Practical Case Studies & Know-How

MarketingSherpa

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Top 10 B-to-B Lead Generation Marketing Mistakes

Special Report

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of MarketingSherpa's B-to-B Mistakes Report.

You may be amused or surprised, to learn this second edition is strikingly different from the first published just 24 months ago. Back then, we thought we were at the cutting edge, mistake-wise that is.

But, business-to-business marketing has evolved quite a bit more than we expected in the past two years. Mistakes have evolved along with it. What follows is based on Sherpa research via:

- Case Studies -- Our reporters conduct in-depth interviews with marketers every week for exclusive Case Studies on what works and what doesn't.
- Marketer Surveys -- More than 10,000 marketers respond to MarketingSherpa surveys every year, revealing their budgets, results, and ROI.
- Target Market Surveys -- MarketingSherpa's research team also conduct studies of your end prospects -- business executives and technology professionals -- to determine which marketing truly influences their decisions.
- B-to-B Summits -- Each fall, more than 500 B-to-B marketers gather at our advanced Demand Generation Summits to swap war stories.

All of this can add up to fairly authoritative data. However, we beg you not to merely take our word for anything. Here, at MarketingSherpa, our mantra is "Test It".

If you are making one of the "mistakes" examined in this report, don't suddenly and abruptly change tactics. Instead, set up an A/B test (or some other type of test) and try changes out. Then go with the winning results.

Good luck!

Mistake 1 Calling a Monthly Email Newsletter a "Nurturing Program"

When you get a new inquiry, perhaps via a white paper offer or contact us form, and that person gives you permission to email him or her, what happens next?

If you're like many B-to-B marketers, you dump that name into the "house email file" which includes all sorts of prospects, customers, and leads. Then, you send that entire house file a routine monthly email newsletter.

Why is this a bad thing? Well, consider the following:

- Not everyone likes to read email. Some prefer images, some -- audio, some -- meetings, some – print, etc.

- Not all email gets through, especially in the corporate environment where estimates of filters stopping permission emails are as high as 40% per send. (If you send through your own server or use an outsourced ESP but don't pay for your own IP address, you're probably on the high end of being filtered.)

- Your customers, true leads, and general inquiries are three very different groups with extremely different areas of interest in your company and offerings. The same content cannot (and should not) serve all three.

- Newsletters can feel like a one-way mass communication (especially when they are in HTML.) If you're trying to start a one-to-one relationship with a new inquiry, you need more interactive email than just a newsletter.

What's best? Our suggestion is to isolate new email opt-ins from inquiries on your list and send them something special -- either instead of or in addition to your newsletter. That special something might be:

- A site resources map featuring links to your best canned webinars, white papers, etc.
- A survey, quiz, or questionnaire for their opinions on your industry
- A handy calculator or glossary
- A case study about a company similar to their own
- A personal-looking text email "from" their assigned sales rep containing a highly relevant white paper or canned webinar to click to (i.e., not your offer-du-jour.)
- A postal direct mail package with response device
- Offers via other media (podcast, vidcast. etc.)

Mistake 2 Telephoning Leads to Qualify Them … Days Later

Bravo! You ran an amazingly successful lead generation campaign and hundreds of prospects inquired about your offerings. Now you have to sort through, qualify and score all those inquiries before the best 10%-20% can be handed over to the sales department. (We assume the rest are sorted into no-good and needs-nurturing and dealt with appropriately by the marketing department.)

These days, more often than not, the marketing department is in charge of that process, generally overseeing an inside sales team or an external telemarketing vendor (or some combination of the two.) No matter who's supervising this telephoning, the big question is: how quickly can it be done?

Many marketers say, proudly, 'We phone call all incoming queries within a week."

We can assure you none of these marketers has measured the difference a few days, or even hours makes. However, the automotive industry has. They've determined that for every 30 minute lag after a car buying prospect submits his or her info on an online form, the resulting lead quality sags.

If you get back to a lead in less than 1/2 an hour, you'll reach far more people and you'll have far greater success in ultimately closing the deal. If you wait for an hour, you'll reach fewer people, close fewer deals. Wait for an entire week and … well, you get the picture.

Lag time is especially critical:

- in highly competitive industries where prospects may be comparing several vendors.

- if your leads are driven by search engine marketing.

- if you're marketing to small businesses and you offer something that's not so core to their vertical that they'll spend the time researching vendors carefully and waiting for your call prior to buying. (In other words, IT services, telephony, accounting, etc.)

- if your sales cycle is under a month

Solution? Before the campaign goes out, get your team ready to act on responses. And if it's a big campaign, consider staggering it to segments so you're not inundated by too many inquiries at once.

Mistake 3 Big booths at the big national shows (year after year)

Are you still buying a booth at the big annual convention because “that’s what we’ve always done”? Or perhaps because “The sales team loves it.” Or maybe, “Our competitors are there, so we have to have a presence.”

All three are bad reasons to splurge on big trade shows. It’s not just your budget, it’s the time and effort shows take from you. Top marketers, including those from IBM, have revealed they are cutting back on massive shows.

Key decision makers don’t walk the floor in the ways they used to in the old days. Now, if they attend, it’s to give a speech and fly out again. Or for closed-door networking sessions. Plus, it’s hard to have any impact on new prospects in a cluttered or overwhelming show floor.

The simple truth is the people your reps often wind up talking to the most at these big shows are your current clients. Why not save the money and time and schedule a client get-together -- perhaps an invite-only party -- at the hotel in conjunction with the big show instead of a booth? You’ll spend $5,000 instead of $30,000 or more.

The good news is that you can still reach and form new relationships with highly qualified prospects at shows. But, in a different way. Take your big booth budget and test it for any of the following higher-impact tactics instead:

- A dedicated PR staffer to help your key execs and most enthusiastic clients land speaking gigs at shows.

- An intimate series of breakfasts in cities across the US featuring a guest star your prospects are yearning to meet (a best-selling author, their peers at competing companies, a research firm, etc.)

- Booths and multiple touch point sponsorship at niche vertical shows or strong regional shows. You’ll have 1/4 or less of the traffic and cost of the big national, but far more impact on the prospects you meet.

- Highly targeted virtual events -- not mass webinars with 500 prospects but perhaps intimate niche webinars with 10 prospects.

Mistake 4 Using a free trial or free demo as your mainstay offer

Free trials and demo-takers are the absolute best leads. They convert faster and more reliably into sales than leads from any other type of marketing offer. So it begs the obvious question: why not use this as your main marketing offer? (In fact, why use any other offer at all?)

If you have an extremely large prospective client pool (i.e., you're probably marketing to small businesses or to all businesses), you might consider sticking with trials and demos. However, if you market to a niche, you'll be in big trouble.

Prospects who raise their hands to accept a trial or demo are in the last part of the sales cycle, close to the end. By making a free trial or demo of your lead offer, you're filtering out potentially great prospects who aren't ready for a trial. You'll never get the names of people who might want a little more information, persuasion, or product education to turn into ready-to-act prospects.

Moreover, you may be missing the crucial opportunity to educate your prospects' colleagues and decision-making committee members. (Only one member of a typical committee may sign up for a demo, but you need to influence all members to get a favorable decision.)

Widen your net a little. Broaden your sales funnel. You can always make that trial or demo offer once they've become a lead through some other offer. Then, you can offer existing prospects a free trial and/or demo repeatedly until it's accepted. But you have to start a relationship with your prospect first.

Mistake 5 We, us, our

Quick test: Go look at a copy of your marketing materials such as your Web home page or your latest direct mail piece. Count the number of times you see the words We, Us, Our, or your brand name.

Then, count the number of times you see the words, You, Your, Yours, or the job title that your prospects tend to have.

Which count wins the contest? If it's the former, then you've got a copywriting problem. Switch the focus and you'll land more prospects and conversions. It's so simple yet so often forgotten.

Mistake 6 Art-Director-It is in Two Parts

Part I. Stock photos

They are so painfully obvious:
- Two men in suits shaking hands outside an office tower.
- A group of happy executives in suits sitting around a shiny board table (or all staring raptly into a PC monitor.)
- A beautiful and intelligent-looking woman smiling

So, why do you use them? Why are they on your home page and/or brochures? We know why. Art-Director-Itis

Your art director or graphic designer thought your logo and your copywriting alone weren't enough to be interesting-looking. He or she thought a photo would look more "professional" or slick. You didn't have any photos of your own executives, your own customers, your own building. Maybe your product is boring (or even impossible) to photograph. So, you popped in some stock photos.

And every single prospect knows it.

Clip art is especially dangerous on the Web where prospects know that small companies (AKA, a-guy-at-home-in-his-underwear) use it to look like big boys, which ultimately has the effect of making the big guys also look small.

It's time for you to get some photos of your own people, products and buildings.

Part II. Hard-to-read type

Get out a copy of your latest email newsletter, Web page, space ad, and/or brochure. Is any of your copy:

- Smaller than 10-point type?*
- Reverse type (such as white letters on a dark background)?
- Pale grey?
- Centered for more than two lines in a row?
- In paragraph blocks of more than six lines long?
- In lines of more than 60 characters across, including white spaces?

If any of these describe your text, rest assured: nobody will read it. (Except maybe your proofreader.)

*Note: 12-point or bigger is even better than 10. The few exceptions to the 10-point rule are copy in clever footnotes, such as quiz answers and subtitles under graphics which people will squint to read.

Mistake 7 Not Working Referrals

MarketingSherpa research shows business executives trust word of mouth far more than any other marketing communication. Yes, even for extremely expensive investments (in fact, often more for big investments.)

Good word of mouth can get your company name on the shortlist more easily and faster than any other type of advertising. Yet, we've found very few business-to-business marketers have any sort of formal referral-encouragement program.

Have you:

- Scored the referral potential for every current client in your database? Do you know who is more likely to refer you and who thinks you stink? (Start by looking over your annual client survey and then your service center call logs.)
- Added end-user data to your client database so you can keep in touch with some one besides the accounting department and the top-exec who signed off on the purchase?
- Kept track of which client, end-user, media, and analyst bloggers might conceivably ever write about you?
- Set up a routine re-connect operation to track and maintain relationships with all key client executives as they make career moves? (A client who loves you is your best evangelist when they switch companies or divisions.)
- Let your clients know they are rock stars to you by profiling them in your email newsletter or other materials? (No, we're not talking about a marketing case study or testimonial. We're talking about interviews and profiles of general interest.)
- Centralized and internally promoted a wiki or intranet where client-facing staff from all departments can post testimonials, favorable emails, great phone call notes, etc when connecting with current happy clients, so that marketing knows whom to ask later for formal testimonials?
- Brought in a videographer to your annual user group meeting with the express purpose of collecting some video and audio snippets for your Web site and email programs of clients talking about you.

Mistake 8 Lack of investment in PR

“I don’t spend money on anything that’s not direct response. My budget is tight. I have to see every penny pay off.”

We hear those excuses from a lot of marketers, and it worries us. Fact is, we’ve seen plenty of data—formal research studies and anecdotal evidence—revealing that if prospects don’t know enough about your brand, they are far less likely to respond to your direct response marketing.

Frankly, very few CFOs or CEOs in sales-driven companies really understand or support PR, aside from the ego placement (I want my name in the WSJ!)

However, the fact is, MarketingSherpa research data indicates that trade show speeches, print magazines and online magazines are the top three marketing factors -- aside from word of mouth -- that truly influence more than a third of business purchasing decisions.

You can do all the email, podcasting, Webinars, white papers, paid search marketing, telemarketing, etc. that you want. None of it may be as influential as a raving story in a trade magazine about your brand.

Let’s face it—what would you trust—marketing copy or reporters’ stories? An advertisement or a best-of rating from a trade magazine?

If you can’t get the budget to hire a great external PR person, try starting a black ops operation in-house using a freelancer or even a college intern. (There are plenty of PR students in universities near you.) Track everything carefully -- much easier these days with free Net services, such as PubSub. And then, present at the next quarterly management meeting with an eye to getting a real budget assigned.

Mistake 9 Blocking Search Engine Spiders From Your Best Content

If you're like your peers, you have spent an enormous amount of time, budget, and energy creating a gargantuan content library. It probably contains white papers, past canned webinars, PowerPoint slides from show presentations, etc.

You fondly consider this 'resource center' a lead generation and qualifying device. Any humans who drop by have to register or log in to get at the content. That's fine.

Just one thing. Search engine spiders aren't human. They are robots following a trial of hotlinks to publicly available content. That content must (at this time anyway) be either flat HTML text, or text in another standard format such as PDF, Word, PowerPoint, Excel or meta tags accompanying the non-readable content. The spiders can't read audio files, Flash files, images, or video directly.

They also can't read anything that's behind your registration barrier.

In the old days (i.e., 24 months ago) you could create a program that would lift that barrier automatically for selected visitors, such as spiders. However, Google et al now say that's a bad idea. They don't want their spiders seeing anything that a normal non-registered human being can't see.

How do you get around the problem? Talk to your Web department about creating a new, more extensive, pre-barrier HTML page for every piece of content in your library. It should use highly relevant keywords to describe what's behind that barrier. Both humans and search engines alike may find this content more useful than your, perhaps too brief, resource page descriptions.

Plus, start adding content to your site that's not registration-dependent. That might be more technical FAQs, a glossary, a blog, past newsletter issues, etc. Be sure to ask your Web team if the site is dynamic or static. If it's dynamic, you'll need more static HTML workaround pages for this content too.

Mistake 10

Registration forms that appear daunting or time-consuming

You created a lovely, beautiful marketing campaign. You spent hours with the art department tweaking typefaces, photos, copy. You bought the best media you could select.

And then you asked the Web guy to "stick up a form for them to respond to."

It's a bit like gussying yourself up for a date, then showing up with onion-breath. That's why about 94% of prospects who "click here" and reach your registration form to get a white paper, or sign up for a webinar, or get a quote, will immediately leave.

That's right: 94% take one look at your registration form and leave.

You'll need to tweak, measure, and tweak some more to beat the averages. But for starters, we recommend that you make some quick fixes:

- I nclude a picture plus a brief description of what the prospect will get when they fill out the form. Just because you described the offer on the marketing piece they clicked from doesn't mean they remember (or trust you to.) They need to see it again here.

- Get rid of every question that you don't desperately need right away. If you have zip, you don't need city and state. You don't need fax. You may not even need phone.

- Add a short line of reassuring copy immediately next to the box asking for email address. "We value your privacy" is a good standard. Don't rely on a little tiny privacy link at the very bottom of the Web page to be reassuring.

- Strip off the button that reads "clear form" or "reset" because that can only hurt you.

- Take off extraneous copy and hotlinks (including your regular nav bar.) These can be fatally distracting. Don't describe your company, your clients, your glory, your options. Wait until after they've registered.

- Replace stock photos with real people or products or white paper covers.

Plus, start measuring your form abandon rate. It's easy -- just take the number of leads generated (forms successfully submitted) and divide it by the total number of visitors to that Web page. It's a very useful number to convince your CEO to give you more Web design and testing funds!