

Top **10** Reasons

B2B Case Studies Help Close Sales

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By Kara Kuryllowicz



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B2B case studies help close sales and influence decision makers because they are true stories about how real companies' problems were solved with the help of a particular product or service and are relevant and pertinent wherever prospects happen to be in the sales cycle.

"Business buyers invest in solutions to their problems, not in a particular product or set of capabilities," said Laura Ramos, VP-principal analyst and author of the new Forrester Research report, *Use Third-Party Content to Attract and Persuade Elusive B2B Buyers*, which found that case studies are the most valuable kind of content when it comes to making a purchase decision, according to **54%** of respondents.

As well, the Content Marketing Institute's survey, *B2B Content Marketing 2015: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends – North America*, found **77%** of respondents report that case studies rank in the top three for effective B2B tactics only after in-person events and webinars/webcasts and before white papers, videos, research reports, e-newsletters, blogs, infographics and more.

DemandGen Report's *Inside the Mind of the B2B Buyers: Influence Outside the Funnel* states that in the new decision making process, **48%** of buyers took more time to do research and used a wide variety of sources, then **36%** also did a more detailed analysis of costs/ROI. As importantly, respondents confirmed the importance of the consultative sale, with almost **95%** of recent purchasers saying the solution provider they ultimately chose *"provided them with ample content to help navigate through each stage of the buying process."*

As well, DemandGen Report's fifth annual *2015 B2B Buyer's Survey* reported that multiple pieces of content also play a significant role in the decision-making process. More than half of all respondents (**52%**) indicated they view two to four pieces of content from the winning vendor and more than a quarter (**28%**) view five to seven pieces, while **10%** view eight or more pieces.

When it comes to content, B2B buyers want the facts and an overwhelming majority (**86%**) of *2015 B2B Buyer's Survey* respondents said that vendor-focused data such as case studies and product data sheets influence their purchase decisions. Content that built a business case or showed clear ROIs for the purchase was cited as somewhat or very important by **83%** of buyers surveyed. Notably, content played a role in the final selection with **82%** of respondents indicating the winning vendor's content had a significant impact on the buying decision.

Google's Zero Moment of Truth – Pre-Shopping Before Buying

Way back in 2011, Google coined the term Zero Moment of Truth to describe the "online decision making" that occurs the second someone has a need, a problem or a question which of course they immediately address online.

"Pre-shopping before buying has become a huge, huge part of customer behavior," adds Bob Thacker, Gravitytank Strategic Advisor and former CMO of Office Max.

In fact, **71%** of people Google spoke with use the internet on a daily basis for their business purchase decisions.

B2B or B2C, the ZMOT occurs when people research products before buying and applies to all customers *"whether you're buying a big jet engine or a refrigerator,"* says Beth Comstock, SVP and GMO of GE. *"We've seen enough data to know that C-level executives do their own search for queries for research before they ever meet with potential suppliers... whatever you're buying... you want to do your homework in advance."*

Access is generally as close as a smart phone, a tablet, a laptop or comparable digital device in a pocket, carryall or backpack. Available 24/7 from anywhere they have internet access, B2B buyers can click, slide or tap into a wide variety of sources for a broad range of information.

They start researching and diligently seeking a solution in the form of a product or service whether or not they know for sure that it actually exists. If they don't find the product or service that fills the need, they will settle for some direction and insights.

How do we know that's what people really do?

Simple – everyone we know does it all the time and so do we! The internet is clearly today's most convenient, accessible trade and consumer show, all rolled into one, with the search engine's results pages functioning much like the aisles filled with the booths of exhibitors touting their products/services.

Let's look at a real life example of a ZMOT:

A plastics injection molder in South America had been using its in-house enterprise resource planning (ERP) system for decades. However, senior leaders recognized it was hampering their ability to effectively and profitably operate their business while causing errors and bottlenecks that were negatively affecting customer satisfaction. They'd tried big-name generic ERPs but those had proven truly disastrous because no amount of so-called customization gave them the flexibility and capabilities they needed day-to-day as injection molders.

Senior managers knew that they desperately needed an off-the-shelf, plastics-specific ERP designed and built by people that truly understand the day-to-day business requirements and challenges faced by a plastics injection molder.

Did that product even exist?

They turn to their favourite search bar!

What did they find?

A website for a plastics-specific ERP built for plastics molders by plastics molders with case studies about how a wide range of plastics injection molders in South America, the U.S. and Canada had addressed their issues and achieved tangible benefits and ROIs with it.

Evidently, when looking to buy a product or service that addresses a particular pain or challenge, astute prospects do their homework to educate and inform themselves by going online because it works.

In the Forrester Research report, Ramos also says: *"Business buyers invest in solutions to their problems, not in a particular product or set of capabilities."*

Ideally, your B2B case studies will pop up when those C-level executives are in ZMOT mode, diligently researching and querying in anticipation of finding, assessing and ultimately meeting the providers they pre-select.

Let's dig into exactly why and how B2B case studies help close sales.



B2B case studies help close sales because they're highly detailed customer testimonials that present as word-of-mouth:

Essentially detail- and fact-rich, long-form customer testimonials, B2B case studies let your most satisfied clients put the word out and make the case for your firm, its products and services.

As Google's Jim Lecinski wrote in his book, *ZMOT Winning the Zero Moment of Truth*, while he was managing director, U.S. Sales and Service, *"Word of mouth is stronger than ever. For the first time in human history, word of mouth is a digitally archived medium."*

In addition, Hawkeye's new *B2B Buyer Journey Research* survey discovered B2B buyers still say that word-of-mouth is the most influential purchasing driver for complex products across all channels. To start the process, the operations, production or purchasing manager, the head of IT, the CIO or the CFO will reach out to a trusted colleague or peer at a parent company, affiliate, head office or franchisor, an

industry association or networking group, to point them to the most tried and true products/services.

When that first-hand referral isn't readily available, the *B2B Buyer Journey Research* from Hawkeye indicates that case studies and testimonials were cited by **77%** and **71%** of respondents as most important in both the awareness and evaluation stages of the process by B2B decision makers.

That digital word-of-mouth, or "word of mouse" as some pundits are now calling it, offers an extraordinary range of information. It gives you access to the case studies, reviews, comments and posts of millions, even billions of individuals, depending on just how common that pain point is and the number of products/services offered as solutions.

Evidently, case studies are seen as an objective referral from knowledgeable third parties.

Why do prospects pay attention to "word-of-mouth" in case studies, reviews, comments and customer testimonials?

They don't know the individuals and are probably not familiar with their firms, but what they're fundamentally seeking are people who have faced the same pain points and challenges and hopefully found a way to deal with them through a particular product or service. They recognize themselves and their firms in the customer's organization and employees.

As a result, it's likely they will see your customer as a peer or even a colleague with a relevant perspective that's well worth considering.

Because the customer's employees are identified by names and titles, often with corporate logos and photos of the

employees and their headquarters or facilities, they are seen as the real people and firms that they actually are. As well, the fact they're publicly acknowledging that your firm's products/services satisfactorily addressed their issues indicates they really are happy customers.

Prospects and decisions makers realize that only truly satisfied clients would agree to go on the record and go public about the pains/problems they faced and how your products/services helped address them, then delivered measurable benefits and ROIs.

B2B case studies are a powerful testament to the quality of the relationships and the trust that your customers have developed with your firm and its products/services.

2 B2B case studies help close sales because they feature objective, credible third-party content:

While today's sophisticated B2B buyers certainly realize the majority of case studies were initiated by the provider of the product or service, they're perceived as relatively unbiased and objective because the supplier doesn't have a voice in the story that's being told. The customer that's being profiled is the one reporting on the pains, solutions, facts and data not the provider.

In fact, **62%** of B2B buyers told Forrester that they find content authored by a qualified expert/analyst to be the most credible, followed by data-driven content (**60%**) and brand agnostic content (**48%**). B2B buyers also want less, but more targeted content, according to the report. Half of respondents said vendors give them "useless" content and two-thirds (**64%**) said vendors give them too much of it.

The best B2B case studies present the customer as an expert/analyst precisely because they have first-hand, relevant knowledge and experience as a bona fide member of that industry or vertical and its inherent challenges and issues.

While the content is not brand-agnostic, the most effective case studies always include detailed data that highlights the results achieved with numbers pertaining to productivity,

downtime, production volumes, head counts, customer satisfaction levels and more. Whether or not hard data is available, B2B case studies should always include customer quotes, anecdotes and comments about the results delivered by the products or service as well as the pain points, challenges and solutions. That's exactly what makes B2B case studies so believable and credible.

Prospects understand that the only benefit realized by the customer is having the opportunity to share a solution that worked for them with colleagues and peers that they may or may not know personally. For some, it's a way to show their appreciation to a firm that delivered the solution they'd been seeking for years.

Most of us are thrilled to share the Eureka moment when we finally found, implemented and realized the benefits of the solution that made our business lives easier and improved our firm's financial and operational performances.

That's likely why a DemandGen report found that post-purchase, **59%** share what they learned during the research and buying process with others in one-on-one discussions, blog posts, discussion forums and on Twitter.

3 B2B case studies help close sales because they focus on real, common pain points and challenges and then the implemented solutions:

When prospects realize they share, recognize or are somehow familiar with the real pain points and challenges outlined in a B2B case study, they pay attention.

The fact the customer is in a particular industry or vertical and using your product/service, also positions your firm as an expert with relevant expertise and experience in this specific area.

It's also worth noting that because B2B case studies highlight customers in a select industry or vertical and as importantly, address shared challenges, they are perceived as targeted and personalized rather than random and generic.

"With content marketing expected to consume, on average, 12% of B2B program dollars this year, marketers would be better off cutting back on volume and delivering more targeted and personalized substance over style," wrote Ramos.

Human Brains Want ONE Basic Message & Embed Consistent Messaging

Every day, individuals are bombarded by 1,500 to 30,000 messages reports the Business Marketing Association. Since the number of marketing messages will only continue to increase, firms need to break through the noise and set themselves apart.

"To get prospects' attention, you need to understand how the human mind works and accept the fact that audiences remember best when you present the single most important message, supported by no more than three or four points," says Dr. Carmen Simon, who authored *Impossible to Ignore – Creating Memorable Content to Influence Decisions*. In addition, Dr. Simon notes that our memories really do play a role in decision-making: *"Memory fuels our decision-making and it is a lens on the future. The same brain areas that reminisce are those that plan for the future."*

When the buying cycle is long, consistency creates credibility and consistent messages, for example, the B2B case study's primary message about how this solution addressed the problems and delivered these benefits, earns a "place cell" in prospects' brains.

What does that tell you?

Your B2B case study must be highly focused with a primary message about the solution that dealt with the customer's key challenges with several supporting points.

So what's the main message?

This solution (product or service) handled this customer's problems, pains, issues or challenges.

What are the three to four supporting points?

This is what the solution did and these are resulting benefits/ROI.

Anything else?

Yes, absolutely!

If you consistently post and share B2B case studies, the key message, that your product or service solves these problems to deliver these benefits, will be forever embedded in your prospects' brains.

Prospects Want to Get These Messages About Solutions

As we saw earlier, a plastics-injection molder that needs a plastics-specific ERP will really appreciate knowing that the software developer has experience in the plastic injection molding-industry, built the product specifically for injection molders and has implemented dozens of ERPs for molders in different countries. They like knowing which specific challenges/pains the ERP solved and finding out more about how the provider supported them during the start-up and training phases.

Likewise, a firm that needs to precisely, cleanly and quickly drill multiple small or large holes in metal will be more comfortable considering a provider's drills knowing how they performed for other customers. If a firm that custom-designs and machines centrifugal- and sand-cast parts for the steel, aerospace, power general, nuclear, glass and pulp and paper industries trusts that manufacturer's drill to produce components, that if flawed, can destroy a multi-million dollar steel furnace, they're more likely to very seriously assess this drill brand.

As much as every manager and C-suite executive would like to think that their challenges/pains are unique, they very rarely are, yet sometimes despite overwhelming demand, a viable solution has yet to be developed.

So imagine the relief when a retailer or warehouse operator learns that a device that will "destuff" heavy, yet fragile boxes has finally been invented. A liquor retailer's warehouse director came up with the concept and found a firm that would design and build it for him. That patented device now boosts productivity, protects and preserves valuable goods and drastically reduces absenteeism and compensation/benefits claims.

Of course, prospects will be thrilled that someone has finally designed and built the solution they've always wanted and appreciate knowing it performed as promised. Again, it's highly likely they'll very seriously investigate this "destuffing" product.

B2B case studies remind prospective customers that they're not the only business or management team facing these particular challenges and show them that your firm and its employees know and understand your industry. They further confirm your firm has developed an industry presence and earned a solid reputation in it.

Your firm is now positioned as the trusted expert and your product/service as a viable solution that delivers tangible ROIs.

4

B2B case studies help close sales because they present hard benefits and measurable ROIs:

A DemandGen report shows that in the past year, **34%** of B2B buyers have multiple stakeholders weighing in on the purchase with seven to 20 people involved in a B2B buying decision. Notably, in some instances, the sale will require the approval of five to six decision makers.

As marketing agency IconSive notes, *“The B2B buying process is changing out of a fundamental need to reduce risk... Customers are increasingly seeking out ways to identify risk factors and eliminate unknown variables.”*

B2B buyers don't want to compromise their job security, results-oriented compensation, professional credibility or their firms' ability to maximize its performance. Of course, there is also a fear of misusing or even wasting company funds and resources on a product or service that simply doesn't deliver.

Everyone involved with the B2B purchasing decision wants to minimize and manage the potential risk, which means they need plenty of proof that it worked for other customers.

That's why B2B buyers will always prefer hard facts that will help support and justify the investment in the product or service to reduce the very real and perceived risk to themselves and their colleagues.

DemandGen Report's *2015 B2B Buyer's Survey* found that B2B buyers do want the facts and that **86%** said that vendor-focused data such as case studies and product data sheets influences their purchase decisions. Content that built a business case or showed clear ROI for the purchase was cited as somewhat or very important by **83%** of buyers surveyed.

In addition, a Blue Nile online survey that produced 528 buyer responses confirmed that:

*“B2B buyers ‘strongly prefer’ content that features data and statistics and as a result, **46%** are most likely to click on search results offering data and statistics, while other research has shown that B2B buyers find content that includes strong supporting evidence to be particularly persuasive.”*

A survey from KoMarketing Associates and Dianna Huff takes a broad look at the essential components of a B2B vendor's website and finds that **31%** of prospects consider case studies, white papers and articles as *“very important”*, closely followed by a client list and testimonials (**29%**).

Why do numbers carry such weight?

Broad statements such as *“significant production increases”* and *“dramatic reductions in downtime”* are far more meaningful and powerful when backed up by hard numbers and ROIs.

DemandGen Report's *Inside the Mind of the B2B Buyer: Influences Outside the Funnel* found that **33%** of respondents'

determined the potential impact through other adopters and built a business case for immediate adoption. In fact, **23%** also said that the budget was allocated to the product/service after the ROI had been proven.

“Google searches led us to various solutions providers, but we needed to see that they really had relevant industry experience that produced measurable results for our vertical,” said an operations manager with a U.S. injection molder. *“We need to know the product works because we can't afford to be anyone's software testing guinea pig.”*

Added the president and owner of another injection molder: *“You always need the hard data to make the best business decisions.”*

Let's look at the type of data and statistics that tell prospects a product or solution delivers real results for customers in an industry vertical:

Tallman Bronze (customer), Dormer (solutions provider)

Tallman Bronze, which offers design and computer simulation, casting, machining and welding, invested in Dormer's range of deep hole drills and realized these ROIs:

- Production time on most parts dropped to seven from 90 minutes
- Average production times fell **80%**
- Saved/gained 323 production hours and 38 minutes annually
- \$47,633 yearly saving

Liquor Control Board of Ontario (customer), Engineered Lifting Systems (solution provider)

On average, each LCBO warehouse employee typically spent 7.5 hours daily manually unloading 400 cases of vintage wines weighing nine to 18 kg., which consistently produced injuries that adversely affected productivity and benefit costs.

ELS built the solution based on the design provided by the LCBO to deliver these ROIs:

- Average time to unload a container down over **50%**
- Handles 650 cases with one employee versus manual system's 400 cases with two people
- Boosts case rate about **75%**
- **82%** decrease in lost-time accidents
- **80%** drop in workers' compensation costs
- Nine-month ROI/payback
- Annual \$121,000 saving at just one of three warehouses

PH Tech (customer), Packsize (solution provider)

A designer and extruder of PVC profiles for residential doors and windows, PH Tech requires 200 packing boxes daily in 100 standard sizes, most of which employees had to manually cut to size. The Packsize unit makes the exact size box required and can produce any number of boxes required, from one to many.

- Right-sized boxes allow PH to get **10 to 15%** more product on each delivery truck

- Reduced on-site cardboard inventory by **17%**
- Freed up warehouse space and cut corrugated waste disposal costs by **5 to 10%**
- Average saving of **35%** due to reduced shipping, excess packaging, product damage and returns and disposal costs
- Shipping volumes and corrugated consumption dropped **40** and **15%** respectively



B2B case studies help close sales because they can offer relevant quotes, anecdotes and comments when the numbers aren't available because they weren't tracked.

Ideally, B2B case studies provide hard numbers and facts to prove the product or service delivers real results for real customers.

However, when accurate statistics aren't readily available simply because some customers don't track those key performance indicators, relevant anecdotes and comments will still tell prospects exactly what the product or service did accomplish.

For example:

Company Performance & Profitability

"We now know with certainty the cost of each SKU, can accurately determine profit margins and even have the information to better manage mold history and performance as well as planning and production scheduling."

"In the past, we'd had to rely on what we saw happening on the plant floor day to day or week to week. We were running our business on observation and intuition because we simply didn't have current, accurate facts and figures. The new system gives us real-time, accurate reports that put us in control of our business, its quality and bottom line."

"The system forced us to challenge our assumptions around which customers and product lines had the most positive impact on our bottom line - we couldn't argue with the numbers and eliminated certain SKUs!"

Productivity & Efficiency

"Executives, managers and operators regularly worked after hours unpaid to get production and other data - when you use skilled, talented employees to collect and manage data, you're misusing them. We now do more with the same employees who don't miss the administrative tasks one bit."

"The system provides the detailed information I need to best allocate production in order to minimize change over and machine downtime."

*"The system has automated **95%** of the ingredient and volume calculations that we'd done manually to save time and reduce the likelihood of errors."*

Client Satisfaction

"Inventory is now tracked automatically rather than manually so the stock outages that had become far too common are no longer an issue - there is no greater gift to clients that depend on us for just-in-time delivery."

"Traceability and recordkeeping are a big part of what we do for our medical and military clients. They've been impressed with our ability to pull up information while they're on the phone with us. They no longer hear, 'I'll have to get back to you on that!' When communicating with clients we look and sound more professional and even our product and shipping labels look better."

Employee Acceptance, Engagement & Morale

"Home computers are still a novelty in our country, so our employees find the new system with its high-definition color touch screens so new and so cool that they're really interested and embracing it."

*"Clients haven't commented on service, quality or delivery times, but my stress level and my shipping distribution managers' are down by **40%** - we're so proud of our new machine that we show it off on every plant tour."*

"An employee's lack of computer and equipment experience had relegated him to packing boxes for more than 25 years. The new machine is so easy to use, he's now in charge of programming and operating a big machine that is essential to our daily operations. He's proud and thrilled to have expanded his skills and changed his job description."

"Employees got a real kick out of face-to-face interactions with our provider's C-level executives when they flew in from overseas to train our people. Employees are happier and more productive because instead of the painstaking, manual data entry and inventory control, they're working on special tasks and projects that use their real skills and experience."



B2B Case studies help close sales because their goal is to educate and inform.

"You must create value for your audience before extracting value," says Joe Pulizzi, Content Marketing Institute. "Although 90 per cent of B2B marketers use content marketing, 30 per cent treat content like advertising."

Marketing agency Iconsive argues that *"the job of businesses is no longer to harangue and coax people into a sales; it's to educate, inform, and reassure"*.

How do you provide value by educating, informing and reassuring?

Present new solutions and offer insights because in 2014, LinkedIn and IDC surveyed 1,500 decision makers and influencers and learned that B2B buyers are five times more likely to engage with a sales professional that offers new insights about their business.

If your B2B case studies answer the many questions your prospects are sure to have, then you are informing and educating versus selling them.

How do you know what questions your prospects have?

Think back to the hundreds of emails and calls your firm has received over the years!

They've been asking more or less the same questions in thousands of different ways for a long time.

Some of them have probably asked a few questions for the first time.

Your firm might even have raised some questions that were brand new to your prospects!

If your prospects could get your customers on the phone – what would they want to know?

1. What is your business?
2. How many years have you been in business?
3. How big is your firm? annual sales, # of machines you run, # of seats?
4. # of employees
5. Do you specialize in a particular vertical or industry?
6. How has your business changed over the past few years?
7. What challenges and opportunities lie ahead?
8. What challenges, issues, events or circumstances caused you to reach out to this product or service provider?
9. What other solutions had you considered?
10. Did you assess several providers? Why did you select this firm?

11. What 1 to 3 factors influenced you to pick them?
12. In the first to 12 months of the relationship – what did you like about working with this provider? Implementation, training, onboarding?
13. Did anything in particular surprise you, positive or negative, about working with them?
14. How did their product or service address your challenges or issues?
15. What were the tangible benefits you experienced as a result? From a company, employee, supplier, and of course client perspective?
16. How did clients react? Employees?
17. What was the ROI or payback period on the investment?
18. Did you experience any absolutely unexpected benefits?
19. Anything else you'd like to tell me or add?

Your B2B case study needs to answer the questions your prospects might not even know they have!

Once you get the answers to those questions, your B2B case studies need to leverage informational & educational communications strategies:

- a. Use relevant, detailed quotes, comments and anecdotes from customers.
- b. Use language, sentence structures and a tone that make your case study credible.
- c. Use descriptive, but plain accessible language with reasonable adjectives and believable statements.
- d. Resolutely avoid over-the-top adjectives and verbs as well as the superlatives and hyperbole typically associated with hard-sell marketing and promotional material.
- e. Avoid industry jargon, insider terms and convoluted acronyms.
- f. Write it like a newspaper or magazine article.
- g. Hire a business-savvy writer with a journalism background to handle the interviews and writing – they'll ask the questions that your prospects would ask and tell a story that actually gets read.
- h. Make it look like a newspaper or magazine article with headlines, sub-heads, decks, pull quotes, info graphics and photos of the customer's office or factory and the employees that were interviewed.

7 B2B case studies help close sales because they DO NOT sell!

To build value and develop trust by informing and educating prospects *“Ditch the sales pitch in your content.”* as Forrester Research so aptly phrased it.

Today’s sophisticated B2B buyers are also consumers who have become adept at recognizing the hard sell when they see it. If you try concealing the hard sell in informational, educational content, for example, a case study, you’re eroding the trust you’d started building. In fact, it’s likely the prospect will be irritated and even feel duped or suckered in. The moment they sense the big push to close the deal, they’ll start to resist, the defense mechanism kicks in and you’ve lost them – maybe forever.

Right now, I’m sure you’re asking: How do we know that’s what people really do?

We’ve all experienced and been put off by the hard sell – that’s how.

In the 2013 Buyersphere report, respondents were asked to say what frustrations, if any, they faced in their search for information to help in the decision-making process.

These are their replies:

- Information incorrect/not credible
- Sales speak
- Lack of clarity
- Difficult to find unbiased information
- Information too generic/vague

- Slow response to requests for information
- Lack of comparative information
- Lack of information in general
- Too much information

What tells prospects your B2B case is focused on educating and information NOT selling?

1. The B2B case study tells one customer’s story once in different formats suited to a variety of media.
2. The B2B case study is objective with facts and figures.
3. The B2B case study uses customer quotes, anecdotes and comments.
4. The B2B case study never mentions let alone slams or diminishes competing solution providers, their products, services or results.
5. The B2B case study never includes a call to action because they know that if you have questions, you’re smart enough to know what to do next.
6. The B2B case study doesn’t offer you a discount that won’t be available in 48 HOURS!
7. The B2B case study doesn’t tell you to buy it NOW before the SPECIAL OFFER expires just three days from TODAY!
8. The B2B case study doesn’t invite prospects/readers to sign up now for a free, one-on-one consulting session because the provider just so happens to have availability today!

8 B2B case studies help close sales because prospects and decision makers actually read them.

B2B buyers also want less, but more targeted content, according to the Forrester report. Half of respondents said vendors give them “useless” content and two-thirds (64%) said vendors give them too much of it. B2B tech buyers also respond more to short, digestible forms of content. About 69% prefer articles, while 68% like four- to five-page reports.

In *Leveraging Psychology in Digital Marketing* by Kath Pay, cloud.IQ and Marketo, Pay notes that today, people tend to pride themselves on making “rational” decisions based on their analysis of the available information but that subconsciously, purchasing decisions are based upon emotion.

Tell an engaging story with people at the heart of it – your customers – and prospects will read it. Most people don’t remember numbers, facts and statistics but they tend to keep them in mind if they’re embedded and a compelling component in a great story.

Basic human psychology also indicates that *“if you want someone to do something, you must make it as easy as possible”* so in addition to telling that super story, make your B2B case study incredibly easy to read with plenty of images (photos, infographics), color, white space, blocks and of course, headlines, subheads and pull quotes to lead prospects through the text.



B2B case studies help close sales because they tell great stories that inspire an emotional response by demonstrating your customer and your firm's personality, culture and human side:

B2B case studies help close sales because they showcase your firm's personality, culture and human side through your customers' eyes. We all know that when it comes down to it, we all do business with the people we've come to know and trust not the faceless corporate entity they represent no matter how omnipresent and ubiquitous the logo.

In his article, *"Do emotions play a part in Business-to-Business Decision making?"*, Paul Hague of B2B International says:

*"Emotions are an instinctive response to a situation... In business to business markets we are of the view that emotions account for a good **50%** of the buying decision and not the **5%** or so that may be suggested by a rational points/spend question. We know that emotions are of huge importance, not from asking direct questions about how decisions are made, but by asking questions about the behavior of the decision maker. A decision maker that returns again and again to the same brand and yet claims that they are influenced by price, quality and availability, is in effect telling us that they are acting emotionally. They quite clearly are demonstrating that they feel safer buying the same product because, if price, quality and availability were the most important drivers, another brand would have been found to fulfill their claimed requirements."*

Yet another case study subject can let prospects know that if you need the software in a language other than the standard English or French – start the conversation. Their provider of choice agreed to partner and collaborate on an industry-

specific translation that made it accessible to all employees, while strengthening the relationship and creating a few unique memories. Certain terms that had the operators either puzzled or chortling required a little linguistic fine-tuning. For example, one of the modules, The Punch, while catchy and logical in English, became *"punch in the face"* when literally translated into Spanish! The provider's decision to build a Spanish-language version demonstrated the firm's leaders were flexible, practical and incredibly collaborative – the prospect because a loyal, long-time customer.

Another B2B case study advocate repeatedly heard that no firm is perfect and that the real measure of a successful relationship is how the provider handles the situation when things go wrong. His customers love the fact his executive and management team takes responsibility, never gets defensive and works through the issues with openness, transparency and plenty of dialogue. He hadn't thought to include that point in his B2B case studies, because he thought every astute provider would approach issues that way. He's since learned that in an easily commoditized, price-sensitive vertical, his firm's communications and resolution style has real value and is a key differentiator.

Remember, we all do business with people as much as, or even more, than the products and services they represent.

Let your B2B case studies help prospects get to know what you're like to work with as people.



B2B case studies help close sales because their reach can be exponentially extended through use in other marketing and sales collateral:

"For us, the difference between a winning vendor and other vendors is the ability to provide relevant information at all stages," said a B2B purchasing survey respondent.

Producing case studies is an investment that demands both time and effort, both of which carry a dollar value, so maximize the return on that investment by using the information in each case study however, wherever and whenever you can.

Reformat it, rewrite it and put it to work for you in all of your sales and marketing collateral, such as websites, press releases, magazine articles, newsletters, speeches, seminars, at trade shows and via social media channels. You have the facts and the statistics, the quotes and anecdotes as well as the images and infographics – use them to let your customers make your B2B case to as many prospects as possible.

Dell and Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College's Digital Transformation Social Selling Research, Insights and Best Practices noted that you need to use the right social platforms, but as importantly, use them to be helpful by providing relevant information rather than using them to pitch sales. Decision makers that were interviewed agree that relevant content about specific solutions is still one of the most important aspects that influences their purchase decisions.

How frequently content is posted or published on social media doesn't affect engagement – the key is to capture the target market's attention. Content strategies include posting comments with links to internal articles, articles on highly credible third-party websites such as industry and business magazines, blogs, technology trends and research.

As well, Bryan E. Jones, vice president, Dell Commercial Marketing said, *“Social media plays a pivotal role in this transition, for both business and customers alike, in helping to develop a deeper and richer relationship with our customers.”*

The *Buyersphere Report 2013* found two-fifths of respondents had used some form of social media to find information or advice ahead of making their purchase. However, B2B buyers are not generalists. To find valuable information, they prefer to use industry specific forums and sites – the most useful and most popular social media destination.

In the digital age, where word-of-mouth tends to rule, it's also interesting and even surprising that **51%** of b2b buyers downloaded at least one digital PDF, but **47%** also used printed brochures!

Demand Report found that:

- **41%** of respondents followed discussions to learn more about a topic
- **37%** posted questions on social networking sites for suggestions/feedback
- More than **20%** connected directly with potential solutions providers via social networking channels

In the 2012 report, Buyersphere noted that Facebook and blogs are most useful in the first buying phase. LinkedIn and blogs are the most effective in the second phase and Twitter and Facebook are most influential in the final stage of buying.

Likely due to convenience, low- to no-cost and ease of access, downloaded PDFs and printed brochure are used the most commonly however, in order of influence, physical events, such as seminars and presentations rank first, followed by videos, presentation decks, blog/web, ebook, printed brochures, downloadable PDF, mobile app and podcast.

As well Dell and Carnegie Mellon reported that according to research findings:

- Large B2B IT organizations look to LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter as well as SlideShare and Spikeworks to influence purchasers
- **75%** of B2B buyers are influenced by information found on social channels
- **67%** of the buyer's journey is now digital

Which social platforms matter the most to B2B?

The *Global Digital Snapshot* in January 2015, a survey by We are Social, states there are about **2.03 billion** active social media users and that in the U.S. alone, **53%** of the population has active social media profiles on different platforms.

“We're all selling something. However, it's no secret that the most successful salespeople are helpers first. In fact, they're passionate about it. They listen carefully, ask the right questions, get to know their prospects as individuals and assist them in their decision-making process. Social just gives us new and varied channels for helping, especially if you establish a good content pipeline,” said Bryan Kramer, CEO of PureMatter and author, in the Dell and Carnegie Mellon report.

LinkedIn:

- LinkedIn, a community of **380 million** potential decision makers, is the first stop for B2B social selling
- **97%** of the time cold calling is ineffective, but a warm referral through LinkedIn can double or quadruple the odds of sales success
- **40%** of B2B decision makers say they use LinkedIn to research and evaluate products before even contacting any vendors

Twitter:

- B2B companies who use Twitter can identify twice as many qualifying leads as those who don't use Twitter.