Empowering Frontline Marketers to Architect the Buyer Experience

In a digital-first marketplace, big shifts in B2B buying behavior are giving rise to a new go-to-market model led by the Frontline Marketer

With findings from the 2021 B2B Buyer Experience Survey conducted in partnership with The Demand Gen Report
Introduction: The Evolution of B2B Buying and Selling

Over the past decade, B2B buying behavior has been in a constant state of evolution, fueled by digital transformation, mobile connectivity and easy access to information and insights. We now live in the experience era. People will clearly pay a premium for a great customer experience –we see it every day for B2C companies for both mobile and desktop apps. Now B2B buyers are developing the same discerning expectations.

Buyers today are more informed, digitally savvy and armed with readily accessible information from a broad spectrum of digital sources. For example, the popularity of software review sites such as G2 Crowd and Capterra, underscores a notable digital shift several years ago where buyers charted their own course to research a solution to solve a business challenge.

Unfortunately, B2B vendors have not kept pace, creating a disconnected journey for buyers. Compounding this challenge, the typical buying group for a B2B solution incorporates six to ten decision makers from different buying centers, each armed with four to five pieces of information they’ve gathered independently. Finally, 80 percent of the buyer’s journey is now conducted digitally, and sellers have lost control over a buying journey that has become incredibly complex, unpredictable and nonlinear.

Lacking a coherent buyer-centric strategy, B2B marketers are delivering disconnected experiences, wasting valuable marketing dollars, and ultimately generating anemic sales pipelines. Today’s marketing departments have a new mandate – to rethink how every key stakeholder works together to architect a compelling digital journey engage and delight today’s B2B buyer.

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, Folloze in partnership with The Demand Gen Report surveyed 104 marketing professionals to understand the changing nature of B2B buyer behavior and how marketing teams were adapting their go-to-market plans.

When it comes to marketing to today’s B2B buyer, what are your top three challenges?

- **Buyer Experience**: Understanding buyer’s changing needs and business requirements (63%)
- **Buyer Engagement**: Engaging buyers at the right time in the right channel (57%)
- **Personalization**: Creating the personalized campaigns and content that will engage buyers (49%)

In a post-pandemic marketplace, creating connected, contextual, and personalized digital experiences is core to driving growth.
The COVID-19 Catalyst that Changed Marketing Forever

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation across every industry and upended long-held beliefs about the need for in-person meetings and traditional go-to-market motions.

Overnight, the pandemic raised the bar and put B2B companies on notice that they must deliver the same digitally-rich personalized experiences -- the hallmarks of B2C brands such as Starbucks, Airbnb, and Uber -- or perish.

In a post-pandemic and digital-first marketplace, B2B buyers prefer to guide their education and discovery through digital self-service and online channels, often without consulting a sales rep through the entire purchase process. More importantly, digital-first buyers want to be treated as partners, not campaign targets.

Unfortunately, the pivot from product-oriented campaigns to journey-centric engagement instantly generates a problem of scale for marketing teams. How do you create a multiplier for one-to-one engagement so that you can build fully connected buyer journeys spanning multiple channels for a broad and often diverse audience?

This shift is shining the light on customer-facing functions in the field that are closest to prospects, buyers and customers. These “Frontline Marketers” know what their buyers want and how to build data-driven omnichannel experiences -- all orchestrated with the right sales resources.

Most importantly, Frontline Marketers are empowered to create the personalized experiences that engages and builds trust and relationships with buyers. While the direct sales, channel and partner teams all play an important role in the field, frontline marketers have the best line of sight into their buyer’s needs and are the logical choice to be elevated and execute a holistic buyer-journeycentric strategy.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, what is your top go-to-market priority?

- Better Alignment with Sales: 28%
- Expanded scope of lifecycle marketing: 26%
- Improve our ABM Programs: 21%
- Bolster digital competencies: 16%
A New Go-to-Market Model Led by the Frontline Marketer

As they are elevated with a digital-first and buyer-centric mandate, marketing must rethink their teams and operations. In the old selling model, each stakeholder had just one role in the process. Marketing took the first stab at engagement, then passed it on to SDRs, then to sales and support functions. Now, frontline marketers are empowered to architect and deliver the full buyer experience (tailored to each specific audience) all on their own, with complete visibility into every stage of the buyer journey and the tools to orchestrate campaign activity at scale.

In the new frontline marketer operational model, marketing stakeholders assume greater ownership across the lead-to-revenue lifecycle, working closely with account teams to discover micro-signals from buyers (behavioral data) and architect personalized experiences that engage prospects, support buyer self-learning, and advances buyers through each phase of the customer journey.

They focus on local execution and agile response to customer needs, designing the friction-free journeys that build trust and advance buyers through every step of their unique buying cycle. Frontline marketing features a more democratized GTM model that rightfully puts the buyer at the center of the universe.

The buyer experience may begin at the customer journey, but it doesn’t end there. It is an ongoing process of engagement that feeds the buyer the information and insight they need to progress through the buying cycle and maximize what they spend in the long term. The greater the collaboration between frontline marketing stakeholders, the greater harmony they develop and the better the ability to scale their efforts. While digital has become the primary channel, human interaction with sellers is still important, but is now reserved for high-value opportunities.

In 2021 and beyond, how important is personalized content, messaging and journeys to engage your buyers?

75% Important
24% Somewhat Important
1% Not Important

With an eye to replicating the success of their B2C marketing counterparts, 99% percent of respondents unanimously cited the importance of personalized content, messaging, and journeys to engage today’s digital-first buyers.
The Impact on Marketing and Sales Teams

The Folloze-Demand-Gen Report survey found that 50 percent of marketers believe that a digital-first marketplace will create hybrid GTM models shared between sales and marketing, where marketing takes the lead on digital selling efforts with close collaboration with sales.

What does this new operational model mean for marketing and sales teams? In the future, how will the two teams collaborate?

Frontline marketers can be reorganized into pods, where they work closely with corresponding sales teams on specific customer micro-segments across the buyer journey. For example, regions, local field teams, or lines of business may need to execute a very focused and micro-targeted campaigns for a new product upgrade or a competitive displacement initiative.

In this example, frontline marketers can quickly collaborate with their sellers in the pod to build a campaign using precise customer data and a targeted prospect list -- all slickly and digital-y packaged with relevant content and compelling CTA.

For frontline marketers, the focused campaign ultimately optimizes customer engagement -- while maximizing marketing spend -- and delivers the projected revenue outcomes for the sellers.

Finally, in the increasingly popular “no-code” model, frontline marketers no longer need to go to IT or other technical resources to get something done. They can simply add and update content to a website or microsite on their own.
The 6 Building Blocks of Dynamic Buyer Engagement
A Practical Guide for Frontline Marketers

1. Data

Companies big and small have invested heavily to collect, transform, analyze and act upon ever-growing volumes of first- and third-party data. For the first time, analytical data has become easily and quickly accessible for every marketing and sales stakeholder to support decision making, campaign creation, and revenue attribution. Data that is gathered into integrated customer data platforms (CDPs) measures and detects buyer intent and propensity and defines audience targeting and segmentation, and account-specific firmographic information. Most importantly, data will guide frontline marketing teams to build the engaging, contextual, and personalized experiences based upon buyer history, needs or location within their unique journey.

2. Accounts and Segmentation

Once behavioral data has been collected from various channels, frontline marketers can focus on the activation layer, identifying the right signals within the data to segment audiences and personalize messages accordingly. Switching from a centralized, generic set of messages to those that are microsegmented and hyper-targeted gets the seller closer to what each buyer expects. Groups of customers can be segmented based on a variety of contextual factors, enabling frontline marketers to architect dynamic, on-demand experiences across every critical digital touchpoint. By activating the CDP data, we view each customer through a lens focused on their actual needs and motivations, not those based on the seller’s best guess.

Who are Frontline Marketers?

The frontline marketing function has rapidly evolved over the past year. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a digital-first GTM model is shining the spotlight on these customer-facing – or frontline – marketing teams in the field. These highly-effective marketers have a direct line of sight into unique buyer needs and preferences.

Often, these roles are in the field outside of the realm of corporate marketing. Typical frontline marketing roles span events, field, demand gen, ABM, channel, and partner marketing.

With their new digital-first mandate, frontline marketers must develop a strong execution muscle as they build end-to-end buyer journeys. The Folloze-Demand Gen Report research found that only 25 percent of respondents felt they could successfully drive growth -- and at scale -- across every phase of the buyer journey.
Modern B2B buyers have grown more independent and prefer to do their own research before speaking with a sales representative. It’s up to the marketing and sales organizations to guide them on the path to purchase with educational thought leadership content on the channels they frequent most, in the formats they want to consume it. Today, 59 percent of customers say that much of the content they receive is useless, and 58 percent say that they receive too many materials. The goal of the frontline marketer is to create a better experience layer across all stages of the lifecycle to enrich the learning process and make every touchpoint smarter.

Frontline marketers and managers must also rethink how their tech stack is architected to optimize the personalization tools available. MarTech has typically revolved around CRM and marketing automation, but by putting the buyer experience at the heart of the new tech stack (and integrating its capabilities to legacy systems), companies can orchestrate more relevant outreach and swifter movement down the buying lifecycle. It’s a shift to a much richer technology stack, from the data layer and segmentation to personalized content and more focused engagement.

Building and scaling digitally-rich buying journeys takes a change in thinking and a cultural shift. The new operational model must support the entire lead-to-revenue process, with the buyer at the center of the universe. It fully connects every stakeholder on the same platform and keeps them working from the same playbook—and it’s built for agility, speed, timing and local execution. Developing a consistent buyer experience is also an exercise in scale and flexibility. By allowing frontline marketers to easily experiment with content and messaging, a routine of continuous improvement is created from month-to-month and quarter-to-quarter, with a constant eye on delivering the most satisfying experience possible.
6. Sales Orchestration

In a digital-first environment where buyers are comfortable with digital self-service and discovery, the sales team becomes one of many channels that marketers will leverage across the entire B2B buyer journey.

Within the survey, one-third of respondents said the most significant challenge with their sales counterparts is orchestrating digital campaigns that incorporate the sales team across different stages of the customer lifecycle.

To succeed in 2021 and beyond, frontline marketing teams must orchestrate the marketing-led engagement programs with their sellers and translate account engagement into real pipeline and revenue.

Facing an elevated digital-first mandate that incorporates new GTM models and an expanded scope that spans the entire customer lifecycle, marketers acknowledge gaps and execution challenges.
Frontline Marketers Must Take a Practical Approach to Building a Buyer-Centric GTM

In the wake of COVID-19, frontline marketing teams are facing an elevated mandate that also requires an expanded scope across the entire customer lifecycle. For many, the prospect of rethinking and digitizing an entire go-to-market machine may seem like a daunting task.

Don't panic. Remember, Rome was not built in a day.

Creating a fine-tuned and data-driven buyer experience machine will take time. That said, marketers should take an incremental approach and leverage the six building blocks outlined in this section.

You are not alone. Work with your colleagues and peers and industry and networking groups to share best practices and key learnings.
Conclusion: Marketing Must Lead From The Frontlines

B2B marketers have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to lead and build the next-gen digital engines of growth. To succeed, organizations must rethink their teams and empower their Frontline Marketers with the tools, agile best practices, and resources to successfully execute and drive revenue. Here are the top-6 takeaways from the Folloze-Demand Gen Report Survey.

1. We live in the experience era:
The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation, forcing B2B firms to step up and deliver the same powerful digital experiences as their B2C counterparts.

2. Marketing’s new mandate:
Only marketing can lead the final leg of the digital transformation process. They will become the digital architects of personalized and end-to-end buyer journeys.

3. Evolve or perish:
In a digital-first marketplace, legacy tools and old school GTM models are of little use. A fundamentally new GTM and operating model is required.

4. The new table stakes:
Personalized content and data-driven experiences are the new table-stakes for growth in a digital-first marketplace.

5. Rethink your marketing team:
Empower customer-facing or “frontline marketers,” with the tools, agile processes, and support to effectively execute at scale.

6. Rome was not built overnight:
Create a realistic plan to evolve your buyer experience capabilities over time and across key variables including data, content, teams, and supporting technology.

About Folloze

Folloze builds the leading B2B Buyer Experience Platform. Marketing and revenue teams rely on Folloze to quickly and easily deliver engaging, personalized, and data-driven experiences across the entire customer journey. Top B2B brands, including Autodesk, RingCentral, Cisco, and ServiceNow, use Folloze to create amazing digital experiences that help win and keep more customers and fuel long-term growth. To learn more, visit www.folloze.com.

About the Survey

Demand Gen Report surveyed 104 B2B marketing executives and professionals in April of 2021. The respondents range from Manager (20%), Director (32%), Vice President (16%), and C-level (26%) roles. Respondents work across a variety of industries, including business services/consulting (21%), software/technology (18%), manufacturing (10%), and financial services (9%). Their companies are equally diverse, with annual revenues ranging from under $100 million (43%) to greater than $10 billion (13%).