives you the perfect opportunity for show and tell, both about your company and your products. If done well, it's a format that allows the viewer to digest information in small, but meaty, bites. This may be why 70% of B2B buyers watch video along their path to purchase.<sup>11</sup> Buyers are hungry for information. Product videos, demos, how-tos and pre-recorded webinars are what they need. And don't forget to showcase your company in an 'About Us' video on your website's homepage, front and center.



## Trade Shows

Exhibiting at trade shows is still one of the most common and powerful ways to generate leads for B2B tech companies, but they have their challenges. Booth space, booth design and setup, signage and collateral, staffing and travel – all make participating very costly. That's not even considering the time and attention sales people and marketers spend to make the show successful. Plus, it's difficult to predict your pay-off for attending. Nevertheless, the right events can give you an opportunity to show buyers, pretty much en masse, just what your product can do and how they can benefit. Shows present a great opportunity to book in-office demos and help you fill your sales funnel. The challenge lies in choosing which shows to participate in, booth and all, and which to simply send a few key staff members to for networking. Once you've established your company as a thought leader in your industry, participating as show speakers and panelists will help further bring your company's name to the fore.

## Demos

Demos, either in person or remotely, are the best ways to showcase your technology. If your tech lends itself to demos and/or a free trial, then each and every one of your marketing tactics should end with a call to action that says so. 'Book a demo today' or 'try it free for X-days' should become your new mantra.

## Case Studies

Last year, case studies ranked second after blogs as being the most shared content amongst colleagues, and 79% of buyers reported reading them during the purchasing process.<sup>12</sup> Case studies help prospective buyers understand, in a very concrete way, how your technology can fit their needs. They provide real-world proof that your product has solved specific problems for other companies in the same or similar industries. It's important to produce a variety of case studies, showcasing the results your product can achieve in each of the industries you serve. And when it comes to lead nurturing, the well-timed delivery of a case study – that shows proof of how your technology has solved a prospective buyer's particular problems in their industry – could tip the balance toward a sale.

## Networking

If you're marketing to a small niche in a tightly knit industry, buyers from competitive companies likely know (or know of) each other. Do a good job for one client and all the others will hear of it. Become a regular at industry networking events to raise your company's profile and drum up referrals and recommendations. Even if your company is a smaller player in your field, being ever-present at networking events and working the rooms can build relationships that tear down buying barriers and make your company seem more established (and even larger) than it is.

## Pitch Decks

A pitch deck is the epitome of show in your show and tell marketing. A pitch deck is a professional PowerPoint presentation, often accompanied by a leave-behind brochure, presented to a company's buying group. It's delivered at an in-person meeting where you can describe exactly what your product can do and how the company will benefit. You can also outline your methodology and describe the processes for onboarding your technology, the go-live, the change management support and the aftercare. A pitch deck presentation also shows why your product is better for that particular company than competing products and enables you to work on obtaining buy-in from all stakeholders at once.

# Reseller Programs



Often tech companies will use resellers to broaden their reach and open up new markets. In fact, over 70% of tech sales were expected to go through channel partners in 2018, alone.<sup>13</sup> Resellers are often selling competitive products alongside yours, so it's important to stand out in their minds. A strong channel partner incentive program, along with good educational tools, will go a long way to ensuring you build advocates among the channel sales force. Reps that understand your products and feel well-compensated to do so will sell more of your products.





## Co-op and MDF

If you're a B2B tech reseller, make sure you have a system in place to take advantage of your OEMs' co-op and MDF (Market Development Funds). It's reported that OEMs allocate over \$70 billion dollars to co-op advertising and MDF every year, yet nearly half of those funds go unspent.<sup>14</sup>

To qualify for and secure MDF, you must:

- Identify which activities will qualify (these will vary by OEM)
- Devise a plan, including project scope, target market, resources needed and timeline
- Set a budget that encompasses all associated costs
- Outline your expected results, including lead generation and sales goals
- Submit your application
- Demonstrate results by reporting with data

The most important thing is to ensure you understand and use your MDF before its expiry date. Include MDF activities in your annual marketing plan so they become part of your overall strategy. Establish relationships with OEM channel marketing managers to ensure you're kept in the loop on new opportunities/program updates. Once you have your MDF plan in place, you need to execute it in-house or with the help of outside experts.

# Conclusion

When starting to gain traction, B2B tech companies often grow so quickly that in-house resources are stretched thin. Everyone is concentrating on sales, and marketing is forgotten or sidelined. But while your company is busy growing, that's when you need to market strategically and build your company's reputation and customer base.

Many tech companies see marketing as just a set of tactics or activities that can generate leads. Such ad hoc marketing brings about overspending and underachieving – and it leads companies to conclude that marketing doesn't work. B2B tech companies need to take a strategic approach with a long term outlook, work their niche and establish themselves as the go-to knowledge specialists in their field. Be the company that educates the buying pool. It's all about tell then show: share what you know, then show what you can do.

If you want to outsource your strategic marketing to experts who understand how to drive revenues for B2B tech companies, we can help. At Mezzanine we specialize in developing results-oriented strategies – and we're usually called upon to implement them as well. If you're ready to maximize sales and see measurable results from your marketing...

LET'S TALK!

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# What Our B2B Tech Clients Are Saying:

*"We grew 109% as a company, due in part to Mezzanine's strategic thinking and the marketing foundation they built, including key messaging, product development lifecycle, quality sales tools and getting our brand working for us online."*

– Dean Hachey, Senior Vice President Sales, ThinkOn

*"Mezzanine's marketing experts helped us tell the world why we're great. They really homed in on who our audience is and how to reach them – and the results speak for themselves."*

– Michael Desnoyers, President, Etratech

*"Mezzanine did a great job setting up our marketing foundation and orchestrating a flurry of activities. They're fast, focused and really know how to get the job done."*

– Eva Kostiuk, Director of Business Strategy, Lanworks



## About Us

The Mezzanine Group accelerates revenue growth for business-to-business companies. We build B2B lead generation machines that combine traditional and digital marketing with marketing technology, systems and processes to deliver powerful and consistent revenues. Over the past decade we've helped over 250 B2B companies across a variety of emerging and mature industries. [www.themezzaninegroup.com](http://www.themezzaninegroup.com)