

A Unified View of Audiences Is the Key to B2B Digital Advertising Success

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What Does Your Audience Know About You?

Sixty years ago, McGraw-Hill ran an ad in a number of its B2B magazines that became known as “The Man in the Chair.” It is one of the most iconic B2B print ads ever created. (See Figure 1.) The ad features a scowling, bow-tie-wearing executive sitting against a plain background; next to him are seven assertions:

*“I don’t know who you are.
I don’t know your company.
I don’t know your company’s product.
I don’t know what your company stands for.
I don’t know your company’s customers.
I don’t know your company’s record.
I don’t know your company’s reputation.”*

And then, his pointed question:

“Now – what was it you wanted to sell me?”

The true success of this advertisement was in how meta it was. “The Man in the Chair” was an *advertisement* that convinced B2B marketers that they needed to consider *advertising* as an important piece of their marketing mix. The moral at the bottom of the ad was, “*Sales start before your salesperson calls – with business publication advertising.*”

Sixty years later, B2B marketers face a completely different challenge. Marketing must deliver relevant experiences and build trust not just before the salesman calls, but also during and after the sales process – in other words, across the entirety of the buyer’s journey.

Today, the buying process itself has evolved.

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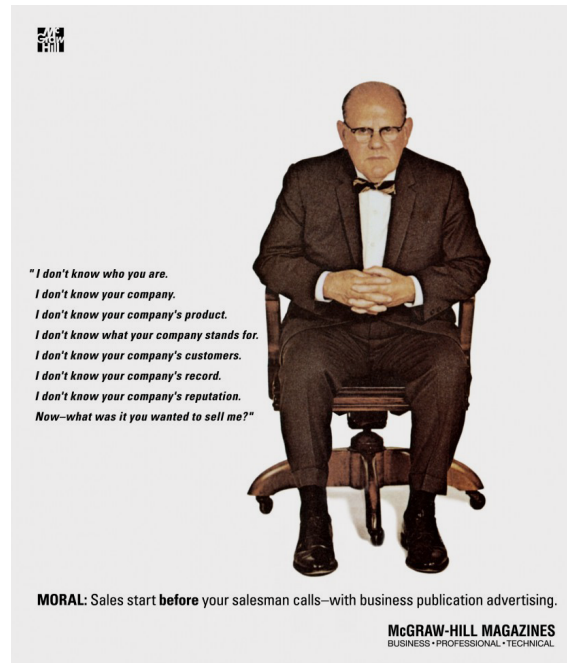


What Do You Know About Your Audience?

Today's B2B buying environment puts more pressure on buyers to quickly sort through the noise and myriad choices, and to make the best decisions with as little risk as possible.

- **Buyers are self-directed and educated:** They don't want or need to talk with sales representatives to educate themselves about solutions for their challenges. Only 12% want to meet a sales representative in person. And 71% prefer to conduct research on their own, with a sales representative available via phone or online chat only when needed.¹
- **The buying environment is more complex:** Today's B2B buyer is more frequently part of a cross-functional buying committee than before. Almost 70% of companies with more than 5,000 employees have four or more people involved in purchasing decisions.² As one researcher found, this leads many B2B buying committees to set thresholds for decisions at the "lowest common denominator" of risk. They want to "move cautiously, avoid risk, and save money."³
- **Buyers are younger and more cynical:** Half of all B2B buyers are between the ages of 18-34.⁴ They utilize social media, search, and all manner of digital tools to acquire information. And they are loath to receive pushy sales messaging or overt persuasion

Figure 1
"The Man in the Chair"



on any platform. This is one reason that today's B2B buyers perform so much online research before talking with a salesperson. They believe that once they begin interacting with the company, the rep will push an agenda rather than help them solve a problem.

When performing research, today's B2B buyer is attentive, much less dependent upon a consultative sales approach, and extraordinarily demanding of the companies she is researching.

In sum: the B2B buyer is high on expectation, low on trust, and short on time.

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Digital Advertising: A Key to Enabling Buyer Trust

In order to rise above the digital cacophony of content, advertising, and opinion, today's B2B marketer needs to reach buyers and begin building trust as early and as often as possible. This means that any data that helps the marketer understand the buyer's needs, and target the buyer with the right content at the most relevant time, is critically important.

Today, digital advertising can help marketers understand the buyer's needs from the beginning. In a recent study, 5% more B2B buyers than last year cited "digital ads" and "ads on social media" as resources that first informed them of the solution they were researching.⁵ Here are additional findings:

- **Targeted advertising works:** 63% of B2B buyers notice relevant, targeted ads from candidate providers that are displayed during their research.⁶
- **Targeted advertising has a positive impact:** 32% of B2B buyers who notice targeted advertising agreed that these ads positively impacted their view of potential vendors.⁷
- **But insight into buyer needs isn't a differentiator – it's table stakes:** 92% of B2B buyers believe that any sales team should have insights about their personalized company needs.⁸

So, the 2018 version of "The Man in the Chair" is very different. In today's media saturated world, the Man would not be frustrated that he doesn't know who the company is. He would be frustrated that the company doesn't know *who he is*.

"You don't know who I am.

You don't know my company.

You don't understand my industry.

You don't know my needs.

You don't know who else I am researching.

You don't know who I have to collaborate with.

You make it hard to get information from you.

Now – what was it you wanted to sell me?"

Digital advertising for B2B solutions can be one of the primary ways that businesses surface trust and continuously deliver it (across devices, platforms, and formats) as the buyer goes through her buying journey. It can provide a through-line as the buyer moves from source to source in her education process.

However, digital advertising's effectiveness is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. In order for it to provide the value that helps marketers attain deeper understanding, a digital ad must itself be driven by data that is based in some understanding.

In other words, successful digital advertising must be both *relevant* and *targeted*. Today, most B2B digital advertising is exactly the opposite.

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The Digital Advertising Challenge: Team and Technology Alignment

Digital advertising is expected to grow globally by approximately 18%, to \$269 billion, in 2018.⁹ However, consumers' evolving capabilities to filter content, channel proliferation, the challenge of data acquisition, and changing (often conflicting) global regulatory dynamics will continue to complicate digital advertising.

Most B2B marketers are still struggling to understand how to optimize paid media strategies. In a recent survey, 96% reported that their digital campaigns lead to waste because they primarily reach audiences outside their intended target. Some 71% of B2B marketers believe their organization's digital advertising "fails to meet their expectations."¹⁰ Fixing this is paramount. As consulting firm McKinsey found, "meeting customers at different points in their journey" can create 20% more leads, 10% growth in first-time customers, and a "speedup of as much as 20% in the time that elapses between qualifying a lead and closing a deal."¹¹

Current Team and Technology Structures Hinder B2B Success

At the heart of the challenge for B2B enterprises is tying the customer's experience journey from the customer stage all the way back to their first introduction to the brand.

Historically, three technology platforms separate the customer's experience into silos.

Adtech – such as programmatic and content syndication tools – is responsible for scaling and optimizing paid digital media strategies. Martech – such as web content management and marketing automation – is responsible for displaying content that engages visitors, builds audiences, nurtures leads, and is personalized, as well as optimizing and collecting data within digital platforms. Customer relationship technology – such as CRM systems – helps to collect and measure customer data and determine how customers are on-boarded, upsold, or cross-sold.

Enterprise alignment and integration between these processes and technologies is still in its infancy. A recent study by Forrester Consulting found that more than half of marketers believe that integrating these strategies will improve customer satisfaction, enable better personalization, and deliver stronger customer insights.

Further, 42% of these same marketers say the biggest hurdle to unifying their customer experiences is "working across our internal silos."¹²

The net result of these siloed marketing organizations is to simply throw more generalized paid media advertising across as many channels as possible, point buyers back to unrelated and irrelevant landing pages, or microsites, and ultimately have no visibility into what the buyer truly needs or wants.

Forty-two percent of marketers surveyed say the biggest hurdle to unifying their customer experiences is "working across our internal silos."¹²



Unified Audiences Are Key to Digital Advertising Success

One of the main challenges that the Forrester study uncovered was that more than half of marketers surveyed believe that their colleagues don't understand the difference between advertising, marketing, and CRM technology, and why they may perform better when integrated. The notion of the unified audience is a framework that can help communicate the benefits of such integration.

A unified audience may be one of the most valuable assets a business can manage. It delivers a data-enriched and customer-centric view into the business, and provides insights that enable marketing teams to optimize paid channels and deliver more relevant and targeted advertising. At the same time, the data helps content-driven experiences such as websites, landing pages, product catalogs, and blogs to be more personal and relevant to the B2B buyer.

The unified audience consists of three valuable, data-enriched audiences:

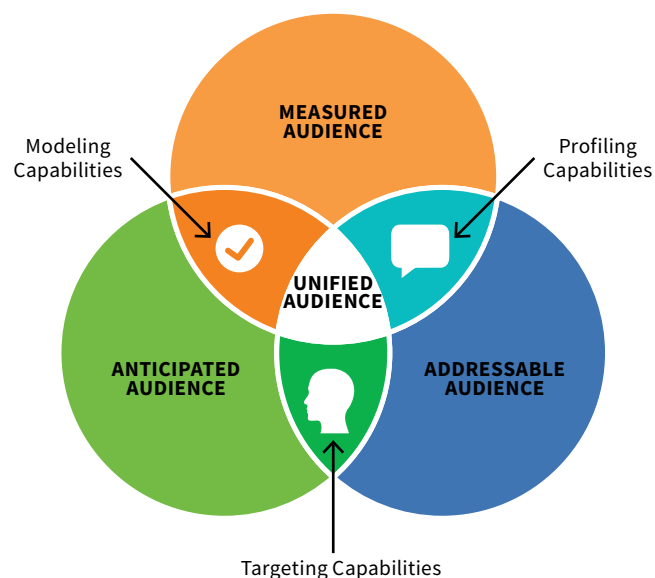
- 1. The Anticipated Audience.** This is the audience *we want to know* – they are potential buyers researching and making decisions. This audience is served by the digital advertising strategy. Marketers want to rise above the noise and influence this audience, while simultaneously ensuring that these buyers are highly targeted for their solution. So, the more data a marketer can acquire in order to serve up targeted, relevant content to this audience, the better.
- 2. The Addressable Audience.** This is our *known* audience, one that *we can reach at will*. They have supplied the business with contact information, typically because of the marketer's efforts to reach the anticipated audience. These may be existing customers in a CRM database, existing entries in a marketing database, or even email addresses in a salesperson's rolodex. This audience is most often served by martech and customer relationship processes and technologies. However, sending blind emails or targeting a contact that is actually a competitor, or has no intention of ever engaging, can be wasteful. The marketer's ability to coordinate the addressable contact with data based on interaction with web content, email, or advertising is what ensures quality and enables personalization or more targeted, relevant experiences.
- 3. The Measured Audience.** This is an audience *we can measure*. Specifically, one where the marketer can quantify the number and also determine that measuring the data provides some demonstrable value to the business. This audience may ultimately be anticipated or addressable (e.g., unknown or known), but is different from those types in that the business can actually measure and validate their quality in aggregate at some level. These audiences may be measured by attributes like "visits," "active users," "returning vs. new," or "number of shares." But, in order to truly make sense of these data, B2B marketers need the ability to tie in and match the aggregate, measured customer behavior with individual audience members.

Unifying These Audiences Provides Three Capabilities

When unified through the smart application of technology and the use of data, the increasing overlap between these audiences enables marketing organizations to develop three compelling capabilities that can drive a much more successful digital advertising strategy (see Figure 2):

- **Targeting capabilities** enable the organization to redefine what a “lead” really means. Utilizing the data marketers glean from addressable audiences can help drive more targeted capabilities into paid media for new anticipated audiences. For example, B2B marketers could upload addressable audience data into ad networks or social media networks, then dynamically target ads on these external sites by geography, interest attributes, past purchase, look-alike audiences, membership level, etc. Conversely, anticipated audience data could be appended to addressable audiences to provide optimized insight into which publications actually provide the most qualified opportunities, or the most highly targeted accounts.
- **Profiling capabilities** enable the business to understand the customer with a much higher degree of certainty. By unifying the data collected from measured audiences and addressable audiences, the business will have a much more holistic and trusted view of both the aggregate and the individuals within the aggregate. For example, the marketer can see which content a particular lead or opportunity


Figure 2
The Unified Audience
Integrating Marketing, Advertising & CRM



Three disparate audiences come together, managed by smart application of technology, data, and aligned processes. If we were to animate this to reflect passing time, these audiences would merge and ultimately unify, increasing the capability for B2B marketers to deliver targeted, personalized, and relevant content at every step of the buyer’s journey.

consumed. Or, conversely, the marketer may segment qualified leads and see that the vast majority are consuming content from mobile devices. The marketer can use this unified, trusted data to profile individuals and deliver targeted experiences at the profile (or segmented) level.

- **Modeling capabilities** enable the marketing team to provide better visibility into future needs and strategies. Joining the measured and anticipated audiences can reveal, over time, which channels, content, and audience types provide the most likely customers. By integrating the data gleaned from paid media,



the marketer can also develop the capabilities to examine new anticipated audience platforms and develop predictive models for the value that growing trust with them might produce. For example, by understanding that a particular type of publication (social media for example) delivers a particular industry vertical or persona-based audience, the marketer may be able to more accurately forecast the value of targeting one type of persona or vertical over another.

Together, these capabilities get to the core of the challenge of today's digital advertising success. Rather than simply trying to pour more records into a marketing database, B2B marketers can drive more efficient and effective advertising campaigns and greater return on the marketing and advertising investment. They can deliver more insight and enriched data to their sales teams. And, they can have better visibility into what kind of content, experiences, and targets are providing the most value.

Who Is in the Chair Behind the Screen?

Sixty years ago, the challenge for B2B marketers was ensuring that their addressable market knew the business, its offers, its reputation, and what problem it could solve for its customers. Media was limited, so the buyer's journey started with a recommendation, the discovery of an ad, or a salesperson-initiated conversation. Building trust started well before the buyer ever made a call to the company.

Today, media is unlimited, infinite, and starts with a search. The initial waypoint of trust might be exactly the same, but how and where the marketer fulfills it is entirely different. Today, the buyer seeks trust in a solution that is one step ahead, anticipating needs, eliminating obstacles and noise. That does, indeed, start well before the salesperson calls, but it continues to be important during and after the sales process as well. Today, marketing's job is to deliver trust continuously, across the entirety of the buyer's journey.

Insight into the buyer is the clear answer. Today's man or woman in the chair is an anonymous buyer behind a screen. Data from a unified audience can be the fuel for insight. It helps us understand how to deliver an optimized digital advertising strategy, and what to continue to deliver to buyers and customers on any part of their journey.

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