

3 Essential Best Practices to Grow Leads, Sales and Job Security



Brad Chittim

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A Special Report for B2B Technology Marketers

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Brad Chittim, B2B communications specialist
303-255-4944
brad@writeconcepts.biz
www.writeconcepts.biz

Executive Summary

In the Marketing Sherpa, *2011 B2B Marketing BenchMark Report*¹, marketers shared their top challenges:

- To generate high-quality leads (78% of respondents cited this issue)
- To generate a high volume of leads (44%)
- To effectively market within a lengthening sales cycle (41%)

I believe these stats tell only half the story. Your company's half. YOUR challenge is to do all that...with lower budgets...with fewer people...with more work...with *less* job security...and with more stress. In essence, you're being asked to:

1. Be effective (high-quality leads, more of them, shorten the sales cycle, more sales!), and to...
2. Be efficient (optimize the use of the meager resources you've been assigned)

If you're like my clients, you've made sacrifices in your personal life to do more. But today's economic environment quickly exceeds even this stopgap measure.

Meet expectations...and reclaim your private life. Frankly, the only way out of the do-more-with-less trap is to apply the 80/20 rule. By using the 20 percent of strategies and tactics that garner 80 percent of your results—you really *can* do more—in less time.

What follows are three best practices that marketers like you are using today to do just that.

1. **Deliver a decision-support portfolio to keep prospects moving through your sales funnel**
2. **Use social proof to earn credibility, trust, leads and a shortened sales cycle**
3. **Use the "S"-word to sell, cross/up-sell and retain customers**

By applying these best practices (the 20%) you'll be able to make marked improvements in the results you deliver (the 80%). And that will create a strong foundation for an all-smiles conversation with your boss at your next review. Your family and friends will thank you too. You'll be happier. And you'll have more time to spend with them.

Wishing you success,



¹ Doyle, Jen, et al, "2011 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report," Marketing Sherpa. Executive summary available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/47092436/2011-B2B-Marketing-Benchmark-Report-Excerpt>. Last accessed 02-18-11.

Best Practice #1: Deliver a decision-support portfolio to keep prospects moving through your sales funnel

When it comes to doing more with less, it's useful to distill marketing down to its core. In the case of your collateral, that would be this: The number one purpose of your marketing content and collateral is to promote sales.

But in today's economy, what does "promote sales" mean? The answer to that question begins with an understanding of today's technology buyer.

The 2.0 B2B buyer

A recent survey² of more than 100 B2B buyers gives us insight into how the technology purchasing process has changed.

Conceptually, today's buyer may be likened to the herding of skittish cats. Hence, **the 2.0 buyer is more independent and proactive than their predecessors**. This is particularly evident in the pre-sales process. For example:³

- 78% of buyers started with informal information gathering to solve a business challenge
- 59% engaged with peers who had addressed the challenge
- 44% conducted anonymous research of a select group of vendors
- 41% researched papers/postings from thought leaders

What this shows, is that today's 2.0 buyer is as much student/researcher, as they are technologists and businesspeople.

More importantly, **marketers who deliver *the* information/education buyers want, when they want it, are rewarded with quality leads and sales.**

To wit, about 95 percent of survey respondents indicated that the vendor they chose "provided them with ample content to help navigate [them] through each stage of the buying process."⁴

"The savviest B2B online marketers are building decision support portfolios—a content portfolio which fills information gaps at key points across a buyer's purchase experience, and presents a clear path for progressing with the supplier across each decision point."

Rob Hamshar, Marketing Leadership Council Wide Angle blog post, [link](#)

² "Breaking out of the Funnel: A Look Inside the Mind of the New Generation BtoB Buyer," A DemandGen Report, White Paper. Last accessed 02-07-11, at <http://www.genius.com/resources/MarketingGenius/content/research/b2bbuyer/ThankYou.php>.

³ Ibid, p. 5.

⁴ Ibid, p. 3.

So, your 80/20 solution is to provide your prospects with "ample content" in the form of a decision-support portfolio.

“...buyers now control the engagement process and they are expecting and demanding solution providers to respond to their information needs in a timely manner and through a variety of channels and mediums.”

Breaking Out of the Funnel, DemandGen White Paper, p. 7.

What is a decision-support portfolio?

When you create a flowchart of your sales process, what does it look like? At your company, how do you define a prospect? What differentiates your prospect from a lead? How is a lead different from an opportunity? And how do you define a customer?

At each stage of this sales process there are transition points. Your prospect makes a decision to become a lead...an opportunity...and a customer. Your marketing goal is to deliver:

1. The right *kind* of collateral (white paper, case study, brochure, podcast, etc.)...
2. that includes valuable information (from your prospect's viewpoint)...
3. at the right time in sales process...
4. to promote/support the decision to move to the next step in the sales funnel.

The right kind of collateral

Being an 80/20 marketer requires focus on the essentials. I define "essential" as those collateral that meet your executives' two primary criteria. They support marketing initiatives that are:

1. **Effective**—that collateral that are *most influential* in helping your B2B buyer make their final purchasing decisions.
2. **Efficient**—your B2B buyers **consume this collateral on a large scale** to optimize the reach of your content and budget.

Now in order for a decision-support portfolio to earn the title of a "Best Practice", I believe that there *must* be evidence to support its efficacy. And there is.

B2B buyer consumption habits: Optimizing your reach

A recent survey of 500 B2B technology purchasers revealed their collateral consumption habits. The survey also showed which collateral was considered influential (i.e. effective) and to what degree. These results feature five core collateral pieces as detailed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Collateral types consumed in the last six months to evaluate a technology purchase.⁵

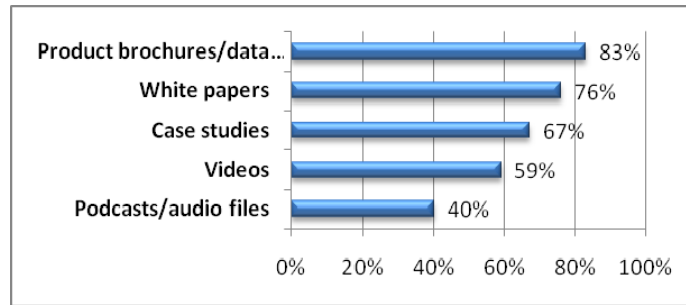


Figure 1 shows the reach (consumption) collateral has. Yet, it gets better.

B2B collateral consumers share your content with fellow decision makers and influencers. An overwhelming 89% share white papers; 87% share case studies, 84% forward podcasts and 80% make product brochures available to colleagues.⁶

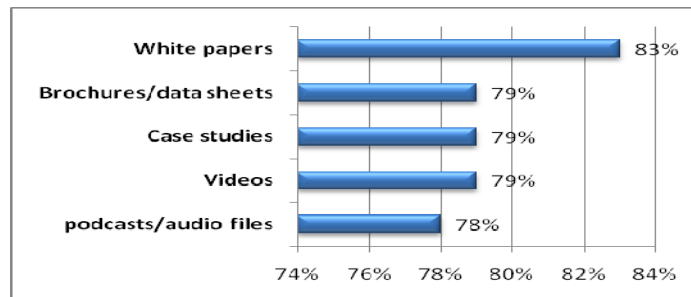
Armed with these B2B buyer consumption habits, you can rank-order your content development projects and align them with your available budget.

This supports your efficiency objective. But which collateral do readers find to be influential (i.e., effective in your view)?

Choosing effective collateral for your decision-support portfolio

Many marketing managers today have to make a case for how they spend their content development dollars. The chart below will help you justify your proposed budget.

Figure 2: B2B buyers considered collateral to be influential in making a purchasing decision⁷



What is valuable to your readers?

Over the last decade I've interviewed hundreds of my clients' customers to create case studies, video/audio references and white papers. What follows are the common content qualities that these B2B technology buyers deemed valuable.

⁵ Eccolo Media 2010 B2B Technology Collateral Survey Report, www.eccolomedia.com. p. 7. Available at: www.eccolomedia.com/IMAGES/PUBLICATIONS/2010_B2B_Technology_Collateral_Survey_Report.pdf. Last accessed, 02-10-11.

⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

⁷ Ibid, pp. pp. 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, (sum of extremely-, very- and moderately-influential results).

A consultative partner relationship

In tone and style, IT managers and business executives want your help to solve a business/technical/financial challenge. They want content that shows that you understand their business. And that you *know* how to deliver value to their enterprise. They also don't want in-your-face B2C, Super Bowl-style advertising and promotion. The white paper sample at the left illustrates this information/educational content approach.

[To see a white paper sample, click on this thumbnail.](#)



Prove it!

B2B buyers want to know that your solutions work in IT environments similar to their own. And, before they put their necks on the line, they need to be convinced that your solutions will do the same for them. They want proof of your claims. The nuts and bolts of social proof are discussed in detail in Best Practice #2.

Content must be targeted, concise, well-written, and provide sufficient technical details

An engineer evaluating your solution has different questions and concerns than a CXO. Thus, the content in your brochures, white papers etc. must use language relevant to those audiences. Your collateral should state your case then move on. So the need to be succinct needs to be carefully balanced with providing enough technical details to support your goal—to trigger a decision to move to the next step in your sales cycle.

What collateral do you offer when in the sales process?

Referring back to the collateral survey, there was a dramatic drop off in "first-consumption of collateral piece" usage. The average "first use" fell from 50% in the Pre-sales process to 31%-Initial-sales process to 17%-Mid-sales process to a low of 4% in the Final-sales process.⁸ (Table 1 below tabulates the five collateral types by use during the sales cycle.)

The *Breaking out of the Funnel* survey found even *starker* Pre-sales activity noting that: 78% of buyers began the sales process "with informal information gathering around a business challenge."⁹

Clearly, engaging your prospects sooner is 80/20-quality better than later. Thus, your effective strategy would be to:

1. Offer your prospects as much of the full spectrum of collateral as your budget allows.
2. Offer the most effective collateral first, and work your way down your list.
3. Tailor inbound/outbound marketing tactics to promote the consumption of your collateral as early in the sales process as possible.

Table 1 tells us that the utility of white papers and brochures is most acute during the Pre- and Initial-sales stages. Case studies and

Table 1: What's consumed when in the sales process.

| Collateral | Pre | Initial | Mid | Final |
|--------------|-----|---------|-----|-------|
| White papers | 53% | 31% | 13% | 4% |
| Case studies | 49% | 34% | 21% | 3% |
| Podcasts | 41% | 35% | 20% | 4% |
| Videos | 49% | 30% | 18% | 3% |
| Brochures | 60% | 25% | 11% | 4% |

⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

⁹ "Breaking out of the Funnel: A Look Inside the Mind of the New Generation BtoB Buyer," *ibid*, p. 5.

podcasts, on the other hand, deliver value through the Mid-sales stage.

Now that you know what a fundamental decision-support portfolio looks like, we'll turn to 80/20 Best Practice #2: Social Proof.

Best Practice #2: Use social proof to earn credibility, trust, leads and a shortened sales cycle

Your buyers are busy, stressed and have no room to make a mistake that would negatively impact their business. To mitigate these hazards, B2B technology purchasers use the strategy of social proof.

Why is social proof so important?

The *Breaking out of the Funnel* survey found that 59 % of respondents "engaged with peers who had addressed the same challenge."¹⁰ In other words, they networked to collect specific experiences and information about targeted solutions.

More telling still:

"Executives...showed a higher propensity to follow successful trailblazers, with 44%...indicating that they determined the potential impact of a solution through other adopters and *then built a case for immediate adoption, even though the project was unbudgeted.*"¹¹

So 44% of the executives in this survey did their vendor's work for them. The customer built a case (based on social proof content) for the purpose of securing the budget to implement the solution.

Ask yourself this question. For these customers, was the sales cycle longer or shorter?

How do you define social proof?

Social Proof is the use of other's experiences to support a decision to buy or not buy your solutions. In this context, social proof answers the following buyer questions:

- Can your solutions address my business challenges?
- Can your solutions deliver value to my business?
- Do your solutions deliver measurable results and what can I expect here?
- What is the effort required to implement your solutions?
- Will you be there for me after the sale?

Social proof content comes in many forms. Buyers **network** in person or via social media like LinkedIn, industry forums, and at tradeshows. Marketers harness social proof in

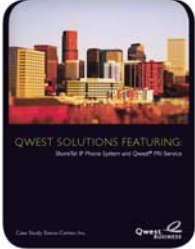
¹⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 5.

collateral like videos, audio files, podcasts, quotes in press releases and case studies.

Case studies are particularly valuable because they're an accepted and well-used social proof tool.

[To see a case study, click on this thumbnail.](#)



Recall Figures 1 and 2 detailing how decision makers consume collateral.

- 67% of respondents **consumed case studies**.
- 87% of decision makers **shared case studies** with other decision makers and influencers in their company.
- 79 percent of decision makers found case studies to be extremely- to moderately- **influential** in their purchasing decisions.

Thus, the case for case study content is solid. But what makes case study content *valuable* to your prospects? More importantly, what content do they need to support a decision to move forward with you?

Developing social proof content that earns credibility, trust, prospects and customers

A decade's worth of case study experience has shown me that there are three fundamental qualities that elevate a story to social proof status.

- Usable quotes
- Meaningful metrics and
- Story themes that resonate with your prospects

Let's take each in turn.

Usable quotes

I define a usable quote as something your customer says that demonstrates the value your solutions deliver to their company. What does this mean?

Your customer **quotes are specific**. They specify a) what solution they used, and link it to b) specific results from their use.

For example, "(a) The WondurTelecom MPLS network promotes collaboration among our loan officers and (b) cut our processing time by 12 percent."

Contrast that with a vague quote, such as "The people at WondurTelecom are awesome! We love their services."

Meaningful metrics¹²

Consider the attitude that Oracle Vice President of Global Customer Programs, Julie Tung, has toward measurable results.

¹² I go into great detail about how to capture, and express persuasive metrics in my interview ebook, *How to Capture Customer Reference Content That Influences Decision Makers*. Just contact me to request your free copy.

Her team finds them so important that their collateral *must* include three quantifiable results or be dropped from consideration.¹³

Oracle's policy is consistent with my experience as well. Tech buyers are bombarded with so many claims from vendors that they routinely disregard numberless content. Instead, they tend to consume—and give credence to—"unbiased" case studies, video/audio interviews and happy-customer podcasts.

Trade journal and business editors have picked up on this trend as well. So much so that it's nearly impossible to see your social proof content in print absent measurable results. So do yourself an 80/20 favor and create content that features meaningful metrics.

I define a metric as anything your solutions achieved that can be expressed numerically.

- Your solution saved time or money
 - It's easier to administer and they spend x fewer labor hours per year managing your solution
 - It helps the company perform task B xx percent faster
- Your solution delivered greater value
 - It allowed Bank A to implement a virtual loan-processing team that generates \$xx,xxx in additional revenues annually
 - Your solution enhanced customer satisfaction by x percent

So for example, "WunderTelecom's MPLS *LinkEveryone* solution reduced our inter-office long distance costs by 17 percent. We've also noticed that the collaboration among our engineers has increased and the time to complete projects has fallen by 14 percent."

Story themes that resonate with prospects

Keep in mind that your prospect's ideal case study is one that features a company of the same size, in the same industry and using the same solution set as the ones they're considering.

Sometimes, you can deliver this; sometimes not. Either way, you'll feature core story themes that have a high probability of satisfying your demanding prospects.

After a decade of writing case studies and conducting video/audio interviews, I've found a number of "universal" themes that tech buyers zero in on.

Your can't-fail case study story themes:

- What were the solution alternatives and how did your "consultants" help your customer choose the best option?

[To view a video reference sample, click on this thumbnail.](#)



¹³ "State of the Profession 2010: A Report on Customer Reference Forum 2010," Customer Reference Forum, 2010, p. 5. Available at: http://www.customerreferenceforum.com/resources_reports.php#sop.

- What is the *value* your solutions delivered to your happy customer? (business financial and technological)
- Why specifically did your customer choose your company?
- What unusual or remarkable information make this story stand out? For example, the Red Cross' use of customer relationship management software to manage volunteers.

Now that you've covered the social proof base, let's move on to Best Practice #3, the "S" word—SERVICE.

Best Practice #3: Liberally use the "S"-word to sell, cross/up-sell and retain customers

Everyone knows that sex sells. But in the world of B2B technology, SERVICE sells 80/20 better.

Why is service content so important?

My tech-buyer interviewees repeatedly share that **excellent customer service is a major differentiator between vendors**. By emphasizing your superior account management and technical support service you *will*:

- Win more customers who...
- spend more on your solutions while...
- retaining them longer to reduce your churn.

Note that you must promote your superb service *both* in word before the sale (via your marcom materials) and in deed by your salespeople and support staff after the sale.

Results from the *Breaking out of the Funnel survey* found that **60 percent of respondents shared what they learned from their research and buying process with others after the sale**. They did this via one-on-one discussions with peers, postings to blogs and participation in online forums on social sites.¹⁴

Your customers are going to talk about your service anyway, so it's in your 80/20 interests to proactively shape their perception before and after the sale.

What does good service content include?

When you spend hundreds of hours interviewing tech buyers like I have, you begin to notice a number of recurring themes. Thus, good and valuable service content emphasizes the benefits that have helped trigger purchase decisions.

Those benefits are:

- The pre- and post-sales service they received *starkly* differentiated their vendor's solutions from their competitors.

¹⁴ "Breaking out of the Funnel: A Look Inside the Mind of the New Generation BtoB Buyer," *ibid*, p. 7.

- A spirit of service reduced the uncertainty of buying from their vendor and as a result reduced the anxiety they may have felt in making a final decision.
- The service they received in every case simplified their lives.
- The service they received predisposed them to buy:
 - More current services
 - Other services they weren't using
- Superior service was *stickier* than blood or money, which boosted vendor's retention rates. Over and over again, my interviewees say things like "Yes I could pay less with vendor B, but then I have to factor in the time I'll spend on resolving issues."

So how can you leverage this inside information to your benefit?

Start by reviewing the service benefit bullets above. Which ones are relevant to your company? How specifically, does your company deliver these service benefits?

From that, you can complete the Service Messaging Matrix in Table 2. Then use it to drive the creation of specific content.

Table 2: Service Messaging Matrix

| Service | How do we do it? | What results differentiate us? |
|---|------------------|--|
| Our Pre/post sales service is better than our competitors | | e.g. responsive |
| Our service-centric philosophy reduces uncertainty | | e.g. they know we'll do the right thing |
| Our service simplifies our customers' lives | | e.g. fewer admin hours per year, single point of contact, etc. |
| Our service inspires up-/cross-sales | | e.g. x% of our customers buy more... |
| Our service inspires customers to stay with us | | e.g. we have low turnover |

Conclusions

To help you be more effective, efficient, and have more job security, this Special Report details three essential best practices. By applying them in combination, you'll position yourself to:

- Increase the number and quality of the leads you generate.
- Increase sales by tilting the scales in your favor over your competitors.
- Increase your employability by beefing up your resume with measurable accomplishments.
- Increase your happiness by doing more with less and having more time for your own life.

Develop and implement a decision-support portfolio. By providing content that your prospects a) consume, b) are influenced by and c) consider valuable, you will markedly improve your chances to move them along in your sales funnel.

Moreover, by being the marketer-on-the-spot—with all the answers—you will have made a dramatic step towards compressing the sales cycle. After all, *you* were the vendor that gave them something of value up front. That will inspire trust. And your prospects will want to reciprocate by giving you greater consideration.

Deliver social proof. By providing case studies, customer videos/audios and press-release quotes, your prospects will believe you are credible and trustworthy. To the point, executives will use examples of your successful implementations to make—and defend—the case to do the same at their company.

The key to valuable social proof content is to incorporate:

1. Usable quotes
2. Measurable results
3. Story themes that resonate with your audiences

Use the "S" word in your collateral. By incorporating content illustrating your commitment to SERVICE, you'll differentiate yourself from your competitors. Your service will predispose your customers to buy more from you. And to stay with you even when moving to your competitor would save them some money.

Such content would feature your:

- Service level agreement guarantees
- Service support process
- Specific examples of above-and-beyond service
- Single-point-of-contact policy, should you have one

I wish you the best of luck in applying the knowledge in this Special Report.

How can I get even more help creating decision-support content?

You can hire me to create the content you need to be effective and efficient. You get the added benefit of outsourcing labor-hours that you can apply to other 80/20 projects.

Getting started is as easy as contacting me.

Brad Chittim, 303-255-4944, brad@writeconcepts.biz. Or visit me on the web at www.writeconcepts.biz.

Read below for more information about what I can do for you.

Who are you?

When you hire me, you get a 10-year B2B copywriting veteran. One who applies all the Best Practices detailed in this Report to your finished copy.

As a marcom manager at Carrier Access Corporation I sat where you are now. Praying that the writer I just hired to finish a brochure/case study/press release would deliver professional-grade, B2B copy on time. Those are the standards you can expect from me.

What do you do?

I love working with marketing and marcom managers who want to increase their prospects, leads, opportunities and sales. My service packages specialize in three areas to achieve these ends.

Customer Reference Program (CRP) Service Packages

My CRP service packages fully support Best Practice #2. They deliver the content your technology buyers want in a format that they respond to. In this way, you'll earn the trust of your prospects and leads to move them along in your sales funnel.

I also write the "roll-out" emails and newsletter summaries announcing your latest reference tool to your sales team. And I can help you incorporate your reference "buzz piece" as a tantalizing freebie to boost your direct and online marketing response rates.

Marcom Service Packages

My Marcom service packages fully support Best Practices #1 and #3. I deliver finished copy for the collateral your tech buyers consume, including brochures and web content. I also leverage my research, writing and marketing skills to develop and create white papers that influence your tech prospects.

PR Service Packages

Call me when it's time to pitch or publish your by-lined article in your favored trade journal. Or when you want editors to publish stories about your satisfied customers. Or when you want an agency-grade press release completed so that you can focus on other value-add projects.

My offer to you

The key to successfully develop information/educational marketing content is to complete a targeted interview. One that captures the tasty content your buyers can't resist. Just contact me to receive your free copy of my ebook *How to Capture Customer Reference Content That Influences Decision Makers: A 10-step interview guide for marketing & PR professionals*.



Brad Chittim, Chief Scribe
Write Concepts, Inc.
303-255-4944
brad@writeconcepts.biz, www.writeconcepts.biz