



Sweet Success

How to Partner with the Right B2B Marketing Agency

BOP DESIGN®

Finding and partnering with the right B2B marketing agency is not an exact science. Rather, there are recipes you can follow to identify the best match of ingredients, styles, and designs to bring the right amount of lift and flavor to your marketing strategy.

Whether you are considering hiring a marketing agency or are in the process of evaluating agencies, our Sweet Success Recipe Book will show you when bringing an outside agency into the mix yields the best results and how to make sure that agency brings the right blend of ingredients, styles, and flavors to the table to achieve your business objectives.

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All Ingredients Are Alike: Aren't They?

Experienced bakers know that the same ingredients used to make delicious home-baked chocolate cupcakes for a child's birthday party aren't the same as those used to make a decadent flourless cake at a high-end restaurant. The differences come down to who is creating the end product and who is consuming these baked goods.

The same holds true for B2B vs. B2C marketing. We've heard marketers claim that B2C and B2B marketing are the same. It's all about crafting a human connection and appealing to the end user's tastebuds. While we do agree with this general recipe for good marketing, there are many other things that differentiate B2B from B2C and impact strategic planning for marketing professionals.

There is Only One Way to Bake a Cake, Right?

Think of it in terms of cakes. If you are looking for a one-of-a-kind, grand wedding cake, do you enlist the help of the local donut shop owner or do you find a custom cake bakery? The donut shop owner does a wonderful job of putting out a vast array of delicious donuts, but the experienced bakery knows how to craft custom cakes that are consistent with a wedding's theme (or brand) and create a special experience for the wedding guests.

You don't want to put the digital face of your brand in the hands of just an one. You want to work with someone who understands your type of business and brings a certain level of expertise to the table.



What makes B2B Marketing Different:

When baking for a group, you need to be aware of all the different taste testers at the party with different palates. Will children be eating the baked goods? Does someone have a gluten allergy? Does the host of the party have a particular flavor, like chocolate, that they really love?

For B2B companies, there may be one decision maker, but the decision to purchase a product or service often affects several different departments and different levels of management. For this reason, the buyer persona for a B2B marketing campaign needs to include various profiles and use cases. Understanding the various use cases and preferences is critical for the marketing company to ensure they properly position the product and provide resources for all users.



The Deal Takes Longer to Bake

While a batch of brownies can be fairly straightforward to churn out, a multi-layered cake with various flavors, fillings and icings will often take time, input, and customization to get just right. For this reason, baking a multi-layer cake is more complex and time-consuming than putting out a batch of uniform brownies.

Similarly, for many B2B companies, the sales cycle is often 6 weeks to a year based on the complexity of the project or service delivery. Due to a longer sales cycle and influencing factors, it's crucial that the B2B marketing strategy identify and address all stages of the buying cycle.

THIS LONGER SALES CYCLE IS INFLUENCED BY A VARIETY OF INGREDIENTS

- The product or service is complex or has a lot of moving parts
- Often, buy-in from multiple decision makers is required to move forward
- It's not a decision made lightly or quickly
- Budget or attaining budget can be a factor, for example, the prospect may need to wait a few months before moving forward to acquire budget approval
- It requires extensive research and comparisons
- The decision relies heavily on proof (case studies/results) or testing

The Finished Product or Service Is Complex and Expensive

When it comes to baking complex or custom creations, they take time, skill, and often a good deal of financial investment. Why? Because customized or personalized baked goods often use high-end ingredients, involve skilled bakers, and take time to put together so they fit together beautifully.

In our experience, B2B products and services tend to be more expensive and require a larger investment. Yes, B2C products can be expensive (right now a KitchenAid® Pro Line Candy Apply Red Stand Mixer retails for \$599.99), but in comparison, B2B products and services are in a whole different range of prices (varying from \$5,000 for a product to \$100,000 for a yearly service subscription to tens of millions of dollars for manufacturing or service contracts). Due to the required investment (of money, time, resources, personnel), B2B branding and marketing efforts must continually build and uphold value.

The Experience Is Longer and More Meaningful

When baking for a special event like a 20th wedding anniversary, a 60th birthday, or a retirement party, you put more thought into the cake or desserts. Since the cake on a special occasion can make or break the memory, you want it done well. It's not a muffin grabbed on a whim while ordering coffee and forgotten two minutes after being consumed. It's something that the end users will be discussing and reminiscing about for a while.

B2B products and services are rarely transactional like the coffee shop muffin. This is due to the ramp up, onboarding, and implementation time involved. It's stickier to get out of a B2B product or service and often leads to a longer, more meaningful partnership.

What differentiates B2B from B2C is that the relationship for a B2B company and a client is often much longer term. It's not mere service-delivery, it's a partnership that is cultivated to last a long time. B2B marketers fail when they don't treat the client as a partner.

There Is More on the Line

If you bake a cake for your family and it is a flop, no big deal. If you bake a cake for your niece's wedding and everyone gets sick, it's a big deal. Everyone blames you for ruining the event.

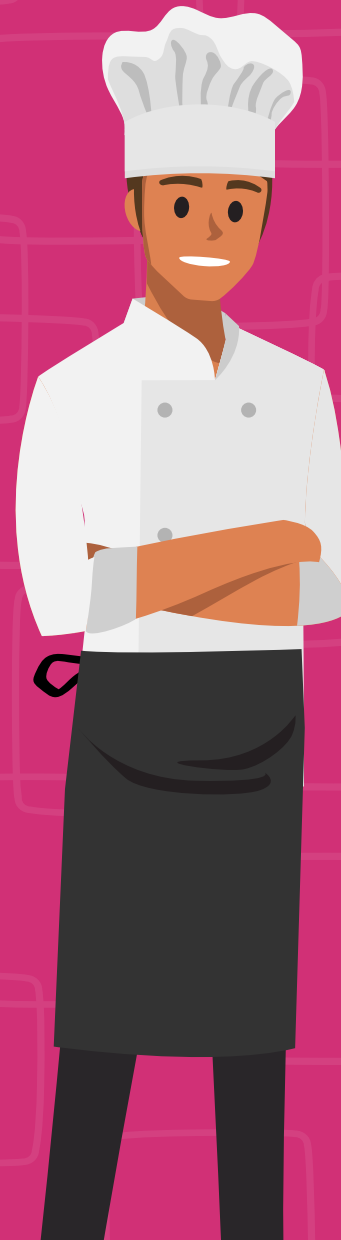
The same is true for a decision you make about a B2B product or service. If you fail to choose the right product or service, it can affect how your peers view you, how your boss views you and not only your performance, but the organization's performance as a whole. There is more on the line when it comes to making decisions for B2B companies. B2B marketers understand that there is a lot on the line for prospects and clients, and as business partners, they strive to make their clients successful.



Why Hire a Professional Baker?

Why hire a professional baker to do the job when you can easily teach yourself how to create a delicious masterpiece? Often, you are hiring them for their skill, experience, and knowledge. If you hire the right baker, they can partner with you in your kitchen and make you more successful at a variety of different things.

You may already have a few internal marketing people at your organization, so why bother bringing in more marketing people? There are a lot of reasons to work with an outside marketing agency, but here are few major ones.



Limited Internal Resources

The biggest reason companies look to hire an outside B2B marketing agency is not from lack of internal marketing acumen, but rather because of limited internal resources. The three biggest resource limitations many B2B companies face are personnel, time, and budget. For most of our clients, there are two to three internal marketing professionals who are highly experienced at managing and marketing their firm's brand. They look to us to help fill in the gaps where they just don't have the resources.

Think of it like this: If you own a bakery, you can't bake the cupcakes, take orders for more cupcakes, maintain your delivery truck, sweep the floors, grow the wheat, raise the chickens and harvest the eggs, run to the bank, and teach yourself every last baking technique all at once.

Experts in Baking Success

TEAM OF SPECIALISTS: When you work with expert bakers, you get less ruined cakes and pastries, have less trips to the store for more ingredients, no kitchen mess to clean up, and spend less time learning how to efficiently crack eggs while mixing batter. Likewise, you get the best results when you work with experts in the field. Partnering with a B2B agency provides access to experts in all facets of marketing: design, copywriting, digital outreach, inbound, direct mail, web development, conversion optimization, analysis and tracking, campaign creation, automation, print, advertising, nurturing, etc.

UP ON CURRENT TRENDS: Cupcakes are out and donuts are in! A company working with an agency can be certain the agency's employees are current on the latest marketing trends. As an internal marketing professional, you are likely aware of all the recent advances and news affecting your firm's industry. Likewise, an agency's employees stay current on the latest trends in marketing and are using them daily on client campaigns. They know what is working, what is overblown hype, and can discuss the latest techniques and tools with you.

VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS: An experience chef or baker knows where to get the best ingredients, who to hire that will deliver on their promise, and where to sell the baked goods to get the best results. On a similar note, a comprehensive marketing strategy utilizes various channels, tools, and tracking software to ensure that campaigns are working and producing results. Many of these channels, tools, and software require ongoing relationships and subscription services. By working with an agency, a B2B company reaps the benefits of these tools without having to make the additional investment or spending the time to manage them.



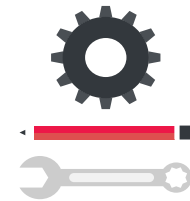
Cost Savings

Haven't you seen the amateur baking shows? How many failed attempts to make a meringue does it take before you ask an expert to help you make one or just pay them to make it for you?

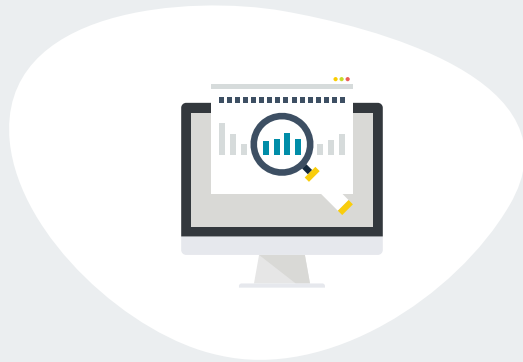
Wait, does that mean that hiring an outside agency means cost savings? Yes, it does, and we can break it down by the numbers. The minimum folks needed to run a successful B2B marketing strategy complete with blogging, downloadable guides, pay-per-click advertising, email marketing, website updates, and print advertising campaigns requires the following positions:



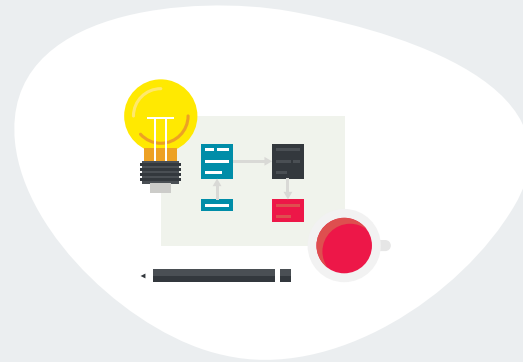
Graphic Designer to make sure all marketing materials are consistent with the brand, and source photos, videos, animations and manipulate them for each individual piece.



Project/Account Manager to ensure the strategy is executed properly, all tasks are completed, and the campaigns are driving results. This person is the client's advocate to ensure everything is seamless and easy for the client, while also completing a lot of the tasks in the campaigns.



Pay-per-click Specialist– to manage all PPC campaigns (AdWords, Bing, and Retargeting) to ensure budgets are maximized and driving the right leads (not just traffic).



Analytics Specialist to evaluate the efficacy of all programs, ensure everything is tracking properly so campaigns can be evaluated on their ROI and lead generation capabilities.



Technical Manager to make sure all things work together seamlessly and ensure the user experience is great and search engines can easily access the website.



Copywriter to draft and edit all copy and content to ensure the value proposition is clear and the text speaks to the desired audience.

Now, these are the minimum of specialists required on a successful B2B marketing campaign. There are many other specialists that can be drawn in as needed: media buyers, SEO managers, content strategists, video specialists, conversion specialists, printers, mail houses, and more.

So, let's break down the numbers. We are giving the range, so you can get an idea of entry-level, mid-level vs. highly experienced, skilled employees.

Graphic Designer	\$40,000 – 83,250
Web Developer	\$62,500 – 110,000
Copywriter	\$55,000 – 105,250
Pay-per-click Specialist	\$52,000 – 94,750
Analytics Specialist	\$49,000 – 104,250
Technical Manager	\$62,000 – 126,000
Project/Account Manager	\$53,500 – 98,000

If a company hires all these positions at entry level to manage their B2B marketing plan, the minimum yearly spend would be \$374,000.

For a company looking to hire the best of the best to work on their campaigns, the yearly salary costs (not including money spent directly on advertising) would be \$721,500. And this doesn't factor in the cost of benefits!

Entry Level

Minimum Yearly Spend \$374,000

Experienced Professional

Minimum Yearly Spend \$721,500

The End Results Are Delicious!

When you hire a skilled baker or work with an experienced chef, you expect the end result to be delicious. For that same reason, one of the main reasons for hiring a B2B marketing firm is to drive and track measurable client leads (all those scrumptious leads!). An outside marketing agency can build on the great work of an internal team and, without adding any additional overhead, drive additional leads or help to nurture existing leads. It's important to consider the revenue of a new lead. If a typical deal for a consulting firm is \$50,000 with a chance for recurring revenue from future projects, it makes sense to spend money to get more of those types of leads. Closing one lead can often pay for several months of fees for a B2B marketing agency.



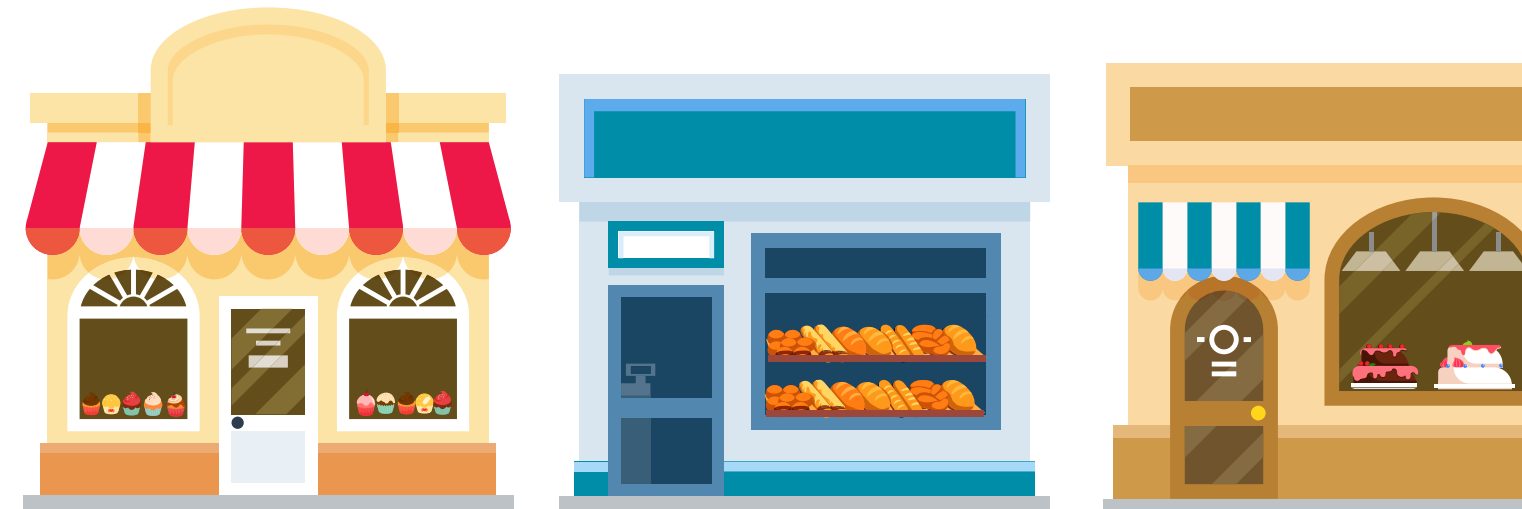
How to Choose the Right Baker

Picking the right baker to partner with for sweet success shouldn't be taken lightly or made hastily. You are trusting them with your vision and expect them to deliver a delectable end result. Similarly, the marketing agency you choose will be a trusted brand advocate and tasked with helping you to meet your strategic marketing objectives. At the end of the day, they will either make you look smart and help accomplish your goals or they won't.



Are All Bakers Created Equal?

Are all pastry chefs, cake pop makers, wedding cake designers, mom & pop donut shop owners, and home cookie business owners all the same? Definitely not. They each have their own skill and specialty. When it comes to agencies, while an agency may not be “better” or “worse” than another agency, they are not all the same. Agencies range in size, approach, skill set, and service offerings. As such, it's imperative that you find the right B2B marketing agency for your firm.



What Is Their Best Bake?

Start by asking the potential baking partner what they do best. What are their best creations? The same should be asked of a marketing partner. Be wary of B2B marketing agencies that offer everything since they will be master of nothing. While you want to work with an agency that is a resource for you and can help with all your projects, you want to make sure they excel at the main things you need them to work on. Here are the main questions to ask:



B2B OR B2C?

This is the first question to ask. If they say they do both, they may not entirely understand what makes the B2B space different from consumer-focused brands.

DIGITAL MARKETING?

If your main B2B marketing goals include online lead generation, it's essential that the agency you work with is on top of all the latest digital marketing trends and knows which ones are most effective for B2B firms.

WEB DESIGN?

Many agencies say they provide B2B web design services, but in truth, they end up farming it out to someone outside their agency. This can make the process slow or future edits difficult to make on the website.

PUBLIC RELATIONS?

There are great PR firms out there that are dabbling in the digital marketing space, including social media and web design. However, while they are superior in creating buzz and garnering media attention, they may not be able to drive results as far as lead generation as this is not the core function of public relations.

LEAD GENERATION?

Don't automatically assume that an agency is focused on lead generation. Be sure that when you are discussing your plans with a potential B2B marketing agency, you are clear that lead generation is the main objective and ask how they plan to track and increase leads for your firm.

INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE? DO THEY KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY?

Many agencies work within a handful of industry verticals as they have discovered these verticals are where they can provide the most value. If a B2B marketing agency hasn't worked with a client in your industry or in a similar industry, they may not be the right fit.

What Is Their Experience?

Did they just open up a cupcake shop or have they been serving up cupcakes for years with thousands of happy customers? Do they know the average donut purchaser or do they stick to cake-pop aficionados?

We've all been there when a salesperson has said yes to everything we've asked, only to find out after the sale that they can't deliver on half of the things we asked about. Rather than asking if they can do something, ask what they have already done.

Potential queries might include:

INDUSTRIES – Do they understand the taste buds and palate of your customers? As we've mentioned before, find out if they have any B2B marketing experience in your industry. Ask for examples of other clients that they have worked within your industry or a similar industry. They should have an organized portfolio ready to show you. If they haven't worked with your industry, ask what companies they have worked with that are similar and what results they have gotten for them.

PROJECTS – Has that potential partner baked something similar to what you are looking for? Have they worked on larger projects? Smaller projects? Long-term projects? National projects? Regional projects? You want to ensure they understand your objectives and can tailor the marketing services to meet your needs.

PERSONNEL – Is their baking staff ready to go? Who works for the agency? A lot of larger agencies will hire and lay off workers depending on their client load. While this is common, it's not always a best practice. Ideally, you want to work with a B2B agency that is flexible and adaptable but has an experienced, core group of designers, writers, project managers, developers, and technical specialists that will be managing the day to day work on your project.

OUTSOURCING – Do their bakers work offsite using different kitchens and inconsistent ingredients? We work in an age where borders and time zones aren't barriers, but merely factors. As such, it's not uncommon for agencies to outsource design, development, copywriting, technical editing or publishing. However, when it comes to your business and brand, consistency is essential. Ask what duties they specifically outsource and how they manage the process.



How Is Their Sales Process?

What it feels like to be a prospect tells a lot about what it feels like to be a client. If a potential baking partner doesn't ask about what styles and flavors you like up front, they probably won't deliver the right end product or service. If a B2B marketing agency has a smooth sales process that involves understanding your company and your goals, the partnership with that agency will likely be the same. However, if the sales process is bumpy and unpredictable with a lot of uncertainties, it doesn't leave much hope for their internal project management processes.

Talk to Existing Clients

Are their end products delicious? Find out. In addition to looking at their work, talk to existing clients. Seasoned, professional B2B marketing agencies will have a host of clients you are able to contact. Much like you would ask a potential employee for references, you should be asking a potential agency for references as well.

They Should Be Interviewing You as Well

In a true partnership, you both succeed. A successful baker is one that doesn't take every order or agree to work with every type of customer or partner. The best bakers have a specialty and they work on refining it to become best in class. As such, the right agency will be interviewing you to ensure your firm is the best fit as well. At Bop Design, we are careful during the lead qualification and proposal phase to be sure that the potential client is a good fit for our skill set. If we don't think our agency is the best fit, we let them know. At the end of the day, it's on us to ensure our projects are successful, so we only take on projects where we truly believe we can deliver.



Health Warning!

This wouldn't be a helpful recipe book if it didn't include a few warnings or red flags to watch out for during the B2B marketing agency vetting process.



Red Flags to Watch Out For

Quality baking takes time. Agencies that promise to meet tight deadlines without reducing the scope should be avoided at all costs as they will produce under baked strategies.

The best bakers are clear on what they are delivering as the final product. Vague proposals that don't detail what is included should be questioned.

When you want a great final product, you want an experience baker who knows what she is doing. Vastly different proposals from seemingly similar agencies indicate something isn't right and you should proceed with caution.

Are there too many cakes in the oven? Lack of follow-through in the sales process is a clear sign that the marketing partner may have too much on their plate already.

Do they eat their own baked goods? It's important to find out if the potential partner practices what they preach. Are they going to be running a dynamic social media campaign for you but haven't touched their own Twitter in six months? Will they be creating a B2B web design for you from scratch but have a website that has several broken links and missing images? A bit of research can tell you a lot about whether the agency really knows their stuff – or is just all talk.

Don't get burned by the wrong mix of ingredients, skill, and experience. Follow the recipes listed here to ensure you pick the right marketing partner for sweet success!

BOP DESIGN®

**Interested in finding out if Bop Design is the
right B2B marketing agency for your firm?**

Contact us today for a personalized consultation with our B2B experts.

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