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communications



From Bots to Behavior:

B2B Digital Marketing Trends for 2019

WHITE PAPER

From Bots to Behavior: B2B Digital Marketing Trends for 2019

The marketing industry's leading thinkers on content, digital marketing and marketing technology are abuzz. As marketers look to making an impact in 2019, it's important to understand new trends and best practices in lead generation and how to use these strategies to build a strong digital presence.

Marketers know that our work is never done. There's always a new technology, a new social media platform, a new design trend to try. With the constantly changing digital landscape, what should you be considering as you identify new initiatives for your marketing program?

Technology, Technology, Technology

Technology has become a central aspect of marketing. Embracing tech love can help your marketing become measurably better. But today everyone has a website, everyone has a landing page, everyone puts content offers on their blogs. If you want to win, you need to do more than these basics.

Increasingly, the impact of a marketer will come from how sophisticated we can be in not just generating the lead, but in pushing that lead through the funnel to close – in less time, and with less money. The amount of technology offerings designed to help accomplish that grows every year. According to Scott Brinker of ChiefMartec.com that number is now over 6,800. No wonder marketing seems so complicated.



And things aren't showing signs of slowing down as 2019 looks to be a year of significant new technology adoption in marketing:

- HubSpot's [acquisition of Motion.AI](#) has brought the use bots to the forefront. In fact, 85% of online interactions will be with chatbots by 2020, according to Gartner. And in HubSpot's own testing of its upcoming Messages function, they saw a 20% conversion rate **to customer** (not lead!) compared to just 0.7% from gated content.

¹ <http://chiefmartec.com/2017/05/marketing-technology-landscape-supergraphic-2018/>



- The growing adoption of virtual assistants like Siri, Amazon's Echo or Google Home means marketers need to include Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a core distribution channel. Content is now being searched for and delivered via the voice of an AI; consumers can even make purchases directly using this functionality.
- Even seemingly-unrelated technologies, like Blockchain, are poised to start disrupting B2B businesses. Blockchain, while created as the system to support cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, is actually expected to change the way many industries do business. Its decentralized nature makes it more secure and adaptable than traditional tech. While Bitcoin may bust, Blockchain is here to stay.

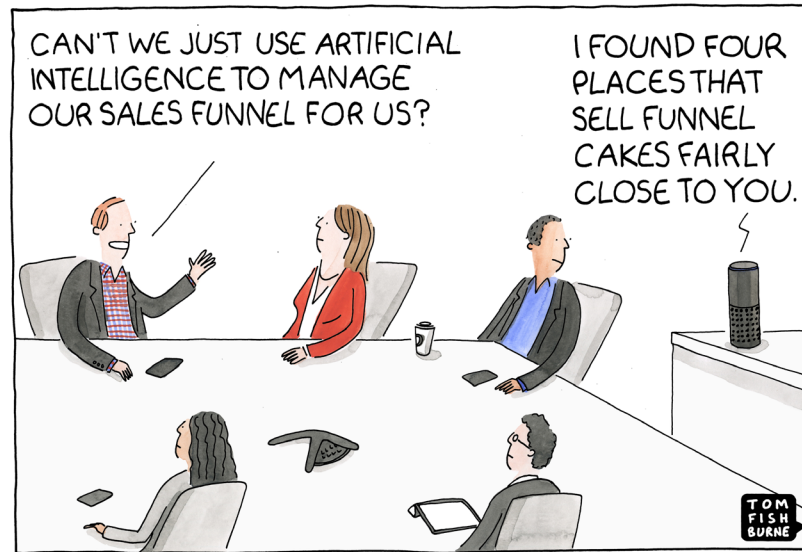


Figure 1

© marketoonist.com

Debunking Bots

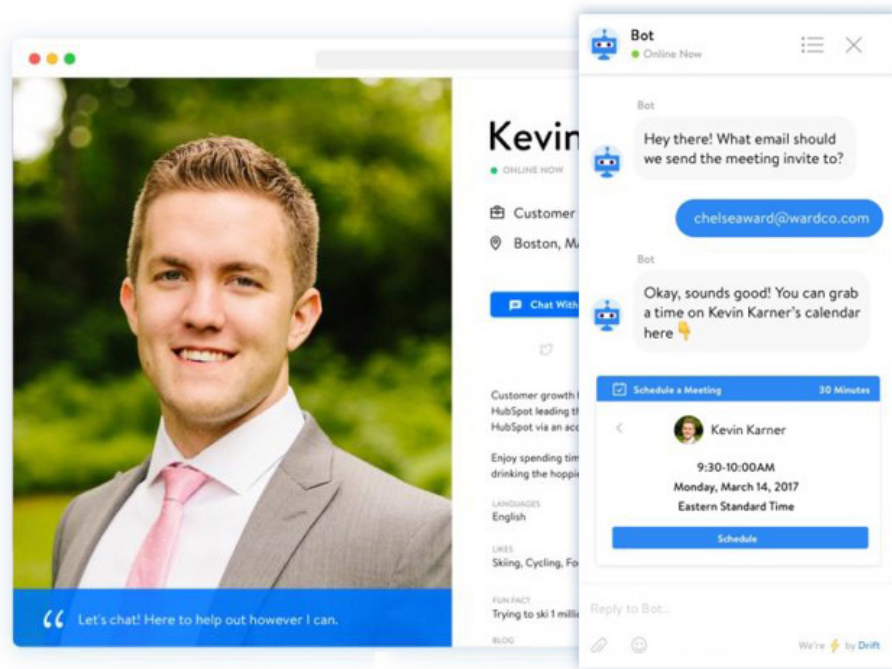
There's a lot of information and speculation on the use of bots in marketing. As we discussed above, bots are poised to help increase conversion rates drastically. But what is a bot, and where do you start?

A bot has different definitions in different markets/environments. In the case of marketing, a bot refers to an automated computer assistant.² You may also hear the term "chatbot," but functionally there isn't a significant difference between them. A chatbot is simply a bot that is designed specifically to chat. However, the end user experience functions essentially the same – the user interacts with bots via a text-based interface.

If you've ever used Slack, you've encountered Slackbot. HubSpot has GrowthBot, which can research and answer questions about marketing-related topics. Or if you've recently purchased a new Windows laptop, for instance, you may have been guided through the setup process by a bot like Cortana. The basic premise behind all of these examples is that there is artificial intelligence interacting with a human to guide their experience.

This can be especially useful for B2B marketers, who deal with longer evaluation and sales cycles than their B2C counterparts. Just imagine the value you could provide by using a bot to answer your most commonly asked questions, or by automating a product builder or selector. Or perhaps you want to implement ecommerce in a new way – bots can even accept payments and tender entire transactions. Below is an example of how a company, RewardStream, used a bot to schedule meetings with leads.

² <https://www.techadvisor.co.uk/feature/software/what-are-bots-3638979/>



The applications of bots are virtually endless, but B2B marketers should take care to avoid the flashiness of it all. Always consider the value you're bringing to your customer. Make sure you're enhancing and improving their experience, not detracting from it.

Creating Meaningful Stories

On the other end of the marketing spectrum from technology is storytelling. Marketers often overlook the value of building relationships, not just content. We need to shift our thinking from content creation to how we can leverage content to deepen a relationship.

Get past the idea of "throwing content out to see what sticks," Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute, warns, saying that what people REALLY want is to be able to connect – with colleagues, with experts, with brands that matter to them. Moving from content en masse to personal content and meaningful storytelling, marketers can find more traction. After all, once you have a content marketing strategy, the next step is to create valuable content that connects with the human on the other side of the screen.

It's a concept being echoed across B2B marketing: the need to re-think the type and volume of content we're generating. Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer for MarketingProfs, urges marketers to "be writers first and marketers second," saying that less content that's tied to better quality will prove more valuable. And, Jay Baer, bestselling author, says that "most marketing fails" because only a third of marketers say their content is effective.

People relate to storytelling, and equally they relate to the storyteller. Creating a personality that's fresh, consistent and relatable is a powerful way to add authenticity to your brand.

75% of B2B Marketers

already have a content marketing strategy, but only 34% say that those strategies are sophisticated.

B2B Content Marketing 2018: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America

Figure 2. Source: <https://www.ventureharbour.com/5-b2b-chatbot-case-studies-do-chatbots-increase-conversions/>



Maintaining a Human Connection

Technology remains important, but at the same time we're hearing some comments, almost said with a tinge of embarrassment or in whispers, that traditional methods of selling and marketing are making a comeback as a response to clogged inboxes. It's no surprise that many people are craving a more human connection in an increasingly digital world. It's important to consider that desire when building a 2019 marketing strategy.

82% of people

seek recommendations and

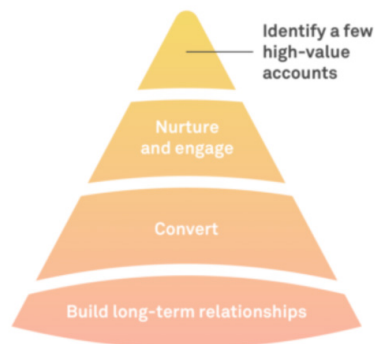
74% say word-of-mouth was a driving factor in their purchasing decision.

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Ambassador

We see this desire for human connection embodied in various trends:

- **Influencer marketing** is now 4x larger than it was in 2016. 67% of marketers believe influencer marketing campaigns help them reach a more targeted audience³. And influencer marketing can be helpful at all stages of the buyer's journey: educating during awareness, guiding during consideration, and offering recommendations during decision.
- As the digital marketing landscape becomes increasingly crowded, capitalizing on existing **referral networks** can help B2B companies bust through the noise. Similar to influencer marketing, providing resources and expertise to the right individuals can help drive new leads to your business. This is especially useful if your business aligns, but doesn't compete with, other similar businesses. Giving those partners ready-made, white label content allows them to easily recommend your business to their existing clients and customers.

ACCOUNT BASED MARKETING FUNNEL



- **Account-based marketing** flips the traditional marketing funnel on its head, literally. This model has marketers focus on a select group of high-value prospects with targeted, specific and personalized messaging and touchpoints. And the proof is in the numbers: 84% of businesses say that account-based marketing delivers higher ROI than other types of marketing.⁴
- Visit to contact conversion rates have been steadily increasing for **social media** – meeting your prospects (especially millennials and Gen X'ers) on their preferred networks is becoming more and more important.
- Even **website development and design** need to account for the human behind the screen. We already know how responsive, mobile-friendly design is essential for any web experience. But as we move forward, developers and designers will need to provide interactive, engaging websites that work on multiple devices. Gone are the days of bland stock photography and static pages.

Going forward, we'll see more customer events and human-based marketing programs coupled with digital marketing, simply because many programs are reaching a plateau in lead flow.

³ <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/306688>

⁴ <https://www.slideshare.net/itsma/itsma-abm-survey-fueling-the-account-based-marketing-fire-abbreviated-summary>



Optimize for People, Not Browsers

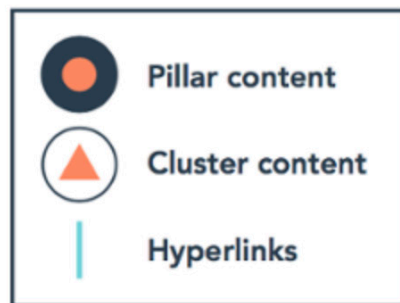
Google is serious about making its algorithm act as human as possible. The rise of virtual assistants has made that even more necessary. As people are asking Alexa questions, they're not asking a search engine or computer but rather act as if they're talking to a real person. It's no longer sustainable to stuff your keywords and compound your internal links, instead you need to consider natural language flow.

It doesn't stop there. [Google Lens](#) uses a smartphone's camera to provide relevant information to the user. For instance, when pointing at a restaurant, the phone displays key info: menus, pricing, reviews, etc. If Google Lens succeeds, you'll need to make sure your brand or product is showing up not only in browsers, but also live image searches.

That's why creating content clusters – multiple different content pieces with interrelated topics, all linking back to a core topic – will be necessary for marketers in the future. This will give Google the signals it needs to recognize your main topic (keyword), while still serving the human on the other side of the search. Your SEO will thank you.



Topic Clusters



Inboxes are Cluttered, So Email Must Evolve

We've all heard it: email is dying. **Or is it?** Turns out, the inbox may just be evolving with the rest of the industry. Virtually every single person looking for your products has at least one email address, so until that changes email will remain a core marketing channel.

According to Adobe's 2017 Consumer Email Survey, 61% of consumers want to be contacted by brands via email. But gone are the days of the one-and-done mass email blast. It's not hard to guess the replacement: personalized messaging, speaking to the human behind the email address. Marketing automation tools offer ways to include personal information, like a first name or salutation, and many are starting to offer integrations or embedded functionality that brings AI to email. For instance, there are marketing technologies that can use an individual's reading and engagement history to **automatically** craft targeted messages in a specific tone for that individual.

As marketers work on their email strategies, it's important to keep in mind your targeted persona, the main action you want them to take and where they are in the journey. Even without AI, by writing with these considerations in mind, your messaging will be even more powerful.

It's Never Been Easier to Be Average

Many marketers are looking for answers from influencers or best practices from successful companies on how to make their content stand out. But, best practices are what worked yesterday. By the time you tell a group of marketers that 3pm on Tuesday is the best time to publish social media posts, that time is no longer the best time to publish your posts. Instead of looking to others for answers, we need to be willing to create our own answers.

We don't lack for data. Most marketers have the analytics about our specific audiences to create our own best practices. This is how you stand out from being average or publishing the same content everyone else is publishing.

Only 49% of marketers

believe they are able to use data
to guide marketing strategy.

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MIT Sloan Management Review

There's Science Behind What Persuades

We all understand the role of creativity in building good marketing, and there's an element of persuasion science behind how our brains are wired that marketers need to understand. Why does someone click on your email or respond to an ad? What are the words and images that function as brain triggers to first move your prospect into your funnel?

More and more frequently, people prefer personal over pretty – so casual, informal and personal writing, even slang, tends to work well. Personalized content performs 42% better than non-personalized content, according to [HubSpot](#). 61% of customers rely more on a company that is inclined to create custom and individualized content.

On the other hand, don't overreact and move to only text-based marketing though – humans process visuals 60,000 times faster, so building in animations, videos, hand-drawn arrows pointing to your call-to-action are all helpful for triggering those brain waves.



What About Millennials?

Millennial marketing is all the rage, of course, with everyone looking for the magic keys to unlock their mysterious ways, before they “kill off” yet another industry. The human connection again comes into play, as millennials are becoming a larger part of the overall workplace, and increasingly are in decision-making positions. Their influence on the job market is staggering:



- 70% of millennial employees are disengaged
- During 2012-2014, 2 million people quit their jobs each month during a period of time that was still a tough job market
- 34% of the workforce are freelancers, with that growing to 40% by 2020
- 75% of the workforce will be millennials by 2025 (about 7 years!)

The move to a freelance-driven workforce is interesting. The marketing industry has always relied on freelancers, so in our sector that 40% percentage may even be higher. In an environment where we're struggling to maintain institutional knowledge, as Baby Boomers retire, a freelance-based workforce will pose even more challenges to producing good, consistent work.

Marketers are already aware of how millennials are impacting our work:⁵

- 67% use smartphones to access the Internet
- 82% access the Internet with laptop computers; 47% with tablets
- 52% use their mobile devices on social media to note that they “like” a brand
- 59% report that the brands they buy reflect their style and personality

If the average age of your database is in the forties to fifties, you have a millennial marketing problem in that you're not attracting and engaging the next generation of decision-makers. As your current buyers/customers retire, millennials with purchasing power may never have heard of you but may have heard of your competitors.

And you'd better be aggressive about millennial marketing, because Generation Z is right behind them. *Forbes* magazine in 2015 reported that Generation Z (born from mid-1990s to early 2010s) currently represents 25% of the US population.

How Important Is Lead Generation?

Perhaps marketers are focused too much on top of funnel content to get people into our funnels? That's the premise Joe Pulizzi posed when he asked:

“What if everything we know to be true about marketing is actually what's holding back our business?”

His point is that content marketers are focused too much on initial lead gen rather than on nurturing contacts to move through their buyers' journeys. So often, that's how we're judged as marketers, and how we define our value to the C-suite. Pulizzi pointed to his recent study, conducted with MarketingProfs, that showed 90% of marketers feel their content is effective in BUILDING their audiences.

⁵ https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/marketing_center_consumer_customer_insight_how_millennials_changing_marketing_forever/?chapter=3



More content is being produced than ever before. With so much content available, how do we re-direct content to qualify, not just acquire? How do we provide value to our lead to actually enhance their journey? For any prospect database at any company, some percentage of that database is in the active process of considering to buy. Whether it's 5%, 10%, or 25%, we've paid to acquire the lead, but is the digital program built well enough to identify those active buyers at the right time?

By considering the buyer's journey, and truly understanding the pain points and motivations driving our personas, marketers can create the right content for the right stage of the journey. After all, 60% of prospects actually want to talk to a sales person during the consideration stage, after they've completed their initial research.⁶

Considering the Customer Experience

For years, B2B marketers have been laser-focused on lead generation. Continued pressure from the C-Suite for new leads has led marketers to spend much of their time and effort on inbound lead generation. But as Joe Pulizzi's question illustrates, marketers need to consider the entirety of the buying cycle. And there's one piece that marketers especially tend to overlook: the customer experience.

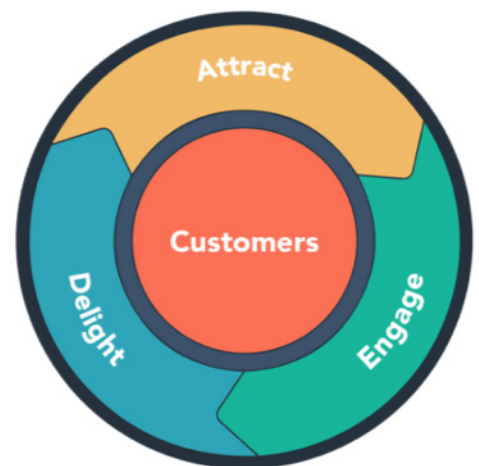
Consider this: **84% of B2B decision-makers now begin their buying process with a referral.** Once you acquire those customers, their lifetime value is on average 16% higher than that of non-referred customers.

Those referrals are almost entirely going to come from your **current customers.**

Looking to 2019 and beyond, B2B marketers need to consider the holistic experience from prospect to customer. If you're familiar with the inbound methodology, you know that "delight" is a core stage in that process. To be successful, marketers will need to recognize the importance of happy customers and service them accordingly. By focusing at least a portion of your marketing strategy and dollars on engaging existing customers, you create a system that will drive lead growth through increasingly-important referrals.

If you've attended a webinar, training or marketing conference over the past year, you've probably heard the phrase "the funnel is dead." For HubSpot, the funnel has been replaced with the flywheel, at the center of which lives the customer.

For many organizations, this is a hard pill to swallow. It's taken years to get marketing and sales aligned on the funnel. The harsh reality is that the funnel isn't going anywhere. But what is happening is that marketers are discovering new ways to approach the system, in ways that supplement, challenge and evolve the more traditional funnel approach.



Putting It All Together

The competitive advantage for B2B companies is to find where technology, storytelling and marketing intersect. How do I create content that resonates with the right persona, at the right time, and still feels genuine? How can I do more than just send out emails, but do so in a more sophisticated, nuanced way that improves conversions? How can I do more than create videos, but promote them in ways that affordably get them in front of targets? How can I do more than just generate leads, but push them through the sales funnel faster?

⁶ HubSpot sales perception survey 2016



The answers to each of these questions are typically tied to new and better applications of technology tools, making our efforts have more impact and leverage than how everyone else is using digital marketing techniques. The best part is that by utilizing both human storytelling and technology, B2B marketers are well-equipped to succeed and outpace their competition.



Summary

As B2B marketers look to succeed in 2019, one theme will continue to come to the forefront: the importance of creating valuable content that speaks to the individual's stage in their buying journey. Personalization, artificial intelligence and valuable storytelling can provide the tools necessary for B2B marketers to not just succeed, but thrive, in an increasingly crowded marketing landscape. By creating meaningful messages for your personas, you can generate leads and build relationships to grow your business.



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About Us

Goldstein Group Communications (GGC) creates high impact branding and lead generation programs for B2B companies that are seeking more powerful ways to find and keep customers. The company specializes in Marketing to Engineers and has a long track record in writing engineer-to-engineer technical copy that other agencies struggle to produce. GGC was founded in 1992 as a public relations agency and today represents both entrepreneurial and billion-dollar multi-national firms throughout the country, with 50% of revenues coming from clients outside Ohio. GGC combines both left-brain analytics with right-brain creativity to provide a powerful marketing approach that leads to "Measurably Better Marketing."



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