6 Major Differences Between B2C and B2B Sales Strategies

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One of the most crucial aspects of your work as sales manager is to come up with an on-target sales strategy. Your B2B B2C strategy is a make or break. You may have the best talkers, presenters and deal makers in your team. (Heck, you may have Don Draper and Jim Halpert in your team.) It's going to be a long and difficult sales cycle if you have a mismatched sales strategy.

To get to a strategy that fits your business, your first step is to distinguish between B2B and B2C. The sales strategies that you employ are distinctly different, depending on your target audience. Here are 6 key differences to keep in mind.

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 1: Lead Pool

The lead pool size is a major differentiator between B2B and B2C sales strategies. With B2Cs, you are presumably targeting millions of people who need your product. Let's say, as example, that you're selling cornflakes. To zoom in on your target audience, just count the number of people who have breakfast every day. And, in case you want to broaden the market, you can get marketing to design a campaign that sells cornflakes as snack and dinner alternatives. Now, you potentially have a lead pool made up of billions of people.

For B2Bs, the lead pool size shrinks by the millions, and is more defined by the companies' specific requirements. As example, let's presume that you're selling one of those cornflake/ oats making machines. This limits your lead pool to companies, such as Trader Joe's, Kellogg's and Nestle. You don't even have those artisan cornflake makers in your lead pool, unless you can convince them to turn to machines.

Given this reality, a blanket approach won't work. Similar companies will go after that puddle-sized lead pool. So, you need to be specific in your pitch to each of the companies in your pool.

For both B2B B2C sales teams, here's a good reminder from SEOmoz CEO and co-founder Rand Fishkin regarding dealing with your lead pool: "Best way to sell something: don't sell anything. Earn the awareness, respect and trust of those who might buy."

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 2: Required Product Knowledge

Your sales team needs to know about what they're selling. This is the same, regardless of whether you're B2B or B2C. As Brian Halligan, CEO and co-founder of HubSpot, says: "People shop and learn in a whole new way compared to just a few years ago, so marketers need to adapt or risk extinction."

Both B2B and B2C sales teams need to know their product like the back of their hand. They should know their features, design details, advantages and disadvantages. Competitor knowledge is necessary too. Buyers are more sophisticated these days – be it B2B or B2C. They will know some details about your product and ask questions.

The difference lies in the depth of knowledge required. Buyers in B2B and B2C have different information requirements. A mom buying cornflakes, for instance, will want to know the calorie and sugar count of the product, as well as its price and taste. Your sales team can train to respond to these queries in a day or two. After a week, they may be already be expert in your product.

Compare this to a B2B sales team. Your team needs to know the specifications and technical details of the product. They need to know how this would fit into the systems – hardware, software and human-powered – and processes of your target companies. And, it is almost always different from one company to the next.

Months of training won’t cut it. An effective B2B sales team needs continuous training, thorough product knowledge, and experience in product presentations and fielding questions from executive-level prospects.

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 3: Number of Decision-Makers

In a typical B2C buying scenario, you only deal with one decision maker. In our cornflake example, it is the mom, her tastes, budget and preferences that you need to consider. Perhaps, her hubby or kids will also factor into the cornflake buying decision – but not always.

In the case of B2Bs, the decision-making process is a lengthy process that involves several stakeholders. According to CEB (now Gartner) executive advisor and author Brent Adamson, the average number of B2B stakeholders is 6.8, as of 2016. This number has likely increased today.

There are several factors to explain this, such as globalization, the decentralization of decision making and solutions packages (instead of singular products). Whatever the case, your B2B sales team should employ a strategy that factors in several key decision-makers.

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 4: Expected Response

The response to your sales strategies is expectedly on opposite ends when it comes to your B2B and B2C efforts.

You strive for an emotional response from your B2C clients. Sure, you might offer some facts here and there. Perhaps you will tell your prospects that cornflakes are good fiber sources and that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. But, the end goal of your marketing outreach is to gain customer loyalty. You want them to love and prefer your product, even if there are better breakfast options.

It’s different with B2B clients. Corporate purchases – such as cornflakes/ oats making machines in our example – are usually on the top end of the price scale. They’re investments that need thorough consideration, especially when it comes to the expected costs, returns, advantages and disadvantages. These are things that shouldn’t be left to emotions.

B2B buyers are more likely to approach their purchasing decision with rationality. Keep this in mind when drafting sales strategies that target corporate buyers.

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 5: Decision-making Process

In the B2C scenario, the decision-making process is quick – in some case, even impulsive. People buy out of habit or they buy in-the-moment. Their decision is influence by advertising, word-of-mouth or habits/ cravings. To sell to this kind of audience, you need product awareness and presence.

With B2Bs, however, the wooing period is longer. There are several people making the decision, and you need to convince each one of them. You will go through a lot of phone calls, meetings and demos if you’re keen on closing the deal. And, this can take months.

B2B B2C Strategy Difference 6: Length of the Business Relationship

Typically, B2C business relationships are looked upon as one-off transactions. The focus is right there at the point of purchase. Outside that, preferences and loyalties can change. The cornflake-buying mom today may decide on another brand next week; or, she may choose to switch to eggs and toasts for breakfast.

With B2Bs, it’s different. The whole purchasing process is an investment for both sides. Your sales team puts in months of their time and effort attending to the requirements of the prospect. You nurture your lead, and provide necessary information and content. You follow-up, meet and present to all stakeholders. Your buyers put in their time and effort too to find the best-fit solution for their needs.

The underlying expectation of this mutual investment is that it’s for a long-term relationship. It’s never a one-off transaction because there’s going to be a consistent need for maintenance, support and upgrades. The stakeholder’s purchasing decision takes a long time because it’s a crucial one: that of choosing a business partner.

Of course, this can also apply to B2C transactions, at a lesser degree. You create relationships with your clients, whether B2B or B2C. This is where your business’ success lies. As speaker, writer and Chief Content Office of MarketingProfs, Ann Handley, puts it: “Make the customer the hero of your story.”