



Top Tips from Top Marketers:

The Secret to B2B Marketing Success in 2017



Introduction

B2B marketers know that there's no single secret to success. The industry's methods, tools, and tactics are always evolving to meet the changing needs of buyers. Succeeding in B2B marketing requires a strong connection to those buyers, in the form of relationships and engagement, and a suite of powerful tools to help define, create, and attract clients and prospects. As we go into 2017, marketers continue to focus on the role of technology in the customer experience, new marketing methods like account-based marketing and inbound marketing, and new tools and metrics in predictive analytics and data analysis.

We broke down four of the main elements of B2B marketing: planning your marketing strategy, creating top quality content, leveraging the tools and technology, and working with industry influencers, and interviewed some of the top industry thought-leaders, marketers and consultants to get their insights on how to maximize your success in each phase.



Planning Your B2B Marketing Strategy



Neal Schaffer
Creator of *Maximize Social Business Blog*
Maximize Your Social

“2017 will be an evolutionary, not revolutionary, year for B2B social media marketing. Do you need to be on Snapchat? Not necessarily. Live streaming on Facebook on a daily basis? Not necessarily. But you need to make sure you are properly optimizing and maximizing the opportunities you have on the following platforms and leveraging the following trends:

- Social media and paid social
- Blogging
- Employee advocacy
- Influencer marketing
- Social selling

Of the above, how many can you say that you are truly confident that you are maximizing 100% of your potential but also are measuring and assured that you have positive ROI from your investment? Now is the time to take a step back and audit what you are doing and how it is helping your enterprise. If you haven't started, don't know, or don't feel confident that you're generating positive ROI from your efforts, you need to shake things up and do things differently.

You might not generate positive ROI from all of the above networks and concepts, but being able to measure them and A/B test them against each other should make you feel confident that you are well prepared for the year ahead.”

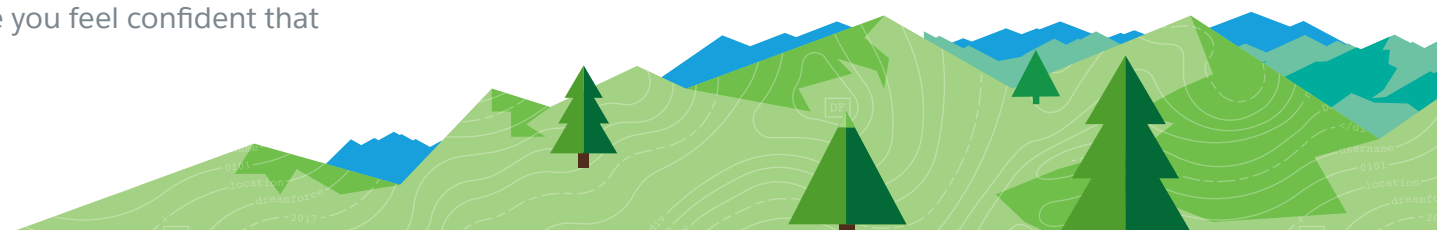


Ann Handley
Chief Content Officer
MarketingProfs

“In 2017, I believe modern marketers need to challenge what we think we know. Poke holes in what we've always done and the way we've always done it. Challenge ourselves to think of alternatives, and simplify our marketing by putting quality above quantity. Challenging our marketing assumptions starts with slowing down. I spoke and wrote about slow marketing a few times in 2016, and I'll do more of that in 2017. There is such a thing as a 'bad slow' in marketing, but there is a critical need for a 'good slow,' too. In 2017, the smartest companies will slow down at the right moments. We need to say no sometimes, and aim for sustainability over the quick hit.”

“In 2017, the smartest companies will slow down at the right moments.”

Ann Handley



Planning Your B2B Marketing Strategy



Brian J. Carroll
Speaker, Researcher, and Founder of the
B2B Lead Blog

“I think the one thing marketers should focus on to be successful in 2017 is humanizing their marketing. Why? You can’t automate trust. We have all this technology to connect with our customers, but they’re increasingly tuning us out. Because they don’t feel it’s authentic, or relevant, and marketers are using marketing automation in a way that misses the bigger picture. Modern buyers have a general lack of trust, and they simply don’t want to be sold. People are weary of pitches, hype, pushy sales people, and irrelevant marketing messages. They are time constrained and too busy to think. So what do buyers do with most of our sales and marketing messages? They simply ignore them. Marketing isn’t something you do to people. It’s something you do for people. When you are marketing to people, you’re trying to get them to do something or buy something. But when you’re marketing for people, you’re advocating for them. You’re doing something that helps and may make a difference. To humanize marketing, apply this truth from neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. He said, ‘We are not thinking machines that feel; rather, we are feeling machines that think.’ Successful marketers understand this truth.”

“I think the one thing marketers should focus on to be successful in 2017 is humanizing their marketing. Why? You can’t automate trust.”

Brian Carroll



Andy Crestodina
Co-Founder and Strategic Director
Orbit Media

“The weather forecast for B2B marketers is loud and crowded with a chance of growth. To do well in 2017, button up and get ready for a busy one. Up your game. Go bigger. Don’t be a writer; be an editor. Build a team. Collaborate with others. Delegate, outsource, and leverage your time in ways that let you do much more. If you’re in a crowded niche, this will keep you relevant. If you’re in a less crowded space, it will create a position of dominance. It’s going to be a good year for those who focus on relationships and data. It will be a great year for those who run tests, build publishing machines, and focus on the friends who matter most.”



John Jantsch
Marketing Consultant, Speaker and Author of
Duct Tape Marketing

“Personalize, personalize, personalize. We moved well beyond the point where content and email marketers can rely on blasting the same message to a large and responsive list. A combination of email filters and fatigue has severely limited open and engagement rates. That does not mean that people are no longer responsive to email; they are simply very picky about what they consume and are no longer moved by anything that does not, well, move them. Meaning – marketers must create messages and segments tailored to the needs, wants, and fears of individuals, not subscribers.”

Planning Your B2B Marketing Strategy



Jeremy Miller
Speaker and Author of
Sticky Branding

“My theme for 2017 is: Clear thinking drives results. There are several massive forces at play in 2017, from big tech trends in machine learning and artificial intelligence to tumultuous geo politics. You can easily predict that any one or all of these forces will impact your business. Instead of fixating on the trends, rise above the storm. The companies that are poised to make a real impact this year are clear on their thinking and strategies. They know who they are, what they want, and how they will make an impact. That clarity of thinking provides a significant performance edge. There are new tools and technologies coming online that you can exploit, and clear thinking lets you separate opportunities from herd mentality.”



Matt Heinz
President
Heinz Marketing Inc

“A business-centric mentality from everyone involved in sales and marketing will be key in 2017. It requires everyone to think beyond traditional operational metrics and to instead make the business objectives in front of their efforts as paramount. Marketers need to treat their departments as profit centers, and sales organizations need to focus on the best customers and the highest lifetime value opportunities. A single, integrated approach to the buying journey in complex B2B environments is what will win in 2017, and increasingly create a competitive advantage for those who do it well.”



Brian Carter
Author, Speaker
Marketing Leader

“Based on all the trends and what works best, I still believe Google and Facebook are the best platforms for most companies. Twitter and LinkedIn are my ‘B’ players based on our case studies and surveys from entities like Social Media Examiner, MarketingProfs, and the Content Marketing Institute. Advertising is critical – ignore it at your peril, because organic social is not enough to ensure you reach your target customer. Viral is not reliable; no one knows how to turn it on at will.

I counsel most businesses to stick to the most proven platforms and strategies, which, in digital, are things like AdWords, SEO, blogging, email marketing that includes autoresponders, ebooks, white papers, Facebook ads, and retargeting. SEO and blogging have changed a lot. Long-form, 2,500-word+, high-quality content wins, and you have to get distribution for that in order to earn links, so social ad distribution is a smart way to do that. Facebook is the most affordable ad network and has the best targeting – the only thing it’s missing is AdWords’ search intent.”

“Clear thinking drives results.”

Jeremy Miller



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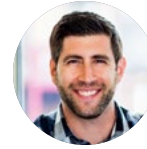


Heidi Cohen
“Actionable Marketing Guide”

“Contextual marketing is the next marketing wave for 2017 and beyond. It extends beyond your content. Contextual marketing taps into your organization’s ‘small’ data about your customers, prospects, and audience to deliver tailored, real-time experiences. We’re not talking fake ‘Dear Customer’ personalization. Your objective is to attract audience attention and remove buying friction. Start with a deep understanding of your audience, including:

- Who you’re trying to reach
- Why they should care about your offering
- What information they need and want from you
- When and how they need the information (including content format and platform)
- Where they are (this includes physical location and device)

Contextual marketing requires an integrated approach across your entire marketing tech stack. It involves your entire business. To this end, use a mobile-first approach. Integrate voice search ‘findability’ to tap into the Internet of Things and its related information across devices and platforms.”



Jay Acunzo
Speaker, Host, and Producer of
“Unthinkable”

“In 2017, let’s pledge to stop using lists, roundups, and best practices as absolutes and instead use them as ingredients to combine with our own creative intuition (and copious amounts of customer conversations) to better contextualize and personalize marketing advice to your specific marketing setup. Enough copying what people say and more strategically thinking about what YOU would do. Because it’s never been easier to be average – just copy everyone else in this listified era – but it’s never been harder to be exceptional. And to do that? Well, you have to be an exception.”

“Enough copying what people say and more strategically thinking about what YOU would do.”

Jay Acunzo

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Bruce H. Rogers
Chief Insights Officer and Head of the CMO Practice
Forbes Media

“In 2017, B2B CMOs will continue to be under pressure to produce and innovate. Produce” means performance marketing and the ability to attribute marketing activity to business outcomes. This remains a relentless trend to drive out inefficiencies in marketing spend and is closely aligned with the CEO’s overall digital transformation agenda to digitize everything that can be and to use data and analytics to show better pathways to efficiency and customer interactions.

This trend is reflected in the movement toward account-based marketing and one-to-one personalization, with better data supporting it all. CMOs must also innovate through better product or service offerings as well as a better customer experience. CMOs will continue to be drawn into owning the omni-channel customer experience, and this trend will be reflected in the move to enhance customer interfaces through artificial intelligence (for example, chat bots and voice-activated interfaces like Alexa, Cortana, Siri, and so on.).”



Carla Johnson
Speaker, Author, and Founder of
Type A Communications

“In 2017 we’ll see bigger trends toward creativity in how we get audiences excited about connecting with our brands. We’ll see the success of marketers who take a 360-degree look at their work and explore opportunities from many perspectives. Creativity is the foundation for design – whether that’s the design of a product, process, or experience. Creative companies are more likely to have satisfied customers and deliver a better customer experience, but only a third believe they’re living up to their creative potential. This means that the marketers who can become idea-driven, rather than format-driven, are the ones who will consistently and strategically deliver exponential business outcomes. This is the year that we marketers will realize that by becoming strategically and consistently creative, we’ll not only deliver great marketing, we’ll be the ones who identify areas of opportunity for innovation and greater customer happiness.”



Creating Top-Quality Content



Cappy Popp
Principal, Analytics, SEO, and Digital Marketing
Strategy at
Thought Labs

“I think 2017 will be a turning point for many B2B marketing tactics, especially in content marketing, ABM, marketing automation, and mobile. Seventy-one percent of SMBs profiled in MarketingProfs and CMI’s 2017 B2B study reported their content marketing programs were still immature but 62% of them were more successful this year than last.

Account-based marketing will become more prevalent in 2017 because it blends traditional long-cycle, campaign-based B2B marketing and the inbound, agile approach. It’s gaining traction because social media has made it easier for B2B marketers to identify high-value potential leads in target companies, making ABM a more viable and defensible option. Email is the juggernaut that drives B2B marketing programs. The study above found 93% of B2B marketers use it as their primary content channel, and this year we’re seeing a shift from stand-alone email solutions to the significant productivity gains offered by full-featured marketing automation software.”

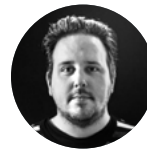
“Transforming the marketing experience we give our customers starts with transforming our approach.”

Colleen Jones



Colleen Jones
CEO of
Content Science

“Big data, bigger content, and bots – oh my. 2017 will be anything but boring. Marketers face tremendous opportunities to personalize, automate, and scale their marketing experiences more effectively than ever before with everything from chat bots to dynamic, contextual mobile experiences to rich, useful, engaging content. These opportunities underscore the need to get serious about integrated strategy and operations. Myopic marketing and operating in silos will not work. Marketing strategy has to factor in brand, technology, content, customer journey, user experience, data, and more. Transforming the marketing experience we give our customers starts with transforming our approach.”



Jason Miller
Global Marketing Leader
LinkedIn

“For 2017, one of the trends I’m thinking about is focusing not on more content, but more relevant content – doing more with less. That starts with revisiting the best content and finding new ways to expand its reach and increase its CTR. CTR seems to be increasingly important for rankings in search engines, so I’m focusing my efforts on optimizing our best content for not only relevancy but CTR. Not all of it, but certainly all of the content that does well organically. And that will be done through better targeting with paid advertising and A/B testing.”

Creating Top-Quality Content



Mathew Sweezy
Product Evangelist
Salesforce

“I’ve got no grand predictions, just the renewed confidence content marketing will fail for many, many, brands. Why? One simple reason: Consumers don’t want content. They want experiences, and most brands don’t understand what this means. Let me make a few clear points here. First off, when was the last time someone on your marketing team picked up the phone to ask a customer/lead/prospect what they thought about a piece of content, not for lead qualification, but to get feedback to make your content better? To let you know how the world answers this question I’ve asked it to tens of thousands of people around the world, and less than 1% of marketers have ever done it. This means they are just doing content marketing because someone told them to, and have no real clue what they are doing. Your consumers don’t want content so stop making so much of it. Take some of that time to talk to your audience, maybe even over the phone. So no grand predictions, just a simple ask. Figure out what your audience wants, not what you think they want.”

“Figure out what your audience wants, not what you think they want.”

Matthew Sweezy



Rebecca Lieb
Marketing Leader and Speaker
RebeccaLieb.com

“I’ve got two primary trend predictions for this year: First, context will be the foundation of the next phase of content marketing. Content is moving beyond screens, and also far beyond mere personalization. Beacons, sensors, and IoT-enabled devices mean content is more contextual, and hyper-relevant messaging can be delivered in the phygital (physical + digital) world at places, times, and under circumstances that are meaningful, valuable, and helpful to individuals. Enterprises are beginning to investigate with contextual campaigns and content. They will develop methods for making highly personalized and relevant real-time messages based on triggers such as purchase history, the weather, physical location, and myriad more factors. Such campaigns are highly complex and technically demanding, but as one Disney executive once told me, ‘The more context there is, the higher the ROI.’ Next year will be an experimental year, when trials are floated in this very new and potentially very lucrative arena.

The second prediction is around global content. Enterprises are investing heavily in creating global content strategies. Content in diverse countries and regions must both ladder up to central messaging and goals while at the same time containing enough local relevance to resonate with audiences. People, processes, and technologies must be coordinated and synced – easier said than done. Moreover, doing so creates efficiencies and cost savings, as well as better content. Over the past year I’ve seen a spike in this type of planning among my clients, and this trend is already gaining serious momentum.”

Creating Top-Quality Content



Arnie Kuenn
CEO
Vertical Measures

“In 2017, brands will be creating more and more content in-house, and they will be the ones that are successful at content marketing. Most organizations resist the idea of their teams creating content. They often say they just don’t have time. I say it’s just a matter of resetting priorities. You do that for the things that are important to you. As an agency, we have rolled out a content marketing coaching program where we teach in-house teams how to create agile strategies, ideation, writing, promotion, distribution, and so on. So far, the response has been outstanding. This leads me to believe deeper, more focused training of internal teams on how to create and distribute content is in our future.”



Mari Smith
Speaker, CEO of
Mari Smith International

“These are some of the things I think B2B marketers should do in 2017:

- Create highly shareable video and photo content
- Use Facebook Live
- Test giveaways with your audience
- Publish five times per week and experiment with posting outside business hours
- Focus on educating, and entertaining, your audience”



Michael Brenner
CEO of Marketing Insider Group, Co-Author of the
Best-Selling Book *The Content Formula*

“Content marketing has emerged as the best and most trackable way to demonstrate marketing ROI, but content marketing requires the internal cultural acceptance to create customer-focused content over the natural instinct of every business to promote itself. The most notable marketing trend in 2017 is that culture is the new marketing mandate. Leading brands will focus on building a culture of empathy inside our organizations to deliver truly valuable customer-centric marketing and customer-first approaches across the entire business. 2016 was the year for marketers to put up or shut up. The brands who committed to creating valuable content and who focus on positive customer experiences will really start to separate themselves from the pack in 2017.”



Cassio Politi
Content Marketing
Tracto Content Marketing

“I would say that short videos and live videos will keep growing as a format, especially in social media for brands who aim to increase their awareness. At the same time, marketers will try new methods of content distribution, by increasing the mix of online and offline tactics, for example. The logic of pay for play will accentuate from 2017 on. Many companies will spend more money to distribute content than they spend to create it. In the big picture, I expect to see more and more companies and platforms being acquired by giants.”

Creating Top-Quality Content



Russell Sparkman
Co-Founder, CEO of
FusionSpark Media

“Let’s assume that your content marketing activities have reached parity with the major competitors in your sector. From your content strategy to your editorial calendar, e-newsletter, blog, webinars, videos, and marketing technology that pulls it together like a well-oiled machine, you’ve done it, you’ve arrived. It’s 2017 and you’re a content marketing rock star. Well, except for the fact that deep down you feel something is ... missing. And the unsettling fact is that your colleagues and your boss ... well, they feel it, too. So, what is the missing ingredient? It’s your sense of purpose. And a lack of purpose is contributing to your inability to create quality content on a consistent basis that doesn’t just attract an audience, but endears them to your brand. In 2017, the single most important marketing question to elevate your content beyond your competitor’s will be ‘What’s our purpose?’ By developing a purpose-focused marketing mindset, answers to this single question will inspire more quality content ideas than any other question you can ask.”



Jay Baer
New York Times Best-Selling Author, Founder of
Convince & Convert

“As more and more brands embrace storytelling, they will shift the nature of those stories from fiction to nonfiction. The rise of live video, behind-the-scenes content, and true brand journalism will begin to tip the storytelling balance from glossy best-foot forward to documentary-style realism.”



Robert Rose
Chief Strategy Advisor
Content Marketing Institute

“There are two key trends on the 2017 horizon: The first is that brands will increasingly turn to acquisition to jump-start their content marketing initiatives both for talent and existing audiences. I see B2B brands looking to acquire blogs, magazines, and other media properties in order to get a leg up on the competition, and to get access to content talent. The second is that publishers and media companies will begin to more prominently disrupt and displace agencies to achieve that ‘trusted advisor’ position. I see agencies purchasing media companies in order to catch up.”



Joe Pulizzi
Founder, Content Marketing Institute, and Author
Content Inc

“There is a noticeable move away from ‘snackable’ content to longer-form content. More marketers move away from social channels for organic content distribution and focus on email subscriber creation. Blogger, influencer, and smaller media company websites and audience databases begin to get purchased by medium-size and larger brands.”

Leveraging the Tools and Technology



John Rampton
Founder and CEO of
Due

“In 2017, marketers need to focus on the need to continually deepen the level of personalization in their content. There is an ever-increasing amount of content available due to the demand for it, but the audience is becoming complacent. In order to keep them engaged, we have to reach out across all channels and give them content that is speaking directly to them. That means a greater focus on analytics, studying the demographics of all followers, and carefully analyzing their feedback, comments, and online behaviors. That means spending more time in 2017 understanding how to use available analytics tools and being more open to any new machine learning-enabled tools that can do the data sifting and suggestions on personalization for us.”



Pawan Deshpande
Founder and CEO of
Curata

“As many people have cited, there are over 3,000 vendors in the marketing technology landscape, many of which are point solutions which excel at specific tactics. In 2017, it’s unlikely that we will continue to see new marketing technologies sprout up at the same rate. Instead, we may start to see some of the weaker and redundant technologies dry up, while others consolidate into larger, more dominant vendors. Technologies which are really features, not products, will be the most vulnerable. Ultimately, we will see the emergence of ‘galaxies’ of marketing technologies highlighted by a few key platforms that tie the rest of the point solutions together.”



Sujan Patel
Growth and Content Marketer
Co-Founder of WebProfits

“A trend I see developing in 2017 is a movement against social media as a reliable organic driver of traffic and leads. Instead, people will look at social more and more as a paid acquisition channel that can be supplemented by organic posts and engagement. Social media platforms like Facebook have not hid the fact that they continue to reduce your page’s organic reach. On Twitter, the average number of views my Tweets receive has consistently declined over the past year, despite the fact that my follower numbers have consistently grown. We leverage social media advertising for most of our clients across a range of niches, and don’t rely on non-paid posts to move the needle. I think more companies and agencies will feel the same by the end of 2017.”



Gini Dietrich
Founder and CEO of Arment Dietrich, Author of
Spin Sucks

“I’m obsessed with artificial intelligence and how it might affect the role of communicators in the next five to ten years. We already have marketing automation – that works when done well – and chat bots, but those are just the tip of the iceberg. If Watson can diagnose a rare form of cancer and self-driving cars will change the way we get around, think about what AI will do to and for communications. It’s scary, sure, but the possibilities are also endless. Right now, think about how your content curation can change for the better. Think about how much easier it will be to update your website to customize for the visitors on-site at an exact moment. Think about a more evolved customer experience. It’s exciting!”

Leveraging the Tools and Technology



Jeff Bullas
Speaker, Author, and
Marketing Leader

“The Terminator movie Rise of the Machines is science fiction, HAL in “2001: A Space Odyssey was futuristic, and the Iron Man series is fantasy. That is, until technology starts making them a reality. Arthur C. Clarke, the futurist and science fiction writer, was famous for this line: ‘Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.’ In marketing this is happening now. There is no escaping the fact that the rise of the smart marketing engines has now arrived. We are seeing the advance of the machines as they assist us in growing our business as extensions of our minds and amplification of our efforts.

Three trends that are tapping into this mechanized marketing at scale are:

- **Artificial intelligence:** We are seeing this in a simple form with the rise of chat bots that learn as they work on websites and social networks.
- **Digital marketing automation:** This is going mainstream for businesses big and small (not just for the big enterprise).
- **Optimization of marketing tactics with applied big data:** Expect the ability for every business to start tapping into this as the tools become more powerful, cheaper, and easier to use.

The intersection of the art and science of marketing is now on the event horizon of 2017”



Vala Afshar
Chief Digital Evangelist
Salesforce

“In 2017, marketing leaders will leverage data science and artificial intelligence technologies to improve lead scoring, lead nurturing, and comanagement of the sales pipeline. Advanced marketing organizations will actively adopt and bolster their company’s e-commerce practices. Forrester estimates that B2B e-commerce will reach \$1.1 trillion by 2020. The most effective method of strengthening sales and marketing alignment is for marketing organizations to measure their success based on tangible business results – revenue growth and customer lifetime value and increased propensity to buy. Successful CMOs will own the customer experience and digital commerce initiatives.”

“Successful CMOs will own the customer experience and digital commerce initiatives.”

Vala Afshar



Working with Industry Influencers



Shane Barker
Digital Strategist

“The marketing landscape will be more competitive than ever this year. As the number of people using ad-blocking software continues to increase, we will see a significant decrease in the ROI from traditional ads. The most effective solution will be to promote brands and products through people consumers already look up to and trust for recommendations. That is why influencer marketing will become even more popular in 2017. But instead of top influencers and celebrities, marketers will focus more on micro-influencers, who can more effectively engage a specific niche, and drive better conversions, to offer a better ROI.”



Andy Crestodina
Co-Founder and Strategic Director
Orbit Media

“The proper response to this insight? Up your game. Go bigger. Don’t be a writer; be an editor. Build a team. Collaborate with others. Delegate, outsource, and leverage your time in ways that let you do much more. If you’re in a crowded niche, this will keep you relevant. If you’re in a less crowded space, it will create a position of dominance. It’s going to be a good year for those who focus on relationships and data. It will be a great year for those who run tests, build publishing machines and focus on the friends who matter most.”



Ian Altman
Best-Selling Author, Contributor to
Forbes.com

“In 2017 we’ll see a shift to subject matter experts (SMEs) as rainmakers. Clients embrace those who can bring value to a discussion, and the SME is someone the client would willingly meet with to discuss industry trends or best practices. This will drive a shift in CRM and sales support geared toward helping the SME with follow-through and details. Since the SME often has other responsibilities on their plate, top-performing organizations will extend their CRM to include the SME and will surround the SME with sales support resources to keep opportunities moving forward while ensuring nothing slips through the cracks. These SMEs will also need sales training for nonsalespeople, since traditional sales tactics won’t appeal to these trusted business experts.”



Conclusion

2017 will be a busy year for B2B marketing. Technology continues to change, and with each shift comes new perspectives, new goals, and new challenges. Among the top B2B marketers, industry leaders, and consultants, the year will focus on strengthening the connection to the customer, working with industry influencers, and creating the kind of content your buyers will want to consume. Achieving these goals will look different in each industry and on each marketing team, so being agile enough to adapt new strategies, ideas, tools, and technologies will be a big part of making 2017 your best year in B2B marketing.



Special Thanks to Our Contributors

A huge thank you to the industry thought leaders who lent their wisdom to this e-book. For more great insights, try these additional resources:

[Ann Handley](#)

[Sorry For Marketing](#)

[Tracto Content Marketing](#)

[Convince & Convert](#)

[Jay Baer](#)

[Duct Tape Marketing](#)

[LinkedIn Blog](#)

[Forbes.com - Bruce Rogers](#)

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