

B-to-B: Reaching Purchase Influencers

By Susan Fantle

How easy folks have it in consumer marketing! At least that's how it appears to us in the business-to-business arena. You see, in most consumer marketing efforts, the decision-maker, budget manager and product end-user are one in the same — not so in much of B-to-B marketing.

Depending on the size of the businesses you target and complexity of what you sell, multiple individuals can be involved in reviewing, recommending, choosing, purchasing or preventing the purchase of your product.

If you're marketing your B-to-B product to just one title you may be selling yourself short.

If you market to small retailers, it's likely the owner makes all the buying decisions. If you are selling office supplies to larger companies, it's possible that a person in purchasing will make the decision. However, if you're selling a new telecom system to larger companies, dozens of titles company-wide could influence the decision.

Here are the players you may have to reach:

- **Decision-makers** — Decision-makers can be CEOs, CFOs, VPs, department heads, purchasing managers, etc. They may not actually use the product or service being considered, but have a strong interest in its bottom-line benefit(s).
- **Influencers** — Influencers are the individuals at many levels of the company who have a problem your product can solve.
- **Stakeholders** — Stakeholders have little or no say in the decision but are acutely affected by it. For example, the decision to contract for an 800# and put it on all marketing materials may not involve the telemarketing manager, but it's this manager's staff who answers the phones.
- **Preventers** — These individuals have the authority to say “no,” but may not be actively involved in the buying process. For instance, if the VP of Sales wants a specific CRM solution, the CIO could squash the request because this particular software is incompatible with the company's current enterprise system.

So you see, if you're marketing your B-to-B product or service to just one title you may be selling yourself short.

➤ **Focus your message to each influencing title.**

You can increase the success of your programs by reaching more people in the organizational chart who influence the purchase.

For example, suppose you are selling an enterprise-wide software system designed to replace paper timesheets and to record and track employee labor hours. The ultimate decision-maker is likely the CFO who wants to accurately track the cost and profitability of projects. However, this title would rarely make the decision without input from every department touched by the product — and every one of them has a specific “pain” to solve.



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- ◆ Employees need the ability to input the data faster and easier than the current process or they will be reluctant to use it.
- ◆ HR wants a system requiring little training.
- ◆ Project managers want to monitor labor performed by job number to keep the project on time and on budget.
- ◆ Executive management wants instant access to real-time labor hour status to track productivity and ensure that projects remain profitable.
- ◆ Top management wants to know how your solution supports company growth, enhances market position and boosts the bottom line.
- ◆ IT management wants to minimize installation, maintenance and support efforts, and ensure compatibility with current systems.
- ◆ Accounts payable wants accuracy to minimize billing and payroll errors.
- ◆ Legal wants to avoid over billing charges and employee complaints

of improperly tracked overtime or vacation.

Your job is to determine the particular “need” of every stakeholder, influencer and decision-maker, then communicate how your product or service satisfies that need. If there are 10 titles in every company with influence on the purchase, you should attempt to reach as many as possible. Here are some of the ways other B-to-B marketers successfully accomplish this goal.

⇒ Expand the impact of your direct mail.

You cannot be successful sending the same message to multiple titles. But you can easily version a common package that addresses the specific interests of different influencers.

Envelope Package: A classic #10 package containing a letter and reply device is a low-cost and business-like tool for sending targeted messages. Here’s an example of a successful campaign composed only of a non-promotional outside envelope, letter and reply device. It was designed to generate leads for a consulting firm offering assistance to Managed Care Organizations to maintain a government required accreditation. It targeted three important players in each prospect company.

1. Opening of Letter to the CEO — Decision-Maker

Are you dreading the time, money and lost productivity it will cost to renew your NCQA accreditation in 2003?

2. Opening of Letter to the Chief Medical Officer — Influencer

Are you concerned about your company’s ability to maintain NCQA accreditation in 2003 or losing your level of accreditation?

3. Opening of Letter to the Quality Improvement Director — Stakeholder

- Are you concerned about your company’s NCQA accreditation in 2003?
- Would you like additional support for this complex task?
- Could you use extra hands to help with parts of the preparation process?

Each letter then explains how this firm can relieve the specific pains of the targeted individual. The reply device repeats the targeted benefit in the call-to-action.



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Post Cards and Self-Mailers: Some large company mail rooms do not deliver promotional mailings, so you should test this option. But it has shown effectiveness in some B-to-B campaigns when used as part of a series. By creating a shell design, and using black plate changes or digital printing you can easily and cost-effectively version these formats.

Use informational offers to further target your message.

Whether you mail dimensional packages to top executives, mail targeted versions of a classic letter package, or choose other tactics is totally dependent on your product, market and acceptable cost-per-inquiry. But, no matter what package you use, offering free, relevant information — that addresses the “pain” of the targeted title — is consistently one of the most effective devices for generating leads and influence.

Providing free information of interest and value to your market generates leads and positions your firm as one with an interest in helping prospects improve their skills and knowledge. This information can be printed and mailed, or delivered online, by CD, video or in person at workshops and seminars. Just like your marketing message, the information you offer should be targeted to the needs of each specific title. Make sure, however, that the information you provide is focused on the reader, not your product. Prospects will not be interested in your product or service until they are convinced you can help them solve their problems.

Informational offers can be how-tos, case studies, tips and techniques, success metrics, or other approaches targeted to each influencing title.

Or, you if you'd like a single offer to reach all titles, you can produce a “kit.” Containing multiple components (white papers, calculators, checklists, reports, etc.), a kit can be successful as long as it includes at least one item appealing to each title group.

Another single offer that is effective for multiple titles is a live seminar or workshop. This approach makes it possible to address a variety of needs at breakout and Q&A sessions within the presentation.

➤ Provide tools to help influencers “sell” to decision-makers.

You can reach influencers and interest them in your solution. But you can't rely on them to make the effort to apply that influence where it counts. One way to overcome this barrier is to provide influencers with a sales sheet they can easily hand off to the decision-maker telling the story for them. It is easy to produce and post on your Web site or enclose in targeted mailing pieces. This one-sheet can include a cost or savings formula, ROI calculator or other interactive device to make it even more appealing and productive.

➤ Support your targeted messaging on your Web site.

The beauty of direct marketing has always been its ability to focus a message directly to an individual. Unfortunately, many B-to-B direct marketers target their message to influencers very nicely, then direct prospects to an un-targeted Web site.



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Just because the Internet is a prospect/customer-driven medium, doesn't mean it can't target.

All that's required is the addition of a simple sidebar on your Home page. The links on this sidebar can be as basic as listing the individual titles:

How ABC Software benefits your department:

[Human Resources](#)

[Accounting](#)

[Project Management](#)

[Financial](#)

[Executive Management](#)

[Information Technology](#)

When your site visitor clicks on the chosen department, the link opens a page specifically highlighting the features and benefits your product delivers to that department.

Another approach is to use actual benefits as the link. This not only attracts prospects to a targeted message, but presents your product benefits up front.

How ABC Software delivers benefits to every department:

[Minimizes Training](#)

[Boosts Billing and Payroll Accuracy](#)

[Monitors Project Labor Hours](#)

[Tracks Cost and Profitability](#)

[Supports Bottom-Line Growth](#)

[Delivers Enterprise Compatibility](#)

In this case, the site visitor self-selects an item to open a page that highlights the applicable features and accompanying benefits for that department.

Once your site directly communicates with appropriate titles, you can send your decision-makers and influencers there with confidence.

Reaching influencers is no different than reaching decision-makers. The key is understanding and communicating the benefits your product or service brings to those individuals, then providing them with tools to assert their influence on the decision. It's a proven and effective way to boost B-to-B lead generation and sales.



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