

Tips & Tactics

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Why B2B branding doesn't work, a Google for open source, and a geek packaging lesson

by [Gordon Graham](#), Editor, **SoftwareCEO**

This issue, we're bringing you some radical-sounding ideas.

Among them: Stop wasting time and dollars on B2B branding. Stop writing code. And don't overload your packaging with attention-grabbers.

Sound crazy? To many successful people in the software biz, they're just practical, common sense.

Why B2B branding doesn't work

We came across an intriguing little book the other day, called ["Branding Doesn't Work in Business to Business."](#)

It's written by Maureen Blandford, a seasoned sales and marketing consultant who's passionate about this cause.

Her mission is to help B2B vendors align marketing with consultative selling — and stop the millions of dollars of wasted spending along the way.

We think she's on to something big, something that can give you a real edge if you get the message five years before the rest of your competition.

Here's her thesis, in a nutshell.

B2C customers buy differently than B2B customers. The deals are bigger, slower, and more considered. Buying an enterprise software product is *not* like buying a pack of gum.

All the research into buyer behavior, advertising, and branding was done on B2C products. But it doesn't apply to B2B, and there's no valid research to show that it does.

Yet B2B companies waste millions of dollars a year on useless exercises like tweaking logos, naming products, setting guidelines for product literature, and most of all, advertising.

And it's all done by marketing people and the agencies they hire, with no clue how any of it adds to the company's bottom line.

It makes sense to us. In fact, everything in this book jived with our 25+ years experience in the software business.

If you agree with these ideas — and especially if you don't — you owe it to yourself to take a look at her book. It's a quick read, with more common sense packed into less than 100 pages than

we've seen in a long time.

If you're the CEO of a growing B2B software firm, the day will come when you're sitting in a room surrounded by agency and marcom types passionately arguing that you need a better logo, more branding, and more advertising.

You should be spending three to six percent of your revenues on marcom. Everyone else does it. Your competitors do it. It's time for you to do it too.

Let this book be your armor against these insidious demands. It can save you hundreds of times its cover price in resources you might easily waste, with the best of intentions.

By happy coincidence, author/consultant Blandford was in town last week, so we met her for a rollicking interview.

In rapid succession, she dispensed tons of practical advice on how to make the most of your marketing budget and actually sell more software.

We came away with more than a dozen useful tips. Here's five of her common sense tips. Watch for the remaining tips in the next newsletter.

B2B marketing tip #1: Don't apply B2C marketing to B2B software.

These are two different worlds. Mix them up at your peril.

"A B2B has so many different things to offer, you can't tie it all up in a slogan," she says, not like you do for a candy bar or a soft drink.

Consumer products are designed to be quick and easy, cheap and simple. You don't need to read a data sheet or a white paper before you buy a bottle of shampoo.

So why are consumer-marketing techniques routinely applied to B2B products?

"Our communications people do not understand the B2B model. We teach the consumer model. We are enmeshed in the consumer model," says Blandford.

And it's high time to stop, because it just doesn't work.

"It's a ridiculous exercise!" says Blandford. "There is no marketing campaign you can possibly do in B2B that's going to make anyone in a big company go, 'OK, we're going to spend \$5 million with them!'"

B2B marketing tip #2: Focus on your customer; not branding.

Instead, focus on sales support, making your numbers, and keeping your customers satisfied.

"You need your sales guys going in and uncovering the pain, and

quantifying what the pain is costing a prospect, coming back and presenting a solution that costs less than their pain," she says.

"That's where the focus should be, not on branding."

And once you have the deal, the best thing you can do is deliver and execute properly. B2B customer satisfaction does not depend on the color of your logo.

"Customer satisfaction ratings are almost completely tied to performance, and not, you know, did they get a **SoftwareCEO** pen?"

B2B marketing tip #3: Do escape from any consultant who leads with "branding" or "advertising."

Keep your guard up.

Otherwise, you may well be writing a blank check to someone who doesn't understand your business at all.

"Any group that's not talking to you first about your business strategy, and how well your sales force is doing, and your numbers, is not worth talking to, because they don't understand your B2B model," says Blandford.

"Run away from anyone who doesn't do that, because they don't get it. And most of them don't get it."

Remember that room where you're surrounded by agency types? Get out of there, fast. And hang onto your checkbook during your escape.

B2B marketing tip #4: Do keep your marcom people focused on your real goals.

You know, like how much software you're supposed to sell this year.

As opposed to how many brochures they can publish, or whether Pantone 1234C feels "warmer" and "more approachable" than Pantone 5678D.

"The first thing a CEO has to do is make sure every marketing communications meeting has the business strategy in front of them," says Blandford.

"You'd be amazed how many marcom folks — I'm not talking about the analytics guys — do not know what percentage of their revenues the company hopes to get this year from growing the base vs. getting new accounts.

"And you need a completely different approach for each. They should be concentrating on gaining new accounts. I contend that growing the base takes very little marketing communications."

In everything marcom does, they should be asking, "How is this adding to the bottom line? What's the revenue generation here?"

If you can get your marcom people to think like that, you're

getting somewhere. If not, see the next tip.

B2B marketing tip #5: Do send your marketing people out on a sales call.

Tell them to shut up and listen. If they have ears, they'll learn a lot.

"All marketing people need to understand the sales process," says Blandford. "If you're an incumbent, your sales approach is different than if you're the new guy. Your focus should always be on how to get from one call to the next.

"But the focus with marcom people is always, 'What's my budget? How much of that can go to advertising?'"

That's the wrong focus, she says, and a reality-check from some field trips can help shift it back.

She should know. Early in her career, Blandford was given the job of interviewing dozens of sales people for [NCR](#) to ask them, "How'd you shoot the bear?" In other words, how'd you land that big sale?

The tips, techniques, and perspectives she picked up then are still with her today — along with a healthy respect for what sales people actually do out there.

Three new search engines for open source

Programming used to mean typing up code to solve a problem, and then testing to make sure it worked.

Today, programming often means searching for open source code that solves the same problem, and then integrating it into your application.

But finding exactly the right snippets of code takes almost as long as coding it yourself.

Now there are at least three search engines to help developers find code faster. The goal is to make developers more productive, and maybe even speed up the spread of the open source movement.

The inevitable comparisons are being drawn to, as in "a Google for open source." But it's still pretty early to tell which search engine most developers will gravitate to.

Perhaps the most ambitious open source search engine is from Silicon Valley startup [Krugle](#).

Although it's still in beta, Krugle promises to deliver a clean, simple, powerful search engine for millions of pages of open source code and related information.

It works essentially the same way as a regular search engine: by crawling and indexing code found in open-source repositories, archives, mailing lists, blogs, and web pages.

Krugle promises the ability to annotate code, create bookmarks, and save search results in a workspace with a unique URL. Then you can share an entire batch of your annotated code with colleagues anywhere in the world, just by sending them the URL.

[There's a great demo available here](#), plus a blog on the site showing the latest developments as it heads for public release.

[Koders.com](#) is an existing search engine for open source that was launched a year ago. It claims to index 225 million lines of open source code in more than 30 different programming languages.

Developers can run it from inside their familiar Visual Studio environment. An enterprise edition is available, with modules for management and reporting that promote best practices such as source code reuse.

An [interesting interview with founder and chief architect Darren Rush is available here](#).

Another entry is [Codefetch](#), which indexes code samples from programming books. It's intended both to help developers and promote books on coding.

If you've ever found a great code sample in a book — but don't want to type it in yourself — you may be able to find it online through Codefetch. Then you can simply copy and paste it over. And then order the book too.

Geek packaging humor — from Microsoft?

An amusing video clip is making the rounds on the web.

The clip is about three minutes long, called "Microsoft designs iPod packaging." [You can watch it free from Google Video here](#).

It shows the award-winning packaging of the iPod — described by one judge as "beautiful, whispering restraint" — being systematically shredded by marketers who insist on "making better use of this space" to give the package more "shelf presence."

These packaging "improvements" include sticking in system requirements, third-party endorsements, a product chart, more photos, more color, and making sure to keep the whole mess "on brand."

Nobody knows who made it, but now it turns out that the clip may have come from Microsoft itself.

The [iPod Observer](#) recently reported the parody was created by Microsoft's packaging team to help educate marketers about the pitfalls of branding.

Read it and laugh — or weep — depending on where you sit in the industry.



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