

5 Buyer Insights To Improve Your Marketing To HR



Take advantage of the increased sales opportunities that come during an economic recovery.

After budget cutbacks and freezes during the recession, more and more HR buyers have money to spend. Bersin By Deloitte, for example, reported in May that 57 percent of companies planned to make a major new HR software purchase in the next 18 months.

As a vendor, this is a great opportunity to increase sales—and profits. (Woo-hoo!)

However, buyer behaviors and preferences are changing at a tremendous pace.

If you are unaware of these changes and behind the times, you're probably failing to serve buyers' needs. That means their freed-up dollars could be going to your competitors, and not to you. (Oh no!)

With the hopes of getting the "woo-hoos" to drown out the "oh nos," here are five buyer insights to improve your marketing to HR, and thereby take advantage of the increased sales opportunities that come during an economic recovery.

#1. THE BUYER MARKET IS TWO-TIERED

THE SITUATION:

With the proliferation of online content, we have seen significant HR buyer behavior changes. The changes have resulted in a two-tiered buyer market that for now is split roughly evenly between traditional buyers and social buyers, a recent survey of B2B buyers by the marketing group Acquity Group shows. It is crucial for you as an industry vendor to understand these buyer categories.



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- **Social Buyers:** Primarily use online content to learn about the industry and to research purchasing decisions. They tend to be technologically savvy, are more likely to be in tech-oriented roles, and are more than twice as likely to read and value information they find on social media, in electronic newsletters and in blogs.
- **Traditional Buyers:** Attach greater value to in-person interactions and peer opinions for education. They are, for example, more than twice as likely to highly value conferences. Importantly, however, traditional buyers do value certain types of online content; for example, traditional buyers rated research reports slightly higher than social buyers did.

The survey reveals that a significant difference between the buyer groups is age. More than 50 percent of respondents between the ages of 18-34 identified as social buyers, while nearly 70 percent of those ages 35-54 identified as traditional buyers. This makes sense given that younger professionals grew up using the Internet; it's what they know, so it's how they learn and research. As a result, as more time passes, the ranks of social buyers should continue to grow.

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

To maximize sales, you need to engage both traditional and social buyers.

This requires using a marketing mix that combines creating a steady stream of content with exhibiting, sponsoring and speaking at conferences.

Be careful, though. Buyers are making judgments about your company in every interaction. Not only in person, but also online. So, just as it's crucial to make a positive impression at a trade show, it's vital to do so through your online content. Most buyers are skeptical of vendor-produced content. To overcome that distrust, produce high-quality materials that show your company is an industry thought leader, perhaps partnering with influencers to co-author content (influencers can help increase credibility and visibility). As a result, until a buyer is ready for a brand-specific offer, each piece of creative should provide information your buyers will find useful, avoid being overly self-promotional and be well designed. It's also important to repurpose a major piece of content into a variety of formats (e.g., a white paper can be turned into an article, several blog posts, a webinar, an infographic, etc.), as people differ in the content types they prefer to consume.

The rewards of an effective content marketing strategy are significant: 87 percent of B2B content consumers say that online content has a major or moderate impact on their vendor selection, according to a 2013 report by the CMO Council. Plus, more than 68 percent of buyers say they rely on content more in 2013 than



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they did in 2012, compared to just 1.4 percent saying they rely less on content, according to Demand Gen Report.

#2. VENDOR WEBSITES ARE CRUCIAL RESOURCES

THE SITUATION:

There are two main reasons people visit vendor websites: for information and to make purchases.

As the ranks of younger, Internet-based buyers have continued to grow and traditional buyers have become increasingly open to consuming content and making purchases online, websites have only become more important for businesses. When buyers begin their purchasing research, vendor websites are their primary source of information—even above peers, analysts, trade media and conferences—according to the Acquity Group. A Google/Compete survey found 85 percent of buyers visit solution provider websites as part of their research.

Many vendors, however, have websites that don't serve their potential buyers' needs effectively due to poor navigation, lack of quality information, too much promotional information and the lack of a quality online purchasing portal. According to the Acquity Group, 70 percent of buyers say they would spend more of their budgets online if "suppliers' websites were easier and more convenient to use."

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

You need a quality, modern website that is designed specifically to serve your buyers while also gathering the crucial leads-related data you need to fuel your company's sales and marketing efforts.

- **Serving Buyers:** Since many buyers focus their attention online, the quality of your Internet presence is hugely important to earning their respect, and ultimately their dollars. If your homepage is outdated, buyers, especially more tech-savvy ones, will judge your company negatively. If navigation is clunky or confusing, they will wonder if your products are as well. A bad or mediocre website can destroy the potential benefits of strong content. On the other hand, a great website can pique HR buyers' interest and convince them to engage with you by taking up your calls to

A hand-drawn illustration of a contact form. It consists of three horizontal input fields labeled 'Name', 'Company', and 'Email'. Below these fields is a yellow button with the word 'Send' written on it.

Use tools such as landing pages to get names and contact information so you can identify leads, and then nurture them with related content.

action (download content, view presentations and videos, request a quote or consultation, etc.).

- **Gathering Sales & Marketing Data:** With many buyers eschewing website visitors don't leave business cards as a visitor to your exhibit booth might. As a result, you need to use tools such as landing pages to get names and contact information so you can identify leads, and then nurture them with related content. Be careful not to require too much information, as the percentage of buyers who say they'll provide detailed information in return for access to a white paper fell from 10.8 percent in 2012 to just 4.8 percent in 2013, according to Demand Gen Report.

#3. BUYERS WANT TO INTERACT WITH SALES, BUT FIRST FOR INFORMATION

THE SITUATION:

More than 70 percent of buyers desire to interact with sales reps before they are ready to begin making a purchasing decision, the Acquity Group reports.

Twenty-four percent want to do so from the start of the buying process, so they can keep up with industry news and events. Another 23 percent prefer to wait to the awareness stage, when they can learn about potential solutions and solution providers. An additional 24 percent seek sales interaction to help identify a short list of vendors from which to make a possible purchase, as most buyers consider three or more companies when purchasing.

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

Your sales reps can play an important part in demonstrating your thought leadership. Buyers are looking for information to make an educated, intelligent purchase that will deliver the results they are seeking. Plus, in many cases, prospects have to "sell" a potential purchase to others in their organization before they can make it. According to Demand Gen Report, 45 percent of B2B buyers said four or more people were involved in the purchase process, while 75 percent said the C-level or executive committee were involved.

So it's crucial to educate. When interacting with buyers, your reps need to provide stimulating perspectives on the market, and be the faces, or at least the voices, of



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your company's expertise.

But there is an alternative to having your sales reps being the educators. After all it can be quite time-consuming for them to send relevant quality content pieces to buyers, especially when they are manually looking up blog posts and other supporting content pieces for each prospect. Instead, distribution can be automated for leads acquired via premium content registrations; using an inbound marketing service provider, vendors can send a series of automated emails with relevant content offers to registrants, providing more education before sales gets involved.

#4. BUYERS WANT SOLUTIONS THAT HELP THEM DO THEIR JOBS BETTER

THE SITUATION:

It's great to be reaching buyers, have an awesome website and to have an effective process for educating prospects through the sales funnel, but ultimately you need a product that they want to buy.

But what are they looking for? Ultimately, HR wants products that are easy to use and help them do their jobs better. But according to a survey by SumTotal Systems, only 33 percent of HR buyers say that HR technology allows them to do better work. And among those companies planning to replace talent management applications, 68 percent cited improving the user experience as the reason for the change, according to Bersin By Deloitte.

Ultimately, nearly half of organizations are not satisfied with their current learning, talent and HR technologies, according to Brandon Hall Group research.

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

The findings above indicate HR is far from satisfied with many HR technology products. Certainly there are highly effective HR technologies the industry is quite pleased with, but if your product is challenging to use, you have work to do. The good news is that, with dissatisfaction high in some HR technology niches, addressing these issues could help you significantly boost sales and renewals.

That's, of course, easier said than done. It's important to work with and listen to potential buyers and your existing clients. Nobody can tell you what you are doing



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well, what you need to improve and what features you should add better than those who are interested in or are already using your product.

#5. THE SALE DOESN'T END AT THE SALE

THE SITUATION:

You've made the sale. Great! But you're really just getting started. There's a common adage that it costs five times less to retain a client than to get a new one, and it's probably about right. So now the job is to make your new client happy, so you can retain it in the future.

But what is a new client looking for after making a purchase?

Demand Gen found 67 percent of buyers reported that education and training were highly useful, while 66 percent listed product support, and another 33 percent cited a user community/forum.

WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU:

To create more happy clients means continuing to offer education, training and support until a given client: A. Is comfortable using your product or service. B. Accomplishes something using it.

In our experience, if you are offering a product, the real key to a happy client is to ensure that the client is actively using it. When your client wins with your product, you are a winner. You get the renewal, and perhaps positive word of mouth or even a referral.

As a result, your sales and/or training staff should keep in contact with clients after the initial sale and after training to see if they are using your product, and to ask about their experience using it. This early period is the time to fix any issues clients are having with implementation, and their feedback can also help with product development.

If you are offering a service, it's also crucial to keep the client engaged. It may be even more important to have ongoing communication with a service client than it is with a product client. It's a good idea for communication to occur both formally and informally, so that a partnership develops where you and the client are working toward common goals. As you interact, it's vital to get feedback on how your service is or isn't working, and to work together to refine strategy as the



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relationship moves forward. Ultimately, failing to develop a relationship with the client and failing to make adjustments is a recipe for failing to get a renewal.



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CRAIG'S THOUGHTS:

"The top problem I encounter with HR buyers of technology or services is user adoption. So maintaining good communication on a regular basis and asking the right questions about how users are actually benefiting from using the product or service is key. And send cookies! Joking aside, customers like to feel a connection to their vendor beyond phone calls to customer support."

WRAPPING UP

So what should you do to match your marketing to HR with today's buyer preferences? Here are six action items:

1. Create a steady flow of quality content, and put it in a variety of forms
2. Exhibit/sponsor/speak/mingle at tradeshow
3. Have a modern content-driven website that is easy to navigate and allows you to identify leads and analyze traffic
4. Educate leads with content and insight—either through your sales team, or via automated emails—to nurture them down the sales funnel.
5. Work with buyers to ensure your products are easy to use and have the features they are looking for.
6. Continue to provide support/training post-sale until the client is using your product and getting winning results.

Now get to it. And start bringing in, and retaining, more clients.

Woo-hoo!



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HRmarketer improves your vision of the HR marketplace so you can improve your brand's visibility.

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