



B2B DIGITAL MARKETING FOR SMEs

Using digital marketing techniques to develop
your company's activity

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This document presents B2B digital marketing for SMEs. At a time when it has become essential to place digital marketing at the core of each company's marketing mix, plenty of marketing people and decision-makers working in SMEs are still hesitant to deploy it, despite its vital importance and its huge potential. Companies tend to shirk away from digital marketing because it is still relatively new in the B2B context, and is perceived as complex:

- Traditional offline marketing channels and their expected results are, for the most part, well recognised and understood.
- Conversely, the actual implementation of digital techniques requires a certain amount of specialist knowledge, and is often perceived as risky by inexperienced users.
- The biggest obstacle to the adoption of digital marketing is a lack of resources in terms of competences, budget and time.

And yet, no one can ignore the fact that the Internet is the most important channel when it comes to searching for information and products, both from the consumer's perspective and that of the business buyer. Digital channels also offer a number of advantages over traditional offline B2B methods. Moreover, their integration and complementarity with offline channels are highly promising:

- They serve to deliver information and rich, diversified content to a targeted audience.
- The ROI from digital marketing is easy to measure given the accessibility of the corresponding data.

To make optimal use of these digital channels, the B2B marketer must understand that each digital tool plays a specific role. In fact, when looking for suppliers on the Web, the business buyer will generally adopt a process comprising a series of steps. Each phase is characterised by the level of information the buyer wants to obtain, and his or her propensity to buy.

- When B2B buyers have no clear intention to buy, they nevertheless remain watchful, exploring their relevant subject to stay informed of news and trends.
- Then, when the right product comes along, B2B buyers will want to gain some insight into the solutions and the potential suppliers available.
- Only then will they search for detailed information to finally compare offers.

Understanding which marketing tool to use at each step in the process is key to the success of B2B digital marketing. The marketer must get organised in order to deliver the right information at the right time.



"Today, buyers tend to contact suppliers much later on in the purchasing process."

So why are many B2B SMEs still holding back from adopting digital marketing?

Despite the large number of economical and easy-to-use solutions available, SMEs often persist in focusing their online presence on a limited set of options.

The reasons why many marketers working for B2B SMEs have not yet implemented any digital marketing techniques are diverse, so we must be careful not to generalise.

→ Offline channels are well recognised. The marketing process has been optimised previously, and marketing departments have amassed a wealth of pertinent information concerning the effectiveness of their actions. Most of the time, they are able to allocate resources optimally.

→ Conversely, digital marketing often falls victim to preconceptions, and comes up against a serious obstacle: since it hasn't yet been tried out, the result of its implementation remains uncertain, and the perceived risk high.

→ In parallel, we can also observe a lack of understanding in relation to analyses and key metrics used to schedule, manage and gauge the impact of digital actions. In reality, with plenty of easy-to-use tools available, analysing the results of a company's digital actions is actually more precise and reliable than that of offline actions.

→ People working in VSEs/SMEs are very often focused on the company's core activity, which is perfectly understandable; B2B digital marketing is a relatively new discipline, and the main obstacle to its adoption is a lack of human resources, budget and time.

Why exactly should digital marketing be implemented?

→ **Every SME should implement digital marketing to adapt to new forms of behaviour among B2B buyers.**

In the past, B2B buyers would contact a sales person directly to evaluate the solutions available. But in the last decade, the purchasing cycle has become increasingly complex.

Today:

1. Most B2B buyers spend a considerable amount of time online.
2. They spend this time searching for companies and products, and benefiting from access to a wealth of information on potential suppliers and available solutions.
3. Using the Internet, they can get most of the information they need for themselves, and now tend to contact suppliers much later on in the purchasing process.



"The equation is simple: 77% of B2B buyers search on Google." "A company that does not appear in this search engine's list of results will thus be invisible for 77% of its prospects..."

Source: Accenture Interactive "2014 State of B2B Procurement Study"

→ **Many of today's B2B buyers and decision-makers are digital natives.** It can be explained by a major demographic shift, i.e. young managers born in the digital age. Given the ongoing evolution of technology, newcomers on the market are now more active online than ever before. This evolution is here to stay, and is unavoidable¹. B2B marketers must take an interest in these new buyer profiles, and understand how best to target them to avoid falling behind the competition

→ **Digital marketing allows you to perform test campaigns with a limited risk and budget.** Readily-available data concerning the results of test campaigns can be used to quickly gauge the efficiency of actions, allowing the company to deploy its investment free from doubt.

The same can't always be said for traditional marketing. For example, taking part in a new trade fair involves a certain amount of upstream investment, but without being able to assess the return on investment.

In addition, the ability of a digital marketing campaign to cover a target is much higher – for a comparable investment – than most classic, offline marketing actions.

→ **SMEs can build on data obtained from digital campaigns.** The data gathered from digital campaigns – much more comprehensive and precise than that from traditional offline campaigns – allows the SME to increase its knowledge of its targets, identify what works and what doesn't, and make informed decisions regarding which resources to allocate. In short, this data allows the SME to improve its return on advertising investment.

The time is past when John Wanamaker² claimed: "*Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half.*"

Today, measuring the ROI from digital communication is possible, necessary, and insightful.

That said, the difficulty lies in ascertaining which solutions are available for managing digital campaigns. By searching the Internet, marketers can identify the solutions (some of which are available for free) that will allow them to get started with their first tests.

By way of example, here are some of the solutions available:

- Google Analytics (free) to measure a website's performance
- Website Grader (free) to grade a website's SEO
- Mailchimp (free for up to 2,000 addresses, and to send up to 12,000 emails per year) for emailing
- Hootsuite (free) to manage social media
- Similarweb (free) to assess the online competition

¹More than one third (35%) of buyers in the digital native age category have already made a purchase for their company via a mobile device, compared with only 19% of buyers aged 45 and over. Source: https://www.accenture.com/t20150624T211502__w_/us-en/_acnmedia/Accenture/Conversion-Assets/DocCom/Documents/Global/PDF/Industries_15/Accenture-B2B-Procurement-Study.pdf#zoom=50

Adapting your digital marketing to each phase in the purchasing process

Inbound marketing approach

Traditional offline B2B marketing adheres to a *logic of pushing* information to a target² via channels such as trade fairs or advertising in professional magazines.

As such, traditional offline B2B marketing assumes that the procurement process is linear, and that the potential buyer is passive. Against this backdrop, the idea is to "push" the company's offers to the prospect to take that prospect out of the awareness phase and into the interest phase, before reaching the conversion phase.

Conversely, digital marketing campaigns adopt the *logic of pulling*³, taking into account new online search behaviour, integrating the fact that today's buyers are active, and that they search and compare the solutions likely to respond to their need.

²This outbound marketing strategy, also referred to as push marketing, considers the prospect to be passive, and thus sends information that is not always relevant, often at the wrong time.

³By adopting this inbound marketing strategy, also referred to as pull marketing, the company considers the prospect as someone who is actively searching for information, and thus makes every effort to maximise the availability and visibility of its information.

It is clear that the inbound approach solves the timing problem: whereas a trade fair or an advertising insert may well miss the buyer's moment of need, a product or service offering available on the Internet is accessible all the time. On the Web, supply and demand meet each other synchronously.

Consequently, B2B marketers must make sure that comprehensive information concerning their offer is available online throughout the buyers' search process.

The purchase decision process takes place via a number of successive phases during which the type of information searched for and the level of intention to buy may vary. Depending on the extent of the buyer's knowledge and experience, he or she may disregard certain steps, or complete them in a non-linear manner.

Generally speaking, when a buyer is confronted with a problem to solve, she will start out with some fairly generic searching to better frame the issue. This is the exploration phase. Let's take an example. A buyer is tasked with acquiring paper towel dispensers to replace an existing base of such devices within his company. In this exploratory phase, he may well run a search using an expression such as «hand-drying solutions for companies». This query will enable her to frame the problem and, perhaps, to find alternative solutions that are more economical and more environmentally-friendly.

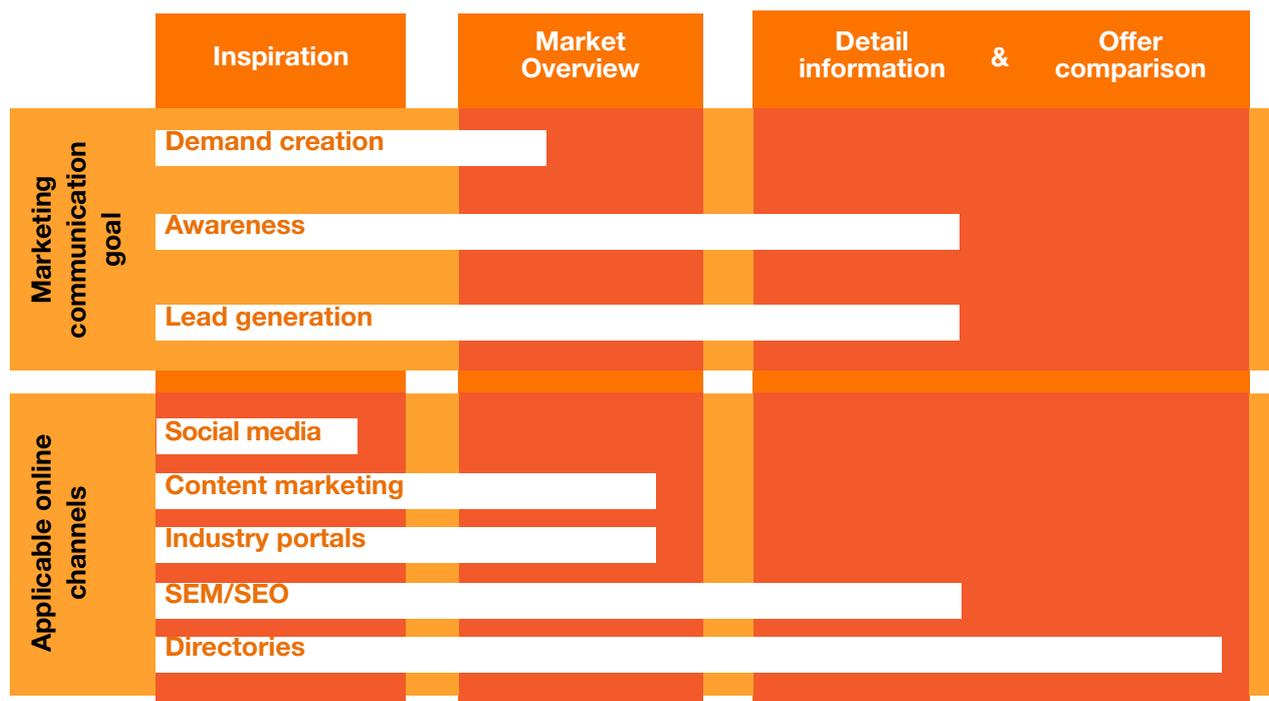
Once the buyer has completed this phase, she will search more specifically for a list of suppliers offering those solutions. After that, she will search for more detailed technical characteristics, and will attempt to compare solutions and prices, leading to a shortlist of potential suppliers to contact.

According to this general model, the closer we get to the final transaction, the more the requisite information becomes specific and precise. In this respect, it is up to the B2B marketer to use the appropriate content and format. On the whole, the marketer must anticipate the questions a buyer may come up against in her procurement process, and present suitable and exhaustive answers. By establishing a relationship based on dialogue with potential buyers, both parties can benefit from the information exchanged.

A matrix (see the diagram) describes the digital marketing tools suited to each phase in the purchase process.

Below, we will describe each phase in the process, along with the suitable digital marketing techniques.

Need-based marketing model



Exploration

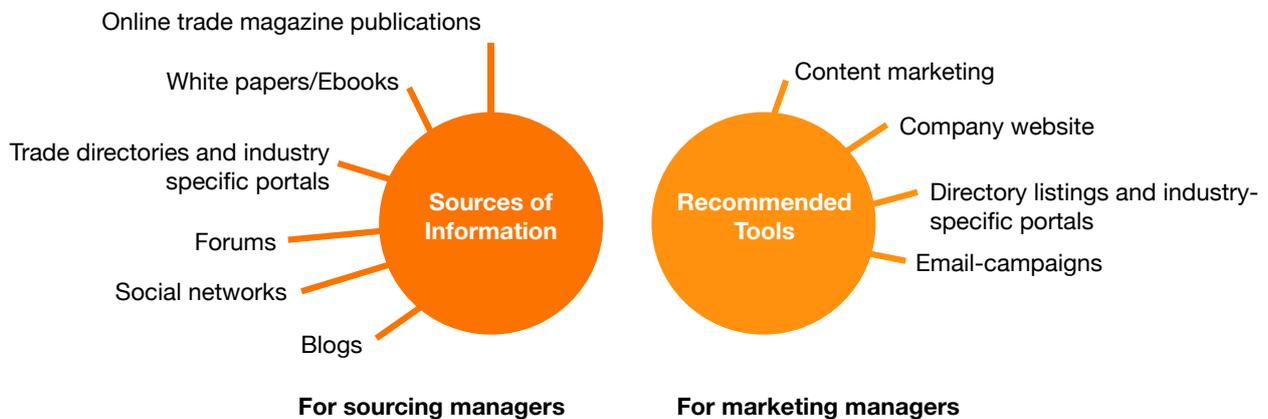
During the initial exploration phase, a buyer has not yet scheduled his procurement, but uses a broad spectrum of information sources to conduct an extensive search for solutions, products, trends, and sometimes to simply stay informed of new developments within a given sector or market.

While it is unlikely that a purchase decision will be made during this exploration phase, this is when the initial interest is aroused.

Traditional marketing channels such as specialised magazines, industrial exhibitions, or even direct personal exchange continue to represent pertinent sources of information during this exploration phase. Having said that, online channels have become the preferred source for most of today's business buyers. During this phase, buyers will tend to favour neutral online sources that present information in a factual manner rather than from a promotional perspective. For this purpose, professional directories and portals are often consulted.

The diagram representing Phase 1 shows a list of sources that a buyer is likely to use during the exploration phase. It presents the digital tools which the marketer can utilise so that the buyer finds, qualifies and remembers the company and its solutions. The common denominator in these tools is a high level of information, but a low level of specificity. They are

Phase 1: Exploration



intended for a broad target, and offer general content allowing decision-makers to also obtain a preview of the various possibilities in addition to their precise procurement objective. The relatively recent «content marketing» techniques are adapted to this exploration phase. Basically, content marketing is not intended to boast a given product or service. It is essentially a matter of educating and raising the awareness of targets on a specific issue or solution. It is also a means for the company to convey an image of professionalism and extensive capabilities.

By actively and consistently contributing to discussions on the trends observed in forums and on social networks such as LinkedIn, and by publishing research reports via e-books or white papers, the B2B marketer can establish her company as a trustworthy actor in the corresponding field.

Consequently, content marketing not only offers a response to the goal of creating demand during the exploration phase; it also participates in enhancing the company's notoriety and brand image. In addition to the tools already mentioned, the marketer may use other types of content such as webinars, video, customer case studies or discussions between experts.

Analysis of the solutions

Once the purchasing requirement has been clearly defined, the subsequent phases are characterised by a targeted search on the available solutions. In this respect, the business buyer's search behaviour is hardly any different from that of everyday consumers.

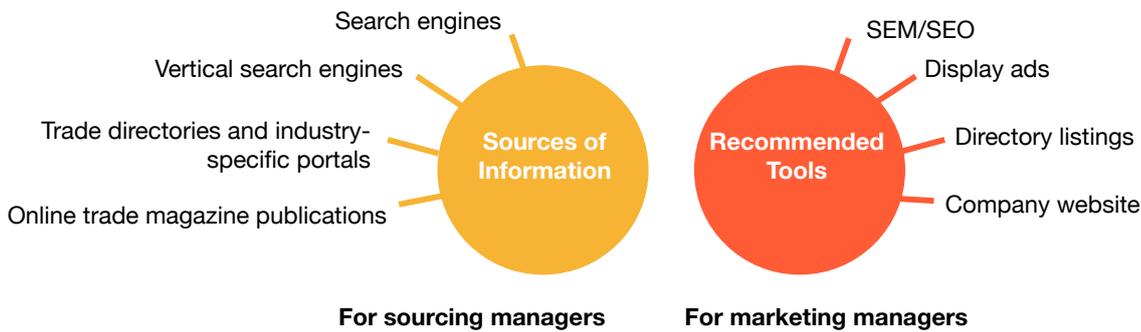
There are two possible scenarios at the start of this second phase:

1. The buyer knows of a supplier – identified during the exploration phase, and visits the supplier’s website.
2. The buyer does not know of any potential suppliers, and thus consults the various sources to find one or more.

In scenario 1, even if the buyer has a preference for a given supplier, it will still tend to look for alternatives, especially in the case of important investments.

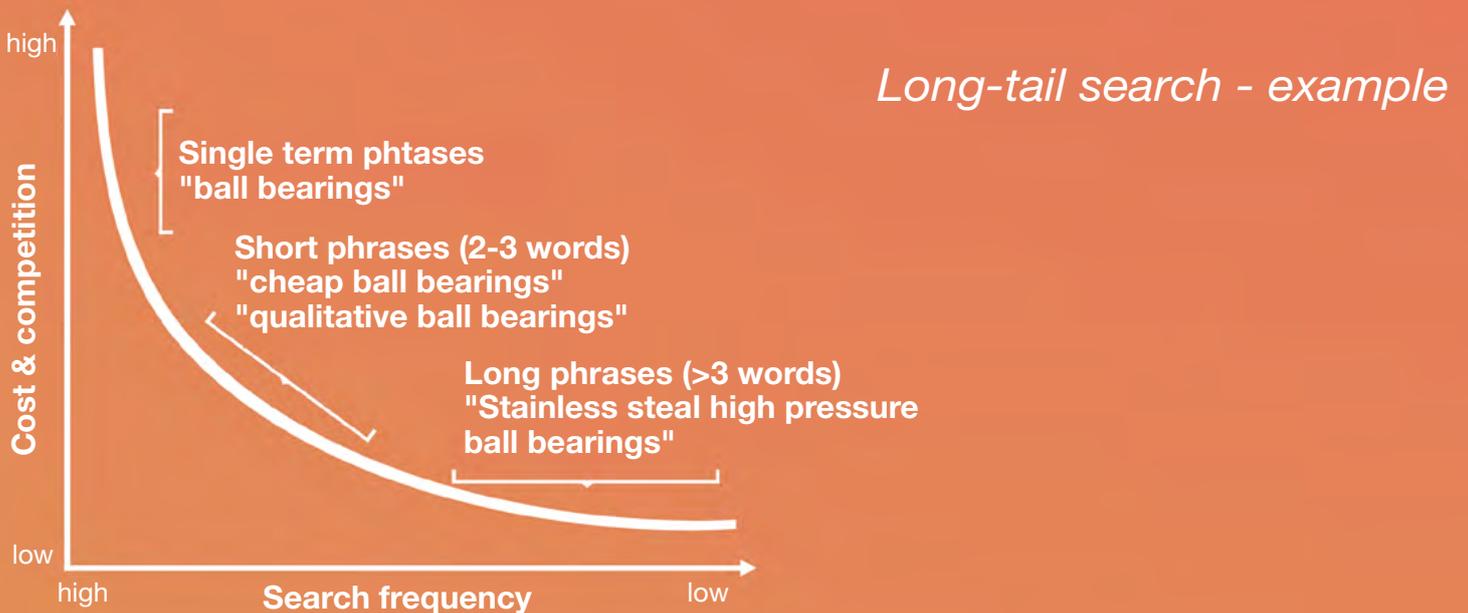
In both scenarios, the B2B marketer must make every effort to ensure that the buyer visits her company’s website. In this second market analysis phase, the marketer must bear two keywords in mind: visibility and specificity. In fact, during this phase, buyers run highly specific searches to quickly find the relevant information. They are especially likely to use the main search engines (Google, Yahoo, Baidu (China), Yandex (Russia)), as well as professional directories and industrial portals.

Phase 2: Market overview phase



Buyers will necessarily enter more specific search expressions using several words to obtain a precise list of results. To come back to the previous example with paper towel dispensers, the buyer may well use Google to enter something along the lines of «supplier of forced air hand dryers for professional organisations». Here, the so-called «long tail» concept – which is all-important in B2B – deserves a mention.

In the B2B context, long-tail searching refers to the fact that professional buyers use long search expressions, containing more than four words, when using search engines. One particularity with these highly precise search expressions is that they are less used than expressions containing only a few popular words. Given that highly specific, long-tail searches are used relatively infrequently, the competition to feature among the first results on the leading search engines is less fierce.



Consequently, the marketer must make sure that the search expressions associated with his or her company's products/services are included and correctly structured within the company's website and digital documents (SEO). In order to be exhaustive, the marketer may conduct an analysis of expressions synonymous with those that characterise his or her products, and that are likely to be used by potential buyers. To do so, he or she can use tools available for free, such as Google Keyword Planner or Ubersuggest.

The marketer may also choose to take out a listing for her company and its products/services in one or more professional directories, which have become highly adept at structuring very specific information and ensuring extensive referencing of keywords.

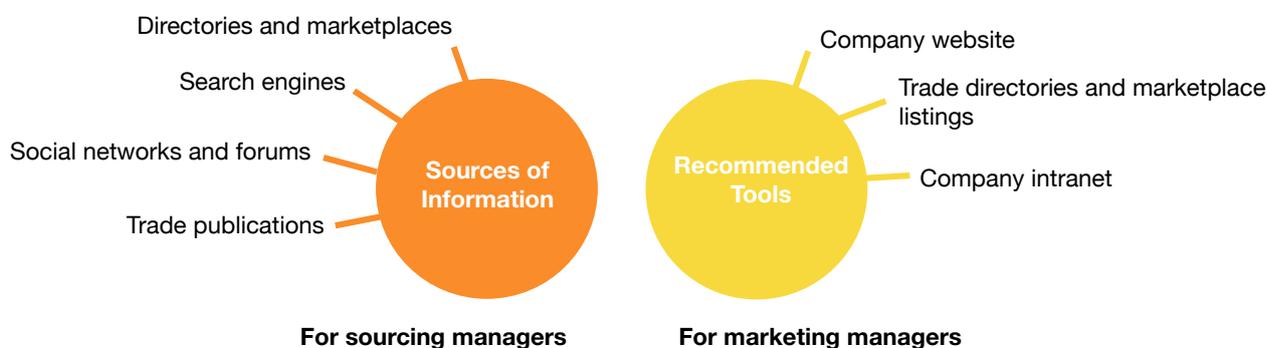
Another tool that can be employed during this phase is that of display ads. Provided the marketer has identified the leading portals and websites the most frequently viewed by his or her potential buyers, she can create a display ad and place it on any of these sites. The advantage with display ads is that they build on the company's notoriety and generate qualified traffic to the company website.

Detailed search and comparing offers

Once the business buyer has identified certain suppliers, he will run a more detailed search on the technical specifications and performance characteristics of the products to see how they compare with one another.

This kind of information is not always available online. The potential buyer might then collect additional details by contacting directly the selected suppliers. The most common ways to establish a first contact are telephone calls and emails. To facilitate the request for information or for quotes is a good practice to have a specific page with a dedicated form for contacting the company. Bear in mind that the number of fields to complete in the form should be limited⁴. Ideally, the content of these fields will be automatically integrated in the company's CRM solution. Lastly, the marketer must specifically ensure that any form entered duly receives a prompt response. Any failure to respond within a reasonable time will necessarily compromise the chances of closing the deal.

Étape 3: Detailed research and offer comparison



Implementing the actions

As described in the previous section, B2B companies should give preference to an inbound marketing approach («being found») rather than an outbound one. «Being found» on the web is anything but a passive attitude; it is a genuinely active approach in which marketers ensure that they have done all they can to ensure that their company's solutions emerge, one way or another, in each phase of the purchasing process which, as we have seen, takes place on the Internet for the most part. It's all about being found when someone is looking for a product or service similar to the one you provide, which is exactly the opposite of reaching out someone that is not searching or has not yet manifested a specific need.

⁴ 69% of buyers state that having too many fields to fill in will dissuade them from completing a contact form. Source: 2015 B2B Web Usability Report, Huff/KoMarketing <http://www.komarketingassociates.com/files/b2b-web-usability-report-2015.pdf>

The equation is simple: 77% of B2B buyers search on Google. A company that does not appear in this search engine's list of results will thus be invisible for 77% of its prospects...

To take their first steps into the world of digital marketing, marketers will make the most of tools available for free which we mentioned previously, and will proceed cautiously by testing them. In fact, these tests are key since they serve to get an idea of what works and for what cost, as well as to acquire knowledge. A methodological framework can be used. It can be summed up in four words: *Plan, Do, Check, Act*.

The role of professional directories and marketplaces

A building block in the inbound marketing strategy

Companies that are getting started with digital B2B marketing, but whose time, skills and finances are limited, can start with setting a presence on professional directories (also referred to as trade directories) and marketplaces.

These professional directories and marketplaces have qualified traffic and benefit from teams specialised in search engine optimisation (SEO), and tasked with referencing the content of the companies listed.. Many professional directories allow the company to freely manage its content, post catalogues and video clips, and update and enhance all of this content. For companies seeking to enhance their international visibility, some directories offer targeting services by country, for example to support the company's export policy, or test an export approach at least cost.

Generation of qualified prospects

Generating more prospects is the greatest challenge faced by B2B marketers. This is the primary objective given by European marketers in the "State of inbound" survey conducted by HubSpot with a panel of 3,570 participants. The vast majority of visitors to professional directories and marketplaces are buyers who are looking for information. These buyers can send requests to the companies listed. The companies can then deliver the requested information with a view to completing a sale. In this way, the buyers form a vast pool of prospects whom the companies can contact at a later date, for example when launching a new product.

Conclusion

The spread of Internet is changing the way buyers search, select and make a final choice of potential suppliers. Marketing and sales managers are faced with a real change of direction in the choice of marketing and communication tactics. The main objective is the generation of qualified leads. Given the abundance of information available online and the active role of potential buyers, it becomes increasingly important to «be found» at the right time rather than «get ahead» at any time. Is the difference between being present when needed and come forward at all costs when no one's looking for you that creates a qualified contact.

In the digital world, marketing is not just a matter of activities and campaigns. Is an evolving path where you can experience thanks to the many low-cost tools available on the net and without much risk.

About EUROPAGES

For more For more than 30 years, EUROPAGES has been helping SMEs increase their international online visibility. Representing Europe's leading B2B directory and supplier of e-marketing solutions, EUROPAGES has managed to constantly reinvent itself to offer its customers high-performance marketing tools. Headquartered in France, EUROPAGES works with a solid network of partners in more than 20 European countries.

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About Kyto

KKyto GmbH is an international software-as-a-service provider based in Berlin. It optimizes the online presence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) working in B2B thanks to custom online marketing solutions.

Kyto helps its customers choose the appropriate search engines, trade directories and B2B platforms.

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