

Four ways B2B marketing must change

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Working from home, no trade shows, meetings, or events: it's time to rethink the way we deliver B2B messages. Charlie Fiordalis identifies the opportunities.

COVID-19 has supercharged the pace of change in B2B marketing. The move to working from home has highlighted many much-needed changes that have been long in development.

Back as far as March, when we were all still happily going to the office every day, [Forrester argued that B2B marketing has shifted](#) from a set of known, rational, loyal buyers to more anonymous, emotional, mutable buyers.

The driver for that transformation is the fact that B2B buyers are also consumers. Yes, they

have always been consumers, however, the psychological distance between their 'work' persona and their 'home' persona has been reducing in recent years and that has only accelerated during the last six months of working from home.

The merging of these two personas means we can no longer conduct B2B marketing with the same media mix, tone and content as we once did. We must change in four key ways to best serve our customers:

1) Digital events will largely replace physical ones

During the pandemic, events shifted online due to necessity but they were already heading there. By contrast to physical events, which attendees plan months ahead, 64% of virtual meeting attendees choose to attend less than one month in advance, 58% prefer virtual events that are two hours or less and 2/3 expect them to be free or greatly discounted*.

[There's still room for innovation](#) – with startups such as Andressen Horowitz-backed *Run The World*, which combines the capabilities of Zoom, Eventbrite, Twitter and LinkedIn to create an immersive event experience that mimics the spontaneity and creativity of a live event.

Opportunity: Virtual-event innovation will present new opportunities to engage potential and current customers, capture and integrate data-driven signals into CRM and continue the post-event conversation. It's a chance for the internal Events, Marketing and Sales teams to evaluate new opportunities and make shared bets on innovative solutions.

2) Outside and inside sales will converge

Traditionally the inside sales team ran outbound communications from the office while outside sales held on-site, in-person meetings. Now they are being forced to work much more closely together.

As virtual meetings improve, inside sales could start to specialise in securing meetings, while outside sales could hold virtual meetings and focus on improving meeting

experiences. Imagine opting-in to a virtual meeting from an outbound call, attending a virtual experience and then receiving a direct-mail piece at home reinforcing the interaction. Expect Business-To-Home direct mail volumes to rise in the coming year.

Opportunity: The integration of CRM, Mar-tech and Ad-tech systems presents a huge opportunity to deliver insight-driven, timely communications to customers and act in a coordinated way that nurtures leads. Customers expect it from us, and the best marketers will deliver it.

3) Mobile content snacking will shift to desktop self-directed experiences

Laptops are enjoying a resurgence with [some PC makers experiencing sales lifts of more than 20%](#) thanks to COVID-19. While mobile was the dominant road-warrior medium pre-COVID-19, the laptop is the dominant device for the new B2B consumer.

Mobile engagement is tailored to bite-size moments on the go. Laptop usage favors more immersive digital experiences that allow potential customers to explore solutions on their own. They will identify themselves to sales teams much later in the process.

Opportunity: Audit your site from a customer-centric POV to identify any gaps in digital experiences. These gaps are great opportunities for strategic content development as part of custom media partnerships. Involve the site team and negotiate for content distribution on the publisher's site, across social, and on your owned sites for maximum impact.

4) Contextual content will replace cookies

As cookies are phased out, marketers will need to look to contextual environments and more specialised content to meet the evolving needs of B2B consumers. You might not be able to identify a B2B consumer who comes to your site, but you can certainly infer their level of interest and phase of the buying cycle based on the content they chose to consume. This creates more work for marketers, as they need to develop and maintain a user-friendly suite of content that engages B2B consumers on their own terms, at their own

pace.

The effort will be worth it, though, as these new, more digital B2B consumers are more open to new partners and solutions: 64% of B2B technology buyers say they are likely or very likely to switch vendors (Google Survey, 2020).

Opportunity: As context grows in power relative to audience-based, third-party targeting, it's important to understand the contextual environments and keywords that are most valuable for converting your customers. Partners such as Peer39 and Grapeshot offer tools for garnering these insights and for targeting them programmatically to develop a differentiated, contextual marketing engine for your client over time.

The evolution of B2B marketing has been a long time coming. Today's B2B consumer is more digital, more self-directed and more likely to switch companies. As companies continue to evolve to the ever-changing business environment, smart B2B marketers will embrace these changes to adapt and thrive.

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