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THE RELUCTANT SHOPPER



Taking a closer look at the B2B marketing process and the actions that CEOs, MDs, business owners and key decision makers must take in order to maximise the value of their B2B marketing and design spend. By Cliff Findlay, Marketing Director.

INTRODUCTION.

This is not a typical white paper. After 20 years working with B2B clients, I'm about to reveal some of the key actions that can most powerfully impact the B2B sales process.

This paper is written from a business perspective for business owners, MDs and CEOs. It is NOT a brand and design 'how to' paper. There are quite enough of them around already (get in touch if you want me to recommend one).

This paper is aimed at getting businesses like yours to reconsider their internal sales and marketing process - to think differently about how you win new business and convert clients. In particular I'm concerned with how businesses work with creative agencies (whether advertising, marketing, design or digital) to achieve their commercial goals.

Now, I'm not concerned here with disparaging creative agencies. The right agency can be invaluable in helping you define your objectives and spend your money wisely and effectively. However, too often it's a case of the blind leading the blind. You get a client that doesn't know what they want (or worse, think they know) being advised by an agency that is unable (or worse, too afraid) to ask the right questions.

The outcome is usually the same: a short-lived impact on turnover, and sometimes not even that. In other words an entirely futile exercise that leaves both parties disappointed and unwilling to work together again.

In this paper I want to reveal exactly how sales are lost.



HOW SALES ARE LOST.

Common factors include:

- Sales teams not understanding the key pointers behind a B2B sale.
- Lack of clarity about the customer's needs, leading to poor communication that disrupts the sales process.
- Companies not clearly defining why customers should choose them over competitors. (poor messaging)
- Lack of strategic planning.
- Companies seeing themselves as a product/service provider rather than a brand.
- Not understanding the specific pain that the customer wishes to ease (so instead of meeting a trusted advisor your customer feels they're attending a sales meeting).

Too often creative agencies are expected to solve a company's issues by dreaming up ideas for generating sales. However, unless the business owner understands that sales and marketing are integral to the operations of his business, this approach will be, at best, a quick fix and will NOT deliver sustainable scalable results.

The points highlighted in this paper are the same ones we discuss with clients before undertaking any brand or marketing work. They have led to our clients doubling (or more) their turnover within a year and maintaining strong growth for as long as they maintain their focus.

However the changes I recommend are not for the faint hearted. They could take you far out of your comfort zone and get you thinking differently. You may face resistance from colleagues or employees who are unaccustomed to new work patterns. Implementation of new ideas is never easy, but it's the only way to make these ideas reality.

An underlying complaint I hear all the time is that there is less money around than in previous years. This simply isn't true. However, what is true that the B2B shopper has become more discerning and expects more certainty that the money has been well spent. Fail to satisfy them on this point and you may have a problem.

With the right message, design and approach you can get clients to listen to you and choose you.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN B2B & B2C.

B2C

B2C (business-to-consumer marketing) has been around for a millennium. This is the approach a company makes to a mass consumer market where the purchasing decision is typically made by a single individual. (The exception is for big ticket items such as a house, holiday or car, which is probably why these purchases are famously stressful - two heads aren't always better than one!)

The B2C decision-making process is typically based on the 'feelgood factor'. Sometimes it's a case of 'I have money and I'm going to spend it'.

More often it's a repeat purchase as in the case of supermarket shopping where the customer will often buy the same item time and again because they're familiar with it and have developed brand loyalty. Occasionally it could be an impulse buy, such as a bar of chocolate, which is bought just because it's there.

B2C consumers can be extremely fickle so brand loyalty is important. Currently we are seeing a major shift in B2C shopping habits. Mobile apps enable the consumer to scan a product, look for it online and buy it cheaper elsewhere, even while standing in the shop! This has destroyed high street brands such as Dixons, Comet and HMV, none of which were quick enough to adapt to the new reality. The B2C sale is becoming more complex but remains far behind B2B in that respect.

B2B

B2B (business-to-business marketing) is a relatively new concept. The term itself was first coined around 2001, though it was previously called industrial marketing. Considered a poor relation for many years, B2B marketing now attracts more US college majors than the supposedly more glamorous B2C sector.

So how can we define it? The main driver for B2B is the needs of other businesses. Dwyer and Tanner (2006) say business customers fall into four broad categories:

- Companies that consume products or services (such as automobile manufacturers and small firms who buy in stock).
- Government agencies (the biggest area of B2B purchasing).
- Institutions (including schools, hospitals, churches).
- Resellers (wholesalers, brokers and distributors).

Marketing to Governments is now usually called B2G and lies outside the remit of this paper (involving, as it does, a whole other game and much red tape).

The ultimate goal of B2B (and its main driver) is to create a long standing relationship with another business. This is built on a number of factors including personalities, service, ease, price and skill set or quality of product.

The diagram on the right illustrates the main drivers for B2B and B2C buying habits and why the process and approach in a B2B sale is and always will be different.

As you can see by the drivers involved in the sales and decision-making process, the B2C and B2B sales processes in the buyer's mind are completely different. This is why in our mind they should be viewed as two different disciplines when it comes to winning clients. The messaging, collateral and process need to be considered throughout.

B2B is based around relationships because typically the impact of purchase is longer and therefore the buyer wants to ensure that they have a trusted source. The sales cycle is longer and more complex so that a company can ensure that when a decision is made it is the correct one. Businesses create steps and barriers to ensure that when money is spent it is spent wisely. How often have you come across departments that have a fixed cap on sign off? Say £5,000 and anything above that needs sign off from head office?

If you think about it, it makes total sense. The impact of a poor decision is WAY bigger than if you buy something personally. Let's say as a business I purchase some software that I expect all of my employees to use. If it's wrong and people hate using it or it doesn't talk to my other software properly then the cost, time and impact can be huge. If personally you download an app or buy some software for your PC and it's wrong or you don't like it you'll know immediately, get annoyed you've spent the money, shout, kick the dog, make a cup of tea, say sorry to the dog and go and buy some other software. No harm done (Other than the dog of course). But you get the point.

B2C DRIVERS	B2B DRIVERS
Product driven	Relationship driven
Emphasis on the value of the transaction	Emphasis on maximising the value of the relationship.
Large target market	Small, focused target market
Single step buying process	Multiple step buying process
Short sales cycle	Long sales cycle
Brand identity created through repetition relationship	Brand identity created through relationship
Merchandising and point of purchase activities	Educational and awareness building activities
Emotional buying decision based on status, desire or price	Rational buying decision based on business value
Limited fear of poor decision	Very significant fear of wrong decision

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SALE.

In this chapter we'll look at some of the reasons why people might not want to buy from your company and what you can do about it. Of course there are many possible reasons, but they broadly split into two categories: customer psychology and poor communication structures.

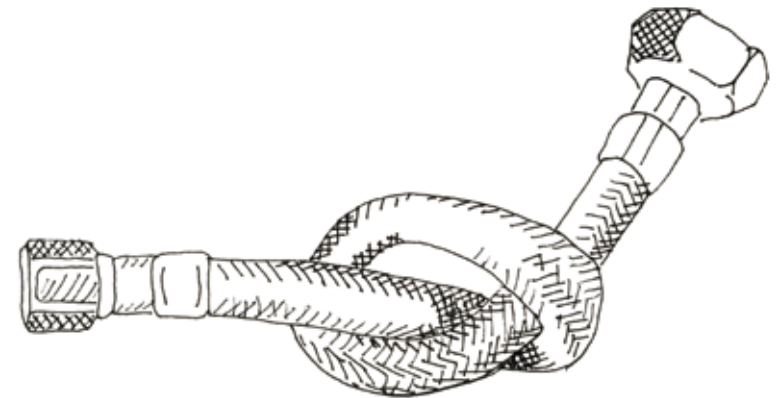
Perhaps you've looked back over a failed pitch and wondered what went wrong. Looking at the prospective client and their requirements you were convinced you could have done a brilliant job and they must have been mad not to choose you. However, there are no certainties in business. Sometimes the customer does nothing, sometimes they pick someone else and sometimes they simply never reply. It's a fact of commercial life.

It's worth taking some time to look at these situations as they're often avoidable and can have a serious impact on:

- Your sales process
- How you prospect
- How you present at a pitch
- The amount of time you take trying to sell to this type of customer
- Your post-sale learning
- Your marketing message
- Your design and brand
- How you work with them going forward should you win their business

We'll look at the branding side later on. However, if the impact of the sales process isn't understood, all the sexy design and marketing in the world won't help.

It's also important not to waste valuable time on potential sales that simply won't happen. This is a major bugbear of organisations where the pipeline looks brilliant but conversion is poor. The time wasted on these 'pipeline' clients would be far better spent winning real business but having committed so much time already it's hard to admit that all this effort is going nowhere. Unfortunately it often is.



CLIENT PSYCHOLOGY:

TIME TO FACE THE F.A.C.T.s

Understanding how the client thinks is critical to making a sale and overcoming the many barriers that can stop a sale happening. The client mindset can be broken down into four broad categories which we call the FACTs: Fear, Apathy, Complexity & Timing. And any one of them can be an obstacle to a sale.

F: FEAR

This is the biggest and most common issue faced by business owners and one we all seem to suffer from at one time or another. After all, some decisions can have a profound impact on your business and must be taken seriously. Little wonder they're so fraught.

Fear operates on many aspects of the sales process:

- Fear of making the wrong decision: the daddy of all fears and one which can stall the entire process at any time. This fear underlies all the points below and is the number one to allay if you wish to make the sale.
- Fear of personal impact: a subconscious fear that an incorrect decision could have personal ramifications, up to and including potential demotion or job loss.
- Fear of overpaying: how often have you made a purchase, only to find it cheaper online? This fear can cause the buyer to procrastinate, shop around, over-analyse or demand masses of proof and documentation.
- Fear of working with a new supplier: when entering a new relationship everyone has concerns that they won't get what they paid for. It's so much easier to stay right where they are while using information gleaned from the pitch or tender process to squeeze their current supplier on price or service.

How to get around these fears:

- Develop a clearly defined process so that the client senses that the sale is being well managed.
- Clearly communicate why you are the best possible choice.
- Explain and repeat the benefits to the client and the pain they will alleviate.
- Have the confidence to sometimes say no to a potential client.
- Show a good understanding of the client's real business issue and explain how you can help them resolve it.

A: APATHY

A strange one, but I've come across it time and again. Some business owners simply don't get why they should change, aren't interested in the benefits that would result and are quite happy the way things are.

This can be very destructive simply because an apathetic client will lead you a merry dance. Certainly it's very frustrating after committing hours or days costing, designing and continually meeting with the client, only for them to turn around and say: 'We'll think about it!'... and then never hearing from them again.

Apathy can affect many aspects of the sales processes:

- Hoping the problem will resolve itself: often business owners believe the issue will just go away. They have neither the time, the budget nor the inclination to take the issue seriously. They might be stuck in a rut or the thought of change could be more frightening than staying where they are.
- Unwilling to make tough decisions: often they will procrastinate (busy themselves with other matters than the ones that actually matter) or play for time by continually requesting more information.
- Unwilling to take the risk: often there's a budgetary or personal issue they haven't disclosed. This one is very difficult to get past as it can be highly personal and impossible to change.
- Not a business priority: they prioritise other matters so that the decision you seek becomes a 'we'll get around to that' which of course they never do.
- Information gatherers: they have no intention of doing anything with you at all. They just want to look like they're doing something while stealing your valuable thoughts. Very dangerous.

Some ways to avoid this apathy:

- Explain the key benefits for THEM if they make the decision.
- Explain the key pain points if they don't.
- Avoid giving too much information while trying to win the business. This also reduces the sales time.
- Ensure the actual decision-making process is as easy as possible.
- Sell them something small initially, just to see if they're serious.

C: COMPLEXITY

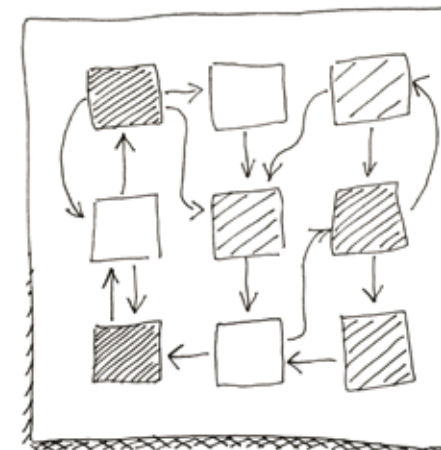
This is one we all suffer from at one time or another.

Complexity can arise at many points throughout the sales process:

- Making the sale process too complex: this is very typical of sales people who get over-anxious or exuberant. It's also very common with high I's (yellows) like myself [more will be explained shortly]. They discuss issues that are off brief or add items to the brief or sell other services before selling the initial product or service the client actually wants.
- The project becomes too big: sometimes a project can simply run away with itself and vastly exceed the client's original intentions.
- Too many decision makers: the sale eventually happens but will be delayed or derailed by so many people wanting a say simply to justify themselves. In the worst case, however, the item could be discussed at a meeting you didn't attend only to be killed by a senior executive.
- Personalities: people buy from people and a major cause of complexity in any sales is the way people within the team interact. (We'll cover this in the next chapter)

Some ways to avoid this complexity:

- Stick to the brief.
- Create staged processes and payments.
- Ensure the decision maker(s) are in the room whenever the project is discussed.
- Know how the client wishes to be communicated with (next chapter).
- Understand the client's deliverables and create an overview of how you will achieve them.



T: TIMING

Depending on whether the client has called you or you are prospecting, timing can be a huge issue within the sales process.

The following are some timing issues we have encountered

- › Not having the budget at the time: possibly the most common 'timing' issue, though often an excuse to avoid making a decision.
- › Not having time internally to do what is required: this is an issue clients don't always consider. Successful projects require commitment. Without it, the timing is never right, especially when complexity and apathy set in.
- › Not being in the 'right place' to make those decisions: this is partly about budget but also suggests the client has other issues with higher priority.
- › The company is going through expansion or change of management: major organisational changes can also bring about changed priorities as the new management seeks to make its presence felt. Of all the timing issues this can be the most difficult to manage, yet it could also represent the biggest opportunity. Major changes require a lot of implementation and this presents opportunities for additional business.

Often if the timing is wrong, it's wrong. So be sure to do the following:

- › Ensure the client maintains awareness of you and your offering by keeping lines of communication open until the timing is right.
- › Hold back from wasting too much time and effort trying to win business from them until they are better placed to hear you out.
- › Get your contact to introduce you to the new management as soon as possible so you can quickly establish a good relationship with them.
- › Ensure you're working with the highest authority within the business.
- › Avoid giving away too much free consultation.

The balance between winning new business and the time taken trying to win it must be tracked. You need a process in place to ensure that sales time and return are effective. Often it's not about timing at all; the client is just a bunch of time wasters.

Remember YOU are the limited resource not the clients. There is only one of you and hundreds, thousands or even millions of them. So define a process that makes them want to start working with you. And if they appear unwilling to do so, have the confidence to walk away.

COMMUNICATION DURING THE SALES PROCESS.

The second part of the sales process is communication. The following may appear obvious but experience has shown us that's far from the case.

'Effective communication is more about how the client wishes to be communicated with than about how you wish to communicate.'

According to DISC profiling there are four key types of communicator: a D, an I, an S or a C. Hence DISC. Everyone has a main characteristic and also a secondary one. The major characteristic is the one we revert to in times of stress or confrontation.

Understanding these styles is critical to communicating with people in the way they wish to be communicated with and will help you build an initial good communication platform for the future. The quickest way of finding out someone's style is to ask the question:

What do you want to get out of this meeting?

- The D will answer: what, by when and how much.
- The I will answer: I thought we might just have a chat and a coffee.
- The S will say: I'd like to know how this will affect my team or group.
- The C will say: I'd like to know more about your process.

Therefore what you communicate to them needs to be what they want to hear. Matching your style to theirs will make them feel at ease, understood and listened to - instead of feeling like they're being sold at.

A perfect example to finish this section off is a short story that involves me. I am a high I (off the scale actually) so I love to chat, make friends, explain and help. Through a network I was introduced to a fellow who was very high D (short, sharp, to the point). We spent two hours in each other's company.

When I next met the woman who introduced us, she asked how the meeting had gone. "Brilliant, excellent, couldn't have been better" was my reply. A few days later she called and asked me whether I'd like to know how Mr High D thought the meeting had gone. Obviously I did. "Awful, terrible, went on and on," was the answer.

Since this initial meeting the D and I have become friends and even worked together (down to a lot of fixing by the original introducer). However, had it simply been a chance meeting the answer would have been a resounding NO. Not because I couldn't offer any value, or that we couldn't work together. I'd simply not given him what he wanted as a high D.

For ease of reference the following are the basic profiles.

D: DOMINANCE

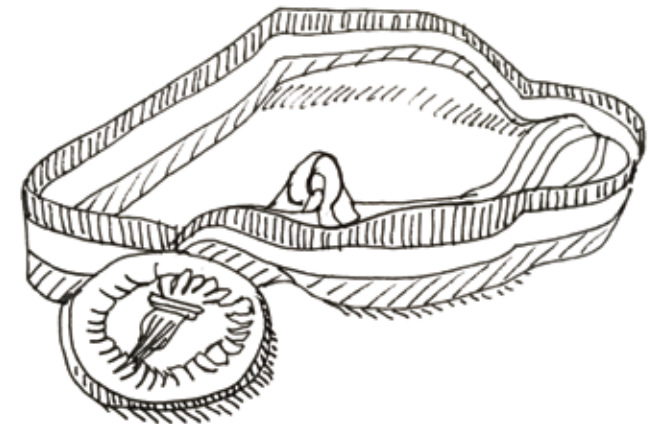
People with the D style place an emphasis on shaping their environment by overcoming opposition in order to accomplish results. They often become CEOs, MDs or senior decision makers. So if that is your target your key to success is to understand that they want quick, high level information.

A person with a D style:

- › is motivated by winning, competition and success.
- › prioritises the acceptance of challenge, taking action to achieve immediate results.
- › is described as direct, demanding, forceful, strong-willed, driven, determined, fast-paced and self-confident.
- › may be limited by lack of concern for others, impatience and even open scepticism.
- › may fear being seen as vulnerable or being taken advantage of.
- › values competency, action, concrete results, personal freedom, challenges.

When communicating with D styles:

- › Be direct and specific.
- › Provide alternatives.
- › Ensure he/she "wins".
- › Disagree only on facts.
- › Enjoy the battle.
- › Do not be emotional.
- › Do not dominate.
- › Act quickly, he/she decides fast.



I: INFLUENCE

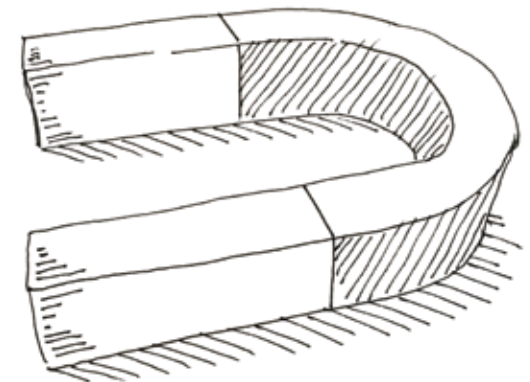
People with an I style place an emphasis on shaping the environment by influencing or persuading others. They are often sales people as they character and are generally liked by many. But they must also be careful as they are prone to waffle and will often say yes but do nothing.

A person with an I style:

- › is motivated by social recognition, group activities, and relationships.
- › prioritises taking action, collaboration, and expressing enthusiasm.
- › is often described as convincing, magnetic, enthusiastic, warm, trusting and optimistic.
- › may be limited by being impulsive and disorganised and displaying a lack of follow-through.
- › may fear loss of influence, disapproval and being ignored.
- › values coaching and counselling, freedom of expression and democratic relationships.

When communicating with I styles:

- › Be a friend, do not ignore.
- › Schedule time for chatting.
- › Have fun and act silly.
- › Let them speak.
- › Give recognition.
- › Speak about people and feelings.
- › Remember to follow up.
- › Move closer.



S: STEADFASTNESS

People with the S style place an emphasis on cooperating with others within existing circumstances when carrying out a task. S types will often be in HR or run departments as they are more concerned with the group than themselves. Of course, in reality, it is all about them but they don't like change so when selling to an S ensure you explain how everyone will benefit from their decision.

A person with an S style:

- › is motivated by cooperation, opportunities to help and sincere appreciation.
- › prioritises giving support, collaboration and maintaining stability.
- › is described as calm, patient, predictable, deliberate, stable and consistent.
- › may be limited by being indecisive and overly accommodating with a tendency to avoid change.
- › may fear change, loss of stability and offending others.
- › values loyalty, helping others and security.

When communicating with S styles:

- › Slow down your presentation.
- › Build trust.
- › Focus on people.
- › Provide the information he/she needs.
- › Present issues logically.
- › Secure commitment piece by piece.
- › Be sincere, do not dominate.

C: CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

People with the C style place an emphasis on working conscientiously within existing circumstances to ensure quality and accuracy. C types will typically be in charge of business change. They love a process so explain your process clearly and give them plenty of space to tell you all about their processes.

A person with an C style:

- › is motivated by opportunities to gain knowledge, show their expertise and do quality work.
- › prioritises ensuring accuracy, maintaining stability, and challenging assumptions.
- › is described as careful, cautious, systematic, diplomatic, accurate and tactful.
- › may be limited by being overly critical, over-analysing and isolating themselves.
- › may fear criticism and being wrong.
- › values quality and accuracy.

When communicating with C styles:

- › Provide facts.
- › Do not touch.
- › Be patient, slow down.
- › Give plenty of detailed information.
- › Control your own activity.
- › Do not talk about personal issues.
- › Do not pressure.

Understanding these styles will help you deliver the information the client wants, NOT what you want to tell them.

It will also prevent you from entering, what Sandler sales training calls 'the buyer seller dance.' This is where the buyer has all the power and the sales person is seen as just that, a sales person. We all know what we think of sales people and how it feels to be treated like one.

The aim of this section is to show you that on many occasions you could have won more business but for using the wrong language or process. Your failure to do so may have nothing to do with your product, service or price; it's simply that you didn't read someone correctly. They're not sure they can work with you because they didn't get the information from you they were seeking.

As further reading you may wish to look at Transactional Analysis where they discuss a different but also highly useful model. This is somewhat advanced reading and so I'll leave it to the author, Eric Berne, to explain the complexities. However, combined with the DISC process it will ensure smoother running sales meetings where you will be seen as a trusted advisor and not a sales person. You will also learn how to spot and avoid troublesome, time wasting clients.

FACT and DISC can help you understand the communication styles of your clients and show you how to allay their fear of working with you.

The more you consider the client and their needs, feelings and communication style, the more they will feel listened to. The more someone feels listened to by you, the more they will trust you.

These tools will also help you define the pain that your potential client is suffering and know whether your products or services can help. This way you can build trust through understanding, support and delivering on your promises. Maybe that won't, in the end, include what you offer. However if you help the business owner out, chances are they'll feel obliged towards you and will refer you to a business contact or even use your services themselves some other time.

How many sales do you think you've lost out on because of not understanding the client's communication style? And how many more could you achieve if you fixed the situation?

Could this process change how you think and interact with existing clients as well as potential clients?

COMPANY PSYCHOLOGY.

Often a company can stand in the way of its own sales. Mad, isn't it! But if you have a desperate sales person trying to hit their target, they can easily resemble a desperate date. Now I'm sure all of your sales people are consummate professionals who'd never allow this to occur. BUT if it does, it will be picked up by the client. Their reaction? Either they'll refuse to work with you again or they'll negotiate you down on price.

Mindset for a sale:

If you truly believe that your company offers a great product then your clients are lucky to have found you aren't they? And if they choose to work with you, they are even luckier.

Cocky? No, just confident. So now, with these new goggles on, how many potential clients are out there? In your city, your country, globally? When you truly start to think like this, you'll soon see that the odd lost client isn't the end of the world.

That is the mindset that all of your sales people should adapt. And all your employees too, if possible. Again NOT cocky, just not about to be messed around by old school business owners who assume they have all the power and can call the shots. While it's true that the internet has freed them to choose from multiple vendors, it works the other way too. You can now go and attract as many clients as you want and are no longer reliant on any one business.

So the mind set should be something like this: "You and I are business professionals, let's have an adult to adult conversation and if we BOTH believe there's something in this for us let's progress. However, if at any time either of us wants out, let's part as friends".

Easy yes? Well, no actually, but it's something to aim for. It takes balls to say no, but not all business is good business. Some clients are difficult, demanding, slow at paying and many other things besides. Maybe you should divorce them and put better clients in their place?

Again, it sounds mad, but think how much time and effort you spend managing those difficult clients? What does that do to your hourly rate? Profit from the job? Think about it. The more powerful you become, the easier it is to say no.

One final point. A good client will refer you to other businesses, write you testimonials, pay on time and refer you to other clients. A bad client won't. Which do you want? Then get a backbone and go and win them.



YOU AND YOUR BRAND.

So far we've discovered that trust is the key to a B2B sale. We've also looked at what you need to avoid and how you can impact the face to face communication process with a potential client directly. In this chapter we'll look at what must be done internally to create the kind of trust that will build a strong brand presence in the client's mind.

To do this we must look at four key areas of the business: Message, Design, Culture and Approach. These outward facing areas of your business must be aligned if you're to develop a single, strong, stand out message to your target market.

But first let's find out: what is a brand in today's market and why should you develop one?

Now that the internet connects everyone, businesses are becoming increasingly transparent, whether they like it or not. If an unhappy customer or disgruntled employee blogs about a bad experience, the story can spread like wildfire by email or with social media tools such as Twitter. The good news is that the reverse is also true. A great experience with a company can be read by millions of people almost instantaneously.

The key is to make the brand about more than what you do as a business. Instead it should be about who you are, what you stand for and the contribution you make to the wider community (customers, employees, shareholders, your community, the environment).

If you choose to build your brand around the best customer experience, then you'll need to make real change. It's not enough to plaster it on your promotional material, shout it from the rooftops and let one internal department deal with it.

Instead, you must make it a reality. You must fully embed great customer experience into your company's values and ethos, so the effect can be felt by anyone who comes into contact with you.

How can you build a long term brand?

Decide how you are different, where you can set yourself apart, what your ethos, vision, mission is and then get your employees to buy into that vision. After all, they will have to live up to it.

Make sure you have the backing of all key stakeholders. Also, do you have processes in place to ensure that IF you make a mistake it is rectified quickly and efficiently?

Get the culture right and most of the other stuff - such as great customer service or building a great long-term brand or passionate employees and customers - will happen naturally on its own.

Your culture is your brand

If you think about it, your company's culture and brand are really just two sides of the same coin. If the entity as a whole isn't fully thought through then a gap may develop between the product/service you say you're going to offer and what the customer gets in reality. We call this the 'brand gap'.

WHAT YOUR COMPANY PROMISES

External brand image & messaging

Delivered through brand & marketing initiatives such as website, brochures, blogs, social media, exhibitions & events, marketing & advertising, etc



Brand Gap

The bigger the discrepancies between company promise and the customer's experience, the bigger the gap becomes and the more your sales figures will drop.



WHAT THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

Governed by internal brand processes

Quality of Product/Service Delivery, Customer Support, Pre & Post Sales Customer Experience, Telephone & Email Responses, Staff Behaviour, Brand Culture, Office location/interior, administration & Invoicing, etc.

WHY SHOULD YOU DEVELOP A BRAND?

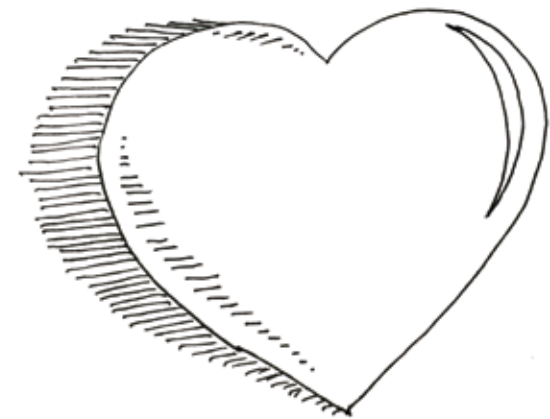
Two words: 'customer loyalty'

A strong brand presence, however big or small, sets you apart from the competition and gives people a reason to buy from (and work for) you and not your competitors.

That's a priceless asset in today's highly competitive market that often offers identical products. It will also encourage people to pay more for the perceived value of your brand.

The Coca Cola brand, for example, is worth far more than the intrinsic value of its products. If it sold all its assets it would probably realise less than 50% of the company's market value. People claim to like Coke for its taste, but the real reason is brand awareness.

Every business should think of itself as a brand because that's the key denominator that will set it apart from its competitors, whatever they do.



BRAND MESSAGING.

Why should a potential client choose you above all the other suppliers that offer similar products/services? If you can't answer that question then you have no differentiator. Without that, your success is based either on a) your popularity or b) your cost. Even if you're a charming individual offering a good price, that's really not a business you want to be in.

A 'why you' message can come from anywhere: service, culture, process or any other area where you can provide a distinctive benefit. It's all about creating a point of difference that is attractive and useful to a large enough target market. To give you some idea of what I'm talking about, the brands on this page show off some very powerful examples of highly recognisable and successful messaging.

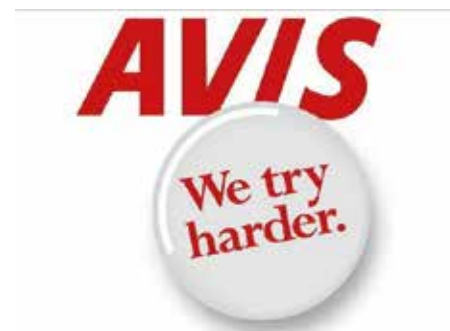


John Lewis

Never knowingly undersold.



When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.



I'm lovin' it.



REMEMBER,

IT'S NOT ABOUT DIFFERENCE FOR DIFFERENCE' SAKE.

It's about creating a sense of worth over and above the services you offer - one you can easily and effectively supply. As a buyer, if I know you are different, I then have a decision to make: do I want that difference or not? Simple.

Equally IF you are not the same as everyone else, why would you cost the same? Again the client has a decision to make: do they pay extra for your difference or not?

So where do you start?

Maybe look at running a survey with your clients. Why did they buy you? You may be shocked by what you hear. Look at your competition what are they offering and (more to the point) what aren't they offering that you could?

What do you do that is so special, or could be made special? Create a guarantee or a perceived value - or focus on something you already provide that creates a tangible difference - then highlight it.

If you're really stuck, think about why you got into business in the first place. What was it that gave you that initial confidence that you could build a successful company. There might be something there that you could use.

What not to use:

Banal service values such as friendly, on time and on budget aren't points of differentiation. They're what the customer expects. Also, you can't exactly own them so don't use them.

I cannot emphasise how important this is.

If you only do one new thing this year it should be to develop a stand out message. Something that is defensible, attractive and creates added value in the clients mind. It is THE key to creating a successful brand and business.

Looking at Rackspace for instance. They created 'fanatical support' when all of their competitors were selling the same product. Just a word, you might say. But then they backed it up with fanatical support business processes so that, from the moment you approached them to the resolving of your issue, you received fanatical support.

They not only said it, they did it. This is what turned them from being just another hosting company into becoming THE UK's biggest hosting company within two years. Just a word but a word that meant so much to their target market that they couldn't help but sign up with them.

Something they were already doing, but instead of hiding it they shouted it from the roof tops. It was what their market wanted to hear and the pay back was huge.

BRAND CULTURE.

Put simply, brand culture is the “the way things are done”. That doesn’t just mean the physical processes of transforming A into B. It encompasses the attitude, approach, communication-style and decision making processes of the organisation. It’s the DNA of your company and is apparent in every interaction with the organisation, internal or external.

The culture of your organisation has evolved over time based on the attitudes and personalities of everyone who has interacted with it. Improving that culture can be quite a challenge, as it means taking on the hearts, minds and attitudes of everyone involved.

Once achieved, however, it can bring about efficient practices, improved margins, enhanced reputation and a happy and productive workforce. It has also been proven that companies with a solid culture produce 3.5 x more wealth than those without.

The 5 main steps of developing an effective brand culture are:

- Set a compelling vision and robust strategy for your business.
- Develop your leadership capabilities and define the core company values.
- Engage your employees in the process.
- Develop an infrastructure that supports the culture.
- Measure success and make changes when required.

What compelling vision could you create with a blank piece of paper?

What does your business and brand stand for right now? Is it endemic? Could you improve it? How much better could you perform with a strong culture that everyone lived up to?

To see the value of a strong culture, look at the brands that have it: Apple, Google, John Lewis, Commerce bank, McDonalds. Every one of them has gone from strength to strength.

Again, this isn't just a statement of intent; it's the realisation and embodiment of what you're creating. It reflects in how your sales team communicates, how you behave in the office - right through to your wellness programmes, your marketing and how you actually win business.

John Lewis, for instance, has a fantastic culture based on a few simple rules:

- Don't sell, inform.
- Help the customer at all times
- As an employee, you're also a shareholder so dividends and bonuses are linked to your performance.

Brilliant. It means I get a wonderful customer experience every time I visit. In a market as competitive as the high street that in itself is one reason people go back time and time again.

THE BRAND COMMUNICATION PROCESS.

Whatever way you go about building your marketing arm, please don't 'sell' at clients by telling them how good you are or trying to inundate them with lots of messages about what you do.

It's called feature selling and it doesn't work. Unfortunately, it's still the default for most companies. Think about it: would you sit down with a new girlfriend and go on non-stop about what you do, who you are, what you earn...? (Perhaps you would, in which case keep a look out for my next book on how to find a life partner).

No, if you were serious about the relationship, you would listen as well as talk, then see where the interest lies and move the conversation in that direction. The same goes for communicating to potential clients.

Speak little, say much, get heard:

The fewer words you use, the more chance someone will read them. The more they read, the more you'll be heard above all the noise. The more they hear you above the noise the easier it is to decide whether it's of interest to them. The easier you make this journey the better they'll feel about you.

A happy person is emotionally involved so the chances of a sale are much higher.

Look at it this way: how do you feel when you land on a website or get some marketing material that just talks about the product? You just switch off, don't you. So cut it out!

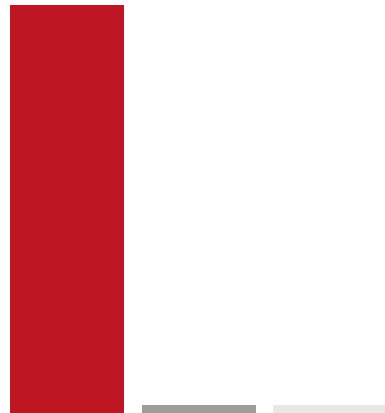
Below is a graphic we came up with showing how the communication process works. Key message: Should I click or not? Is what they are selling of any relevance to me and my current or future pain?

This structure is valid throughout the communication process but nowhere more so than on your website. Try to sell too quickly or bombard the prospect with information and they'll either not read it or feel sold at. Either way the outcome is the same: no sale.

Have respect for people's intelligence. Show courtesy by allowing them the space to decide whether to move forward with you or not. The more you sell at them, the more chance they'll resist. And in the end the decision is theirs.



AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION.



Importance to the sale Amount of content Time spent reading

1. Key messaging (the hook)

Although in the overall communication picture only very little time is spent actually reading your messaging, it is of course a customer's first introduction to your brand/business. At this point they will make an instant decision whether they want to find out more about you or look elsewhere so it is absolutely, 100% critical that you get it right.

Get it wrong and you will have lost a potential client in less time than it took to read this paragraph.



Importance to the sale Amount of content Time spent reading

2. Service/Product Information (the solution to their problem)

This is where the magic should happen. You've managed to intrigue people enough for them to want to find out more about you but now you need to convince them that you can offer them exactly what they need. HOWEVER, now is not the time to start bombarding them with an overload of information.

Try to reduce and structure your content until it's as clear and concise as possible. If you can't convince them in one or two paragraphs, you won't do it in five either. And if they want more information, they'll ask for it.



Importance to the sale Amount of content Time spent reading

3. Back-up (the proof)

Providing clients with access to a wealth of additional technical information, case studies, articles, blogs, videos, testimonials and industry news will make you appear bigger, more knowledgeable and trustworthy. They won't necessarily read it, but the fact that you look like you know what you're talking about will often help swing the vote in your favour.

So in this case the more content the merrier, although make sure it's easy for customers to navigate and DON'T let it obscure your core messaging/service information. Ideally provide a dedicated area for it on your site.

BRAND APPROACH.

How you approach a prospect can say as much about your brand as your culture or design. For instance if you walked into a shop and someone came and shouted at you would you be impressed? Probably not. If they ignored you, or tried desperately to sell to you would you feel like buying from them? Again, not likely.

The approach must be appropriate

For example, if you're selling high quality products or services, it's probably not a good idea to market them using email or cold calling. It wouldn't fit with the premium style of the brand and would not be a suitable way to start the relationship.

As we have seen, the B2B process is built on trust, so the way you approach someone will dictate their initial feelings about the value you put on getting their business. I'm certainly not dismissing email advertising, which can work well in some instances. I'm just raising the point that the initial part of the communication process is vital. As you've probably heard, you only get one chance to make a first impression.

Too often we find clients want it all and want it now. This attitude will deliver results. However our experience has shown that a simple strategy and time taken to think about what success might look like can generate 2-4 times the results.

Think: how would you like to be approached?

A key area that we believe will become increasingly critical to a business is referral-based word of mouth marketing. For two reasons. First, you typically get a heads up that a project will start before it starts and second, a third party referral is more powerful than any amount of marketing spend.

All of this will rely heavily on everything discussed in this paper (attitude within meetings, culture, brand recognition) but once this engine is in full flow (which may take a couple of years to fully develop) the work will come to you. How nice would that be?

It will take time to build a network capable of supplying you that kind of work. In the mean time here are some good questions to ask yourself: who can get you the kind of work you need? What level of seniority are they? What can you offer them? Commission? Links to your network? In order to develop your network you'll need to spend as much time as possible interacting with these people. So work out the cost to profit ratio and make sure it's peer to peer.

Referrals are just one way of winning new business, but whatever decision or approach structure you create it should have the same attention to detail and quality feel as your product or service. It may cost more, but think about the returns. Perception is 95% of the sale. If you don't look like you can deliver then you're losing the battle.

Every decision you make about your marketing creates a multitude of questions.

Every one of those questions needs an answer and a reasonable rationale. Your response and win rate greatly depends on this, so be sure to test and test again. Could you finesse your approach to new clients and what you say to them on first contact? How might you respond in their shoes? What action could you take right now to up your conversion rate?

YES, NOW YOU'RE READY TO DESIGN!

So, you now understand your client, their mindset, the kind of thing they want to hear. You've also developed a culture and process to make them love you - based on a key message that stands out from the competition and which you can develop over time. You are finally ready to design.

The good news is that the design phase should now be simple. The designers will know:

- who they are designing for (and, no... it isn't you).
- what it is you wish to convey to your target as a brand and what message goes where.
- not just what you want, but why.

Meanwhile you will now know:

- exactly how to brief them for each job.
- Whether or not they nailed it and developed something your market will respond to.

At this point DO NOT design for what you are now, but for the size and shape you're aiming to be.

It's a bit like when your mum bought you school clothes a size too big so you'd grow into them. Design for the scale of company you want to be and you'll start to behave like that company - as will your customers. The more you, and they, believe in a bigger and better you, the quicker it will become reality.

This phase should be the most fun but it is also the most critical. That's why so much time and effort is spent developing what to say and how to support that message.

One small point to remember is that 'it's all in the detail'. So make sure email signatures, LinkedIn profiles, PowerPoint presentations, contracts, quotes, blogs, social media, everything is used to support your brand positioning and reinforce your brand message.

Internally and externally this message should run through your business like it's Blackpool Rock. Your design and message must be visible and coherent however and whenever there is customer contact. Mixed messages, incoherent design or failure to fulfil on a promise will all create fear in the customer mind. As we've seen, fear will damage or delay any sale.

So take a look at your sales process

This may be: initial contact > visit website > second contact > further information sent > meeting/ presentation > follow up email/call > contract.

ALL of these interactions give you time to a) explain why they should choose you and b) determine whether they are a suitable client or simply wasting your time. Do you need to change your brand vision to create trust within your target market? Are you reinforcing your key message throughout your sales process? Have you thought about how you might tighten it even further - and what results you might get if you did?

HOW TO GENERATE MORE SALES FROM EXISTING CLIENTS.

So let's say you've won a new client, delivered an excellent service to them and they love you. What next? Well, then it's time to take full advantage of this new found love. So often we find that companies win a new client and then start looking for the next one. However there are many things you could do at the same time.

Keep selling:

Are there any up-sales you could achieve? By this I don't mean selling current clients anything and everything. The client will soon realise that they are being misled and trust will be lost never to return.

What I mean is this: is there a natural up-sell to your existing clients that might accompany the previous one? If so, is there a time when they might typically purchase such an item? If so, diarise a call for that time. As well as potentially making a sale you can also keep your relationship with the client alive.

Ask your clients for new clients:

MDs usually have other MDs as friends. If they are happy with your service why wouldn't they introduce you to their contacts? Simple, yes? But it's amazing how few people think of this. Take a peek at their LinkedIn profile and see what networks they're on that might be of interest. Or just ask. Perhaps they know another business owner who could use your service.

Back fill:

Always remember to get testimonials, case studies, good words - anything that can support your process going forward. Remember, though, that these should bolt back into your key differentiator and not just be 'they are really nice people' type quotes. Those are worthless. We are all really nice people when we're doing business.

The aim should be for them to support the promise you're making about your business. If there's something unique about your business (and there should be) make sure they're telling others about how unique it is.

FINAL WORDS.

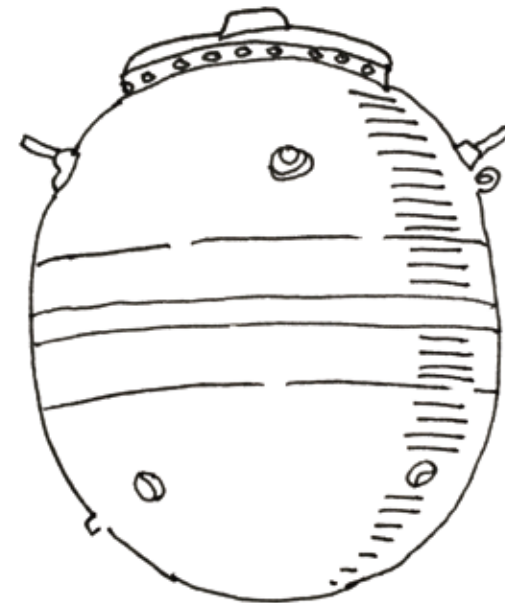
I hope this paper has been useful. In particular, I hope it's given you ideas as to why or where your B2B strategy may have failed previously and how you can improve it.

I also hope this paper has helped you understand that B2B marketing can impact your entire business structure - and that it's not just some 'stuff' done by creative departments.

If you're a business owner you should now be able to identify when a marketing or design company hasn't thought through your brief carefully enough or asked the right questions of your business.

Alternatively, you may realise that you haven't always supported the process internally in the past. If so, it's time to change.

The B2B sale is a minefield. However with careful thinking you can create the kind of well-defined process that brings the wins in thick and fast. Our clients are a testimony to that. Remember trust is the key throughout the process. It takes time to develop and minutes to destroy. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you."



ABOUT ME.

I have been advising and working alongside CEO's, MD's and Business Owners for over 20 years. I've helped win millions of pounds worth of business for my clients and ran everything from total rebrands to social media and direct marketing campaigns.

I have been told that I am a flavour (Marmite actually) but I take that as a compliment as at least I have a flavour and people see why they would work with me and maybe as importantly why they would not.

My view is that Sales and Marketing MUST be driven by the business growth goals at all times and to do this initially you must work out what a good client is. One that will generate the profit the company is after not just turnover.

From there your message must be driven down throughout every touch point, conversation and discussion on or offline to ensure that your point of difference understood by the market and the potential customer.

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