



HOW B2B MARKETERS ARE FINDING SOCIAL SUCCESS



Can we be honest? When it comes to social media marketing, many B2B companies resemble the shy, awkward kid in the corner at the party. You're not sure whom to talk to or what to say, and you're probably thinking about escaping out the back door. You may also be questioning whether your vast knowledge of metallurgy or chemical compounds is interesting to anyone present, so why bother? Well, hesitant party-goer, we're here to tell you to be brave and put yourself out there, because the results are worth the effort! Sure, B2Bs may not be as recognizable and alluring as B2C companies, but social media can still be highly effective if you know what you're doing.



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Pick the Right Party

When social media platforms first emerged, consumer brands were quick to see the potential beyond college students connecting and friends oversharing vacation photos. Engaging potential customers and developing a following of fans made perfect sense for these companies. Meanwhile, B2B marketers were much slower to join the conversation; naturally so, since results were difficult to track, especially for their more complicated buying process. In the B2B world, having lots of likes and a legion of followers is not enough to spell success. Now, however, technology has caught up, enabling marketers to collect data and target leads using social media. As Andy Lombard, founder and CEO of SocialWhirled, says, "Marketers are seeing a tremendous uptick in demand for B2B social media campaigns designed to nurture prospects, collect user interest and attribute data, and reapply that data to shorten the sales cycle." In other words, it's time to join the party.

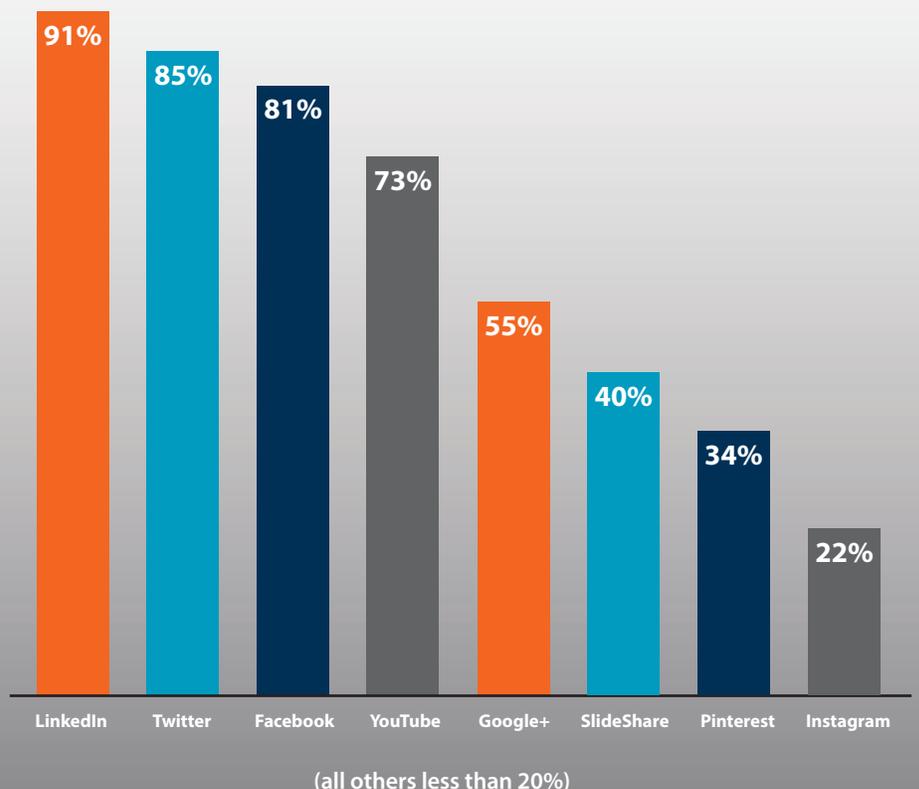
According to NewsCred, 87% of B2B marketers use social media to distribute content. However, many B2B brands are still trailing behind their B2C counterparts when it comes to social media strategy and results. What's holding you back?

But not just any social gathering will do. While it's tempting to "be everywhere" these days, the key is to find out where your existing and potential customers are hanging out and then engage them in relevant, ongoing conversations. As always, the first step is developing a strategy. Instead of crashing every party in town, you'll be much more effective (and less exhausted) if you determine which social platforms are the most useful for your particular company or product, what your messages will entail, how often you'll interact, and when, and most of all, how you'll measure results.

In his article "Crushing the Myth of B2B Social Media," Jay Baer asserts that "social media can be MORE transformative for a B2B company than a B2C company... because B2B has a smaller potential customer base, a higher average price point, and a customer decision funnel that is more influenced by word of mouth and reputation." We would add that a longer buying process also affords a B2B company more opportunities to communicate and requires more complex layers of interaction.

So where in the world of social media are B2B companies finding success? According to a 2014 survey conducted by the Content Marketing Institute, LinkedIn is the only platform that the majority of B2B marketers considered to be effective. While the use of social media platforms across the board increased, the top three remained overwhelmingly popular.

% of B2B Marketers to Use Various Social Media Sites to Distribute Content



Source: 2014 B2B Content Marketing Research: Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends—North America, Content Marketing Institute



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Mingle Effectively

Of course, it takes more than being in the right place at the right time to get results—it's also about how you work the room. With LinkedIn, B2B marketers find the most success creating and joining discussion groups or forums, publishing exclusive content, and maximizing professional networks. For instance, if you regularly monitor and participate in forums and discussion groups, you have the opportunity to answer questions and offer suggestions. Therefore, the next time someone needs a product or service you provide, your company is likely to be top-of-mind. Likewise, you have a chance to learn from your customers, especially those who complain in public forums. By addressing concerns, you increase customer advocacy and build credibility. Another benefit of these forums is longevity. Information on many forums and discussion groups might remain posted for years; and because the information is so specific, it earns high rankings in Google and other search engines. One bit of advice: it's often more effective to have one person dedicated to participating in discussion groups or

forums. Not only does this create a more personal touch, but it helps build recognition and trust.

While YouTube is currently being used by only 73% of B2B marketers, a case can be made for incorporating this platform more often in your social media strategy. Most of the B2B clients we talk to use video to share something on social media, educate or explain something during the sales process, illustrate product features at trade shows, or as a means to keep people on their website longer. These are all valid and effective uses for video. However, what you may not know is that YouTube is also a highly successful search strategy. In fact, it is the second largest search engine, processing more than 3 billion searches a month and logging more search results served than Bing, Yahoo, Ask and AOL combined. (For more, go to <http://mushroomnetworks.com/infographics/youtube---the-2nd-largest-search-engine-infographic>) This means that producing and posting entertaining, instructional, and even educational videos can help improve your search rankings and generate leads.

When it comes to Facebook and Twitter, the number one question we get asked is "Do you have to pay to play?" or is there a way to grow a following organically without spending a ton of money on social advertising. Most experts agree that simply investing in social advertising isn't worth much unless you have some great content to support it. With that in mind, a better investment might be using an agency to help you develop a content marketing strategy and continually create awesome content!

That being said, there's no doubt that advertising is a great way to get more eyes on your content, especially on Facebook, where it's almost imperative to get noticed. Social posts with paid support can help you deliver a targeted campaign to a highly qualified audience; but you have to make sure there's an alignment between your advertising strategy, the audience you are trying to attract, the content you're sharing, and the KPIs (key performance indicator) you're trying to accomplish. So, yes, you should consider paying to play on Facebook and Twitter, but be sure to have the other elements of your strategy in place, as well as a way to measure your effectiveness. This is where a CRM (customer relationship management) system can be invaluable.

92% of B2B marketers say that increased exposure is the number one benefit of social media marketing, while 80% cite increased traffic, 72% name development of loyal fans, and 71% point to gaining marketplace insights.



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Take Some Tips from the Popular Kids

While they may have different goals, some of the social media techniques B2C marketers employ work equally well for B2B companies.

#1 Hire the Right Person—Sure, you can simply add “social media” to the already long list of a staffer’s responsibilities, but like anything else, social media is a marketing technique that requires skill and dedication to be effective. Many B2B companies hire someone with industry expertise rather than social media experience, which can backfire. The right person should have the experience and know-how to build and protect your company’s reputation online. When you find that person, let him or her humanize your company by being the online voice (and face) of your brand. After all, people like to interact with other people, not robots.

#2 Make Sure You Have

Meaningful Content—Don’t be that guy at the party who tells the same tired jokes or rehashes reality show episodes. Fresh, meaningful content is the foundation of social media marketing. Your goal is to motivate potential or existing customers to engage, learn, share their comments, and come back for more. Social media should be part of an overall content marketing strategy, including blog posts, video, webinars, white papers, and more. Remember, though, that content should not be overtly promotional, but rather provide value to the reader. (To learn more about content marketing, [..possible link here](#)).

#3 Think Visually—Studies show that the brain reacts immediately and viscerally to visual information, so it’s important to include photos and other visual elements, such as infographics in your posts to attract and maintain attention.



#4 Engage in Ongoing

Conversations—Instead of a single 60- or 90-day campaign, plan for a series of social campaigns across the calendar. Most B2B companies need to keep prospects interested throughout lengthy sales cycles. Also, this gives you time to actually use the data you’re collecting to generate targeted leads and nurture buyers.

#5 Be Mobile—People are spending more and more time on their mobile devices, using them primarily (and sometimes exclusively) to read emails, browse websites, and interact on social media. Therefore, your social media campaigns must be mobile-friendly—meaning they must look and feel like they belong on a mobile device.



#6 Find an Interesting

Angle—Okay, we understand that building supplies or auto parts are not as exciting as the latest flavor of Starbucks’ frappuccino, but that doesn’t mean you can’t be creative. Even the most boring B2B can find an interesting angle that is understandable and enticing to a broad audience—which is why it’s important to hire someone who knows social media and how it works (see #1). It helps to think more like B2C companies who often feature people outside of their organization. Also, instead of just showing processes and technology, don’t be afraid to show the human side of your company by featuring stories about employees or loyal customers. Finally, it never hurts to create a little anticipation by posting teasers before a product roll-out or event.

#7 Provide Incentives—While B2C companies often offer coupons to entice buyers, B2B companies can provide incremental access to information. As you slowly dole out valuable content, you’re also gathering user data that can help you customize future interactions.





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Leads Will Follow

As a B2B company, you may never garner millions of followers, but that's not your goal. When it comes to social media, you're going for quality vs. quantity. It can be hard for many B2B companies to swallow, but the primary objective of social media campaigns is not leads. Leads are a byproduct of getting your name out there, engaging with potential customers, and positioning yourself as an expert. Once you've gained a presence, leads will follow.

If, after reading this, you still feel like the shy kid in the corner at the party, consider hiring an agency to help you not only navigate social media, but develop a strong content marketing strategy and track your results. With more resources at their disposal, an outside company can often do more for less than you can manage in-house. This is especially true as social media continues to expand and become more fragmented. Who knows, with a little help and some creativity you might even go viral, or at the very least, get invited to another party.

Sources

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