



B2B marketing:

Six steps to thrive in a world upended by COVID-19

With salespeople stranded at home and face-to-face interaction stymied in a world upended by a pandemic, the traditional B2B model is no longer adequate. The need for a marketing transformation that puts digital at the fore has become urgent. As much as a more mature B2B model is a sudden necessity, however, it's also an opportunity.

With a new approach comes the chance to improve your organization's understanding of client needs, deepen relationships, build better service, and create a more fully realized, more digitally-enabled customer journey.

Our approach is to focus on **six key actions** every organization should take as it strives to put in place a futureproof B2B model.

1

Address shifting stakeholders and complex decision-making units

The shift in who has power to make purchasing decisions was already a trend. The measures to slow the spread of coronavirus have only made this change more obvious and immediate. Accepting and accommodating this new reality is an important step toward staying competitive in the future. Often, a growing number of people are involved in purchasing decisions. These potential buyers are looking for product information online, and B2B marketing needs to meet them where they are with more creative and rigorous use of digital channels, personalized to specific buying needs.

2

Become fully customer-centric

The traditional B2B sales approach is too often focused on the technical aspects of your products rather than the needs of an identified customer persona. The digital transformation of the B2B model can make it easier to understand your customers and to map a journey that brings them to a purchase decision. Move from facts, features, and specifications to communication centered on the needs and challenges of the target audience for your products. Your strategy shouldn't be sales-driven as much as it is buyer-driven; your messaging shouldn't be product-centric so much as audience-centric.

3

Keep up with fast-paced change and technology innovation

Now, markets and customer behaviors are shifting faster than ever in response to the societal and economic disruptions of a global pandemic. In order to achieve effective and efficient customer-centric marketing, and keep pace with this change, data is key. Fortunately, marketing technology is changing too and has made enormous strides in recent years. Cloud-based solutions can make it easier to ingest data, build decisions on the data more efficiently, and automate delivery of your messages through preferred connected channels.

5

Build new market roles and functions

There is no one structure that is clearly better than another for a marketing organization. It might be strongly centralized, or mostly localized. But success will be rooted in having the right capabilities, which can be organized along three axes:

- **Product**—includes technical expertise on features and benefits, along with knowledge of pricing, launch plans, and so on
- **Audience**—where analysis and understanding of the customer journey resides
- **Deep expertise**—consists of centers of expertise to drive marketing excellence across product groups and audiences such as branding, social media, and e-commerce

A customer-centric marketing approach needs to move away from the product-push mindset, but product-driven content is vital in the later stages of the customer journey. Roles need to reflect both aspects.

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Transform to digital in new business, operating and customer models

The domain is bigger than just marketing. Smarter use of connected insights will impact the entire business model. The digitalization necessary for a successful B2B marketing transformation needs to be seen as a building block—or better, an enabler—of a bigger digital plan. Marketing can drive the digital maturity of the organization as a whole. But the opportunity lies in bringing the customer view, backed by data and the customer journey, into the larger business discussion.

6

Redefine collaboration and break down marketing silos

Boosting your marketing maturity requires the rest of the organization to accommodate the necessary changes. Organizational empowerment to support a B2B marketing transformation demands intentional collaboration, breaking down silos in which marketing may have traditionally operated. Full alignment of marketing and sales will be particularly important as a maturing digital organization increasingly engages with customers. Done right, all of this will involve continual disruption. A good way to look at this is to make a coherent story out of the marketing organization's aspirations, with the goal of better buy-in. Strategic alignment and support from leadership are key.

Deloitte Digital's approach to boosting marketing maturity and futureproofing the B2B model starts by diagnosing the existing structure, practices, and capabilities of the marketing organization. Then the goal is to define and design the new operating model—with the six key actions outlined in this report clearly in mind. At the heart of this effort is the need to align on goals and create a road map for the future.

It's important to also recognize, however, that the effort has to be viewed as a continuous one. This ongoing cycle of optimization may well start with data-driven customer insights, for example, leveraging them to inform organizational design and technology platform choices, but then it's going to come back around. After the effort reaches fruition in better omnichannel marketing and e-commerce strategies, it's right back to the data and analytics to see what's working and design the next round of improvements.

In the end, a continuous, agile process is what's needed to respond to the health crisis that for many B2B organizations is forcing change. If the changes make the organization less static, more nimble, and more able to engage with customers, then the B2B organization will be better prepared for whatever unexpected changes come next in an uncertain world.