

Survey report: How to communicate with B2B buyers in a hybrid-customer journey.



Introduction

Ironpaper survey shows B2B leaders struggle with messaging and understanding the effectiveness of marketing and sales efforts.

Clearly communicating a value proposition to B2B buyers is a challenge. Creating clear, compelling messaging across marketing and sales content can motivate a buyer to take action, eventually leading to a sale. B2B leaders must use digital tools to measure how messaging performs across the customer journey, identifying bottlenecks where buyers need further education or inspiration in the sales process.

Ironpaper surveyed 159 B2B leaders to understand the success rates of messaging in the customer development process. The survey questions focused on messaging, the hybrid (in-person and online) sales funnel, and the process in which leads go from marketing to sales teams.

Results showed that this group does not have effective messaging and struggles to measure which marketing efforts work. Over half of the respondents noted that they send all leads directly to sales, indicating a lack of prospect nurturing or pushing a product-focused message too early in the process.

Understanding the success rates of messaging in the customer development process.

This survey uncovered key challenges B2B leaders face in creating and measuring effective marketing and sales campaigns.



B2B organizations are struggling to adapt to a volatile marketplace in order to grow. As the world adjusts to changes brought on by the pandemic and some in-person events return, a hybrid sales funnel has taken shape, blending in-person and digital tactics.

This hybrid sales funnel requires messaging that encourages buyers to take action and measurement tools such as CRMs. A hybrid approach can take many forms, such as attending industry events in person and creating a follow-up email campaign through a CRM, tracking the engagement of digital content.

Companies that invest in blending digital and live tactics will be well-positioned to capture buyer attention and make an impact in the industry.

Ineffective messaging

Messaging is how a company communicates a value proposition and positions its brand throughout the sales or marketing process. Modes of messaging include web copy, talking points, scripts, headlines, etc. Messaging is a make-or-break element of a marketing campaign.



Highly engaging, effective messaging can educate buyers on pain points and guide them through the sales pipeline. On the other hand, ineffective messaging can discourage or confuse a buyer and result in a lost deal.

To understand how respondents felt about their messaging, we asked them to rate the effectiveness of their messaging on a scale of one (not effective at all) to five (very effective). The average response was 2.7 out of 5. What was truly remarkable is that only 8.2% of respondents felt their messaging was "very effective." Even coupling those who responded "mostly effective" with "very effective," that number only reaches 25% of respondents.

From the survey:

Only 8.2% of B2B leaders feel their messaging is very effective.

Looking at respondents on the other side of the spectrum, nearly half of respondents felt their messaging was either ineffective or needed improvement.

According to this survey, **B2B leaders generally feel that their messaging efforts are lacking**. Perhaps they don't have the know-how or resources to improve their messaging; alternatively, they may not value this element of a marketing or sales campaign.

To dig into what matters in a messaging strategy, we asked respondents what is the most important part of marketing and sales messaging:

- **30% said speaking to buyer's pain points**
- **27% said informing buyers about our products or services**
- **23% said clearly communicating a value proposition**

These answers showcase how a B2B company can create effective messaging. While organizations may not feel confident in doing this, speaking to buyers' pain points is critical. Companies can only speak to these pain points if they truly understand the buyer. Messaging that informs buyers about products or services has its place, though typically further down the sales funnel, once a prospect is further along in the process of selecting a partner. Less than a quarter of respondents claimed that communicating a value proposition was the most essential element of messaging.

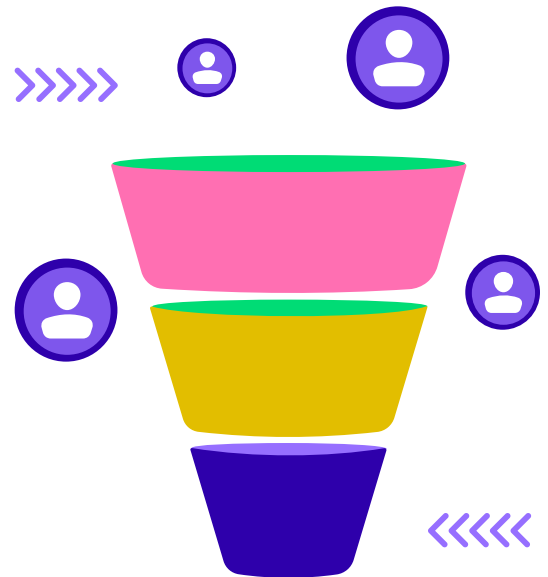
A value proposition should be communicated across all marketing and sales content, and a clear map of the customer journey can help to assess the effectiveness and performance of this communication.

Online customer journey: From investment to assessment

In the past few years, B2B companies have increased investment in the digital customer journey to drive growth, replacing traditional in-person growth initiatives. We wanted to know the most challenging part of that shift. We allowed respondents to select more than one response because we recognize that companies have multiple challenges that span their customer development lifecycle. Our goal was to understand the balancing act that B2B companies make when investing in growth initiatives. The top answers included:

- **27% - We don't know which digital marketing techniques are working**
- **26% - We are struggling to digitize the sales process**
- **25% - We lack the expertise to build a strong buyer's journey online**

What's clear from these responses is that there are challenges at various customer journey stages as organizations shift into a greater level of digital competence. Organizations that do not know what techniques are working are likely not to measure sales and marketing efforts or perhaps not measure efforts effectively.



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Combating these challenges requires customer understanding and technology that can enable a better customer experience. Pairing knowledge about the customer and technology creates customer insight that can inform campaigns. Select a CRM and implement it effectively to digitally map the marketing and sales process to view actions a prospect takes. Create content along that journey that educates and inspires the prospect, careful not to send them sales-focused materials too quickly. Aggregate this data within a CRM and create reports that allow marketers and salespeople to have a holistic look at the buyer's journey.

Don't forget to nurture leads. A common mistake B2B companies make is going for the sales push too soon. To figure out how many B2B decision-makers do this, we asked what companies do once a lead converts.

Leads sent directly to sales

In which ways do you digitally engage leads after they convert?
(Multi-select)

- 55% We send them to a sales representative for an initial call
- 21% We conduct a product or solution demo
- 19% We use social media or advertising to engage leads
- 18% We send product- or service-related content
- 14% We provide a trial experience
- 14% We send content that discusses buyer motivations
- 6% We perform a structured buyer challenge assessment

Some leads convert and are ready to go directly to sales; however, many of these leads require nurturing before heading over to a salesperson. The majority of respondents perform a sales activity after a prospect converts:

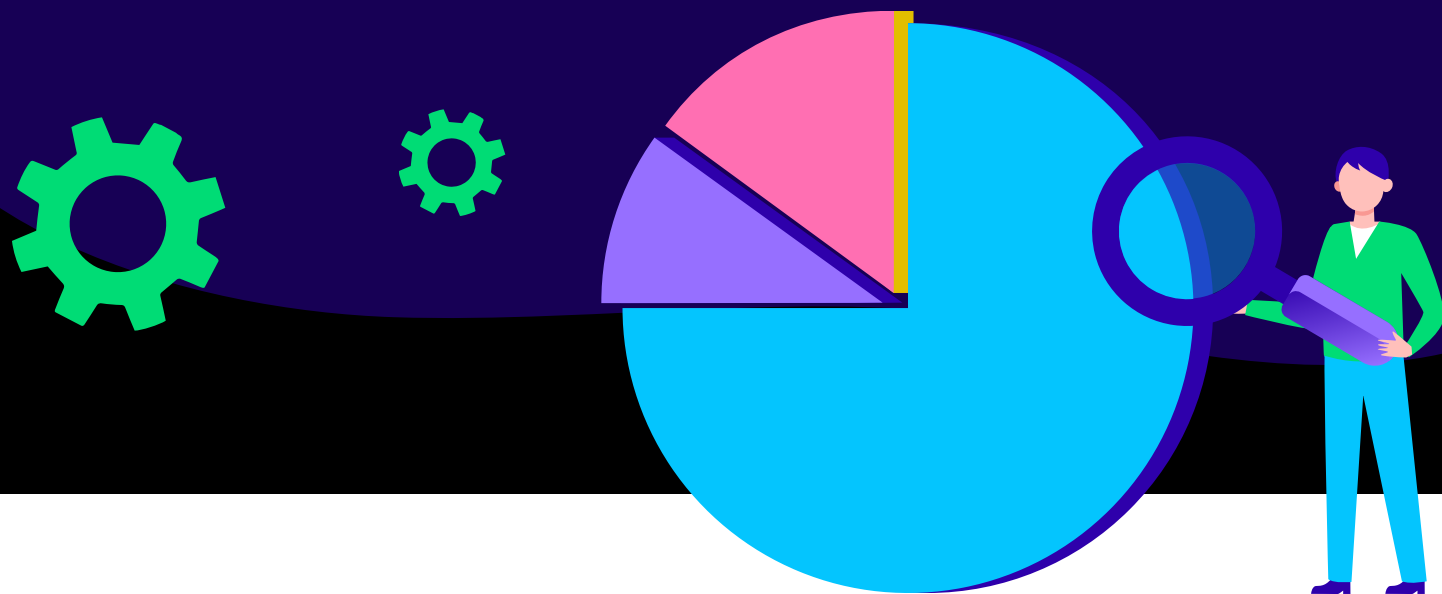
- **55% We send them to a sales representative for an initial call**
- **21% We conduct a product or solution demo**
- **18% We send product- or service-related content**
- **14% We provide a trial experience**

Only 14% of companies send content that informs the buyer, discussing their pain points, value, and aspirations. This type of content performs very well for buyers who are truly at the beginning of their search, just beginning to understand the problem they want to solve.

Consider these answers with the finding that most respondents struggle to measure and digitize the sales process. **If B2B companies quickly take sales action, they won't have access to marketing data and, therefore, may not truly understand the journey the buyers take or the messaging that effectively moves them through the funnel.** Without that information, assessing campaigns and improving upon them is very difficult.

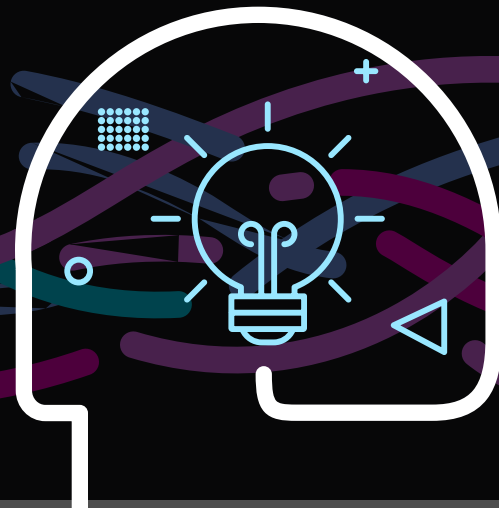
Final Thoughts

The pandemic has accelerated digital transformations. It pushed companies to rethink marketing and sales tactics in a digital-only world. Because of that shift, B2B companies must now invest more in the digital buyer's journey. This investment should include understanding buyers - their behaviors, pain points, and needs - as well as the technologies that can foster insights about these buyers. While pockets of challenges, such as messaging, are emerging, these challenges also present opportunities for better understanding and responding to customer needs.



Methodology

Ironpaper surveyed 159 individuals between June 2021 and May 2022. All respondents have a part in business or marketing decision-making at their company. Respondents could choose from “I have sole decision-making authority,” “I share decision-making authority,” “I have some input into decision-making,” or “I have some insight into decision-making.” Those with no role in decision-making were disqualified from the survey. All respondents’ organizations sell products/services to “other businesses (B2B)” or “Other businesses and individual consumers (B2B and B2C).”



About Ironpaper

Ironpaper is a B2B growth and intelligence-gathering agency that uses a hybrid data-driven and creative process to produce measurable business results for clients. We partner with B2B companies to build growth engines for marketing and sales success. Through these partnerships, we've uncovered common trends in the marketing and sales process that can accelerate a business forward and pitfalls that cause stagnation.

Our intelligence-gathering capabilities center on asking meaningful questions that get to the heart of business challenges. We use this intelligence to power demand generation campaigns, create B2B content, strengthen sales enablement, and improve B2B marketing efforts.

Ironpaper's team is made up of individuals who like to create, build, learn, and think. Ironpaper's culture is both helpful and inquisitive, which allows us to cross the boundaries of the digital skills divide and collaborate to offer real business value to our clients. We bring together designers, marketers, writers, engineers, and account leadership to build agile go-to-market approaches. Our work blends content, strategy, design, technology, marketing, sales, and business consulting in order to solve real-world growth issues.

Learn more: <https://www.ironpaper.com>