

Best Practices

Key Elements of a successful
B2B Technology Product Website
and Online Program

Executive Summary

The primary objective of a corporate website is to generate sales, create leads, increase brand recognition and establish customer loyalty. According to Jakob Nielsen, B2B sites earned a mere 58% success rate. In contrast, mainstream websites have a substantially higher success rate of 66%. This paper will provide strategies, tactics and insights into what it takes to have a program for B2B technology products. So if you are a product marketer, involved in your company's web initiative, this paper will be of your interest.

B2B marketers continue to shift focus towards digital strategies to acquire and engage with customers. The share of online spend has grown considerably over the years, and the recent economic downturn has increased online's share in the marketing budget of B2B technology marketers.

However, our marketing research shows that many B2B marketers are not implementing key elements that are essential for the success of their web strategy. Strategies are being implemented in isolation and are quite often not integrated. The weakest link often leads in an overall program. We see Ineffective Conversions of traffic to leads, lack of insight on leads to close them, leads not being nurtured, which ultimately leads to ineffective online programs and low ROI. A clear call to action on every page leads to a better customer service and avoids confusions thereby turning visitors into customers.

Real Simple Syndication has made the decision to buy a B2B Technology impactful for the respondents. So finally the quality of content determines the engagement of a prospect buyer with the vendor and not just marketing strategies.

This paper is meant to help identify key elements of an online strategy that a marketer should consider. Following are the key elements of a successful online product website and online program:

1. Lead Generation

Marketers are using multiple strategies to drive traffic to their websites. Web is a cost efficient route to lead generation and increasing sales. The challenge lies in getting a prospect's attention, keeping it long enough to get the message across, and motivating them to contact or buy a product.

B2B Technology Product Websites & Online Program

Banner advertising and Search Engine Marketing strategies have now become 'traditional'. Social strategies need to be the flavor of the day. Twitter is a good example of B2B marketers experimenting. To create an effective Twitter account, businesses must be transparent in their objectives and engagement is the key to using Twitter successfully as it is a two-way communication tool. Twitter can also be used for product updates, version releases and new wins. B2B companies like Sun Microsystems, Dell and Oracle are good examples of well executed online marketing strategies.

However, there are some companies simply pushing all kinds of information without sound objectives or strategy. Quite a few strategies are not strategies, simply forays with a lack of focus.

Some lead generation activities are:

- ▶ **Search Engine Marketing - Increasing your search rank**

Two programs dominate search engine marketing (SEM)—Google AdWords and Yahoo Sponsored Search. Also known as pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.

- ▶ **White Paper Syndication Services - A platform to express your thoughts and experiences**

White papers remain the leading form of thought-leadership and content distribution. It is among the most productive forms of B2B lead generation.

- ▶ **Webcasts and Podcasts - Make complicated information simple by presenting it with visuals**

Webcasts, also referred to as webinars and podcasts are alternative vehicles for delivering thought leadership content. Use a webcast to present long pieces of information with an important visual component.

- ▶ **Email Marketing - Don't just email prospects - engage them in a dialogue**

- ▶ Deepen relationships with triggered, multi-step campaigns.
- ▶ Get to the inbox using the latest deliverability technology.
- ▶ Raise open and click rates by targeting segments.

- ▶ **Social Media – An online public relation strategy**

According to latest research by eMarketer, online ad spending on social networks is projected to increase 180%, to \$2.5 billion between 2007 and 2011. The key drivers that are making large organizations invest in Social Media Marketing are as follows:

B2B Technology Product Websites & Online Program

- ▶ Additional targeted traffic
- ▶ One-way links to your Website
- ▶ Quality back links
- ▶ High Google Page Rank
- ▶ Improved search results
- ▶ High visibility in search engines

We advise our clients to have a clear strategy defined prior. Define your objectives clearly, the target audience you would like to reach, and a clear plan to increase awareness, engagement and conversion. As part of your strategy, create an integrated marketing plan to target your audience through various channels such as Search, Display and Social Media Optimization cohesively.

2. Target Audience Analysis and Segmentation

Marketers need to identify and prioritize the target audience. This has the biggest impact on how the online program will function and how your website will be structured. Once the target audience has been clearly segmented and a targeting strategy created, you will find that managing an integrated online marketing strategy becomes a lot easier. Several analytical tools help provide this insight (see marketing insight section below).

Marketers often make the mistake of simply focussing on only a single audience group. While onsite audience studies profile current visitors, market research provides insights into the potential audience. Marketers need to ensure that focus is not only on the end customer, but other groups as well. B2B products are quite often sold through partner/VAR channels, so besides the end customer, they are an important channel to consider. Your user groups could include prospects or customers. In today's world of social networking relationships, pro-active bloggers and reviewers will have a say in the reputation of your product.

eBooks are a rage in B2B marketing and on the marketer's content menu they serve as the main dishes. They establish a credibility that earns a prospect's trust and establishes company's authority.

Relevant eBook topics not only tackle customer-centric issues, but speak to relevant concerns at various points along the decision-making cycle, from initial research to closed contract.

User segmentation helps bring clarity to web initiatives. With a clearly segmented user base, you'll find it easier to identify user needs and utilize different online channels to target the audience with specific strategies.

B2B Technology Product Websites & Online Program

The Information Architecture's recommendations drive design and usability. They lay the foundation for designers and give them a solid structure to which they can apply their creative and usability skills. They help segmenting the user-base & focus on user-centered design. Combining an active collection with appropriate incentives, and careful sampling procedures, Audience Research and Analysis can achieve very high response rates.

► Audience Research and Analysis

Following points need to be considered while conducting Audience Research and Analysis:

- **User-Centered Design:** When the user isn't your main focus, who are you designing the site for? User-centered design (UCD) is an approach in which the needs, wants, and limitations of the end user are incorporated into each stage of the design. It's a multi-stage problem-solving process that requires designers to analyze and foresee how users are likely to use an interface, and to test the validity of those assumptions in sessions with actual users. In addition to the quantitative methods, Audience Research and Analysis leads to a qualitative research in the form of focus groups, one-on-one depth interviews, and post-performance intercepts.
- **Web Design Personas:** Modeling personas of site visitors is a powerful technique for increasing usability and customer focus. Personas give a summary of the characteristics, needs, motivations and environment of typical users.
- **Usability Testing:** This is a technique that evaluates a product by testing it on users. It's an incredibly important usability practice, since it gives direct input on how real users use the system.
- **Surveys:** Online surveys and questionnaires help gather key input from real users and help the strategy, design and development teams further improve the online experience. Brief questionnaires should be available on pages where the user may find it important to list areas that he/she had trouble understanding.

► Effective User Experience/Look and Feel of the Website

The look and feel of the site conveys a brand perception to users. Quite often is the case with technology products that the website is the only window for prospects to form their opinion about the product. It's imperative for the design to convey your brand perception appropriately. Integration of a Brand with direct marketing leads in generating awareness and an emotional connect goes a long way in making the prospects believe as if they are in a relationship. The User Experience of the site should be made keeping the industry and target audience in mind.

► **Creating an Appealing Visual Design**

- **Page Layouts and Wireframes:** The information architecture is used as a basis for a series of mock-ups, which are all analyzed to determine the most appropriate approach and design.
- **Color, Mood and Personality:** Color plays an important role in brand recall. A brand-specific web color palette is shared with all design teams to help maintain a synergy across all site elements. The mood and personality of the website is based on the primary objective and key users. A product website should carry forward the personality of the brand, e.g. Coke, McDonalds, Nike, etc.
- **Rich Media:** Using rich-media formats like Flash to convey information on the Web is a convenient, economical, and dynamic way to keep visitors coming back to the site.
- **Typography:** Font plays an important role in creating brand. The standard fonts used on corporate websites include Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, Helvetica, etc. Some companies may use serif fonts such as Times New Roman or Georgia. In addition, Web 2.0 has redefined the way designers use fonts and font families for blogs and forums. Fonts specifically created for Web 2.0 tools should be used prudently, since they carry a distinct personality that should ideally be limited to a particular section only.
- **Persuasive Copywriting:** Good copywriting is a key to turning visitors into customers
- **Web 2.0 Elements:** Google AdSense, blogging RSS feeds, etc. are increasingly useful communication tools, and integrating them into corporate sites is gaining acceptance and popularity.

3. Enabling research and compare process

A good website isn't simply pretty web pages, but what's more important is allowing users to find the information they need efficiently. Most prospects engage in a research and compare process prior to procuring a product. Enabling this process efficiently will have a big impact. For example, technology companies quite often provide products list by name. Most users don't think in terms of product names, but have a criteria in mind, based on which they select a product they need.

For eg. Providing access to products, Lenovo.com allows users to find laptops by price, screen size, weight and other criteria. This allows users to choose the criterion that is important to them and find the product appropriate for them.

With complex products, consider providing a wizard which allows users to get to the right product.

B2B Technology Product Websites & Online Program

► Prospect Engagement

So, how do you engage a prospect during their journey through a B2B product website?

You need to have a strategy to make the journey memorable for the prospect.

Some products have key differentiating features so it's easy to emphasize on the features of these products and engage prospects. For example iPhone marketers have focussed on marketing the product with ease of use through not only TV advertisements but also by using rich media on their website to showcase the product. The average business loses 80% of sales due to lack of follow-up. To avoid losing sales, prospects must be fed with the information they need in order to build trust, to value products and services and to remember. This eventually leads to a better conversion rate. However, most technology products play in commoditized markets where feature differentiation doesn't work. In such scenarios, different strategies need to be applied, which have to be aligned with the customer acquisition process. Some of the tactics being used include:

- **Customer testimonials to engage prospects:** Video testimonials have become quite popular. For example, Eloqua, a marketing automation firm, has excellent video testimonials from customers.
- **Customer success stories:** Capturing case studies, podcasts and indicating the value makes a great difference.
- **Creating emotional linkages with the product:** For example physical products, bringing the product to life through interactive media on websites can help create emotional linkages with the product.
- **Communicating the value proposition of products clearly**
- **Providing pricing:** This seems to be a major pain point for prospects in the mid-market space. They don't want to go down the path of engagement unless they have either a clear or atleast some idea of pricing. If you cannot offer specific pricing, which is the case with technology products targeted towards enterprises, provide some clues such as 'this product is ideal for mid-size organizations whose budgets are ..' . This would give a clue to the prospect that the product may be of use.

Targetting customers with personalized messages can be very powerful. Based on user segmentation, paths and needs, specific dynamic messaging can be used for targetting.

► Content Management Solution

High value content that is fresh engages users. We highly recommend Web Content Management software like Sitecore, Ektron, Open Text Web Solutions to manage content. If you're looking for model details, this video can help marketers select the right solution -

<http://tinyurl.com/nsrkqh>

4. Conversion

There are moments in a prospect's experience on a product website that need to be memorable. By Memorable moments I mean, building trust, credibility and emotional linkage which is the starting point of a relationship with the prospect. These Memorable Moments typically lead to the prospect converting to a lead. Success of Online Business lies in combining the perception-shaping, relationship-oriented logo power, design advertising with the one-to-one persuasive pulling of direct marketing and in how the two combine during the different phases of a customer's lifecycle.

These moments can occur at any time; while reading a case study, listening to a testimonial or reading thought leadership material; but when it happens, you have to seize the moment. This is where call-to-action comes into the picture. At eDynamic we provide a free assessment specifically to improve calls-to-action thereby improving conversion.

Once user is provided the information they need, calls to action that allow you to engage with prospects is critical. You should consider having several levels of calls to action depending on prospect commitment.

The first level involves a give and take relationship. You will have to give something to your audience for them to start engaging with you. Providing whitepapers, thought leadership material and case studies as gated content, i.e. behind a registration process. The second level is here. Finally, you need to provide a capability for users to ask the company to contact the user or have the user call in. Our experience tells us the former is used more widely in mid-market. At eDynamic, we provide a free assessment specifically to improve calls-to-action.

Also, some simple rules should be followed - the user should clearly know how to get in touch with you, your phone number should be available, your lead forms should have linkages on all pages of your website.

5. Lead Scoring

For the sales team to be effective, Leads should be scored on a criteria that places right sales people on the right leads. Lead scoring need not be that complicated. B2B leads can be quite expensive, so identifying high quality leads is critical. Further, getting insight into how the lead came through is important. Analytics and some content management software provide this insight. You can shore the various pieces of content.

6. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Integration

Best of breed sites integrate the lead management process with CRM systems. Pushing high quality lead data into CRM systems such as Salesforce.com is the best practice being followed in the market. This allows the salesforce to act on leads immediately. Time is of essence as the prospect is out researching other products, and the experience around first offline contact with the customer will have an impact on how successful you are at earning their business.

7. Lead Nurturing

Marketers understand that not all leads will close right away. A lead nurturing program that takes a lead to fruition by managing and tracking effective communication is imperative. Eloqua and Marketo are market leading products that can help you manage your lead management program.

8. Marketing Insight and Continuous Track & Measure Processes

Marketers need to gather deep insight into customer behavior for them to continuously iterate programs. Through business intelligence and analytics platforms marketers can gather excellent information on platforms.

Quite often, the challenge for mid-market marketers is choosing the right product. This is becoming increasingly difficult as products are not only becoming more specialized but complimentary, like Content Management Systems. So you'll find a range of products to choose from, including:

- ▶ Pure play Analytics software such as Google Analytics and Clicktracks
- ▶ Marketing automation software such as Eloqua and Marketo
- ▶ Web Content Management systems such as SDL Tridion and Sitecore. They provide analytics as well, where the analytics is tightly integrated into content management and can provide deep insight into how content is used.

Each of the above has its benefits, and the choice of the appropriate solution will depend on your needs. Marketing Automation platforms for example allow you to perform true Lead Management where you can gain insight into your leads and drive, whereas analytics software just focusses on insight, but maybe cheaper. Your solution might require more than one capability depending on your needs.

User paths, content and leads need to be tracked and measured

Conclusion

Customer Acquisition and engagement requires all elements to be working in harmony towards a common goal. The plan must be focused on the audience and their buying process. The key to a successful program is to have a cohesive end to end strategy based on the points mentioned above.

We hope that this paper has given you critical insights into what makes an online program successful.

For more information visit us at

www.edynamic.net

Call us at:

North America: 1-877-EDYNAMIC (339-6264)

India: +91-11-26384306-07

Write us at contact@edynamic.net

About eDynamic

Established in 1999, eDynamic is a Global Web Solutions Firm. We are a one stop shop for Web solutions offering a wide range of services including Web and Enterprise Content Management, Portals, Web Design/User Experience, Online Marketing, Custom Application Development, Business Intelligence and Managed Services. We blend strategy, technology and creativity to deliver integrated, fully customized business solutions, and partner with our clients for cornerstone strategies and critical Web initiatives.

eDynamic has a flexible delivery model that is driven by agile methodologies & a cutting edge technology resource base. We also have partnerships in place with Sitecore, Ektron, Microsoft, Open Text, IBM, Kentico, Media Chase. Through our offices in New York, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Toronto, London, Dubai, and New Delhi, we are serving customers such as Suncor Energy, UPS, PepsiCo, New York Life, Aviva Insurance, Minnesota State University, Moneris Solutions, HarperCollins, Estee Lauder, GlaxoSmithKline, Sunlife, General Electric, Allianz, Advance America, Preferred Commerce, Intercontinental Hotels, Jet Airways, Maruti Suzuki, Barista-Lavazza, Costa Coffee, Samsung, Sony, People's United Bank among many others.