



The Complete Guide to
B-to-B Web Strategy





Introduction

In this paper, we've presented the complete picture of B-to-B web strategy... from defining your goals, through a useful "how-to" cookbook, right up to measuring the results. Whether you're a rank beginner, or working to further improve your existing web marketing effort, you should find some ideas here that will help you do your job more effectively.

We've addressed the entire process, including...

- Setting goals
- Profiling your audience(s)
- Designing your web site for usability
- Driving the audience to the site – through search engine optimization, pay per click advertising and integration with offline means
- Engaging visitors with relevant, benefit-oriented content and simple navigation
- Capturing visitors' strategic data
- Nurturing your leads over the total length of your sales cycle
- Promoting leads as they mature; involving Sales at the optimal time
- Measuring the results

You need to read this paper if....

- You're initiating a new web site design ...or re-design
- Your site has been up for awhile, but isn't meeting expectations
- Your site is doing "all right", but you feel it could be doing better
- You suspect that your company's process for converting inquiries to sales simply grew like "topsy" and really needs to be re-thought
- Your management wants to see a clear demonstration of ROI before committing to further web investment
- You're not sure about how to integrate SEO with PPC, or online with offline
- You've just taken over your company's web strategy, but have limited experience
- You're fairly experienced, but want to make sure you're not missing any tricks of the trade

Goals & objectives

It's an old saw, but true nonetheless: without goals, you can't know that you're where you wanted to be, even if you do get there. So before setting out on a web marketing program – and at least annually throughout it – it's a good idea to sit down and define what it is that you're trying to accomplish.

It's also important to recognize a few truisms at the outset...



- many more people will visit your site than the handful that you specifically want to market to;
- those other visitors are likely to talk to the relatively few real prospects, which makes them influencers ...making their goals also important.

It turns out that neither group completely shares your (company's) goals, which makes your task one of finding the area of intersection where both your goals and those of your web site's visitors can be mutually satisfied, as fully as possible.

Your company's goals:

For a B-to-B company, by far most of the point of doing Web strategy is to identify prospective customers and capture their salient information, so that they can be nurtured over time toward a potential sale.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't also provide for other users' legitimate needs for information, or try to accommodate other company goals as well. Those might include:

Reinforce company brand/identity: If your company has gone to a lot of offline expense to establish a branding strategy, then certainly you want your site to reinforce that strategy as consistently as possible.

Broadcast the company's message: Having a company web site essentially gives you a bulletin board in cyberspace ...or the equivalent of a space ad with near-zero insertion costs. It only makes sense to take maximum advantage of it.

Your users' goals:

Your web site's visitors come for a wide variety of reasons. For a B2C site, it might be entertainment. For B-to-Bs, it will most often be education/information; they may be:

- evaluating your company's growth prospects and financial health for an investment recommendation they are preparing
- seeking background information on the company for a story in an industry magazine
- researching your product/service space and the vendors in it for an industry analytic report, a future buying decision, or simply self-improvement

Or they may be seeking a solution to a specific problem, such as...

- seeking a career change
- looking for support on a product they recently purchased from your company



- comparing your product/service with those of competitors as part of an imminent buying decision

Note that only a few of the above examples actually represent potential leads (the major reason we're undertaking this entire effort); but as noted above, both true leads and the other kinds of visitors work for the same organization and probably talk to each other ...so the only safe choice is to make both groups happy.

Note too that even the real leads come in various "temperature" categories (research phase, early sales cycle, serious buyer, etc.), so even they can't be treated identically. We'll need to take this into account in our next step.

Profiling audiences:

As we've seen, the visitors who come to your site represent a very wide variety of goals ...even though each individual visitor may have a fairly narrow goal in mind.

What you need to do is group the various types of visitors into segments based on their likely motivation/interest, so that you'll be able to provide a common, satisfying experience to all of the members of each segment. As we'll see below, this will involve creating appropriate, specific content for each segment, and then providing them with clear paths to that content (navigation).

Warning: this step is one of the most important in the entire process. If you don't get this right at the outset, you can easily end up with an ineffective web strategy. Talk to people in your target audience, learn what they want and need, and don't rely solely on your perceptions.

ROI expectations:

Most likely your company has already defined an approach for measuring return on its marketing investment, and some idea of what constitutes "goodness" in that scheme. It's reasonable to expect that – when comparably measured – the return on your web strategy should be similar, if not greater. Most B-to-B companies find their web program to be more efficient (lower cost for same return, or greater return for same cost) than traditional marketing methods ...which goes a long way toward explaining why virtually every B-to-B company now has a web strategy effort of some scale.

In fact, most companies find that their web site investment pays for itself quite rapidly. Consider this fairly typical example, using assumptions that are reasonable to conservative for many B-to-B technology vendors...



Revenue from an average newly-acquired customer: \$100,000 first year + \$40,000 in each of the next 4 years (from upgrades/renewals, upsell/cross-sell, services, etc.)

Acquisition cost (marketing/sales): \$2,000

Profit margin: 20%

Customer Lifetime Value: Net present value of profit stream from customer

= 20% of \$184,260 (using a 15% NPV discount rate)

= \$36,852

Thus, a web site investment of \$20,000 is returned nearly double if it leads to just one of these “average” customers!

It's a good idea to establish some sort of ROI expectation before starting up your web program. Even if you later conclude that the target was somewhat optimistic, the efforts you undertake in trying to hit it will nonetheless enhance your program's effectiveness.

Engaging your site's visitors

Site design; image/brand:

First you'll need to decide on the overall look and feel of the site. You should have a general sense of how you want the site to appear before handing it off to a designer. The importance of this step is to create a site that is appropriate for the image of your company. Your imagery and look should give some sense of what your company does, even if there were no content or navigation on the page.

If your company is in telecommunications consulting, you aren't going to want a comic, graphic-heavy site. More than likely you aren't going to want images of people on the beach, hiking across a snowy mountain, or of cartoon characters. You'll want to use professional, industry-appropriate images that convey a sense of what you do. Being creative simply for the sake of being creative is a recipe for failure.

If you haven't already, you then need to decide on the thematic elements – logo, other visuals, and/or a tagline – that are important enough to be part of your branding. You should then use these consistently on every page, not just on your home page ...because people may bookmark pages, get dropped into subsidiary pages by search engines, or follow a link that someone sent them. They don't always come in through the front door.

Your homepage needs to do two things, and two things only: tell visitors what you do and lay out the paths for your visitors to take for further information. Write up what you do and/or what you make. And keep it brief and clear; it should take less than 5 seconds to read and comprehend. If users have to search around to make sure they're on the right site, they will too often make a premature exit.



Ease of use; navigation:

Navigation is the “mass transit system” of your site; so it is important to make your labeling say exactly what it is in terms the user will understand.

The most important thing about navigation is that it be specific and clear. People using the Web usually check their patience and reading ability at the door on entering. Nobody reads and processes information in the traditional sense ...nobody! Instead, most people will enter a site and immediately begin scanning for one of two things: anything that looks remotely similar to what they want, or something that looks like it can be clicked. If your navigation is vague, odds are your users will never even get onto the path you have laid out for them. The longer it takes them to get from the homepage to an action page, the more people will get frustrated and simply drop out of the site. Across the Web, this is known as the “leaky bucket” effect.

Your navigation must also avoid “company talk”, the jargon that most companies use to describe the products and internal processes that are the lifeblood of any business. Using your profiling as a base, create your navigation labeling, looking at it as the user would. You may think that your “company talk” is the industry standard, but odds are that some of the visitors to your site will have learned different lingo, or be decidedly non-technical. Always aim for the lowest common denominator.

Avoid complex, innovative navigation structures. Users have become very accustomed to the inverse “L”, where the primary navigation runs across the top of the page and sub-navigation appears on the left. You should provide persistent, constant navigation that lets the user know where they are at all times; this is done by placing navigation and page titles in the same location from page to page. Also, follow standard convention by repeating top-level navigation at the bottom of each page, giving a user who has scrolled to the bottom of a page an alternative to scrolling back up.

Site content: messaging, value proposition:

So why is content so important? For two absolutely critical reasons...

- it’s what your visitors come to your site to find; and
- it helps visitors find your site via the search engines (as we’ll see below).

Here are some key guidelines to follow in developing your site’s content:

Don’t simply toss content from your printed marketing literature onto web pages. This is only likely to bury what the user is looking for under volumes of words that aren’t going to be read. A better starting point may actually be your slide presentations, which are likely to be more crisp and organized in key-bullets-plus-drilldown-slides form, which is readily adaptable to the hierarchical page structure.



Shorter is generally better. Reading is pretty much a lost art on the Internet, so forcing users to read vast quantities of material risks losing them. Let them decide how much to read by summarizing the highlights on the “top” page and indicating that they can find more explanatory detail only a click away.

Your key message or value proposition should be clearly stated on the first page where a product or service is presented. Visitors shouldn't have to read everything about your widget in order to finally discover why it may be useful to them.

Search engine optimization

So much ink has been spilled on this subject – indeed, so many courses offered – that it seems almost foolish to try to summarize it in this brief paragraphs. But, we'll do so anyway, and then provide a couple of sources for much-recommended further study of this complex and always-evolving subject.

The keys to improving your share of search-engine traffic are conceptually pretty simple (it's the nuances and wrinkles that make them complex):

Get relevant content onto your site. How much content? ...enough to satisfy your site's visitors, remembering that they will come at various stages of the sales cycle. Also, “relevant” is the term used by the search engines meaning, “containing the keywords used in a search phrase.” The key to gaining search engine visibility is not stuffing your pages with the same keywords over and over, but providing your visitors with deep, compelling content and making sure that your target keywords are well-represented in that content. This pretty much sets up our next point...

Figure out what keywords are used by searchers looking for your product/service. To some extent, you can do this simply by brainstorming (perhaps supplemented by the brains of some volunteers in your target market). You can also get some analytic help from your site's log files and from web-based tools, including some provided by the search engines themselves. One of the biggest barriers to keyword selection is the desire by some companies to differentiate themselves by nomenclature: “Our product is so different, it's really a new category, so let's create a new term for it.” It's all fine to try to re-educate the market (if you think you can successfully do so); but it's not a good idea to start that process with the search engines, which are rooted in today's language.

Get other sites to link to yours. Your site is considered more “important” (from its inception by Google, soon by other major engines) to the extent that other important sites link to it. This is really not all that hard to arrange; some common methods include:

- Get listed in the standard online directories for your industry/market.



- Develop a partner program (a good idea anyway for most B-to-Bs) and ensure that reciprocal links are one result of each relationship.
- Submit your press releases to an online distributor (e.g., PRweb), which will get your URL on their site and potentially into numerous online pubs that pick up your news.
- Start a blog; send comment postings to other relevant blogs.

Pay per click advertising:

For years, many web marketers wished that they did not have to play the search engine optimization game – in essence, that they could simply buy their way to the top. Advertisers had longed for a way to pay only for visits to their site from true prospects. Add to these wishes the items of conversion tracking and daily budgeting, and you have perhaps the ultimate interactive advertising method ...or the perfect prospect delivery mechanism.

With pay per click advertising, you select your keywords, set your daily budget, write a compelling ad, and you're on your way. Faster than with the organic listings, you're going to appear almost exactly where you want to be. Any serious search engine marketer will be using pay per click to his/her advantage. It has many advantages over other forms of marketing:

- easy-to-implement conversion tracking
- instant setup and delivery of ads
- real-time ad performance statistics
- constant introduction of new tools
- easily and objectively measurable ROI

Getting started with PPC is so simple, it's easy to believe that the whole topic is simple; but it isn't. There are numerous wrinkles involved in keyword selection, bidding strategies, ad development ...and of course these differ between the major search engines. And the engines don't stand still long enough for you to get comfortable with any of that. In fact, if you've never tried pay per click advertising, it can be beneficial to outsource it to a knowledgeable firm like eMagine, who will review your keywords/bids/ads/click-through rates/conversions on a regular basis.

One of the most common mistakes companies make is to set up a PPC program and simply "let it ride". What they should be doing is treating it as a continuously-running experiment, in which they vary ad copy, keyphrases, landing-page design, offers, etc. in a systematic way, attempting to beat the ROI of their currently-deployed setup.



A smart search engine marketing campaign will contain both an organic strategy and a pay per click campaign. You should be able to use both to maximize your website's visibility and meet your targeted traffic goals.

Offline methods of driving traffic:

Most B-to-Bs still use traditional offline marketing vehicles ...and probably always will. Now, however, it's important to ensure that these methods also support the online effort as much as possible. For example...

Direct mail: At a minimum, feature the site URL prominently in every mail piece. For better results, give the reader a reason for keying in that URL by means of a unique offer on a special landing page. And try to make it as easy for them as possible: preferably a short URL, with the unique bit to the left of the domain name (e.g.: offer.yourco.com; not yourco.com/articles/whitepapers/specialmailoutoffer). As a bonus, you'll also get some fairly bulletproof results-tracking for your direct mailing!

Advertising and trade shows: We grouped these primarily because they happen – or can be set up to happen – in a specific time window, which makes them very amenable to “limited-time offers” that just happen to require a visit to your web site for fulfillment (and lead capture). Obviously, the comments just made about URLs and landing pages apply here as well. Whether or not they feature a particular web-tied offer, your ads and trade-show presence should still give prominent visibility to your site's URL.

PR, collateral, etc.: We grouped these because they're typically hard-copy print and “timeless”, hence not good vehicles for time-limited offers. Even so, they can and should give visibility to your site URL ...along with other items that you may not think of as “advertising”, such as stationery, business cards, marketing spiffs, the exterior of your company's trucks & service vans, etc.

Converting visitors (to something...)

OK, so your web site visitors have been attracted to your site and engaged... what's next? That would be conversion, the process of moving them from some State A to a State B that is “better” for both of you.

In State A, your visitor may simply have a quick question they'd like answered...

- What were your company's revenue and profits last year?
- Is your company looking to hire accountants? ...new college graduates?
- Will your firm be exhibiting at Linux World?
- What do industry analysts think of your flagship product?



...etc. It's even possible for a visitor to arrive at your site by accident, as a result of an unintentionally broad search for something completely different. In any case, the common denominator of State A is that the visitor is (relatively) loosely bound to your web site and your company; and in most cases, you'd like to change that by moving the visitor to a State B where they are a bit more tightly bound ...if not starting to feel downright warm & fuzzy.

You do that by conversion, which doesn't only mean capturing their contact info as though they were a full-fledged lead ...although that's surely Job 1 from your perspective as a marketer. It means first serving the information they came looking for, of course; but then preferably stimulating something more, such as...

- a longer visit... possibly including a 2nd or 3rd page view
- a return visit (maybe even creating a user account for subsequent visits)
- downloading a white paper, podcast or product brochure
- signing up for a webinar or other event
- linking to your blog, or perhaps to a partner's site

Such actions will be encouraged to some extent by the means just discussed above ("Engaging your site's visitors"). In addition, you should ensure that your site contains "meaty" content that conveys thought leadership ...some of available as a download offer (once the user provides his/her contact info), some of it organized as drill-down pages. The more you can get your visitors feeling comfortable clicking around your site, the more likely they are to eventually get to the product/service pages that "mean business". Also remember... that meaty content is doing double duty: both raising your site's relevance, making it more likely to be found; and giving visitors reason to spend significant time on your site once there.

One last thing: do have a process and update cycle in place that ensures no out-of-date content ...which causes many visitors to doubt the currency/validity of all the other good info on your site.

Lead-response management

OK, so your site has been very busy, successfully converting visitors to leads for your product(s) or service ...now what?? Well, this is why you spent all that money and time on a well-designed, well-performing web site; so now is the time for Marketing and Sales to join hands and start turning leads into orders or engagements.

The task would be much simpler if you could tell just by looking exactly which leads will end up buying; then you could focus only on those and ignore the rest. Since in fact you have no clue which leads will prove to be the "good" ones, you have to treat them all as potential



orders ...until they prove themselves otherwise. The best way to do that is to run them all through a consistent process, like the one described in the rest of this section.

Qualifying / responding to leads:

Hopefully, your lead-capture form includes a question of the form, “Our need is...” or “We expect to make a purchase decision in...”, followed by a menu of various time intervals. If so, then your leads have already done Step 1 for you, which is to classify themselves by “temperature” ...with time-to-decision being the customary proxy for temperature.

Most B-to-B firms will use a classification scheme similar to the following:

- A = 90 days or less
- B = 3-6 months
- C = 6-12 months
- D = 12+ months (or disqualified)

Typically, Groups A and B will be distributed to Sales, in the expectation that personal contact will be initiated with these prospects within a day or two ...if not within hours for the “A” group. Groups C and D will usually stay with Marketing for further nurturing, as discussed below. Some companies may give the B and C groups to a telemarketing function to obtain additional qualifying information (Company size? Budget? Decision process and authority? Timeframe? Vendors in play so far?); and based on the responses, make a more considered decision as to whether/when to give the lead to Sales.

Integrating with your CRM (you do use a CRM ...right?!):

By now, most B-to-B companies use some sort of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system ...and if by chance your company doesn't, it's something you really need to be looking into, as an issue of marketing best practices. The most popular of these are Salesforce.com and Oracle (Siebel); others include SalesLogix, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, SAP Business One, Oncontact V, Entellium, ADAPT and NetSuite CRM+.

The key point on this is that – just as with leads from your off-line programs – it's critical to ensure that your website-derived leads invariably end up in your CRM. Once that's done, management needs to ensure that everyone who touches a customer or prospect in any way – phone call, fax, email, physical visit – documents that fact as prescribed in the CRM in a timely manner. Usually that will be Sales and Marketing, but Accounting and certain others may also play a role; and their interactions can also “color” the overall relationship with the customer, and must be taken into account in the next “touch”. Any responsible individual should be able to view a given customer's history via the CRM and be able to correctly decide the timing and nature of the next best step with that customer. If not, then what was the point of shelling out good money for the CRM??



Lead nurturing (aka incubation):

For many marketers, this is the fun part: moving raw leads along from casual interest to serious prospects by dint of their creativity, brilliance and sheer persistence. The most common tools of the trade include...

- email “blasts” or newsletters, typically on a schedule commonly varying from weekly to monthly;
- blogs... best if on a very dependable schedule;
- podcasts... especially effective for highly mobile prospects;
- event invitations, from webinars to company-run or industry conferences/shows;

white papers, or announcements thereof;

telephone... there’s no rule against talking to the prospect while nurturing, especially if kept to a “light touch” aimed mainly at seeking information and/or feedback;

surveys... there aren’t many better ways to make a prospect feel better about you than to ask his/her opinion – of your product/service or even just your marketing communications

A really sophisticated nurturing program will take account of the prospect’s stage in the cycle: i.e., it will send different materials/opportunities to the “C” group than the “D” group ...perhaps even on a different schedule. Within a group, it might even vary by the prospects’ responses to your last blog or survey, their visits to a particular web site page, or simply the number of communications they’ve received to date. (In theory, there’s no end to the level of segmentation you can achieve, although there’s surely a point beyond which there’s insufficient return for the level of effort required.) Generally, though, it seems sensible to give the less-qualified group more general “domain” information that positions your company as a thought leader; and then to migrate toward more specific product/service information as the prospect matures and – because of those earlier communications – is now at least somewhat more conditioned to view this more specific info as authoritative!

But regardless of the vehicles chosen or the level of complexity, even a basic program should have certain characteristics:

- Most important, it should be a real program, not something that only gets done “as time permits”. You can’t realistically expect prospects to take your nurturing effort any more seriously than you do.
- It must provide prospects with real information and/or a useful experience ...in their estimation. It’s the only way to establish your credibility for the sales pitch that’s coming. Also, if prospects perceive that they are being fed propaganda, or simply content-free fodder, they will tune you out and/or hit that “Remove” link.
- In your domain information, try to bury points that in fact are differentiators for your product/service. The more you can help the prospect buy into your world-view, the more obviously brilliant your product/service will seem to him/her when it’s finally pitched.



- As much as possible, try to make your program interactive. Everyone prefers having a conversation to sitting through a lecture; so the more you can find ways to get the prospect to respond in some way to your material, the more it will approximate that conversational mode. (Also, the more accustomed the prospect will become to responding to you ...so the less abnormal it will seem when it comes time to ask that \$50,000 question!)

How important is lead nurturing? Just consider the “Rule of 45”: within one year, 45% of all leads (inquiries) have gone on to purchase ...from someone. Lead nurturing keeps your company in the game, and should raise the odds that that “someone” will be you.

Lead promotion:

As might be expected, this is what happens when a lead “graduates” from one level to another: D to C, B to A, etc. This can happen purely due to the passage of time (a lead that was 7 months out – and hence a “C” – in September is automatically a nominal “B” in November). or it can of course be the result of your effective nurturing efforts raising the prospect’s temperature.

In the latter (marketing-driven) case, you would only know of the change if the prospect told you in some way; so there’s no reason to question that “promotion”. In the case of automatic or time-driven promotion, it’s best to verify that the promoted prospects are truly where the calendar now says they are ...minimally for those that will now cross the Marketing-Sales boundary; you don’t want to hand Sales a basket of leads who have had their projects put on hold, budgets cut, etc. It may be possible to set up your CRM to show you the promoted leads on some scheduled basis; but worst case, you can certainly query it yourself around the first of each month, for at least the important promotions.

The work put into determining the true status and temperature of leads can pay off big by avoiding the yawning crack that develops between Marketing and Sales in far too many companies. Into that crack, a large number of leads can disappear: the potentially good ones lost forever, along with the unqualified ones that made the whole lot seem not worth the time spent on it.

Metrics and measurement

For your “info-only” (non- sales lead) visitors, there are a couple of indicators as to whether or not your site’s visitors are getting what they came for. One is “touch-&-go” hits to your homepage; i.e., no subsidiary page views. The odds that your homepage fully satisfies any visitor’s needs are fairly low; so if the ratio of these hits to all visits climbs above industry norms, you can be sure there’s a problem ...although you won’t be able to determine where the problem is from this alone. Other indicators are non-lead reply forms and emails to



“webmaster@” or “info@”. Typically these are requests for information that could not be found on the site; so they can be a useful indicator of content that perhaps should be added, or navigation problems that need to be addressed. Remember... your non-lead visitors are also industry professionals who tend to talk to your purchase decision-makers; so meeting their informational needs and leaving them with a favorable impression of your company is a valid part of the web-marketing job.

With regard to actual leads... well, obviously the metric that matters most is sales made to customers who started as inquiries to your web site. This raises again the importance of installing a CRM and having strong discipline around its use; without one, there's almost no way to tie a lead to a sale, over perhaps 12+ months' time. But with that – and with reasonably accurate knowledge of your costs for web site development/improvement, SEO, PPC advertising (if any) and lead nurturing – you'll be able to easily calculate your overall ROI for web strategy. Within that, you may also be able to spot some trends that will help inform budget allocation among the various spending categories. For example, if you find that PPC leads convert to sales at the same rate as “free” search-engine hits, but cost you \$10/click, it's tough to make a case for increasing the PPC budget ...but easy to recommend contracting a writer to beef up the relevant content on your site.

While sales and ROI are clearly the bottom line, there are some precursor items you'll want to track as trend lines, because they can be “leading indicators” of trouble down the road. These include...

- promotions (D to C, C to B, etc.), as ratios of lead or category totals: ideally these will be stable or increasing ...but not decreasing;
- opt-outs (again as a ratio of total leads/inquiries): an increasing trend line here may indicate a problem with your nurturing communications;
- + lead respondents / opt-ins, as a ratio of total opportunities (clicks to the response page): again, should be fairly stable or increasing; a decrease could be due to any of several factors, so further diagnosis will be needed.

Are you getting everything you need from your web strategy? We hope the hints provided here will help; but if you're still not satisfied, eMagine will be happy to provide consulting in any aspect of web strategy, tailored to your specific business environment ...as we've done for scores of other client companies.

However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results

Winston Churchill

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