



White Paper

Are You a Wallflower at the B2B Social Media Party?

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Are You a Wallflower at the B2B Social Media Party? B2B Use of Social Media Comes of Age

The B2B sector is poised to take the social media plunge. The tipping point is occurring because marketers are seeing evidence that social media works to influence the B2B customers as well as the shopper buying consumer goods. Companies that sit on the sidelines can risk being relegated to permanent wallflower status.

Why B2B Companies Should Consider and Use Social Media

1. Social media is where your market is.

- According to research from CK Kerley (www.ckb2b.com):
- 57% of U.S. workers use social media for business purposes at least once per week.
- 59% engage with peers online who addressed their challenges.
- 48% followed online discussions.
- 37% posted questions on social network sites looking for suggestions and feedback, and connected directly with potential solution providers via social networking channels.
- 59% shared what they learned from their research and the buying process experience with others.

2. Social media allows you to build the relationships that lead to purchases.

Building relationships is key to B2B marketing. B2B branding is high touch and established through directly interfacing with customers and relationship building. Ad campaigns raise visibility but do not build relationships. This is a major reason why dollars are shifting from traditional marketing and advertising tactics to social media and other online options.

3. B2B buyers are heavily influenced by third party feedback in their purchasing decisions.

Where does this validation occur? Primarily online and in social media. If your co-worker recommends a service or product favorably, are you influenced by that opinion? Of course. If you read positive reviews and comments online, it has the same effect. And in social networks, you can quickly find people who've had experience with a product or service and who can share their experience. The same is true for the service you are selling.

4. B2B companies rely on thought leadership to communicate, differentiate, and position.

Social media creates a direct, omnipresent way for companies to create this thought leadership. B2B firms can even build their own professional communities centered on increasing knowledge share and reducing challenges.

5. Social media gives access to new markets.

With so many firms reducing spending, the only option for many companies to grow or even maintain their market share is to find new customers. Where are these new customers? Chances are they are online and reachable through social media. They may be new firms, early adopters looking for a better solution, or companies thinking of changing vendors. Merely monitoring online conversation can uncover changing needs and emerging opportunities; participating in the conversation starts the relationships.

6. Social media is cost effective.

The main investment is time and patience, and the creation of interesting, relevant content. By using resources such as Scott PR's content creation concepts, cost and time are minimized by developing articles and stories that can be used in multiple channels. It's considerably less expensive than traditional direct mail or marketing communications. B2Bs must remain relevant with existing and new customers; fresh content made available through multiple channels allows companies to stay connected, constantly educating prospects throughout the purchasing cycle. Is this investment in social media worth it? Yes, because the value of one B2B customer is greater than a single or even multiple B2C customers.

B2Bs Have Changed Their Social Media "Laggard" Status

B2B marketing was taking to social media rapidly at the start of the decade, with a predicted growth rate of 43.3% in 2010. Now, according to [Articulate Marketing](#), in 2018 83% of B2B marketers are using social media. Over 70% of B2B tech companies use social media to get results, more than blogging and paid search. Ninety percent of B2B companies are using LinkedIn, and more than 50% of B2B buyers said that they used LinkedIn to help make a purchasing decision.

LinkedIn stands at the top as B2B marketers' preferred social media platform—in 2015, [Statista's](#) research discovered that 66% of marketers thought it was the most effective tool. Twitter came second at 55%, and YouTube was third at 51%. Facebook, perhaps unexpectedly, ranked only 5th at 30%. Instagram and YouTube have grown in popularity, with Instagram ranking second in 2018 as marketers' most commonly used social media platform. Two out of three marketers said they intend to increase their organic usage of Instagram in 2019, potentially bringing it up to equal usage among B2B as it is with B2C.

Where Are B2B Firms Spending Their Social Media Dollars?

Three social media forums are leaders within the B2B sector.

1. [LinkedIn](#), the business social network. Besides having their profiles up when people are searching for the firm, individual executives, or specific key words, and being linked to others, B2B firms can use LinkedIn to join or start special interest groups and connect to new contacts.
2. [Twitter](#) gives the opportunity to do microblogging - posts of 280 characters or less. Besides following people that interest you, you can also capture followers from your own tweets. Users can also search the Twitter universe by topic.
3. [Facebook](#) - is it more than moms sharing photos? You bet. Facebook has its own share of special interest groups and is also searchable.

Eight Ways B2B Companies Can Use Social Media

1. Monitor discussions. Find out what people are saying about you, your space, and your competitors. This is valuable marketing intelligence available with a few clicks. Information gleaned from monitoring social media can uncover unmet needs, issues with products and services, and competitive data.
2. Conduct a social media audit. Document where these conversations are taking place, between what audiences and individuals, and to what extent. Who are the online “thought leaders” in social media? What channels, forums, groups are they using? Use this data to inform your social media plan. You want to go where the customers and stakeholders are.
3. If you find that your primary audience is not engaging in social media for business purposes yet, don’t just sit back and relax until you see some activity. This is a major first mover advantage opportunity. You could be the first to break the social media barrier, establishing yourself as the forward-thinking industry leader.
4. Evaluate your best course of action to respond to what people say about you online. Develop a policy and process for addressing both positive and negative posts. A criticism with no response serves the same function as saying “no comment.” It means I’m guilty and whatever was said is true. Sometimes executives are reluctant to take action, out of fear that a nasty exchange will occur. However, a clear concerned response and offer to resolve the situation with the person who made the post is the best course of action. A sincere attempt to reach out by a company employee is usually viewed positively. There should be guidelines in place to draft these responses, as they will remain online with the original post. Some companies have a designated individual tasked with this responsibility.
5. Use social media as channels to distribute your content. For example, a press release distributed to the media can then be sent directly to your customers and prospects, and posted on your website. It should also be tweeted, sent to Facebook friends, and shared through your LinkedIn network.

A word about content: engaging in social media without having something valuable to say is a waste of time.

6. Build search engine visibility with social media. Use key words in social media content as you would in website copy and press releases.
7. Enter the conversation and use your conversation to provide answers and resources to people searching for information.
8. Include any special offers and complimentary evaluations throughout your social media channels.

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