

Pressing the Right Nerve of Online B2B Prospects



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Introduction:

The B2B sales cycle has gone through massive transformations in the last few years. A buying environment controlled by vendors and advertisers is history. Now the buyers spend more time online, and they only choose amongst millions of options provided there. The buyer decides his favorites and the online market molds itself to fit the current trend. Aligned web solutions can help in optimizing online businesses in this regard.

When does a B2B major visit a particular website?

- **Often** – He is randomly looking for information for a particular service/product.
- **Seldom** – He is choosing amongst vendors to get the best deal.
- **Rare** – He is looking for you!

Apart from repeat customers and maintenance issues, rarely would buyers come to one particular vendor for their professional web solutions. Abundant information makes buyers self-reliant when they are online, and sales becomes more buyer-dependent in the process. Generally, vendors who engage the visitors first get the deal. For web solutions providers, visitor engagement becomes the first and foremost priority for surviving and succeeding in the highly competitive online B2B market.

The Complete Buyer Cycle



In the complete sales cycle of a prospective online B2B customer, the actual "sales-talk" comes only after 60% of the process is completed. By that time, the visitor already knows about:

- The company
- The product/service he is looking for
- How you promise to deliver

So, any sales representative harping the above points (even if it be finer details), is wasting his breath and his listener's patience. Previously applied sales funnel of sales-influences-customer is now inverted and the buyer has equal chances of engaging the vendor before the vendor engages them. In a way, this is actually a good thing. A prospect knowledgeable about your services doesn't need chit-chat introductions. The sales cycle is shortened, and the representative can directly come to points with the customer. But he also has to be careful. Sales communication without buffers is a double-edged sword.

Optimizing B2B Engagement through Web Solutions

Millions of customers – both B2B and B2C – are engaged in various sales activities online each day. Yet, a general negative sentiment towards sales cannot be ignored. (Think about the sales promotions you get over phone – daily!) Creating a successful online approach for a B2B service/product hence needs elaborate planning. Align your web solutions components for a three-phase customer engagement process:

- **Educating**
- **Influencing**
- **Nurturing**

3 Check-Lists to Ensure Optimized B2B Engagement

Educating

In the early phases of their visits, customers will be mostly looking for ways to ascertain their needs - the right vendors, comparisons and consolidations, the right products/services for their businesses etc. Only after proper research will they actually start choosing. The site which educates prospects more with relevant and useful content rather than pushing product features, will score in this phase.

To-Do:

- 1** Put in educating materials, like relevant articles, whitepapers etc. on business-related subjects.
- 2** Maintain a resource page for ready access to these materials.
- 3** Organize a regularly updated blog page for current updates in the industry. Link the top 5 recent updates in the home page.
- 4** Keep a comparison tab between different services wherever applicable.
- 5** A Search Bar at the top of the page is helpful for comfortable browsing. It is a good way to increase click-throughs within the site too.

Influencing

Once the visitor has finished reading a certain piece of update (considering that they've like what they read), he would try to apply it then and there. It's a tried and tested fact. While the prospective buyer is looking for "what is next", it's time to convert them to identified leads. There are times when the customer finds the information from one site, and subscribes in some other plainly because the engagement options are not ready-at-hand. Engrave lead generation mechanisms deeply into the site's architecture.

To-Do:

- 1 Business development and lead conversion strategies should be the founding blocks for creating your website.
- 2 Place a simple and customized lead-generation form at the end of each document. Give readers a chance to express their enthusiasm of learning a new insight.
- 3 Strategically place Call-to Actions (CTAs) in the site wherever applicable.
- 4 Channel the CTAs to landing pages with specific offers. There they furnish their contact information in return of getting the offer.
- 5 Track the different paths of conversion for leads. Each path defines a separate need.
- 6 Segment the leads according to the different paths of conversion.

Nurturing

The buyer's conversion journey doesn't end with lead acquisition but actually begins there. By McKinsey & Company's February report, it has been calculated that on an average a prospect interacts on six different communication channels simultaneously to reach a decision on a buy. The key for converting an identified lead to a confirmed customer hence lies in consistent and relevant contacts. It's true that all the leads are not sales-ready. In fact, the Gleanster survey suggests that about 30-50% leads in each campaign turn out to be interested, but not ready for buying. Such leads need to be nurtured over time.

To-Do:

- 1 According to Genius.com study, buyers suggested that consistent and relevant communication between the buyer and the organization (from both sales and marketing departments) are big influencing factors behind choosing the best solution providers.
- 2 Out of sight, out of mind! Keep the prospective buyers in loop with 'drip' email campaigns – a series of emails sent at regular intervals harping the initial offer. This process is especially great for the prospects who are not ready to buy now, but can result in future sales.
- 3 Once the prospects have made their needs clear, they will narrow down their choices. Be there when they are at it. Regular contacts, again, will keep their memory afresh with your offer.

In a Gist

With the world shifting to virtual, online markets are the future for B2B businesses. Diversified communication channels and ever-increasing grasp of web solutions technology is going to empower sales. But at its core, business development will still be a game of relationship building. There is no substitute for useful services. As long as helping visitors/readers/prospects/leads/customers is your priority, your fundamentals are strong. Your beneficiaries will be benefited, and your web solutions business will be mounted on a strong foundation. High engagement rates will also boost your online business reputation.