

The undeniable capacity of a human touch in an increasingly digital B2B marketing space

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We've always known that the personal touch and interpersonal relationships are most often the deciding factors when it comes to committing to a long-term B2B business partner. A huge part of this is the degree of trust that exists between the parties.

However, market trends are predicting that in-person buying and selling is being replaced by a far more digital journey. Gartner's Future of Sales research indicates that 80% of B2B sales interactions between suppliers and buyers will happen online in 2025. What's more, 73% of millennials in the workforce have a say in their companies' buying decisions – and two years ago 44% already indicated that they prefer not to have to deal with a seller in person.

How, then, does one evoke that personal touch online? To remain human in a digital B2B marketing arena, you have to start with what it actually means.

Consider the person first, before the data

With our approach to B2B at Dentsu Creative, we talk about taking a high-resolution view of the person and treating the consumer or customer as a living, breathing individual rather than as a demographic or a lead. This means balancing their 'business purchasing decision-maker' identity with their personal interests, worries, likes and dislikes. Personalised experiences are especially powerful when engaging with millennial audiences.

An interesting campaign from Spotify, which won the inaugural Creative B2B Lions award at Cannes last year, gives a glimpse of what's possible in terms of a personal approach.

They identified 14 key CMOs who they wanted to consider Spotify as an advertising channel. The result was 'A Song for Every CMO', a campaign that targeted each directly. Based on data that identified key CMOs who were using Spotify in

their personal capacity, the highly targeted campaign set out to communicate with them based on their likes and preferences. Yes, the campaign reached only 14 people – but they were the right 14 CMOs that Spotify wanted to notice them.

This campaign and the results, which included inspiring other CMOs to reach out and ask for songs of their own, shows just how important it is to never forget the people behind the business and business decisions.

How can we make your life better?

To create meaningful campaigns that help people in practical ways that are relevant to their situation is essential. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced all businesses to rethink their products, services and marketing, SMEs, despite being hardest hit during the lockdown, often took the lead – showing what it really means to be agile and responsive.

Our client, Old Mutual Corporate, sought a way to support not only their clients but all SMEs, and we at Dentsu Creative partnered with them to build an omnichannel content offering. It started with a digital campaign, followed by a magazine, *Nine Yards*, and grew into Nine Yards TV, a YouTube video series that supports small businesses and demonstrates the incredible grit, ingenuity and innovative spirit of South Africa's entrepreneurs.

When the pandemic hit South Africa, the impact on their clients, who tend to be bigger businesses, was significant. However, it was clear that small businesses were in a fight for their survival. It became crucial to reach out and share knowledge and resources. Enter Nine Yards, the brand that helps entrepreneurs to go the distance.

The solution, although delivered digitally, was underpinned by humanity and focused on providing help, useful guidance and support. It positioned Old Mutual Corporate as a true partner to SMEs. This omnichannel campaign won a much-coveted 2022 New Generation award for Excellence in Content Marketing (silver).

The travel industry was as severely impacted by global lockdowns and American Express Global and Large Market sales teams entered a period of dramatic and immediate challenges: reduced sales headcounts; disruption in global business travel; and a shift in customer needs. In response, Dentsu Creative launched a bespoke B2B LinkedIn social influencer programme with custom training and content designed to position Amex team members as thought leaders to help their customers drive their businesses forward while enhancing Amex's reputation.

Amex team members reported a vastly improved ability to use LinkedIn to its full capacity and were significantly more comfortable with sharing company initiatives on the platform – even finding that they were being 'recognised' by new customers as having shared useful content.

So, where is B2B headed?

It's clear that customers and clients of all age groups have begun to demand a more human and personalised experience online, and B2B marketers are going to have to adapt and prioritise accordingly.

- Put your people first
Whether it's equipping and empowering employees in your organisation, showcasing your senior talent or using the right content creators and influencers, buyers want to see more humanity and relatability from the organisations they do business with.
- Challenge expectations and preconceptions
Too often B2B thought leadership starts to feel very 'samey'. Audiences appreciate being challenged and want content with a bit more edge – they want something to think about and are willing to spend time engaging with digital content if it has a point of view and brings fresh insights or opinions.
- Get specific

Speaking directly to niche topics or targeting small audience subsets can yield great results. Identify content gaps or specialised customer requirements to own an uncontested area in a noisy digital space and build trust with the decision-makers who matter.

B2B audiences are going to increasingly seek tailored experiences in mass reach, digital environments. Finding a way to put people at the heart of communication is challenging, but increasingly crucial for any B2B marketing campaign to succeed. At the end of the day, while the data informs, the age-old human need for relevance and personalisation is what will set your brand apart.

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