

A Metia report

# B2B marketing trends for 2019

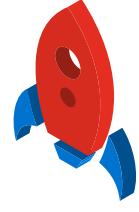
Six essential trends for the savvy CMO



Marketers take stock  
and focus on the  
fundamentals ahead  
of seismic change.

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# Introduction

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For those following current affairs, 2018 has been a year to take stock – with plenty of uncertainty and the prospect of major change ahead. It's been a similar story for marketers.

After the implementation of the GDPR in May, brands have been waiting to discover its true impact – and its implications for global privacy law, and their bottom line.

Advertisers have been learning the full impact of the industry's lack of transparency and accountability – where a lack of due diligence has compounded bad practice upon bad practice, hurting brands and their customers.

Modern technology has increased efficiency in marketing departments, but a reliance on the same platforms and techniques – and too little focus on brand building – is delivering bland, undifferentiated customer experiences.

Smart B2B marketers are mindful of these trends, investing in new approaches where

there is clear value – and recognizing that the fundamentals on which marketing is built remain as important as ever.

This guide aims to help these marketers and is born from our experiences in 2018, working in partnership with our clients to generate measurable returns for their businesses.

If these trends pique your interest, make sure to get in touch. We have a host of case studies that illustrate these points and would love to talk you through them.

**Peter Morgan**  
Vice President, Demand  
Metia Group

# 1 Machine learning is transforming how organizations identify prospects



While artificial intelligence (AI) promises massive, long-term benefits for the global economy, its maturity is likely decades away.

Smart B2B leaders, however, are already harnessing AI in the form of machine learning to improve the efficiency of sales and marketing investments.

A recent PwC study heralded AI as “the biggest commercial opportunity in today’s fast changing economy”<sup>1</sup>, forecasting that AI will provide \$15.7 trillion in global economic growth by 2030.



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**\$15.7tn**  
in global economic growth by 2030<sup>1</sup>

“A more immediate … impact of AI can be found within the enterprise, via the aggregation of big data and the application of machine learning. Machine learning, a subset of the broader AI field, is the area of AI most likely to provide direct and tangible benefits to an organization for the foreseeable future.”<sup>2</sup>

**Paul Lipman**, Forbes.com

When you dig into PwC’s predictions, however, it’s clear we’ll have to be patient with five years of modest impact before growth accelerates. But early adopters in B2B are finding significant rewards through AI, using machine learning and predictive analytics to identify – and better understand – prospects through big data.

<sup>1</sup>Source: PwC: <https://press.pwc.com/News-releases/ai-to-drive-gdp-gains-of--15.7-trillion-with-productivity--personalisation-improvements/s/3cc702e4-9cac-4a17-85b9-71769fba82a6>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Forbes.com: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/10/25/machine-learning-the-new-language-of-leadership/#3681699d5271>

## **Predictive analytics can increase marketing and sales effectiveness**

A growing selection of vendors are powering this revolution, enabling organizations to match their customer data with a wealth of third-party data sources to identify high-priority, in-market prospects.

These new capabilities have contributed to the resurgence in account-based marketing (ABM), allowing organizations to focus marketing and sales investments on the businesses most likely to buy. This brings obvious benefits – not least of which is helping brands prioritize how effort and investment are applied – but the long-term opportunity for marketers is more nuanced as knowing whom to target is only part of the challenge.

## **Marketing success still depends on human intelligence**

Maximizing funnel conversion requires content that informs, educates, and stimulates action – delivered in the right formats, at the right times, through the right channels.

Delivering to these standards requires a detailed and fluid understanding of your customers, along with operational and creative excellence to ensure you consistently hit the mark. For the time being at least, that still requires human intelligence and judgement to determine the optimum strategy from data.

## **Marketers should invest wisely**

As with any investment in technology, your decision to pursue AI should be guided by cost-benefit analysis. Invest only where there is clear and measurable value for your business. It's then on you to deliver full value through the tool – combining its benefits with the marketing fundamentals to deliver maximum impact.

"Demand for predictive marketing analytics is growing because B2B marketers see early implementations delivering increased program efficiency and returns on marketing investments."<sup>3</sup>

**Forrester**

<sup>3</sup>Source: Forrester: <https://www.forrester.com/report/The+Forrester+Wave+Predictive+Marketing+Analytics+For+B2B+Marketers+Q2+2017/-/E-RES134929#>

# 2

## Website load time is a critical battleground for marketing ROI



B2B demand generation is an “all-or-nothing” process: you must achieve excellence at every step of your program or your investment will be wasted. Landing pages are often the weakest link in this chain – with slow loading time killing return on investment (ROI) no matter how strong your content.

The landing page has long been a focus of optimization, but efforts typically focus on marginal gains: how tweaks to layout, content, calls to action (CTA), and data capture forms can drive incremental improvements to conversion.

Too often a focus on the visual aesthetic or the nuances of product positioning means basic hygiene factors like the load time of pages are forgotten. This can be a key point of wastage for marketing investments – and minor changes can transform ROI.

### **Quantifying the impact of load time**

To better understand this issue, we investigated 82 social advertising campaigns from the last two years – analyzing a sample of 159,429 clicks and 143,225 website visits generated through LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. All were tracked, and data was aggregated into Metia’s proprietary Performance Benchmark Index (PBX).

For each of the 82 campaigns analyzed, we tested landing page load time using independent website speed test tools and then calculated the drop-off rate: the percentage of ad clicks that failed to wait around to make the destination page.

## **Slow load time will kill your performance**

The results show a significant and steady increase in drop-off as page load times increase.

Campaigns with load times under two seconds experienced an average drop-off rate of 39.24%. For every 10 clicks an advertiser pays for, an average of 4 will fail to make it to the intended destination.

When load time increased to more than four seconds, the drop-off rate leapt to 73.56%. In other words, for every \$1 spent on advertising 74 cents was wasted.

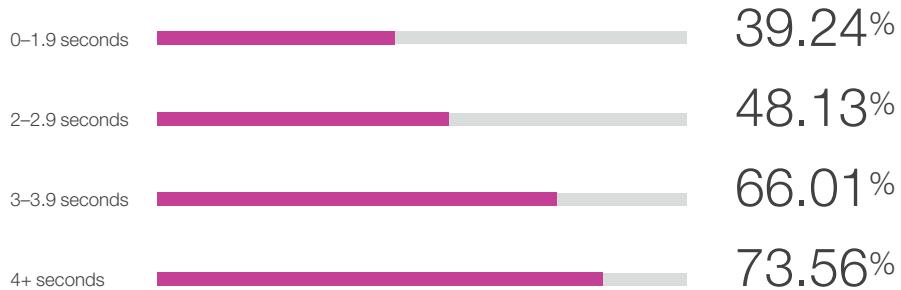
## **Minor changes will reap big rewards**

Let's look at the impact of this data on a theoretical lead generation campaign run through LinkedIn. In this example, the advertiser has spent \$10,000, generating 2,000 clicks to its landing page at a cost-per-click (CPC) of \$5.

When load time is between 0 and 1.9 seconds, 39.24% of clicks never make it to the destination. That results in 1,215 visits and – assuming a 10% conversion rate – 122 conversions at an average cost of \$81.97.

When load time is more than 4 seconds, 73.56% of clicks fail to make the destination. That results in only 529 visits and – assuming the same 10% conversion rate – just 53 conversions at an average cost of \$188.68.

**Drop off rate**



#### The impact of load time on lead generation

| Revenue | Clicks | Load time             | Drop-off         | Visits       | Conversions | Cost per conversion |
|---------|--------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------------|
| \$10k   | 2,000  | 0–1.9 secs<br>4+ secs | 39.24%<br>73.56% | 1,215<br>529 | 122<br>53   | \$81.97<br>\$188.68 |

In this example, reducing load time generates 230% more leads from the same budget. Or phrased another way, the marketer would achieve its lead target with 57% less budget – freeing up funds to be invested elsewhere.

In blunt terms, the marketer that pays attention to the detail and understands the importance of load time will spend \$81,970 to get 1,000 leads, while its colleague who doesn't will spend \$188,680 to get the same 1,000 leads.

#### Marketers must act now

While this analysis was limited to social advertising, the importance of understanding this type of detail reaches even further. For example, in 2018 Google announced it had started to penalize slow-loading websites in its search results.<sup>4</sup>

The opportunity for marketers is clear: streamlining landing pages can significantly increase ROI. Get your team researching lazy loading, file minifying (yes, that's a thing), and content delivery networks (CDNs). The age of landing page apathy is over.

The opportunity for marketers is clear: streamlining landing pages can significantly increase ROI.

<sup>4</sup>Source: Google: <https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2018/01/using-page-speed-in-mobile-search.html>



# 3 Smart brands are rethinking lead generation post-GDPR

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The impact of the GDPR and advances in reporting technology will shift budgets back to brand building. Through strong content and brand awareness, companies can supercharge their lead generation investments.

Few things have shaped B2B marketing strategy over the last five years like the arrival of marketing automation software. Platforms such as Marketo, Eloqua, and Hubspot have changed the game, forging a new pattern for B2B demand generation through content marketing: capturing leads through gated reports and whitepapers, then email marketing to qualify users and nudge them along the funnel.

While this approach generates demonstrable impact for brands, many marketers have become blind to the need for applying the full marketing mix – focusing budget too heavily on short-term direct response tactics that can immediately be proven and neglecting longer-term brand building where results are harder to quantify.

"The GDPR will eventually obliterate the “volume = value” equation with many specific regulations about the collection and storage of data."<sup>5</sup>

**Forrester**

<sup>5</sup>Source: Forrester: <https://tools.marketimpacttools.com/go/forrester/beyondthelead/>

In “Beyond the Lead,” its recent thought leadership paper on content marketing, analyst firm Forrester describes B2B buyers as wanting content that is “easy to consume, empathetic, data backed, and interactive.”<sup>5</sup>

Content that hits this mark delivers mutual benefits to consumers and businesses. The team at Metia describe the savvy marketers who achieve this as providing a Fair Exchange of Value – and these marketers are helping to change the B2B lead generation paradigm.

Instead of relying solely on direct response tactics to drive lead generation, smart marketers are balancing those investments with brand building.

### **Trust is more important than any business case**

Instead of relying solely on direct-response tactics to drive lead generation, smart marketers are balancing those investments with brand building. They are stimulating demand at the top of the funnel, utilizing tactics including PR, video, and advertising (both online and offline) to increase awareness, build reputation for domain expertise, and deepen the emotions leading to inherent trust that are critical in high-value B2B decision making.

### **Liberate your content, let genuine prospects qualify themselves**

In this world of stricter data compliance, some brands are also un-gating much of their long-form content – betting that its value will encourage users to willfully request contact.

This strategy was highlighted in Forrester’s report, referencing a global digital identity management firm that generated a 400% increase in requests for contact after removing data collection from some of its most valuable content. Theoretically, at least, these users should be more engaged and more likely to convert through the funnel.

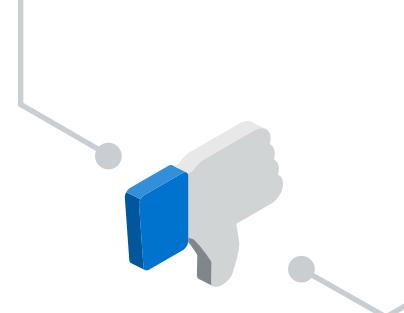
### **A pragmatic approach is the order of the day**

Such a bold approach isn’t for everyone. For starters, it’s a long-term play. Building awareness and recognition takes time, so un-gating all content early probably won’t please your sales team.

Secondly, success requires consistent excellence through every marketing and sales touchpoint. Without it, brands are unlikely to create the groundswell of organic demand required to fill the sales funnel.

For most brands, that is a longer-term goal – but now is the time to start the journey.

<sup>5</sup>Source: Forrester: <https://tools.marketimpacttools.com/go/forrester/beyondthelead/>



# 4 Just because you can, doesn't mean you should

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B2B marketers need to move slower and think harder about the long-term implications of decisions. The marketing fundamentals remain as important as ever, and customer relationships are too important to risk through poor practice.

Advances in data and technology have increased the ways marketers can reach their audiences online.

It is now possible to track and target an individual across the Internet and between devices, allowing marketers to serve personalized content at virtually every moment a user is online.

Sooner or later, vendors using inappropriate techniques will experience their own Cambridge Analytica moment.

On paper, this should increase the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing investments, but in the rush to adopt new techniques many marketers are losing sight of proven fundamentals – and failing to apply common sense.

## **Just because you can, doesn't mean you should**

Take display advertising as an example of common bad practice. An ever-growing group of technology vendors collect data on business decision makers and allow marketers to reach these audiences through their networks.

But there are two reasons why marketers should be wary: the consent behind such data collection, and the context in which advertisements are served.

## **An industry relying on unconscious consent**

When it comes to data collection, most vendors claim to operate within the letter of the law – for example, the GDPR in Europe.

Metia researches and meets many potential vendor or data services partners every year. Perhaps because of the arrival of the GDPR, or the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal, we are probing deeper into the sources of data upon which services are provided. Increasingly we are coming across vendors whose offer is built upon questionable practices. Take the anonymous example of a leading in-app advertising vendor that allows marketers to target niche B2B audiences through its network of partner apps.

Increasingly we are coming across vendors whose offer is built upon questionable practices.

User consent is granted via terms and conditions displayed within partner apps. These notices typically appear when a user first opens an app, and – let's be frank – it is unlikely that users will read them in full, unaware they are granting sweeping access to their data, including their full web history and app usage in perpetuity, and the right to target them with advertising.

While vendors claim this approach complies with the letter of the GDPR, we argue it is against the spirit – and wager that most users are completely oblivious to what they have agreed to. A recent privacy ruling against French ad tech vendor Vectaury suggests that regulators are beginning to take this view too.<sup>6</sup>

Sooner or later, vendors using inappropriate techniques will experience their own Cambridge Analytica moment. Their customers will then also be implicated as either complicit or incompetent. We advise our clients to stay clear.

<sup>6</sup>Source: TechCrunch: <https://techcrunch.com/2018/11/20/how-a-small-french-privacy-ruling-could-remake-adtech-for-good/>

## The second issue is context

In the anonymous example explained above, the advertising vendor can log every website I visit – allowing it to build a clear picture of the industry I operate in and my intent around purchase decisions. Thus, advertisers can easily target me with their solutions wherever I browse.

The problem here is context. While I may be a B2B buyer, if you target me with B2B adverts when playing an app like Candy Crush, it is unlikely I will be responsive – and, worse, if I respond at all, my response may be negative.

As any B2B salesperson will tell you, building and maintaining an emotional connection with your customer is critical to the sale. Is it worth risking so many relationships – and your brand's legitimate right to engage relevant decision makers – for just a few clicks?

Exposing a creepy level of knowledge about your audience and then annoying them at scale will not build your brand. Or at least not in the way you want.

Modern marketers are bombarded with new tools and techniques daily. There is a smorgasbord of options for reaching your audiences online. But it's critical that each choice is guided by cost-benefit analysis – and this analysis must extend to include risk to your reputation and customer relationships.



## 5 clicks

is the average return generated by a display remarketing ad for every 10,000 times it is shown.<sup>7</sup>

## The ability to annoy target audiences at scale

Research by Smart Insights shows that average click-through rates for display remarketing are 0.05%.<sup>7</sup> For every 10,000 times your ad is shown, you'll generate – on average – five clicks.

With modern analytics technology, it's easy to demonstrate the impact these five clicks might have on revenue. But what about the 9,995 impressions that don't generate a click? How many of these impressions are noticed? How many react positively? How many react negatively?

Any short-term sales or lead target-based imperative needs to be balanced against long-term business benefit. If you make investments based on a tool or technique providing just *any* benefit, you risk wasting money, damaging customer relationships, and impacting the bottom line.

<sup>7</sup>Source: Smart Insights: <https://www.smartsights.com/internet-advertising/internet-advertising-analytics/display-advertising-clickthrough-rates/>

# 5

# It's time sales enablement was focused on your customers



Sales enablement is positioned as empowering sales teams, but too often it forgets the most important people in the sales process: your customers.

B2B marketers can improve the effectiveness of sales outreach by ensuring a relentless focus on their motivations and challenges.

In his book *The Sales Manager's Survival Guide*, David Brock describes sales enablement as providing the “tools, systems, processes, training, coaching, and development that ‘enables’ sales to be more effective and efficient.”<sup>8</sup>

So far, so good – and most large organizations have a sales enablement program in place. In fact, a recent SiriusDecisions survey found dedicated sales enablement teams within 83 percent of organizations reporting \$750 million or more in annual revenue.<sup>9</sup>

For many organizations, though, sales enablement is dominated by standardized sales tools, templates, and processes – tuned to rational decision making.

The problem? Customer decision making is not purely logical, and especially so in B2B where the personal risks of purchases are far greater than in B2C.

“B2B buying is often treated as a rational activity, [but] all human decisions are driven by a complex mix of gut, emotion, post-rationalization, and reason. When [B2B prospects] don’t see personal value, they are over three times less likely to purchase.”<sup>10</sup>

**CEB**

<sup>8</sup> Source: David Brock, Sales Manager Survival Guide: Lessons From Sales' Front Lines

<sup>9</sup> Source: SiriusDecisions: <https://veeloinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SiriusDecisions-The-State-of-Sales-Enablement-2017.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Source: CEB: <https://www.cebglobal.com/content/dam/cebglobal/us/EN/best-practices-decision-support/marketing-communications/pdfs/promotion-emotion-whitepaper-full.pdf>

## **Enabling sales in a world of emotion**

In last year's report, we discussed the importance of emotion in B2B decision making – and the importance of aligning the customer experience to the personal motivations and challenges of your audience.

"Sales reps often want to jump right to the product stuff, leaving the buyer-focused thought leadership content on the shelf. Enabling sales teams to internalize and amplify your messaging in their conversations with buyers is critical."<sup>11</sup>

**Forrester**

While top-of-funnel content marketing is often buyer-centric, there can be a disconnect between this marketing content and the sales conversations that follow.

## **Good marketing sets the agenda for sales conversations**

Sales enablement must be more about your customer than your sales team. Too often corporates bemoan the gap between marketing and sales siloes. Rather than better aligning

marketing and sales functions to each other, you must better align both functions to the concerns of your customers and the conversations they want to have with you.

This means listening to and understanding the signals you are prompting in your customers throughout the buyer journey, and then feeding this insight into every customer touchpoint to build an authentic connection.

Providing sales teams with a suite of content tuned to these emotional triggers is not enough. They must feel empowered to understand and utilize these triggers themselves, to build a relationship with customers and address their priorities – and not to immediately talk product, unless and until the customer is ready to have that conversation.

Delivering on this promise depends on sales enablement being core to marketing programs – and not an afterthought, as is too often the case.

Marketing and sales leaders that drive these initiatives together will multiply the impact of their activities.

"Content, while important, is not enough. A great presentation does not make a great salesperson. [Sales reps must] have the right knowledge and skills to present and share that content with buyers in a meaningful way."<sup>12</sup>

**Jim Ninivaggi**, Chief Readiness Officer, Brainshark

<sup>11</sup> Source: Forrester: <https://tools.marketimpacttools.com/go/forrester/beyondthelead/>

<sup>12</sup> Source: Brainshark: <https://www.brainshark.com/ideas-blog/2018/september/sales-enablement-trends-ninivaggi>

# 6 The changing face of customer advocacy

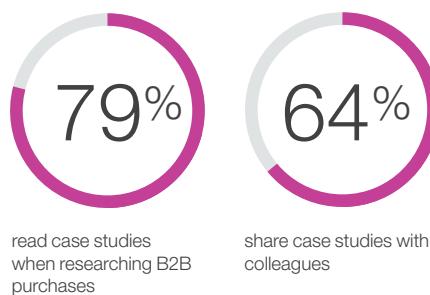


Customer advocacy has been transformed, with a stronger focus on telling personal stories, delivered through a broader range of content formats, supporting activities throughout the full sales funnel.

The case study remains as influential as ever in B2B purchases – with 79% of respondents to Demand Gen Report's 2018 Content Preferences Survey indicating they read case studies when researching B2B purchases, and 64% of respondents having shared a case study with colleagues during the past 12 months.<sup>13</sup>

While there will always be a role for written case studies, brands are evolving their approach to telling customer stories – using new techniques and formats that better address audience motivations and engage buyers through the purchase journey.

**2018 Content Preferences Survey<sup>13</sup>**



<sup>13</sup> Source: Demand Gen Report: <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/research/2018-content-preferences-survey-report>

## **Moving from product to outcomes**

Prospective buyers read case studies to assess vendor credibility. They evidence how a product or service has benefited a real customer – and the customer's willingness to provide a reference builds confidence and trust.

While the traditional written case study tends to focus on the short-term solution to a specific business problem, the longer-term impact of a purchase – both organizational and personal – is often neglected. Given the emotional nature of B2B decision making, this represents a missed opportunity for marketers.

By following a storytelling approach with case studies – and placing the buyer at the heart of the narrative – B2B marketers will find it much easier to trigger the emotional connections so critical to purchase decisions.

Another limitation of the traditional written case study is the focus on product specifics. B2B marketers must remember that prospects are likely comparing multiple products, so the onus is on vendors to simplify their solutions and appeal to the different audience groups assessing their product.

This is consistent with findings from the Content Preferences Survey, where 88% of respondents agreed that brands should focus less on product specifics and more on the value that can be brought to their business.

## **Smart marketers are coupling storytelling with intelligent delivery**

By following a storytelling approach with case studies – and placing the buyer at the heart of the narrative – B2B marketers will find it much easier to trigger the emotional connections so critical to purchase decisions.

This approach lends itself to content formats outside of the written word – for example, infographics, animations, and video – allowing brands to use customer stories much earlier in the buyer journey. Marketers can then use targeted paid media including LinkedIn and Twitter to deliver this content directly to the individuals who matter to their business – using customer references to build awareness and recognition at top of funnel.

## **Customer references driving broader engagement**

Customer reference programs are also becoming an engine for broader initiatives, including content marketing, lead generation, and sales enablement. Given direct access to customers, marketers can develop a far greater understanding of audience priorities, creating a platform to develop more resonant content to improve marketing and sales effectiveness throughout their organization.

# Are you ready for 2019?

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We hope this report has proven informative and provides practical insight for your 2019 planning.

The pace of change in marketing is relentless, and understanding key platforms, tools, and techniques is key to generating measurable outcomes for your brand – so make sure you have the appetite and resource required. If you're a little worried or slightly confused – or simply too busy – seek outside help from experts dedicated to this sector.

If you'd like to discuss these trends in more detail, please get in touch. And if you want to learn more, you'll find a host of additional content at [www.metia.com](http://www.metia.com).

# About Metia

Metia Group is a global marketing agency with offices in London, Seattle, Austin, and Singapore. We employ some 140 marketing professionals; each is expert in a particular area of specialization.

Our clients include big corporations and ambitious businesses. We provide them with structured marketing programs that reach across geographies, scale massively, can be deployed systematically, and are measured relentlessly.

Metia has specialist services designed to support our clients in the areas of Insight, Demand, Content, and Advocacy. These services are based upon deep expertise, proven methodologies, and are enabled by unique tools and systems. Our Content Resonance System (CRS) and Performance Benchmark Index (PBX) are used by many of the world's largest corporations to better connect with their customers.

To learn more about our capabilities and discuss how we can help you reach and engage your target audiences with focused, measurable campaigns, please contact us at [info@metia.com](mailto:info@metia.com).

## Metia Group

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