



ARTICLE

## **Four New Year's Resolutions to Improve your B2B Marketing**

Michael E Zimmerman  
Senior Marketing Strategist  
MarketPoint, LLC

# Four New Year's Resolutions to Improve Your Business-to-Business Marketing

Why is it that organizations have no trouble focusing on revenue in the fourth quarter? Okay, that was too easy. But if it's patently obvious why we have to hit our targets in Q4, why is it so hard for us to focus on the marketing behaviors that will drive revenue in Q1?

Well, here are four simple steps that any organization can take to drastically improve their marketing efforts in the new year. They're presented in business-to-business terms, but with a little imagination, the principles can be adapted to fit consumer companies, or schools, or non-profits as well.

## 1. Reevaluate your communications channels.

Every contact you have with your marketplace – whether intentional or not – will affect your sales effort. Moreover, every touch-point between you and your customer will either build or erode your brand. It's no secret. In fact, it's so basic that it's one of the “Four Ps” of marketing: promotion. And it's the only “P” that every marketing manager has control over. We aren't all given free reign over product design and development, or placement issues, or even pricing, but virtually every marketing manager has a say in promotion. Perhaps that's why so many people who don't understand marketing think that promotion is marketing.

In the B2B space, “promotion” typically encompasses a selling effort (through a sales force or through distributors), a body of company and product information (sales collateral) and a website. If that describes your organization, it's time to get in the game. Today's B2B communications channels are broader and more robust than yesterday's. Successful B2B marketers are exploiting whitepapers, distributed articles, e-books, YouTube videos, viral marketing, and email campaigns. And these new channels work.

The new year is a perfect time to challenge your assumptions about communications – a perfect time to try new channels. Use your knowledge of the marketplace as a litmus test for evaluating your communications options. Talk to marketers with experience in these new media. Examine your customer and prospect databases to determine which channels you can implement. Start collecting data (and gaining permission) to use as a basis for future campaigns.

But don't lose your focus. It's easy to bite off more than your organization can chew – or, for that matter, to choose the wrong channels entirely. Pick one or two new channels strategically and keep your messages consistent.

Remember: you can only tell one story at a time, so whatever you say must promote your brand.

## **2. Reconnect with your customers.**

In 30 years of marketing, I have found very few CEOs who wouldn't say their company is "customer centered." Unfortunately, upon closer examination, I often find that the company is centered on an outdated understanding of the needs and values of those customers.

When was the last time your organization took your customers' pulse? It doesn't take a lot of effort or technology – or even money – to stay in touch. Done professionally, surveys and focus groups are relatively simple to execute, and they can quickly validate (or debunk) your understanding of your customers.

If you're looking for an easy way to reconnect with your market, try encouraging your top executives to spend some time in the field. Visit your customers. Join your sales people on sales calls. Ask the real decision-makers in your marketplace tough and probing questions about their problems, their ambitions, and their pain. And listen to what they say.

And if you're really serious about fostering communication with your customers, try forming a customer advisory board. You don't need to invite them to your office or fly them to an exotic retreat; phone calls will do. Just let them know how much their opinions matter to your business. Share your plans; test your new ideas; and listen.

## **3. Recheck your most fundamental assumptions.**

How long has it been since you started your business? How long has it been since you wrote a marketing plan? Chances are your markets have changed. New markets have emerged. Your market position may have slipped, even if your sales volume has grown. Or your market share may have grown, even on declining sales, if the market space is shrinking. You need to know.

More importantly, your customers' needs are evolving, and some of their new needs are still not met. If their values are shifting, as most people's do, your legacy position may not be congruent with their new values. Take a close look at new competitors who have entered your market – even if they seem inconsequential – because the fastest way for new competitors to gain a foothold is by tapping into an unmet need. The success of a new competitor is often a sign that your organization has failed a customer or prospect.

SWOT analysis is an easy way to gain a better understanding of the internal and external factors that determine your organization's success. Armed with probing questions based on experience with many organizations, a seasoned marketing consultant can significantly improve the results of your SWOT exercise.

#### **4. Audit your brand.**

Surprisingly, most businesses are unable to articulate their brand essence. Many have no well-defined position. And some have no USP at all. Still, they go on, believing they are focused on the behaviors that generate revenue.

But think about this: If you can't clearly define your point of distinction, what makes you think your customers can?

Now is the perfect time to find out what your customers think of your brand. It's the perfect time to confirm whether your brand essence is congruent with the needs and values of your marketplace. And it's the perfect time to adjust your position in support of your selling effort.

Take a walk around your organization. Listen to the interactions among your employees... and between your employees and your customers. Do your organizational behaviors manifest your brand? They can. Talk to someone with experience promoting brand-positive behavior among employees. The dividends can be huge.

Of course, it's going to take more than these four resolutions to hit your new year's sales objectives. You'll need a strong marketing plan and a company-wide focus on results. But if you incorporate these four basic resolutions, your plan will be stronger and your goals more attainable.

Besides, they're a lot easier to keep than that no-donut diet.

**About the Author:** Michael Zimmerman is Senior Marketing Strategist at MarketPoint LLC, a consulting firm providing honest, insightful and effective brand and marketing services for business-to-business, education, and non-profit organizations. Visit [www.yourmarketpoint.com](http://www.yourmarketpoint.com) to learn more.



**Physical Reprints:**

MarketPoint, LLC grants the reader permission to print and distribute unaltered copies of this article. Reprints must include, without changes, the entire text and author profile.

**Distribution and Publication:**

Individuals or organizations interested in republishing this article may obtain permission from [EzineArticles.com](http://EzineArticles.com).

**Contact:**

MarketPoint, LLC  
106 Grace Manor Drive  
Havre de Grace, MD 21078

410 942 0600  
1 866 21 POINT  
[Info@yourmarketpoint.com](mailto:Info@yourmarketpoint.com)

[www.yourmarketpoint.com](http://www.yourmarketpoint.com)