

# Tips & Tactics

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## How B2B software firms can get more from your marcom budget

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

[Last issue we introduced Maureen Blandford](#), a sales and marketing consultant who's passionate about helping B2B vendors drop their B2C habits — and get better results from their marcom spend.

Here are 11 more do's and don'ts from her on how to make the most of your marketing budget, so you can actually sell more software.

Who wouldn't want that?

### **B2B marketing budget tip #1: Do invest more in your sales force.**

It's weird what companies have done to sales people over the past few years, says Blandford.

"Companies have really depleted their sales training. Salespeople need mentoring. But these days, they're not riding around with the experienced guys any more. They're all virtual.

"We make them do more administrative tasks, even though we could easily get a lower-wage person to follow up on the administrative stuff.

"Yet these people are responsible for generating millions of dollars!"

There's an imbalance between what some software companies invest in their sales team and what they invest in marketing, especially on practices that seem to make little impact on selling B2B.

"So what I'm saying is, look at your marketing budget. My question is: what happens if you stop producing marcom material for a year? And most CEOs I ask tell me, 'That won't really impact our revenue generation.'"

So why not transfer some money out of marcom into sales training and support? And one of the best things you can invest in, she says, is training in consultative selling. She doesn't give it herself, but she recommends [Sandler](#) or any other consultative training program.

### **B2B marketing budget tip #2: Send your sales people in**

**empty-handed. All they need are some good questions to ask.**

Can you really sell if you leave your laptop and product literature in the trunk?

Sure, says Blandford. It's more important for a salesperson to ask leading questions than to show off canned demos and flashy brochures.

"You can go in empty-handed," she insists, especially when you're trained in consultative selling. "Consultative selling approaches don't want you to go in with glossy brochures; they want you to go in with great questions.

"We don't want the sales force going in and doing features, functions, and benefits. We want them going in and asking great questions."

Here are some ideal questions to engage anyone, she suggests:

- What's going well?
- What could be going better?
- What have you tried to do to fix that?
- How'd that work for you?

Once a prospect starts telling you about their business issues, you've engaged them far more effectively than you can with any PowerPoints or glossy brochures.

"If you're having these ongoing dialogs, you can improve your marketing, your sales, and your product development," she says.

**B2B marketing budget tip #3: Don't give them 30 minutes, give them 30 seconds.**

There's a lot to be said for budgeting your time as well.

"A lot of companies are training on selling," she says. "But then I'll see one of the checkmarks a sales person needs is to be able to give a 30-minute presentation on your company.

"That's painful! Can you imagine anyone sitting through 30 minutes, even if it's your third call? They want 30 seconds, maybe 60.

"So if somebody says, 'Tell me a little about yourself,' you give them 30 seconds. A good consultative sales training will tell you that."

**B2B marketing budget tip #4: Don't ask what their budget is.**

By the way, here's one question a salesperson should never ask.

"Don't ask, what is your budget? They don't have one, or they won't tell you anyway," says Blandford.

If you're the new guy trying to get a prospect to unplug their incumbent supplier, they don't have a budget for switching. They don't have a budget for tearing up their infrastructure and

rebuilding it. Nobody needs the headache.

The only way anyone will consider doing that is if you can show them how to relieve the pain they're experiencing now — and how you can save them money, or make them money.

That's how B2B decisions are made — not because someone heard a jingle on the radio, or they liked the color of your packaging. That's B2C, not B2B.

### **B2B marketing budget tip #5: Do shift resources away from brochures and advertising.**

That kind of spending doesn't do much good for B2B software.

"Your C-level prospects are not reading brochures. They haven't been reading brochures for 10 years! No one has time," says Blandford.

If you're really serious about supporting your sales force, think about it.

"The top 20 percent of your sales people are good, and nothing you can do will wreck them. The bottom 20 percent need to be managed out. And the middle 60 need help — and that ain't going to happen from a brochure," she says.

"Sometimes even really smart people will ask, 'Shouldn't we be advertising on TV?' Hello?! How many of your C-level prospects are watching TV? How many of those guys are reading ads? They're not!"

Do you think Blandford is overstating the case?

For an even more incendiary look at this topic, check out ["The End of Advertising As We Know It"](#) by former advertising executive Sergio Zyman.

Here's his take on advertising: "It doesn't work, it's a colossal waste of money, and if you don't wise up, it could end up destroying your company."

Hey, Sergio, tell us how you *really* feel!

### **B2B marketing budget tip #6: Need a new logo? Do get it done by an art student.**

If you have to deal with a frustrated Picasso, at least deal with an *inexpensive* frustrated Picasso.

What if you're a startup with no logo? Or what if you have a logo that everyone agrees is really ugly?

First of all, remember that your logo never sold a single piece of software.

"You need something contemporary, what it is doesn't really matter. You could go to any art school, and get any student to design you a fine logo," says Blandford.

"Pay them \$500. Pay them \$100. They'll be thrilled. Whatever art

school you have nearby, get a logo from them.

"Most companies I talk to, I say, 'Leave your logo alone. It's fine.'"

The key is to simply be consistent with how you use your logo, without going to insane lengths about it.

"You don't want your logo looking like one thing on your business card and something else on your website. Fine, whatever," says Blandford.

"Consistency is a fine thing. But we're too driven by consistency, when what we really need to be driven by is, who is our target? How are we going to reach them today? And how can we support the sales force in doing that?"

"That's how you can grow your sales, as opposed to sending out sunglasses the same color as your logo!" she says.

### **B2B marketing budget tip #7: Don't worry about product names.**

Spending weeks to come up with a dynamite product name is B2C thinking.

"I tell companies that come to me and want to rename products, and redo their branding: 'Nobody cares what it's called! It doesn't matter.' You don't need a fancy-schmancy name," says Blandford.

"Because no matter what you name it, your product is not going to be something so all-encompassing that people in your target audience are going to hear its name once, and then go, 'Oh, that's just what we need!'"

### **B2B marketing budget tip #8: Do give your marketing materials "glanceability."**

Concise and compelling. That's how your marketing materials should be.

"Your marketing stuff needs to have a high degree of what I call 'glanceability.' Use a couple of interesting headers, maybe a couple bullets with some interesting percentages.

"Just like those **Oracle** ads that have been running: 'Oracle beats **Microsoft** Mail.' That's going to stick in your mind," she says.

Shoot for that kind of instant, unforgettable message. Don't even write in paragraphs, she suggests, write in short snippets like on a PowerPoint slide.

"Paragraphs don't belong on your website. They don't belong in your brochure. Once people get to management, these folks don't have time to be reading paragraphs of copy — unless it's in a legitimate white paper. That's where the paragraphs go."

In the early stages of the sales cycle, you need glanceability, she says. Later, you can go into more depth.

"Once you get to about the middle of the sales cycle, that's where they'll start investing more time in you.

"When it comes down to the two or three vendors they're going to decide to go with, they'll read your white papers, they'll read your case studies, they'll read your tech sheets — but nobody's reading your paragraphical brochures."

**B2B marketing budget tip #9: Do invest in PR. That will pay off.**

Getting stories written about you is far more powerful than telling your own story.

Here's another provocative question from Blandford, "If you're a CEO of a software company, when some media is covering a big idea in your space, are they calling you for quotes? Do you have anyone on your team who's considered a guru?"

If not, you need better PR.

"A lot of times people do press releases but they can't connect with anyone. That's what great PR does, and that takes time. It takes an investment in building the relationships with the media," she says.

No money for PR? Guess where to find some?

That's right. Blandford suggests shifting resources away from brochures and advertising into PR. That will pay off, she says.

**B2B marketing budget tip #10: Do cover the basics, without going overboard.**

Blandford isn't suggesting you spend nothing on marketing.

She's just saying spend wisely.

"There are things you have to have," she says. "You have to have a website, you have to have some sort of brochure, so people get some sort of tangible item — but it doesn't need all the resources that are put into it today. And then you need PR."

She says white papers and case studies also have their place during the sales cycle, especially if they're legitimate productions with lots of facts and outside opinions.

It's all the spending on branding, advertising, and glossy printing that gets her goat.

"Maybe small companies can't do this, but any Fortune 1000 firm can easily cut their marcom budget by one-third to one-half, and no one would ever know. That's not risky, that's just common sense."

**B2B marketing budget tip #11: Don't worry that you don't have enough money for marketing.**

If you're not yet in the Fortune 1000, you're probably spending a lot more wisely than many big companies with money to burn.

"Even if you don't have the money or resources for marketing, stop fretting about that fact that you don't have money or resources," Blandford quips.

Relax. It's fine.

And when you do have some money, here's how to invest it for best results: get your logo from an art student, invest in PR, train your sales force.... and don't be seduced by anyone who tells you anything different.



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