



5 ways to turn B2B prospects into customers.

DALTON BRAND CATALYST

Your transformation from B2B to B2Better starts now. We live in exciting times. B2B marketers are quickly catching up with their B2C counterparts, successfully leveraging today's media and marketing analytics and technologies, allowing them to accurately and affordably reach prospects. But according to a recent survey conducted by Dalton Brand Catalyst, *reaching* prospects isn't the same as *engaging* them, let alone converting them to customers. It takes something more.

B2B companies across the country bust their butts to create and sell products and services that make organizations—and people's lives—better, safer, easier, more efficient, more comfortable, and more profitable. And the passionate ones tinker, test and refine their offerings until they meet or exceed the highest industry standards—or create entirely new categories! Why then, do so many deserving companies fall short of achieving significant market share, let alone market domination? This eBook will give you insights based on survey responses of 30 very bright B2B marketers and advice based on my 40 years of B2B marketing experience.

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SYMPTOM: “Our marketing doesn’t differentiate our brand from our competitors.”

This was far and away the biggest frustration we heard. But hold on, it gets worse. Most B2B marketing doesn’t even get noticed. And about half of the people who do notice it, are annoyed because of the interruption and lack of intelligence or value. Okay, now that the bad news is out of the way, let’s dry our eyes, take a deep cleansing breath and look at how marketing that uses three key ingredients can differentiate your brand.

TREATMENT:

Be fascinating. Your marketing has to fascinate prospects to get their attention. Unexpected and creative messaging cuts through the hyper-competitive and overcrowded Business to Consumer marketplace, so imagine how it could help your brand rise above your B2B competitors. Start by looking at characteristics that make your sales people fascinating. Stuff like, intelligent, fun, proactive, trustworthy, etc., and apply these to your marketing.

Q: What’s the most fascinating subject marketing can communicate in order to attract a new prospect? (Hint: it doesn’t matter what you sell or who you want to attract.)

A: Your prospect. Yup, your prospects want to know what’s in it for them. Don’t make them wait. Demonstrate an understanding of their lives and pain points, and how your solutions will impact them personally.

Be valuable. You don’t have time to waste, and neither do your prospects. So reward them with value at every opportunity. Start by identifying three areas in which your brand excels. Let’s say you’re known for: 1) Products that last longer, 2) Exceptional customer service, and 3) A great loyalty program. Get your sales and marketing people together and brainstorm ways to strengthen each of these areas and apply them to your marketing. Build on ideas that support your brand strengths. For example, if you host an annual customer appreciation major league baseball game, consider hosting double-headers and conceptually tie *long lasting* products to *long lasting* baseball parties.

Tell the truth. We live in a world of “spin,” “alternative facts,” and “fake news,” causing many people to become cynical and expect brands to stretch the truth and exaggerate results. B2B marketing is based on trusted relationships, so create marketing policies and practices that reflect honesty, transparency and integrity. Say what you’ll do and do what you say, and your brand will stand out and be revered.



Identical babies are cute. But when prospects can’t distinguish your brand from your competitors’ it’s a crying shame.



You wouldn't pay a salesperson who didn't produce. Why pay for marketing that just sits there?

SYMPTOM: "Our marketing doesn't generate qualified leads."

Customer acquisition is a common growth goal. And today more than ever, urgency is a key driver. Most company leaders see marketing as a slow, drawn out tactic that does little more than raise awareness for the brand. For most B2B companies, they're right. The quick fix for many of them: hire more salespeople with big, fat rolodexes. The good ones have customers who will follow them anywhere. But what happens once these customers come on board? Do you hire more salespeople? And still more? Here's how marketing can make the difference.

TREATMENT:

Define the role of marketing.

This eBook is a one-way communication, so we can't talk about how you define marketing. But the role I feel B2B marketing plays is simple. **B2B marketing exists to deliver qualified prospects to your sales people.**

Make it personal. B2B is inherently relationship based because a single sales transaction can affect an entire organization. Your sales people strive to build trusted relationships and provide information and value at every touch point, and so should your marketing. Personalize your marketing messages and segment your media channels to address and engage specific audiences and their needs. **Personalized and targeted marketing telegraphs to your prospects, "We get you."**

Ask for action. Notice I didn't write, "Ask for the order." Successful marketing attracts prospects by conveying a broad understanding of common issues. And then intentionally invites interested prospects to engage in the next level of value such as a free webinar, eBook or white paper. This allows you to build a database of fans who already feel warm and fuzzy about your brand, and are likely to give your salespeople a face-to-face meeting where they can discuss issues and needs specific to their situation. **Lead generating marketing is about attraction, not persuasion**

SYMPTOM: “We aren’t fully leveraging today’s digital marketing opportunities.”

The majority of your potential prospects will engage with your brand digitally, well before you know who they are or the solutions they seek. And once they become customers, they’ll expect digitally enabled experiences and access to products, people, guidance and ideas. Marketing technologies play a key role in identifying and targeting new prospects and guiding them to a deeper engagement with your brand. That’s the good news. Digital transformation can (and should) cause you to re-think every aspect of your marketing from talent, to technology, to processes. And yes, that can be daunting. Hiding under your desk, however, is not going to help your company take advantage of today’s digital marketing opportunities. It’s time to commit.

TREATMENT:

Find a digital technology resource.

Marketing directors who wish to strengthen their digital marketing capabilities quickly discover keeping up with the abundance of marketing technology products alone could be a full time job. Partner with someone who has experience helping B2B companies make successful digital transformations. Here’s what to look for in a partner:

- An ability to align business strategy, marketing strategy, sales strategy and customer experience
- An understanding of today’s B2B digital marketing advancements and best practices
- Collaborative and trustworthy
- Resource agnostic—willing and able to connect you with best-in-class vendors to execute auditing, research, marketing processes, media, measurement and tactics.

Don’t promise value, deliver it.

Two brands manufacture kitchen cabinets. Brand X’s advertising promises to provide color and style consultation *after* you sign a contract. Brand Y’s advertising features a free, comprehensive color trend and style gallery. Which company would you be inclined to work with?

Measure for a perfect fit.

Many B2B marketers simply aren’t sure if their traditional marketing works because metrics and objectives tend to be arbitrary and inconclusive. Virtually every aspect of digital marketing is measurable, allowing you to test various messaging, offers, channels, audience profiles, geographic locations, and so on. Feed what works and starve what doesn’t to get optimal results.



Keeping up with hyper-changing digital technologies can take a toll. Just ask this 26-year-old marketing director.

TREATMENT (CONTINUED):

Tell a better story.

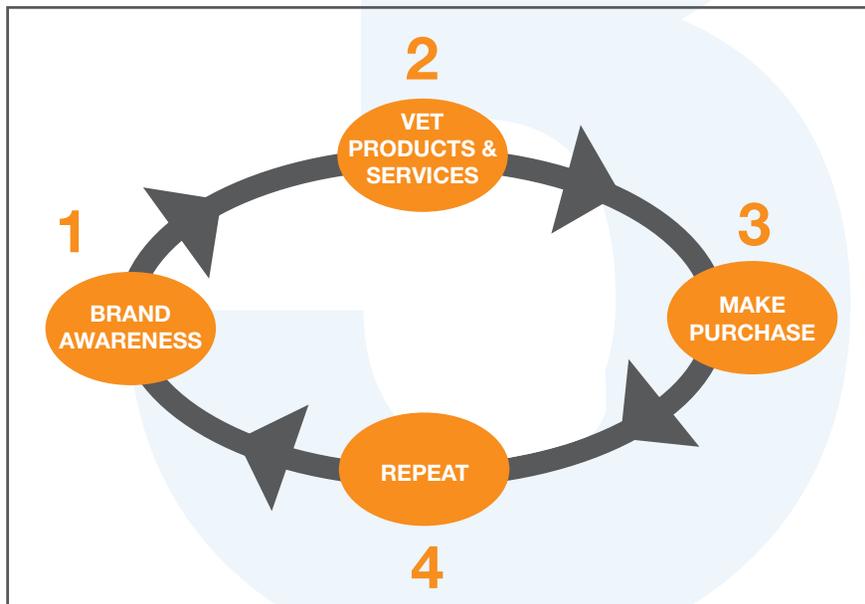
Chances are, your brand is more awesome and valuable than your marketing portrays. (I live in Minnesota, where it's considered unbecoming for a brand to even hint of product or service superiority. I'm pretty sure the term "smarty pants" was born here.) That said, brand stories that resonate tend to be more about the prospect and less about the brand. Try re-crafting your brand story by breaking it into three simple and short chunks.

Intro— This was your prospect's life including her pain points.

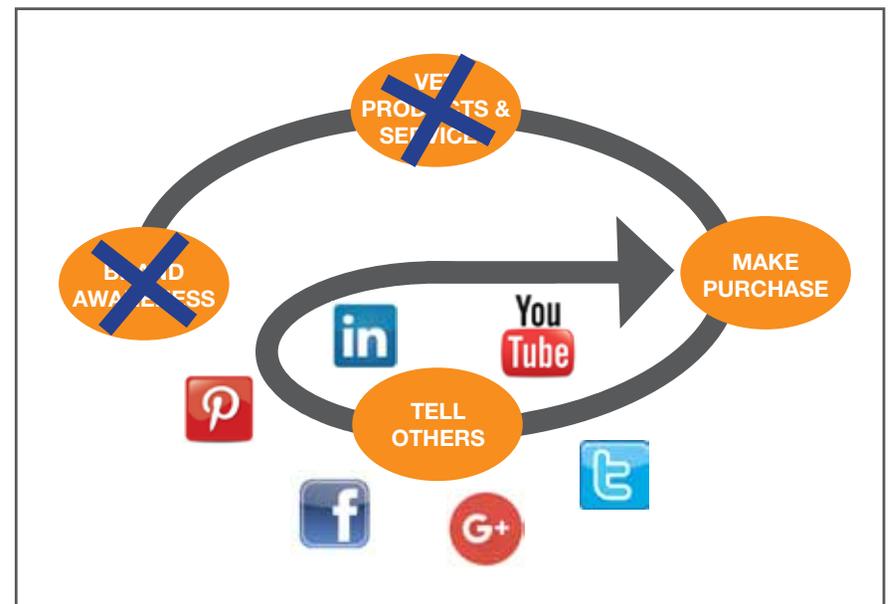
Middle— Then something big happened! She discovered your products or services.

End— This is her new and life, greatly improved because of your products or services. Two thirds of your story is about your prospects!

Today, more than ever, people love to share their cool experiences. Take advantage of social media and turn happy customers into brand advocates.



The traditional buying cycle was reliant on expensive paid media.



Today's buying cycle is driven by your satisfied customers. Less expensive for you. More believable for you prospects.

SYMPTOM: “Our leaders can’t agree on our marketing goals and objectives.”

Most C-level executives are confident discussing top line and bottom line business goals and objectives. But aligning them with marketing goals and objectives can throw them into deer-in-the-headlights territory. And if they don’t “get it” chances are, you don’t get a marketing budget.

TREATMENT:

Host a brainstorm session with your marketing team, sales team and corporate leadership. Start by clearly stating the company’s business goals and objectives, and explain how marketing, done right, can accelerate these efforts. Here are three multiple choice questions to get your group talking.

Mission or Margin? (Choose one.)

Ask the group to choose what’s most important—achieving our mission or achieving our revenue goals. (They may want both but ask them to decide which is the “lead dog”.) Here’s an example of mission—*To assure every kitchen our customers build reflects the owners’ personal style.* If the group agrees that marketing’s primary goal is to accomplish the mission, take your brainstorm session to the next level and toss around ideas that support it such as an app that allows prospects to plug in lifestyle preferences—from their favorite foods to cars to music and see what cabinet styles and colors others with similar preferences have installed in their kitchens.

Outspend or Outsmart? (Choose one.)

Ask your group which of these marketing strategies makes the most sense to compete for business. Larger companies may have the resources to outspend their competitors but the likely response will be, “Let’s outsmart them.” Brainstorm big and bold ideas about how to make your marketing stand out and be more valuable than your competitors’ marketing.

Sales or Marketing? (Trick question, choose both.)

Work with your group to develop marketing that turns cold calls into hot leads. Your sales people can describe customer pain points and the solutions that get the best responses—good stuff to know when you’re creating marketing tactics. I believe Marketing and Sales should work together to get optimum results. This exercise is a great way to inspire collaboration.



Candy corn— vegetable or not?
We may never agree but please
get consensus on your marketing
goals and objectives.

SYMPTOM: “Our marketing budget is small, but we want to take on big competitors.”

TREATMENT:

Marketing that punches above it’s weight starts with a strong messaging platform and finishes with unexpected communications and “branded” customer experiences. In order to be effective, your marketing must push the boundaries of bold or exquisite. The stuff in the middle won’t get noticed. Let’s cover the building blocks of a powerful messaging platform.



Stop letting those big brands kick sand in your face. It’s time to be a “bad-ass” brand.

Voice of Customer.

Successful marketing starts with a problem. Maybe a bunch of problems. You have to deeply understand the issues your prospects are facing in order to offer solutions with clarity and empathy. Look for VOC sample questions online or send me an [email](#) for a list of proven questions I’ve developed over the past several years.

Key Messages.

Most B2B companies have lots of great reasons why prospects should become customers. Marketing that focuses on the most important and compelling reasons produces the best results. Create one Key Message for each of the things that makes your brand and its products or services valuable and unique. Work with your sales team and leadership team to narrow down your 10-20 key messages to a handful of messages. Most marketing directors don’t have the skill set to craft the “Emotional Statement” portion of your Key Messages, so consider hiring a creative writer to help.

Key Messages start with a Rational Statement about a brand attribute or product feature.

But people buy on emotion, so it’s critical to articulate the claim with emotion and creative topspin in order to assess the overall value of the Key Message.

RATIONAL STATEMENT

CABCO is successful largely because they offer the latest color trends, so your homes will appeal to today’s largest segment of buyers.

EMOTIONAL STATEMENT

We don’t follow color trends. We set them.

TREATMENT (CONTINUED):

Ad-Like Objects

Most people are visual learners. We comprehend visual stimuli faster and retain it longer than words. Perhaps most important, though, is that visual cues trigger an emotional response. And creating emotional connections between your brand and your prospects is critical to positively changing the trajectory of your growth. So, in order to properly vet your top Key Messages, it only makes sense to create and assess visual companions. Keep in mind, your company may never run a print advertisement, but we all know what an ad looks like, so this format is user friendly. Assemble 10-12 of your corporate, marketing, and sales leads and have them weigh in on each Ad-Like Object. I recommend creating 10-20 examples covering a spectrum of possible messages, brand personalities, graphic treatments and emotional triggers. The samples below are companions to the Key Message on the previous page, *CABCO is successful because they offer the latest color trends, so your homes will appeal to today's largest segment of buyers.* Just as I stated on the Key Messages section, most marketing directors don't have the skill set to create Ad-Like Objects so consider hiring an art director and writer to do this for you.



This Ad-Like Object is somewhat abstract and taps into the power of the prospect's imagination.



This Ad-Like Object is more literal, showing an array of new cabinet colors.



This Ad-Like Object features a new cabinet color in its most literal expression.

The cool thing about this exercise is, you can "try on" lots of options in the privacy of your conference room. By exploring a full range of options and reaching a consensus among your key stakeholders, you'll save tons of time and money when your team creates actual marketing tactics. But more importantly, your marketing is likely to outperform even your biggest competitors.

Transform your brand from B2B to B2Better**.** I hope this eBook helped you identify some of the issues you have in common with many other B2B marketers and gave you insights into how your marketing can convert more prospects into customers, sell more products and services, and change the trajectory of your growth. If you'd like to chat about your specific marketing obstacles and opportunities, please contact me to set up a **free, one-hour phone consultation**.



Rob Dalton
Brand Therapist

DALTON BRAND CATALYST

rob@daltonbrandcatalyst.com

612-247-1516

5600 Chowen Avenue South, Edina, MN 554210

daltonbrandcatalyst.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Two decades ago, Rob Dalton transformed a successful career creating award- and business-winning trade advertising for big honkin' companies including FedEx, The Wall Street Journal, VF Corporation (Lee Jeans), Coleman (camping stuff), Fair Isaac & Company (The FICO Score people), Boston Scientific, 3M, Target, Ford Lincoln-Mercury, and other Fortune 500 companies, to an exciting and satisfying career helping growth-minded B2B companies revitalize their branding and messaging platforms. Unlike typical brand consultants, Rob taps his extensive creative expertise to establish brand foundations that lead to marketing that gets noticed, inspires engagement and drives business. His 30-day Brand Catalyst Program has helped transform start-up and "challenger" brands as well as global market leaders. In addition to his creative approach, Rob is known for his collaborative style, his ability to build consensus among stakeholders, and for making marketing fun. Rob lives with his wife Debbie in Edina, Minnesota, and would greatly appreciate gigs in southern regions of the country between November and April of any given year.