

How to Pick the Right B2B Marketing Agency



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Finding the right B2B marketing agency to help your company achieve your goals is not an exact science. It's more of an art that depends on whether you and your team "gel" with your agency's team. That said, there are a few best practices you can follow to identify the agency with the best match of service offerings, styles, and designs to help you execute your marketing strategy.

Whether you're considering hiring a marketing agency or are still evaluating agencies, this guide will show you when partnering with an outside agency will likely provide the best results. We'll also cover how to choose an agency that provides the strategy and resources to achieve your business objectives.

All Marketing Agencies Are the Same... Aren't They?



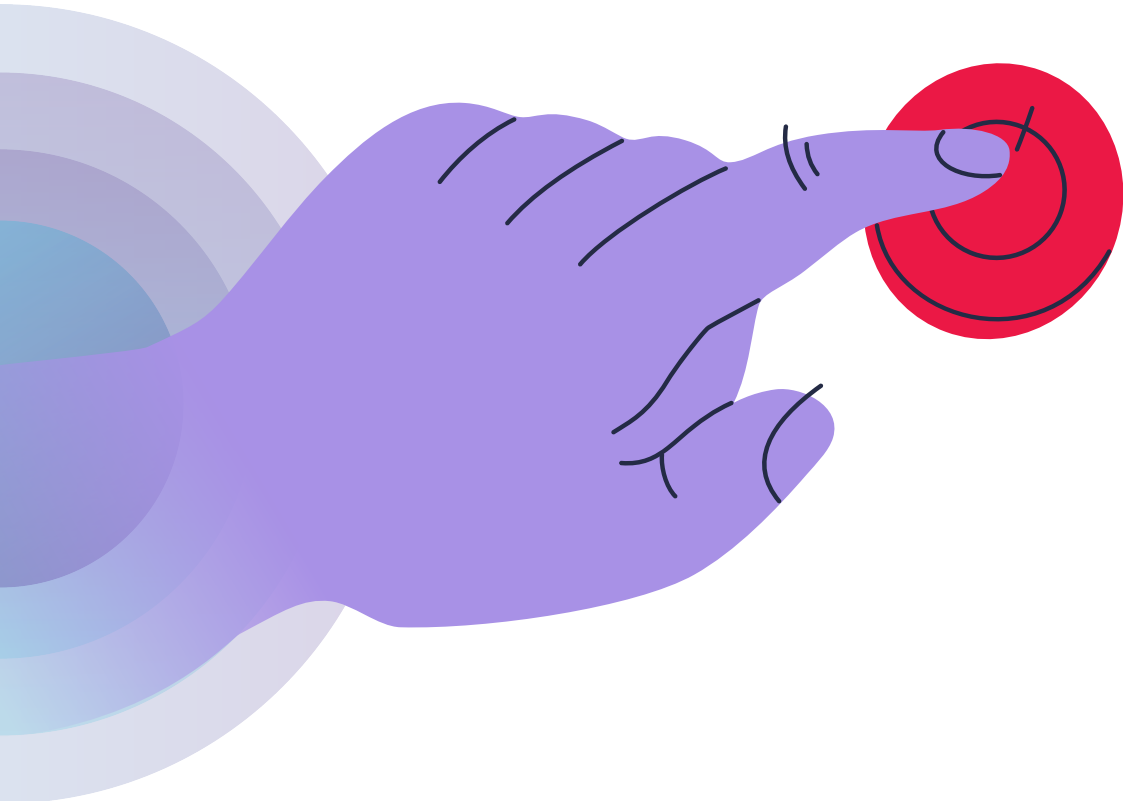
The truth is that marketing agencies vary wildly in their service offerings. Your industry probably has lots of firms offering a huge range of services or products, and so do marketing agencies. Many agencies specialize in certain niches or industries or strategies, which can be great when it comes to selecting a partner who understands your industry and your goals. This is especially true when it comes to B2B vs. B2C marketing.

Some marketers claim that B2C and B2B marketing are the same — after all, it's all about crafting a human connection and appealing to the end user's needs. We do agree that this general idea is behind quality, but there are lots of other things that differentiate B2B from B2C and can impact your strategic planning efforts.

What Makes B2B Marketing Different

B2B firms often have one final decision-maker, but purchasing a product or service usually affects management across several different departments in your business.

That's why it's essential that the buyer persona for a B2B marketing campaign includes various profiles and use cases. Understanding all the use cases and internal team preferences is critical for your marketing partner to ensure they properly position your products and provide resources for all users.



The Buying Process Is Often Longer

For many B2B companies, the sales cycle is usually a lot longer than B2C transactions.

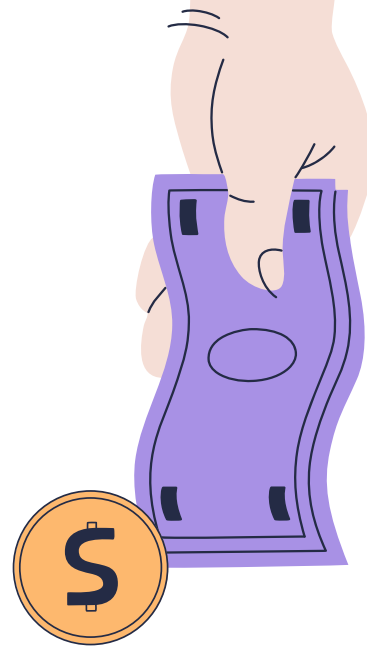
Because of the complexity of the project or service delivery, most B2B companies take six weeks to a year to close a deal. Therefore, it's crucial that your B2B marketing strategy identifies and addresses all stages of the buying cycle — and your marketing partner understands this.

WHY LONGER SALES CYCLES? LOTS OF REASONS:

- The product or service is complex or has a lot of moving parts
- It's not a decision made lightly or quickly
- It requires extensive research and comparison
- The decision relies heavily on proof (case studies/results) or testing
- Buy-in from multiple decision-makers is usually required to move forward
- Budget or attaining budget can be a factor. For example, prospects may need to wait a few months before moving ahead to obtain budget approval.

The Finished Product or Service Is Complex and Expensive

Crafting customized or complex products or service agreements takes time, skill, and a hefty financial investment. Why? Because customized or personalized products or services use complex materials, involve skilled professionals, and take time to put together, so they're the right fit for the project. transactions. Because of the complexity of the project or service delivery, most B2B companies take six weeks to a year to close a deal. Therefore, it's crucial that your B2B marketing strategy identifies and addresses all stages of the buying cycle —and your marketing partner understands this.



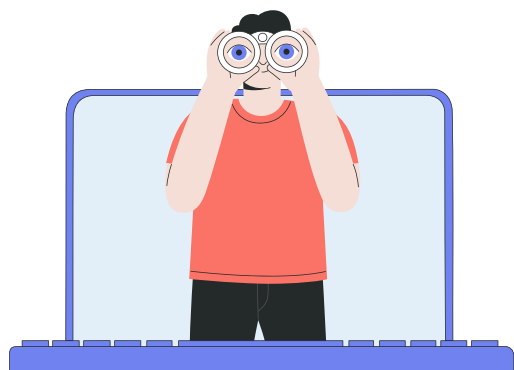
We've found that B2B products and services tend to be more expensive and require a more considerable investment. Yes, B2C products can be costly (as of now, an anti-virus subscription for a personal computer averages about \$100/year). In comparison, B2B products and services are in an entirely different price range (hiring an MSP to implement a complete cybersecurity system for a business can vary from \$500,000 for a year of service to millions of dollars for larger contracts).

Because of these deep investments (money, time, resources, personnel), B2B branding and marketing efforts must continually build and uphold value.

The Experience Is Longer and More Meaningful

What differentiates B2B from B2C is that the relationship between a B2B company and a client is usually much longer. B2B products and services are rarely transactional. Instead, partnerships often end up lasting months or years. Ramp-up, onboarding, and implementation all take time, effort, and resources. It's more challenging to get out of a B2B product or service agreement, so your clients will be choosing wisely between you and your competitors.

B2B marketers fail when they don't treat the client as a partner. Your marketing agency must also understand this and use long-term relationship-building to fuel your efforts.



There's More on the Line

To continue the example above, if you choose a lackluster anti-virus software provider for your personal computer and it fails, hopefully it involves only a bit of frustration on your part to cancel credit cards, change passwords, and call your bank.

But if you choose a cybersecurity solution for your company and it fails, there is a lot more on the line. If you fail to choose the right product or service, it can affect how your peers view you, how your boss views you, your performance, and your organization's performance as a whole.

There's more at stake when it comes to making decisions for B2B companies. B2B marketers understand there is a lot on the line for prospects and clients, and as business partners, they strive to make their clients successful.

Why Hire a B2B Marketing Agency



Why hire a professional marketing agency when you already have some marketing experience? You are hiring the agency for their skill, experience, and knowledge. Hiring the right agency will help maximize your skills, effort, and time.

You might be thinking to yourself, “I already have a few internal marketing people at my organization – why bother bringing in more?”



There are lots of reasons to work with an outside marketing agency, but here are few of the major ones.

Limited Internal Resources

The biggest reason companies hire an outside B2B marketing agency isn't from a lack of internal marketing acumen, but because of limited internal resources. The three biggest resource limitations many B2B companies face are personnel, time, and budget. For most of our clients, there are two to three internal marketing professionals who are highly experienced at managing and marketing their firm's brand. They rely on us to help fill in the gaps where they just don't have the resources.

Marketing Expertise

TEAM OF SPECIALISTS:

Working with an experienced B2B marketing agency gives you the best results. You get access to experts in all facets of marketing, like design, copywriting, digital outreach, inbound, direct mail, web development, conversion optimization, analysis and tracking, campaign creation, automation, print, advertising, nurturing, etc.

CURRENT ON TRENDS:

The employees at a B2B marketing agency are all current on the latest marketing trends. Just like you're aware of all the recent advancements and news affecting your industry, the team at a marketing agency stays current on the latest trends in marketing and puts them to use daily. They know what's working and what's overblown hype. They'll discuss the latest techniques and tools with you and bring ideas you probably haven't thought of.

VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS:

An effective marketing strategy utilizes lots of channels, tools, and tracking software to make sure your campaigns are producing results. Many of these channels, tools, and software require ongoing relationships and subscription services. By working with an agency, your company gets the benefits of these tools without having to spend time or money on licensing or maintenance.

Cost Savings

“Wait, hiring an outside agency means cost savings?” You bet it does.

Running a successful B2B marketing strategy (that means blogging, downloadable guides, pay-per-click advertising, email marketing, website updates, and print advertising campaigns) requires a bigger team than you may think:

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

to make sure all marketing materials are consistent with the brand. They source photos, videos, and animations and manipulate them for each individual piece.

PROJECT/ACCOUNT MANAGER

to ensure your strategy is executed properly, all tasks are completed, and campaigns are driving results. This person is your advocate to ensure everything is seamless and easy while also completing many of the tasks in your campaigns.

PAY-PER-CLICK SPECIALIST

to manage all PPC campaigns (AdWords, Bing, and retargeting) to ensure budgets are maximized and driving the right leads (not just traffic).

ANALYTICS SPECIALIST

to evaluate the efficacy of all programs and ensure everything is tracking properly, so you can evaluate campaigns on their ROI and how well they generate leads.

TECHNICAL MANAGER

to make sure all things work together seamlessly and ensure your user experience is great and search engines can easily access the website.

COPYWRITER

to draft and edit all copy and content to make sure your value proposition is clear and all the text in your marketing materials speaks to your audience.

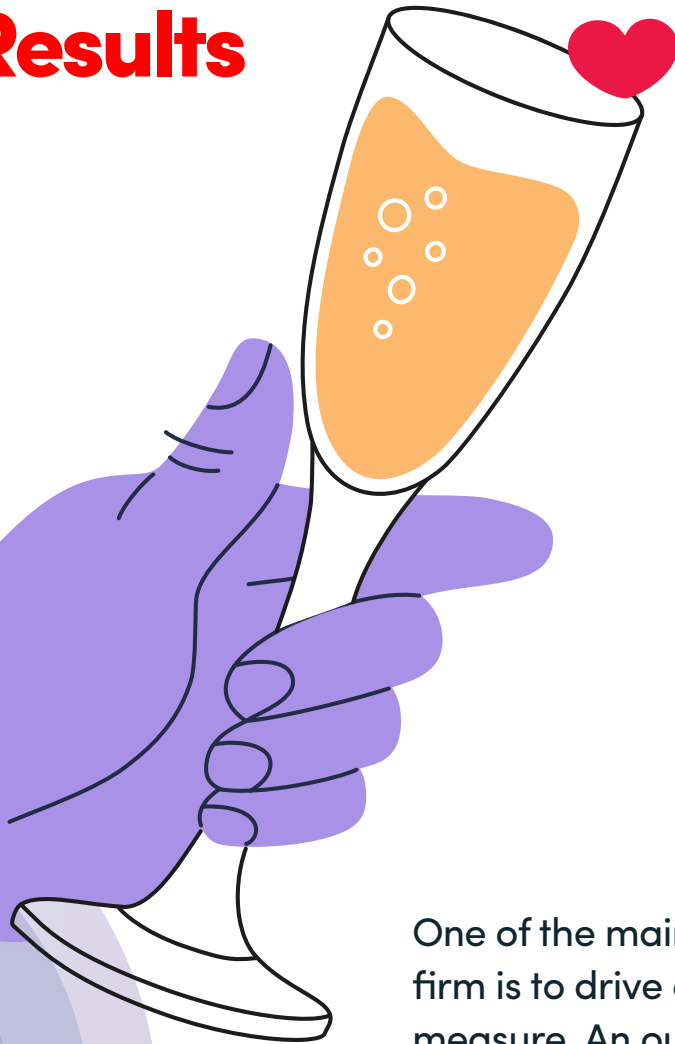
Now, these are the minimum number of specialists required for a successful B2B marketing campaign. There are lots of other specialists that can be drawn in as needed: media buyers, SEO managers, content strategists, video specialists, conversion specialists, printers, mail houses, and more.

So, let's break down the numbers. This is just the range, so you can get an idea of entry-level, mid-level vs. highly experienced, skilled employees.

	Entry Level	Experienced Professional
GRAPHIC DESIGNER	\$ 40,000 — 83,250	
WEB DEVELOPER	\$ 62,500 — 110,000	
COPYWRITER	\$ 55,000 — 105,250	
PAY-PER-CLICK SPECIALIST	\$ 52,000 — 94,750	
ANALYTICS SPECIALIST	\$ 49,000 — 104,250	
TECHNICAL MANAGER	\$ 62,000 — 126,000	
PROJECT/ACCOUNT MANAGER	\$ 53,000 — 98,000	
Minimum Yearly Spend	\$ 374,000 — 721,500	

If you were to hire all these positions (at entry level) to manage your B2B marketing plan, your minimum yearly spend would be \$374,000 (not including taxes, insurance, equipment, and more). Hire "the best of the best," and your yearly salary costs (not including money spent directly on advertising) would be \$721,500.

The End Results

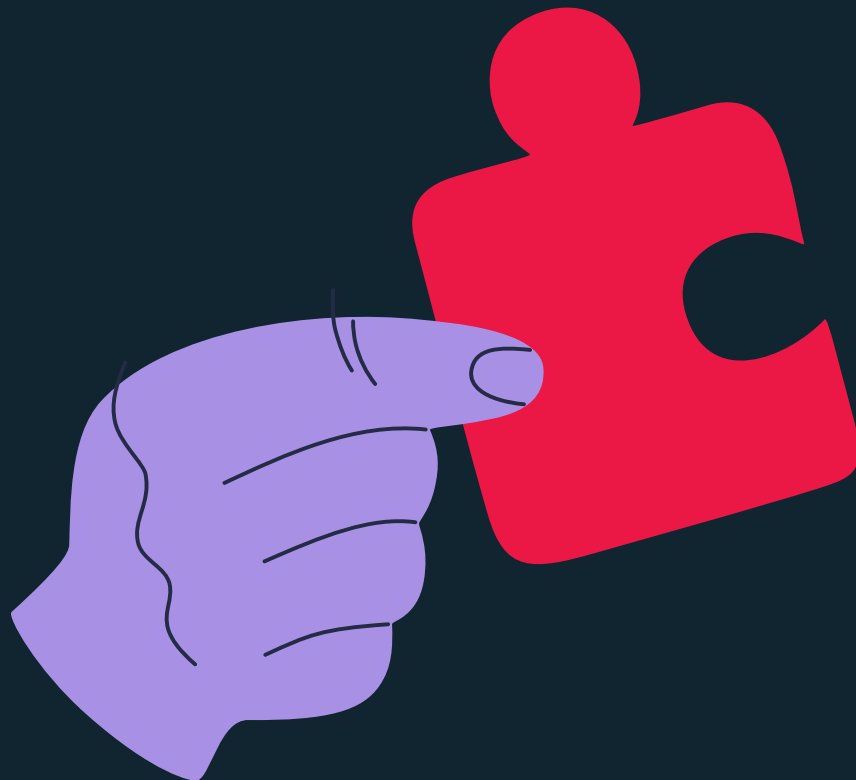


One of the main reasons to hire a B2B marketing firm is to drive and track client leads you can measure. An outside marketing agency builds on the great work your internal team is already doing to drive and nurture additional leads without adding any additional overhead.

Think for a moment of the revenue generated by a new lead. If your typical lead generates \$50,000 with a chance for recurring revenue from future projects, it makes a lot of sense to spend money to get more of those types of leads. Closing just one lead can often pay for several months of fees for a B2B marketing agency.

How to Choose the Right Agency

Don't decide on an agency partner in a hurry. Your marketing agency will be a trusted advocate for your brand and will be tasked with helping you meet your strategic marketing objectives. At the end of the day, they'll either make you look smart and help you accomplish your goals...or they won't.



Agencies Vary Greatly

One agency may not be “better” or “worse” than another agency – but they’re definitely not all the same. Agencies range in size, approach, skill set, and service offerings. These are all reasons it’s imperative that you find the right B2B marketing agency for your firm.



What Are Their Top Projects or Services?

Kick off the conversation by asking the agency what they do best. What are their biggest successes? Where don't they focus?

Steer clear of B2B marketing agencies that offer everything – they'll likely be masters of nothing. You'll want to work with an agency that can help with all your projects, but you must make sure they excel at the main things you'll need them to work on.

HERE ARE A FEW ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK:

B2B OR B2C?

Start here. If they say they do both, they may not entirely understand what makes the B2B space different from consumer-focused brands, and they may not be right for your B2B brand.

DIGITAL MARKETING?

If your main B2B marketing goals include online lead generation, it's essential that your agency partner is on top of all the latest digital marketing trends and knows which ones are most effective for B2B firms.

WEB DESIGN?

Many agencies say they provide B2B web design services, but in truth, they end up farming out the project to a third party. This can slow the process down or make it harder for you to implement future edits or updates to your company website.

PUBLIC RELATIONS?

There are great PR firms out there that are starting to dabble in the digital marketing space, including social media and web design. They're probably stellar at creating buzz and garnering media attention, but they may not be able to drive lead-generation results. After all, this isn't the core function of a PR firm.

LEAD GENERATION?

Don't automatically assume that an agency is focused on lead generation. When discussing your plans with a potential B2B marketing partner, make it clear that lead generation is your main objective. Ask how they plan to track and increase leads for your company.

DO THEY KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY?

Many agencies work within a handful of industry verticals, as they have discovered these verticals are where they can provide the most value. If a B2B marketing agency hasn't worked with a client in your industry or in a similar industry, they may not be the right fit.

What Is Their Experience?

We've all been there when a salesperson has said yes to everything we've asked, only to find out after the sale that they can't deliver on half of the things we asked about. Rather than asking if an agency can do something, ask for examples of what they've already done.

HERE ARE SOME THOUGHT-STARTER QUESTIONS:

INDUSTRIES

What do they know about your customers?

As we've mentioned before, find out if they have any B2B marketing experience with other businesses in your industry. They should have an organized portfolio ready to show you. If they haven't worked with your industry, ask what companies they have worked with that are similar and what results they have gotten for them.

PERSONNEL

Who works for the agency?

Lots of larger agencies will hire and lay off workers depending on their client load. While this is common, it's not always a best practice. Ideally, you want to work with a B2B agency that is flexible and adaptable but has an experienced core group of designers, writers, project managers, developers, and technical specialists that will be managing the day-to-day work on your project.

PROJECTS

Has the agency worked on something similar to your proposal? Have they worked on larger projects? Smaller projects? Long-term projects? National projects? Regional projects?

The goal is to make sure they understand your objectives and can tailor their marketing services to what you need.

OUTSOURCING

We work in an age where borders and time zones aren't barriers but merely factors. So, it's not uncommon for agencies to outsource design, development, copywriting, technical editing, or publishing. But when it comes to your business and brand, consistency is essential. Ask what duties they specifically outsource and how they manage the process.

What's Their Sales Process Like?

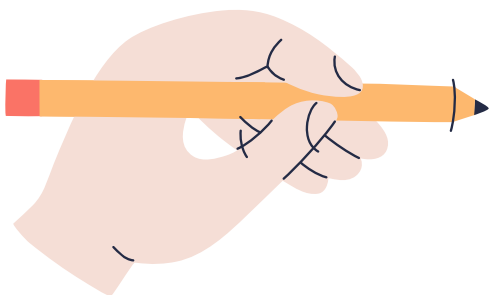
The feeling you get as a prospect can tell you a lot about what it feels like to be a client. If a B2B marketing agency has a smooth sales process that involves understanding your company and your goals, the partnership with that agency will likely be the same. But if the sales process is bumpy and unpredictable with lots of uncertainties, it doesn't leave much hope for their internal project management processes.

Talk to Existing Clients

In addition to looking at the agency's work, talk to a handful of their existing clients. Seasoned, professional B2B marketing agencies will have a host of clients they'll be fine (even proud) for you to contact. Much like you would ask a potential employee for references, don't be shy to ask a potential agency for the same.

They Should Be Interviewing You, Too

True partnership means you both succeed. That means the right agency will be interviewing you to ensure your firm is the best fit for them, too. At Bop Design, we are careful during the lead qualification and proposal phase to be sure that potential clients are a good fit for our skill set. If we don't think our agency will be the best match, we let them know upfront. At the end of the day, we want to deliver success, so we only take on projects where we truly believe we can deliver.



Watch Out! Beware of These Red Flags

A bit of research can tell you a lot about whether the agency really knows their stuff – or if they're just all talk.

HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Agencies that promise to meet tight deadlines without reducing the scope.

Avoid these partners at all costs, as they'll produce strategies they can't execute or strategies that don't include everything you need.

Vague proposals that don't detail what's included in your deliverables.

You deserve to know what you're paying for, and a clear deliverables list lets you track progress.

Vastly different proposals from seemingly similar agencies.

This indicates something isn't right, and you should proceed with caution.

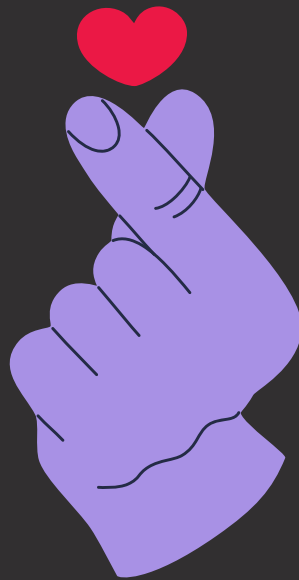
Lack of follow-through during the sales process.

This is a clear sign that the agency has too much on their plate already, and you won't be a priority once the contract is signed.

They don't practice what they preach.

Are they going to be running a dynamic social media campaign for you...but haven't updated their own Twitter in six months? Will they be creating a B2B web design for you from scratch...but have a website that has several broken links and missing images?

Finding the right marketing partner is the beginning of a long, strategic relationship built on mutual success. It's easy to get caught up in slick presentations and savvy-sounding pitches. We hope this guide helps you take a step back, pause, and critically evaluate potential B2B marketing partners to find the best fit for your business objectives.



**Have questions?
Want to talk shop?**

Let's chat.

CONTACT US TODAY TO DISCUSS
YOUR MARKETING NEEDS.



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