Chapter 7

B2BEYOND MARKETING

What's the Trend?

Brands used to promoting their products or services to other businesses embrace their humanity, take inspiration from other sectors and think more broadly about effectively marketing to decision makers as people first and buyers second.

Sysco is the perfect example of a dominant B2B business in its industry. Since 1970, the company has been a preferred supplier of food to restaurants, healthcare facilities and other out of home food service providers. In 2014, the company had over $46 billion in sales and had more than 50,000 employees working to provide services to more than 425,000 customers around the world.

If they operated like most B2B businesses, you would expect that most of Sysco's marketing would focus on sponsoring trade shows, running print ads in food industry magazines and using a dedicated sales force to call upon restaurants on a regional basis. Like most other B2B brands, you would expect them to focus on being where the influencers were and targeting their message.

In fact, the brand has done all these things – until 2013 when it tried something different.

In that year, Sysco started a relationship with the *Food Network* which included having Chef Robert Irvine (star of the restaurant makeover show *Restaurant Impossible*) become an official Sysco brand ambassador. Since that time, he has spotlighted the quality of their ingredients and the importance of those ingredients in running a quality restaurant in nearly every episode.

The format of the show features “before” stories of everything from fridges filled with rotten milk and brown old produce to disorganized owners making convenience store trips to pick up ingredients they failed to order in advance. Each time, Chef Robert transforms this process by bringing in his preferred food supply partner – Sysco Corporation.

The integration of their services onto his show is one of the best examples of brand integration you are likely to see on network television today – but it may seem like an odd place to do it. After all, the vast majority of people watching *Restaurant Impossible* don’t own restaurants and will never buy a single thing directly from Sysco. Yet *Food Network* ratings data shows that one of the most popular times of the day for viewing is the usually dead midnight to 4am time slot.

One possible explanation for the popularity of this time is that it overlaps with when restaurant owners working long shifts are getting home and decompressing. The numbers support this theory, as network data shows that more than 70% of independent restaurant owners watch the *Food Network* at least once a week.

For most consumers, the only “brand experience” they are likely to have with Sysco is driving alongside one of their trucks on the highway. Yet rather than limiting their marketing to trade media – Sysco is a perfect example of a new philosophy of *B2Beyond Marketing* where brands are focusing more on *humans* instead of *buyers* and the way they communicate.

Imagination Comes To Life

For years B2B marketers aimed to solve the same fundamental question: how can we best reach our extremely targeted niche audience at exactly the right time with the right information? Industry publications promised a straightforward solution to this challenge through print (and more recently digital) advertising. Industry events promised a solution through networking and bringing buyers and sellers together through trade shows and conferences.

General Electric is a brand that invests in both tactics – but across 2015 the brand won attention and praise for consistently thinking beyond these limitations to pioneer a new way of thinking about reaching business buyers. The shift is based on a simple but frequently forgotten insight: *B2B buyers are people first and buyers second*.

Years of B2B marketing has consistently obscured this fact.

Most of the time, B2B brands justify this choice as a strategic one, based on the reality that they are charged with promoting more "serious" products to professional audiences. Real time tweets about "dunking in the dark" during the Super Bowl or funny YouTube videos are fine if you're selling a cookie – but enterprise software (for example), is an entirely different story.

Over the past several years, GE has changed this script. Last year I rated the brand as the "most strategic brand in social media" and shared lessons from a session I fortunate to host at an event alongside GE CMO Beth Comstock about the role of storytelling in B2B marketing (see the article "How To Create A Brand Story" in Bonus Content section at the back of this book for a full recap of this session).

Today the brand is has a suite of marketing all designed to tell stories about the people behind the brand. A new set of TV spots launched in 2015, for example, focus on the human side of GE. One called "Childlike Imagination" features a little girl talking about what her mom does at GE and was launched alongside an emotional employee engagement effort which featured kids of real employees doing the same thing.

Another ad series called "What's the matter with Owen?" features an excited millennial-aged developer talking about getting a programming job with GE, while his incredulous developer friends ask "so, you'll be working on a train?" The tagline at the end sums up the message: "GE – The digital company. That's also an industrial company."

Moving into 2016 the brand will continue to focus on being more human by creating stories that, as GE global creative director Andy

Goldberg puts it, "capture the wonder and magic of what we do." The ambition is big for GE, as are the resources they are committing to the effort. Though they are one of the most prominent leaders, they are not the only B2B brand thinking creatively about how to tell their story in a human way. Other unexpected brands are trying the same strategy as well.

Making Construction Equipment Fun

Last year construction equipment manufacturer Caterpillar launched a video featuring a collection of industrial moving equipment with "names" like Cat 320E and Cat M316D set in a place called the Caterpillar Testing Facility facing off in an epic Jenga game with the object of removing 700 pound wooden blocks one by one from a tall stack until eventually the entire stack collapsed. The video rapidly went viral and has racked up more than 3 million views to date.

The point, says Caterpillar global brand creative director Archie Lyons, is "to take the Cat brand on the offensive. We are a large, Fortune 50 company … we want to go from cold, corporate and conservative to human, relevant and approachable."

The video series clearly does that – but the campaign has also faced common B2B industry criticism. How valuable are branded videos like this, skeptics ask, when they are most likely to be seen and shared by people who are *not* prospective buyers or qualified leads?

To answer, one analysis of the campaign described the potential value this way: "Caterpillar scored valuable sales points with prospective buyers without hitting them over the head with a sales pitch. And they built credibility for the brand by demonstrating the capabilities in a dramatic and very memorable manner."

A follow up quote from Lyons, when speaking about the potential value of these efforts, points to a similar theory – "the campaign is designed to reach people outside of our normal scope of customers. The viewer for these videos could be a teenage boy who likes to play Jenga, and he might show his mom and dad, or uncles, who may work in construction." The value, in other words, comes from starting conversations from person to person – which may eventually lead to consideration, growing reputation, and eventually purchase. Of course, these types of anecdotes also illustrate that being more human is a notoriously difficult business strategy to assign value against or measure quantifiably.

ROI of Epic Content

In a recent talk, Content Marketing Institute (CMI) founder Joe Pulizzi shared a telling insight from an upcoming 2016 research study: only 30 percent of B2B marketers rated their own organizations as using content marketing effectively – down eight percent from the previous year. Yet 83% of those same marketers admitted to having *some* strategy for content marketing and investing dollars into it. With all of these marketers investing in figuring out the power of content, why were so many admitting failure so early?

A big part of the reason stems from the temptation to look at an audience in terms of two distinct groups – people who are prospective customers … and everyone else. The problem with this point of view is that it leaves out nuanced audiences like business influencers and also fails to make the connection that B2B audiences are also consumers themselves.

When Volvo took the unusual step of launching an ad for the "dynamic steering" available on commercial trucks during the Super Bowl in 2014 – the mission was to get consumers of all kinds to reevaluate the brand through the highly impactful visual of aging action star Jean Claude Van Damme doing an "epic split" while balancing between two moving trucks.

The ad treated its business consumers as people first, and buyers second – a perfect example of *B2Beyond* thinking.

B2Beyond In Building

One industry that has dealt with this dual audience challenge since its inception is the building industry. When construction industry media firm Hanley Wood announced their top marketing brands of 2015, Marvin Windows and Doors was selected as the *2015 Brand Builder Awards*

Marketer of the Year. Citing the "cohesiveness of their campaigns, the platforms used and the results of this transformation," Hanley Wood CEO Peter Goldstone praised their brand reinvigoration and innovation.

Like most brands in the competitive residential, commercial design and construction industry – Marvin Windows' "Built Around You" campaign featured communications directly to consumers as well as targeted information to dealers. Like many other industries, in building trade industry buyers can be influenced by retail customer preferences and vice versa.

Dealing with this same truth, glass supplier PPG launched a series of explainer videos about glass and windows featuring a consumer friendly character called "Glenn the Glass Guy" explaining how to select the right type of window and comparing the thermal performance of different windows with different technology inside them. The videos are simultaneously detailed and basic – making the complexity of buying a product with which many non-trade consumers would have limited experience far less daunting.

Across the home building industry, this trend is leading to a new evolved model of thinking about the consumer and creating integrated content and messages that are appealing both to the trade professional and the residential consumer as well. Over time, this dual challenge for industries like this will lead to more of this B2Beyond thinking – and continued crossover of communications.

Why It Matters

In an opening presentation for the 2015 Business Marketing Association conference, Google exec Jim Lecinski shared insights from recent Millward Brown research, including a key finding that 46% of B2B buyers are now millennials – up from 27% when the survey was last conducted just two years ago.

In addition, the research online product searches had doubled in the past two years, yet the number of brands buyers were actively considering had dropped. In other words, online content was being used to allow buyers to be more selective and narrow their consideration lists earlier.

The implication is that B2B brands will need to do more to get on the radar of potential customers before those customers even identify a need – and they will have to do it using more untraditional forms of media that appeal to younger audiences. As a result the future of B2B marketing will be about creating better content, leveraging tactics and ideas that were once considered solely the realm of B2C brands, and ultimately building credibility by being more human.

Who Should Use This Trend?

Any B2B brand will be able to use the lessons in this trend to think more broadly about how they can create marketing and communications that engages people on a human level and then adds the detail and nuance afterwards to answer questions and provide value as part of the ongoing sales process.

How To Use This Trend

✓ **Make it fundamental** – When it comes to changing how we think about B2B marketing, much of the resistance comes from getting mired in the complexity of the message. How will an “ordinary” person understand what you want to say when they don’t know your industry? Yet Volvo didn’t fret over whether people would know what “dynamic steering” was, or even whether they would care. Their fundamental message was that Volvo technology can make driving surprisingly smooth – even if the driving experience happens to be two 18 wheeler trucks going backward with an action superstar balanced between them. People got the message.

✓ **Get over the fear of wastage –** It is easy to think that making your content and marketing available to a more broad audience will simply be irrelevant because people won’t be interested. The reason most B2B advertising gets placed in trade media is because of fear that it won’t be as relevant to anyone else. When Sysco partnered with the Food Network, they didn’t worry about how many non-restaurant owners might see their message. Instead, they focused on the fact that if they told their story simply (we can get you fresh food!) – their target audience would get it, and act on it when they had a need.