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# It's No Secret:

B2B and B2C Marketers Share a Passion  
for Customers, Data, and Results



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**B**2B marketers have a reputation. B2C marketers often consider their B2B counterparts a bit, well, stilted because of their no-nonsense, feature-laden ads and methodical, funnel-centric approach to marketing.

B2C marketers have a reputation of their own. Many B2B marketers think they're all about flair and image, data be damned.

The reality is this: Not only are those stereotypes incorrect, but B2B and B2C marketers actually have quite a lot in common. And the lines between their approaches are blurring more and more every day.

Both B2B and B2C marketers have an affinity for data and segmentation. They're both looking to move faster to keep pace with customers' changing buying habits and increasing demands, yet also take the time to build the kind of deep customer relationships that foster loyalty and engagement.

But they also have mastery in areas that the other might not. Fortunately, B2B and B2C marketers can learn from each other; they can adapt best practices from areas where the other excels.

We asked several industry experts what techniques B2B and B2C marketers should adopt from the other. Their recommendations include connecting with customers on an emotional level, taking an agile approach to managing campaigns and other marketing initiatives, and thinking differently about how data can inform marketing across the customer lifecycle.

# It's No Secret:

**B2B and B2C Marketers Share a Passion for Customers, Data, and Results** By Ginger Conlon / Designed by James Jarnot

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B2C marketers rely on evoking an emotional response from their target audience. They focus expertly on benefits of their products and services over features. B2B marketers should adopt the same approach.

In fact, every marketer should bookmark Simon Sinek's clutch TED talk on the golden circle and "Why?" In it, he explains the emotional appeal of Apple over other computer companies: People don't buy "what you do," but rather "why you do it." Consumers want to align themselves with the "Think different" tagline because it reflects who they are or aspire to be.

All marketers must ask: "Why should my customer care about my products and services? How is it going to make their life or job better, smarter, easier? How does my product or service make the buyer the hero of her company?" Businesses don't buy things, people do. Figure out what makes your customer tick, the pain you're solving for that person or his role, "the job to be done" that they hire you for.

Doing the hard work to identify the "why" your company exists — and "why" anyone should care — is critical not only for external communications, but also for motivating employees. If you're just another whatchamacallit with the same features as everyone else, why should anyone buy your product or remain loyal?

Salesforce is a great example of a mission-driven B2B brand. It's Trailblazers messaging applies both externally to the type of customer it seeks, as well as internally to the employees moving the company forward every day. Wouldn't you want to call yourself a "trailblazer?" It's an emotional appeal to customers, not focused on Salesforce does x, y, and z. Benefits over features.

# JON CARLSON

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One common B2C technique that I don't think is used enough in the B2B world is gamification. No matter what we sell, all marketers should be trying to create fun and rewarding ways to keep their customers actively engaged with their product.

Are you an email marketing company? Give your client a free platform seat when they send their 500th email. Do you sell CRM software? Unlock early access to a new feature when someone creates a report they've never used before. Want someone to view a demo? Unlock exclusive content for them as part of the session.

You get the idea.

In virtually every product, there are milestones your customers — and even your prospects — can hit that they should be rewarded for. So, why not bake this into the user experience? Not only will it make people more excited to buy and use what you sell, but it will also make the product stickier and increase the likelihood of retention.

I think you don't see more B2B companies doing things like because B2B sales tend to be more complex, require more education, and take longer to close. Somehow over time that's translated into — let's face it — boring marketing: eBooks, research reports, webinars, event sponsorships. All of which are good and useful, but also tend to be pretty dry.

What we as B2B marketers must never forget is that even though we're selling to a "business," we're always marketing to the people behind that business. They're just humans who want to be compelled by our brands, same as if they're looking for new shoes or a new place to eat. Speak to them like that. Engage them with great storytelling and reward them for interacting with you. Present them with relevant stories, offers, and features that they wouldn't find anywhere else, and keep them coming back for more.

If we as B2B marketers start acting with more of this mind-set, I'm convinced that we'll see sales cycles shorten and retention levels rise. By treating businesses like humans, we'll stop trying to inundate people with KPIs and flow charts and start discovering the stories and messages that make people want to hear more from our brands. That's something all marketers, B2B and B2C alike, should be striving to achieve.



# NANCY HARHUT

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B2C marketers are more emotional. By that, I mean they focus more on emotions — on what their customers and prospects feel. They make it a point to know what a person is feeling before they use a given product or service. How they'll likely feel after they use it. And which emotions are most salient.

And while B2B marketers may dismiss this as soft, it's not. In fact, it's smart.

Scientific research proves that people make decisions for emotional reasons, and then later *justify* those decisions — to themselves and to others — with rational reasons.

And while there is no question that there are differences between B2C and B2B buying, not the least of which are the number of stakeholders attached to a purchase decision and the length of the sales cycle, one thing is the same: People are involved.

These people may sit on a committee. They may be called influencers. Or they may be called decision makers. But they are people. And because of this, emotion is essential in B2B marketing.

## **BALANCE THE RATIONAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL**

Certainly, we need the facts. B2B buyers want to make informed decisions. But the facts alone aren't enough — because as much as we'd like to think that B2B buyers make the choice that is best for their company based on the information presented, it's simply not always the case.

In fact, one study from a few years ago revealed that even though a product would benefit their company, business purchasers would not support it if they felt it'd be too hard to sell internally. It wouldn't surprise me if a new survey were to confirm that same behavior today.

Even in a B2B environment, people are still people. And



they still make decisions for personal reasons. They want to feel like a success in front of the boss or the board, they want to feel safe from reproach, they want to feel confident they'll have some nights and weekends free.

As a result, their buying behavior is based on what they feel, as well as what they know.

While perhaps a little foreign to B2B marketers, this approach to marketing based on emotion can actually be quite helpful to them. Scientific research has proven that emotion:

- Helps people make decisions
- Makes a more lasting imprint than rational thought (you remember what you feel)
- Creates a connection

And once you create an emotional connection with your customers and prospects, you've made them more open to

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Cont'd.



responding to you. Psychologists call it “emotional contagion.”

If you can make someone feel something, you can connect with that person. And once you connect with them, you are in a better position to persuade them to do what you want them to.

## WHICH EMOTIONS ARE PROVEN TO BE POWERFUL?

When it comes to which emotions to tap, social science offers some proven human behavior principles for marketers to draw on. Here are a few:

**Loss aversion:** Social scientists have found that people are twice as motivated to avoid the pain of loss as they are to achieve the pleasure of gain. So, when trying to prompt action, evoking the emotions of fear and anxiety, or the feeling of self-protection, can be highly effective.

**Social proof:** Research shows that when people are uncertain about what decision to make, they look to others — particularly others similar to themselves — and follow their lead. Marketers can apply social proof by citing how many customers have already made purchases, or which products and services are especially popular. This will prompt feelings of security and confidence.

**Scarcity:** Studies have proven that people place greater value on things that are scarce — either products in limited supply or services reserved for select people. By using the Scarcity Principle, marketers can trigger feelings of anxiety and longing (if something’s in limited supply), or of pride and joy (if special treatment is reserved for the target).

Ultimately, people are people — whether at home or at work. And as a result, emotion plays a large role in their decision-making. B2C marketers have relied on emotion for years, and with good results.

B2B marketers can tap emotion to increase their success, as well. In fact, I’ve seen it firsthand. I’ve worked on acquisition and retention campaigns for big blue chips and small startups. And when we’ve added emotion to those campaigns, they’ve delivered.

Because without it, people can have a hard time making a choice.

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There's little doubt that many B2B marketers could put more resources against segmenting their customer base. Too often, B2B marketers look at their customers as a single entity, such as any business owner, for example, or any business in a certain industry. Many B2C marketers, on the other hand, generally are doing a good job at using granular information to more effectively target consumers. B2B marketers could benefit from following suit.

In most cases, B2B marketers are sitting on a gold mine of customer segmentation data. It's underutilized typically because those marketers don't have the available resources to do the analysis, not because they don't see the value in it. And for companies that don't possess such data, it usually can be acquired by developing and implementing the right data capture strategy.

For B2B marketers, the use of customer segmentation is about more than just determining who gets what email blast and when. It delves into the data to determine the types of products and services the client company engaged with on its customer journey or path to purchase.

And here's a key point: Customer segmentation applies to more than just marketing. Marketers can use it to impact the entire sales process.

Consider this example of a customer segmentation analysis for a financial services firm. The company's goal was to organically grow its B2B business, starting with an underdeveloped segment of current customers. Segmentation analysis on five years' worth of cleaned customer data led to more informed decisions for a revitalized sales approach. The customer segmentation analysis also yielded:

- A reengineering of the company's internal sales processes



- An enhanced ability to identify high-value customers
- Greater efficiency of internal client teams through an increased ability to put the right people and resources in place
- A revamped process and strategy to enable better collection of data for future analysis

All of this led to a 50 percent year-over-year increase from this underdeveloped customer segment.

Clearly, a focus on customer segmentation can yield dividends across many elements of the sales and marketing chain. It's also an area where you can start small and test your way to success. B2B marketers would be well served to put greater attention against this growing discipline.



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A key technique that B2B marketers can adapt from B2C marketers is taking a customer-centric approach to content creation. B2C marketers have been mastering this art for

decades by developing messaging, creative, and marketing activations that have the consumer at their core — which is the only way to effectively engage with customers. The alternative leads not only to campaign failure, but also to the loss of consumers' trust.

The B2B world has yet to master a consumer-first approach to content marketing. Consider, for instance, in its 2018 outlook Gartner's Todd Berkowitz predicts that over 90 percent of content coming from tech companies will focus on their brand instead of focusing on the consumer. This is a staggering statistic, but as B2B marketers we've all been guilty of making this mistake at some point. Now more than ever, a true consumer-centric approach is of paramount importance for B2B marketers. Here are the top two of the countless reasons why:

1. If the B2C consumer is savvy, the B2B consumer is even savvier, because she likely spends the day focusing on techniques to engage with her own savvy consumer. This means that your prospective customers will be more receptive to your content if it's rooted in relevant consumer insights and tells a story that puts them at the center.

2. If you're able to elevate your content strategy and make your customer the hero, you'll gain a powerful competitive advantage. Think about it: if 90 percent of content is self-serving and you differentiate yourself by being the 10 percent focusing on the consumer, you'll put your brand on a winning trajectory.

So, how can we take a page from the consumer-centric B2C playbook to create more value for our B2B consumers and, ultimately, drive ROI for our brands? Start by understanding your customers' behaviors, journey, and attitudes. Ask yourself, your prospects, and your clients as many questions as it takes to complete the picture.

Once you're clear on which issues your prospective customers need help resolving and how you can help, let those very same customer-derived insights inform your messaging, storytelling, and communication strategy. If you can stay true to a consumer-centric approach, your brand will evolve from being the hero of your content to your client's hero.

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These days, brand marketers need to think fast. The pace of business and changing consumer tastes makes it nearly impossible to plan your next campaign or product launch in month-long chunks. In fact, most B2C marketers already know this, especially if they're incorporating healthy doses of digital and social in their plans.

Moving fast by testing your messages and offerings and getting real-time feedback from the field is essential these days. Especially in fast-moving CPG segments such as packaged foods and beverages, cosmetics, office supplies, and apparel. For these types of markets, small data is very much the currency for understanding consumer behavior and targeting promotions, and even tracking what products are selling the best at certain retailers or online outlets.

Fortunately, there's a science to this fast-moving approach, which comes from the world of product and software development and is increasingly part of the B2B toolbox: *agile marketing*.

Beyond daily scrums and weekly (or biweekly) sprints and the regiment of continuously testing and adjusting plans, agile in a marketing context, as McKinsey points out, "means using data and analytics to continuously source promising opportunities or solutions to problems in real time." Sounds good, right? Ever better, McKinsey has found that even the most digitally savvy marketing teams who embrace agile techniques have seen revenue lift of 20 to 40 percent.

At its core, being agile in your marketing strategy means predictably responding quickly to market changes and working together (via cross-functional teams) towards a common goal that results in consistently delighting customers at each stage of their journey.

For B2C marketers in growth brands who sell through retail, an agile marketing (and merchandising) approach can help to boost field execution and competitive differentiation, while flowing insights back to product development and even finance teams. But getting everyone aligned is a key step. Here's how:

First, articulate the purpose of going agile. Are you entering a



new category and facing a new breed of competitor? Or perhaps planning a launch event where team members from different regions are coming together and need to be coordinated and introduced to new in-field processes or data collection?

Second, look for ways to allow agile to piggyback on other data initiatives. If the marketing team is already conditioned to start by asking "why" (like Simon Sinek suggests), agile is a natural extension that helps to build in regular data collection, investigation, discussions, and planning or revising. Plus, if teams in the field are equipped to seek and capture both structured (via mobile forms) and unstructured (via photos) insights, this information flow can become the lifeblood for agile experiments and brand learning.

Third, use agile to foster collaboration between corporate and field marketers, and marketing and other stakeholders. If you're working with product teams or app developers, it's likely they'll be excited to have you speaking the language of agile, and perhaps even more likely to join forces on your next big campaign or launch.



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B2C marketers excel at consistency, and the leading B2C brands have it down to a science. Every marketing detail for consumer goods — from packaging to retail end caps to billboards — is carefully calibrated across every medium, ensuring that the consumer is consistently experiencing the brand.

At first glance, a B2B marketer might balk at taking a page from a toothpaste marketer, thinking that hard goods and packaging have zero relevance to their complex software-

as-a-service. But having worn both hats, I'd say that there's indeed a lesson and principle that can be applied in new ways for B2B marketers in 2018.

With today's digital transformation and the power of social media, we may have less control over marketing channels, but that's all the more reason to be extremely diligent and ensure brand consistency for your company's voice, whenever and wherever you can.

Customers of all types — consumer to small business to large enterprises — want to interact with brands they can count on. Having a consistent experience across all channels and interactions is an important first step in building that trust. And it's not just your logo and look and feel. It's your tone, your message, your product, and the quality of your commitment.

Where B2B marketers excel is knowing how to deliver that personalized, authentic message to their customers. In an environment with high-priced customized, product and services, a tailored approach, with depth and authenticity, is crucial.

B2B marketers do this with account-based marketing — essentially communicating with individual customers as a “market of one.” Given longer purchase cycles and recurring or renewal sales, there's an opportunity for ongoing dialogue and a consistent narrative over time.

In a B2C environment, that same price tag or sales cycle may not apply, yet consumer expectations for personalization and authenticity are ever-increasing. The challenge for B2C marketers is applying that personalization principle on a mass scale.

B2B marketers often have the advantage of account managers with personal relationships. But they also use advanced CX and CRM tools that B2C marketers can use, as well. Those tools provide important insights. It can be as simple as knowing a customer's account history, or as advanced as delivering tailored products and suggestions. The payoff, both immediate and longer term, is loyal customers who are engaged and passionate about your brand.

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Media consumption is increasingly fragmented across an ever-growing number of sites and screens. In response, many B2C advertisers have turned to programmatic capabilities to find their audiences at scale — and deliver to them the right message at the right time. In the B2B space, where audiences tend to be niche, this capability is invaluable.

B2B Marketers can leverage programmatic advertising technology to simplify their marketing efforts, as well as make them more efficient and effective. For example, instead of working with numerous publications individually, marketers can use programmatic targeting capabilities and private marketplaces. Programmatic technology also has the ability to gather data about B2B audiences' online behaviors, and then create targeting profiles based on this information. This enables B2B marketers to gain deeper insights about their audiences and customize messaging based on these learnings. For instance, by examining the websites that a key audience visits, B2B marketers can derive meaningful information about their path to purchase, and then can use programmatic technology to serve different messages at different stages of the purchase cycle. Additionally, a single user can be served sequential messaging — across devices — as he or she progresses along his or her purchasing journey.

Another valuable use of programmatic technology is testing which marketing and creative messaging is working best across which channel — and then optimize campaigns in real time.

Efficiently finding audiences at scale and optimizing performance are capabilities that should not rest solely in the hands of B2C marketers. Programmatic levels the playing field and its benefits should be fully embraced by B2C and B2B marketers alike.





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The most important skill we as B2B marketers can learn from B2C pros is how to best capture and apply relevant data across the customer lifecycle. For example, in B2C circles millennials are now the largest generation of digital media consumers. They have influenced B2C marketing approaches faster than any other generation. They expect personalized experiences and will desert your brand and your message if the user experience isn't relevant. As a result, capturing insights on consumers' content preferences and what's most important to them is arguably a B2C marketer's top concern in delivering the quality experiences millennials care about most.

B2B approaches are no different, particularly in competitive markets. Yet most B2B companies overlook opportunities to collect audience data in ways that are truly useful to the measurement and effectiveness of their programs.

Take online video for instance. Just playing through a video without exploiting opportunities to capture behavioral insights with interactive elements, for example, you might only know how many times the player loaded, or when viewers dropped off. Without the information that navigation or direct responses can deliver, it's difficult, if not impossible, to ensure the type of experiences and interactions that audiences want to consume, share, and engage in. As a result, campaigns can fall short.

With B2B buyers increasingly expecting personalization and content relevancy in their online experiences, too, marketers will need to look deeply at ways to derive insight from every prospect or customer interaction.

The winners and losers in B2B brands' ability to win customers will be strictly determined by marketing's ability to both gather and apply data, and then respond effectively — just as B2C marketers do.



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