

Three 2018 Sales and Marketing Trends

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Why are the vast majority of successful marketing teams using AI? Because it helps marketers increase efficiency and gain deeper, more personal insights from their data. Marketers expect it to bolster campaign analytics, business insights, lead scoring, digital asset management, personalization of content, dynamic websites and more.

AI is also working its way into inside sales. Talkdesk, a company that provides cloud-based contact center solutions, offers some cool new features. For example, by combining AI with voice analytics, it pinpoints crucial topics in conversations and provides the rep with real-time responses. For instance, if a prospect mentions a competitor's solution, Talkdesk delivers real-time information on advantages of your

company's offering over that competitor's.

- **Influencer Marketing: People Trust People**

While B2B marketers lag behind B2C marketers in using influencer marketing, they are exploring it — 15 percent have ongoing programs, a little over a third have influencer campaigns and the remainder, almost half, are experimenting with it.

Because investments tend to follow positive results, it's likely that these companies will invest more in influencer marketing in the future. Most (55 percent) marketers expect to spend more on influencer marketing in the future. What's notable, however, is that 77 percent of those using technology to manage influencer relations strategically intend to spend more, proving that when it's done right, it has a measurable impact on business.

It's not surprising that influencer marketing works so well in the B2B world. Top management and executives tend to rely on their peers and industry leaders for advice and recommendations. By leveraging these influencers, you can add immediate credibility to your brand, especially if you have informative content that resonates with them.

- **Getting Personal**

Consumers are becoming more and more accustomed to personalized experiences in e-commerce. When they visit Amazon.com, the site dishes up a variety of products related to previous items they have viewed. If they select a product to view, Amazon shares related products. Also, when they visit Facebook, they see ads that cater to their interests. This is an example of the type of personalized experience that consumers have come to expect.

For B2B marketers, it's important to realize that B2B buyers are people. Therefore, they are accustomed to the consumer experience, which shapes what they expect when searching for B2B products and solutions. That means one-size-fits-all no longer works. B2B marketing teams need to catch up with their counterparts on the consumer side.

What does personalization look like in the B2B world? It includes:

- **Extreme personalization of content**, especially for account-based marketing. For example, an e-book may be customized to a key account and the role the target recipient plays in the buying process. It's more work, but 80 percent of marketers say personalized content is more effective than its generic brother.
- **Increased use of the phone** to reach out to contacts. After all, it allows for a two-way conversation, it is the most personal medium for developing a relationship.
- **One-on-one engagement through social media** platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter.
- **Personal sales emails** that reps write based on in-depth research about an account.
- **Personalized websites**. These sites use analytics to dish up content based on what users view, the time they spent on specific pages, their IP address, their location and search terms they used to reach the website.

It feels like marketing and sales are evolving faster than ever before. While it's difficult to master the whole progression at once, there are three areas that you'll want to investigate further in 2018. These include artificial intelligence, influencer marketing and personalization. All of them help you create a more individualized and human buying and customer experience. And while most of the sales world is shifting, one thing remains true — the customer is king.

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