

The disruption of B2B marketing is underway

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Wunderman Thompson is taking a fresh look at B2B marketing and believes that B2B brands can gain the advantage in the consideration set if they adopt new customer-centric tactics and operating models.



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Seven or eight-figure B2B buying decisions are likely being made by teams of purchasing decision-makers nowadays, and those decision-makers, like all of us, have had the lines between their personal and professional lives blurred.

One minute sees them ordering goods online through an intuitive, friendly and seamless user experience, tracking those purchases in real-time, and selecting the most convenient time for delivery; the next has them logging on to an online video call and analysing spreadsheets. Albeit subconsciously, they're increasingly expecting similarly seamless experiences from their business suppliers, and they're judging B2B suppliers against a new standard of customer-centricity. With most of their interactions happening mostly online, their experiences are falling short because this has not pre the pandemic been a particular area of focus for B2B brands.

Online websites, for example, have primarily functioned purely as online brochures or catalogues. Relationships have been built on face-to-face interactions, and B2B players have traditionally relied on networking and showcase opportunities afforded by bricks and mortar events and conferences. The pandemic has changed that – more and more B2B brands are realising they need to experiment with new marketing tactics, sales teams have had to change the way they interact with their clients, and digital transformation across operating models has had to be fast-tracked.

In 2020, Wunderman Thompson launched Inspire, a global proprietary study that seeks to understand what it means to build an inspiring brand. If one looks at the B2B subset of inspiring brands researched as part of the study and digs deeper to consider what successful B2B brands are getting right in this changing landscape, some common characteristics emerge.

What B2B players recognise is that paying attention to brand-building is no longer purely in the ambit of B2C brands. The brands that grow fast and can drive price premiums focus both on brand building and an overhaul of their traditional B2B marketing tactics. They want to be relevant, they need to show that they appreciate their clients' current business reality and challenges, and they try to inspire their audiences to feel something, talk, act and share, and make a change in their business work lives. If there is an opportunity for B2B brands, it is to build appropriate experiences that support this across various customer touchpoints.

To do this, successful B2B brands are paying attention to several key areas:

- Being relevant
- Fostering positive societal impact
- Providing motivational content and insights that help business leaders make transformational decisions, and above all
- Investing in data capability enables them to understand buyer intent and motivations and show up personally for an individual decision-maker who is part of a purchasing team

"If, for example, account-based marketing (ABM) is implemented effectively, it can service a number of these key focus

areas. And in a world without third-party cookies, being able to overcome targeting challenges and serve relevant, thought-provoking and insightful and inspiring content that enables a B2B brand to build its first-party data insights, would be a step in the right direction for B2B brands,” says Astrid Ascar, chief growth officer of Wunderman Thompson South Africa.

As opposed to product-punting and citing lists of features, brand-building content can inspire and shift brand perceptions to the extent that a B2B brand can secure its place in a potential client’s consideration set. In future, B2B brands are going to need the right mix of inspiring and activating content, and they’re going to need to deliver it on appropriate channels and platforms at the right time. To do this, they need to think about altering marketing approaches, aligning marketing and sales teams to work far more closely than ever before and rethink product-centric campaign-driven mindsets. This requires building new future-fit marketing, sales, data and tech-related capabilities across B2B marketing and sales teams; skills such as optimisation, automation, analytics, data excellence, and segmentation. It requires an organisational and cultural change, and challenging B2B marketing habits of the past, highlights Ascar.

The customer journey has changed, and B2B marketers who don’t change with it will be left behind. If you want to win in B2B beyond 2021, you need to embrace new ways of thinking, says Ascar.

“Ultimately, it’s all about embracing the disruption and laying the foundations for digitally enabled, customer-centric B2B communications that are but one aspect of digital transformation.”



Astrid Ascar

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