A Strong B2B Marketing Strategy Starts with Choices, Not Tactics

When I talk to companies about marketing, the conversation often quickly turns to tactics. Should we become more active on LinkedIn? Is it time for a new website? Should we launch a newsletter, organise an event or invest in online advertising?

These are all relevant questions, but in my view, they come too late in the process. Before deciding what to do, you first need to know where you want to go, which customers you want to reach and why they should choose your company.

To me, that is the essence of a strong B2B marketing strategy.

Marketing Is More Than a Series of Separate Activities

A marketing strategy is not a collection of ideas that happen to come up throughout the year. It is a long-term plan that defines the position you want to occupy in the market, the target groups you want to focus on and how marketing will contribute to the organisation's commercial objectives.

Without this coherence, you quickly end up with a calendar full of activities without anyone knowing exactly what they are supposed to achieve. A trade show is booked because the company attends every year. A few LinkedIn posts are published because the account has been quiet. The website gets a new design and sales asks for more leads. Everyone is busy, but are all those efforts actually moving in the same direction?

A strategy helps you make choices. It is not only about deciding what you will do, but especially what you will not do for the time being.

Start by Understanding Where You Are

Before you can formulate a strategy, you need to take an honest look at your current situation. What is happening in the market? Which developments are relevant? Where are the opportunities and where might threats emerge?

This involves looking at customers, competitors, technology, legislation and changing purchasing behaviour. An internal analysis is just as important. What is the organisation genuinely good at? Which products or services are distinctive? Where are commercial opportunities currently being missed? And does the organisation have the people, knowledge and capacity required to execute its plans?

Models such as a SWOT analysis, DESTEP, Porter's Five Forces or a portfolio analysis can help. However, a model should never be the final product. It is simply a tool for developing better insights and making sharper choices.

After all, an impressive SWOT analysis in a presentation does not change anything by itself. Its value only emerges when the conclusions are translated into concrete decisions.

Not Every Customer Is Your Ideal Customer

A common pitfall in B2B marketing is targeting a market that is too broad. Anyone who could potentially use the product or service is considered a prospective customer.

But not every prospective customer is automatically an attractive customer.

A good strategy identifies the markets and segments that offer the greatest opportunities. This is not just about market size, but also about profitability, growth potential, accessibility and the extent to which your proposition is genuinely distinctive.

You also need to understand who is involved in the purchasing decision. A managing director views an investment differently from a procurement manager, technical specialist or end user. In B2B, you are usually not dealing with a single decision-maker, but with a group of people who each have their own interests and questions.

Marketing should therefore do more than explain what a company offers. Effective marketing demonstrates the value of the solution to every person involved in the decision.

Positioning Requires Courage

Once you know which markets and customers you want to target, the next question is: what position do you want to occupy?

Many companies use terms such as quality, service, flexibility and reliability. These are important qualities, but they are rarely truly distinctive. Almost every competitor says the same thing.

Strong positioning requires a clear choice. What do you want to be known for? Which problem can you demonstrably solve better than others? Why should a customer invite you to a meeting instead of one of your competitors?

This positioning should then be recognisable everywhere: on the website, in presentations, in proposals, at events and, above all, in the behaviour of employees. A brand promise only has value when customers actually experience it in practice.

From Strategy to an Actionable Marketing Plan

Once the strategy has been determined, it needs to be translated into an operational marketing plan. This plan should clearly describe:

- the objectives we want to achieve;
- the target groups that will receive priority;
- the value proposition for each target group;
- the marketing channels and activities that support these objectives;
- the available budget and capacity;
- who is responsible for what;
- how results will be measured and adjusted.

Only at this point should the choice of marketing tactics be made. These may include content marketing, email marketing, social media, online advertising, public relations, sponsorship, direct mail or business events.

Not every channel needs to be used. The best marketing mix is the combination that fits the target audience, the commercial objectives and the organisation’s available capacity.

Marketing and Sales Must Tell the Same Story

In B2B, there is a great deal of discussion about lead generation and the marketing and sales funnel. Leads are important, but a strong B2B marketing strategy goes beyond collecting contact details.

Marketing should also contribute to brand awareness, trust, customer retention, cross-selling and a strong market position. Furthermore, marketing only works effectively when it is closely aligned with sales.

If marketing develops a campaign for a target group that sales sees little potential in, energy and budget are wasted. The reverse is also true: if sales identifies commercial opportunities but marketing fails to respond, valuable opportunities remain untapped.

Marketing and sales do not have to do the same work, but they do need to operate from the same objectives, target groups and propositions.

Opportunities Are Often Missed in SMEs

In many small and medium-sized businesses, marketing is considered important, but no one has full responsibility for it. The managing director handles part of it, an assistant or commercial employee maintains the website and an external agency occasionally runs a campaign.

Everyone does their best, but time, overview and coherence are lacking. As a result, good ideas remain unused and activities are often carried out on an ad hoc basis.

At the same time, these organisations may not need or be able to justify employing a full-time marketing manager. This is precisely where an external marketing director or marketing coordinator can make a real difference: someone who safeguards the strategy, determines priorities, coordinates internal and external specialists and ensures that plans are actually implemented.

My Conclusion

A good B2B marketing strategy does not need to be a lengthy report. Above all, it should provide the organisation with a clear and practical compass.

For me, it starts with several simple but important questions:

Who do we want to reach? Which problem do we solve for these customers? What genuinely sets us apart? Which commercial results do we want to achieve? And which activities make a demonstrable contribution to those results?

Once these answers are clear, marketing becomes more manageable. The organisation gains focus, budgets are used more effectively and marketing and sales can work together towards the same commercial goals.

The most important lesson I take from B2Bmarketeers’ explanation of developing a B2B marketing strategy is this: do not start with the tactics. Start with direction, choices and coherence.

Because marketing only delivers meaningful results when strategy and execution reinforce each other.