CREATING CONTENT. CLOSING DEALS.

The ultimate guide to content marketing and sales strategy for B2B

BOP DESIGN®

Content marketing is an ideal companion to a B2B sales team. Why? Two reasons:

1. The B2B sales process' inherent nature (a longer sales cycle, smaller potential client pool, higher priced purchases and multiple decision makers) requires multiple touch points with a prospective client.
2. The traditional B2B "sales funnel" is evolving from a predictable linear model to a much more diverse and jumbled path—requiring marketers to consistently remind prospective clients of a B2B brand through relevant, new content on an infinite number of platforms.

So if you're not already modifying your content to fit a buyer's needs in each stage, it's time to get started! In this guide we'll address common obstacles in the B2B sales process, how content can solve them and how to measure your outcomes.

Discovery

Attracting web visitors and transforming them into qualified prospects is the first step in a B2B sales process. These customers are conducting a web search, gathering preliminary information and sourcing referrals from trusted sources. Most importantly, they're trying to find a business they can trust, meaning helpful content that addresses their need will nurture the relationship much more than pushy, fluffy sales talk.

How content helps during discovery:

- Begins building the relationship with a sales person
- Positions the business as a trusted source
- Better educates (and qualifies) a prospect

Obstacles During Discovery

Doubt

When beginning their preliminary searching, it's common for a prospect to approach your sales team with skepticism. Doubt stems from a variety of circumstances, such as confusion with your service delivery or perhaps a poor experience with your type of business in the past. Content can help mitigate doubt by establishing credibility and initial trust with the prospect.

Content marketing that defeats doubt can include:

- Third party validation of your firm (e.g. thought leader endorsements, positive media coverage)
- Social media clout
- Third party articles about your industry, process, etc.
- Portfolio
- Industry client list
- Client testimonials

Price and Budget

B2B services are often high priced ticket items. Think of software, engineering, medical, and consulting services. All typically involve relatively high prices and long-term contracts—as well as little industry transparency—compared to B2C. Meaning there will be prospective clients with unrealistic budgets and sticker shock. Instead of immediately disqualifying, content can help re-evaluate price requirements, build your firm's value and set the prospect back into the sales funnel.

Content that can address price concerns include:

- Tip lists
- Service delivery breakdown
- Introductory videos

Client Education

Depending on your industry, prospective clients may have never heard of your service or business. A sales person should be well equipped with content that educates a prospective client. This allows a sales person to alert prospective clients of new challenges and realized problems that originally weren't considered.

Content for client education can be:

- Free white paper and state of the industry reports
- Checklists
- eBooks

Consideration

During the consideration phase, a qualified lead recognizes your business as a potential suitor and understands your unique value proposition. They're most likely comparing you to competitors and have a clearer picture of their project needs. Recycling the same content from the discovery phase is a bad idea. These qualified leads want to engage with a B2B firm and in return receive personalized answers and attention.

Content helps the consideration phase by:

- Outlining your unique value proposition vs. your competition
- Deeper education about your specific services and need for tailoring
- Prospect can picture future success with your partnership

Obstacles During Consideration

Indecision

At this point a prospect is closer to making their decision, but will start prolonging the sales process. This could be for a variety of reasons, the prospect may have other higher priority projects/needs, they're awaiting team feedback or there is still lingering doubt and questions from the discovery phase. While discovery content casts the widest net, the consideration content should mitigate the risk of losing any that have stayed for the ride.

Content to aid indecision includes:

- Webinars
- Demo videos
- Service delivery guides
- Newsletters

Disorganization

Sometimes in a business your prospective client is stretched very thin in available time and resources. Additionally, depending on your target industry, a prospect may need buy-in from senior leadership and may not have the time or required skill to sell your firm internally. Your content should succinctly describe your service within the confines of their needs—saving your prospect the time and energy when they discuss internally. Most importantly, your content should make your prospect's job easier when trying to gain internal buy-in.

Content that improves disorganization can be:

- Competition comparison
- Analysis reports
- White papers
- Webinars

Decision

Finally, a percentage of prospects from the discovery stage have made it to the decision stage. Remember that even if a lead is ready to buy, you should build a case of credibility through content before moving to a proposal.

Content supports the decision stage by:

- Instilling trust and credibility
- Closing the sale

Obstacles During Decision

Multiple Decision Makers

As stated before, many times your primary point of contact isn't the only person making the decision to buy from you. Senior level colleagues also weight in. This is a great opportunity to gain brand recognition and trust deeper within the company, but you also risk failing to drive consensus. One naysayer in the group can derail the whole project, so it's best to have content on hand that can quickly absolve any negative thoughts.

Content that brings the group together includes:

- Process tips and sheets
- Before & after stories
- Competitor comparison sheet
- Phone calls with teams
- Special demos
- Team bios

Misalignment of Goals

It's easy to assume that by the time a prospect reaches the decision phase their objectives are thoroughly understood and mapped out within the service agreement. But sometimes perceptions change since the initial sales discussion and new needs present themselves. This could mean miscommunication on the client end, internal changes within the company or industry changes.

Content to address last minute goal setting are:

- Service agreements
- Personalized slideshows
- Case studies

Client Inexperience

Similar to client education in the discovery phase, sometimes your point of contact is inexperienced with your service delivery. An inexperienced client may not be involved in the actual delivery of the service, but still has to communicate your business and benefits to their team.

Content that helps client inexperience includes:

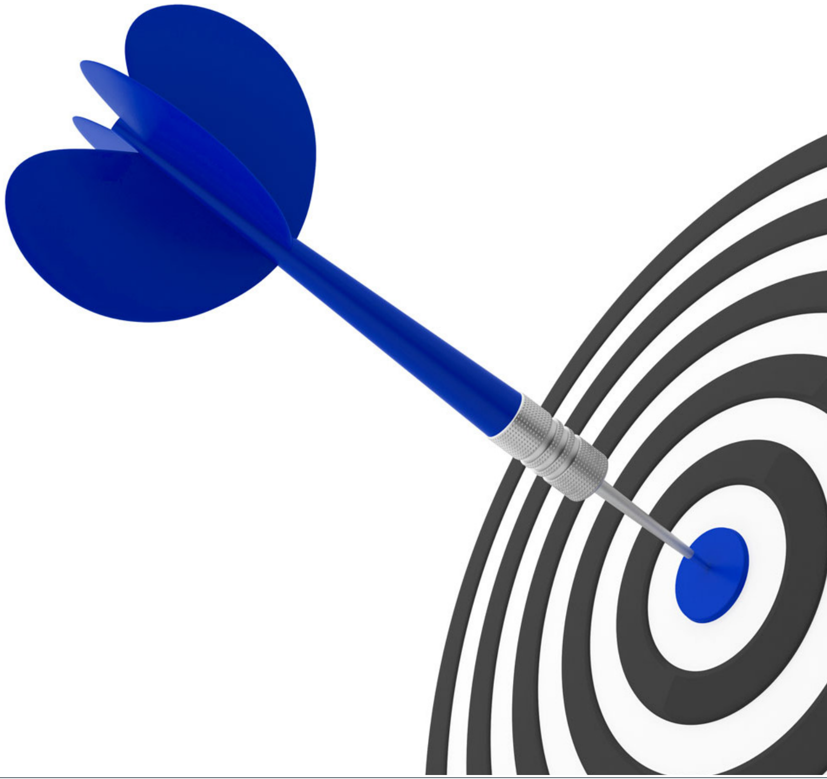
- Guides geared toward the sphere of influence
- Pricing information

Buyer's Remorse

A sales person's initial goal is land a sale, but turning a client into a long-term advocate sweetens the deal. Money spent now, and the results of that, have great impact on that prospect's job review, internal recognition and future budget. So it's important content drills home your business as a critical partner.

Content that relieves buyer's remorse:

- Ongoing educational webinars
- Podcast interviews
- Newsletters
- In-person events and speaker opportunities



Measurement

So you have your buyer personas and your content strategy in hand, but wondering if the content is actually helping reach sales and marketing objectives? No need to fear, here are four simple metrics (two for sales, two for marketing) that you should really be measuring.

Marketing: Web Analytics

The bulk of your content will be digital and hosted on your website. This means using Google Analytics or a similar tool helps in measuring content engagement. Here are some metrics to pull:

- Time spent on site (greater time spent on your website = a more interested customer)
- Pages per session (more pages browsed in one visit = a more educated customer)

Marketing: Social Media

If your business is involved on social media, then discover what content is receiving the most shares and clicks on those platforms. These metrics shouldn't be observed in a vacuum, as there is a lot of data showing that social shares don't always equal high readership. Instead, pull the following:

- Referral traffic (based on platform) combined with the web analytics

Sales: Leads Generated

This requires some big picture thinking and wrangling of multiple platforms. If you're a B2B business that still conducts most sales over the phone, it becomes even more complicated. But, as stated above, if your content is digital the measurement becomes easier.

If you have important calls to action on your website that you want an individual to make—such as signing up for a newsletter, downloading a guide or completing a contact form—then track these conversions by setting up Google Analytics Goals.

Sales: Length of Sales Cycle

A B2B sales cycle can often take weeks—or even months—to close. Keep the lines of communication open with your sales team and provide them with relevant content along the way. To help, ask your sales team some of the following questions:

- Is the content attracting the wrong type of prospect (e.g. seeking different services, needs additional education, etc.)?
- Are there common misconceptions of our business among prospects (e.g. understanding of unique value proposition, service delivery or other)?
- What common questions are prospects asking that you need support answering?

Need more information on how content marketing supports the B2B sales process? For more insight into content marketing and sales strategy, visit the Bop Blog.