Meltwater

Demystifying the B2B Online Customer Journey

The Complete Guide in 5 Easy Steps

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1 Introduction: What Is the Customer Journey?

The customer journey describes the consumer's path throughout all brand touchpoints that lead to a decision, such as making a purchase. This process is called a journey because prospects usually look at a product or brand several times before deciding to take an action. It's important to bear in mind that the journey doesn't begin and end with the transaction. In fact, the better the overall before-and-after sales experience, the greater the chances of a customer buying another product and becoming loyal to the brand.

Many marketing professionals find offline marketing initiatives less helpful in mapping a journey since they don't provide as much trackable data compared to online sources. In most cases, information regarding the awareness step is missed as it comes from offline sources

such as recommendations from family or friends, a flyer, a newspaper, a TV ad or other print advertisements. A company can track these types of offline brand touchpoints via qualitative surveys and market research, though this can be complex and expensive. Moreover, companies may be limited in their capacity to monitor ongoing offline touchpoints and therefore fail to learn quickly and act accordingly.

On the contrary, online touchpoint activity is a lot more insightful since potential customers looking for a product or service leave a digital trace that can easily be tracked and analyzed. Many brands use such insights for the purpose of benchmarking and more informed decision making.

| Awareness | Consideration/Evaluation | Purchase | Customer Experience | Loyalty |

2. Why the Customer Journey Is So Important for B2B

Most companies are leveraging new technology to become more efficient and have successfully started an internal process of digitization, transforming their production processes. Externally, however, many still struggle to meet even the basic needs of their customers and potential clients in the course of their online journeys. If established B2B companies don't leave their comfort zones and sharpen up the online activities affecting the customer journey, it's likely they'll get left behind and eventually become invisible to their audience. "Out of sight, out of mind" is a dangerous place to be.

So how can B2B companies position themselves in the midst of the digital revolution? This question is key. According to a study by the market research company Forrester, **74% of all B2B buying agents do their research online** before deciding on a supplier. This goes to show the importance of online visibility.

When it comes to brand touchpoints during the customer journey, human resources should not be overlooked. After all, it is people who make a brand. An increasing lack of skilled labor has negatively impacted sales departments in almost every B2B company. One side effect we've seen from a shortage of experts, such as engineers, is a dilution of brand positioning. Engineers have the technical know-how to work alongside sales and marketing teams, explaining and selling complex technical products. Without them, messages can become mixed and confusing, and prospects may look elsewhere for answers.

# How can B2B companies position themselves within the customer journey?

The answer is simple and complex at the same time: thought leadership using relevant formats and channels! Through high-quality content and its distribution, companies can acquire huge reach and visibility and strengthen their authority in the eye of the target group. The effects range from brand awareness to concrete online interactions such as subscriptions or transactions. Thought leadership is essential within the B2B market if you're aiming to build trust with the customer. The target group's perception of the quality and innovative capacity you offer is critical – except in the case of commodities, where price alone usually makes all the difference.

Thought leadership is facilitated by the creation of excellent content that's focused on gaining as much relevant reach as possible. Thought leadership also contributes to customer loyalty, as well as to lead generation and sales nurturing.

Upscale products and high-involvement investments, in particular, demand an intense decision-making process with information on all details, implications, and benefits. Because of content a qualitative analysis is possible; this is how a sustainable trust relationship with the brand can be cultivated – similar effects won't result from Google ads or other promotions that don't offer any additional value to the

Decision makers are increasingly taking an interest in content marketing and its relevance. According to "The State of B2B Digital Marketing" study by Demand Wave, 41% of all surveyed companies are planning to invest more budget in search and social media content. And the "Content Marketing" study by Suxeedo tells us that about 30% of all surveyed companies deem content marketing to be of high importance.

Furthermore, research by Saxoprint found the most profitable companies spend on average 13% more money on content marketing than less successful competitors. Overall investment in content-driven strategies is going up.

Content ▸ Engagement ▸ Funnel ▸ Transaction
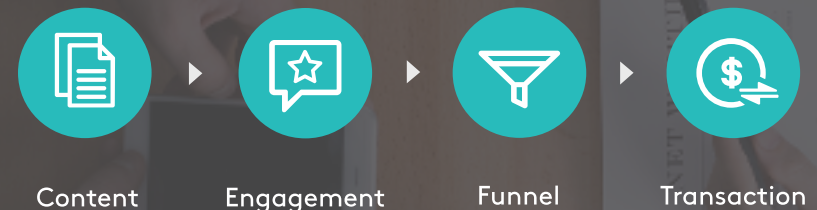
The target group becomes aware of a company through relevant content. The awareness leads to engagement with content and initiates the B2B customer journey.

3. The Role of the Buyer Persona

Before you start mapping your customer journey, you need to have a good understanding of the actual target group as a collective and the customer that results from it. Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of your ideal customers based on market research and real data about your existing customers.

When creating your buyer persona(s), consider including demographics, behavior patterns, motivations, and the goals of your customers. The more detailed you are, the better you will be able to map out the customer journey.

When creating your buyer persona, you should answer the following questions:

What is their **role** and **who do they report to**?

What **goals** do they have?

Are they on **social media** and if yes on **which channels**?

Which **information sources** do they trust?

Define your buyer persona by answering these questions:

- What is the average age of your customer?
- What did their education look like?
- What is their role and who do they report to?
- What goals do they have?
- What challenges do they face?
- How is their work evaluated?
- Which information sources do they trust?
- Are they on social media and, if yes, on which channels

Example of a buyer persona profile:

Persona Name
Angela

Industry, geographic or other segments

Roles

Reports to

Education

Solutions, Sales Play or Campaign

MY RESPONSIBILITIES
- ....
- ....

HOW I AM EVALUATED
- ....
- ....

INFORMATION RESOURCES I TRUST
- ....
- ....

4. B2B Customer Journey Mapping Simple Steps

In order to create successful touchpoints for the company and the target group, each channel and its effectiveness needs to be considered individually. This allows any potential to be identified and utilized strategically. For example, users don't look for transactional content on social media. Instead, you'll find social media users typically in browsing mode, looking for new topics and more interested in entertaining content rather than heavy content. Nevertheless, companies can position themselves within the realm of the user's browsing mode by providing thoughtful content that matches the user's expectations. Essentially, there are 5 steps within B2B communications based on the user's intentions (often called user intent). Think of these as 5 steps to optimize your positioning throughout the customer journey. But first, a few words about user intent.

The B2B customer journey is all about user intent.

As complex as the B2B customer journey may be, focusing on user intent allows you to figure out the topics that will perform well and help convert prospects into customers. The modern B2B customer journey needs to be based on the average user's funnel steps. Each step of the user's funnel is defined by the user's intention or intentions. Experience has shown us the importance of the first two levels – awareness and consideration – simply by the traffic volume these levels generate. Interestingly, these first two levels are all about the informational needs of the user. Various papers estimate that approximately 80% of all internet traffic is triggered by the need for information. Starting with the awareness level and continuing with the consideration level, the search funnel becomes more narrow as it transitions into further levels such as transaction and customer loyalty.

80% VOLUME

20% VOLUME

Awareness

Consideration

Transaction

Customer Loyalty

About 80% of all internet traffic is initiated by informational requests. The potential of content-driven strategies is huge, because the majority of research within the B2B industry is happening online first.

1. Awareness

Awareness	Consideration/Evaluation	Purchase	Customer Experience	Loyalty

The user is gathering information about solutions.

The first step of every journey starts with awareness. The user becomes aware of a topic or wants to know more about it – whether it is an issue that demands a solution, or solely for the sake of entertainment. This step is defined by browsing and researching a certain subject in which the initial interest turns into a more focused attention, and ultimately transitions into the next step.

TIP

Connect the Dots

The user is likely to be looking for a solution regarding a certain issue. The content you create for this stage should therefore focus on delivering a solution to their issue and ultimately delivering expertise. The business proposition can be presented within the content - for example, as a consultant or a supplier of the required materials. Therefore, the content always needs to be close to the company's goals and competencies, otherwise it will be hard to bridge the user's intent with the company's capabilities. The goal must be to publish content that creates awareness - not just for the solution, but for the brand as well. This needs to be in a way that promotes the brand, but puts the issue and its solution front and center.

2. Consideration

| Awareness | Consideration/Evaluation | Purchase | Customer Experience | Loyalty |

## The user is actively looking for options.

The second step is defined by the user's intention to get all the relevant information he or she needs in order to make good decisions. The user already has all the basic information about a subject but wants to narrow it down. He or she considers making a transaction.

TIP

Highlight the Options

When the user is researching solutions and alternatives, he or she is expecting concrete options for actions in order to make decisions and to differentiate. Here, it makes sense to highlight products, as long as it doesn't turn into a one-sided sales pitch. Clarity on the pros and cons is expected. Content formats that work well during the consideration stage of the journey include listicles, where options are tested and compared against each other, as well as reports, where customers share practical experiences they've had with a product or service.

3. Transaction

Awareness	Consideration/Evaluation	Purchase	Customer Experience	Loyalty
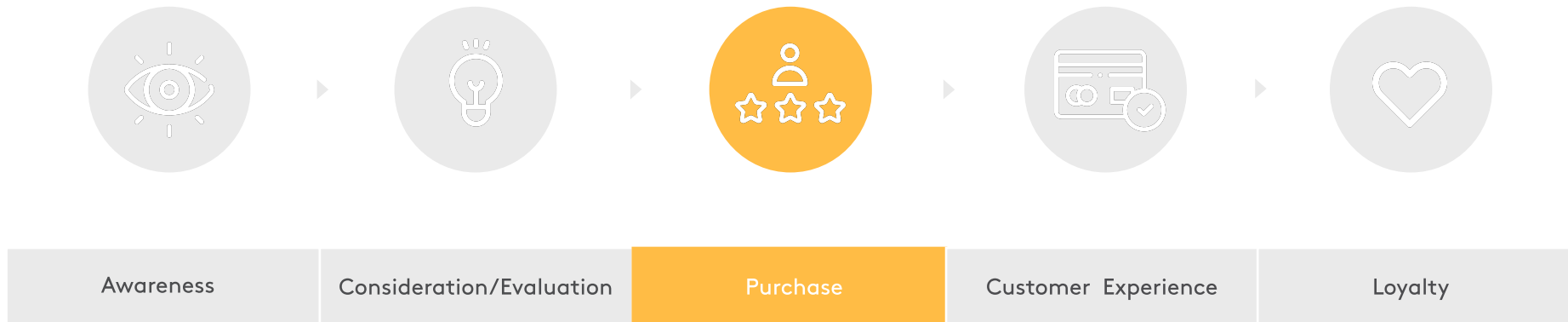
The user is ready to purchase.

What the user is looking for at this stage is a transactional landing page that is focused on the product or service he or she wants to purchase. There shouldn't be any distractions or further content that the user has to navigate through in order to make the transaction. At this stage, a user interface that is easy to understand and includes trust signals such as testimonials and seals of quality makes all the difference.

TIP

Display the Benefits

The transaction step is only as strong as the first two previous steps. The user expects a credible and trustworthy display of all the benefits he or she would gain with a purchase. If all he or she gets is a shallow landing page, merely filled with claims but no concrete explanation, the user will not convert. The user experience (UX) is definitive and makes a purchase attractive, but a comprehensible display of the benefits must be part of that experience. Oftentimes it is also useful to address purchasing barriers the user may encounter.

4. Customer Experience

Awareness	Consideration/Evaluation	Purchase	Customer Experience	Loyalty

Brand engagement is key.

Customers and leads need to be kept alive. Even if the lead didn't respond to any further offers or calls to action, an opportunity still exists. The consistency of content, its quality, and its additional value might be just what it takes to make a deal attractive. The tipping point in many cases is an ongoing process through which the prospect continues to see the brand as the leading expert and best solution to their issue. At a certain point, the consideration of another brand won't make sense anymore.

TIP

Engage in Conversations

Users are subject to having emotional reactions - even experienced B2B people. Try to speak about the users' needs, aspirations, and challenges. Content that's about your company, your products, and your services is less engaging. Thus, the user gets the impression of having found the right fit in your company and feel they're being understood.

5. Customer Loyalty

Awareness	Consideration/Evaluation	Purchase	Customer Experience	Loyalty

What happens after the purchase matters.

Just because the transaction is complete doesn't mean the customer is out of the game. In fact, the work has just started. There may be additional needs that come with the product or service and make sense, such as repair services or upgrades. What the customer needs is additional content to create more awareness of everything there is to consider. This helps with customer retention and allows the relationship to be strengthened. Every customer has the potential to go beyond brand loyalty and become a true brand advocate capable of having a positive impact on their peers – provided the overall experience is positive, including any additional value beyond the initial purchase that the customer may receive.

TIP

Communicate Additional Value

A customer that just purchased something may need further information that you can supply. A newsletter can be a great gateway to upselling opportunities such as upgrades or consulting based on an identified need. Whatever it is, the customer always looks for ways to optimize things and make solutions more sustainable for themselves. The company can establish itself as an assistant that makes sure the customer is successful every step of the way.

5. Defining the Right KPIs for the B2B Customer Journey

Your B2B customer journey comes alive once you define its touchpoints. Every company needs to have a profound understanding of the buyer personas and the way they search for information. If there is clarity on the different touchpoints that will move the potential customer from the initial awareness stage to the purchase stage, the opportunity exists to improve them to increase return on investment (ROI).

No matter which touchpoints are identified as the most relevant ones, there are certain indicators along the journey that will tell whether or not each and every single step is working. There are 3 layers when it comes to analyzing and evaluating digital actions. These 3 layers can be connected directly to each step in the customer journey, since they mirror what should happen in every step:
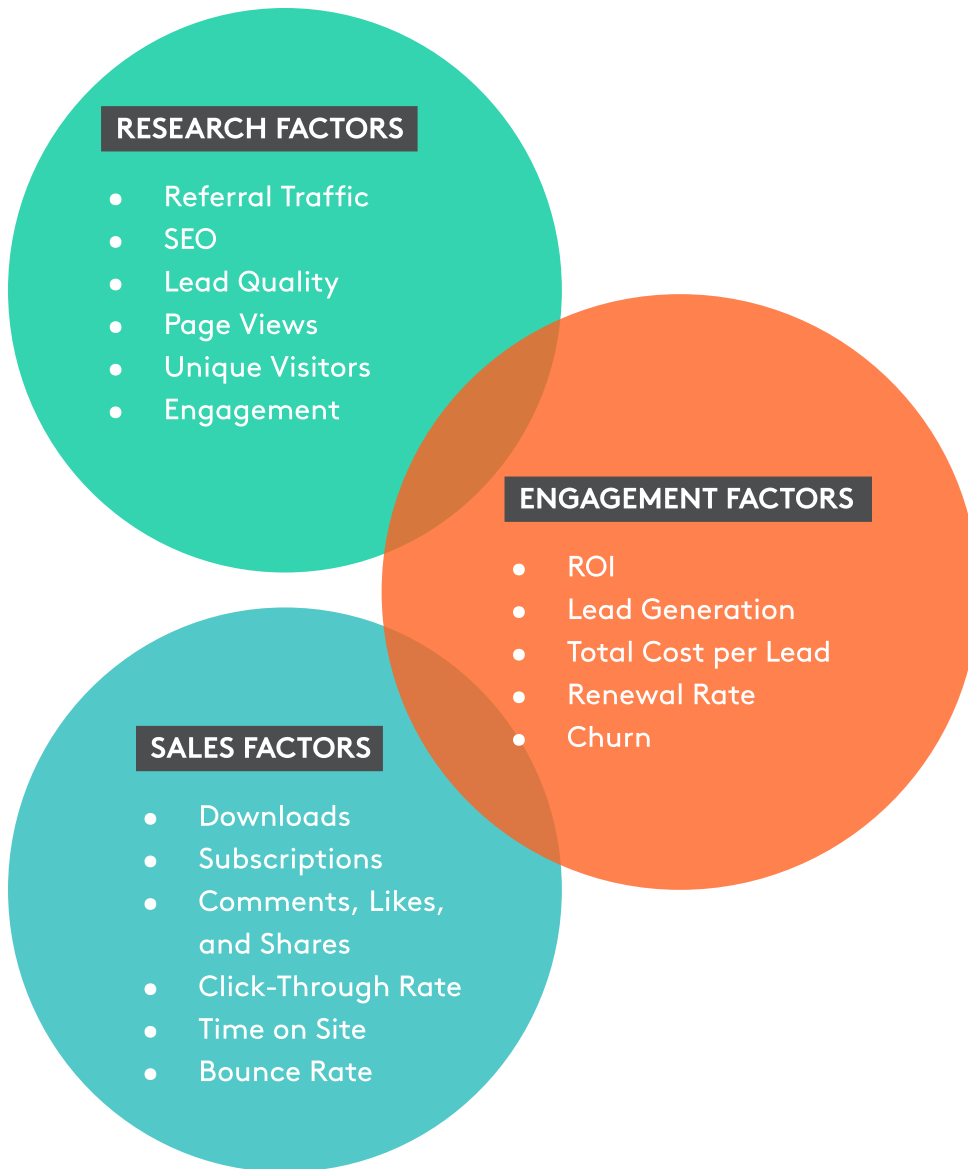
1. User factors
Everything that is connected to how the user responds and interacts with the content.

2. Traffic factors
Everything that describes the quality of the generated traffic.

3. Sales factors
Everything that describes the economic efficiency and outcome.

RESEARCH FACTORS

- Referral Traffic
- SEO
- Lead Quality
- Page Views
- Unique Visitors
- Engagement

ENGAGEMENT FACTORS

- ROI
- Lead Generation
- Total Cost per Lead
- Renewal Rate
- Churn

SALES FACTORS

- Downloads
- Subscriptions
- Comments, Likes, and Shares
- Click-Through Rate
- Time on Site
- Bounce Rate

In order to make the B2B customer journey effective, goals need to be defined and then translated into KPIs. This way progress can be tracked and weaknesses can be flagged early.

Companies must be able to identify ROI holistically, weaknesses as well as strengths, by looking at the performance of every aspect of the strategy. User traffic and sales factors are built on each other, for example, with a strong connection between traffic quality and converted leads. The relationship may be common sense, but only when there is an underlying awareness of the various aspects and factors.

User factors, such as click-through rate, time on site, subscriptions, and comments are indicators of how relevant the content might appear to the target group. If there is no response, it's probably because the content doesn't hit a nerve or otherwise incite interest.

Traffic factors, like referral traffic, lead quality, page views, and unique visitors are indicators of whether the content appeals to the right audience at every touchpoint. They are also useful in measuring whether extra effort is needed to increase visibility, or determining whether to change tactics in terms of channel, timing, or place of publication.

Sales factors, like converted leads, total cost per lead, and ultimately ROI are indicators of the overall effectiveness from an economic perspective. If the strategy is not profitable, the company might be failing to appeal to the right target group, or something equally fundamental is not working. Maybe the topic of a campaign does not appeal to the target group, or maybe the UX of the landing page is poor. Whatever it is, in order to make the right adjustments, you need to take a step back and review the user and traffic factors again. These indicators should provide detailed information on where, what, or who the missing link is.

6. Getting Started: Visualizing the B2B Customer Journey

So how does a company get started? In order to set the customer journey up for a win, there needs to be a clear overview of all the relevant components. It starts with a profound understanding of the target group, its user behavior, the channels and formats users prefer, and most importantly, the user intent, based on the actual need. Only then can a systematic approach become possible.

As mentioned, the B2B customer journey comes alive once you define its touchpoints. Touchpoints on the buyer journey vary according to the B2B company in question, but it's safe to say that the better you understand how the touchpoints work, the more you are able to control and improve the performance.

As soon as you know the different touchpoints that will move your ideal customer from the awareness to the purchase phase, you'll be able to benchmark and improve them in order to increase sales. For example, while many companies still rely on PR and print ads to

generate awareness for their products, that may not work for your company. Other B2B companies understand that they need to focus on thought leadership content rather than writing about their products to increase awareness for their solutions. Through relevant and engaging content that addresses real-life audience challenges without selling any product, companies are able to win the trust and awareness of potential customers. This will lead to a significant increase in website traffic and is therefore a very important part of the overall buyer journey. The website needs to host a lot of information in a visually appealing way in order to make any further interaction attractive and the navigation easy. You'll find this will contribute to the conversion rate and actually strengthen sales.

All marketing programs for B2B should be focused on driving the ideal customer through the customer journey funnel.

Visualizing the Journey

In order to visualize the B2B customer journey for strategic ideation, evaluation, and optimization purposes, the company needs to not only identify all important touchpoints but also gather all relevant data along the journey. The data will empower the company to spot strengths and weaknesses and to adjust the campaign if needed. Data can also be benchmarked over time so professionals can understand if (and where) they're positively moving the needle. There are different tools out there that help to collect performance data and thereby provide solutions for each step along the B2B customer journey. After you've identified all the touchpoints of your customer journey, you'll want to use the specific tools that pertain to the journey of your target group, as seen here.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC
Google Analytics is the most important tool to analyze website traffic. Whether you want to know which sources drive the highest amount of traffic to your website, the quality of the user's interaction, or the response to specific content, Google Analytics is useful.

PAID MEDIA
This includes Adwords for Google Ads and "analytic" insights for social ads on Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Every paid input needs to be monitored. It makes sense to perform an A/B-test campaign to find out which kind of ad works best for the target group. Begin by testing your wording, visuals, and message. Every tiny detail matters and can have an impact on the conversion rate.

EARNED MEDIA
Meltwater is one of the most sophisticated tools when it comes to online news and social media analytics. The tool provides rich media intelligence in order to paint the whole picture of brand awareness.

EMAIL
There are several marketing automation tools that can make repetitive processes that include responding to downloads and subscriptions easier to perform, more scalable, and more effective. Email as a channel is still one of the most crucial vehicles when it comes to B2B communications, and every B2B company needs to understand how to get the most out of it.

WEBINARS
Hands down, webinars as a content format is one of the most effective ways to communicate during the B2B customer journey and generate high-quality leads. Webinars have the added benefit of generating useful and helpful data, for example engagement insights, including which topics appeal to your target group and who among your audience is ready to make the next step.

CRM
All communication with current and future clients needs to be documented and evaluated. A CRM tool empowers the company to identify patterns as well as opportunities, and to learn from them. It gives the company a chance to look at every lead individually and to come up with a thoughtful next step.

Use Case:

How to Measure Earned Media

Meltwater offers various ways to evaluate the visibility of a company. Using the example of Krones AG, it is clear to see why investing in social media visibility benefits the whole company. Krones AG is a leading German mechanical engineering company that has been tremendously successful in building a social media community around its brand.

In the awareness stage of the customer journey, it is important to create a dominant stance when it comes to the perception of your brand in the mind of the consumer. This perception is formed based on a number of touchpoints, with media exposure and social media being two of them.

Using informational content, Krones AG manages to stand out and rise above the noise. The connection with their target group is strengthened through an interactive content strategy that focuses mainly on visual channels like Pinterest and YouTube, as well as the big player Facebook.

> Understand how your brand, industry, and competitors are being discussed on social media. **Get a demo** from a Meltwater Analyst to see the most advanced social listening metrics available today.

Stories about employees, the company, and informational content about processes and technologies enrich the Krones AG profile on YouTube, positioning them as thought leaders. As a result, the B2B company has built an engaged audience of 12,500 followers.
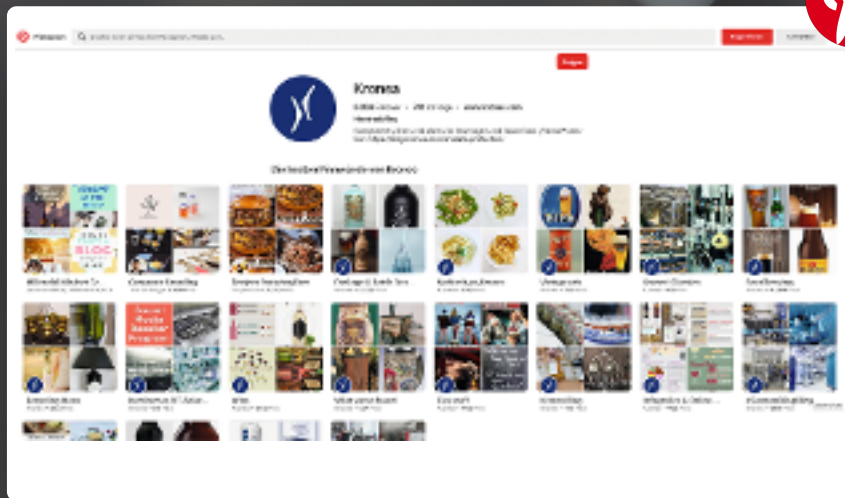
On Pinterest, Krones AG publishes boards on food and beverage as well as industrial design content - both topics that are close to the company's brand and highly performative within all visual channels. They understand the types of content that resonate with their audience and use this to drive engagement.

Krones AG also has more than 119,000 followers on Facebook. The company mostly posts news, technology content, and employee-stories, all of which sharpens their profile and triggers conversations.

Maria Seywald is a social media manager at Krones AG and explains the company's approach as follows:

"It is very important for us to be 'social' ourselves. We want to respond quickly, and be helpful and likable as we interact with the community. There are conversations with some of our followers that are more of a trivial nature; nevertheless we can see that the care we put in gets rewarded with the faithfulness of our fans. They stay engaged, keep commenting, and send us pictures as well as feedback regarding our technologies. Furthermore, we won't post technology and other serious content only, but rather entertaining content as well, which creates various opportunities for us to engage with the target group - even with those that are not fans of us yet."

Share of Voice

Share of Voice (SOV) is a metric that highlights the dominance of a brand within social media compared to other competitors in the space. Krones AG is clearly leading the way with a share of voice of 68%. This metric demonstrates how Krones AG has captured a significant share of the customer journey in the awareness stage.

Companies also want to present themselves in a positive light. This is why sentiment analysis is so important. In the sentiment analysis below, you can see Krones AG has a largely positive score. You also see a hint that competitor Andritz AG has been sinking into a potential negative perception on social media in the last two months, an insight that might lead to a competitive advantage if you dive into the trending themes around the negative conversations.
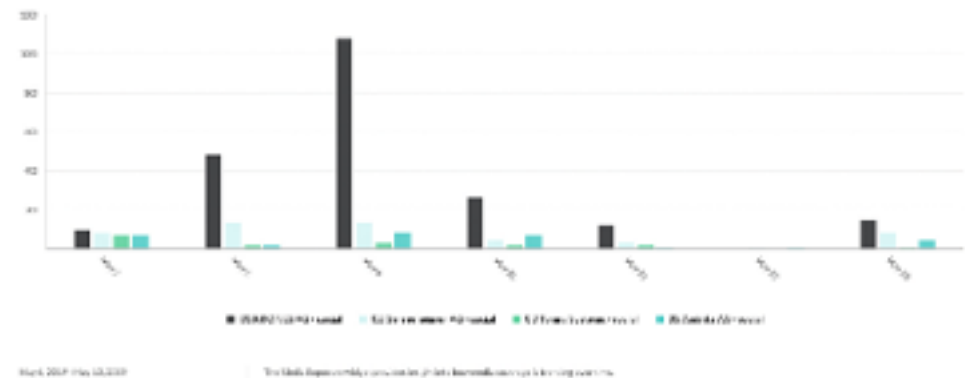
Sentiment Score (3 Months)
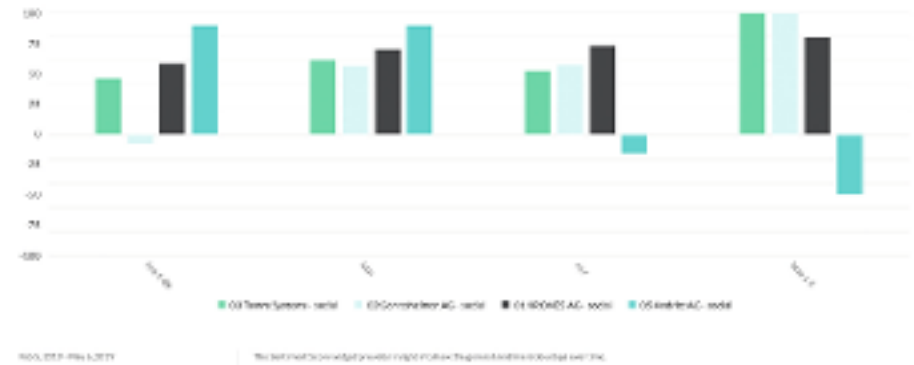
Regarding the coverage and reach via classic media-channels, the picture slightly changes.

Media Exposure describes a brand's reach. In this case, the metric confirms the dominance of Krones AG, since it delivers the highest peak by far.

Media Exposure

In May, Krones AG released a study on the effectiveness of "picking robots," which generated a huge, positive response throughout the channels.

Zooming out allows the user to get a wider perspective on the overall development. It enables the company to evaluate trends and spot opportunities - especially within a competitor context.
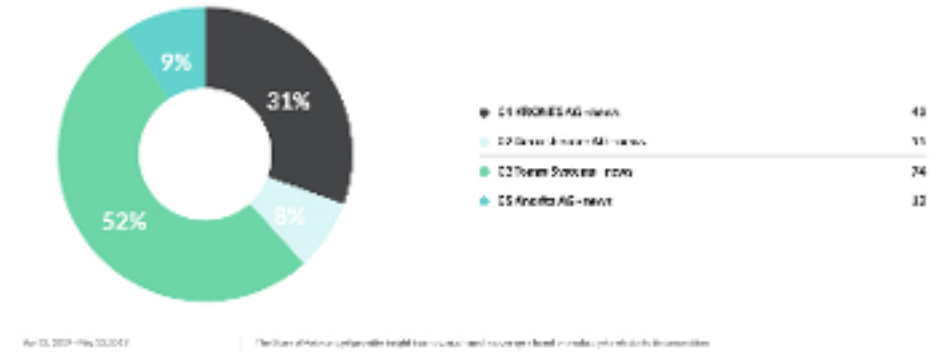
Media Exposure (3 Months)
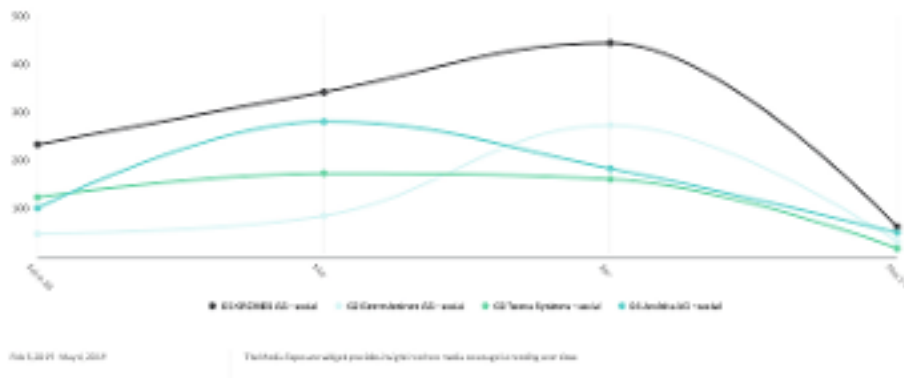
The Sentiment Score implies the quality of content. Krones AG appears to be consistent here with its positive associations on social media when it comes to published content. Maria Seywald identifies two main goals of Krones AG regarding social media: "On the one hand we want to strengthen our employer branding, and on the other we want to communicate about our product well enough to build a strong brand within the industry. Because these two goals are completely different, we need to play on different channels with different formats. It always depends on what we are trying to achieve."

Nevertheless, the bigger picture shows that Krones AG is not always leading the conversation.
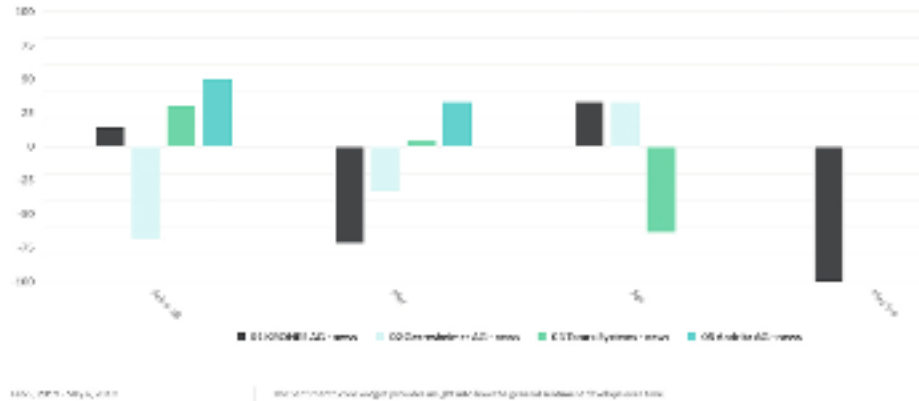
## Share of Voice

Media Exposure (3 Months)
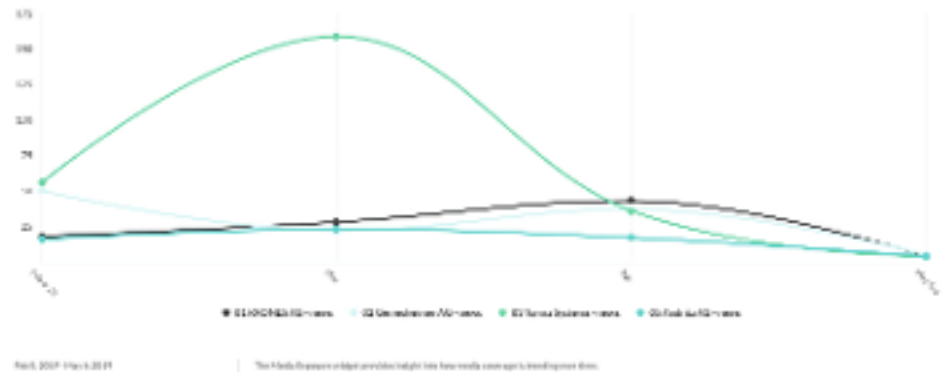
The graphs reveal that media dominance in terms of exposure is not enough. A company might reach a large audience, but it also needs to make sure that all content is relevant and generates a positive response, otherwise the company won't benefit from its reach.
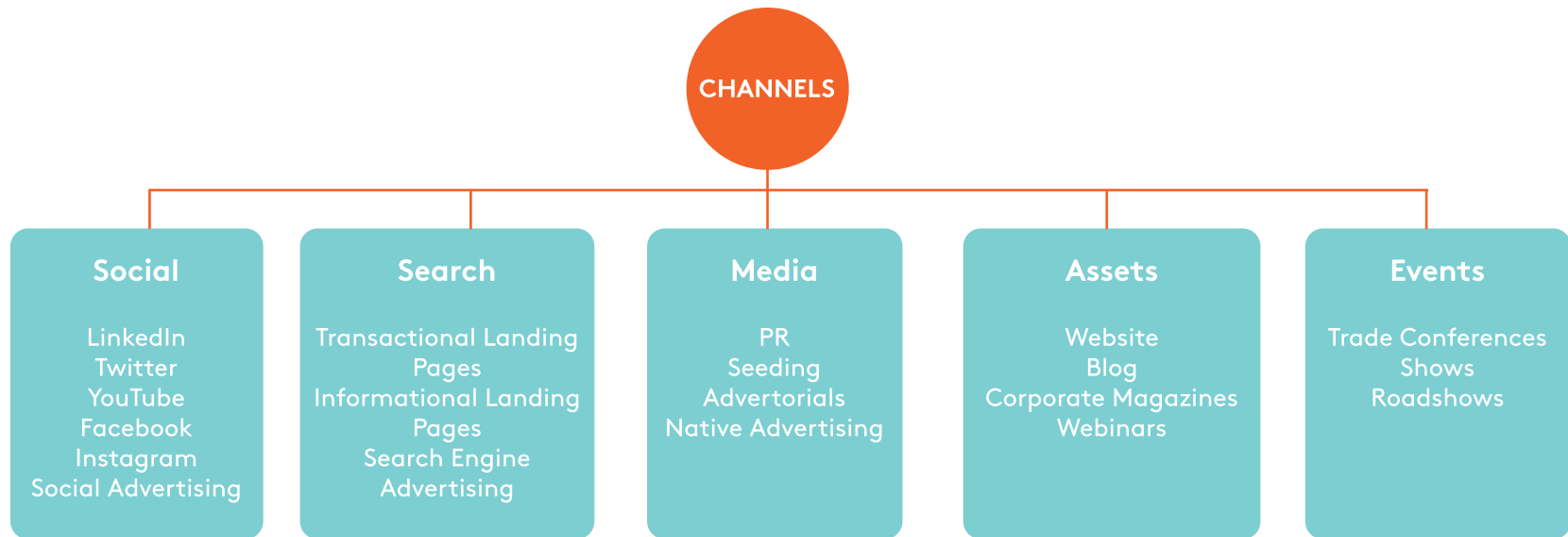
Sentiment Score (3 Months)

Tomra Systems, a competitor of Krones AG, released some news about the mining of precious metals. It earned a big reach number, but the responses were mixed and not always favorable.

A data-driven approach will provide plenty of insight on which topics, formats, and channels might work for the target group. A content-driven strategy must be based on a scalable outcome in order to lay the foundation for further optimizations. This way a company won't need to juggle all possible formats and be present on every channel. Instead they can focus their resources on the options that are most promising, especially the channels where their audience is most active.
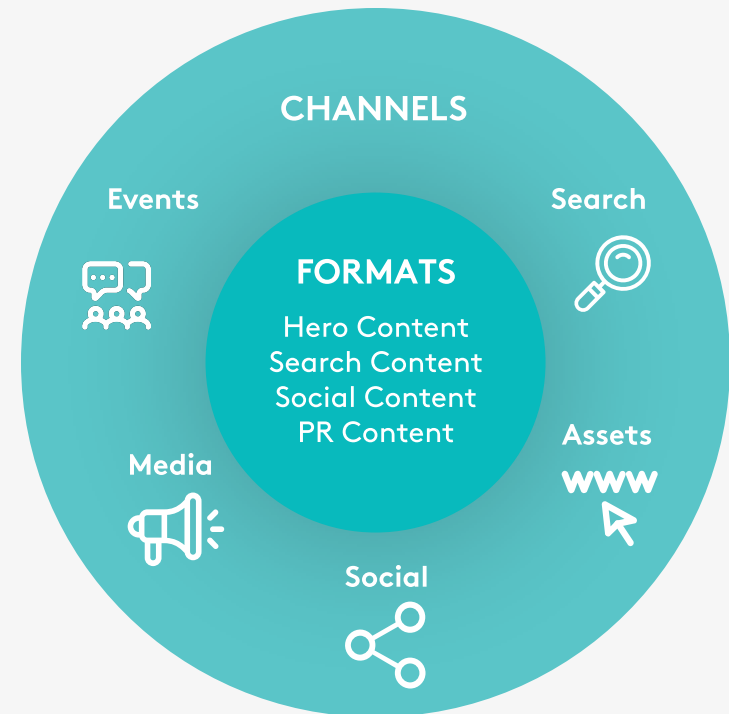
There is a large variety of channels and formats available. Remember, you don't have to choose them all. Only adopt the ones that are relevant. Once the goals are set, the company needs to define how to best appeal to the target group present on the channels.

- Remember, the topics should be based on the user's need. A sound analysis of the target group is fundamental to every strategy. One way to identify concrete issues, questions, and needs is to analyze and evaluate relevant keyword clusters.

- The need leads up to the channel. Whatever the intent might be, the user looks for certain answers in certain places. The expectation that the user brings to a specialist magazine is different from the one that comes with a social media channel, for example.

CHANNELS

Social

LinkedIn
Twitter
YouTube
Facebook
Instagram
Social Advertising

Search

Transactional Landing
Pages
Informational Landing
Pages
Search Engine
Advertising

Media

PR
Seeding
Advertorials
Native Advertising

Assets

Website
Blog
Corporate Magazines
Webinars

Events

Trade Conferences
Shows
Roadshows

The user intent and the touchpoint provide the framework for the format. If the touchpoint is an online magazine, then the user expects to find high-quality articles and respectable content pieces like whitepapers or graphics. The more the format conforms to the user's expectation, the more positive the impact it will have on the conversion rates.

FORMATS

Hero Content

E-Book
Whitepaper
Study
Infographic
Viral Video

Search

Informational Articles
Transactional Content
Case Studies
Tutorials
FAQs

Social Content

Story Article
Interviews
Guest Articles
Contests
Memes
Guide Videos
Story Videos

PR Content

Press Release
News Article
Presentations

LEVELS

FORMATS

Content hub: Journals, news articles, stories, videos & graphics (social or search focus), webinars
Hero content: Whitepapers, e-books, calculators, studies, infographics
CTAs: Downloads, banners, contact forms

Commercial landing pages: Product descriptions, FAQ, problems & solutions, stories & cases, testimonials
CTAs: Contact forms, online booking

Content hub: Journals, news articles, stories, videos & graphics (social or search focus), webinars, tutorials
Hero content: Whitepapers, calculators, studies, infographics
CTAs: Downloads, banners, contact forms

CHANNELS

Search & social marketing, native advertising

Performance marketing

Dialog marketing & social marketing

PLATFORMS

Focus on Google, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, Outbrain & Co.

Google & LinkedIn

Newsletter, LinkedIn & Facebook

The customer journey step defines the channel. If there is clarity on what the user needs, the company can strategically position itself in all relevant channels, and as a result, create meaningful touchpoints. The steps of the B2B customer funnel are a framework for the content strategy. If you know the user's intent and the various touchpoints, you can match them with relevant topics and formats.

The challenge is finding the right format for the right topic and matching these with the right channel. There are many opportunities to address certain needs, but above all, it is the user intent that must define the approach.

Awareness and consideration: The user is looking for informational content, mainly on editorial platforms or via search engines like Google. The user is browsing and becoming aware of a topic or a concrete solution that appeals to his or her needs. Wherever the content pops up, the context is key. The user's intention on Instagram or Facebook is different than the one on LinkedIn. Therefore the content needs to be different. Especially when it comes to B2B communications, LinkedIn offers a much more straightforward approach. According to **"The State of B2B Digital Marketing"** study, 59% of all companies replying said LinkedIn was the most performative channel regarding lead generation. Overall, 92% said LinkedIn was the most important social media channel for their company. Furthermore, 93% of the decision makers believe that social media is one of the most important channels for their communication strategy.

Search engines, on the other hand, are the most important channel to serve the B2B target group in terms of research, specific requests, and the display of options. A company can connect the dots here as far as delivering high-quality content that matches the user's request, while creating a pathway to the very concrete solution the company offers. SEO is non-negotiable during this stage of the journey. Specialist articles need to be visible so that the target group, and eventually the company, can benefit from the content. According to an analysis from Shareholic, it is the search engine rather than social media that generates the most traffic for websites.

Search vs. Social: Shares of Visits
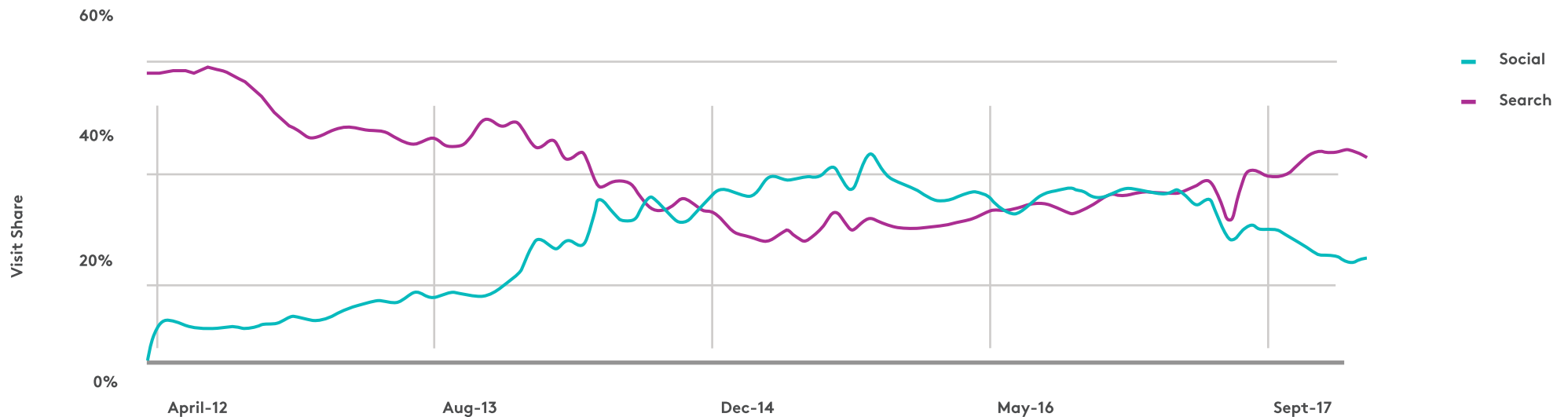
Based on activity aggregated from 250,000 sites and 400+ millions unique monthly visitors

Purchase and transaction: At this stage the user gets targeted via performance marketing actions in order to optimize the conversion rate, using, for example, search engine advertisement (SEA)platforms such as Google Adwords. A/B-testing offers a sound evaluation of the ads that work and those that don't. The same is true for social media as it is for paid media. Google and LinkedIn are the most performative channels for transactional content via social or search ads, LinkedIn because it channels the B2B target group and offers great tools to communicate. Via dynamic ads that feature integrated lead-generation forms, the user receives personalized ads focusing on content pieces such as white papers and exclusive specialist articles. If the added value seems promising enough and matches the user's profile, the user will most likely interact with the ad and leave his or her personal details.

Customer experience and loyalty: Once a transaction has occurred or a customer gets in touch with the company via a new request, there's clear potential for another conversion. How can a company create a successful appeal to further action effectively? No matter where a lead is at any given moment, consistent and ongoing communication is key to help people get connected and bound to the brand. In the conversion stage it makes sense to establish a direct communication via email and social targeting based on the user's former behavior. "The State of B2B Digital Marketing" study by Demand Wave says that 95% of all surveyed decision makers consider email one of their most important channels. Additionally, "hero content" such as white papers, webinars, and ebooks may help to bait the user and restart a conversation.

7. Potential Pitfalls of the B2B Customer Journey and How to Avoid Them

The most important lesson to learn is the immense potential of the informational need of the user. High-quality content needs to be in place. It is imperative for everyone that wants to take part in the website traffic game and fetch the customer at whichever touchpoint he or she is at. Considering that transaction levels amount to only 20% of all internet traffic volume, any company that starts at the transaction level limits the potential of its communication strategy and forgoes 80% of its potential success. Regarding the remaining 20%, it is the UX rather than the content that makes all the difference. All components that make a transaction look attractive – including trust signals, easy navigation, and clean design – help make a transactional website stand out.

There are several aspects to consider when it comes to optimizing the B2B customer journey, and we've listed those here.

Know the relevant touchpoints.
While the customer journey is ongoing, there are several touchpoints along the way that will contribute to the experience. Make sure all touchpoints are taken care of. This means content is up to date, consistent in its excellence, and suits the touchpoint. Touchpoints that are not performing or are irrelevant to the company's needs should be eliminated as they are a waste of resources. A lean communication strategy with high-quality content is much better than lots of plates in the air needing to be juggled.

Never end the customer journey.
Whatever happens, the journey never ends! There is always another opportunity to restart the conversation with a customer or to provide new opportunities for them to engage. A B2B customer journey as a strategy should always include pathways to initiate further touchpoints, even when the initial transaction has been completed.

Don't slack off with your insights.

No matter how much you think you know, there is always another learning curve in front of you. If you neglect your research, you will be left behind by other companies that stay on their toes and refuse to settle. Grow with your audience and understand the needs and intentions of your target group. This will offer you with a fresh outlook on your communications strategy on a regular basis.

As a team, work smarter, not harder.

A company cannot afford to think in silos when considering its different communication departments. PR, marketing, social media, and SEO need to work together in order to generate multidimensional effects. If you fail to think collectively, you'll be unable to create a holistic communications strategy. Instead you'll turn each responsible department into a headless chicken that won't know what it's doing, and lose resources as a result.

Address the user's needs, not yours.

The last thing your target group needs is you over-promoting yourself. Instead, deliver answers before you even think about pushing your USP. Every user has a need that turns into an intent. Take this opportunity to position yourself as a thought leader. Instead of being a noisy ad that just says something for the sake of it, be the brand that has something of substance to say. If you provide additional value in your content – without any strings attached – you'll stand out and initiate a customer journey.

Summary

The B2B customer journey is a multi-dimensional road that never ends. The different layers, goals, user intentions, formats, and channels require a holistic approach. Companies used to doing the minimum when it comes to content creation need to change their mindset. Otherwise they will be left behind by companies that understand the value of and are willing to invest in thought leadership. In times when the perception of a company defines its competitive capacity, the creation and development of a brand has to focus on its content. More often than not, the additional value will rival that of the USP of a company, a service, or a product.

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