

Developing a Winning Go-to-Market Strategy for B2B Companies

By: Michael Million

A Go-To-Market strategy is the intent behind *HOW* you will deliver your unique value proposition to target customer segments and accompanying road map for introducing your offer to the market. The Go-To-Market strategy can have many components including sales coverage and process, operations, customer service, and pricing, as well as more tactical things like messaging and marketing campaigns that, together, reinforce a unique position in the market. Go-To-Market strategy should not be seen as a quick-fix prescription for a current quarter shortfall, but rather as a long-term plan to increase revenues, decrease costs, and improve the customer experience. To achieve success, a company must align its Go-To-Market strategy with the evolving needs of its customer and answer strategic questions such as: What markets do we pursue? Which customers do we target? Which channels fit with how our customers buy? How do our offers fit with our channels? What is our unique value proposition to each target customer?

Market Intelligence

For any B2B strategy, a deep understanding of the market is needed. The best way to ascertain this information is a combination of primary and secondary market research. The elements of thorough Market Intelligence analysis include:

Customer Research. Who are your customers? Where are they? What is their job title? And most importantly, what is it that keeps them up at night?

Market Research. What is your market? Who are your competitors and what are they saying? How are you competing within this market with regard to price, expertise, functionality, etc.?

Market Segmentation

In the past, most Go-To-Market plans were based on product launches or pre-established media dates. This approach proved to be less than effective in making a business impact, so corporations began considering a host of other dimensions to better target customers / prospects and drive desired behaviors among them. Among these segmenting dimensions include: who the customer is, what their attitudes are toward the category, how many there are, how much they spend / times of year they spend, and occasions that trigger decision-making. Moreover, segmentation research can unearth insights around customers' propensity to buy your product / service and their overall perceptions of referent brands, which is helpful information in building a Go-To-Market strategy.

Value Proposition

Another key Go-To-Market strategy element is the Value Proposition, or an articulation of what makes your offer or company unique and better than the competition. Once you know just how different your products/services are, who your target is (ideally the economic buyer), and the benefit you provide them, you can make decisions on price, packaging, etc. Understanding the purchase decision process of your buyer – how they use the product, the need your product solves, what they are willing to pay for – makes all the difference. Questions to consider: Is what you are bringing to market something that is needed by your target market? What supports your claim that your solution will fulfill their need? Why should your target market believe you?

Importance of a Team

Any strategy may turn without the presence of an effective delegation framework supported by management. The role of the executive team in backing the implementation team is critical to success. Senior leadership has to be involved through the definition of a top-driven strategy agenda, defining what is a high priority, what is going to be taken on during a period, and what is not on the

agenda. A clear strategy agenda empowers the team working on the project; if senior executives aren't engaged, no one will see the project as important. Engage the entire organization, with everyone moving in the same direction. Cross-functional and multiregional teams to lead the process and carefully recruited champions across the organization can support the process.

Define the "what" and the "when" with a degree of specificity that allows people to know what to do when they show up for work. Once you begin to roll out your plan, make the measurement commitment to ensure you know what is working and what needs improvement. Define the most important metrics before you launch, and create accountability around data collection and analysis. Consider short- and longer-term objectives, such as brand development and improved sales productivity, as well as revenue and profit. Communicate results internally and adjust programs accordingly. Through measurement and refinement, you can get the most from your Go-To-Market plan. After you do the initial launch of your plan, document what works, what doesn't, and what you'll do differently next time. Documentation is the key to avoiding mistakes in the future and building on your successes.

The Evolution of Channel Strategy

Today's firms have an increasing number of channels from which to. Ultimately, when it comes to finding the right mix, what matters most is having a deep understanding of their customer behavior and expectations when it comes to dealing with their company. Particularly, in a B2B setting this means understanding.

The group of people involved in the B2B buying decision, the different stages in their decision-making process, and what they each expect when doing business with a company. Selecting the best marketing channel is critical because it can mean the success or failure of your product or service. The Internet has been so

successful as a marketing channel because customers are able to make some of the channel decisions themselves: they can shop virtually for any product in the world when and where they want to, as long as they can connect to the Web. They can also choose how the product is shipped. However, the question of “traditional marketing” vs. “digital marketing” is not an all or nothing decision. Instead, the conversation needs to shift to how the two channels work together, as well as how marketers can leverage the best each channel has to offer. Successful businesses mix digital and traditional channels to satisfy their clients and achieve business objectives.

To understand their customers’ paths-to-purchase, companies must capture and analyze the ways that customers are using the digital and physical environments to make their purchase decisions. A good way to think about traditional marketing is that it presents a highly effective way to reach a broad consumer audience. On the other hand, digital marketing can be used to create a relationship with the customer that has relevancy and personalization. A dialogue that begins in e-mail can segue to conversation that happens in a store, on a mobile device, or a self-service IVR. Businesses need to develop an institutional memory of each customer to maintain a fluid ongoing conversation across channels. Marketers should consider the wider reach traditional marketing channels offer to generate broad awareness and drive consumers to the more “focused” digital experience.

Comcast Business Services – Winning with a Competitive Advantage

Ethernet has become the preferred protocol for business connectivity. Service providers are benefitting from Ethernet’s popularity as a less expensive replacement to legacy services. In 2012, Comcast Business Services, a unit of Comcast Cable, earned the Frost & Sullivan Competitive Strategy Leadership Award for MSO (Multiple System Operator) Ethernet Services. Comcast Business Services’ Ethernet strategy includes a focused market segmentation approach, prospect evaluation and target prioritization, and early ongoing client education that

empowers the business in decision-making. The company's strategy effectively incorporates specialized high-touch customer support resources, including local staff. Their Ethernet services' Go-To-Market strategies are focused on strong local business presence, customizable solution bundles, and effective proactive education and communication components beginning in the pre-sale stage. Comcast has leveraged these elements to expand its Ethernet resources and capabilities, targeting increasingly larger businesses with multi-site networking needs.

According to a recent Gartner study, "As technology has continued its unprecedented advance in recent years, the models used by providers to bring products and services to market have failed to keep up." Profitable growth is increasingly dependent on the ability to optimize Go-To-Market strategies. The buyer's journey is more educated, engaged, and fluid. However, these shifts do not just change what customers are buying; they should also change the way providers sell. If organizations are to continue providing real value to customers, they must evolve at the same pace that buyer behaviors are changing. Companies must become more agile and responsive to the new informed buyers, who have many options that are "good enough" in this highly competitive marketplace. Those with the will and capability to innovate on their sales approach will enjoy a valued benefit — a sustainable competitive advantage.

Michael Million (mmillion@fullsurge.com) is a partner at FullSurge, a strategic consulting firm that helps clients grow through brand-building and marketing. For more of FullSurge's thinking, please visit <http://fullsurge/thought-leadership/resource-category/articles>.