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The Rapidly Evolving B2B Marketing World

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A deliberate past, evolving present, and uber-competitive future

Business-to-business marketing has long been a challenging proposition. The inherent circuitous path from brand to buyer, coupled with a myriad of influencers scattered along the path leading to the ultimate decision maker, has always made it that way. But if it was challenging in the past, the level of complexity has skyrocketed in recent years. Numerous factors are fueling this evolution. Smarter buyers, advanced technologies, supersized organizations, and social media shifting the power from seller to buyer are among the more significant.

Out of necessity, B2B marketing has grown up. The level of sophistication is rising continually. In many ways, B2B marketing looks much more like consumer marketing. My colleagues and I at Oden should know, since we have been living, breathing, eating B2B marketing most of our professional lives. This dynamic, ever-changing B2B environment is the very catalyst for our firm's existence.

The void in B2B marketing

Today, we see a different kind of void in B2B marketing. In this environment created by an accelerated pace of change, fragmentation in media, socialization of messages, and empowerment of the customer, B2B companies must fight for customers on numerous fronts and in increasingly complex ways, relegating control of strategy, brand, and execution to a growing and diverse marketing organization. This reality for today's Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) makes it harder to manage and grow a brand, ensure consistency and effectiveness of marketing tactics, and execute a multitude of projects and programs that

are complementary to and consistent with the overall vision of the organization. Thus, the collective voice of the B2B brand is simply not as strong as it could be.

These observations come from decades of experience as a marketing and creative services provider in the thick of B2B. However, significant research, assessment, and validation were needed to identify and understand the most pressing needs and challenges that marketing leaders face moving forward.

This thorough assessment has led us to an important conclusion: high-level marketing, creative and technology expertise, capabilities, and processes are both needed and valued by large companies serving B2B markets. These organizations typically rely on a multitude of high-quality marketing resources to help them succeed. Most have an agency of record (AOR) for their most significant global needs—brand strategy and positioning, advertising, public relations, digital strategy. In addition, they typically engage numerous second- and third-tier resources to execute a variety of functions and projects. In truth, managing a group of disparate marketing, creative, and digital technology resources with varying strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities is a complex proposition

What keeps marketing leaders up at night?

Our assessment and subsequent synthesis of research findings comes from a group that includes the ANA, AMA, BMA, DMA, 4As, Deloitte, Fierce CMO, Forrester, Gartner, McKinsey, and Social Listening, among others. From this work, we identified these top challenges on the minds of CMOs.

- Building brand and awareness
- Generating qualified demand
- Quantifying results and proving ROI
- Customer journey mapping and customer experience
- Nurturing leads into qualified sales opportunities
- Enabling sales and channel partners to better close business
- Expanding current customer relationships
- Technology adoption
- Marketing skill development
- Sales and marketing alignment

A closer look revealed that the CMO typically feels responsible for and focuses on the first three challenges, while senior marketers (directors, managers, specialists) tend to tackle the remaining ones. While the CMO-related challenges are generally high profile, and highly-visible, those of the senior marketers are equally important, and they are where the “rubber meets the road.” As the CMO usually relies on global resources to tackle challenges, the senior marketer often seeks help from a variety of different types of resources to help address challenges and manage projects at a high level.

Naturally, CMOs and senior marketers continually look for insights on how to choose and assemble the optimum mix of resources, organize them, and communicate expectations so that this list of crucial challenges can be overcome effectively and efficiently—and strong, unified brands are the result.

To achieve the high level of effectiveness described requires a step back to view the big picture and understand what is working well and what is not with each current resource. Obviously, it is counterproductive to engage a group of high-level resources who all want to drive and think that their way is the only way. Established roles and responsibilities and unilateral understanding are important criteria.

As a CMO or senior marketer looking to add to or change your mix of marketing resources for a more effective outcome, consider the following criteria as a means of helping determine how well current and prospective resources can fit and be successful.

- As you look down your marketing and creative resource bench, what's missing? Do you have the right mix of resources in place to help take you where you are trying to go?
- Do your resources have the level of talent, expertise, and experience necessary to help you meet your greatest challenges?
- Can they differentiate your brand while remaining true to core attributes and staying on strategy?
- Can they guide you to a better place rather than simply follow you down a rabbit hole?
- Do they have the systems, protocols, and practical understanding required to navigate your large, perhaps decentralized, organization?
- Are their production systems fine-tuned and scalable for the intricate business challenges you will present to them?
- Do they bring the right combination of strategic thinking and creative execution?
- Are they focused on helping you accomplish your objectives, rather than using you as a stepping stone to other business within your organization?
- Do you have trust and confidence in their ability to seamlessly pull your corporate brand through any project appropriately to any audience, in any environment, at any touchpoint?
- Will they work WITH your other agency partners and internal resources in whom you have invested significant time, energy, and resources, rather than AGAINST them?

You may have additional criteria that are important to your environment. Yet validating that current and prospective marketing resources meet the criteria outlined above can significantly increase your comfort level and confidence in your ability to achieve your goals.

To be certain, navigating the perpetually evolving B2B landscape will remain complex. And assuming some of the top challenges articulated by numerous marketing leaders hold true for you, the need for high-caliber marketing and creative resources to help you and your colleagues meet these challenges effectively will remain ever-present.



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About Oden

Oden is an expert business-to-business marketing communications firm. We provide marketing, branding, and design solutions to help FORTUNE 1000 corporations and mid-size businesses adapt, progress, and remain relevant in the ever-evolving B2B space. We bring the combination of talent, experience, and tenacious service our clients expect and need in today's business environment.

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