SOCIAL MEDIA FOR B2B MARKETING
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS IN B2B MARKETING .......................... 3

II. HOW CAN YOU START? BASIC RULES OF ENGAGEMENT .......... 8
   I. PLAN YOUR STRATEGY ........................................... 8
   II. DO YOUR RESEARCH ............................................ 9
   III. SET YOUR GUIDELINES ........................................ 11
   IV. GET CRACKING .................................................. 13

III. HOW ARE OTHERS DOING IT ...................................... 15
   I. PRODUCT LAUNCH ............................................... 16
   II. LEAD/Demand GENERATION & CUSTOMER RETENTION .......... 17
   III. BRAND BUILDING & MANAGEMENT ............................ 18

IV. MONITOR AND MEASURE RESULTS ................................ 19

V. NOT THE FINAL WORD ................................................ 23

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SHARE THE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR B2B MARKETING WHITE-PAPER
WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MATTERS IN B2B MARKETING

Business-to-business (B2B) marketing is undergoing a sea change. Traditional marketing channels like television, the print media, and outdoor advertising no longer deliver the return on investment they once promised - for a simple reason: your customers are spending less than 25% of their time paying attention to these channels. Wondering where all the action is taking place then?

Here’s a clue:†¹
- More than 133 million blogs indexed since 2002
- More than 10 million users create 1,500 new "tweets" every second
- Facebook user growth for the 35-plus demographic has grown to 12 million users in the first quarter of 2009

Welcome to the world of Social Media. Where conversations, interactions and consumer-generated content get mashed up into a heady mix that's potentially marketing elixir. Remember the days when we heard of new brands and products through either word-of-mouth, press reviews or advertising? Now, take all these, add loads of opportunities for strong customer relationships, and what you have is social media. In fact, over 90% of B2B buyers are already using Social Media tools, often to research and execute purchases.†²

Social media defies organizational boundaries. And social media is not something you would want your "agency" alone to run, like traditional marketing campaigns. No longer are you bound to "media buys" and agency dictates. You are now engaging directly with your customer. And far from shying away from or fearing it, you can now leverage it to its maximum potential by understanding what your customers are saying, why they are saying it and how their dialogue could impact your business. Listen to, learn from, measure and engage in their conversations. Grasp their context and mindset, relevance and sentiment, and you will be able to gauge your customer's passion in a new and multi-dimensional way.

If that alone doesn't enthuse you enough to buy in to using social media, there are some very pertinent reasons why social media can play a very major role for B2B marketing in particular.†1

1. B2B relationships and transactions are typically high-touch and are mainly established through direct interfacing with customers and relationship building. With social media, you can interact with prospects and customers using an array of touch points. The two-way, typically synchronous real-time nature of these tools lend a highly personal dimension to the relationship. And, unlike traditional B2C marketing channels (ads, campaigns, etc.), social media allows more people in your organisation to engage and build relationships with customers and prospects, thereby multiplying the high touch effect.

2. The B2B market is far smaller than the B2C market. This fact alone impels expanding your reach to identify new leads. Social media is well-placed to do just that. Just monitoring online conversations alone can help you glean changing trends and needs and pick out emerging opportunities a mile way before your competitors do. This could then fuel new offerings and new revenue channels. With the expanded reach you also get to identify companies with which to establish revenue generating partnerships.

3. The remarkable thing about the B2B arena is how people in it actively network online to share knowledge and build their network of industry contacts. Using social media, they can now build professional communities online to share insights and solve problems, and leverage upon these interactions to build brand, reputation and prospects.

4. B2B buyers rely heavily on third-party feedback in making purchase decisions. They would also like to be part of the product or solution development process. They are also likely to trust the opinions of colleagues using the products far more than that of the company selling those very products. Social media channels are great avenues for providing objective, third-party experiences and feedback, reduces buyer-side risk for big-ticket B2B purchases.
Social media engagements are a good platform to consistently demonstrate thought leadership. Thought leadership is fast emerging as a must-have in B2B marketing to have real impact, lead and stand out. It helps strengthen your market positioning, enhance your perceived value to clients, build trust and loyalty, and generate more business overall.†1

Thought leaders can also expect greater recognition, demand and reach in the market.†2 And what exactly is thought leadership? When you help people frame the way they think about key issues or guide them to smarter decisions, by presenting insightful, compelling and often provocative perspectives, that's when you are likely to be acknowledged as a thought leader - the "go to" business (or person) for a particular interest area.

Social media is cost-effective. Some would say, the most cost-effective ever. That is not to say it's free. It does require investment of budget, professional resources, and most crucially, time. But all these combined is nowhere close to the cost associated with other media. In tight economic times like these, it's social media that can be utilized most effectively to gain competitive advantage. And as the cost of sales acquired through social media is significantly lower, ROI and profit margins can increase.

B2B offerings tend to be complex and B2B purchase decisions are not by any stretch impulse-driven or low-risk. Sales cycles are long and buyers will spend a lot of time on upfront research. So why not be a part of that process? Social media offers unprecedented and abundant avenues for knowledge sharing that can help educate prospects and facilitate faster sales cycles. You get to communicate information and answer buyer questions about your offerings more quickly. By providing this almost real-time, two-way communications, you not only inform, but also build trust and credibility that can work to increase sales in shorter periods.

Furthermore, in lessening the confusion around your offerings, the information exchanged and relationships built through these conversational media can help position you as a trusted advisor and decrease the concerns associated with high learning curves. In turn, these could help increase purchase rates of your products, services and offerings.

Using social media for B2B marketing is not without its rewards. Socially engaged companies are in fact more financially successful, according to one study. And engagement refers to going beyond mere presence. It involves interacting with others, setting off discussions, and responding in a timely manner during conversations. This can be a challenging transition for traditional marketers used to having control over their channels.

At the same time you would not want multiple interactions from people in your company responding randomly without coordination. Keep in mind too the need for transparency in all outreach activities. Lack of genuineness is a sure-fire way to slide down the social media ladder.

With these considerations in mind, let us take a look at how you can kickstart social media marketing in your own company.

**HOW CAN YOU START? BASIC RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

**PLAN YOUR STRATEGY**

The first thing an organization needs to do to kickstart their social media marketing campaign is to draw up a social media strategy. The social media strategy is an extension of the overall marketing strategy. It needs to be commensurate with the business and the market you are targeting. This keeps your brand identity unified across the board. The question is not how to make money from it, but rather, how you can use the various social media channels to facilitate prospecting; and how you can cultivate relationships and integrate ways of communicating and selling to buyers. To begin you may want to choose to focus on a few of your overall marketing goals e.g. lead generation, customer retention, establishing yourself as the experts, or increasing your brand awareness and equity. Depending on your goals you may choose different social media platforms to best suit your purposes.
Another key point would be to communicate this strategy to your entire organization and involve everyone. Get everyone on board and actively participating in blogging, tweeting or interacting with your consumers on forums. Put together a roster to schedule participation or set a weekly/monthly minimum contribution from each person. This enables your organization to be 'heard and seen' from all the perspectives.

**DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Once you have your social media strategy in place you will need to invest some time on research to find out where your audience spends most of its time. From LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, forums, to YouTube and Facebook there is an increase in users across all age demographics. The Forrester report on Facebook demographics reports the increase in the over 35 age demographic and predicts that 75% of its worldwide users will be out of college.

When you have identified the platforms where your audience spends most of its time it’s important to begin listening to your customers and find out what kinds of conversations they are having about your brand. Some social media tools you can use to help you do this would be Monitter, Social Mention, Google Alerts, Alltop etc. Many of these services are provided free and let you listen in on the conversation about your brand by using their sites to search using your brand name or a contextual theme.
From analyzing these conversations you will be able to identify and learn what your brand perception is as well as that of your competitors, what drives your brand and identify white space which possibly will provide opportunities for you to improve and grow your brand perception. Listening to your customers and being critical in your analysis of their conversations gives your organization an immediate advantage as you can leverage on the positives in these communications and work on what your consumers perceive to be the negatives of the brand. Researching into your brand conversations will also help you to identify your evangelists and detractors and see how influential they are based on their reader base.

BtoBonline reports that B2B marketers are making their presence felt on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Youtube. Each of these platforms has specific advantages over the others and you may want to use a combination of these for your social media campaign. Twitter provides you with an avenue to engage and interact with your consumers, both starting and joining conversations, by routinely providing information, updates and even discounts to the follower base. BtoBonline further reports that the use of viral video, through sites such as YouTube, is being primarily used for customer/demand generation (58%) and the building and management of the brand (35%). The primary objectives for blogs on the other hand are customer retention (33%) followed closely by brand building/management (29%) and customer demand/generation (25%).

†1 Source: BtoB and the Association of National Advertisers (June 2009)
SET YOUR GUIDELINES

As a good social media campaign involves all parts of your organization, from sales to PR to technical support, it's unrealistic to assume that everyone will know just how to dive in and start working on making your brand social. It is helpful and indeed important to set some basic rules for your staff to follow when blogging, tweeting or responding to comments on forums. The guidelines should cover how the post/tweet/response should be written. It is important to keep in mind that the one of the key objectives of any social media campaign should be to add value for your consumers through the information you distribute. The use of social media is not to preach to or only advertise to your audience but to engage and participate with them in conversations. When responding your staff should speak in the first person, be mindful of the tone of what they are posting, and have care to exercise their best judgement when responding to negative comments.

Some guidelines used by companies already using social media are

**IBM**

- Don't pick fights, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.
- IBM's brand is best represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on IBM's brand.
- With conversations, participate online. Don’t “broadcast” messages to users.
- With moderation, only police where we have to. Trust our users where we don’t.

- Be external. You don’t have to be 100% internally focused. Link to other blogs, videos, and news articles. Retweet what others have to say
- Post frequently. It’s a lot of work but don’t post to your blog then leave it for two weeks. Readers won’t have a reason to follow you on Twitter or check your blog if they can’t expect new content regularly.

- Separate opinions from facts, and make sure your audience can see the difference.
- Be engaged and be informed. Read the contributions of others. Know what the current conversations are and what people are saying in order to see if, and how, you may be able to contribute a new perspective. Participation is the fuel of social computing.

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### Social networks/media use among B2B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BtoB and the Association of National Advertisers (June 2009)
- Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate. But if it gives you pause, pause. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take a minute to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you, then fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your manager or legal representative. Ultimately, what you publish is yours - as is the responsibility. So be sure.

- Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as an Intel employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about Intel by our shareholders, customers, and the general public-and perceptions about you by your colleagues and managers. Do us all proud. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with Intel's values and professional standards.

GET CRACKING

You have a strategy, you know from your research where and in which direction to focus and have some basic guidelines for everyone to follow. The only thing left is to implement your action plan.
Its not enough for an organization to just make itself visible on a social media platform. You have to create value through the content you make available for your readers and consumers and you have to be regular and consistent with your content creation and distribution. Offer insight into your expertise through well-written and meaningful articles on your corporate blog. Establish your position as thought leaders and the proven experts as it increases customer confidence. Any organization that embarks on a social media campaign needs to actively participate in conversations relevant to the brand and its goals.

**The organizations that succeed using social media are transparent and genuine with their reader base.**

One way to do this would be to start your own community through blogs and forums. Its important to remember that the organizations that succeed using social media are transparent and genuine with their reader base. They offer information that has value for their consumers and welcome the participation of these consumers on how to better improve the products and services offered as compared to the brands competitors. Cultivating your own community is also a great asset as these online conversations can be used as focus groups for new offerings as well as enhancements on the brands current products and/or services.

When publishing and creating your brand content its useful to create and maintain the social identity of the brand as a stand-alone. This is easy enough with a blog or forum where the branding remains that of your organization but with multiple contributors.
For those brands that want to leverage on Twitter you can use applications like Co-Tweet or HootSuite to manage your organizations Twitter account and allow multiple contributors. Brands that have video content can use applications like TubeMogul to push their video content to multiple user generated content (UGC) sites such as YouTube amongst others to track views and other consumer engagement metrics.

**HOW ARE OTHERS DOING IT**

Every organization which has successfully launched a social media campaign has used a combination of social media platforms to achieve their objectives. This is due to the fact that every organization has multiple marketing goals in varying degrees of importance. It is also due to social media platforms differing in their functions as content and conversation platforms which serve their purposes as stand-alones but are most effective when used in combination.
HP devised a creative strategy when launching their Z-series workstations which were to directly compete with Apple who were the dominant players in that arena. HP's social media strategy was to identify the biggest influencers within agencies who were heavily interactive and participative in online technology and hardware conversations. HP also created a character, the superhero Mr Z, to anchor this campaign. HP loaned the 12 selected influencers a Z-series workstation and got them to use and talk about their experience of using the product in creative ways. These 12 individuals were asked to make short animation clips which were posted to YouTube. Blogs on the z-series experiment were created both on the agency websites and independent blogs. The winners had their clips on the Mr Z website and HP continued the conversations on this product via Facebook and Twitter.

†1 Source: HP uses social media to out do competition From www.b2bm.biz
AMEX's strategy was to drive their pull marketing by "having something differentiated to say, get influencers to say it, and use social media to allow it to scale". AMEX embarked on this campaign after their research identified that the use of social media was increasing amongst the older and more mature small business owners in the running and promoting of their businesses. The site "Open Forum" is divided in two sections; the idea hub and the connectodex. The idea hub is a space for business owners to blog about the topics they are passionate about without first investing the time and resources to develop their own corporate blog. These posts and the resultant conversations in the community give AMEX a first-hand sneak peek into what their consumers are looking for. It also provides AMEX an opportunity to drive conversions to their additional products and services from their participation and conversations with the consumers via the forum.

Just having a space to blog would not necessarily drive traffic to that site and that's where the second part of the forum comes in. The connectodex is a community of business owners who have been approved for an AMEX business card. AMEX validates these businesses through their open endorsement of them as credit worthy organizations and gives businesses a forum and community within which to connect to one another to grow their business networks and opportunities.

†1 Source: AMEX Social Media Forum from socialmediab2b.com by Jeffrey Cohen
IBM started their social media experiment in 2006 with videos on YouTube. They started with their mainframe program and had sufficiently creative and compelling stories to which got them success which they also built on to tell more stories. They exercised some creative license in their story telling with dashes of humour while keeping in mind the need to engage their audience and spread their brand message. IBM wanted to communicate the mainframe’s new value proposition and reach a younger college age audience. By using YouTube they managed to easily embed their videos on the IBM blog and greatly increased their blog traffic. The increase in eyeballs benefitted the company as a whole as it brought a larger audience to the IBM blog and gave them exposure to other products, articles and expertise.

Cisco Systems put an innovative twist to marketing their ASR9000 servers by using the concept of Retro Valentines in which the ASR9000 server features as the perfect romantic gift every woman cannot live without. These are just some of the many examples of how social media can be used to virally promote a well thought and executed marketing campaign by organizations and how it is not in any way restricted to consumer products.
Monitoring (or listening) means to find out what is being said about your company, where, and by whom. You need to know who is driving conversation share, what are the top issues that matter, where your customers live online, how you can add value to your customers, when you should engage the community, and why customers are passionate about certain topics. Some tools that can help with this are:

- **Social Mention**: a social media search and analysis platform that aggregates user generated content from across the universe into a single stream of information.

- **Google Alerts**: free tool to monitor millions of blogs and new sites using target keywords; receive streaming or batch reports.

- **Radian6**: a robust social media monitoring tool with configurable dashboards, broad and narrow topic definitions, and features such as custom alerts and engagement workflow management. Licensing fees apply.

- **TweetDeck**: a free desktop app that combines Twitter and Facebook monitoring with search for a multi-dimensional social application that also allows for publishing.

- **Viralheat**: a social media monitoring tool tracks hundreds of video sharing sites, twitter, blogs, social networks, groups and forums in real-time. Viralheat now offers the capability to restrict your profiles by location. A great way to power regional marketing and monitoring campaigns!

\[\text{Source: Forrester Research. Feb 2009.}\]
Now that you are monitoring and responding, you are likely to hit the perennial bugbear of any marketing initiative: measuring ROI. Tracking the ROI on social media tools is indeed quite tricky. How do you measure the profit you make on something so fuzzy? This is where most B2B social media marketing initiatives run antithetical to conventional ROI goals that focus on numbers. For B2B, less is usually more. You don’t want gazillion fans, subscribers and followers, when your target market is usually far less. Bear in mind that social media is an opportunity to scale relationships, involve in direct customer engagement, get real-time survey data, and experiment with ideas. It is not an extension of traditional marketing (television ads, media buys, etc.) where you are looking for individual engagement numbers, eyeballs, immediate sales and sign ups. On it’s surface social media may appear to be a marketing and sales driver. Scratch a little under it and you will realize it’s a customer engagement model encompassing product feedback gathering mechanisms, integrated support models, product launches, procurement planning, among others.†1 Lionel Menchaca, Digital Media Manager for Dell, recently said about their social community development initiatives, "I frankly don’t care that we’ve done $3 million in revenue through Twitter - but I do care that (we are) out there answering questions and engaging with customers."

Quite simply therefore, there is no "standardised" model (yet) to measure ROI in social media. Every company is different - has different goals, different customers, different cultures, different budgets and tools and channels. The key then is to decide what you want to measure and what goals you are looking to achieve through the social media marketing initiative.

†1 Source: Alex Schultze, Social Media Academy (www.socialmedia-academy.com)
If it's not numbers, maybe you want to look at advocacy rates. Advocates are those who support your company and products, and visit you at trade shows. This would be a more effective gauge of social media success than pure numbers. Another way of looking at it setting a baseline before the social media initiative began, then measuring the results after it started. And using a standard "MBA" form of reckoning - "all things remaining equal" - did social media lead to an increase impact, financial or non-financial.†1 If there was a significant upshot in transactions, it could well be due to an increased number of positive mentions. For a more accurate idea of what you want to measure and a strategy that will support it, ask yourself the following questions†2:

I. Does this effort help me connect with someone who can purchase my product?

II. Does this strategy help convert a customer into an advocate?

III. Do the strategies and tactics tie into my sales funnel and CRM system?

IV. Is my strategy leveraging the support of internal and existing advocates?

V. Are measurable objectives that drive transactions integrated into the entire social media strategy?

The good news is that powerful new tools have emerged to automate and measure everything you’ve listened to and analysed.

†1 See Olivier Blanchard's Basics of Social Media ROI http://bit.ly/Ht5Lc

MEASUREMENT METRICS CAN INCLUDE:

**Buzz and sentiment** - who’s talking about your company right now and what’s the tone. Useful if you want to manage your company or brand reputation.

**Influence** - are compliments/complaints coming from isolated individuals or people with huge followings and influence? A factor that could lead to financial impact. In fact, you may want to think about looking at ROI with a different perspective - Return on Influence!

**Reach** - how far are your messages spreading; how many users/viewers are interacting with and consuming the blog-generated or twittered content and comments?

**Virality** - the speed at which a conversation moves through the social media ecosystem.

Tools like Viralheat and Chartbeat are great for monitoring buzz in real time. They also deliver analytics that help you optimize your outreach and engagement on social media platforms. Meteor Solutions offers Meteor Tracker, which enables you to determine the real impact of social media marketing programs on traffic and conversion by tracking the flow of shared content via links, email, instant messages, social networks, and Twitter. Jodange monitors word-of-mouth conversations about your brands or products to give a reading on customer sentiment. Trendrr lets you set up configurable dashboards to see where conversations about your brand are happening, and how your industry, sector, or topic is "trending" across the social web. And Hubspot’s Grader Tools provide directional scores and metrics for channels such as Twitter and Facebook to help you assess the relative impact of their branded pages and accounts.
Social media for B2B marketing continues to evolve even as we write this paper. The best thing about the field is how there are no "right" or "wrong" ways set in stone yet. But what is clear is the growing role social media will play in B2B marketing. The direct engagement model it encourages is set to transform relationships between businesses and customers. No longer will businesses hide (whether they wish to or not) behind "marcom" firewalls. Transparency and clarity, sincerity and speed, will become some of the hallmarks of these rejuvenated B2B relationships. Starting off on this not so well-trodden path may seem daunting at first but there are great ways to make that initial foray without too many missteps. The trailblazers have left several clear markers to guide those who are embarking afresh. However one may start, it would be wise to not lose sight of metrics and return on investment. How this is done is yet to be clearly defined, but what is known is that traditional marketing numbers-driven metrics are relatively moot. Engagement and advocacy are perhaps more appropriate to start with.

We welcome continuing conversations on this topic. Do visit us at http://www.b2bento.com, or follow us on Twitter at http://twitter.com/b2bento.
B2B marketing requires a different approach from conventional B2C marketing. In fact the B2B marketing space is evolving continuously, accommodating developments in the social media space, among others. B2Bento blog serves to capture the essence of this evolution. From the latest developments, reviews, tools and other cool stuff, to our take on what’s happening from an Asian perspective – B2Bento curates what’s out there into a neatly presented, healthy mix of stuff you can consume with minimal fuss.

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