

Social Media Matters

Despite the popularity of social media in business-to-consumer (B2C) settings, some business-to-business (B2B) companies are still hesitant to invest in social media. They are missing out on a huge opportunity to engage with their customers. Indeed, two in three business people want a social relationship with companies, yet 70% don't think B2B brands know how to communicate with them on social media, according to a 2013 [survey](#).

Julie Bevacqua, a Vancouver-based B2B marketing expert, argues that B2B brands need to engage their customers by sharing content—and social media is an extremely effective way to deliver content. “Content marketing is how buyers identify and evaluate your business and brand as they make a purchasing decision,” she adds. Jay Baer, *NY Times* best-selling author and marketing consultant, agrees: “I see content as fire, and social media as gasoline.”

A 2014 research report by Content Marketing Institute found that 91% of North American B2B marketers are using LinkedIn to distribute content, followed closely by Twitter (85%), Facebook (81%), and YouTube (73%). Savvy B2B firms are discovering how social media helps convert prospects by building strong communities and brand loyalty.

Chris Brogan, a leading authority in social media, says, “Content is my best B2B social media lesson. I've seen many companies learn that providing interesting content (like video testimonials or how-to information) is a great way to encourage prospects, warm up leads, and convert to sales opportunities.”

To build engagement and foster loyalty, B2B firms need to deliver content that informs and educates their target market. Instead of pushing product-centric content on your Twitter feed, a more effective tactic is to share content that solves a problem or fills a knowledge gap for your customers. As marketing guru Seth Godin says, “Social media isn't about you, it's about them.”

Bevacqua says, “An successful combined social media and content marketing strategy builds credibility, generates leads, and drives conversion by providing content that customers want to engage with and are eager to share with others through social networks like Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn.”

B2B companies have noted that their number-one benefit of social media marketing is generating more business exposure (reported by 85% of marketers), followed by increasing traffic (69%), and providing marketplace insight (65%), according to a 2012 study by Social Media Examiner.

A well-executed social media strategy draws eyeballs to your company and can transform your followers into powerful brand advocates. Indeed, a 2013 study by market research firm, Chadwick Martin Bailey, found that 67% of consumers were

more likely to buy brands they follow on Twitter and 79% were more likely to recommend brands they follow.

Bevacqua notes, “Social media is an incredibly powerful way to engage with your customers to build brand loyalty. You can establish brand awareness through Facebook interactions or exchange of tweets, but you can also connect on a deeper, more meaningful level as a *person*. Even in today’s high tech world, the old adage rings true: ‘People do business with people.’”

In addition to developing and promoting the brand to boost lead generation, B2B companies can use social media to create buzz around upcoming events or promotions, develop direct relationships with local media and bloggers for public relations efforts, and provide real-time customer service. Social media can also be an invaluable resource for gain insights into customers’ interests, challenges, and needs.

“While social media is not the silver bullet that some pundits claim it to be, it is an extremely important and relatively low-cost touch point that has a direct impact on sales and positive word of mouth. Companies not actively engaging are missing a huge opportunity,” says Josh Mendelsohn, VP at market research firm, Chadwick Martin Bailey.