

The Fundamentals Of Building An Audience- Centric Content Strategy

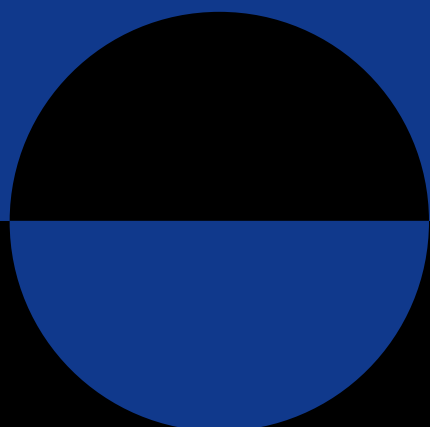
**Build Your Buyer Understanding
To Create Content That Resonates**

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The Power Of Understanding

Our data shows that organisations that go to market with an audience-centric model experience many benefits, including better audience engagement, higher response and conversion rates, increased marketing contribution to pipeline and revenue, improved sales and marketing alignment, and greater sales productivity.

Before you start your content strategy, you should:

Identify your target audiences. The first step to audience-centricity is a clear focus on who to target. For a specified business line or offering, clients can use the [Forrester Audience Framework](#) to drive alignment with the product, marketing, and sales leaders to formally define the target segments at multiple audience levels such as industry, region, organisation type, buying centre, and persona.

Understand the challenges, initiatives, and needs of your buying personas. Understanding [buyer needs](#) is crucial to becoming audience-centric. Forrester defines a need as a desired outcome that has business value for a specific persona. Messaging, content, launches, and campaigns should be planned around audiences' needs, not offerings and features.



The best way to better understand the audience is a deep dive into targeted buyer personas. B2B buyers of today are equipped with almost unlimited access to information and higher expectations when it comes to their buying experience. This development has meant that to be successful, marketers must cater to today's B2B buyers, as their expectations are higher than they have ever been before.

By harnessing this vital knowledge, B2B marketers can create campaigns centered on the buyer lifecycle. This e-book delves into the importance of creating audience-centric content, as opposed to product-centric, and what marketers can do to adapt and thrive in their approach to creating content by better understanding their audience.

Discover:

- Buying groups and buying scenarios and how they impact buyer behaviour.
- Best practices for delivering messaging that resonates by defining the B2B buyer's journey.

The best ways to reach target audiences through a better understanding of key behavioural attributes, such as content and interaction preferences.

Right Audiences

Everything Starts With The Audience

B2B marketers must deliver content and interactions that are contextual and relevant to where the buyer is in their journey. The more a marketer understands the targeted persona and their related buying group, the more impact and reach campaigns will have. This means knowing what role they play in a purchase.

The majority of B2B buying decisions are made in groups. These individuals may include various champions, decision-makers, influencers, and ratifiers, as well as users. As organisations plan and execute campaigns, they must optimise content to provide the knowledge required by each buyer role across individual and collective interactions to drive an effective buying experience. Our 2021 B2B Buying Study found that 60% of B2B purchases involve a buying group of four or more individuals.

Common roles we see:



CHAMPION:
Business Value

Consider limiting roadmap access to specific roles and functions.



INFLUENCER:
Performance

Store in the appropriate location for audience; ensure appropriate permissions.



DECISION-MAKER (CXO):
ROI

Establish specific rules about who may present the roadmap externally.



USER:
Customer Experience

Put specific screening criteria in place to evaluate when in the process to share with a prospect.



RATIFIER:
TCO

Determine whether it is appropriate to provide a client or prospect with a printed or electronic copy.

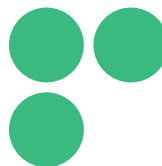
In B2B, individuals who make up the buying groups will consider how a major purchase affects all members of the buying group. Successful marketers must equip themselves with this knowledge by understanding how and when members of the buying group will participate and interact during the buying process. Marketers need to familiarise their content, programmes, and tactics to align with each target; without a complete picture, marketers unavoidably miss addressing the crucial needs of personas.

The size of the buying group can vary based on the importance of the purchase. **Individual buying scenarios** are simple purchases that involve one or two people. **Consensus scenarios** involve several people across several departments. And **committee scenarios** usually involve large groups and require executive approval. Understanding the persona's role in the buying group and how the buyer persona makes purchasing decisions is key to defining that persona. It is important to keep in mind that key personas in a buying group have different buyer roles and may participate at different stages of the buying decision process.

100%

of marketing leaders (director or above), on average, are either a decision-maker or champion across all buying scenarios.

Make understanding the buying process from the buyer's perspective a priority, then design a marketing and sales approach that matches. By establishing or improving understanding, the selling organisation can determine mutual engagement with buyers instead of trying to force them into a journey they may never take. Buying scenarios and the buying decision process are central to understanding how to target organisations to purchase. Understanding the buying scenario helps marketers understand the level of intricacy in how the organisation purchases and the approximate type and number of personas involved in the buying decision process. This can directly inform the content planned and produced for the target audience.



Right Content

Create Content Aligned To Audience Requirements And Preferences

To create the right content to support an audience's buyer journey. B2B marketers must first understand knowledge requirements, asset preferences, and interaction preferences. Great content is vital to every aspect of B2B marketing, but most content fails to enhance buyer interest, pipeline progression, or account-specific engagement. Very few B2B organisations understand their buyer's decision process and therefore struggle to create the right content.

Researching audiences, building or using persona profiles and buyer journey maps, taking messaging themes and value propositions, and finally bringing them to life in content form is not an easy feat. However, mastering these skills is essential to building audience-centric, data-driven content.

Once you've defined and understand the buying group, there are three important behavioural attributes to consider when looking to truly create the right content that resonates: knowledge requirements, interaction preferences, and asset preferences.

1

KNOWLEDGE REQUIREMENTS

This reflects the key questions that the audience needs to answer regarding the way the proposed solution will address their challenges, at each stage of the buyer journey. Marketers need to map the informational and emotional requirements of their target audience at each defined stage. Sharing content is not about what marketers want to give their audience; it is about what the audience wants to know. Rigorous and authentic mapping of knowledge requirements allows marketers to support the buyer with the best content at each stage whilst providing answers to their most important questions.

2

INTERACTION PREFERENCES

This identifies where buyers go to gather information to support their buying decisions. As personas move through the buyer's journey, they prefer to interact with the selling organisation through various non-human interactions. This can include accessing a free trial, searching the internet, and exploring websites. They also expect human interactions including, but not limited to, speaking directly with a representative, attending an industry conference, and having conversations with a customer reference. Recognising the balance of human and non-human interactions per buying scenario is important for allocating and aligning resources to marketing and sales programmes.

3

ASSET PREFERENCES

This identifies the asset types most likely to drive engagement with that persona. Marketers should work with portfolio marketing, content teams, campaign strategists, field marketing, and sales enablement to identify the best content asset types for target personas. By assessing how buying group personas prefer to access and consume information, content creators and strategists can plan and produce assets that are aligned to those asset preferences, which improves engagement and the experience.

Gathering insights into each persona's aspirations and goals, along with their worries and fears, can be used to create meaningful content that the audience craves. To stand out from the competition, be as precise and detailed as possible during the collection of initiatives, challenges, and business drivers.

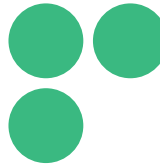
Right Place And Time

Consider Where Audiences Consume Content And When To Deliver To Them

B2B marketers must better understand the channel preferences of their audience and when they receive content based on previous consumption.

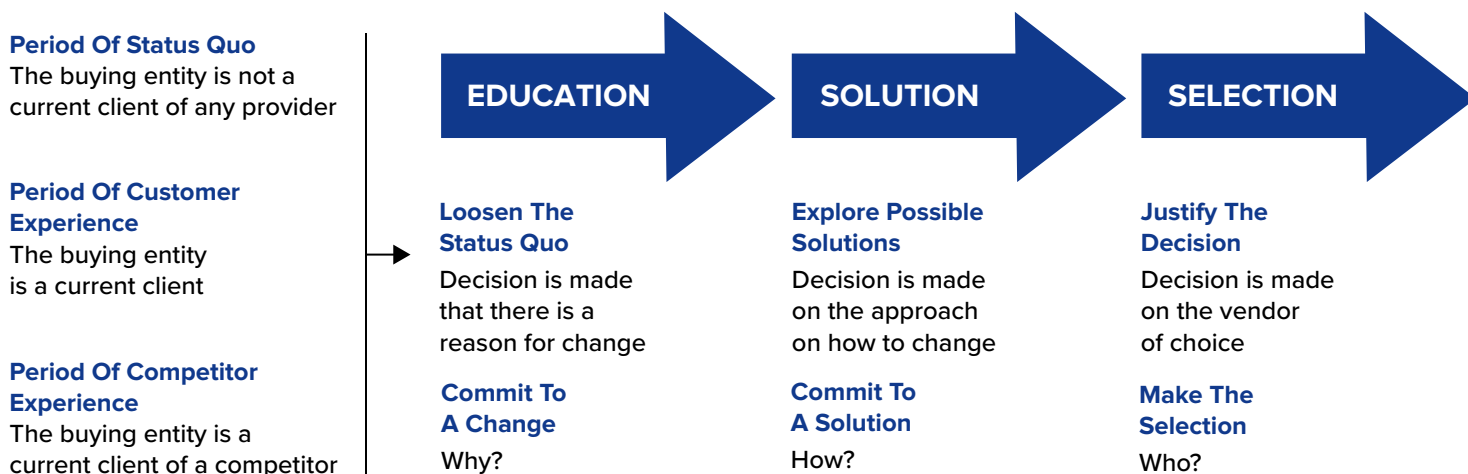
For marketers, it is now even more important to be audience-centric in their approach to both digital and human interactions. Forrester validated that buyers are retrieving information online and interacting through digital delivery channels, but this has not reduced their level of human interaction. B2B marketing has shifted to a purely digital mentality, but organisations must re-evaluate buyers' behaviours to avoid misreading data whose initial classification has potentially led to a digital bias. Marketers should remove the “digital blinders” and create opportunities for the desired human interactions, because it turns out, that humans are still essential to the B2B buying process. Marketers must learn how to foster those human interactions in a digital context, which has made it even more challenging.

While the buyer journey is not linear, a well- thought-out content strategy will help ensure the right information and touchpoints are created, no matter if the buyer journey is progressing or has taken a step back. The majority of these touchpoints occur through three prominent buyer journey phases leading up to a purchase decision: education, solution, and selection.



Forrester's B2B Buying Decision Framework depicts the three major buyer journey phases and the key questions that need to be answered from an audience perspective.

Forrester's B2B Buying Decision Framework



EDUCATION PHASE

During the education phase, the buyer tries to understand a business problem or learn more about an opportunity. The initial need can be instigated by internal triggers or an external trigger.

SOLUTION PHASE

During the solution phase, buyers examine alternative ways to solve a problem or satisfy a need. This phase is not about determining the specific solution, but instead about determining the best approach to fulfill the need and the appropriate way to do that. Buyers are focused on comparing all available options to find the one that will deliver the best result.

SELECTION PHASE

During this phase, the buying decision is made. The buyer is focused on getting final approval of the business case in order to approve the budget release. Final selection tends to require a ratification process by purchasing, procurement, legal, IT, or finance.

Marketers need to move away from random acts of content to delivering visible value that drives engagement and increase content relevance by truly mapping value delivery to the customer lifecycle.

By understanding these core concepts that inform content strategy, like buyer roles, knowledge requirements, asset and interaction preferences, and buyer journey mapping, marketers can prioritise content requirements much more effectively and target specific buyer information needs for better content performance and significant efficiency gains.

Wonderful things can happen when audience-centricity and content strategy come together. Best-in-class organisations understand this and know how to leverage persona information to influence campaigns, content, and tactics. Simply stated, to deliver results, marketing teams must engage their target audiences with the right content at the right time within the buyer's journey. Through content, organisations demonstrate authentic understanding of their customers and their challenges and express a winning value proposition.

Explore a few of Forrester's resources and upcoming events geared toward helping B2B marketing leaders build an audience-centric content strategy that drives results.

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