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BRANDING & DATA – THE NEW ALLIANCE

By

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Old time B2B marketers would see the two words “branding” and “data” as polar opposites in the marketing continuum and would define them as:

- **Branding** – a market awareness (hopefully positive) of the company, product and/or service achieved through advertising, PR and other forms of communication (e.g. trade shows) that communicates the brand story and value proposition. Big picture stuff accompanied with correlated big budgets needed to achieve the intended audience brand awareness and recall.
- **Data** – something needed for direct marketing, and alternately referred to as lists. Internally, data was found on Excel sheets in the marketing departments and, of course, within the accounting department even though marketers couldn’t actually see or access it easily. Some data was also recorded on the early CRM systems that were little more than a client directory.

To paraphrase the words of an equally old TV commercial – “We’ve come a long way baby”. Both the definitions of branding and data have changed, and we now have updated definitions such as *branded content* and *big data*. But, still marketers don’t see them as closely related.

I’m here to say they are now related, and here’s why:

Branding experts haven’t changed in their definition of the desired end result – a positive view, remembrance and knowledge of the company, product and/or service. What has changed is the manner in which this result is achieved. Now, all the touches an individual receives from the company accumulate in the mind of that person and create the “brand impression”. In Don Schultz’s book *Integrated Marketing* he makes the valid point, and I quote, “all the touches accumulate to a behavior”. I couldn’t agree more with Don except that I would amend it to read – **“all the touches accumulate to a feeling and behavior”**.



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Here are the most common B2B touch points we have available to us in no particular order, but slanted to our new digital world:

- The website appearance and ease of navigation on all pages.
- The website content – is it understandable, of value and printable (you would be surprised how many times I have tried to print something and it’s not a good experience).
- The annoyances while on the site – such as a pop-up asking for a live chat. Once is enough and maybe once is too many!!
- Webinars and white papers – hopefully they are of real value and not sales pitches.
- The quick and promised fulfillment of offers from the website, webinars or direct marketing. These are typically e-based, but every now and then terrestrial mail is used.
- The very first call to an 800 number, and how the call is handled, routed and responded to.
- The very first call you receive as a follow up from attending a webinar, requesting a white paper or attending a trade show.
- The second or third touch whether it be by email or phone – does it refer or reference the prior touches? In other words, do they know me now?
- The increasing degree of relevancy of message and offer as an individual moves forward in their buying process. If I am ready to buy, I don’t need or want the lead generation white paper.
- A positive experience when visiting the trade show booth. Best trade show practices now have an online access to the marketing database so that the booth person can identify and treat the visitor accordingly.
- The sales call either on the phone or in person from the actual sales person responsible for you and/or your company. Do they start out by asking “so tell me a bit about your



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business” even though you have been in the lead system for 6 months, and have had multiple contacts and conversations?

- The sales call from your new sales person when the old one leaves or is reassigned – can they pick up the conversation where it left off?
- Calls to customer service of all types – do they know me and/or the company and what we’ve purchased?
- And as trivial as this may sound, the reception you receive when making an onsite visit to the seller. Ever had your name displayed on the Welcome Board next to the reception desk? If so, you know what I mean.

I may have missed some of today’s touch points you experience, as this list is not meant to be overly exhaustive.

If all these touches leave the buyer with a good if not great experience, the brand impression will also go from good to great. **Remember that the # 1 reason buyers don’t buy is the perceived degree of risk they feel in making the decision – either personally and/or for the company.** The less risk the more likely to they are to buy, and a great brand experience builds confidence and decreases the perceived degree of risk.

So how can you create positive experiences across all these touches? If you can’t guess where I’m headed you don’t know me. **A dynamic and accurate marketing and sales database properly structured and populated equips you to make each and every one of the touches a better experience for the prospect or customer.**

The **data on the database should drive what is said and done** when one or more of the “touches” occur. Just one usage of a known fact or past behavior can make the individual feel that not only do you know them, but you’ve got your act together as well. Notice that none of the touches above referenced advertising or PR, even though they still are a staple for some firms but increasingly less important for creating a brand impression in B2B. This certainly is a **branding** result worth reaching for, and the essence of why there is now a **new alliance between branding and data.**



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John has partnered with Direct Hit Marketing and responsible for adding new trade show clients and thought leadership. John is also Co-Founder and Partner of B2BMarketing.com. His background includes experience in both sales and marketing. On the sales side, John was a field salesman, national sales manager and executive in charge of both sales and marketing for three major B2B firms. On the marketing side, he was president of a B2B direct marketing agency for 10 years, was National Campaign Manager at IBM, Sr. VP of B2B at Rapp Collins Worldwide and President of Protocol B2B. John is also the author of *The Fundamentals of Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing*, published by McGraw-Hill. John's next book co-authored with Steve Juedes, President of DHM is titled *Data-Driven Trade Show Marketing & Sales for Organizers and Exhibitors* is due for publication in late 2016. He can be reached at johnc@directhitmarketing.com or by phone at 602-402-6588