

Engagement

Optimising Digital Channels for
Conversion in B2B



B2B TechMarketing

In previous blogs in this series, I have considered the importance of [clearly defining target personas](#) and then using engagement behaviour, combined with other structured data, to [determine their buying stage](#). Delivering [the right message](#) to them to encourage them to offer up their contact details ('convert' from unknown visitors to known contacts) means reaching them where they seek information; at their 'watering holes'.

Reaching Tech buyers with omni-channel marketing

In business to business markets, it is not that long ago that Sales held the power of information on what products were available and buyers would dutifully attend tradeshows, industry events and endless sales meetings to discover how these products were the answer to all their problems!

The differences between selling to business and to consumers were often quite profound, due to the complexity of the products purchased and the number of people involved – see [article](#).

This all changed with digital. The democratisation of business information brought about by digital content, accessed through multiple channels, curated by tech aggregators (such as G2) and multiple industry-specific analysts or other influencers (e.g. Gartner/ Forrester, social contributors) have transferred power to buyers and challenged marketers to find ways of reaching very fragmented groups of buyers wherever they happen to be.

EXHIBIT 1 | Shifting Customer Behavior Drives Changes in B2B Marketing

	OLD WORLD	NEW WORLD
STRATEGY	Sales-led, uninformed buyer	Marketing-led, informed buyer
MARKETING	Push-oriented, mass, disjointed customer experience; mobile an afterthought	Pull-oriented, personalized, customer experience integrated across channels and devices; mobile is central
CHANNELS	Mostly offline (for example, events, traditional media)	Digital and offline are integrated; greater "consumer-like" behavior drives mobile, video, and social media usage
OPERATIONS	More manual, siloed data	Automated, tech-enabled, connected/ real-time data
MEASUREMENT	Activity-based, periodic, last-touch focused	Results-based, continuous, multitouch focused
ORGANIZATION	Siloed	Integrated
SKILLS	Creative	Technical, analytical
CULTURE	Rigid, top-down	Flexible, collaborative, agile

Source: BCG analysis.

‘Standard’ channels for B2B marketers to reach buyers today typically include all or many of those shown here, with the company website and content accessed via the other digital channels often serving up information sufficient to take buyers 70% of the way through their buying journey, according to multiple sources.

A number of these channels figure highly in planned B2B marketing tactics for 2020 according to [Smart Insights](#) (although it is of course difficult to determine how Covid-19 may impact this reported mix) see chart below.

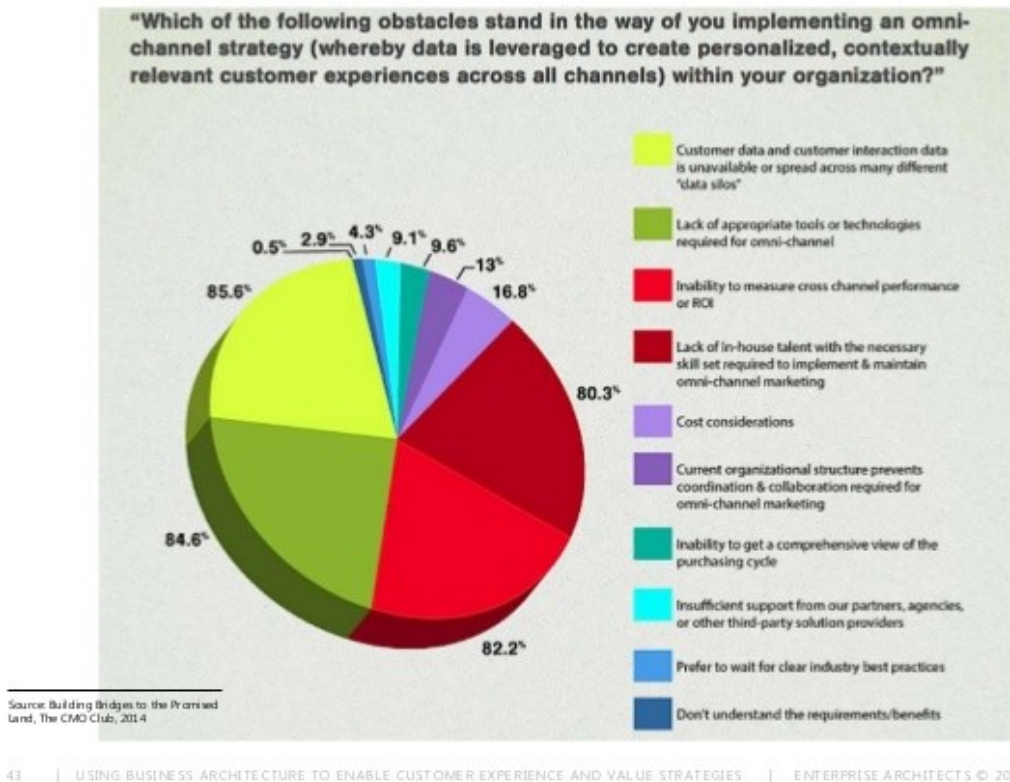
Forecast of most used B2B channels in 2020



The chart illustrates one of the things that has become a standard and significant part of planning channel strategy for many tech marketers: the demands of communicating the merits of an **intangible** service so as to engage the audience. As the chart indicates, this blurs the boundaries between content and channel with content taking much of the responsibility for communicating value, that historically would have been communicated face to face by Sales.

Content and channel have thus become inseparable in a digital-first buyer landscape, particularly since the content needs of each platform, their audience reach and how they are used, is different. In the chart, we therefore have 'video marketing' and 'blogging and content marketing' as prioritised tactics alongside genuine channels. Content strategy is a very different thing from channel strategy, however closely they may need to combine in execution. The performance of the channel and the performance of the content in driving engagement and conversion can only be determined by testing. These tests of performance in turn need to be appropriate to the measurable outcome required. Ultimately we need to be clear on how we are using different channels to drive different outcomes in the buyers' journey (for more on content see my blogs on [brand](#) and [content](#) strategy).

THE CMO'S DILEMMA



Maximising the benefits of the new ways in which we can reach potential buyers requires nothing less than a digital transformation in marketing execution. These new digital channels combine:

1. the need for technical knowledge of each platform,
2. content creation
3. coordination of messaging and content across the buyers' journey
4. tracking and combining touch points
5. performance testing for optimisation, and
6. attribution of all of this to business KPIs.

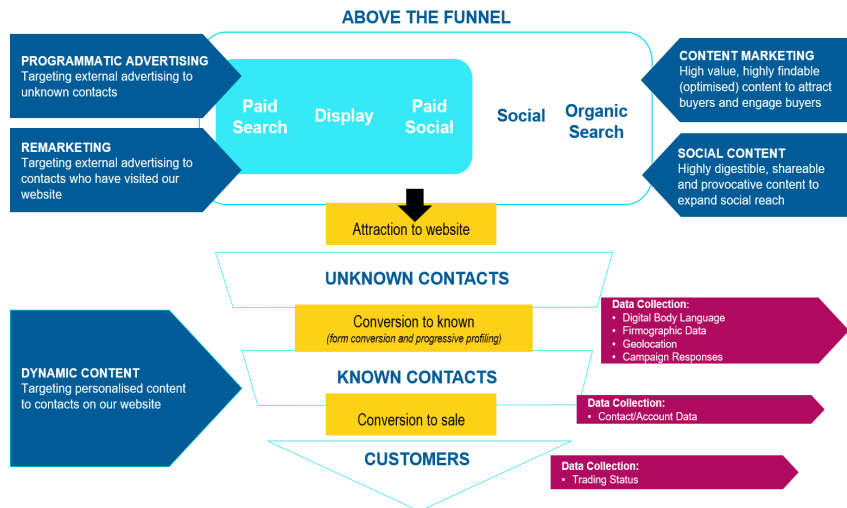
Certainly, this has tested B2B CMOs, as the chart above shows. And while this was produced in 2014, I'm sure we can still relate to these findings in 2020.

Channel strategy in a digital world

I have talked at length in other posts of the complexity of B2B marketing execution, given the long buying cycles involved and the fragmentation of the decision-making unit. Acquiring contacts through digital marketing channels and nurturing them, in this digitally fragmented world is a significant challenge, before the task of understanding their value to the sales funnel even begins! This chart illustrates the use of paid and organic search combined with social, to convert visitors to known contacts, and to capture data then used for persona and segment identification to add contacts to automated nurtures that will generate sales-ready leads.

Digital is often used to acquire net new contacts at a predictable CPA for lead generation purposes. If we look at what is needed to run this process in just one channel – search – as illustrated below, the complexity from a marketing perspective and the range of skills and experience needed to service the requirement becomes clear. And the dependency on generating data, testing and drawing insights, before scaling and investing in new channels is clearly portrayed.

Using digital channels for contact acquisition and conversion



Source: [Ledger Bennett](#)

Therefore, having a strategy for which channels to use to reach the target customer and how to drive a business outcome is paramount. This helps to determine where to invest, both in the short term to drive immediate sales opportunity, and for sustainable growth, with its more predictable returns. Without this, Marketing can get hung up on vanity metrics, reflecting what the different platforms can easily measure: follows, tweets, shares, clicks and the like. None of this is meaningful unless a clear strategy exists that identifies how they contribute to measurement of the progress towards creating sales funnel – generating real value (see <https://www.b2btechmarketing.co.uk/post/managing-and-measuring-performance-of-the-b2b-sales-funnel-pt-2>)