
Rob Blackie

is director of social at OgilvyOne Worldwide where he works with the full range of clients, advising them and building their capacity. He was previously managing director, London, at Blue State Digital and head of digital at Blue Rubicon.

Papers

Do you know what you're doing in social?

Rob Blackie

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Abstract

Adoption of social by business-to-business marketers has tended to be restricted to specific actions or steps in the customer journey. This article considers how a wider use of social channels and the deployment of richer content could deliver leads more effectively.

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Group buying decisions

Influencing internal stakeholders

Doing it wrong

Social used without sophistication

Rob Blackie,
OgilvyOne, 10 Cabot Square,
London E14 4GB, UK
Tel: +44 (0)7931 552 314
E-mail: rob.blackie@ogilvy.com

Introduction

We all know that social media offers a huge opportunity for business-to-business (B2B) marketers for a simple reason — the biggest influences on us at work are our peers. They influence what we think in our professional environment and, in practice, many, if not most, B2B buying decisions are taken by a group of people, not just a single person holding a budget.

Thus, social channels where we interact with our peers are potentially an incredibly powerful way to unlock customer engagement. Some of this is likely to be relatively straightforward. If I read a thinkpiece from Google about the importance of having a mobile-friendly website, then it might influence me to commission a new mobile-friendly website for my company. Or it could be that I then tweet this and a colleague sees it — and when I need to find a budget, I have got more internal allies.

Social value benchmark findings

To better understand social opportunities in B2B marketing, OgilvyOne established the Social Value Benchmark — a process to assess companies' social activities against their direct competitors based on public information. It turns out you are probably doing it wrong. Assessed on 1,672 datapoints for 11 B2B companies, this research had some surprising findings:

- *Social is the new TV:* Social is most actively used in the early stages of customer journeys, with a score of 68 per cent at the awareness stage, falling to 13 per cent at the point of purchase. Social is still implicitly seen as a broadcast medium and is used relatively traditionally by B2B marketers. Whitepapers are put on LinkedIn and live events are tweeted, but there is nothing much more sophisticated being done by many companies.

Missing opportunities outside the owned

- *Are you navel gazing?* Even though B2B buyers routinely engage their peers in forums and are happy to engage brand's experts as well, most companies are reluctant to leave the social 'safe zone' and engage with customers outside their owned social channels. This is a missed opportunity as the vast majority of them are likely to be found outside these owned channels, so companies are ignoring questions or discussions where they can add value using their technical expertise. Given that many, if not most, B2B purchases require a buyer to be confident in a variety of technical aspects, as well as softer challenges such as usability of product and quality of customer support, this is a missed opportunity.

Channel disconnects

- *Join up the channels:* Channel disconnect is a common phenomenon, with a colder tone on websites compared to social. Often companies and their internal experts have excellent testimonials or reviews from their customers in social channels, but do not use these outside those social channels. Again, given the crucial role of peers in persuading B2B buyers, it seems likely that the main reason that websites are different from social channels is that they are often run by different teams.

Precise targeting is possible

- *Social has a role after purchase:* Very little effort is made to engage in social channels after purchase, with an average loyalty benchmark score of only 11 per cent. Many organizations simply do not have any plan to engage their customers in social after purchase. While social will clearly not be the only channel used after purchase, it is more than a little odd that it is so neglected. It is now possible to target social content as precisely as an email, in channels where customers are spending their time.

Five tips to make social work for B2B

B2B marketers can quickly improve their customer engagement with a few simple steps:

Ask meaningful questions

1. *Start linking social activity to business objectives:* Every social strategy should start from the business strategy, rather than a social channel. 'What can we do on LinkedIn?' is essentially a meaningless question compared to 'How do we use social to drive advocacy from satisfied customers?' or 'During which parts of our customer journey are our customers active in social?'

Don't neglect other channels

2. *Think bigger than LinkedIn:* LinkedIn is important, but it is not the only business channel. B2B marketers typically spend too much time on LinkedIn, when Twitter, forums, YouTube and other channels all have roles. While at least one source of B2B website analytics has LinkedIn in third place after Twitter and Facebook¹, Facebook is often completely neglected and simple tactics are often ignored on Twitter. YouTube is the world's second-biggest search engine, but marketers have rarely optimized their content so that it is found in YouTube searches by people searching in their category. This should involve creating

Purposeful content

collections of videos on a topic, like ‘Five ways to save money on your business travel budget’, as well as appropriate tagging.

3. *Content shouldn't be one-size-fits-all*: Content needs to be optimized to a purpose, such as lead generation or improved relationships with individual customer segments, rather than social platform metrics, like retweets.

While B2B marketers routinely pump out whitepapers, very few break these down to address specific parts of the customer journey. For instance, it is rare to see content or tools that are designed to drive advocacy from existing customers, or even inventive uses of content to drive event attendance.

Ensure content is measured

4. *Integrate, integrate, integrate*: Social needs to be integrated with CRM and sales programmes, rather than having separate streams of activity. Very few organizations currently use social to cement loyalty, even through activities as simple as having a separate Twitter feed or LinkedIn group that only customers can join. It's increasingly easy to track the impact of social content so that, for instance, you can understand when your sales force's tweeting of your latest publication is driving leads that subsequently convert. While sales forces increasingly spread their thought leadership through social channels, basic data management practices, such as tracked links, are often neglected, making it hard to understand which content, channels and individuals are driving valuable conversations.

Harnessing customer views

5. *Help your happy customers sell for you*: While most companies in the Social Value Benchmark have good levels of customer satisfaction and many use Net Promoter Score as a business metric, very few are prompting their customers towards advocacy. Not only are customers more credible than what you say, but they often add granular details about the quality of your products that either you may not appreciate or which are particularly relevant to their professional networks. While many marketers think of reviews as something primarily relevant to hotels and restaurants, endorsements from clients in social are potentially powerful weapons for B2B marketers. Customer forums are one example, but even simple tactics such as question-and-answer sessions with customers hosted on a YouTube channel would help many B2B marketers significantly.

The full research can be found at <http://www.slideshare.net/socialogilvy/social-value-benchmark>.

Reference

1. Optify, January 2013, Marketing Benchmark Report, cited by eMarketer.