A simply DIRECT Market Brief

The buyer-centric formula for creating trust-building content

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The Trust Imperative

When it comes to relationship-building, trust is paramount—from trust, everything else flows. In the world of B2B marketing and sales, it can be generally said that you are either building trust or destroying it. In this manner, B2B marketers are uniquely positioned to powerfully shape and influence how prospective buyers view their brand. With content creation specifically, savvy marketers can lay the groundwork for a deliberate and careful forging of trust, be it by communicating directly with the target audience in a manner which conveys a clear understanding of who the buyer is and what their needs are, or by working with our counterparts in sales to help them better articulate a buyer-centric message.

"Buyers are not happy with vendors. Their content [tends to be] overtechnical, product-centric, and self-serving."

-Donovan Neale-May
Executive Director
CMO Council

And the need for a buyer-centric understanding and appeal is clear. In this 'Age of the Customer' (as termed by Forrester, Forbes, and many others), where buyers are empowered on the heels of the Age of Information, buying expectations have changed. Today's buyers expect a customized experience, carefully tailored to their situation. Instead of a personalized experience, buyers lament that all too often marketing content and sales meetings are focused on the vendor's solution, rather than first internalizing the buyer's

context in order to present a product or service which precisely meets those particular needs.

In fact, Forrester's research reveals that buyers only give a marginal grade of "C" to vendors regarding the vendor's knowledge of their own products, while flunking them in all of the following buyer-context categories:

- · Knowledgeable about my industry.
- · Knowledgeable about my specific business
- Can relate to my role and responsibilities in the organization
- Understands my issues and where they can help
- · Prepared for the questions I ask
- Has relevant examples or case studies to share with me

Clearly, in order to begin building that vital element of trust, what is needed is a deeper understanding of the complete buyer context *from the buyer's perspective*. Such a granular approach allows marketers to build trust through understanding and insight, by crafting content that reflect these through their relevance and credibility.

So, how granular can you go? Perhaps you've heard the story of the teacher who asked his class, "How can we fill this large glass jar?" Putting in large rocks, he asked, "Is it filled?" Apparently, yes! Then he added sand around the rocks. "Is it filled now?" Then he added water. "And now?" Then he added sugar. "What about now—is it finally filled?" This story is an apt metaphor for demonstrating that as you add to the information mix and buyer context, you simultaneously deepen the bond of trust you are capable of forging with prospects. And so it follows that if you want to create great content that builds trust, you need a solution that fills the full context. Our formula for crafting trust-building content

✓ the foundational rocks and sand of relevance and credibility

requires adding the following to your mix:

- ✓ the binding water of listening to understand perspective
- ✓ the enticing sugar of a personal, humanized approach

"A Senior IT Director told us he doesn't trust a salesman until the 4th interaction, but he'll ditch someone the moment doubt is introduced."

Know your buyer's context—relevance & credibility

Context matters.

To enrich our understanding of our buyer's context, we must consider it in both the generic and specific senses. The generic context informs our knowledge of the language and issues pertaining to our target buyers' industry, market(s), and personas, while the specific context addresses the individual's particular needs and challenges. And nothing quite replaces the value of learning directly from the source—leading both market research and the sales conversation with questions that dig deep to first flesh out the buyer's specific context, not only informs that understanding, but also conveys a sympathetic willingness to place *listening* to the buyer over *speaking* to the buyer

Active, ongoing research to identify relevant drivers and challenges

Creating relevance requires current, accurate information that paints a complete picture. To this end, carefully select robust, credible, and varied sources. Fleshing out the generic context will help you see beyond the obvious to provide unique insights. Look to industry news, blogs, and analysts for industry insights, but also look to social media to gain the popular perspective. Pay attention to the questions being asked and the content being shared. And also seek to understand overlapping industries and contexts, in an effort to see around the corner to issues that could affect your target market. A well-crafted survey can be a great tool for both customized market research, as well as a vehicle for driving customer engagement.

"Relevance and trust drive better content performance across the purchase funnel."

-Donovan Neale-May Executive Director CMO Council

Own the role of trusted advisor.

Being diligent in amassing a deep understanding of your buyer's context, including what motivates their behavior, provides a wealth of valuable intelligence. Use this resource to craft insightful and unique messaging that will see your organization well positioned as a thought leader. From here, sales can speak intelligently regarding your buyer's full context, from the generic

to the granular specific. Coupled with a sympathetic, buyer-centric approach, marketing and sales can both engender confidence in prospective buyers, creating bankable trust and goodwill.

Gain your buyer's perspective through conscious listening

Conscious listening for real understanding

Nothing is more effective for gaining a prospect's specific, individual context than going directly to the source: the customer. Interviews, surveys, and accompanying your sales rep on a call are all highly effective ways of learning about target audiences. So, too, are conversations within your organization with all client-facing team members (e.g., sales, customer service).

Yet to get more out of these conversations and interviews, sound consultant Julian Treasure advises us that while "listening is our access to understanding, conscious listening creates understanding." To illustrate how poorly we tend to listen, he cites study findings that indicate the average person only hears about 25% of what is said to them. In order to listen more productively when engaged in a conversation or interview, Treasure cautions us to move out of "broadcast mode" (where we speak more than listen). Rather, he suggests we become more aware of our own subconscious mental models through which we filter all information—our culture, language, values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and intentions—in an effort to truly hear what the speaker is saying from their perspective. Treasure also suggests utilizing the acronym RASA:

- Receive—Limit your speaking to no more than 25% of the conversation and check inherently judgmental mental models at the door.
- Appreciate—Show your speaker that you appreciate, respect, and are actively listening to what they are saying by making listening sounds such as "mhmm" and displaying encouraging body language, such as nodding and making eye contact.
- Summarize—After the speaker finishes, summarize your understanding of what they've said to ensure you are both on the same page.
- Ask—Clarify any ambiguities and show interest in your speaker by asking thoughtful questions.

Contrary to conventional approaches that lead the sales conversation from the solution end, buyer studies clearly inform us that what buyers want is to be better understood, not pitched to. Consequently, sales should lead

with questions and dig deep to first flesh out their buyer's specific context. Inherent to our human nature is a need to be heard, to feel as though someone understands our perspective. Business buyers are no different and asking intelligent questions regarding their specific context—questions informed by a well understood larger context—engenders confidence and trust in prospective buyers.

Connect with the human touch—make it personal

Explicitly define your audience & understand how they think

To know how to affect your audience, you need to first understand precisely who they are and what matters most to them—and not just as a functional role within a prospective business, but as people. Focusing on personalization renders your content more meaningful and relevant. To be most effective, build buyer personas and determine your buyer's ultimate goal, while prioritizing their primary concerns on both the business and personal levels. Learn which are motivating influences and how you can leverage these insights to craft messages which resonate and connect profoundly. And truly listen to what your audience is telling you, both explicitly and implicitly —as the influential psychologist Carl Rogers once said, "Man's inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively."

Go for the gut—connect emotionally

Traditionally, creating emotional connections with customers has always been the purview of B2C marketers, whereas B2B marketers have catered to the rational and value-driven needs of level-headed buying committees focused on business benefits and outcomes. Yet integral to that very process is the weighing of risk and reward. where key decision makers often place everything on the line, most notably their credibility and their job. Consequently, B2B buying is, in actuality, highly personal and fraught with emotions—and much more so than B2C buying due to the level of personal risk involved. Explicitly addressing this volatile, emotional component by reassuring prospects of the personal benefits your solution provides, renders your offering significantly more attractive and trustworthy. In fact, a Google/CEB study found that "personal value has twice the impact of business value across a broad range of commercial outcomes."iii

Craft content from your audience's perspective

When shaping text of any kind, storytelling's greatest commandment must always be adhered to: "make me care." Or, phrased more directly, the text must address the all-important, self-serving interest of the reader by answering, "What's in it for me?" From your audience's perspective, you're selling *results*, not a product or a service. Granted, it's a nuanced difference—two sides of the same coin—but the framing is vital. Lead with the results that matter to your target audience and you'll be far more likely to engage them to read further. But understand which of their values or motivations these results tie into, and you can hook them emotionally, while instinctively gaining their trust.

Renowned advertising exec Eugene Schwartz advised content writers to tap into one overwhelming desire. In his book, *Breakthrough Advertising*, he stated, "Copy cannot create desire for a product. It can only take the hopes, dreams, fears and desires that *already exist...and focus those already existing desires onto a particular product.*"

Prospect Surveys: The SimplyDIRECT approach to building relationships founded on trust

Ultimately, prospect engagement is predicated on establishing connections based on trust, which in turn are predicated on effective communication, and effective communication begins with listening. Prospect surveys are a great way to both listen to individual prospects and to gain the collective pulse of your target audience. From these responses, you can form a personalized approach tailored to a specific prospect, as well as develop a broader, more credible approach for your segment based on independent insights and analyses of aggregated results—all from your one prospect survey.

The purpose of a prospect survey (survey-based lead generation), as distinguished from a market/industry survey, is two-fold: to reach, engage, and qualify prospects, while both gaining and communicating insights in one efficient process. The sometimes overlooked and less obvious benefit of this process is indeed the opportunity to communicate and test new ideas and perspectives regarding prospects' personal and organizational challenges by

asking questions they haven't previously considered. Asking good questions is often the best way to show one's insight and understanding of a problem.

And just as the rocks, sand, water, and sugar metaphor provides a structured and increasingly granular approach to gaining a buyer-centric perspective for content creation, so, too, can this same metaphor be applied to prospect surveys. At the widest view, aggregated results provide the larger industry context—the rocks and sand of our metaphor. The water stage informs the company context by providing information on issues specific to that organization, yet still within the context of the industry. Finally, the organizational context is sweetened by the knowledge gained of the individual survey responder's attitudes and perceptions of key issues—the proverbial icing (or sugar!) on the cake.

The granular nature of the information collected from prospect surveys helps establish a personal relationship between the prospect and the sales person. When the sales person contacts the prospect, they already know key facts regarding the business and problems the prospect is trying to solve. Such up-front knowledge allows sales to personalize their story in a manner that engenders trust, by speaking directly to their prospect's particular logistical needs and challenges, as well as their emotional ones. And, of course, aggregated results can likewise be used to inform new, insightful marketing content.

Because human nature is a curious mix of emotion and logic, building trust through a buyer-centric approach truly resides at the crossroads of art and science. Regardless of your messaging, proof points, and rational appeal, people make buying decision to meet their varied needs, often via convoluted reasoning—B2B or not. Using account-based prospect surveys helps you to discover those reasons by creating an opportunity for you to listen in on your audience and truly hear what shapes their thinking.

Attending to the issues of relevance and credibility, while listening carefully to truly understand the buyer perspective, will allow you to craft content that resonates powerfully on all levels: the organizational, personal, and emotional levels. In so doing, you can smartly ensure that your glass jar is truly filled to capacity with a valuable and deeply granular understanding of your buyer's complete context.

iii http://www.executiveboard.com/exbd-resources/content/b2b-emotion/index.html



Forrester presentation, Feb 2014 "Improving content and conversation for B2B sales success." http://www.slideshare.net/poneill1956/improving-content-and-conversation-for-b2b-sales-success

[&]quot;http://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better?language=en

About SimplyDIRECT

SimplyDIRECT through its subsidiary
Gatepoint Research, designs, drafts and
deploys opt-in, by invitation-only surveys
to management-level executives within
a client's target companies. Using web,
phone and email-based data collection,
its cutting-edge IT trends research and
data analysis helps in the generation of
custom reports and thought-leadership
content. They have deployed over 500
surveys since 2000 and engage over
10,000 decision-makers each year.

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SimplyDIRECT helps you identify, engage and qualify prospects with maximum precision through custom database building into your target accounts.

We specialize in account penetration by delivering accurate, high-level contact information for Director, Vice President and C-level decision makers as well as managers.

We focus on:

Key account marketing

Our account-based approach focuses on the right contacts with the roles you need to target, in the accounts you'd like to win. We phone verify our contacts to ensure accuracy.

Survey based demand generation
 Identifying not only prospects but also details about their need for your product or service. Those with appropriate needs are invited to opt-in to be contacted by your sales force.